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DEPARTAMENTO DE LÍNGUAS MODERNAS

HENRIQUE BONATTO NICODEMO

The Role of Fairy Mythology in Irish Culture and Folklore

PORTO ALEGRE

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The Role of Fairy Mythology in Irish Culture and Folklore

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Licenciado em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Orientadora Profa. Dra. Sandra Sirangelo Maggio

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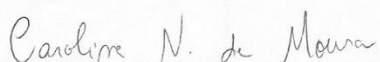
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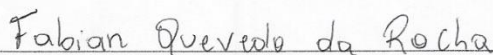
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BANCA EXAMINADORA:



Prof. Me. Caroline Navarrina de Moura
Doutoranda do PPG Letras UFRGS
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)



Prof. Me. Fabian Quevedo da Rocha
Doutorando do PPG Letras UFRGS
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)



Prof. Dra. Sandra Sirangelo Maggio (Presidente)
Departamento de Línguas Modernas
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)

DEDICATÓRIA

Eu acredito que a vida é uma grande jornada e nenhuma jornada se completa somente com um protagonista. Somos todos protagonistas das nossas próprias vidas, mas essa só pode ser uma vida que valeu cada minuto quando temos pessoas marcantes para nos acompanharem no caminho. Quero agradecer aqui, do fundo do meu coração, todos os que me motivaram a chegar até aqui.

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como se estivessem aqui do meu lado. Muito obrigado aos amigos que nunca moraram por perto, mas são para mim como irmãos e irmãs. Agradeço profundamente a presença de todos vocês que fazem ou fizeram parte da minha vida. Cada um foi e é muito especial do seu próprio jeito.

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The present work deals only with the mythology, or the fantastic creed of the Irish respecting the invisible world—strange and mystical superstitions, brought thousands of years ago from their Aryan home, but which still, even in the present time, affect all the modes of thinking and acting in the daily life of people.

Lady Wilde, *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland.*

RESUMO

Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland é uma coletânea importante de contos folclóricos irlandeses publicada por Lady Wilde em 1887. Entre as centenas de histórias e diferentes tipos de criaturas sobrenaturais apresentados nesse livro, o foco escolhido para a presente investigação são os textos que tratam sobre fadas, com especial atenção para um tipo específico, conhecido como “Changeling”. Acredito que mitos e superstições ocupam um lugar importante nas práticas sociais, revelando aspectos da cultura na qual estão inseridos. Nas histórias relatadas por Lady Wilde as fadas costumam enganar os humanos para alcançarem seus objetivos. Nesses textos, as fadas confiam que os humanos se comportarão sempre de acordo com suas expectativas. Na presente monografia, certos aspectos das histórias de fadas são analisados, com a finalidade de identificar traços da influência exercida por esses contos sobre a sociedade humana, apontando ocasiões em que a presença dessas criaturas serve para explicar eventos que, de outra forma, seriam inexplicáveis, ou carregariam uma conotação negativa. O trabalho se divide em duas partes. A primeira explora a ligação entre o folclore celta e o senso de identidade nacional da Irlanda, e apresenta a autora, Jane Wilde. A segunda parte mapeia a tradição do folclore das fadas e explora aspectos da literatura sobre os “changelings”. Espero que esta monografia contribua para ressaltar as relações existentes entre os mitos e histórias sobre as fadas e certas práticas sociais, e também para indicar o quanto eles influenciam a literatura de outros países.

Palavras-chave: Literatura irlandesa. Lady Wilde. *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*. Fadas. Folclore.

ABSTRACT

Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland is an important collection of Irish folklore published by Lady Wilde in 1887. Amongst the hundreds of stories and different supernatural creatures presented in the book, I chose to investigate some aspects of the stories related to fairies, with special attention to the history of that tradition, and one specific type of faery, the Changeling. I believe that myths and superstitions play an important role in social practice, and reveal much about the culture they derive from. In Lady Wilde's representations, fairies are creatures imbued with the power to deceive humans in order to reach their goals. According to these tales, the fairy race is heavily reliant on human response to their doings. I analyze some aspects of the fairy stories in order to find traces of the fairy influence in human society, so as to discuss certain moments when the presence of the fairies seems an attempt to explain natural events that might be unexplainable, or carry a negative connotation, otherwise. The work is divided into two parts. The first examines the connection between Celtic folklore and the Irish sense of national identity, and introduces the author, Jane Wilde. The second retrieves the tradition of faery folklore and explores some aspects of the changeling tradition. I hope that this monograph can highlight the importance of the Irish fairy mythology and legends in relation to some traditional social practices, and also show how they have influenced the literature of other countries as well.

Keywords: Irish literature. Lady Wilde. *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*. Fairy. Folklore.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	10
1. CONTEXTUALIZATION	12
1.1 On Celtic Folklore and Fairies.	12
1.2 On Jane Wilde: Author and Folklorist.....	18
2. FAIRIES IN <i>LEGENDS, CHARMS AND SUPERSTITIONS OF IRELAND</i>	25
2.1 On the Fairy Race	26
2.2 On Changelings	33
CONCLUSION	39
REFERENCES	43

INTRODUCTION

I have always been interested in mythologies and their impact within the societies in which they were conceived. There are elements of literature, religion and history in them. Another most intriguing feature is the fact that different mythologies are so similar to one another. Northrop Frye explains that by declaring the human body, the human senses and the human brain is more or less the same in all places and moments in time. Big geographical events, such as the Pangea, the Ice Age, the warming up of the planet and the rising of the waters have been told in stories carried out by oral tradition all over the world, as well. (Cf. FRYE, 1963) Although many of these similarities have become clear in my mind through literature and other media, some origins are still a mystery. That is why I decided to dedicate my undergraduate monograph to the investigation of one of the greatest genuine contributions of British tradition to literature: the Celtic Fairy Folklore.

The idea of writing about Fairies came to me in one of the English Literature classes, when we were reading William Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where we have a portal that allows the communication of human characters and fairies. In the play, Oberon, king of Fairie, orders that Puck, a fairy sprite, sprinkles a magical love potion on the eyes of Titania (the queen of Fairy), so that when she awakens and sees Oberon in front of her, she may fall in love with him again (they had a quarrel). After many mistakes from Puck, several human characters who happen to be spending the night in the woods have their destinies influenced by the interference of the fairies. Had it not been for the existence of a parallel dimension with these magical creatures, the characters' course might have been much different. At the end of the play, in the Epilogue, Puck asks the audience to forgive the actors if they were offended and, if that was the case, that they pretended it has all been a dream.

The possibility of considering what happened as a dream made me realize that this could also be related to the acknowledgement of fairies in society. How often is a myth transcribed into a belief, or used as a metaphor for things that take place in human life? This question provided the key to my research. Next, I concentrated in the fairies and the way they behaved in that play. Both Oberon and Titania were investing their energy towards their own goals, they were not interested in the implications this could trigger in the human world. They were fighting over a human boy they had stolen from his family somewhere in India. Titania and Oberon were arguing about who would take the human boy. As a result of their dispute, the human characters had their life stories changed unwillingly. I wondered where in time had this kind of

fairy been thought of and why were they much more like a representation of a human hierarchy than that famous simple-minded creature who lives in the forest and is usually happy. Fairies as dancing magical creatures from the forest are a very popular version of the Fairy folk nowadays, but I had memory of an older version of Fairies in which they were evil-intent creatures who are constantly deceiving humans. I believed that, if I could find the origins of the Fairy mythology, I could then trace a timeline between the first concept of the Fairies up to the most recent notions of what a Fairy may be.

That proved to be far more complex than I expected. Besides, a simple timeline would not answer some questions I still had in mind, but that reinforced my determination to research about fairy mythology. That is how I eventually read Lady Wilde's collection of Irish myths, concentrating in the stories that showed the interaction of Fairys with humans. Fairys are one of the most relevant contributions Celtic culture gave to British literature.

Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland was published by Lady Wilde in the late 19th century. Lady Wilde, - or Jane Francesca Agnes Elgee Wilde, or "Speranza" – and her husband, Sir William Wilde, were enthusiastic supporters of the Irish Revival, a literary movement that aimed at reinforcing Irish identity and cultural memory. For decades, it was a hobby to Sir William to travel to the countryside and collect information about traditional folk tales that were kept by memory by the inhabitants of remote rural areas. After his death, his widow, Lady Wilde transformed the annotations into narrative prose and published the collection, in 1887. This book is divided into nine sections. One of them, called "Mysteries of Fairy Power" is the main corpus of this monograph. It consists of seven stories that provide accounts of the fairy race, including their origin, habits and interactions with the human race.

I will now bring the contextualization for the first part of my work, where I explain some elements that led the production of *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*, by Lady Wilde.

1 CONTEXTUALIZATION

In order to study the relations involving fairies and humans, it is better to start with Irish fairies and Irish humans. This is the reason why the first section of the present monograph offers some brief contextualization about the reasons why in late 19th century the Irish were so involved in the study of Celtic folklore, why Lady Wilde and her husband became collectors of folk tales, and why *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* is such an important work.

1.1 ON CELTIC FOLKLORE AND FAIRIES

From pre-historic times Ireland was inhabited by clans that constantly feuded against one another. In the year 1171, in the 12th century, a group of these chieftains asked the help of Henry II, King of England, to defeat their adversaries. King Henry II not only helped them, but he also took control of Ireland. Ever since then, the Irish have resented the English domination, and have tried to get of it. (Cf. FUNCK, 2012)

The Irish resistance can be divided into three moments. During the first centuries, the leaders were the Irish chieftains, who tried to expel the English by force, but they were consistently defeated. Later, the resistance took the shape of political and economic actions, led by wealthy Irish farmers and landowners. Finally, in the turn of the 19th into the 20th century, young intellectuals took the task. They created a number of cultural movements that aimed at recovering Celtic traditions and, through them, recover their lost historical memory and sense of national identity. This resistance took form in two different ways. One was an armed movement, a branch of the *Sinn Fein*¹, that originated the guerrilla movement I.R.A. (Irish proposing the study of old Gaelic language, the creation of centres to study Irish dance, Irish myths and music. (Cf. LESSA, 2013) Lady Wilde was an enthusiastic member of the Celtic revival, and *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* is her contribution to the cause. Her life and family background tell much of what makes those legends food for thought in what constitutes not only the present-day sense of Irish nation.

Lady Wilde's involvement with Irish nationalism seem to have an impact on how she portrays the importance of the Irish folklore on her later writings. The Irish people have a long tradition of resorting to mythology as a constant, vivid means of dealing with their history.

¹ *Sinn Fein* is a Gaelic expression that represents the Irish resistance. It means "We for Ourselves". In 1905 it developed into a political party, that still exist.

One could not talk about how the Irish people have come to the present days without paying respect to mythical heroes such as Cuchulainn or the Cycle of the *Tuatha De Danann*. (Cf. WILDE, 2006) Just as the Irish have these heroes and cycles as a representation of early dwellers of the island and periods of their history, they also have the acknowledgement of fairies and spiritual entities as part of their life. This cultural trait is what makes Ireland different from other countries, and it is also what makes the Irish folklore relatable for many other cultures. Every culture, to a certain extent, has its beliefs related to the supernatural and makes it the answer for questions still unsolved. This is why the current section seeks to describe some aspects of the Celtic folklore and bring an introduction to the concept of fairy within the Irish culture. This is an attempt to show the importance of myths within the Irish culture and also to highlight their significance in the constitution of Ireland as a nation.

Celtic folklore has been widespread in popular culture for many decades now. From the expanding knowledge related to its literature, or even in movies and video games, there may be a trace of the Celts to be found as a reference or core concept of some plots. The Irish legends and myths are a product of their ancestor Celtic which have been used and understood as the origin of Ireland as a nation. There is a strong link between some old legends and what is considered actual Irish history. For example, it is said that the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, the mythical inhabitants of Ireland who moved to the island before the coming of the Celts, were the ones responsible for the development of some important skills. According to the legend, these mythical beings brought four powerful talismans to the island: the stone of Fál, the Spear of Lugh, the Sword of Nuada and the Cauldron of the Daghdha. Each of these talismans had specific powers that were apparently a metaphor for gifts needed in order for a nation to prosper. Both spear and sword would bring positive results in necessary battles; the Stone of Fál would indicate the true king and finally the Cauldron would be the knowledge in medicine in order to sustain life. (Cf. GREEN, 1993) As Green describes, “The Tutha Dé were skilled in magic and druid-lore. Many of the gods were associated with particular functions: thus Oghma was skilled in war-craft; Lugh in arts and crafts; Goibhniu in smithing; Dian Cécht in medicine”. (GREEN, 1993, p.15) There is a structure in these skills that might have been, for the Celts later on, what the tenets of a nation should look like. Also, a very interesting matter is the definition of the said druid-lore. The druids were, according to the myth, early dwellers of Ireland who were versed in the use of herbs and general nature knowledge for medicinal purposes. Healers are a fundamental role in any society and the Celts were no exception.

In fiction, some of the mythical elements associated with the druids made them appear

in stories as magic bearers through the use of their potions. A popular example of that is the popular comic books series Asterix and Obelix, the two Gaelic friends who fight against the Roman empire with the aid of Panoramix, their druid, who prepares his secret potion which gave them supernatural strength. (Cf. UDERZO & GOSCINNY, 2004) This druid, Panoramix, is an example of one kind of individual who has a social role that is fictionalized, generating legends and beliefs that have an impact in people's existence. The same applies to the belief in witchcraft, for instance, since witches were real women with more knowledge than expected at their historical moment. As a consequence, they were punished, and supernatural stories were created to justify the punishment. What I mean is that druids, as any other historical person who has been attributed with supernatural powers, were in fact, at some point, real dwellers of such place (in the case of the druids, the island of Ireland). That may be an indication of myths and legends as part of what constitutes the historical moments of a country.

Just as druid-lore refers to the studies of the druid knowledge, which is associated with the use of herbs for medicine, folklore also refers to a specific area of knowledge. But what kind of knowledge? Alan Dundes presents this people, or "folk":

Folk was defined in contrast with or in opposition to some other population group. The folk were understood to be a group of people who constituted the lower stratum, the so-called *vulgus in populo* – in contrast with the upper stratum or elite of that society. The folk were contrasted on the other hand with "civilization" – they were the uncivilized element in a civilized society – but on the other hand, they were also contrasted with the so-called savage or primitive society, which was considered even lower on the evolutionary ladder. (DUNDES, 1980, p. 2)

Therefore, the folklore (lore = body of stories) of a country is focused on the needs of common people, who neither live with great possessions, nor completely out of society. Folk tales are mainly stories told by and for the common folk, people who either need an explanation for natural events that are still not clear in their time, or those who need a belief to be held as moralizing factor.

When we think about folk tales that are bound to be moralizing, many stories come to mind. The Grimm Brothers, for instance, were great contributors to this style of stories. Tales such as "Hansel and Gretel" are moral-based fairy-tales in which the reader understands that

strangers should not be trusted and that envy leads to damnation. These may not be the true consequences in real life, but the stories and their morals serve as a way to prevent people from suffering such consequences. These stories show examples of what to expect from society, in many layers of action. Hansel and Gretel were, in the original story, abandoned by their parents because poverty had stricken their family and they would not be able to support their children:

Early tomorrow morning we will take the two children out into the thickest part of the woods, make a fire for them, and give each of them a little piece of bread, then leave them by themselves and go off to our work. They will not find their way back home, and we will be rid of them." (GRIMM, 2016, p. 53).

It is important to remember that The Grimm Brothers were two of the earliest fairy-tale compilers in history. This makes the original purpose of a fairy-tale to represent a moment in the history of a certain population or social class in order to bring light to some of their difficulties in life. Not necessarily all fairy-tales are just about a social cause, but many of them are also imbued with the element of mythology. This brings a magic perspective towards the moral factors in the story, but also traces a true moment of belief in the supernatural when these factors are met. The definition of folk-lore lays on the production of stories related to the people, but fairy-tales do not necessarily have to be stories related to fairies. Although it is said that the Grimm Brothers were fairy-tale writers, many of their stories do not rely on the supernatural element, rather than mundane explanations for the events in the stories.

When is it, then, that we can find mystical entities such as the fairy? The answer is simple: folklore. In the past, when people needed to explain the natural cause of a disease or some uncommon social behavior, they usually relied on an explanation brought from the belief in the supernatural. Not only that, but mythology from various other perspectives has always been present in human history.

Taking some examples from Greek mythology, which is at the root of Western literature, we can think of the titans as Gaea and Uranus, representing the earth and the skies; Hades as the god who looks after the lost souls after death; Aphrodite as the representation of love, sexuality and beauty; Zeus as the great leader of all the gods in Olympus. If we think about these examples from Greek mythology, it is possible to understand that each of them took on a different role. Gaea and Uranus were a supernatural explanation for the existence of the earth

and the skies. This is what is called a creation myth. After those, there is Hades, who is a metaphor for the existence of life after death. The matter of death has been one of the most problematic factors to humankind's thoughts and this has been one of the attempts to explain death. Furthermore, Aphrodite as an agent of some specific human feelings and concepts such as love, sexuality and beauty. Finally, there is Zeus, as a mythological representation of a great leader, which is easily applied to the structure of many human societies in terms of hierarchy. All these titans and gods have a role in the societies influenced by those myths, and serve to bring a greater sense of self-consciousness to the common folk and even to the higher classes.

One of the reasons why British Literature is so rich is that, besides counting on the Greek myths, it is also enriched by Norse and Celtic traditions. In Norse mythology there is Freyja as the god of love, sexuality and beauty, among other titles. Odin is the most important god in the pantheon; and the concept of Cosmology, in which the center of the universe is to be held within the great Yggdrasil tree's quarters. Every society has had its own attempt to explain natural events through mythology.

Now, let us consider what constitutes a myth and how it concerns folklore. According to Joseph Campbell, mythologies serve four functions.

The first is the "the mystical function", the supernatural, mysterious element of a mythology. This means, as he says, "realizing what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before this mystery. Myth opens the world to the dimension of mystery, to the realization of the mystery that underlies all forms". (CAMPBELL, 2011, p.38.) According to this concept, it is possible to believe that folklore operates in the same way. The second function of the myth is the "cosmological dimension", as to myths that explain the cosmos. The aforementioned titans Gaea and Uranus are an example of this second function, since they are an interpretation of a type of creationism. The third function "sociological function" defined as supporting and validating a certain social order. Campbell mentions that cultural behavior such as polygamy and monogamy are an example of how this sociological aspect works. Both concepts are either correct or wrong according to which society it is applied.

For the Christian society, to think about polygamy as something unacceptable is a mere factor of cultural and mythological context. It is, then, a matter applied to the third function of a myth. Folk stories are also usually bound to this third function of the myth, as they have a particular focus on showing the behavior of said society. Finally, there is the fourth function of the myth, which is the pedagogical function, bringing the concept of how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances. This last structural component of what constitutes a myth is

probably the most important of all factors. It is the reason why mythology is such a recurrent theme of discussion and thought. There is always a way to interpret old stories such as myths or folk tales, and that is what makes them still present in modern society through literature and other media.

Concerning Celtic folklore, one of the most remarkable mythical creatures is the fairy. Its origins are usually related to the Celtic culture because that was the moment in history when the fairy became more noticeable as a spiritual entity of influence, but that is not one of the oldest origins of the fairy. One of the earliest concepts is bedded in the Iranian culture. Lady Wilde (2006) explains that the ancient roots of the Celtic culture are derived from the Iranian people and one will “find that the original materials have been but very slightly altered”. (WILDE, 2006, p. 7) According to this statement, it is possible to believe that most of the other Irish folklore tales are also anciently connected to the Iranian culture. Another important factor to be considered about the Irish culture is that the Irish people have always kept their traditional beliefs. This means that other cultures were not able to implement their faith in Ireland as to exclude the original Irish traditions. Even though they maintained their ancient faith, new beliefs were seen as an addition to their understanding of the spiritual world, thus, they added them to their repertoire. The author brings the example: “The Danes held the east coast of Ireland for three hundred years, yet there is no trace of Thor or Odin or the Frost Giants, or of the Great World-serpent in Irish legend”. (WILDE, 2006, p. 6) This acknowledgement of the Irish people as faithful to their mythological origins may have been one of the influential factors which brought the fairy-folk among the other legends to the modern days.

Although other myths and beliefs were not included in the official Irish legends, the Irish people were very welcoming towards other cultures and beliefs. The reason for that may be because the roots of the Irish mythology are pagan. Note that when I bring the term “pagan” I am referring to a pre-Christian definition of the word. Paganism on the Celtic context was a form of union between humans and nature through spirituality.

Higginbotham explains that pagan religions are also referred to as “earth-centered” and that they differ from the other world religions such as the Christian religion, for instance, that has as an objective to “try to gain converts”. (HIGGINBOTHAM, 2013, p. 14) The authors also bring a definition of paganism that suits the Irish people in regards to their acceptance towards the Christian Faith. They mention that pagan religions have “an acceptance and tolerance of other religions and worldviews”. (HIGGINBOTHAM, 2006, p. 15)

These core concepts of paganism may have influenced the Irish people when facing the preaching of Christianity in their land. The old legend is related to St. Patrick, who may have been responsible for bringing the belief in the Christian God to the pagan island of Ireland. Some people claim that the legend does not follow any written record. Richards states: “Nowhere will one find in the supposed writings of St. Patrick any reference to him receiving a mandate from Rome or ecclesiastical authority to enter on a missionary Journey to Ireland”. RICHARDS, 2010, p.21. It is also believed that Bishop Palladius, who had been sent by the Roman Pontiff to Ireland in a missionary journey, may have been the one responsible for preaching the Christian beliefs.

Although there is no written proof of St. Patrick as the person involved in the preaching of the Christian Faith in Ireland, his legends survived. Many stories were told about St. Patrick “from the tale of his ridding Ireland of snakes to that of his unlocking an entrance to purgatory”. (FLECHNER, 2019, p.1) The Irish culture was able to turn a Christian priest into a folkloric figure. It is interesting to see, and that only reinforces the power of the Irish tradition, that up to the present days we still see St. Patrick’s figure disposed as a man wearing green clothes, a green top hat with a four-leaf clover on it. This is a representation of the Leprechaun, the famous owner of the pot-of-gold that lies across the rainbow. St. Patrick was devoted to the Christian god, but his image is incorporated into a pre-Christian version of himself, because the Irish folklore is vital to the Irish people.

1.2 ON JANE WILDE: AUTHOR AND FOLKLORIST

Jane Frances Elgee was born in Dublin, in 27 December 1821. As a poet, she wrote under the pen name “Speranza”. When she was 30 years old she married Sir William Wilde, and became known as “Lady Wilde”. Ironically, neither of them belonged in the aristocracy. The reason why Sir William was titled is that he was ophthalmologist to Queen Victoria, who gave him the title so that he might look more distinguished.

Another important fact about Lady Wilde is that she is Oscar Wilde’s mother. As a consequence, we find much information about her in biographies of her famous son. She will be presented here in the light of Richard Ellman’s approach. (Ellman is the author of the most authoritative biography of Oscar Wilde.)

Besides being a very talented woman, Jane Wilde felt she was destined for greatness. There were moments in her life in which she would rather be the dangerous trigger of a revolution than to live in the comfort of her house. Even her age was a mystery up to her later years. It was found out by historians that she lived her life lying about her age, saying that she was ten years younger than she was. This discovery was made “on the basis of her application for a grant from the Royal Literary Fund in November 1888”. (ELLMAN, 2013, p.7) Her famous son, Oscar Wilde, also lied about his own age. He “claimed to be two year younger than he was, even in his marriage certificate and Lady Wilde went along with this chronology, congratulating him on winning the Newdigate Prize at the age of ‘only 22,’ when she knew he was close to twenty-four”. (ELLMAN, 2013, p.7) Jane Wilde was a strongminded person, and also a very influential mother. Her thoughts about how society portrayed women anticipate how Oscar would behave in the future on the subject. Her written works about these thoughts, on the other hand, would only appear in a more distinct manner on her later years.

The many different names she used through her lifetime reflect the different facets she had. Her birth name was Jane Frances Elgee. After her husband received his title, in recognition for his services as a great ophthalmologist, Jane decided to change her middle name from Frances to Francesca, which reinforced her Italian ancestry and ensured that her signature would sound more like a nobility title. By the end of this process, she maintained the name Jane Francesca Wilde and signed her works as Lady Wilde. In her early years she had worked at a newspaper called *The Nation* and signed her poems as *Speranza*, with the intention to portray her writings as a means of hope for the readers. That was the starting point of an important moment in Irish history.

Jane Elgee started to nurture nationalist feelings towards the long decaying situation in Ireland, when she met by a special event. In 1845 she was walking on the street with her friend, the fellow-poet William Butler Yeats, and they saw a great crowd that closed the whole street. She asked a shop clerk what was happening, and he explained that this was Thomas Davis’ public funeral. She had no idea who Thomas Davis was, and asked the shop man for further information. He answered: “He was a poet.”

Jane Elgee got motivated into thinking that to be a poet was the correct path in order to bring people together for a cause. Thomas Davis was one of the early poets to write about the nationalist feeling to his readers. Yeats too was an old follower of the nationalist cause and shared Jane’s opinions about that.

That was a time of need in Ireland, and *Speranza* meant her poems to enter the minds

and the homes of the Irish people. Jane wrote her poetry on the upcoming revolution. She sent her writings to Charles Gavan Duffy, the editor of the newspaper entitled *The Nation*, in hope of a positive return so that she could further develop her plans of feeding revolutionary thoughts with her work. Duffy read her poems and was moved by her words in favor of Irish nationalism. Later on, they met and he invited her to write for *The Nation* in a special section called “Young Ireland”. This was the name the nationalist movement was promoting for the upcoming revolution. (Cf. ELLMAN, 2013) This revolution had many motivations and some were even not visited by that time.

We can only understand the origin of such a nationalism by going back several decades in time. In 1800, England proposed that Ireland joined in what they called the “Act of Union”, an alliance between both countries, establishing The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Scotland had been in union with England since 1707, but Ireland did not belong in this project. The proposal was that the three peoples would not be considered foreigners when visiting the different countries. They would be part of the union, just as neighbors. It was the interest of England to form this alliance for multiple reasons. England needed this pact in terms of protecting them against French invasion, because Ireland would be the first step to make a pincer attack if they eventually waged war. Through Ireland, it would be easier for France to have the upper hand in a final battle against England. Also, in political terms, the alliance would allow Catholics to be part of the Parliament, which was not previously possible because the majority of the Irish Parliament was composed with Protestants. This is an important aspect because later on, the Catholics in the Irish Parliament would receive “powerful assistance from rich Irish Americans associated with Tammany Hall”, (KEENAN, 2008, p.12) a political organization in New York. This means that Catholics had an advantage in the late 19th Century in Ireland in terms of politics, in comparison with the early half of that century. Another English interest in the union was the free commerce between Ireland and England, which would fortify the British capital and help with the Irish sustainability. (KEENAN 2008, p. 15)

The Act of Union of 1800 was signed and some important changes took place. Besides those of political and mercantile order, the Union flag, which was already a fusion between St. George’s cross from England and St. Andrew’s cross from Scotland, had the Red Saltire cross added to it. The Red Saltire was the Irish flag as proposed by England.

That would also change after the Great Famine in 1845, when the French would suggest the three colours for Ireland based on the French flag, but with their own Irish meanings. Another important change was that the Irish army was now united with the English army. This

means that, by 1800's, the Irish men were bound to England if any war were to erupt. The Irish people now also had their representatives within The House of Lords at Westminster in England, so that Ireland could also take part in political decisions.

Within this scenario of mutual commitment between Ireland and England, after almost five decades, a tragical event took place. In 1845, when Jane Wilde was struggling with Irish nationalist causes and raising her people's motivation to fight against the British crown, people were starting to run out of resource, due to a land division law that left the Irish people with smaller portions of land to plant. As this happened, the Irish were not able to plant many cultures in order to sustain life with diversity. Therefore, they concentrated their land work in potato plantations, since this was the most affordable vegetable to grow in their farms.

In 1845, American newspapers reported a potato blight that had been devastating their crops for two years. Later on, the news reported that the blight had arrived in Europe and this information was already running on the Irish newspapers. Although the news about the plague were spreading, the Irish people did not seem to be concerned. Especially because "agricultural reports in general were very promising, predicting that the potato crop of 1845 would be exceptionally abundant". (KINEALY, 1994, p.57) This was the moment when the Irish potato crops started rotting and people started to starve. The situation of Ireland was already difficult before, and motivated to raise arms against England. Now the potato blight turned this situation in a terminal case. It is estimated that almost thirty percent of the Irish population was decimated by the Great Famine. Many others relied on selling their lands to the government in order to pay their expenses on their emigration travels. This generated the second great wave of Irish emigration to the United States of America.

The early 1840's was a moment of poverty for the Irish, because they were running short on supplies and did not have much help from England. Even though they were now part of the Union, England declared to be in a period of hardship as well. This was one last motivations for "Young Ireland" to attempt the revolution.

It must also be noted how the movement was called, depending on whose point-of-view. The Irish people called it a revolution, but the English people called it a rebellion. In 22 July 1848 and on the following week Jane published two decisive articles for *The Nation*.

The first was titled "The Hour of Destiny". There she explained that the long pending war with England has commenced. In the second article, "The Die is Cast", she swore that Ireland would raise arms against England if they did not send help. This last statement received a very negative feedback from the readers, because the Irish nationalists were not willing to

give in. That was what Jane proposed in her writing, because, even though promising to wage war against England, she wrote asking for help from their neighbor. Irish authorities immediately imprisoned Charles Gavan Duffy, who was still the lead editor of *The Nation*, blaming him for the article. Although Charles denied being the author and Jane herself went to the police in order to declare that she was the author, no one was interested, and Duffy went on trial four times before being released. Jane was infuriated, because the police officers would not trust her authority, apparently because she was a woman. This may have been one of the many moments in her life when she gathered the behavioral aspects of society towards women. Her later writings would say much about what she had compiled.

In what concerns the Great Famine and the complications between Ireland and England, the resolution for the situation went on the worst possible manner. As Peter Quinn explains, Ireland tried the armed approach in 1848, but failed despite their intentions,

A sense of historical duty proved, however, to be an insufficient basis for an insurrection. The Young Irelanders had no military experience and few arms, were opposed by the Catholic church and reliant on a population demoralized by three years of hunger and disease. Their attempt at rebellion was ineffectual and collapsed in days. But far from damaging their reputations, the events of 1848 helped to secure them, and they were praised by the later nationalists for having asserted in arms Ireland's right to independence. (QUINN, 2015, p.11)

The feeling of heroism that these unprepared troops delivered to the Irish people was a motivation for their pride. It was a lost battle in terms of conquest, but a victory in terms of honor. As their people saw it, they were the martyrs of the revolution. Ireland has always been very thoughtful on their heroes and these soldiers were remembered in history. All the other nationalists such as Thomas Davis, Charles Gavan Duffy, and Jane Frances Elgee were highly praised by that time.

These facts took place four years before 1852, when Jane Frances Elgee married William Robert Wilde. He was also a nationalist, and shared her interests in literature, art and research. William was a respected medical doctor, who had written books that highly contributed for the evolution of ophthalmology. Some terms created by him are still used today. He was “appointed Surgeon Oculist to the Queen in Ireland in 1863, and the next year was knighted”, (ELLMAN, 2013, p.19) although in reality he and his wife were middle-classed people who had three children, two boys and a girl. In 1864, a scandal involving William and

Jane Wilde erupted. Mary Josephine Travers, an old patient of William, accused him of attempting to rape her during one of the procedures. She wrote letters to a newspaper sending hints of his attempt to rape her while she was under the effect of chloroform. Travers accused him two years after the event, one year after William was knighted. It is believed that his public appearance triggered her interest in revealing this information. Mary Travers wrote about that “in the form of a story with characters named as ‘Dr. and Mrs Quilip’, and signed as ‘Speranza’.” (ELLMAN 2013, p.26) When Lady Wilde read those letters in the newspaper, she promptly wrote to Mary’s father to complain about her using Jane’s famous pseudonym. Mary read the complaint and sued Jane for libel. William did not interfere, since the process was not in his name, and Mary won. The fee they had to pay was considerably high, and the Wildes never recovered economically. Letters from William to Mary with proof that he might have committed the crime were found later, but the Irish society was overwhelmed with the great works William and Jane had produced in the year of the accusation.

In 1867, Isola, their daughter, was sent to visit an uncle. There she contracted a fever and had an effusion in the brain. Jane was only able to arrive in time to watch her daughter die. (ELLMAN 2013, p.41) This event led Lady Wilde into the darkest period of her life. After Isola’s death Jane lost her vigor and underwent a depressive state for three years. Not long after that, in 1874, William died and left her in a negative financial situation. That is when she moves to England to stay closer to her two sons, and to write books about “history, religion, and literature, as well as women’s roles and intellectuals”. (GONZALES, 2006, p.321)

Jane’s writing on folklore, legends and myths were a product of her travels with William on his final years alive. They went to Sweden, Denmark and Germany together. Besides from that, William himself traveled through Ireland collecting old stories about local folklore and legends, which would later be compiled and commented by Lady Wilde in her *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* and other books on the matter.

Some of William’s texts, like *The Early Race of Mankind in Ireland*, were published on *The Flintshire Observer*, a Welsh newspaper. (Cf. ELLMAN, 2013)

As she had to write and publish books in order to provide a modest life for her and her older son (Willie Wilde, who was a journalist and poet), Jane chose subjects which were akin to her learnings and interests in life. The folklore she explores in her books brings her close to the Irish people, and it is with pleasure that she deals about the belief in legends and folklore that shapes the Irish identity as a nation from its roots. Just as the Irish people wanted to guarantee their place as an independent nation through the Great Famine, with the revolution

of Young Ireland, to write about a cultural aspect of the country was also a way to fight for the integrity of her people in terms of identity. Later, in 1893, her work *Social Studies* was published.

In this book, she makes a great revision on how women have been portrayed through history. Her feminist mind is more structured in thoughts and very well explained in this work, where she traces timeline explaining several moments in history when women were forced to be submissive to men because of any given social rule. One of the chapters is called “The Bondage of Women”. The following chapter, called “Genius and Marriage” continues the comment on women’s bondage with the theme of marriage and how it is portrayed in many societies. She then deals on a plethora of subjects, such as clothing for women, spiritual relations, the changes humanity was bound to undergo, and even the matter of martyrs and leaders in Ireland.

Lady Wilde is an important and influential name in Irish society and in the Celtic Revival. Through her participation in the Young Ireland movement she was a key element to the changes that would take place in the country. She lived in a period of hardship and endurance. She endured the Great Famine, went through the scandal involving her husband, lost her daughter, lived her last years in modest circumstances, and witnessed the moral and spiritual slaughter of her middle son, the author Oscar Wilde. Still, she kept influencing people around her. She has a role as preserver of the Irish culture through the writing of her compilation of folkloric tales. She will also be remembered for her writings about the conditions of women in her lace and time.

2 FAIRIES IN *LEGENDS, CHARMS AND SUPERSTITIONS OF IRELAND*

As previously mentioned, although *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* has been organized and written by Lady Wilde, the basis of the book consists of annotations made by William and Jane Wilde during their trips to different places, and during William's trips to the Irish countryside. The final product, the book, was fully written by Lady Wilde, with the exception of one chapter, "The Ancient Race of Ireland", written by Sir William.

The title of the work, as published in 1887, is slightly longer than the present one: *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*. And the author originally signed as Francesca Speranza Wilde. In the first editions, the stories were presented randomly, but in later compilations (such as in the Dover Edition, used in this monograph), they are divided in eight thematic groups, namely: "Ancient Legends", "Legends of Animals", "Legends of the Saints", "Mysteries of Fairy Power", "The Holy Wells", "Popular Notions Concerning the Sidhe Race", "Sketches of the Irish Past" and (the part written by Sir William) "On the Ancient Races of Ireland". Simply by examining these titles we can see how rich the book is in terms of history and mythology.

Respecting creatures and themes of the Irish Celtic folklore, we are introduced to: horned women, leprechauns, changelings, the Banshee, evil eyes, witches, haunted places, superstitions, herbs, recipes of all sorts (from curing a toothache, to getting invisible), love-charms, evil spells, poetic inspiration, marriage rites, orgies, druidic rituals, bards, magical animals (dogs, cats, cows, birds) spirits of the dead, King Arthur, St. Patrick, blessings, and much more. Specifically about fairies, we have the history of the fairies, fairy music, fairy dance, fairies as fallen angels, cave fairies, changelings, fairy help, fairy vengeance, fairy horses, midsummer, and several other fascinating stories.

Because of the limitations of time and scope, I selected only two threads to pursue in this monograph. The first concerns the origins of the fairy race, because this topic provides some keys that may explain the relation involving Irish folklore and Irish history. The second thread offers a closer look into the "Changeling", a kind of creature that approximates fairies and humans, and therefore helps us understand how the two species relate.

Therefore, the current section concentrates on topics related to the fairy race, aiming to find the link to their influence in society. I will bring some descriptions mentioned by Lady Wilde and look for the roots of what constitutes these legends as part of the traditional behavior expected from the Irish society according to their beliefs. I also bring some accounts on the fairies according to other authors in order to reinforce my point and broaden the discussion.

2.1 ON THE FAIRY RACE

In the introduction of her book, and in the specific section called “On the Fairy Race”, Lady Wilde retraces the history of fairy folklore². According to her, one of the earliest records of the fairy race has been found in the ancient Iranian culture³. It is from back then that many of the legends that constitute the Celtic folklore have come from, which makes it possible to believe that the Iranian mythology may be at the root of Celtic mythology.

Fairies are divided in several kinds and functions in the legends and definitions brought by Lady Wilde. They may even have been influenced by Christianity. As previously discussed, Druidism and Christianity mingled very easily in Ireland, to the point that one of the first missionaries St. Patrick, became himself a part of Irish folklore. We must remember that Ireland, as concerning its mythologies, is closely connected with the Celtic heritage, which is, to this day, one of the most known sources of Earth-Centered Religions in history. That makes the Irish people very diverse in terms of supernatural events in their legends and also very welcoming towards new beliefs. With the addition of this new belief, some stories had elements from Christianity added to their plots. I will now point some of the characteristics of the Fairy folk according to the stories compiled by Lady Wilde.

Some ancient names applied to the fairies are *Sidhe* and *Feadh-Ree*. The former as referring to “spirit race” and the latter as an old word for fairy. There are other interpretations that are still in agreement with the stories, such as described by Ruth Nestvold, who tells us that *Feadh-Ree* refers to the people that came before the Gaels, which were the ancestors of the Celts. The author also describes the *Sidhe* as coming from the hills or “dwelling in the magic hills that are often seen as doors to the Otherworld” (NESTVOLD, 2012, p.248) Both definitions agree with the status of the fairy within the stories in *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*.

In one of the stories about fairy origins in Lady Wilde’s book, called “The Fairy Race”, it is possible to relate the origins of the fairies to some other mythologies such as the Greek, the Norse and the Christian ones:

Some fell to earth, and dwelt there, long before man was created, as the first gods of the earth. Others fell into the sea, and they built themselves beautiful

² In this section of the work, all factual references about the history or practices of the fairies (except when referenced otherwise) come from Lady Wilde’s *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*.

³ In the general epigraph to this monograph there is a reference to the Celtic “Aryan home”, which means Iran, site of one of the first stages in the Celtic migrations.

fairy palaces of crystal and pearl underneath the waves; but on moonlight nights they often come up on the land, riding their white horses, and they hold revels with their fairy kindred of the earth, who live in the clefts of the hills, and they dance together on the greensward under the ancient trees, and drink nectar from the cups of the flowers, which is the fairy wine. (WILDE, 2006, p. 42)

The elements here described are similar to the aspects of the Greek and Norse mythology in regards to the type of distribution and agency on earth. It is expected of a polytheist religion to spread their faith through land and people. Just as the Greeks had Gaia to represent the earth, the Norse had Sif. When the Nordic people hailed Thor hearing his fury through thunder, the Greeks hailed Zeus. For the celebration of harvest, the Greeks had Cronos and the Nordic had Baldur. It comes as no surprise that the distribution of the fairies went in a similar fashion to the traditional polytheist theogonies, as it is a constant imagery. To what concerns the Christian mythology⁴ in the origins of the fairy, they can be seen as fallen angels. The description of falling to earth may not be exclusive to Christianity, but there is a second moment which implies that the fairies here presented have been described through a markedly Christian point of view, being a reinvented version, after the preaching of St. Patrick:

Other fairies, however, are demoniacal, and given to evil and malicious deeds; for when cast out of heaven they fell into hell, and there the devil holds them under his rule, and sends them forth as he wills upon missions of evil to tempt the souls of men downward by the false glitter of sin and pleasure. These spirits dwell under the earth and impart their knowledge only to certain evil persons chosen of the devil, who gives them power to make incantations, and brew love potions, and to work wicked spells, and they can assume different forms by their knowledge and use of certain magical herbs. (WILDE, 2006, p. 42.)

This story brings a Christian perspective into the concept of the fairies. Although many elements of the natural earth-centered legends are still present, this part of their origin seems to be directly derived from the Bible, in *Genesis*. It may be understood as inspired in the story of

⁴ I mean no disrespect to the Christian religions when I equate them with mythology. This monograph is written in the field of Literary Studies, where religion and mythology partake of the same status, on the premise that religions die, they become mythology.

Lucifer, when he is banished by God. The concepts of hell and heaven are clear, and there is reference to the Devil, which places the mythology of the fairy as an event after the timeline of Lucifer. This also implies that fairies are angels, since they have fallen from the Christian heaven.

It is also stated that “the islanders, like all the Irish, believe that the fairies are the fallen angels who were cast down by the Lord God”. (WILDE: 2006, p.96) According to this entry, some fairies are ill-intended because of their unheavenly nature. This concept goes against the ancient polytheist roots of the fairy as the best known version of the fairy in the woods, in unison with nature, and turns the monotheist root as an influential factor of the evil fairies who are bound to the devil. Therefore, their mission is to bring suffering to humankind.

The nature and origins of people and beings is a constant philosophical discussion when it comes to religion. Higginbotham explains that earth-centered religions believe that we are all “unflawed by nature”, and, in contrast to that, “most world religions today teach the opposite of one or both of Paganism’s central themes. They teach that the elements of the universe are separate from each other and that there is something fundamentally wrong with all of us”. (HIGGINBOTHAM, 2013, p.8)

The concept of right and wrong is a way to understand what the ethical rules of their society were. By understanding that some fairies have fallen from heaven into hell, and that they became evil entities, we may expect that common folk by that time were thrilled with these stories. Another aspect to be observed is that, on one hand, paganism⁵ brings the idea of a united universe, in which humanity and the spiritual world are connected. On the other hand, world religions such as Christianity have taught that humankind cannot have a direct connection to the spiritual world. This difference was taken in consideration while developing the mythology of the fairies. Even though there are heaven and hell, and God is praised by the people, the fairies are constantly interfering in human routine. Therefore, there is this distant connection to God, as to asking for his blessings just as in traditional Christianity, but that does not stop the interference of the fairies in human life.

The evil fairies who are sent by the devil to earth are presented as the messengers of evil knowledge. They are responsible for evil doings that harms humans. According to Lady Wilde, this is the origin of women known as witches. It is interesting to see that witches were, in fact, women who had a vast knowledge about nature, especially through the use of herbs. This seems

⁵ From this point on I will use the word “paganism” in the sense of a Celtic pre-Christian condition in respect to the Irish tradition.

like a more recent form of druidism, but the witches were distorted within the new mythology of the fairy. Instead of being called masters of healing and nature, they became to be depicted as devilish people guided by, as they also called him, “the Evil One”.

Note that this depiction did appear after the definition of devil was introduced in this mythology. Maeve Callan brings the moment when women were hunted for being accused of witchcraft while tracing a parallel between the reality of the Continent and Ireland:

The island was relatively untouched by the developments that enabled the witch craze to reach the depths it did on the Continent, with little experience of heresy or its prosecution, and little troubled by witchcraft. Although hagiography and penitentials testify to believe in witches, they depict a markedly different kind of witch, primarily a powerful practitioner of the pre-Christian religion in the former and an apparently Christian individual who practices mainly love or reproductive magic in the latter. (CALLAN, 2015, p. 81)

According to penitentials, books who deal on the subject in that period, the Irish depiction of witches, even though within what was supposed to be the Christian perception of witchcraft, was mainly focused on “love or reproductive magic”. (Cf. CALLAN, 2015) This explains why the Irish people had no reason to hunt witches, because they had no previous experience with heresy and prosecution. These concepts were not fully implemented in the legends of St. Patrick. Therefore, the roots of Celtic mythology prevented them from wishing to exterminate witches. Although that was the situation, the witches were still directly related to the mythology of the fairy, especially the evil side, which makes them appear in stories as people who either need to be avoided or repelled by some methods, which vary, depending on the story.

There are also the fairies of the earth, the ones who did not fall into hell. These fairies are fond of nature, happy and festive. They love music and dance and live in the landscapes. Just as the polytheist gods, each fairy of the earth has a different home. Some live inside caves, others in bushes, but all of them have their palaces within these households. They are described as luxurious beings and are “very jealous of the human race, who are so tall and strong and to whom has been promised immortality”. (WILDE, 2006, p.42) Once again there is a trace of Christianity in the promise of heaven for humankind. This is a depiction of the fairies in terms

of clothing in the book:

“The fairy king and princes dress in green, with red caps bound on the head with a golden fillet. The fairy queen and the great court ladies are robed in glittering silver gauze, spangled with diamonds, and their long golden hair sweeps the ground as they dance on the greensward. (WILDE, 2006, p. 43)

Further description explains that fairies have the power to transform themselves in any kind of form, which means that they do, sometimes, behave as shapeshifters. This is an important tool for the fairy to infiltrate into the human society. Note that I do not refer to a human world, or realm, since in these stories the connection between the human world and the spiritual world is so strong that humans could try to destroy a fairy bush, if they wanted to do so. It is so in terms of dimension, because a human can see and interact with fairies and their belongings, but the fairy magic is strong enough to repel, or even kill, humans. The fairies, for being jealous of humans, tend to kidnap human children who they consider beautiful. The explanation for that within the mythology is that they want to bring this child to their realm in order that, when the child comes to age, he or she would marry a fairy king or queen. By the crib of the original child they leave a creature of their own species. The word changeling is used to refer to the two children who have been exchanged. The child’s parents are lured so that they do not find out about the kidnapping. There is also the belief that some fairies who have bonds with the evil one kidnap a child every seven years and offer it in sacrifice for their master. The devil would then provide the fairies with their power until the next harvest. This is like the rituals of the Baal fires, were also changed with time,

The Baal fires were originally used for human sacrifices and burnt offerings of the first-fruits and of the cattle; but after Christianity was established the children and cattle were only passed between two fires for purification from sin, and as a safeguard against the power of the devil. (WILDE, 2006, p. 109)

The bushes where the fairies live in these stories are held as a sanctuary for the race. No human should surpass the limits of these areas, because to do so would result in the death of the invader. Some call them “fairy forts”, or “holy wells”, as they have an association with the called “otherworld”, which is the fairy realm. Peter Narv states that “there are an estimated three thousand holy wells” (NARV, 1997, p.199), and this is only the reference for fairy homes,

since many other folkloric creatures live in places such as grottos, graveyards, chapels and monuments.

Another important aspect of the fairies of the earth is their weakness: fire. The legends brought by Lady Wilde in what always raise the subject of “purification by fire”. It was believed that the flames had the power to reveal and purge the power of the fairies. Being so, fire was used by humans in order to identify a supposed changeling on the crib, or to make sure if someone was affected by fairy magic by any means. There is another kind of fairy magic, described in the story “The Fairy Dance”. One of the powers fairies show here is to abduct the victim with their music. This story is about a lady who was unlucky and fell into a well during the month of November.

The narrative explains that November is the month when spirits have more power. By the time she wakes up, she finds a group of people dancing by a fire. A young man, dressed like a prince, invites her to dance. She goes with him and they dance all night, until reach a large hall with a banquet, but suddenly a man whispers in her ears, “Eat no food, and drink no wine, or you will never reach your home again”. (WILDE, 2006, p. 33) She is almost forced to drink by one of the hosts, but the whispering man saves her and asks her to take a plant called *Athair-Luss* (a ground ivy) and leave at once. She gets home safely, but can still hear the screams from outside: "The power we had over you is gone through the magic of the herb; but wait--when you dance again to the music on the hill, you will stay with us for evermore, and none shall hinder." (WILDE: 2006, p.35) The story ends with a caution note: she never saw them again, but she could hear the sound of their music for a long time afterwards. Although the identity of the man who warned her against eating is unknown, the help of a stranger is a constant factor in these stories; and it is important to remember that no one leaves unscathed. She might have had help, but some consequence was left. In this story, it was the constant song on her mind. If she had not been saved by the stranger, according to this legend, she would have stayed there forever. According to Jack Zipes, this is what is expected of a folktale in a social context,

The various tale types are dependent on actions taken and conflicts that humans have experienced, and continue to experience, through biological and social behavior. Such basic actions as, for example, mating, procreation, child abandonment or abuse, hunting, planting, killing, exchanging gifts or people, violating women, and casting spells with words or signs involved in programs of action and were structured in tales for effective communication. (ZIPES, 2011, p. 8)

Zipes describes many possible situations which might be explained through folklore. Folk stories have the social function of warning and trying to explain human experience. If we take “The Fairy Dance” as an example, we can understand the tale as a warning. The famous statement “do not trust strangers” seems to be the main message in this story. What is described as the fairy folk here could as well be a group of ill-intended people planning something terrible that could not be described without a metaphor. When we think about the purification by fire, the one method that is supposed to repel fairies, it is also possible to believe that some time in history someone might have suffered some false accusation.

When it comes to belief, there is always a possibility that someone tried to use their knowledge, even though distorted means, for a said good cause that might in fact be harmful.

In the next subsection I will focus the discussion in one single (and very important) figure of the fairy-lore: The Changeling. There are many entries on the subject in Lady Wilde’s book, and these creatures are the reason of human fear towards fairies in many stories. I hope this part of the discussion exemplifies the concept of folklore as applied to explain human experience.

2.2 ON CHANGELINGS

The Changeling is a creature from the fairy folklore that may explain some common facts that have burdened the Irish people in the past. Fairies crave for beauty, and they envy humankind. From time to time, when a fairy king or queen finds a beautiful mortal child, he or she attempts to kidnap the child. After that, they take it to the fairy realm and leave a fairy baby in its place, in the cradle. They raise this child to breed with fairies, thus improving the fairy species aesthetically. As to the fairy changeling left with the human parents, it will inevitably bring suffering to the original family, by constantly weeping and failing to thrive. The family then starts to suspect that a their baby may have been replaced by a changeling, and may try to retrieve their child by a variety of methods. Donald Haase explains how the basic structure of the changeling narrative works:

The typical changeling narrative involves: (1) the abduction of a child, usually due to the inattention of the mother or caretaker but motivated by the fairies' desire for human infants; (2) the substitution of a deformed, old fairy for the child; (3) the ensuing chaos that the changeling brings to the house hold-eating and screaming and generally failing to thrive; (4) the suspicion that the human baby has been exchanged and the seeking of advice; (5) the various remedies either to trick the changeling into revealing its true nature or to force the fairy parents to rescue their own from harm; and (6) the eventual return of the child to its parents. (HAASE, 2008. P.179)

After the parents suspect that their baby might be a changeling, there are some ways, according to folklore, to force the creature to reveal its true form and banish it. It is expected, after the banishing of the changeling, that the original child returns. The most common method of banishing a changeling is the "purification by fire". According to the fairy-lore, one of the ways humans have to weaken the powers of a fairy is by igniting a circle of fire around it and waiting for the fairy to disappear into thin air. Within the description of the fairy, it is said that they live long lives and "will never know death until the last day comes, when their doom is to vanish away--to be annihilated forever". (WILDE, 2006, p.42) This description does stresses that fairies will not only one day simply vanish, but they will be "annihilated forever", in relation to their connection with humans. Some fairies are changelings and by all means, no

matter what happens in the beginning of the stories, they will end up vanishing by human punishment.

If we think about the fairy changeling in the perspective brought by Zipes, concerning the social function of folklore, the first, and more at sight interpretation of this legend may be a warning to parents about the risk of having their children kidnapped. They are, after all, stories involving child kidnapping, something that has always existed. This cautionary function of the fairy tale is present, for instance, in every single story, even the ones that we know so well, such as those of the Brothers Grimm.

The changeling folklore also triggers some questions concerning the behavior of the society described in the stories. This can be more clearly perceived if we activate one of the aforementioned four functions of the myth, proposed by Joseph Campbell, the function respecting “how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances”. (Cf. CAMPBELL, 2011)

For the people who have lost a child – something that happened very often in the past – there was some sort of consolation in the belief that the deceased child was now living happily in heaven; and, before the times of Christianity, that the child who died was not theirs: their real child had been taken to fairy-land and is growing healthily there.

The myth of the changeling can also offer some consolation to parents whose child, unfortunately, was born with some malformation or deforming physical or mental problem. Instead of saying that the child is a monster, or an aberration, the family and the community might embrace it by calling it a changeling, a creature with magic features and attributes.

There is also the horrid side to the questions, in the case of families who reject a child and want it to be eliminated from their lives. In ancient times, many tests involving the ring of fire might have failed, provoking a fire that ended up killing the child, regardless if that was a human or a fairy child. The imaginary behind the fairies interfering in human life can easily serve as an excuse to dismiss the unwanted child. In the Grimms’ story “Hansel and Gretel” the disregard with children is very blunt. In the changeling stories, however, it is hidden. If the existence of fairies and their kind is not the real matter, and if there is no real kidnapping involved, the number of motivations for the family get be rid of the child decreases.

I believe that the social function of the Changeling is especially applicable in the case of mentally or physically impaired children. The literature discussing the matter seems to agree with this belief. Peter Narv says: “The number of changelings in the stories that can be tenuously

linked to specific congenital birth disorders, on the basis of one or two symptoms and a good guess, are many.” (NARV, 1997, p.239)

The description of the changeling in *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* is always that of an “ugly misshapen thing” (WILDE, 2006, p.72), “wizened little thing” (WILDE, 2006, p.43) or a creature that will “grow up malicious and wicked” (WILDE, 2006, p.97). Such definitions contain the point of view of those who cannot accept the fact that they will have to carry the an unwelcome burden, the way they see the children who look or act differently from what is expected. The complains of the parents about their children in the stories usually relate to their appearance and behavior. The changelings have “withered little faces and thin crooked fingers” ((WILDE, 2006, p.120), they would “moan as if in pain” ((WILDE, 2006, p.24). Parents who give birth to a child with some syndrome or abnormality are bound to different kinds of responsibility. They have to care and look after the child constantly, which leaves them with less time for themselves and for the other siblings. Treating a sick child may also be expensive, and force the family to work double to get ore money. But the worse part is to deal with the (often unconscious) sense of guilt for having produced an impaired baby. The idea that that child is not actually their child, but a surrogate, would be almost like waking up from a nightmare.

How far did the changeling folklore affect the familial and social response to these children? Lady Wilde comments on that in her book: “This superstition makes the peasant-women often very cruel towards weakly children; and the trial by fire is sometimes resorted to in order to test the nature of the child who is suspected of being a changeling.” (WILDE, 2006, p.218) The author is silent about the things that may happen when a human parent places his or her baby within a circle of fire and the fire does not vanish into thin air.

Negative treatment of the changeling child is not referred only on the part of the family, but also from society. In the story “Fairy Wiles”, Lady Wilde tells of a child who survives the trial by fire: “But if the child survives the ordeal it is accepted as one of the family, though very grudgingly; and it is generally hated by all the neighbors for its impish ways.” (WILDE, 2006, p.97) Prejudice and bullying against mentally impaired people seem to have their own place in the Celtic folklore.

The interpretation of changelings as children with a physical or mental condition brings more than the possible explanation of the social behavior related to children. It may also be the origin of the fairy’s identity. The light-skinned, blue-eyed, blonde flying elf who lives in the holy bushes might, for instance, be an attribution to one specific victim of the changeling myth:

children with PKU (Phenylketonuria). Peter Narv (1997) explains the symptoms of PKU,

When two parents who carry the disease produce a child with PKU, the child will appear to be normal at birth. A large proportion of the children born with PKU appear to be light-skinned, light-haired, and blue-eyed. A common early symptom of PKU is vomiting; because the child cannot metabolize certain amino acids, malnutrition occurs. By the time the baby is six months old, symptoms may include seizures, tremors, hyperactivity, and extreme irritability. (NARV, 1997, p.239)

The description of this disease matches those found in the changeling stories, when the human baby does not show any different appearance or behavior on birth. It takes some time for the symptoms to show. This may be the time needed, according to the myth of the changeling, for the fairies to kidnap the original child. The PKU hypothesis might explain why in the legends that fairies prefer light-haired and light-skinned children, especially boys. PKU is also more frequent in boys, which might be an explanation for changelings being mainly put inside boys' cradles. The disease weakens the child and causes seizures, which might explain the weakness of the changeling and the way it behaves by frantically moving nonstop.

It is also said in fairy-lore that bards and dancers are the offspring of fairies with humans. This means that humans with fairy blood are often adepts of arts in the lore. This may also be related to certain genetic disorders such as Down Syndrome and Autism. One of the specific cognitive aspects of these conditions is that the person may have the capability of hyper-focusing in one task. Mathematics and music are two examples of tasks that produce great results with single focused thinking. Narv explains that PKU people have normal longevity, which means that, if combined with Down Syndrome or Autism, may have resulted in the figure of elves who are skilled in music and dance. Their longevity may be the reason why not only children are kidnapped and fall to the fairy spell. This may imply that people who are fairy stricken have certain mental conditions. (Cf. NARV, 1997)

Note that the changeling and the witch have some connections in terms of origins. Both of them, according to fairy-lore, are a product of the fairies within the human society. The witch is the woman who acquired evil knowledge from the fairies and the changeling is brought to humankind by fairies. They are also connected through the use of fire in history. The witches were hunted by the Church, who used fire to punish them, similarly to what the common folk did to changelings.

That interconnection between the negative responsiveness of society towards certain groups may signify that, supernatural or not, there is always some way of punishment for those who do not follow the established rules or the expected patterns. Fire may be the final test for the changeling, but there is also a preventive charm against the coming of the fairies: the blessing of God.

As mentioned before, these tales have a Christian influence because of the beliefs brought by the legend of St. Patrick. The presence of the Christian God as a reliable power against the evil intents of the fairies is frequent in *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*. In the story “The Evil Eye” there are several references to the importance of calling upon the blessing of God. The evil eye is a superstition related to negative intentions. According to this superstition, every time something is held precious to someone, it should be offered blessings by others. When a child is born, people should say “God bless it,” or else terrible events could occur. One of these events is the dreaded kidnapping of the child followed by its substitution by a changeling. Another moment when the changeling myth meets Christianity refers to God as protection, inferring deeper connections. Narv says that, “The unbaptized are in a nameless state, and thus more subject to the depredations of the supernatural. A number of versions simply state that the fairies were able to effect the change because the child had not been baptized in time”. (NARV, 1997, p.256) This fusion of Celtic and Christian beliefs has a logical connection if we think about their origins. In Christian mythology, God expels Satan from Heaven, and thus the fallen angel becomes the ruler of Hell. The myth of the fairy in Lady Wilde was inspired in that story. The fairies who were vain were cast from heaven to hell and obeyed the word of Satan. These fairies are also the ones responsible for some of the kidnappings related to the changelings. They capture children every seven years in order to prepare a human sacrifice to the Evil One, according to fairy-lore. Therefore, to say that a child must be baptized in order not to be kidnapped by the fairies is, in terms, to say that God prevents the Devil from reaching his grasp on those children.

All these stories and possible events of cruelty were only possible because of the single important element that, for believers, justifies their actions: faith. It is common in the stories compiled by Lady Wilde to have the people as true believers of the myth described. As Wentz says about the changeling stories,

in many such cases there is an undoubted belief expressed by the parents and friends that fairy-possession has taken place. This belief often translates itself

naturally into the folk-theory that the body of the child has also been changed, when examination proves only a change of personality as recognized by psychologists (WENTZ, 2017, p. 271)

Although psychologists recognize that this myth was based on a change of personality, to the people who did believe in it, it was possible to have fairies as the ones to blame in these situations, and they trusted the folkloric instructions to solve their problems. This brings back the original idea of folklore as intended for the common folk. People who did not have enough information available in what concerns, in this case, the human nature. Not only that, but it also seems to be a pattern that people tend to abstain from blaming themselves. It would not be their fault, for instance, to push a child into a trial by fire; the fairies are to blame. The belief in folklore also relieves the parents from the blame for genetic disorders. Children with genetic disorders were the result of a variety of spells. Narv presents some theories of causation developed by people in early times, in the field of superstition.

The first type of causation was the psychologic aspect of the pregnant woman. If the woman had any kind of shocking experience and had been traumatized somehow, the baby would be born with a genetic disorder. According to this theory, the mother's brain produces a said "psychogenic" that chains its effects to the child. The author explains: "For example, the pregnant woman who was impressed or frightened by the gibbons at the zoo might give birth to a child with anencephaly, whose head appears to be monkey-like". (NARV, 1997, p. 229)

Another common reason for the birth of a child with genetic disorders was the theory of hybridity. They believed that the main motivation for these events was the breeding of humans with animals. Back then that was a plausible deduction for the people, since they had a low notion of how reproduction has its limits according to race. Following the same pattern, but now adding the element of the supernatural, there is the already mentioned fairy-human breed, which is the main explanation for the genetic disorders within the fairy-lore.

I believe that the fairy changeling is the most accurate tale in *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* to show how society offers its explanations for the unexplainable. Either by supernatural means or a more scientific approach, as far as they could. Its structure brings many aspects of the culture, including the mixed Celtic and Christian belief, the attempt to explain human nature through the supernatural and also how society behaves towards people who do not fit the standards. It is still, as many other folklore tales, relatable to the present times and brings a productive insight on how knowledge prevents suffering.

CONCLUSION

Mythologies , have been, for thousands of years, an attempt to explain the universe. When we discuss folklore, there is a more clear representation of people and life as a focus. In this work, I tried to bring some elements of the Irish folklore in order to analyze how they could be a representation of the Irish society's reality.

Among the many folklore stories of the Irish people, the Fairy is one of the most complete set of legends in terms of representation. Lady Wilde's commentaries on the fairies bring some characteristics that resemble the Irish people. The fairies descriptions, in *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*, tell of a festive and joyful people. They are adept to music, dancing, and have a strong link with nature. This does seem to be an iconic representation of the Irish spirit, since these characteristics have applied to the Irish people since the ancient times of the Celts. There is also the mischevous kind of fairy, who is guided by the Evil One in tales. Those fairies, the way I see them, may be the representation of the evil side of people as well. Human nature acts on both sides of the spectrum, after all.

After researching and aguing about the subject, I believe that the Fairy folklore has also been a form of escapism to keep the Irish Community in check with the events they had to face in their lives. There are several moments when human life suffers interference from fairies in the stories. Some of these tales describe the vengeance of fairies against rich farmers who neglected food. In stories such as "The Farmer Punished" (Wilde, 2006, p.54) and "The Fairies' Revenge" (Wilde, 2006, p.50), the common topic of poor people in risk of dying from starvation and being neglected help by rich farmers is presented. This may have a relation to some moments in the Irish history. I believe that one of these historical moments was after the act of Union in 1800, because England started to divide Irish lands and leave the Irish people with smaller portions of land to plant. Their dependence on potatos grew by that time, since a crop could guarantee food for a whole familiy in the season. Later on, these revengeful fairies might have been the attempt to have supernatural forces as natural punishment for the landlords who owned larger lands and did not help their starving neighbors. My research on the subject felt like a reminder of how important history is for the interaction between humanity and its myths. I started this work thinking about the subjective aspect of belief-centered theories, such as the Celtic mythology, but later realized that human history involving these creeds, in a more objective approach, is also a very consistent justification for those beliefs.

Folklore stories have shown a tendency to explore the third function of the myth proposed by Campbell (2011).He explains that myths follow four fixed functions.The first is

the necessity of believing in the supernatural for the sake of contemplation of the universe; the second is the function of explaining the creation of the universe as a creation myth; the third function is applied to the social repercussions of a myth; the fourth is the pedagogical function of how to live a human life. The third function of the myth, which is the social function, is the main subject in the Fairy stories I analyzed in this work.

A very important figure in the Fairy mythology, when we think about it in social terms, is the Changeling. I would say that the Changeling is the most accurate form of folklore that might have been used as some kind of escapism among these stories. To have a child kidnapped and substituted by a changeling seems like the perfect supernatural explanation for a natural event. Narv (1997) brings some of the possible motivations for people to have believed this myth when he writes about genetical disorders that provoke physical and mental changes in a child. These manifestations seem to have been used as the key elements to create the Changeling folklore. Still in the objective side of this myth, there are more possible repercussions in what concerns society. Parents might either decide to accept the changeling child or test its integrity by the trial of fire. The latter would be an attempt to justify such a horrible act. When we think about the mythical approach of the Changeling, there is another important aspect in what concerns humanity. There are two changelings in the stories: the fairy changeling and the human changeling. Once the switch has occurred, both children will grow up in a different environment. This means that, at least by the fairies' side, this event will result in a mixture between the human and the fairy races, giving birth to a hybrid fairy-human child. This, according to the myth, reflects on the child's personality. Those who are born from human and fairy parents are deeply connected to many forms of art. This might be an explanation, through folklore, of why the Irish people have been so deeply connected to music and poetry for centuries.

The Fairy mythology is part of what constitutes the past of Ireland's culture and that was one of Lady Wilde's motivations to write about them. Writing about the Irish Folklore was one of the ways she found to perpetuate the old culture with the intention to maintain the Irish identity.

In this monograph, I introduced the importance of mythology for some cultures referring to the creation myths. Many peoples throughout history have tried to explain the origins of all existence with the use of mythology. In order to point the importance of these myths in Ireland, I brought the legend of the Tuatha De Danann as an early example of how myths affected the Irish in the formation of their country. These legends serve as one of the four functions of the

myth as proposed by Campbell (2011). Myths such as the Tuatha De Danann, that are bound to the creation of a universe or a land, serve a wider sense, rather than the other kind of stories that are much more frequent in the Irish folklore: the social function. Folklore seems to be more related to daily human life and learnings. That is what I discussed as an attempt to point to some aspects of what makes people truly believe in myths. I also brought the Legend of St. Patrick as one of the main motifs for Ireland to have become a fusion between the Pagan and the Christian faiths.

The second main topic in this work is related to the life story of Lady Wilde. Her life background indicates what led her to write *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*. From her early years as an active nationalist who wrote for the movement of “Young Ireland” to her later years writing books on legends and anthropology in order to sustain herself and her son, Lady Wilde lived a turbulent life. It was a moment of need for the Irish people, since they had been years in a shortage of land because of the 1800’s act of Union. England had already taken many lands from the Irish people and they were forced to reduce their areas for plantation and even pay rent on lands in order to plant. When the Young Ireland movement was about to start the revolution they so yearned for, Ireland, and other countries, to a lower extent, started one of the worst moment in Irish history: the great famine. A potato blight coming from the United States destroyed most of the crops in Ireland to the point that one third of the population died of starvation, another third emigrated to the United States in order to survive, and the last part survived. Lady Wilde was among the survivors. After living a married life, Lady Wilde dedicated her final years to write about Irish Legends, continuing the work of her deceased husband. This was the moment when she wrote *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*. I believe that her nationalist feelings about Ireland brought to her a greater sense of accomplishment while compiling these stories, since they represent the essence of the Irish culture. This reinforces the constitution of a nation.

The third topic of this monograph directed to the book *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* and its contents. The stories compiled here are, as I see it, divided in three groups: mythical creatures, rituals and superstitions. I analyzed mostly stories that concern creatures, since those are the ones more commonly used for social purposes in their structure. I believe that the stories here told are may be a representation of the historical moment that the Irish people were going through. The depiction of rich farmers and poor people dying of starvation seems to be a translation of the events before and after the potato blight. It seems to be, once again, an important part of folklore that is linked to their history.

The fourth topic I brought is the definition of the Fairy race according to the stories in Wilde (2006). Their description in terms of clothing, habits, housing and nature are very well defined in the book. There is an interesting account on their origin, which vary depending on what kind of personality the fairy had before coming to earth. In this myth of the Fairy, there is an interference of Christian mythology as well, since many centuries ago, the legend of St. Patrick brought the Christian belief to the island. Therefore, fairies and the Christian God, as well as the Devil, live along in the same mythology. That is only possible because of the Irish openness to their spirituality and search for the unknown.

My final topic of discussion was on the “Changeling”. In this part, I chose moments in the stories that describe the fairies as very fond of beauty, which they find very often in human children. They kidnap the children in order to bring them to the fairy realm so that they can marry in the future. According to this folklore, after kidnaping the child, the fairy leaves a changeling inside the cradle. The changeling is always described as a deformed little creature. I believe that this folklore story could also be one of a social function, as Campbell (2011) described, by trying to explain with supernatural answers a simple truth. Peter Narv (1997) may answer that question when he brings the definition of some genetic disorders that are compatible with the definitions of the changeling in the stories. Not only that, but it seems that one of these diseases may be the explanation to the origin of fairies as blonde-haired, light-skinned and blue eyed elves. The Christian belief also plays an important role in these stories. It is said that unbaptized children have a higher possibility of being kidnaped by a fairy. This may imply, as I write in this section, that blessings of god prevent the child from being touched by the devil.

Lady Wilde has contributed to Ireland in many different forms. Her work *Legends, Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* is a noticeable addition to the cultural library of Ireland. By compiling and commenting these stories, she has eternalized the roots of a culture that might have been fated to vanish, because it was a knowledge transmitted through oral tradition. This monograph was an attempt to highlight the importance of the Irish folklore to the composition of Ireland as a nation. Not only that, but also to reaffirm their cultural contribution to humanity with their lessons. If this work is able to inspire someone to read more about this amazing culture, my mission is complete.

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