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**Are All the Fairies Dead?
Fairy Tales and Place in Victorian Realism**

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Introduction

“Fairy tale” is one of the most famous misnomers in the English language. As generations of folklorists and anthologists have pointed out, very few of the stories we now describe as fairy tales include any mention of fairies; if a story includes a magical occurrence—as not all of them do—the magic is as likely to come in the form of a talking animal or an object that conveys special powers as that of a fairy, or even an elf or dwarf.

Perhaps a better interpretation of the term, though certainly not the standard one, is to take “fairy” as describing the tales themselves, not their content. Fairy tales are as elusive, changeable, and mysterious in origin, as seemingly ancient and impossible to understand with complete certainty, as any fairies in folk tradition. A general assertion about fairy tales will always have exceptions, and a specific analysis of an individual tale will always be limited because it cannot encompass all the variations of a story.

Nevertheless, if fairy tales cannot easily be defined, they can be described. For the most part, fairy tales are stories that arise from oral tradition—or, in some cases, are created by an author and absorbed into oral tradition; many of Hans Christian Andersen’s stories were original, but they have long since been appropriated by storytellers who retell and reshape them. In the western European tradition, tales take place in a world resembling medieval Europe where

magic is possible. Derek Brewer offers one description of this world in “The Interpretation of Fairy Tales”:

The fairy tales that we know as such . . . [were] conditioned by an agrarian society in which men were dominant, married women’s mortality high, and stepmothers common, with the nuclear family the core of society. Resources were limited. The forest had been driven back but remained both a physical and psychological dimension of the village’s outer world, dangerous and attractive. Nature was close. Fairy tales evoke an anthropomorphic world where animals both tame and wild may devour or help, and natural objects, even inanimate artefacts may speak. It is a hierarchical society which takes kings and queens, princes and princesses, for granted but kings are seen as heads of households, father-figures who move about the house, and let you in at the front door, while princesses sew their own clothes.¹

This world, whatever its historical roots, is a fictional one, a realm of possibility rather than accuracy. Yet the larger body of folklore frequently includes legends and superstitions that concern the same fairies and goblins in the tales but were treated, at least originally, as factual. It is important to recognize the distinction between the fairy tales that take place in the mythical past and the stories of what might, by their own claim, happen to anyone. But there is a close relationship and frequent cross-pollination between these two kinds of storytelling. In “Beauty and the Beast,” the most literary fairy tale used in this study, the Beast who was once a prince is not a figure anyone would expect to meet; Madame Leprince de Beaumont, who in the eighteenth century wrote the story as it is now told, certainly did not believe it was true. But what happened to him—being changed from a man into an animal because a fairy was arbitrarily

¹ Derek Brewer, “The Interpretation of Fairy Tales,” *A Companion to the Fairy Tale*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson and Anna Chaudri (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003) 15-37; quotation, 34.

angry—is a motif in folklore that may well have been believed. Fairies, especially when they were angered, were felt to be a real threat in European culture for centuries.

This overlap between the world of fairy tales and the real world is positioned differently for different groups of people: class and regional divisions have historically determined much about who was raised to believe in fairies, goblins, and witches, and who only told stories about them. Because of such differences we can draw only a cautious, moveable line between fairy tales and folklore or folk belief. Fairy tales take place in the mythical past and folklore is meant to be immediately relevant, but at the core both take place in the same world, a world where nature is powerful, standards of behavior (ethical or not) are stringently enforced by outside forces, and many strange and supernatural things are possible.

The nineteenth century is a particularly fascinating period for the study of fairy tales. Art fairy tales had been made popular in the eighteenth century by French writers including Charles Perrault, Marie Catherine Comtesse d’Aulnoy (or “Madame d’Aulnoy”), and Madame Leprince de Beaumont. In the nineteenth century, while fairies became even more popular as subjects of literature and painting, folklore became for the first time a branch of academic study. The most famous folklore scholars of the nineteenth century were Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, who with their studies of German fairy tales, folklore, and language hoped to preserve the heritage of the “folk,” the real German people, whose oral

lore and traditional rural life were threatened by industrialization and political change. In the British Isles, academic folklore study began with the Romantics, in particular Thomas Crofton Croker's 1825 book *Fairy legends and traditions of the South of Ireland*. Croker's work was followed in 1828 by Thomas Keightley's *The Fairy Mythology*, an encyclopedic study of European fairy beliefs. As the Victorian period began, writers on the fairies multiplied. Their studies treated the existence of fairies as an open question; writers put forward a variety of opinions about the existence and nature of the fairies, including suggestions that they were fallen angels not bad enough for hell, biological beings that made plants grow, or foreign races that used to live in Britain and survived as fairies in the folk tradition.²

While this flowering of folklore scholarship gives the nineteenth century the appearance of a golden age of fairies, many people were convinced that the fairies were disappearing, chased away by the expansion of cities and modern skepticism. In fact this belief dates back at least as far as the fourteenth century, when Chaucer's Wife of Bath told a fairy story prefaced with an explanation that fairies used to dwell in England but no longer do: "But now kan no man se none elves mo."³ For the Wife of Bath, the reason fairies had left England was that the

² On these theories, see Carole Silver, "On the Origins of Fairies," *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33-57; and Katharine Briggs, "The Origins of Fairy Beliefs and Beliefs about Fairy Origins," *The Vanishing People: Fairy Lore and Legends* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 27-38.

³ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), v. III.864.

church had driven them out with their blessings and prayers, and the former dwelling places of fairies were now filled with churchmen “as thikke as motes in the sonne-beem.”⁴ This belief that the fairies had left England or were in the process of leaving seems to have existed for centuries side by side with belief in the fairies’ presence. It is as if the fairies were always too ancient to belong properly to the modern world, but too important or appealing a part of the culturally received worldview to disappear entirely.

Victorian folklorists and writers about fairies took up the theme of the fairies’ departure and applied it to the social changes and urbanization of the nineteenth century. In J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, fairies die whenever someone avows a disbelief in them; Rudyard Kipling’s *Puck of Pook’s Hill* features a fairy who explains that his kind left England because its intolerant religious beliefs crowded out the old fairy faith; in Walter Besant and James Rice’s novella “Titania’s Farewell,” the fairy court leaves England due to disbelief; in Andrew Lang and May Kendall’s *That Very Mab*, a Queen Mab who has fled to the Polynesian islands tries to return to England, but she is mistaken for a butterfly and trapped in a jar, and she finds the pollution of contemporary London suffocating.⁵

Folktales and fairy beliefs were popularly believed to be threatened by the same social changes that these authors depicted as chasing away the fairies. John Ruskin’s introduction to Edgar Taylor’s 1832 translation of the Grimms’ fairy

⁴ Chaucer III.868.

⁵ See Silver chapter 6.

tales indicates an interest in fairy tales as relics of a particular place and time, threatened by the changes of the Victorian age:

[A]ll the best fairy tales have owed their birth, and the greater part of their power, to narrowness of social circumstances; they belong properly to districts in which walled cities are surrounded by bright and unblemished country, and in which a healthy and bustling town life, not highly refined, is relieved by, and contrasted with, the calm enchantment of pastoral and woodland scenery, either under humble cultivation by peasant masters, or left in its natural solitude. Under conditions of this kind the imagination is enough excited to invent instinctively, (and rejoice in the invention of) spiritual forms of wildness and beauty, while yet it is restrained and made cheerful by the familiar accidents and relations of town life, mingling always in its fancy humorous and vulgar circumstances with pathetic ones, and never so much impressed with its supernatural phantasies as to be in danger of retaining them as any part of its religious faith. . . . But the language in which such ideas will be usually clothed must necessarily partake of their narrowness; and art is systematically incognizant of them, having only strength under the conditions which awake them to express itself in an irregular and gross grotesque, fit only for external architectural decoration.⁶

Ruskin's idea of the proper environment of fairy tales is essentially a reiteration of the pre-Raphaelite ideal of the feudal past. He takes the historical and social origins of fairy tales as a reason to respect their purity and is deeply suspicious of the "art"—which here means artful retellings of fairy tales—that attempts to improve or update fairy tales, as this literature does not have the folk pedigree of the oral tales. In other words, the archaic, rural folktale is threatened by the art of modern people.

Charles Dickens shared this concern for the purity of fairy tales and the threat to them that art could pose. His primary concern, however, was for the

⁶ John Ruskin's Introduction to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "German Popular Stories," ed. and trans. Edgar Taylor, illus. George Cruikshank (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907), xii-xiii.

personal rather than historical past; Dickens considered fairy tales the sacred domain of childhood. In his essay “Frauds on the Fairies,” he harshly criticized George Cruikshank’s retelling of the story “Hop o’ my Thumb,” which introduced a pro-temperance agenda into the tale. Dickens’ article presents a passionate argument for the value of fairy tales: “In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected. . . . [A] nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun.” Political arguments in fairy tales are “like the famous definition of a weed; a thing growing up in a wrong place.”⁷ Dickens believed it a crime to insert political content into fairy tales for children, but he also believed that fairy tales were an integral part of the national character, especially as tools to resist the influence of “an utilitarian age.”

It is my intention to examine whether fairy tales may serve this purpose of resistance as part of a literary genre, the realist novel, that seems on the face of it to be allied to all the forces of urbanization, industrialization, and rationalism that pose a threat to fairy tales. While Dickens believed politics to be misplaced in children’s tales, the same tales might serve as useful background and symbols of a personal and historical past in novels for adults, even novels with political content. To explore this meeting of genres, I will examine five realist Victorian novels by four authors, paying particular attention to the way the combination of

⁷ Charles Dickens, “Frauds on the Fairies,” *Household Words*, 1 October 1853; from *‘Gone Astray’ and Other Papers 1851-59*, ed. Michael Slater (Ohio State University Press, 1999), 168-69.

fairy tale and realism influences the geography of the novels. The opposition between the historic countryside of the “folk” and the modernizing city carries through each of these works, but the geographies examined here range from the personal level to the international; the novels cast certain houses, certain cities, certain nations in the role of an enchanted space. Rather than attempting a chronology of this phenomenon, which in a project of this limited scope would necessarily be incomplete, I have chosen to focus on the thematic connections of the five novels, beginning with the most famously rural of Victorian novels, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and progressively moving closer to the city by way of George Eliot’s villages and towns in *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Felix Holt the Radical* (1866), Charles Dickens’ London and villages near it in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), and Elizabeth Gaskell’s northern industrial city of Milton in *North and South* (1855).

I am not the first person to note the presence of folklore and fairy tales in this body of literature, although the nature of this connection has been judged in various ways. Q. D. Leavis wrote about the presence of folklore in *Wuthering Heights* and the common perception of it in *Silas Marner*, but her criticism of these novels shows some disdain for the fairy-tale form. Of *Wuthering Heights* she writes, “It is a proof of [Brontë’s] immaturity at the time of the original conception of *Wuthering Heights* that she should express real psychological

insights in such inappropriate forms”;⁸ and *Silas Marner* “contains much irony of various kinds and a great deal of pointed social criticism which no lightweight legendary tale could support, not even those art versions of the fairy tale so characteristic of nineteenth-century literature with which *Marner* might be associated if superficially read.”⁹ Such comments evince a belief that something as simple as a folktale cannot bear the weight of psychological or political insight, whereas the Victorian writers quoted earlier seemed to believe that fairy tales had wider potential for instruction than literary “art.” It is true that folktales are usually too removed from the present world to offer political criticism and too one-dimensional to contain psychological insight; indeed, Max Lüthi argues convincingly that folktale characters necessarily lack an inner life.¹⁰ But the very simplicity of folktales makes them better suited to adaptation and reshaping than any other form of literature. In stating that the Victorian novels examined in this study are indebted to folktales, it is not my intention to claim that these novels have no more depth of insight than folktales do. Rather, I see folktales as a shared language of story on which novelists may draw to make their stories richer—not simpler, and certainly not less psychologically and socially perceptive.

Other studies of folklore in Victorian literature include Harry Stone’s

⁸ Q. D. Leavis, “A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*,” *Lectures in America* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), 91.

⁹ Q. D. Leavis, Introduction to 1967 Penguin edition of *Silas Marner*, reprinted in George Eliot, *Silas Marner* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), 208-39.

¹⁰ Max Lüthi, *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, trans. John D. Niles (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982).

extremely valuable book *Dickens and the Invisible World*.¹¹ Stone tracks the different uses of fairy-tale storytelling in the Dickens canon; his comments on *Barnaby Rudge*, particularly concerning what parts of the novel seem to be more like fairy tales than others, were the jumping-off point for my discussion of that novel in Chapter 3, although I have departed from Stone's analysis by focusing on the role of ghosts in the novel. Several writers, including Jacqueline Simpson and Paula M. Krebs, have written about the role of folk belief in *Wuthering Heights*,¹² and there is an ongoing critical discussion of *Silas Marner* as a folktale.¹³ No work seems to have been done on the folklore aspects of *Felix Holt*, however, and Elizabeth Gaskell's works seem to be read exclusively within the context of realism; Carol A. Martin's article "Gaskell's Ghosts: Truths in Disguise"¹⁴ was the sole critical work I found that affirmed Gaskell's interest in folklore and its influence on her fiction. In the realm of folklore scholarship, several scholars who write about the folklore of the nineteenth century, Carole Silver and Katharine Briggs especially, have noted some of the traces of such folk beliefs in fiction; Briggs has also written on the novels of Dickens as records of the folklore

¹¹ Harry Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979).

¹² Jacqueline Simpson, "The Function of Folklore in 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights,'" *Folklore* 85 (1974), 47-61; Paula M. Krebs, "Folklore, Fear, and the Feminine: Ghosts and Old Wives' Tales in *Wuthering Heights*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* (1998), 41-52.

¹³ See, for example, David Carroll's introduction, vii-xxv in the 1996 Penguin edition, and Susan Stewart, "Genres of Work: The Folktale and *Silas Marner*," *New Literary History* 34, issue 3 (Summer 2003), 513-33.

¹⁴ Carol A. Martin, "Gaskell's Ghosts: Truth in Disguise," *Studies in the Novel* 21 (Spring 1989), 27-40.

of their time.¹⁵ It is my intention here to build on the insights of this scholarship and to offer new analysis from a geographical perspective, to discover whether fairy tales might not survive even within the places and fictional forms that threatened to chase them out of England.

¹⁵ Katharine Briggs, "The Folklore of Charles Dickens," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 7 (1970), 3-20.

**Magic Within Realism:
Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights***

*Wuthering Heights*¹ may be the Victorian novel that contains the clearest meeting and fusion of realism and folkloric modes of storytelling. The uncanny elements of the novel, the events that make it seem like a ghost story, are both obvious and unsettling because of the oddity of their occurring at all in a primarily realistic genre. Events such as Lockwood's dream (ch. 3, 20-21) and Nelly's encounter with a spirit (ch. 11, 85) challenge the majority of what the reader is given to understand about these characters and the reliability of their narration. Nelly Dean describes herself as a more sensible and dependable person than the village folk—an impression that Lockwood's narration reinforces—but she is terrified when she thinks she has seen a spirit, even while she calls it superstition to feel so; Lockwood, for his part, can participate in a ghost story at the beginning of the novel, when Catherine's ghost appears to him in a dream, but he ends the novel by claiming he cannot imagine ghosts on the moors.

Through all of this, the moors themselves exert an eerie influence; the environment surrounding *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange brings about events reminiscent of folklore regardless of the characters' stated beliefs

¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003). All quotations of the novel are taken from this edition, with chapter and page numbers cited parenthetically in the text.

about such events. As the most rural of the novels discussed in this study, and the one most immediately indebted to folklore, *Wuthering Heights* offers a particularly knotty relationship between folkloric influences and the realist novel, and demonstrates the kind of interactions between these forms that will be found in subtler form in the more urban and conventional novels.

Lockwood introduces himself as an ordinary man whose chief flaw is excessive timidity in matters of love, and who because of this timidity thinks he is a “misanthropist” equal to Heathcliff (ch. 1, 3). He is extremely naïve about what he sees at Wuthering Heights, misconstruing the relationships and temperaments of the people he meets there, seeming very much the city person or southerner who does not understand the strange way things happen on the moors. But it is soon shown that there is something of the north or the wild in him, something that recognizes a ghost when he sees one. In Chapter 3, Lockwood is dozing in the closet-bed of Catherine’s old bedroom at Wuthering Heights, where she scratched her name on the windowsill variously as “Catherine Earnshaw,” “Catherine Linton” and “Catherine Heathcliff” (ch. 3, 15-16). He has two dreams there, both of them exceedingly violent and strange for a man who has seemed so affably unremarkable. The first dream is inspired by a book in the cabinet, one that Catherine used as a journal when she was a child; Lockwood has been reading her writing in the margins, but when he starts to nod off, “my eye wandered from manuscript to print” and he notices that the book is called “Seventy Times Seven, and the First of the Seventy-First. A Pious Discourse delivered by the Reverend

Jabes Branderham, in the Chapel of Gimmerden Sough” (ch. 3, 18). Lockwood’s dream reproduces this theme and accurately sets the scene of this sermon, a chapel that he has “passed . . . in my walks, twice or thrice” (ch. 3, 19), but the sermon is imagined in grotesque proportions:

Divided into *four hundred and ninety* parts, each fully equal to an ordinary address from the pulpit, and each discussing a separate sin! Where he searched for them, I cannot tell; he had his private manner of interpreting the phrase, and it seemed necessary the brother should sin different sins on every occasion.

They were of the most curious character—odd transgressions that I never imagined previously. (ch. 3, 19)

What Lockwood imagines as the “private” interpretation of Reverend Branderham is really the product of his own dreaming mind; he may never have imagined these things previously, but he is certainly the one imagining them now. When the Lockwood of the dream tries to escape by leaving the church upon the introduction of the “first of the seventy-first,” the entire congregation attacks him with sticks—an image shown to have been suggested by “the branch of a fir tree that . . . rattled its dry cones against the panes” (ch. 3, 20). Lockwood’s environment has played a part in creating this scenario—the real chapel, rapping fir branch, and book all play parts in the dream—but the strange biblical exegesis and the dream’s violence originate with Lockwood himself. If he is really the mild and flustered man he portrays himself to be, then his short time at Wuthering Heights seems to have planted some exceedingly strange ideas in him.

The second dream suggests a real disparity between Lockwood as he portrays himself and as he is. This dream takes place just where Lockwood is, in

the closet at Wuthering Heights with the branch tapping at the window. He is even more aware of this environment while asleep than he was when awake; when he tries to open the window he notices, “The hook was soldered into the staple, a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten” (ch. 3, 20). Immediately after noticing this, Lockwood breaks the window and reaches through the glass “to seize the importunate branch: instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand!” (ch. 3, 20). The hand belongs to a childlike ghost that identifies itself as Catherine Linton and cries, “It’s twenty years . . . twenty years, I’ve been a waif for twenty years!” (ch. 3, 21). As Jacqueline Simpson has pointed out, “it is in fact only seventeen years since Catherine’s physical death, but twenty since by deciding to marry Edgar she made herself ‘an exile, an outcast’ from her true world”²—so that what Lockwood is seeing is not so much the unquiet spirit of a dead person as an aspect of Cathy’s soul that was abandoned and cut off from her bodily life while she was still living. Lockwood has no way of knowing this; furthermore, he wonders, “why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton” (ch. 3, 20). His reaction to the ghost is even stranger than the things he dreams but does not know: when he can’t shake off the ghost’s hand he tries to slit its wrist, rubbing it back and forth on the broken glass of the window. The violence of this action exceeds that of Lockwood’s first dream, and it is far more grotesque than anything his introductory narration suggested he was capable of committing.

² Simpson, “Function of Folklore,” 54.

Furthermore, when Heathcliff enters the room—having come because he heard Lockwood’s scream—Lockwood babbles at him as if he were as superstitious as the villagers:

“I suppose that she [Zillah] wanted to get another proof that the place was haunted, at my expense. Well, it is—swarming with ghosts and goblins! . . . If the little fiend had got in at the window, she probably would have strangled me! . . . I’m not going to endure the persecutions of your hospitable ancestors again. Was not the Reverend Jabes Branderham akin to you on the mother’s side? And that minx, Catherine Linton, or Earnshaw, or however she was called—she must have been a changeling—wicked little soul! She told me she had been walking the earth these twenty years: a just punishment for her mortal transgressions, I’ve no doubt!” (ch. 3, 22)

Lockwood writes that the ghost has appeared to him in a dream, but his speeches betray that he regards it as real, even after claiming to Heathcliff that he screamed because he was having a nightmare. And while Lockwood is to a certain extent speaking nonsense—there is no reason, even in dream logic, to suppose that Reverend Branderham has a familial relationship to Heathcliff—he also demonstrates some familiarity with the folk ideas of changelings and of the dead “walking” (a word often used to describe ghosts, and one that will be applied to Heathcliff after his death). Lockwood has the closest thing to a realist imagination in this scene, but he knows exactly what a ghost is and what a changeling is, and is willing to talk about such things to a total stranger—although his familiarity with these artifacts of folklore is not such that he makes good sense of the situation; calling Catherine a changeling is entirely beside the point. Being at Wuthering Heights may have contributed to this willingness to speak, but it cannot have taught Lockwood about the substance of folk belief; rather, the

eeriness of the house and the moors has revealed a part of Lockwood's imagination that was already present. Heathcliff obviously believes in the ghost as well, as he implores it to come back; and we the readers eventually believe it must be Cathy's ghost because its speech proves consistent with her story. From every perspective, then, the apparition seems genuine, and Lockwood's excuse that he dreamed it does little to remove the immediacy and reality of the supernatural occurrence.

The next clearly supernatural event in the novel occurs when Nelly is walking to the village of Gimmerton and comes to a crossroads where she and Hindley used to play as children:

I gazed long at the weather-worn block; and, stooping down, perceived a hole near the bottom still full of snail-shells and pebbles, which we were fond of storing there with more perishable things; and, as fresh as reality, it appeared that I beheld my early playmate seated on the withered turf, his dark, square head bent forward, and his little hand scooping out the earth with a piece of slate.

“Poor Hindley!” I exclaimed, involuntarily.

I started—my bodily eye was cheated into a momentary belief that the child lifted its face and stared straight into mine! It vanished in a twinkling; but, immediately, I felt an irresistible yearning to be at the Heights. Superstition urged me to comply with this impulse. Supposing he should be dead! I thought—or should die soon! —supposing it were a sign of death! (ch. 11, 85)

Nelly calls the vision “as fresh as reality” without asserting that it is real, and when she begins to fear it she still does not know what it means: she guesses in a stammering manner that it has something to do with death, but the next character to die is Catherine, who is not associated with the spot where the spirit appears;

Hindley dies five chapters and nine months after this incident.³ Like Catherine's ghost, this spirit appears in the form of a child, suggesting that, as with Catherine, some youthful part of Hindley has become separated from him. In fact this is exactly what Nelly believes has happened; before the spirit appears she is feeling sorrowful about her childhood companion's descent into drunkenness and debt. But as with Cathy's ghost, the supernatural event cannot be satisfyingly explained as the imagination of the person who sees it; where Lockwood had no way of knowing the things the ghost said, Nelly has no reason to believe Hindley is dying, and does not know what the spirit might mean.

The spirit is significant for the plot as well as Nelly's personal nostalgia: soon after its appearance a series of frightening and semi-supernatural things start to occur. Nelly goes to Wuthering Heights to call on Hindley and make sure he is all right, but there she finds the young Hareton, who curses her and throws stones at her, and when Heathcliff appears at the door Nelly runs away, "feeling as scared as if I had raised a goblin" (ch. 11, 87). Later she associates Heathcliff explicitly with a demonic spirit: when Heathcliff declares his intention to marry Isabella, Nelly says Catherine is angry because "The spirit which served her was growing intractable: she could neither lay nor control it" (ch. 11, 89).

Immediately afterward, Catherine takes to her room and behaves as irrationally as if she were possessed, speaking of witches, spirits, and other remnants of folklore.

³ A. Stuart Daley works out the timing of these events in "A Chronology of *Wuthering Heights*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 37 (1974): 337-53; reprinted on pp. 357-61 of the Norton Critical Edition of the novel.

After claiming to be haunted and tearing up her pillowcases, she starts to pull the feathers out of a pillow and identify what birds they belong to:

“That’s a turkey’s . . . and this is a wild-duck’s; and this is a pigeon’s. Ah, they put pigeons’ feathers in the pillows—no wonder I couldn’t die! Let me take care to throw it on the floor when I lie down. And here is a moorcock’s; and this—I would know it among a thousand—it’s a lapwing’s. Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot; we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dare not come. I made him promise he’d never shoot a lapwing after that, and he didn’t. Yes, here are more! Did he shoot my lapwings, Nelly? Are they red, any of them?” (ch. 12, 96)

This speech starts by referring to a folk belief that pillows stuffed with the feathers of wild birds—specifically pigeons, according to beliefs in some regions of England—would keep a person from dying, even in the extremes of agony.⁴

This folk idea recalls Catherine’s past on the moors, and in recalling the wild she sets herself up as the ruler or owner of it: “my lapwings,” she says. Furthermore, the wilderness, the past, and the magical powers associated with them are vividly present in civilized Thrushcross Grange, literally inside the domestic objects that would seem, on the surface, to have no connection to the wild. Catherine’s distraction or madness has served to reveal this connection that was already present—rather as Lockwood’s dreaming state reveals the folklore he already knows.

⁴ Jacqueline Simpson & Steve Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 120: “[P]igeons were blamed in Cheshire and Northamptonshire, wild birds of any species in Cornwall, game birds in Sussex and Surrey.”

Catherine carries on by pretending that the scene before her, including Nelly, is one on the moors: “I see in you, Nelly . . . an aged woman—you have grey hair, and bent shoulders. This bed is the fairy cave under Penistone Crag, and you are gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers; pretending, while I am near, that they are only locks of wool. That’s what you’ll come to fifty years hence; I know you are not so now. I’m not wandering: you’re mistaken, or else I should believe you really *were* that withered hag, and I should think I *was* under Penistone Crag” (ch. 12, 96). Where the pigeon feathers evoked the past, Catherine now suggests that Nelly will become a witch fifty years in the future, reinforcing the idea that the folk magic that has been associated with the past is still living and continuing, at least to Catherine’s fevered mind.

As Catherine grows more vicious, calling Nelly a witch (ch. 12, 101) and telling her husband, “I don’t want you, Edgar; I’m past wanting you” (ch. 12, 100), Nelly persistently asserts that Catherine’s speeches are the product of delirium. Nevertheless, Nelly’s understanding and narration of the succeeding events are affected by what Catherine has said. When she leaves Catherine’s room, she sees what turns out to be Isabella’s dog hanged by its neck with a handkerchief, but before she identifies it as such she fears it is another apparition: “I stayed to examine it, lest ever after I should have the conviction impressed on my imagination that it was a creature of the other world” (ch. 12, 101). Catherine’s speaking about witches and magic seems to have convinced Nelly that there is some spirit or magical influence at work in the Grange. And while

there does not turn out to be a ghost in the house, there is Heathcliff, the demonic spirit Nelly feared she had raised by visiting the Heights: once again, the kind of fear that Nelly prefers to call superstitious is proved to be justified.

Taking a step back from this set of events, from the apparition at the crossroads to Catherine's raving, it seems that the influence of the supernatural has been working its way from the wild into the most civilized home in the novel. First Nelly sees a spirit; then she goes to the Heights, where she feels as if she has awakened a goblin and speaks with a child who acts possessed. When she flies to Thrushcross Grange, the eerie influence follows her there; Catherine's speech and actions reveal its presence, the magical potential inherent in the things of the Grange. This interpretation is not drawn from Nelly's explanation: she seems to continue believing that the spirit she saw was an omen of Hindley's death. The interpretation suggested by the events themselves is that there really is some magical influence at work here, one that cannot be the invention of the narrator because she does not recognize the extent of it. The references to ghosts, witches, and magic during this section of the novel stand out because the immediately preceding narrative contained very little of these things, except incidentally, and after Catherine's death, the novel returns to realism.

There is another part of the scene in Catherine's bedroom that connects her apparent madness and the magic of which she speaks with Lockwood's dream of her ghost. When the ghost child tells Lockwood she has been a waif for twenty years, the time since her marriage, she is referring to a specific belief in English

folklore. A waif, or a fetch, is not just someone's spirit that stays on the earth after death but a part of that person's soul that has become separated from the body during life. To see one's own waif is a sign of approaching death.⁵ And this is what occurs to Catherine, although Nelly's account obscures what is happening. There is a moment when Cathy believes she is at Wuthering Heights, and that her mirror is a press there; when she sees her own reflection in the mirror, she thinks it is a ghostly face; she is afraid even after the mirror is covered with a shawl—"Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!" (ch. 12, 96)—and more afraid still after Nelly tells her she is only seeing herself: "Myself . . . and the clock is striking twelve! It's true, then; that's dreadful!" (ch. 12, 97). The fact that Catherine has seen the face in the mirror is, like the fact that Lockwood will see the waif in a dream, a realist mask for a unified supernatural working out of events: Catherine's waif separates from her body at the time of her marriage, presumably because it will not consent to live at Thrushcross Grange; it appears to her before she dies; and it appears seventeen years later to a visitor to its true home, begging to be let in. Again, this version of the story is not the invention of a fanciful narrator within the story; it is revealed in the shape of Brontë's narrative and can be understood only by piecing together the events Brontë dramatizes through Nelly and Lockwood, neither of whom realizes the full extent of what is happening.

⁵ Simpson & Roud 397.

For the period after Catherine's death, while her daughter grows up and Heathcliff keeps to himself at the Heights, folklore is conspicuously absent from the story. Nelly is too realistic a narrator to interject such ideas without being prompted by circumstances, and Edgar Linton belongs thoroughly to the world of Thrushcross Grange; he does not see, or teach his daughter to see, the wilderness and the past that lie under the surface of their civilized and orderly home. But when the young Cathy grows up she longs to go to Penistone Crag, a place reputed to have fairies (ch. 18, 147), as if she instinctively knows the local lore about where magic is to be found. Immediately upon her first escape from the park, Cathy meets Hareton and learns about this lore; he "opened the mysteries of the Fairy cave, and twenty other queer places" (ch. 18, 153), and Cathy wishes to see these things: "I want to see where the goblin hunter rises in the marsh, and to hear about the *fairishes*, as you call them" (ch. 18, 151). Nelly takes Cathy home and tries to keep her away from the influence of Hareton, Heathcliff, and the Heights, the influence that brings the dangers in folklore with it. But Cathy always manages to escape this control and to find her way back to the Heights. Her childish courtship and forced marriage with Linton Heathcliff are ultimately nothing but Heathcliff's attempt to make use of Cathy's longing for the Heights, the ancient, wild, haunted house to which she innately belongs.

Along with Cathy's internal conflict between civilization and wildness is an attendant conflict between different kinds of storytelling. As Lintons, both Cathy and Linton have been educated in literacy; but Cathy also has the heritage

of her mother and of Nelly, so that she has a natural affinity for the folklore that Hareton offers her. For a long time both Cathy and Linton mock Hareton for his illiteracy and wildness, even though Cathy was fascinated by his stories when they first met. When Hareton and Cathy make friends, she both gives him her heritage of literature and enriches his folklore; she brings books to the Heights, but some of them contain ballads that Hareton, growing up without a mother or nurse, has never had sung to him. The act of bringing these ballads to the Heights restores both literate civilization and the oral heritage that has been lost there.⁶ When Cathy and Hareton become engaged and decide to move to the Grange upon their marriage, this event finally unifies the wildness toward which Cathy has yearned and the civilization of which wilderness is an intrinsic part.

What is lacking in the foregoing analysis is, of course, Heathcliff, who plays a part in all the explicitly supernatural episodes noted above but whose role in the novel is much larger than any particular event. Heathcliff's introduction to the novel is the only episode that seems to me strongly evocative of a particular fairy tale, namely the beginning of "Beauty and the Beast," as Q. D. Leavis also notes:

the father, like the merchant in *Beauty and the Beast*, goes off to the city promising to bring his children back the presents each has commanded: but the fiddle was smashed and the whip lost so the only present he brings for them is the Beast himself, really a 'prince in disguise' (as Nelly tells the boy he should consider himself rightly); Catherine's tragedy then was

⁶ For a discussion of ballads in the novel and the way they vary between written and oral transmission, see Terence McCarthy, "A Late Eighteenth Century Ballad Community: *Wuthering Heights*," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 43 (1979), 241-252.

that she forgot her prince and he was forced to remain the monster, destroying her; invoking this pattern brought in much more from the fairy-tale world of magic, folk-lore and ballads, the oral tradition of the folk, that the Brontë children learnt principally from their nurses and their servant Tabby.⁷

This view suggests that Heathcliff's strangeness was the reason Brontë introduced more fairy-tale elements into the novel. Whether or not this is true, it is clear that the other characters understand Heathcliff as a goblin, a changeling, a demon, so that his presence automatically evokes the folklore of the people around him. For a reader to layer more names on top of these may not add much to our understanding of the novel. What the privileged perspective of a reader does add to an understanding of Heathcliff as a folklore figure is the fact that these titles are piled on him, even before his cruelty and greed increase to seemingly Satanic proportions, because nobody knows how else to think of a person with no family, social, or ethnic identity. Even the father who is so fond of Heathcliff seems to share this idea of him: he names him after "a son who died in childhood" (ch. 4, 30), as if Heathcliff were a changeling replacement for this lost son. Even when the names are positive, as when Nelly tells Heathcliff he is a prince in disguise in chapter 7, they are drawn from fairy tales. For Brontë, fairy tales seem to represent an understanding of the world to which people turn when they do not know what else to make of a situation or a person. Everywhere outside the immediate vicinity of Gimmerton is a strange fairyland where goblins and demons are found. Yet Heathcliff belongs at Wuthering Heights; although he was

⁷ Leavis, "A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*," 90.

brought there after being found in a city, once he is on the moors he belongs there completely and is given a name to match this identity. His wild self was enclosed in the self that lived on the streets of the city; once again, the wild and magical is found inside a person hailing from modern civilization.

The plot mirrors the characters' tendency to default to a fairy-tale understanding of Heathcliff. The supernatural events in the novel—Cathy's ghost, Nelly's vision of Hindley, Cathy's vision of her own waif and belief that she has been kept alive by pigeon feathers—occur when Heathcliff has recently been present or is about to appear. As someone who constantly attracts this kind of supernatural occurrence, Heathcliff's resolution is different from that of young Cathy and Hareton. After decades of trying to exact revenge on the Lintons, Heathcliff surrenders to the ghost that has haunted him through the years and dies, for no particular reason but that he is prepared to do so. Nelly tries to believe that he rests peacefully, "But the country folks, if you asked them, would swear on their Bible that he *walks*" (ch. 34, 257). Nelly herself prefers not to go out in the dark after a boy tells her, "They's Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t' Nab" (257). After playing into his role as a folkloric figure his entire life, in death he fulfills the role by becoming a ghost; and Catherine, no longer the childlike waif, is seen as a woman once Heathcliff's ghost joins her. The villagers clearly find this ghost story to be the most believable end for the man they have considered a demon for his whole life, which may be why they call Heathcliff's ghost by name although they do not recognize Catherine. The readers, who perhaps know better

than anyone but Nelly how wild Catherine really was and the depth of her connection to Heathcliff, recognize what woman ghost must be accompanying him in his walks on the moors. For one last time, a supernatural occurrence is apparent to the reader when the characters do not recognize it; and in recognizing what the characters do not, we as readers are placed, at the end of the novel, in the position of seeing the ghosts as a reality.

With the villagers declaring that Heathcliff walks, and Nelly admitting that she is afraid to go out alone at night since his death, Lockwood is the only person who does not see any of the ghosts as real. Ironically he gets the famous last words as he stands by the tombstones of Cathy, Edgar, and Heathcliff: “I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth” (ch. 34, 258). We know that Lockwood is perfectly capable of experiencing a ghost story; what he lacks is the ability to recognize the unity of the tale he has been told with the one in which he has intruded—which he considered giving his own ending, one “more romantic than a fairy tale” (ch. 31, 232), by marrying young Cathy. He does not see what has been demonstrated throughout the novel, that the wild, magical and elusive things are an innate part of what seems quiet, civilized, and understandable.

**A Movable Fairyland:
George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and *Felix Holt the Radical***

The critical discussion of *Silas Marner* (1861) has traditionally considered it somehow related to folk literature—a literature that critics variously describe as legend, myth, folktale, and fable. George Eliot wrote that the novel suggested itself to her as part of this tradition: “It came to me first of all quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by my recollections of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen weaver with a bag on his back; but, as my mind dwelt on the subject, I became inclined to a more realistic treatment.”¹ Taking their cue from this statement, U. C. Knoepfelmacher describes the novel as “a terse fable”²; David Carroll says it “explores the origins of folk myth” (Introduction, xiv); Susan Stewart, who focuses on the role of weaving in the novel and in folklore, reads it as “a kind of ‘Cinderella’ story in reverse in that Eppie refuses to become a princess, just as Felix Holt refuses a class promotion and decides to be a weaver.”³ Q. D. Leavis responded to the general acceptance of the novel as a fairy tale in her introduction to the 1967 Penguin edition of the novel:

¹ George Eliot in an 1861 letter to John Blackwood; quoted in *Silas Marner* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), 213. All quotations of the novel and of Q. D. Leavis’ and David Carroll’s introductions are taken from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text.

² U. C. Knoepfelmacher, *George Eliot’s Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 227.

³ Stewart, “Genres of Work,” 519.

[S]he dropped the association with a fairy-tale figure ... [*Silas Marner*] contains much irony of various kinds and a great deal of pointed social criticism which no lightweight legendary tale could support, not even those art versions of the fairy tale so characteristic of nineteenth-century literature with which *Marner* might be associated if superficially read. . . . Physical deformity and the stamp of alienation are the important factors; the bag then ceases to be sinister, suggestive of a figure in Grimms' Tales, and connects the man with the one in another vision that we often feel to be behind George Eliot's in *Marner*, the Man bowed under "a great Burden upon his back" crying lamentably, "*What shall I do?*" and setting out from the City of Destruction to another country to seek salvation [i.e., the hero of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*]. (213)

The novel certainly contains humor, social criticism, and references to the literary canon, and Eliot's keen observations of personal and social foibles would not last long in this story if it were to be transmitted as an oral folktale. But an important part of the novel's social project is Eliot's close, compassionate portrayal of the old English village life, a culture whose "very existence," Leavis says, "is denied by the intellectuals of our phase of civilization" (217). It is just this sort of life in small community and close proximity to nature that created and passed on the tradition of folktales; furthermore, it is the class with which Eliot sides in the novel—the tradesmen and laborers, as against the landed gentry—who have historically been attributed with creating folktales. From this perspective, to say that the novel is like a folktale is not to ignore its social concerns; on the contrary, what Leavis identifies as the novel's tribute to English cottage life and its criticism of the upper classes are enriched by this association with the form of storytelling native to the place and people Eliot depicts.

There are clear parallels between *Silas Marner* and at least one specific fairy tale. The exchange of Silas' gold for a child is similar to the trade in the

story of Rumpelstiltskin, or Tom Tit Tot as he was called in English folklore. In that story, a mysterious, dwarfish person spins straw into gold for a miller's daughter in exchange for her promise to give him her first-born child. In *Silas Marner* these elements are simply changed around. Silas is regarded by the villagers as a kind of gnome or dwarf—Eliot introduces the weavers of his time as “pallid undersized men, who, by the side of the brawny country-folk, looked like the remnants of a disinherited race” (ch. 1, 5); at one point, the villagers gathered in the pub even think Silas is a ghost (chs. 6-7, 54-55). This strange figure unwittingly gives a member of the Cass family his gold and gets a Cass child in return. In fact, Silas has a vague feeling that Eppie represents his gold returned to him:

Gold! —his own gold—brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he was unable to stretch out his hand and grasp the restored treasure. The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. In utter amazement, Silas fell on his knees and bent his head low to examine the marvel: it was a sleeping child—a round, fair thing, with soft yellow rings all over its head. (ch. 12, 110)

If Eliot sided with the Casses, then this story would be very much like “Rumpelstiltskin”; Godfrey Cass with his modest social aspirations would more or less play the role of the miller's daughter who aspires to marry the king, and who in order to achieve this goal gives up the child she does not imagine she will ever have. But, of course, Eliot's sympathies lie with Silas, and he is ultimately allowed to keep Eppie because of the bond he has formed with her. The Casses

do not understand this bond; unlike the miller's daughter turned queen, Godfrey does not know the secret name of the person who has taken his child.

The novel is suffused with references to folk belief and superstition, many of which have been noted by the critics named earlier, and all of these play a part in Eliot's compassionate portrayal of a vanishing civilization. Beyond these allusions, and beyond the similarity of the plot to the Rumpelstiltskin story, the very form of *Silas Marner* has some characteristics of the folktale form, such as the attribution of character to landscape. Folktale scholar Max Lüthi writes, "Apparently the only way that folktales can express spiritual otherness is through geographical separation."⁴ Because the only dimension in folktales is the physical one, to which even magical occurrences belong, physical movement is the only way to represent any kind of displacement. *Silas Marner* both follows this tradition and deepens it, as all the displacement in the novel takes place on both the physical and spiritual levels. The chapel at Lantern Yard is not only a physical place but also home to a set of principles, such as the assurance of salvation, the forbidding of criminal trials, the trust in such works of chance as drawing lots, and the repudiation of all High Church symbolism and ritual. When Silas leaves the chapel for good he leaves behind all chance of coming to understand its principles; instead, he must slowly learn to see by the light of Raveloe's values, sacraments, and superstitions. Silas must change his beliefs when he changes his home because of his entirely physical mode of thinking; as

⁴ Lüthi 9.

Eliot explains, “A weaver who finds hard words in his hymn-book knows nothing of abstractions” (ch. 2, 16). Silas’ entire sense of faith is rooted in the physical experience of the chapel, and without it his religious life cannot remain the same. Though Eliot offers this concrete explanation, she also ties it to motifs found in older kinds of stories:

In the early ages of the world, we know, it was believed that each territory was inhabited and ruled by its own divinities, so that a man could cross the bordering heights and be out of the reach of his native gods, whose presence was confined to the streams and the groves and the hills among which he had lived from his birth. And poor Silas was vaguely conscious of something not unlike the feeling of primitive men, when they fled thus, in fear or in sullenness, from the face of an unpropitious deity. (ch. 2, 16)

Silas is a simple man who, changing his location, puts himself out of reach of his old beliefs; but he is also someone out of a myth, fleeing the gods of his homeland. These two images are present simultaneously, and rather than exert tension on one another they complement each other. The concrete explanation sets Silas within a believable, realistic world, but the mythical one illustrates Silas’ own understanding of his situation, his vague feeling of flight from “an unpropitious deity.” This image is an abstraction of the particular sort folktales present: it is a physical image that may apply to a wide range of situations that need not physically correspond to it.

A subtler similarity between *Silas Marner* and folktales is the important role that chance seems to play in both. While folk and fairy tales often depict events coming out well because of magical agency—a fairy godmother or a gift with exactly the capability the hero needs—these agents appear at exactly the

right time for no stated reason. (Reasons for such events are frequently stated in the more literary or courtly versions of fairy tales, but this is the branch of the fairy-tale tradition to which *Silas Marner* is least closely related, despite its literary craft.) Lüthi writes,

The blind man stumbles across whatever he is searching for; the person who is lost finds the way that leads him to what he needs. . . . Much has been made of the prevalence of chance in the folktale. One could also say that the folktale is a form of literature that knows no chance.

It has been called chance that in the folktale of *The Twelve Brothers* (KHM No. 9) the heroine is sentenced to death and is led to the pyre at the very moment when the three or seven years of her brothers' enchantment have elapsed, so that they can rush up and pull their sister unharmed from the fire. But this exact dovetailing of the situations is nothing but a consequence of the folktale's abstract style. The two processes that to outer appearances are completely isolated . . . are coordinated in an invisible way. Their coincidence is not chance, but precision.⁵

As in a folktale, everyone in *Silas Marner* gets his deserts: Silas has a happy home with Eppie, Dunsey Cass dies as carelessly as he let his brother's horse die, Godfrey ignores his only child and in consequence ends up practically childless. The plot follows "the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind" (ch. 9, 74). What effects this just ending? If the story were a folktale, the answer would be that the story is simply so tightly constructed that all the pieces come together exactly how and when they need to. But the novel breaks out of the folktale form by addressing the puzzle of coincidence. Characters may come up with their own answers, but Eliot never allows one of these to have the

⁵ Lüthi 54. "KHM No. 9" refers to the story's number in the Grimms' collection, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

final say: everyone's view of the universe is somehow incomplete, whether the person in question is Silas with his pious evangelistic faith that does not give him the "Assurance of Salvation" it offers (ch. 1, 10) or Dolly Winthrop who pricks "I.H.S." into her cakes with no idea what it means (ch. 10, 82). This ignorance extends beyond strictly religious beliefs; Godfrey Cass, for example, trusts entirely in chance:

He fled to his usual refuge, that of hoping for some unforeseen turn of fortune, some favourable chance which would save him from unpleasant consequences. . . . In this point of trusting to some throw of fortune's dice, Godfrey can hardly be called old-fashioned. Favourable Chance is the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in. (ch. 9, 73)

The unfolding plot of *Silas Marner* is enough to show us that Godfrey's faith is misplaced, as chance works against him in the long run. Silas' attempts to understand what has happened are equally fruitless. Near the end of the novel he tries to return to Lantern Yard, to shed "a deal o' light" on what happened to him there (ch. 21, 177), but Lantern Yard, its congregation, and the answers they might have offered are all gone. In place of an answer, Silas is left to trust what light he has found in being a father to Eppie: "Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die" (ch. 21, 180). There is just enough of a guiding hand here, just enough order and light, to assure that seeds will bring forth a crop after their kind; this is all any of the characters can say for certain. "All we've got to do is trusten," Dolly Winthrop says (ch. 16, 145), giving up her attempts to understand what powers might have

been responsible for the things that have happened to Silas. What shapes the characters' lives is precisely mystery, uncertainty, with which the characters must interact as morally as they can, guided by their scattered sources of light and the instincts of love.

The noticing of this darkness, the fact that Silas and Dolly realize there is no rational reason for their lives to have worked out to the ends they have achieved, is the first part of Eliot's twofold break with the folktale form. It is as if the characters in a folktale, who traditionally have no inner life, suddenly woke up and realized what a remarkable kind of narrative they were living. The second part of the break is Eppie's decision to stay with Silas rather than return to the Casses, as she would if this were entirely a Rumpelstiltskin story. Her love for him and the love that knits Silas into the community of Raveloe are more powerful than fairy tales. And where the folktale form gives no explanation for the working out of events, the characters trust in the love that has brought them to a happy ending, one that does not follow the pattern of the fairy tale but that pays great tribute to the culture from which fairy tales first arose.

Felix Holt was published in 1866, five years later than *Silas Marner*; it is a longer book with a much more specific historical setting. As such, the novel form predominates over the folktale here to a greater extent than in *Marner*. But aspects of the fairy tale and fairy beliefs are definitely present, particularly in the domestic sphere. Alongside the political events of the novel, *Felix Holt* traces the phases of family life, narrating marriage both as a past event and a future

prospect, parenthood from the perspective of both parent and child. At every step the novel engages folklore, drawing on fairy-tale material as a text which Eliot challenges and reshapes. The retrospective stories of marriage draw on stories of fairy brides, parent-child relationships evoke stories of changelings and stolen children, and the courtship of Esther Lyon and Harold Transome resembles a mercenary and ultimately subverted telling of the story of Beauty and the Beast. Taken together, these allusions form a world that is realistic, but where people's actions, their identities, and their places in the world—geographic as well as social places—are defined by folkloric ideas.

The language of enchantment is brought into the novel in the same Introduction that gives it its historical setting.⁶ Eliot describes a carriage ride through the English countryside, ending in the village of Little Treby where the story takes place. The view is a retrospective one, describing the roads of England as they existed thirty-five years previous to the novel's writing. The reader is taken through "that central plain, watered at one extremity by the Avon, at the other by the Trent" (5); this journey is described with equal attention to the natural environment and to the attitudes of the people living there. The opening is strongly nostalgic, with its evocation of the "glory" of "the old coach-roads" (5) and the finely observed visual descriptions of the landscape, but physical beauty fast gives way to a suggestion of human provincial suspicion and narrowness:

⁶ George Eliot, *Felix Holt the Radical*, ed. Fred C. Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 5-11. All quotations of the novel are from this edition.

It was worth the journey only to see those hedgerows, the liberal homes of unmarketable beauty—of the purple-blossomed ruby-berried nightshade, of the wild convolvulus climbing and spreading in tendrilled strength till it made a great curtain of pale-green hearts and white trumpets, of the many-tubed honeysuckle which, in its most delicate fragrance, hid a charm more subtle and penetrating than beauty.... Such hedgerows were often as tall as the labourers' cottages dotted along the lanes, or clustered into a small hamlet, their little dingy windows telling, like thick-filmed eyes, of nothing but the darkness within. (6).

This introductory carriage ride ends at Little Treby. This village is not categorized, like the places the carriage passed through, as a place of Dissenters, of superstitious farmers, or of honest provincial industry. The way Eliot describes all these characteristics before bringing the narrative to Treby suggests that all of them will be applicable, the village becoming a microcosm of the country life surveyed in the introduction. Perhaps to accentuate this universality, Eliot gives not a physical or social description of the village, but an allegorical one, connecting the village at once to a landscape immersed in human feeling and to a supernatural mode of language:

The poets [Virgil and Dante] have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the under world. The thorn-bushes there, and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams. These things are a parable. (11)

This image of a “dolorous enchanted forest” hangs over the novel, the more so because Eliot does not specify that it represents any particular part of the story. This generalization of meaning seems to be deliberate; every character and every part of the plot must be read as part of the parable—much as every place passed in this introductory coach ride can be read as an aspect of Treby. By declining to

specify that this parable applies particularly to one character, Eliot sets up the entire novel to be read within the context of the dolorous enchanted forest. All the characters in the novel are potentially hiding the kind of passion and anguish that Eliot describes here in intensely physical and magical language.

Eliot periodically uses forest imagery in the novel, evoking the forest of the Introduction. In fact the wilderness is present in the name of the novel's title character: *Felix*, the Latin for "happy," and *Holt*, a wood or copse (see *OED* def. 2), so that Felix's name offers a happy wood as an alternative to the dolorous enchanted forest of the underworld. Felix's honesty, his willingness to speak his mind at all times, his commitment to his ideals: these qualities, which make him seem barely civilized, are the antidote to the pain of secrecy and silence. Gillian Beer writes that whereas Harold Transome offers his mother no "recognition of her independent being," "Felix . . . is shown to be capable of recognition and change, a capacity shown also in his power to awaken change."⁷ Felix's political activity, futile though it often seems, is evidence of his ability and willingness to create and provoke change, his freedom from civilized stasis.

The narrative picks up on the association of Felix with the wild: Felix and Esther go walking in the forest and have their most personal conversation so far, hinting at the possibility of a future between them. Felix explains his choice of a working man's status, and Esther asserts that she would be willing to make such a choice if she could. Neither one mentions the significance of this conversation to

⁷ Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 144-45.

their relationship, but it is as undeniably present as the “human histories hidden” in the forest of the parable: “Their words were charged with a meaning dependent entirely on the secret consciousness of each. Nothing had been said which was necessarily personal” (ch. 27, 225). After this conversation Esther associates Felix with fresh air and the outdoors; her walk with Harold Transome in chapter 43, when the courtship between them is beginning, is like an inadequate imitation of the walk with Felix, and when Harold suggests cutting down some of the trees of the park he is threatening a symbol of the man Esther actually loves (ch. 43, 343). When Esther is faced with a choice between Felix and Harold, she feels that to leave Felix would be to leave behind “the high mountain air, the passionate serenity of perfect love” (ch. 44, 357). Esther’s ultimate choice of a life with Felix is a choice of the freedom, as well as the social liminality, represented by the forest.

Despite the natural imagery in the Introduction and the novel’s title, most of the parable that Eliot crafts in *Felix Holt* takes place in households. In fact the secrecy and oppression in the forest of the parable is far more present in these households than in any of the novel’s wild spaces, and the houses also contain all the novel’s uses of folklore. The first home described in the novel, appearing immediately after the image of the forest is introduced, is Transome Court, where Mrs Transome is awaiting the homecoming of her son Harold from a long period abroad. Harold, the beloved son, is callous toward Mrs Transome when he arrives; he pays no attention to his relationship with her, to her unhappiness, or to

his own place in the family. These traits horrify his mother and force her to remember that her son is not a Transome, despite her attempts to raise him as one; he is really the son of the lawyer Jermyn. In going abroad, Harold makes himself a home in the professional class to which his real father belongs. He barely resembles the son Mrs Transome imagined for herself:

Three minutes before, she had fancied that, in spite of all changes wrought by fifteen years of separation, she should clasp her son again as she had done at their parting; but in the moment when their eyes met, the sense of strangeness came upon her like a terror. . . .

“You would not have known me, eh, mother?”

It was perhaps the truth. If she had seen him in a crowd, she might have looked at him without recognition—not, however, without startled wonder; for though the likeness to herself was no longer striking, the years had overlaid it with another likeness which would have arrested her. (ch. 1, 17)

Mrs Transome’s heritage has been replaced by that of Jermyn. The likeness is not only physical; Harold comes home with his father’s mercenary attitudes, disregarding his mother’s long care for the house and land, seeing his place there as something that could just as easily have been bought: “It will make a hole in sixty thousand pounds to pay off the mortgages. However . . . I suppose I should have spent more in buying an English estate some time or other. I always meant to be an Englishman, and thrash a lord or two who thrashed me at Eton” (ch. 1, 19). His attitude toward the servants is similar: “Never forget places and people—how they look and what can be done with them” (ch. 1, 21). The house and grounds are the basis for Mrs Transome’s whole identity, from which she draws not only her name (her husband, as we learn in the prologue, would have been a Durfey if his line of the family had not come into possession of the house)

but also the closest thing to a purpose in her life. But the son for whom she held this house in trust cares no more for the place than for any other. Most shocking, of course, is Harold's Radical political allegiance—he has turned into a creature Mrs Transome did not think existed: “There were rich Radicals, she was aware, as there were rich Jews and Dissenters, but she had never thought of them as county people” (ch. 1, 18). Harold does not belong in his mother's feudal world. To her mind, a Radical should live in a house “staring above poor sticks of young trees and iron hurdles” (ch. 1, 21); and her horror at Harold's transformation is the horror of a changeling's mother, a woman who has raised a child from a different world—a world of such uncivilization that houses and land are held at only their fiscal value.

If the Transomes are the chief family of the town, the representative home in the village is that of the Dissenting pastor Rufus Lyon and his daughter Esther. They have a peaceful, domestic life together, but early on we learn what Esther does not know—that the two are not literally father and daughter. The strange circumstances that made them into a family bear a strong resemblance to folkloric stories of fairy brides. This tradition in storytelling goes back at least as far as the fairy Nimue of Arthurian legend, who lured Merlin away and imprisoned him in a tree, and includes the Welsh stories of selkies or seal brides who shed their seal skins and become women; mortal men can capture these women by taking their skins when they are in human form, but the wives can remain with their husbands only until they find their seal skins and must return to the sea. In other stories, a

fairy consents to marry a mortal on the condition that he never strike her. As Katharine Briggs writes, “the fairy is wooed and consents to the marriage with a stipulation, which is generally not arbitrary, but arises out of the conditions of her being. This is almost always contravened and the wife departs.”⁸ Eliot applies this form of story about a marriage between a human and a fairy to describe the relationship between an English Dissenting pastor and the French Catholic with whom he falls in love.

Esther’s mother was a French woman, Annette, whose story is told in retrospect as the secret recollection of Rufus Lyon. Annette comes to Mr Lyon apparently out of nowhere, carrying a child. She is “the daughter of a French officer of considerable rank” (ch. 6, 73) who has disobeyed her family by marrying an Englishman, and subsequently she has grown more and more rootless, trying to find her husband after they are separated. She travels from her home to London, where she is rendered more helpless by the double circumstance of her baby’s birth and her husband’s death. Annette leaves the city on foot. She cannot return home by walking, of course, and given her “disinclination to return to her relatives if any other acceptable possibility could be found” (ch. 6, 75), she has nowhere at all to go. She has pawned “the last thing . . . she could persuade herself to part with” (ch. 6, 74); she has no money left, no way to reach home, and no resources to take care of her child; she has become as rootless a wanderer as any wild fairy.

⁸ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 148. See also Silver chapter 3, 89-116.

Rufus Lyon is obsessed with this wandering, helpless being, despite her devastating unsuitability to his life. She is “a blind French Catholic” (ch. 6, 73), the antithesis of the English Dissenting minister; his feelings for her, threatening the whole identity he has built for himself, resemble the dangerous fascination of some mortal men in folklore with fairy women:

The evening passed; a bed was made up for the strange woman, and Mr Lyon had not asked her so much as her name. He never went to bed himself that night. He spent it in misery, enduring a horrible assault of Satan. He thought a frenzy had seized him. Wild visions of an impossible future thrust themselves upon him. He dreaded lest the woman had a husband; he wished that he might call her his own, that he might worship her beauty, that she might love and caress him. . . . These mad wishes were irreconcilable with what he was, and must be, as a Christian minister . . . they were irreconcilable with that conception of the world which made his faith. (ch. 6, 73)

By her very powerlessness and dependence on the minister, Annette has gained more control over him than any other person has ever had, enough to cast his identity into question. In posing this threat she is like the most dangerous kind of fairy brides, the temptresses who lure innocent young men to their own annihilation. But Annette is herself the victim of such temptation, having followed the husband she barely knew out of her own country to a foreign island where she is not only friendless but a heretic and a native of the enemy country. Like a mortal who has stumbled into fairyland, she is stranded where she does not belong. When she in turn becomes the tempter of Mr Lyon, the otherness between the French and the English is shown to be mutually attractive and destructive on both sides; a native of either country, when become an isolated

alien, might unwittingly turn into the alluring figure who leads to another's downfall.

Annette and her soldier husband, and later Mr Lyon, all try to sever their connections to their homes—family loyalties, religious interdictions, and the dictates of respectability. Mr Lyon “longed to fly to some backwoods where there was no church to reproach him, and where he might have this sweet woman to wife, and know the joys of tenderness” (ch. 6, 75). Annette's husband, we later learn, literally renounced his identity and took that of another prisoner. But this exchange does not make it possible for him to be with Annette; instead it severs him from her and makes it more difficult, a generation later, to reconstruct their daughter's parentage. The baby herself has no name for the first year of her life; she is called only “*la petite*” (ch. 6, 79), her mother avoiding a naming that must place the child within a family and nationality. Between Annette and Mr Lyon there is nothing spoken that might remind either of the barriers between them; the minister says nothing about either religion or his love for Annette, fearing “anything that might cause her to feel a sudden repulsion towards him” (ch. 6, 77). The two of them achieve, for a while, a delicate balance that enables them to live together without broaching these subjects. But this balance is based on denial of both their feelings and identities.

It is Annette who finally gives way. She consents to marry Mr Lyon and baptize the baby as a Protestant, giving both of them over to being under the jurisdiction of an English God: “There is nothing of my religion in this country.

But the good God must be here, for you are good; I leave all to you” (ch. 6, 79).

But as soon as she makes this sacrifice, Annette begins to die: “She withered like a plant in strange air, and the three years of life that remained were but a slow and gentle death” (ch. 6, 79). Annette’s conversion to Protestantism has contravened the central condition of her existence, as with a fairy wife whose mortal husband disobeys the rule she gave him as a condition for their marriage. In folklore, such a forbidden action inevitably leads to the wife’s departure, even if it is against her will. Since Annette’s transgression is the choice to stay and try to become English, the consequence is not her departure but her otherwise inexplicable death. Meanwhile, Rufus Lyon regains his sense of identity. The last three years of Annette’s life are “a period of such self-suppression and life in another as few men know” (ch. 6, 79). By becoming the dominant member of his relationship with Annette, converting her to his religion, and willingly sacrificing himself for her in a way he can understand as religious selflessness, Mr Lyon works his way back to his old life in the ministry. When Annette dies he becomes a minister again, “with little Esther as the one visible sign of that four years’ break in his life” (ch. 6, 80).

This is the end of one phase of the family story, and when Annette dies it would seem that the cycle of foreigners tempting and enchanting one another has ended. But Esther remains, and her true parentage will prove pivotal to the story.

Esther, like Harold, is essentially a changeling, brought up in one kind of life but bearing the traces of another. Mr Lyon treats her as her mother’s

daughter. He sends her to school in France because of “[h]er probable facility in learning French” (ch. 6, 80), as if speaking a certain language were a physical, inherited capability. Her relationship with her adoptive father is devoted but distant: he defers to her as the child of the woman he loved but never really knew, and she behaves toward him with a certain superiority, as if his life is too narrow for her: “Esther’s own mind was not free from a sense of irreconcilableness between the objects of her taste and the condition of her lot” (ch. 6, 68). But as she is, in a real if not biological sense, Lyon’s child as well, she is a misfit even at her school in France and among the English gentry from which her father came. Her socially superior friends “had always said that she might be taken for a born lady” (ch. 6, 69), but they also scorn her upbringing: “all her favourite companions, both in France and at an English school where she had been a junior teacher, had thought it quite ridiculous to have a father who was a Dissenting preacher” (ch. 6, 68).

The unsuitability of a Dissenting preacher as father to such a daughter causes some difficulties between them. The preacher fears that Esther’s tastes and high self-opinion put her soul in danger, “humbling himself for her spiritual deficiencies in the privacy of his study” (ch. 6, 69), but he also subjects himself to her wishes. Esther, for her part, loves her father and recognizes his intellect but avoids walking with him in public, because of his embarrassing habit of talking about theology instead of making light conversation. Esther is compared both to “a light-footed, sweet-voiced Queen Esther” (ch. 6, 69) and “a remarkable

Cinderella” (ch. 10, 106). Like the biblical queen whose husband did not know she was a Jew, Esther is of a different race, a different class, a different nationality from her father, the changeling child he does not know how to care for. The Cinderella reference is somewhat ironic, since at the moment it describes Esther is not working or sitting in the ashes of the fire but prettily seated and well dressed, reading a romance; naming her a Cinderella does less to portray her actual situation than the way she might be imagining herself. Esther knows full well the differences between herself and Lyon even before she knows her own origin, and she speculates that she might have been able to love her mother better than her father (ch. 6, 70). But her character is redeemed, her fey characteristics tempered, by a willingness to stay where she does not entirely fit, a recognition that there is no other place where her mixed self would be more at home.

The difference between father and daughter is also the ground for their affection for one another: Mr Lyon not only loves but admires Esther’s character, and the same intellect in him that embarrasses Esther in public gives her a sense of companionship. When Eliot interjects, “There is a sort of subjection which is the peculiar heritage of largeness and of love; and strength is often only another name for willing bondage to irremediable weakness” (ch. 6, 69), it is hard to know who is meant to be the stronger person choosing subjection to a weaker; both Esther and her father are committed to remaining a family.

Esther is eventually revealed to be the legitimate heir of Transome Court, and later Harold’s illegitimate parentage is revealed, a circumstance that threatens

to disinherit him and leave Esther as the only true descendant of the Transome family. The reversal casts the changeling motif in an interesting light: it is as if Esther and Harold were swapped at birth, each the changeling of the other. This mutual exchange of places is not found in folklore, where stolen children are taken away to a place the stories do not describe; here, as with Esther's parents' story, fairyland can be anywhere, any part of the world or of society that is foreign to the people concerned. As, earlier, the French and the English were tempters to one another, here the rich and the middle-class are shown to be the thieves of one another's children. Esther is the child who should have been raised in wealth and gentility, Harold the son of the professional class who could only ever gain wealth through work and influence through proximity to the gentry.

But before the truth about Harold is revealed, and after Esther's parentage is discovered, there is a period of close contact between these two worlds, a courtship between Harold and Esther that is meant to bring ownership of Transome Court back where it belongs—both to the family who have lived there for the past several generations, and to the person who has the hereditary claim on the property. This courtship bears a certain resemblance to the story of Beauty and the Beast: Esther is resident in the house of the man who is wooing her, having come there from the house of her father, and Harold is dependent on her to restore himself to his former state but forbidden to speak of this underlying purpose. But here again Eliot is not content to use a folkloric source outright, and by the end the pattern established by this story will be subverted.

Esther feels that her life at Transome Court is a story. Mrs Transome tells her “family stories that to Esther were like so many novelettes” (ch. 40, 320), and Esther’s own new life is like “a book which she seemed herself to be constructing—trying to make character clear before her, and looking into the ways of destiny” (ch. 40, 322). She is caught in a situation that would have seemed from the outside—from the perspective of someone listening to the outline of her story—like a complete happy ending: a comfortable fortune, an affectionate acquired family, and Esther’s own identity rediscovered. But the perspective of a story’s listener and that of its protagonist are not compatible, which might be the reason Esther finds herself unable to read: having become the heroine of a new story, she cannot take the perspective of a reader of another story. Instead she begins to take on the characteristics of a fairy-tale heroine, conversing coyly with Harold in preparation for the marriage that seems inevitable. She even makes the same request as Beauty: when Harold asks if he can give her anything—offering to fulfill any wish she tells him of—she says, “I do know one wish distinctly. I want to go and see my father” (ch. 40, 326). Like Beauty she is torn between devotion to her father and attraction to the new life being opened to her. But Esther diverges from the fairy-tale pattern in her interactions with other members of the household.

The “Beauty and the Beast” story developed variously in different parts of Europe after the fifteenth-century publication of the classical story of Cupid and

Psyche, a myth with strong correlations to the fairy-tale genre.⁹ It is likely that George Eliot read Madame Leprince de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast," the first English version of the tale as it is now commonly told.¹⁰ Mme. de Beaumont's tale does not include the exotic touches of some later versions. The palace has no rooms of birds or moving statues, and Beauty does not dream of the handsome prince who beseeches her to disbelieve her eyes. Instead, the enchantments are of a more domestic sort: Beauty's father finds hay for his horse and a fine meal for himself, for which he thanks "good Madam Fairy" (Opie 141); the magic of the palace provides Beauty with a magnificently appointed apartment, already prepared for her when she arrives; her meals are always provided by an invisible server and sometimes accompanied by music. When Beauty arrives at the palace she has a dream of a "fine lady" who tells her, "This good action of yours in giving up your own life to save your father's shall not go unrewarded" (Opie 145). It seems that for Beaumont, the magic attending the castle is a feminine magic, a spirit playing hostess and mother to the guest who has left her father. The place of this spirit is taken up, in *Felix Holt*, by the

⁹ Ruth B. Bottigheimer, "Beauty and the Beast," *The Oxford Companion to the Fairy Tale*, ed. Jack Zipes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45-49.

¹⁰ Madame Leprince de Beaumont's "La Belle et la Bête" was printed in *Magasin des Enfants* in 1756, which was published in English as *The Young Misses Magazine* in 1761. Quotations are taken from the reprinting in Iona and Peter Opie's *The Classic Fairy Tales* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). Terence Dawson argues the likelihood of George Eliot having read the *Magasin des Enfants* in childhood, based on a reference to the first story in the collection, "Prince Darling," early in chapter 15 of *Silas Marner*; see his article "Silas Marner: George Eliot and Mme. Leprince de Beaumont," *The George Eliot Fellowship Review* 19 (1988), 36-38.

Transomes, the family that is practically invisible to Harold but who make Transome Court a home for Esther. And it is by meeting this family with affection and sympathy, particularly by recognizing the suffering of Mrs Transome, that Esther breaks the pattern set by Beauty.

The first time Esther and Mrs Transome meet, in the Lyons' home, each is drawn to the other. Esther offers the sort of young female companionship, a "sweet young deference," that Mrs Transome has never had; Harold has "never seen her so much at her ease, or with so much benignancy in her face" (ch. 38, 311). Mrs Transome in turn represents her house in Esther's eyes. All the domestic enchantments welcoming Beauty to the palace, all the refinements Esther will enjoy at Transome Court, are present in the older woman's person, "the high-bred quietness of her speech, the delicate odour of her drapery" (ch. 38, 311). But even in this first meeting there are indications that they cannot become fast friends. Mrs Transome beseeches Esther to come at the same time as she promises not to stay too close:

"Do oblige me: you shall not be teased more than you like by an old woman: you shall do just as you please, and become acquainted with your future home, since it is to be yours. I can tell you a world of things that you will want to know; and the business can proceed properly." (ch. 38, 310)

When Esther goes to Transome Court, she notices the older woman's distress as nobody else has troubled to do, but Mrs Transome discourages her sympathy: "My dear, I shall make this house dull for you. . . . Run away from me without ceremony. Every one else does, you see. I am part of the old furniture with new

drapery” (ch. 45, 361). She equates herself with the furniture and the house, discouraging even the attention she likes to receive as she recedes further into her role as the domestic spirit.

The older women in fairy tales almost never develop friendships with young girls; folklore is rife with mothers, stepmothers, and mothers-in-law who sabotage young women's marriages or murder them outright. Mrs Transome's sympathetic nature is a softening of this folk tradition, not unlike the sympathetic portrayal of Silas Marner and the child who, in a folktale, would be considered stolen. Nevertheless, Esther and Mrs Transome are held to the traditional opposition between generations of women, however sympathetic they may be to one another; the power dynamics between them preclude a friendship of equals. Esther holds the fate of the Transomes in her hand, as both women know. Mrs Transome's whole identity as a lady could be utterly destroyed. Esther, by the strange circumstances of her birth and upbringing, may parallel Beauty's progress from wealth to poverty to queenhood. But Eliot counterbalances this story with that of Mrs Transome, daughter of a poor family (Introduction, 10) who won her place as mistress of Transome Court by her appealing cleverness as a young girl and who “liked every sign of power that her lot had left her” (ch. 1, 28), but whose influence erodes with the arrival of her son, and who is now threatened with humiliation and poverty. This progression from importance to powerlessness is nearly the exact opposite of the story proposed for Esther; and

the emptiness of Mrs Transome's present life prevents the possible "Cinderella ending" of Esther's story from seeming desirable.

Because of this balance of power between the two women, the connection between them is practically self-extinguishing; the moment of greatest sympathy between them, when Esther opens her door to find that the ghostly noise outside is made by Mrs Transome, "pacing slowly, with her cheek upon her hand" (ch. 49, 391), is also the moment that determines they will be separated. Mrs Transome nearly weeps, though she avoids explaining the exact reason for her distress and Harold's sudden revelation, and Esther is shocked: "The dimly-suggested tragedy of this woman's life, the dreary waste of years empty of sweet trust and affection, afflicted her even to horror. It seemed to have come as a last vision to urge her towards the life where the draughts of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love. But all the more she longed to still the pain of this heart that beat against hers" (ch. 50, 393-94).

The nearest analogue to this scene in Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" is when Beauty finds the Beast dying and is shocked to realize that she loves him, when she had believed she felt only "gratitude, esteem, and friendship" (Opie 149). In the tale, this avowal of love effects a transformation of the Beast to his true shape, Beauty to his queen. Mrs Transome takes the Beast's place, and although she and Harold both hope that Esther will stay and marry into the house, what Esther has seen of Mrs Transome's unhappiness convinces her to leave. She chooses life in what is repeatedly described as outside, "the high mountain air, the

passionate serenity of perfect love,” over “a life of middling delights, overhung with the languorous haziness of motiveless ease, where poetry was only literature, and the fine ideas had to be taken down from the shelves of the library when her husband’s back was turned” (ch. 44, 357-58). She does not consent to marry for a general sense of fittingness, saying as Beaumont’s Beauty does, “He is kind and good, and that is sufficient” (Opie 148). In casting off her wealth for the sake of love, this realist heroine pursues a purer idea of romantic love than the heroine of the courtly fairy tale, choosing instead her humble life as a changeling child from a humbler kind of story.

Perhaps the most telling fairy in the novel is the hypothetical one who appears at the end of chapter 17, in a paragraph that could almost be an epigraph. Mr Lyon has been trying to persuade Harold Transome that he should oppose the general ballot:

If a cynical sprite were present, riding on one of the motes in that dusty room, he may have made himself merry at the illusions of the little minister who brought so much conscience to bear on the production of so slight an effect. I confess to smiling myself, being skeptical as to the effect of ardent appeals and nice distinctions on gentlemen who are got up, both inside and out, as candidates in the style of the period; but I never smiled at Mr Lyon’s trustful energy without falling to penitence and veneration immediately after. For what we call illusions are often, in truth, a wide vision of past and present realities—a willing movement of a man’s soul with the larger sweep of the world’s forces—a movement towards a more assured end than the chances of a single life. We see human heroism broken into units and say, this unit did little—might as well not have been. But in this way we might break up a great army into units; in this way we might break the sunlight into fragments, and think that this and the other might be cheaply parted with. Let us rather raise a monument to the soldiers whose brave hearts only kept the ranks unbroken, and met death—a monument to the faithful who were not famous, and who are precious as the continuity of the sunbeams is

precious, though some of them fall unseen and on barrenness. (ch. 17, 161)

The sprite in this passage holds the privileged perspective of the author herself, or any of the readers given her omniscient view of the novel's events; and this realist novel is created by an act of authorship that, however intentional and intellectual it is, is also magical. It is this most basic spell, the ability to observe an entire little world playing out its events, that enables the readers to reach an understanding of *Felix Holt's* social, political and historical realism; and all of the specific people and places of the novel, from Mrs Transome's decaying feudal world to the religiously ordered universe of Rufus Lyon, are made real through an understanding of each of them in turn as a kind of fairyland. Yet Eliot's magic is more powerful than the magic of the fairy imagined riding on the beam of sunlight because it is more careful, more compassionate, dedicated to memorializing the men and women she describes who would get no recognition from a "cynical sprite" or the teller of a fairy tale; she gives voice to the dolorous forest's "unuttered cries . . . the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams" (Introduction, 11). The story of *Felix Holt*, like *Silas Marner*, echoes much older folkloric stories; it makes every place and every social condition a fairyland to those from elsewhere; but Eliot's realism takes the magic implicit in storytelling a step further by grounding it in a compassionate depiction of the real world.

**“There are ghosts and dreams abroad”¹:
Charles Dickens’ *Barnaby Rudge***

According to Dickens’ own account, the idea that in 1841 was serialized as *Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Riots of ’Eighty* started with his considering the fictional possibilities of the 1780 anti-Catholic riots in London. In his introduction to the novel he wrote, “No account of the Gordon Riots, having been to my knowledge introduced into any Work of Fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary and remarkable features, I was led to project this Tale” (3). It is possible that Dickens actually came by this historical inspiration as an orally transmitted story. His grandmother, Elizabeth Dickens, was housekeeper for the Crewe family, who owned a house at Grosvenor Street and may have been there during the riots; it is easy to imagine the grandmother passing on the story of such an experience to her grandson.² One passage of the novel in particular suggests that the author had the story from an eyewitness account. It occurs when the rioters have burned Newgate and released the four condemned men from the prison:

¹ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Riots of ’Eighty*, ed. John Bowen (London: Penguin Books: 2003), 386. All quotations from the novel are taken from this edition.

² Michael Allen, “The Dickens/Crewe Connection,” *Dickens Quarterly* 5:4 (December 1988), 175-86. John Bowen, editor of the Penguin edition of *Barnaby Rudge*, makes the connection to the cited passage in the novel; see note 4 to ch. 65.

The release of these four wretched creatures, and conveying them, astounded and bewildered, into the street so full of life . . . was the crowning horror of the scene. Their pale and haggard looks, and hollow eyes; their staggering feet, and hands stretched out as if to save themselves from falling; their wandering and uncertain air; the way they heaved and gasped for breath, as though in water, when they were first plunged into the crowd; all marked them for the men. No need to say ‘this one was doomed to die;’ there were the words broadly stamped and branded on his face. The crowd fell off, as if they had been laid out for burial, and had risen in their shrouds; and many were seen to shudder, as though they had been actually dead men, when they chanced to touch or brush against their garments.

. . . Many years afterwards, old people who lived in their youth near this part of the city, remembered being in a great glare of light, within doors and without, and as they looked, timid and frightened children, from the windows, seeing *a face* go by. Though the whole great crowd and all its other terrors had faded from their recollection, this one remained; alone, distinct, and well-remembered. (ch. 65, 546-47)

From this beginning of a true event transmitted as a ghost story, Dickens builds a small but complex fictional world that shows traces of a folkloric or fairy-tale mode of storytelling, more of them in the parts of the novel that are less tied to the historical basis of the story. These fairy-tale elements differ depending on their location. When the narrative is in London, close to the riots both geographically and within the narrative, there are relatively few supernatural images; those that do occur, such as in the passage cited above, are described as aberrations, and their literal reality—in this case, the fact that the men described have been released from a death sentence rather than raised from the dead—is kept in sight. Folkloric fears of the mob of fairies, or the trooping fairies, are perhaps suggested by the descriptions of such chaos, but that chaos is also firmly established as taking place in real, particular parts of London, and tied to particular historical figures. But the farther the narrative goes from London and the riots, the more

pervasive the fairy-tale atmosphere becomes; and in order to see the way Dickens took a historical event and from it projected a fairy-tale world, it is necessary in a sense to read the novel backwards.

Stephen Marcus' analysis of *Barnaby Rudge* points out that the central motivation of the novel is a conservative one,³ revolutionary in the strictly literal sense of revolving something around to its original position. The anti-Catholic rioters put up a pretense of being on the side of Old England, as Queen Elizabeth meant it to be; they cast the Catholics in the role of invaders, despite Catholicism's position as the original English Christianity. This problematic relationship to the past is picked up in Reuben Haredale's obsession with his brother's murder and in Mrs Rudge's attempts to escape her supposedly dead husband.

We might reframe this problem in folklore terms: *Barnaby Rudge* is overwhelmingly preoccupied with the dead walking the earth. Depictions of ghosts are not only present in the more thoroughly fictional aspects of the novel; they are powerfully used to visualize the nature of the historical events. An image of the walking dead is vividly established in the passage quoted above: the four condemned men released from prison are as startled by the life of the city and as frightening to the people around them as if they had been ghosts. If Dickens' grandmother did tell him about witnessing the riots, then an image of the walking dead may well have been Dickens' first impression of the Gordon riots. If not, he

³ Stephen Marcus, "Sons and Fathers," *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 169-212.

does a remarkably thorough job of imposing the idea on the entirety of the novel. Ghosts motivate the paranoia that in turn leads to the riots: George Gordon's supporters are afraid not just of the presence of Catholics in England, but of Mary Tudor, the Catholic queen herself, risen from the grave and threatening the Protestant populace. Gordon's fawning secretary, Gashford, says the present crisis is such that "Queen Elizabeth, that maiden monarch, weeps within her tomb, and Bloody Mary, with a brow of gloom and shadow, stalks triumphant" (ch. 35, 290). The Protestant association gathers support by spreading secretive reports, making it seem that "by-gone bugbears which had lain quietly in their graves for centuries, were raised again to haunt the ignorant and credulous" (ch. 37, 305). Within the novel's politics, ghosts are falsely hinted at to suggest a far greater threat from the Catholics than is actually present; in the resulting riots, this resurrection of old fears leads to the resurrection of men who were supposed to die in a matter of days. The act of raising ghosts is the act of stirring up elements of the past that should have remained at rest.

The prominence of death and the dead in the riots is re-emphasized by the nature of the three characters who become the most important rioters: Hugh, Dennis, and Simon Tappertit. These three come from different places geographically: Hugh from Chigwell (or so it seems), Simon from a middle-class tradesman's household, Dennis from a strange slum on the edge of the city. All three represent the threat of death as it comes from their three places of origin.

Hugh, as the rioter from the wild, plays the part of a predator, a role that is introduced memorably in Chapter 21. Dolly Varden is walking through the woods between the Warren and the Maypole, wearing “a smart little cherry-coloured mantle, with a hood of the same drawn over her head” (ch. 19, 165-66). While Dolly hurries through this forest, entrusted with an important letter from Emma Haredale to Ned Chester, she is accosted by Hugh. Hablot Knight-Brown’s illustration to this chapter picks up on the fairy-tale subtext of this situation and provides an illustration that could come straight out of a storybook about Little Red Riding Hood, the character of whom Dickens once wrote, “She was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding-Hood, I



should have known perfect bliss.”⁴

The association with the fairy tale suggests there is more to Hugh than the danger that he will try to steal a kiss. Red Riding Hood’s wolf is dangerous for more than being a carnivore: he has a plan, and the power to persuade impressionable young ladies to do what is convenient

⁴ *Christmas Stories* I, 8-9. Quoted in Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, 38.

for him, even if they don't realize it at the time. Dolly can't know that Hugh will get involved in the riots to come, but he can be expected to do something dangerous and vengeful before the story is through.

The idea of Hugh as a wolf or a dog is reinforced throughout the novel in text and images. It seems to be a key part of Knight-Browne's image of the character; two other illustrations feature Hugh with a dog next to another character with his own identifying object, a suit of clothes for John Chester in chapter 23, and a figure hanging from a gibbet for Dennis in chapter 38.





Sir John Chester arouses Hugh's anger by claiming Geoffrey Haredale has treated him "more as if you were a mongrel dog than a man like himself" (ch. 40, 334); Hugh says Dennis is "a roaring dog, master—one after my own heart" (ch. 40, 335); Dennis in turn says Hugh "wants as much holding in as a thorough-bred bulldog" (ch. 44, 368). Hugh's identification with animals is most definitively stated by John Willett, who uses his wildness as an excuse to treat him as an animal: "that chap that can't read nor write, and has never had much to do with anything but animals, and has never lived in any way but like the animals he has lived among, *is* an animal. And . . . is to be treated accordingly" (ch. 11, 100). Hugh and his dog were the only creatures that cared when Hugh's mother was hanged for passing counterfeit bank notes: "Out of the two thousand odd—there was a larger crowd for its being a woman—the dog and I alone had any pity. If he'd have been a man, he'd have been glad to be quit of her, for she had been forced to keep him lean and half-starved; but being a dog, and not having a man's

sense, he was sorry” (ch. 23, 200). The dog ironically has more basic human sympathy than any part of the city’s humanity but Hugh.

This passage explaining Hugh’s past reveals that his predatory characteristics were bred not in the forest where he first seemed to be a wolf but in the city, caused by poverty and official injustice. Dickens pushes the point further by making Hugh the illegitimate son of high-society, London-dwelling John Chester. He is revealed to be a neglected creature that is not monstrously “hardened and unnatural” (ch. 79, 664) but who simply falls short of performing an extraordinary act of forgiveness: as Edward Chester says of Hugh’s refusal to meet with him before being hanged, ““We hear the world wonder every day at monsters of ingratitude. Did it never occur to you that it often looks for monsters of affection, as though they were things of course?”” (ch. 79, 664). The wolf of the country and the stray dog of the city turn out to be one and the same, and in either form he is driven to become animalistic because he meets with no human kindness.

Dennis, the hangman, equates himself with the law, based on the faulty syllogism that if execution is the law, and Dennis carries out executions, then Dennis is the law. In fact Dennis occupies a marginal place in the lawful society of which he thinks he is a pillar; in effect, he is death itself, walking unrecognized among the living who have no idea of his occupation. Dennis is highly possessive of death and shocked by anyone dying in a chaotic or unlawful manner. It is perhaps his identification of himself with the nation that allows Dennis to

rationalize his participation in the riots: he is the law, therefore any action he takes on behalf of England is an action of the country. On the strength of this reasoning he suggests hanging Willett without judge, lawyer, or jury, assuming his own presence is enough to make such an execution a lawful one: “Now that he’s ready trussed, as one may say, wouldn’t it be better for all parties if we was to work him off? . . . The public would think a great deal more on us!” (ch. 54, 453).

Dennis’ exaggerated sense of self-importance is mirrored and magnified by the description of his home. His neighborhood is the Green Lanes outside the city proper: “a retired spot, not of the choicest kind,” Dickens delicately puts it (ch. 44, 366), with treacherous heaps of waste and sparse grass for the horses and mules that try to graze there—all of which betrays the extreme poverty of the place’s residents. But the residents have not resigned themselves to this state, and in fact they perpetuate a remarkable masquerade of prosperity:

Poverty has its whims and shows of taste, as wealth has. Some of these cabins were turreted, some had false windows painted on the rotten walls; one had a mimic clock, upon a crazy tower of four feet high, which screened the chimney; each in its little patch of ground had a rude seat or arbour. (ch. 44, 367)

These people, socially and geographically marginalized, subsisting by trading “in bones, in rags, in broken glass, in old wheels, in birds, and dogs” (ch. 44, 367), paint up their houses to convince themselves that they live in a finer place. The luxury they are imitating is of a vague sort. Everyone seems to yearn for a proper garden, as each house has its “rude seat or arbour.” Some houses, with turrets and

false windows, seem to imitate castles or grand houses; the one with a clock on its chimney is like a miniature of Parliament's Tower Clock or a church. The houses, then, might be imitations of pastoral, urban, or medieval grandeur, depending on how their owners conceive of wealth and importance; all of them dwell in a fictionalized version of wealth.

This forlorn portrait is a visualization of Dennis' place in the world: he paints himself up as a figurehead of the state until he forgets that he is simply a man with a gruesome job, and the government never considers his contribution to law and order. Even by the standards of this neighborhood, Dennis lives in "one of the meanest houses, which was but a room, and that of small dimensions" (ch. 44, 367), which seems to have no aesthetic aspirations but is surrounded by a mock moat—Mr Gashford enters the house "by means of a tottering plank which crossed the ditch in front" (ch. 44, 367)—that must, to Dennis' mind, set him apart from the slum he lives in and protect him from malicious outside forces. Gashford, seated on the one chair in the house, plays along with this charade of comfort and importance: "Dennis has great knowledge of the world," he tells Hugh, and later to Dennis himself says, "We are very pleasant here; so very pleasant . . . I should be inclined to stop, until it would be hardly safe to go homeward" (ch. 44, 369). It is the same indulgence, one suspects, that Dennis has been treated with for his whole career, and it lasts just until he is in real danger. When Dennis is arrested as a rioter and sentenced to death, no one recognizes him as the walking law of the land. His fury and bewilderment at his sentence is

darkly comic, but perfectly understandable: he has been indulged for years in an idea of himself that, all at once, has been taken away.

This pretense at the heart of Dennis' life indicates a paradox in the city's workings. The lawful order of London turns upon strict enforcement of the law; and the punishment for those criminals who are apprehended is severe indeed. But in order to maintain this severity, for the sake of civil order, the city must look outside its own boundaries to Dennis' shadow city, a place where "one who carried money, or wore decent clothes," would not dare "to walk that way alone, unless by daylight" (ch. 44, 367). The enforcement of law comes, in effect, from the very dwelling place of death. And this death-filled, crime-beset neighborhood is disguised as a burlesque of the city, with clock towers and fine windows. The city of the living and that of the dead, metropolis and necropolis, mirror each other; the effort to assure safety for the citizens of London makes death an approved civil entity. Dennis is the personification of this paradox, Death disguised so thoroughly as the Law that he doesn't know he is in disguise.

With Dennis and Hugh, then, both Death and the Wolf come into the city, and both of them have been closer to it all along than the urban dwellers would admit. Simon Tappertit is a somewhat different case: he comes from the Vardens' household inside London and has both a social and a physical place in the city. This household is, as Harry Stone has noted,⁵ exclusively realistic. Dolly sometimes takes on the role of babe in the woods as in Chapter 21, or of a

⁵ Stone 90.

captured princess when Hugh, Dennis and Simon take her hostage, but within her home she is always simply the fickle, beautiful daughter, and her character develops like those of many Dickens heroines. Her parents and Miggs, Mrs Varden's maid, are securely lodged in the real world, sometimes caricatures but never magical. Simon comes from this remarkably commonplace background, and while he is part of the household there is nothing very magical about him, only a scheming resentment toward his employer. This ordinariness makes all the more remarkable the way Simon transforms himself when he leaves the house and becomes the leader of the crowd calling themselves the 'Prentice Knights. In these meetings we can find the beginnings of Simon's anger, brought to the forefront of his character in the second half of the book. His transformation into a leader is one that he effects himself, based on his insistent belief in his own superiority. When he meets Hugh, Dickens writes, "this giant and dwarf struck up a friendship which bade fair to be of long continuance" (ch. 39, 326). Simon is like Jack the giant-killer of old English folklore, a peasant who becomes a king on the strength of his own boasts and a greater cleverness than is possessed by giants—which is saying very little. His self-importance first assumes its legendary proportions when he is leading the 'Prentice Knights (or, as they eventually call themselves, the United Bulldogs). Simon makes a throne for himself by setting his chair on a tabletop; he flourishes a bone as a scepter or gavel and raps it on a skull to bring the group to attention; the book of the "order" is laid open on the back of one of the members. A new member is ushered into

the room in full courtly manner, or as near it as the 'prentices can manage; he is solemnly interrogated; and he is inducted into the society with a ritual that tries hard to be occult:

the lighting up of the two skulls with a candle-end inside of each, and a great many flourishes with the bone, were chiefly conspicuous; not to mention a variety of grave exercises with the blunderbuss and sabre, and some dismal groaning by unseen 'prentices without. All these dark and direful ceremonies being at length completed, the table was put aside, the chair of state removed, the sceptre locked up in its usual cupboard, the doors of communication between the three cellars thrown freely open, and the 'Prentice Knights resigned themselves to merriment. (ch. 8, 77)

There is a courtly air to these proceedings, and even an aura of the dark arts, but these are undercut by the fact that we know them to be artificial and meaningless, created for the satisfaction of Simon Tappertit's ego—for the society “had its origin in his own teeming brain” (ch. 8, 77)—rather than for the general good.

These rituals are significant in establishing Simon's brand of anger, and how he comes to join in the Gordon riots. Simon and his cohorts aim to recapture a lost past, when apprentices had “had frequent holidays of right, broken people's heads by scores, defied their masters, nay, even achieved some glorious murders in the streets . . . they united therefore to resist all change, except such change as would restore those good old English customs, by which they would stand or fall” (ch. 8, 76). This past is, of course, a fiction. It is also tellingly similar to the reasons for the anti-Catholic riots: to protect the true England, a place with Protestantism bred into it. Simon and his gang fall in easily with Gordon's followers because they are essentially the same animal. In the trio of Hugh, Dennis and Simon, it is Simon who pretends he can take down giants—whether

the giant is the Catholic Church or all the master tradesmen in the city—but whose destructive capabilities are only turned against the city itself.

The least historically based of the novel's plots concerns the murder that took place decades before the novel's opening, and this part of the story also contains the most nearly real ghost: Rudge, Barnaby's father. He was the steward at the Warren before he murdered both his employer and the gardener and dressed the body of the latter in his own clothes. The people of the village believe Rudge is dead, and he can barely be said to live. He has no connections to people, things, or even his own past, and his wife, the one person who knows he is living, is horrified by him. Without a place in the world, he has diminished to almost nothing; he is the personification of nothing, the threat of annihilation. When he learns of Barnaby's existence he has no paternal feeling; instead he sees the son as a means to manipulate the mother, telling her, "In him, of whose existence I was unaware until to-night, I have you in my power. Be careful how you use me. I am destitute and starving, and a wanderer upon the earth. I may take a sure and slow revenge" (ch. 17, 153). With absolutely nothing left to lose, Rudge is willing to use any means and haunt anyone who used to be dear to him if he thinks he will be better off afterward.

Stripped of home and family, Rudge has a peculiar relationship to the places he occupies. His character draws on the traditional figure of "a wanderer, a

veritable Cain or Wandering Jew”⁶—the latter a reference to an old European story of a man who refused to yield his seat to Jesus or told him to walk faster, and who in return was cursed to wander the earth until Jesus returned.⁷ He seems to spend most of his time in the city, but he has no home there and almost never sleeps. Dickens describes him roaming the streets at night:

To be shelterless and alone in the open country, hearing the wind moan and watching for day through the whole long weary night; to listen to the falling rain, and crouch for warmth beneath the lee of some old barn or rick, or in the hollow of a tree; are dismal things—but not so dismal as the wandering up and down where shelter is, and beds and sleepers are by thousands; a houseless rejected creature. To pace the echoing stones from hour to hour, counting the dull chimes of the clocks; to watch the lights twinkling in chamber windows, to think what happy forgetfulness each house shuts in; that here are children coiled together in their beds, here youth, here age, here poverty, here wealth, all equal in their sleep, and all at rest; to have nothing in common with the slumbering world around, not even sleep, Heaven’s gift to all its creatures, and be akin to nothing but despair; to feel, by the wretched contrast with everything on every hand, more utterly alone and cast away than in a trackless desert;—this is a kind of suffering, on which the rivers of great cities close full many a time, and which the solitude in crowds alone awakens. (ch. 18, 154-5)

Rudge knows the city in a way nobody should have to know it: he has no home to orient himself by, no relations, and no goal. More than once he contemplates the jail, a place that would at least give him shelter and a place to be rooted; but after nearly twenty years of evading capture to the point of erasing himself, he seems incapable of showing his face, being known, and owning what he has done.

The only place that serves as a center for Rudge is the Warren, where he murdered Reuben Haredale and his steward. His visit to the house is the first

⁶ Stone 88.

⁷ See David Pickering, *A Dictionary of Folklore* (New York: Facts on File, 1999), 310.

episode in the book, and he is caught at last in its burned ruin. When the blind man asks him why he returned to the spot, Rudge replies,

“Why is blood red? I could no more help it, than I could live without breath. I struggled against the impulse, but I was drawn back. . . . Why did I come back? Because this jail was gaping for me, and he stood beckoning at the door.”

. . . “You should have kept your secret better.”

“My secret? *Mine?* It was a secret, any breath of air could whisper at its will. The stars had it in their twinkling, the water in its flowing, the leaves in their rustling, the seasons in their return. It lurked in strangers’ faces, and their voices. Everything had lips on which it always trembled—*My secret!*” (ch. 62, 515)

Modern psychology may offer an explanation for Rudge’s feeling that his own guilt is imprinted on the world around him. But what is more interesting about the construction of this novel is that Dickens declines to explain. The novel gives Rudge’s story only in the terms of magic. He is so thoroughly a ghost of the Warren that no natural explanation of his actions would satisfy. The absence of his death from the narrative suggests that even after readers know Rudge’s whole history and understand that he is more or less alive—not alive, nor dead in the common way, as Solomon Daisy might put it (ch. 1, 16)—he cannot die again because he has no dying left to do. Dickens leaves the reader’s supernatural image of this character intact even when the literal truth is known. Similarly, the Maypole regulars hold an idea Dickens never puts to the test, that the stain of the late Mr Haredale’s blood on the floor, where his brother has his study, “will never fade until he finds the man who did the deed” (ch. 11, 102). The stain is destroyed by fire along with the rest of the Warren before Rudge and Haredale meet, so that there can be no discovery that the stain has remained; indeed, these

two events occur in such close proximity that the superstition may seem to be confirmed.

The other man who haunts the Warren is its owner, Geoffrey Haredale. He is portrayed in a more realistic manner than Rudge, if only because there is nothing intrinsically supernatural about his situation, but he seems to be in danger of becoming just as much a ghost of the past as Rudge. The Haredales have a strange position in the novel. As one of the families targeted by the riots, they are sympathetic to a certain degree, if only because they are to be pitied; but nothing about them refutes the idea, inherent in George Gordon's demands, that Catholics do not belong in England. The rabbit names of the family and house ironically suggest fertility, emphasizing how barren is a family consisting of an uncle and a niece, and, somewhat less obviously, link the Haredales with the medieval tradition of rabbits as a symbol of melancholy.⁸ Whether or not this connection was intentional, the Haredales are an extremely melancholy pair. The murders committed twenty years previously haunt them, and their Catholicism cuts them off from their neighbors and thus prevents any future prospect of marriages or births. There are other Catholics in England, but in Chigwell the Haredales are the last of their kind.

⁸ See Anthony S. Mercatange, *Zoo of the Gods* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 125; Mercatange cites Falstaff telling Prince Hal he is as "melancholy as a hare" and Lady Answerwell in Jonathan Swift's *Polite Conversations* calling rabbit "a melancholy meat."

Threatened by this decay, Geoffrey Haredale clings to the Warren and to its past. It is not until his home is lost that he realizes his loss at having trusted in nothing but home and his quest to find the murderer:

With eager eyes and strained attention, Mr Haredale saw him [Rudge] chained, and locked and barred up in his cell. . . . It was not until he turned his back upon the jail, and glanced along the empty streets, so lifeless and quiet in the bright morning, that he felt the weight upon his heart; that he knew he was tortured by anxiety for those he had left at home; and that home itself was but another bead in the long rosary of his regrets. (ch. 61, 510)

The image of the rosary is a lovely if naïve attempt on Dickens' part to understand a Catholic mind, tethered to the objects of devotion and approaching the metaphysical always in physical terms. It may be this idea of Catholicism that has kept Haredale seeking his own salvation by cleaving to his house and family even while they disappear around him. For even before it is utterly destroyed, the Warren is diminishing. Joe Willett says "fifteen or twenty years ago [it] stood in a park five times as broad, which with other and richer property has bit by bit changed hands and dwindled away" (ch. 1, 12). Haredale himself tells Mary Rudge, "we are a fallen house" (ch. 25, 210). Meanwhile the courtship of Emily Haredale and Edward Chester, which if allowed to grow into marriage will be the end of the Catholic family, seems to be brokered by Chigwell itself. "Who are their go-betweens, and agents—do you know?" Haredale asks Chester, who replies, "All the good people hereabouts—the neighbourhood in general, I think" (ch. 12, 106). Chigwell has seemed to be a throwback to old England, with its

pagan Maypole,⁹ wild woods, and legend of Elizabeth I once visiting, but even this place is not archaic enough to be a haven for Catholic Geoffrey Haredale. In the end, having murdered John Chester, he flees to a cloister in a place called only “abroad,” that mythical place outside the British Isles where Catholics can atone for their sins. It seems that Haredale, after practicing haunting for so many years, has not escaped becoming a ghost.

Against this network of ghosts and murderers there remains the crucial character of Barnaby Rudge himself. Barnaby has been compared to the fools in Shakespeare¹⁰ and Wordsworth’s Idiot Boy, and he is certainly part of the literary tradition of wise fools, but he is also part of the novel’s network of ghosts. In fact, Barnaby’s circumstances seem to cast him as the main character in the story that is called “The Juniper Tree” in the Grimms’ collection of tales¹¹ and “The Rose Tree” or “Little Rosy” in the English versions¹² (in which the boy is replaced by a girl; for this reason the German version seems to be the more influential one here). In this story, a second wife is jealous of her stepson’s

⁹ It is possible that the name “Maypole” is itself a misapprehension of the past. The establishment is of uncertain age and may date as far back as the Middle Ages, when the pole in front of the building would be the sign for a public house—not a maypole at all. See *OED*, “alestake.”

¹⁰ Stone 86-87.

¹¹ The Grimm text referred to here is Edgar Taylor’s 1823 translation. The story is number 47 in the Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

¹² “The Rose Tree” can be found in Joseph Jacobs, *English Fairy Tales and More English Fairy Tales* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 27-30. The simpler (and more brutal) “Little Rosy” is recorded in Katharine Briggs and Ruth L. Tongue, *Folktales of England* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1965), 26-28.

beauty and wants her own daughter to inherit her husband's money, so she tricks the boy with a promise of an apple, cuts off his head, and sets the dead child up in a chair with a cloth tied around his neck to disguise the fact that his head has been severed. The boy's loving stepsister goes to see why her brother is so quiet; when she touches him, his head rolls off and she is overcome with guilt. The mother cuts up the boy's body and puts it into a stew, which the boy's father ravenously devours;¹³ the sister, who cannot stop weeping, gathers her brother's bones and buries them outside under a juniper tree. The tree starts to move and ignites into a magical flame, from which emerges a bird, singing in the slaughtered boy's voice about his abuses. The bird flies away and repeats his song to the people of the town, who reward his singing with presents of red shoes, a gold chain, and a millstone; with these three objects the bird returns to the house and gives the shoes to his sister, the chain to his father, and drops the millstone on his mother, who bursts into flame and dies. From this flame the little boy emerges alive, just as the bird emerged from the fire in the juniper tree, and he is reunited with his sister and father.

Obviously, Barnaby's character is not taken directly from this story. What he maintains, though, is significant: the murder committed by a parent; a prominent role played by fire, in London and at the Warren; Barnaby's own flame-red hair and birdlike ornaments (see ch. 3, 35); a new and strange child

¹³ Taylor's translation deletes the cannibalism, although the traditional English versions of the tale that I have read maintain it, so that this detail may or may not have formed part of Dickens' understanding of the tale. If it was, it does not figure into Dickens' use of the story here.

emerging directly after the murder and seeming to come into existence through the crime—Barnaby seems to his father, “with his unearthly aspect, and his half-formed mind . . . a creature who had sprung into existence from his victim’s blood” (ch. 69, 574). Barnaby’s evocation of a resurrected murder victim connects him to the novel’s central concern with the walking dead, to a rather greater extent than he otherwise seems connected to the rest of the novel—in Harry Stone’s reading, for example, “Barnaby’s insanity and bloodguilt are not sufficiently related to the insanity and bloodguilt of the mob.”¹⁴

Barnaby’s connection to the murdered boy of “The Juniper Tree” is strengthened by Grip, the talking bird who, with his refrain of “I’m a devil,” suggests he is a creature from the supernatural world. Grip never comes to take a major part in the plot, which makes it the more remarkable that he is such a prominent part of Barnaby’s characterization; the bird and the boy seem to share between them the role of the resurrected, murdered child. As in the fairy tale, the bird’s speech impresses his listeners, sometimes earning rewards: when Barnaby and his mother are fleeing through the countryside, such donations are their only means of support. Barnaby too has the power of extraordinary speech, as in what he says to John Chester about clothes drying on the line: “Why how much better to be silly, than as wise as you! You don’t see shadowy people there, like those that live in sleep—not you. Nor eyes in the knotted panes of glass, nor swift ghosts when it blows hard, nor do you hear voices in the air, nor see men stalking

¹⁴ Stone 90.

in the sky—not you! I lead a merrier life than you, with all your cleverness” (ch. 10, 94). And as in the tale, Barnaby is to a certain extent restored to normalcy when his criminal parent is killed, though Dickens is charitable enough to attribute this recovery not to the father’s death but to Barnaby’s own near escape from hanging:

Some time elapsed before Barnaby got the better of the shock he had sustained, or regained his old health and gaiety. But he recovered by degrees: and although he could never separate his condemnation and escape from the idea of a terrific dream, he became, in other respects, more rational. Dating from the time of his recovery, he had a better memory and greater steadiness of purpose; but a dark cloud overhung his whole previous existence, and never cleared away. (ch. 82, 687)

If Dickens is borrowing from the “Juniper Tree” story, however, he is also clearly innovating on it. Grip falls short of his counterpart in “The Juniper Tree”—winning a few coins to buy bread with is the only thing he accomplishes in the plot, whereas the bird in the tale avenges his own murder—but in a way he also exceeds it, as he is drawn from the wider folkloric tradition about ravens. These birds occupy a profoundly ambiguous place in English tradition. They are both eerie and helpful, sometimes serving as omens of death and sometimes as symbols of the monarchy in their capacity as mascots of the Tower of London; they may even represent King Arthur, who was occasionally said to have transformed into a raven when he died.¹⁵ In Norse mythology, Odin, chief of the gods, has two ravens. Named Hugin and Munin, meaning “thought” and “memory,” these birds fly over the world gathering news and information and

¹⁵ Simpson & Roud 291 cites a passage of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* that attests to this belief about King Arthur.

return to sit on Odin's shoulders and whisper in his ears. In the tales of the brothers Grimm, ravens and crows are either secret-tellers or transformed humans: in the story "Faithful John,"¹⁶ they reveal the three sacrifices that the faithful servant must make to save his master from death, and in "The Crows and the Soldier"¹⁷ a soldier gains fame and fortune by following the advice he overheard from three crows. The birds, however, are not so benevolent as to provide this advice intentionally, and they tend to react scornfully when they discover they have helped a human being. In "The Seven Ravens"¹⁸ seven boys are changed into ravens because of a careless remark by their father; this kind of tale suggests that Grip really is a second, transformed Barnaby. Adding further to this complexity is the fact that Dickens himself owned three different domesticated talking ravens, as he explains in the preface to the 1849 edition (699-702).

As a weird hybrid of any and all of these influences, Grip seems as significant as the ravens of fairy tales: "If there's any wickedness going on, that raven's in it, I'll be sworn," says Gabriel Varden (ch. 6, 63). But from the perspective of plot, he seems like nothing more important than a tribute to Dickens' house pets. Demonic and harmless, speaking as if he were tremendously clever but proving to know nothing, Grip distills into one figure the competing forces of fantasy and realism in this novel. But perhaps his fantastic

¹⁶ Number 6 in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (KHM), pages 159-67 in Taylor's translation.

¹⁷ KHM 21 (included in 1815 edition, omitted in 1819), Taylor 195-98.

¹⁸ KHM 25, Taylor 285-88.

side wins out in the end. The ordeal of the riots shocks the raven into silence for a year, as if he knows the significance of what has happened. After the year is up he begins speaking as enthusiastically as ever, and Dickens ends the novel by assuring us that “he has very probably gone on talking to the present time” (ch. 82, 688).

Whatever the relationship of Barnaby and his raven to the traditional stories of murdered children and talking birds, their depictions are certainly the more resonant for their connection to this folkloric heritage, and Dickens draws on this rich set of associations without enslaving the story to established types. Even apart from the changes to the “Juniper Tree” story demanded by a realist novel, Dickens renovates the folktale by making Rudge the murderer of someone other than his own child, by sharing the role of miraculous child between Barnaby and his raven, and of course by introducing these characters into the chaos of the Gordon riots.

As the most fairy-tale-like of the novel’s many plots, Barnaby’s story goes some way toward redeeming the political nostalgia that runs rampant in the novel. Barnaby is sentenced to hang for his participation in the riots but is finally saved by a last-minute pardon effected by Gabriel Varden, Geoffrey Haredale, and Edward Chester:

They had striven all the previous day to rescue Barnaby from his previous fate. . . . and made their way, not only to the judge and jury who had tried him, but to men of influence at court, to the young Prince of Wales, and even to the antechamber of the king himself. Successful, at last, in awakening an interest in his favour, and an inclination to inquire more dispassionately into his case, they had had an interview with the minister,

in his bed, so late as eight o'clock that morning. The result of a searching inquiry . . . was, that between eleven and twelve o'clock, a free pardon to Barnaby Rudge was made out and signed, and entrusted to a horse-soldier for instant conveyance to the place of execution. (ch. 79, 662)

Barnaby is saved, in other words, by the appeal of his friends to an accessible and sympathetic monarch and his government. The possibility of such an event recalls Derek Brewer's description of the fairy-tale world as one in which kings are "father-figures . . . who let you in at the front door";¹⁹ it is as anachronistic as the rioters' fear of Bloody Mary. It would seem that Dickens is not entirely averse to the raising of ghosts.

Even before this occurs, Barnaby and Grip participate in another folkloric series of events. When the older Rudge discovers his wife's residence in London, she and Barnaby flee to the country to live in obscurity. The widow and her son, the humble cottage, the blind man who comes to their house looking for kindness: it is a situation similar to the beginnings of many fairy tales,²⁰ placed in the middle of the novel. The widow will of course be protective, the son will be ambitious, money will be tight, and the mysterious stranger who throws himself

¹⁹ Brewer 34.

²⁰ The Grimms' tale "Mother Holle," and the traditional English story "The King of Colchester's Daughters," which Jacobs records as "The Three Heads of the Well," both feature strange figures who ask for a young person's help and offer extravagant rewards when it is given. In "Mother Holle," a mistreated younger daughter girl falls down a well, and at the bottom she finds an old woman, keeps house for her, and is rewarded with rich gifts. In "The King of Colchester's Daughters," the reward is given by three bodiless heads in a well who beseech two princesses to comb and wash them. The young man or woman who must perform these bizarre acts of charity is usually penniless; even the King of Colchester's first daughter is cast out in the world with only a loaf of bread and a bottle of beer.

on their charity will offer some means of wealth in return, a supernatural gift or a chance for adventure. This pattern is so clear that Dickens' subversion of it is quite powerful. The blind man is actually sent to bleed the Rudges of their savings and harry them out of their safe haven, and in the process he plants a hunger for gold in Barnaby without teaching him, as a fairy-tale guide would do, how to acquire it. Instead he suggests vaguely that the way to find gold is to leave home: "It's in the world, bold Barnaby, the merry world; not in solitary places like those you pass your time in, but in crowds, and where there's noise and rattle" (ch. 46, 383). This advice both draws Barnaby away from his mother's protection and casts the English countryside as a kind of nowhere. Dickens' London-centered narrative does nothing to suggest otherwise. Everything that moves forward does so in London and its environs; what is too far from the capital is not, apparently, a proper place at all, only a great expanse of land where widows can hide; peaceful, but only for a short time, and likely to harbor wolves.

There are some important characters not yet mentioned in this analysis, for the reason that their relationship to fairy tales is very slight. Joe Willett's defiance of his father is the sort of thing that can happen in a fairy tale or anywhere else; his character does not seem to be drawn in such a way as to evoke a particular figure or story from folklore. If anything, his return home without one arm at the end of his long journey, rather than a change of social status or winning of riches, makes his story a less transformative one than those of the

young men who go out to seek their fortunes and end by winning half a kingdom.

Joe, in fact, is failed by fairy tales. When he sets out from his father's house he listens vainly for London's bells bidding him to return as, according to English tradition, they did for Dick Whittington at the turn of the fifteenth century, pealing out "turn again Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London" (n. 6 to ch.

31). The only fairy-tale state Joe achieves is perfect poverty:

Since the time of noble Whittington, fair flower of merchants, bells have come to have less sympathy with humankind. They only ring for money and on state occasions. Wanderers have increased in number; ships leave the Thames for distant regions, carrying from stem to stern no other cargo; the bells are silent; they ring out no entreaties or regrets; they are used to it and have grown worldly.

Joe bought a roll, and reduced his purse to the condition (with a difference) of that celebrated purse of Fortunatus, which, whatever were its favoured owner's necessities, had one unvarying amount in it. In these real times, when all the Fairies are dead and buried, there are still a great many purses which possess that quality. The sum total they contain is expressed in arithmetic by a circle, and whether it be added to or multiplied by its own amount, the result of the problem is more easily stated than any known in figures. (ch. 31, 260-61)

It is not true, even within *Barnaby Rudge*, that bells ring only "for money and state occasions": a bell rang on the night of Reuben Haredale's death, and that ringing has become a crucial part of the story of that nineteenth of March as Solomon Daisy tells it. But the London bells have lost this significance. The story of Whittington is the only folktale mentioned or evoked in the novel that belongs particularly to London, but Dickens does not allow the city even this native magic—flatly denies it in fact, saying that whatever mythical properties the city may once have possessed have long since been swept away by the materialism of the modern city. The example of Fortunatus' purse seems to

reflect less pointedly on London in particular than on the world at large in the nineteenth century, “real times, when all the Fairies are dead and buried.” The fairies may be “dead and buried” in London, but in *Barnaby Rudge* there are many dead things playing an active role in current events; and the fairy-tale ending will come through in Joe’s final reconciliation with Dolly.

Ned’s departure is not marked with even an ironic reference to fairy tales. It is possible he would not recognize such a thing himself. His father places no value on the imagination and takes as his guidebook the writings of Lord Chesterfield, who—cardinal crime in the Dickens world—discouraged his own sons from reading fairy stories.²¹ Ned is also, unlike Joe, a native of London, the city haunted only by political ghosts. For both these reasons Ned does not see his life in the context of fairy-tale narratives, a lack that makes both his departure from home and his reunion with Emma far less poignant than the corresponding story of Joe and Dolly.

Throughout *Barnaby Rudge* the present has a problematic relationship with the past, but at the close of the novel the relative positions of the present and the future are also made complicated. It is nothing remarkable for a Dickens novel to contain foreshadowing, but the conclusion of this novel goes one step further with two occurrences that were literally foreseen. The first is Geoffrey Haredale’s murder of John Chester. The night before his last visit to the place

²¹ Stone 18.

where the Warren used to be, Haredale is troubled by a dream. The content of the dream is not specified, but we know that he has had it before: “it had been present to him before, in many shapes; it had haunted him in bygone times; and visited his pillow again and again” (ch. 81, 673). When he encounters Chester at the ruin, Haredale beseeches him not to come too close but despite these efforts ends by killing Chester, whose corpse embodies “the phantom of last night” (ch. 81, 680). In a somewhat more long-range act of clairvoyance, George Gordon ends by converting to Judaism, after dreaming, soon after his introduction to the novel, that he and his secretary Gashford were both “Jews with long beards” (ch. 37, 306). As Stephen Marcus observes, “The puritan, seeking absolute sanction, returns to the original source.”²² And Haredale acts on the hatred that has fueled him since the beginning of the story. For these two instances of dream fulfillment to occur so near the end of the novel suggests a strange circularity; Haredale does not manage to escape the act of murder at the Warren and becomes, in the wake of Rudge’s death, the next murderer to have shed blood at the house; when he ghosts himself by fleeing to a monastery in an uncertain place, he carries on the tradition of shadowy murderer-figures connected to his house. Gordon, likewise, entangles himself with origins once more. These two fulfilled dreams close the circle of supernatural events radiating out from the too-real riots in London; and while most of the characters enjoy a happy-ever-after, the story whose genesis may have been in that first glimpse of a ghostly face outside the window closes

²² Marcus 180.

with the creation of two more ghosts. Peace is restored to London and Chigwell not by the destruction of the story's ominous supernatural elements but simply by their exorcism and removal to a different place. The novel's debt to fairy tales and ghost stories is, if anything, strengthened by this ending that returns to the supernatural after the all too real Gordon riots, reaffirming the role that folklore has played in providing a rich body of material from which Dickens drew and which he reinvented to craft this story of the dead walking the earth.

**The Fairy Tale Put in its Place:
Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South***

Reading literature through the lens of folklore becomes difficult when the literature being read is as clearly realistic as Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 novel *North and South*.¹ The story of Margaret Hale's move from an idyllic rural, southern home to an industrial northern city is firmly rooted in its time and place. But while the novel addresses the geography and society of a very real England, the questions that it raises about the nature of places and environments are well suited to fairy tales and folklore. Gaskell had a deep interest in these kinds of storytelling. Her first published work of prose was a ghost story, included anonymously in William Howitt's *Visits to Remarkable Places*,² and other ghost stories such as "The Poor Clare" and "The Old Nurse's Story" were included in her many contributions to Dickens' periodical *Household Words*. Gaskell's correspondence, too, shows an interest in the traditions and stories of the countryside, including those that touch on the supernatural. The realism of *North and South* bears the marks of this familiarity with folklore, in a way that is deeply connected to the novel's concern with place.

¹ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin Books, 2003). All quotations of the novel are taken from this edition.

² William Howitt, *Visits to Remarkable Places* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1841), 168-73.

The relationship of folklore to realism, however, is much more fragile here than in the fiction of Dickens and Eliot. Folklore is present in some parts of the narrative but not every part, and it is not always distinguished from other brands of storytelling. What is treated as folklore in this novel sometimes extends to Biblical and literary allusions—to any sort of narrative that the characters share through an oral tradition, even if the origins of the story are written, and through which, as is one of the primary purposes of folklore, they order the narrative of their own lives.

North and South opens with an image from a fairy tale:

Edith had fallen asleep. She lay curled up on the sofa in the back drawing-room in Harley Street, looking very lovely in her white muslin and blue ribbons. If Titania had ever been dressed in white muslin and blue ribbons, and had fallen asleep on a crimson damask sofa in a back drawing-room, Edith might have been taken for her. (ch. 1, 7)

At this moment, the reader's introduction to Edith, we do not yet know that she is not the main character of the novel. The image of her asleep on the sofa could lead into Edith's story, the story of her marriage and life in Corfu with her captain husband; the story would, no doubt, be as "picturesque" as her life abroad. But the most important part of this description is not which fairy Edith is compared to, or how happy or peaceful is her sleep; it is the simple fact that this description is given not from Edith's perspective but from that of her cousin Margaret Hale, the novel's real protagonist, coming across Edith asleep in the drawing-room.

This remove holds true for all the fairy-tale images evoked in the first chapter. Edith awakes like "the Sleeping Beauty just startled from her dreams"

(ch. 1, 11), halfway through the conversation about her trousseau that the narrative has been following. Soon afterward, the conversation between Margaret and Henry Lennox cuts against the fairy-tale charm suggested by the novel's opening by calling attention to the very worldly fluster necessary to create a wedding:

“Yes,” said Margaret, rather sadly, remembering the never-ending commotion about trifles that had been going on for more than a month past: “I wonder if a marriage must always be preceded by what you call a whirlwind, or whether in some cases there might not rather be a calm and peaceful time just before it.”

“Cinderella's godmother ordering the trousseau, the wedding breakfast, writing the notes of invitation, for instance,” said Mr Lennox, laughing. (ch. 1, 12-13)

Over the course of these three brief references to fairy tales, the narrator's implied attitude toward them has gone from an innocent allusion, to archness, to outright skepticism toward their simplicity. And even before Edith wakes up, the image of her enchanted sleep has been undercut by the first description of her behavior in waking life, illustrated by Edith's and her mother's treatment of the neighbors currently visiting: “They were the familiar acquaintances of the house; neighbours whom Mrs Shaw called friends, because she happened to dine with them more frequently than with any other people, and because if she or Edith wanted anything from them, or they from her, they did not scruple to make a call at each other's houses before luncheon” (ch. 1, 8). If we are to understand the house at Harley Street as an enchanted place, then enchantment must be a remarkably selfish force, a quality that allows those who have it to impose themselves on

others and to delegate annoying tasks to less charmed people. Enchantment must be, in short, a quality remarkably like wealth.

All the fairy-tale charm in the opening chapter is in fact the charm of a tale that has just ended. If Edith is Sleeping Beauty, she has just been wakened; if she is Cinderella, the prince has already sought her out. Gaskell begins with the charmed ending and immediately gives away the mechanism of the magic: Edith's wealth, status, and attentive family. What remains to be told is the real concern of the novel: what follows this particular happy ending and what happens to the people whom it excludes.

This is not to say that magic is equated solely with wealth throughout the novel. The Shaws lead a particular kind of charmed life, in which they can create whatever fairy-tale scenario for themselves they choose by using their wealth and their place in society, but there is also magic in the second setting of the novel, the village of Helstone where Margaret's father is vicar. Helstone is such a world of its own that Margaret doesn't know how to talk about it when she is in London:

“I don't think I could call it a village at all. There is only the church and a few houses near it on the green—cottages, rather—with roses growing all over them.”

“And flowering all the year round, especially at Christmas—make your picture complete,” said he.

“No,” replied Margaret, somewhat annoyed, “I am not making a picture. I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is. You should not have said that.”

“I am penitent,” he answered. “Only it really sounded like a village in a tale rather than in real life.”

“And so it is,” replied Margaret, eagerly. “All the other places in England that I have seen seem so hard and prosaic-looking, after the New Forest. Helstone is like a village in a poem—in one of Tennyson's poems. But I won't try and describe it any more. . . . I cannot tell you about my

own home. I don't quite think it is a thing to be talked about, unless you knew it." (ch. 1, 13-14)

Even Margaret embraces the idea of Helstone being something out of a story or "one of Tennyson's poems," a poetic place as opposed to the "prosaic" nature of the rest of England. Yet at the same time she refuses to carry through with the comparison by telling a story about the village; unlike the places in stories, which can only be understood through language and imagination, Helstone cannot be imagined by anyone who has not been there. Margaret says that Helstone is *like* a storybook place but asserts its actuality, drawing a firm if fine line between story as invention and as a mode of understanding reality.

Margaret moves fully into the latter mode when she returns home to Helstone: she experiences the place in a vividly first-hand manner that is strongly influenced by a storybook idea of what it is like. Margaret sees the other residents of Helstone as people of the forest, almost as if they were elves:

She took a pride in her forest. Its people were her people. She made hearty friends with them; learned and delighted in using their peculiar words; took up her freedom amongst them; nursed their babies; talked or read with slow distinctness to their old people; carried dainty messes to their sick; resolved before long to teach at the school . . . but she was continually tempted off to go and see some individual friend—man, woman, or child—in some cottage in the green shade of the forest. (ch. 2, 19)

Margaret is not in fact one of the forest's people in the same sense as the villagers. It is a novelty for her to speak as they do; she does favors for them as if playing at their way of life; her resolution to teach at the school is an idle one which she forgets when distracted by the amusements of the forest. Some

distinction of origin or education keeps Margaret distinct from the more simple and more enchanted people who belong to the New Forest; she lives out her own private story about Helstone rather than participating in the general life there.

The enchantment of Helstone is obviously not so strong as to win over everyone who lives there. Margaret's mother has an outright dislike for the place, and for her the same forest where Margaret thrives is oppressive and even sickening: "Mrs Hale said the near neighbourhood of so many trees affected her health" (ch. 2, 19). Gaskell suggests that the benefit someone like Margaret derives from contact with the natural world is the benefit of a theater for her own feelings, rather than that of an external teacher: "the things are an arena in which emotion stems from the human being, yet the objects help define or 'place' that emotion."³ Magic, too, is subjectively experienced, a feeling that stems from the human being, and what Margaret experiences as an enchanted forest is for her mother an oppressive, almost malicious environment.

Margaret's projection of magic onto her life at Helstone entails an intense identification of magic not only in the natural environment of the village, but within small parts of that environment, most notably the Hales' garden. Margaret imbues this garden with great importance in her emotional life, and it is the setting for two of the most important conversations that occur in Helstone. In the first, Margaret must tell her mother that they are leaving Helstone, and the setting is instrumental in directing Margaret's speech; she uses the garden as if it were a

³ Angus Easson, "The Sentiment of Feeling: Emotions and Objects in Elizabeth Gaskell," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 4 (1990), 64-78; 68.

physical manifestation of her willpower, forcing her to say what she is reluctant to say: “Her eye caught on a bee entering a deep-belled flower: when that bee flew forth with his spoil she would begin—that would be the sign” (ch. 5, 45). It is because Margaret is so reliant on the garden to correspond with her feelings that she can feel, when Henry Lennox proposes to her there, that the place has enchanted her somehow. Henry’s proposal, her refusal, and the awkward conversation following all take place in one walk around the garden, and Margaret is shocked to realize how little time has passed at the end of it—as if she had briefly wandered into fairyland:

It was well that, having made the round of the garden, they came suddenly upon Mr Hale, whose whereabouts had been quite forgotten by them. He had not yet finished his pear, which he had delicately peeled in one long strip of silver-paper thinness, and which he was enjoying in a deliberate manner. It was like the story of the eastern king, who dipped his head into a basin of water, at the magician’s command, and ere he instantly took it out went through the experience of a lifetime. (ch. 3, 32)

As with the fairy-tale references at Harley Street, Gaskell shows how the magic has worked—Mr Hale is still eating his pear because he is doing so deliberately slowly—but the effect remains because it is part of how Margaret understands her life here. Magic can seem to happen, in Helstone, to an individual who is willing to perceive the place as magical.

When the family moves north to Milton, it seems as if Margaret’s beliefs about the goodness of Helstone as opposed to other places were justified. Milton, with its smoky air and culture of estrangement, is far more oppressive than even Mrs Hale found Helstone to be. In this setting, moreover, magic vanishes from

the narrative. In the portion of the story that takes place in Milton, there are hardly any playful references to fairy tales such as occurred in the first chapter at Harley Street, nor is there a sense of enchanted nature as in Helstone. The harsh literalness of the landscape seems to refute Margaret's previous fairy-tale understanding of her environment. Folklore is occasionally evoked when things are going well, as after the Thorntons' dinner party—itsself a sort of Cinderella's ball during which Margaret is more confident than she has been since moving to Milton. Leaving the ball, Margaret, in high spirits, has her gown, "like Leezie Lindsay's gown o' green satin, in the ballad, 'kilted up to the knee,' . . . ready to dance along with the excitement of the cool, fresh air" (ch. 21, 164). Or a fairy tale may be mentioned as a show of optimism in the face of bad fortune, as when Mr Hale offers to go hunting for good household help: "'Now let me try. I may be the Cinderella to put on the slipper after all.' Margaret could hardly smile at this little joke" (ch. 11, 93). In this last example, the frustration of life in Milton nearly obliterates the family's ability to turn to fairy tales as a way to think of their lives in a more cheerful manner.

A much harsher artifact of folklore than these Cinderella motifs comes into play when the Thorntons' house is stormed by a mass of striking mill-workers. This crowd is depicted in a way that does not break with realism but does draw on a very old fear of the mob, which in folklore was connected to fear of the fairies or dwarves who might come in a crowd and carry off or kill human

beings.⁴ It would be overstating the case to claim that Margaret Hale is attacked by a crowd identical to the fairy troop of riders who carry off hapless mortals. Nevertheless, the crowd is dehumanized, even though it includes individuals Margaret knows and respects. Individuality is obliterated by collective anger—the more so when Mr Thornton appears: “As soon as they saw Mr Thornton, they set up a yell, —to call it not human is nothing, —it was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening. Even he drew back for a moment, dismayed at the intensity of hatred he had provoked” (ch. 22, 175). The workers react to the appearance of Mr Thornton, the employer who treats them as a mass and a commodity and never considers them as individuals, by acting out further the role of an excitable collective, not moderated by personal judgment. In the midst of this conflict, the men on each side stand more stubbornly than before in the very roles that provoke anger in their opponents—Thornton the lone, selfish master, the workers an unreasoning mass.

Gaskell understood the potential of a crowd to become a monster, and used the idea in shorter works. In “Lois the Witch,”⁵ a young English girl is condemned to death by the famed mass delusion of the Salem witch trials; “The

⁴ See Silver ch. 5, “The Faces of Evil: Fairies, Mobs, and Female Cruelty,” 149-183.

⁵ Michael Ashley, ed., *Mrs Gaskell's Tales of Mystery and Horror* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 136-216.

Poor Clare,”⁶ the story of a young girl who is literally cursed by the anger of her unwitting grandmother, has a riot scene at its climax. In this story in particular, the crowd is a place where people become something different from themselves in more than one way; forgiveness and sacrifice can take place there as well as murder. Margaret’s self-sacrifice before the crowd, for the sake of a man she dislikes, is not unlike Bridget Fitzgerald’s sacrifice of food and water for her enemy, absolving her sin and ending a curse (“The Poor Clare” 387-90). The female protagonists of these stories assert their humanity and virtue by defying the inhuman crowd.

Despite the fact that the workers are acting out the role Thornton assigns them, Thornton himself is “dismayed at the intensity of hatred he had provoked,” as if he never realized that his workers could have such strong feelings. Margaret has a better understanding of the mob: “Margaret felt intuitively, that in an instant all would be uproar . . . that in another instant the stormy passions would have passed their bounds, and swept away all barriers of reason, or apprehension of consequence” (ch. 22, 176). She comprehends the monstrous nature of the crowd and mistakenly believes she holds the antidote to this monstrosity in her own femininity, expecting that the crowd would not dare attack a woman. But she proves mistaken in this trust: “If she thought her sex would be a protection, —if, with shrinking eyes she had turned away from the terrible anger of these men, in any hope that ere she looked again they would have paused and reflected, and

⁶ A. W. Ward, ed., *The Works of Mrs. Gaskell* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1906), V, 329-90.

slunk away, and vanished, she was wrong. Their reckless passion had carried them too far to stop” (ch. 22, 177). Margaret is injured by a rock thrown at Mr Thornton, and the crowd takes it as a show of cowardice for Thornton to hide behind a woman. Yet she persists in believing that her actions were justified, and that her presence should have protected Thornton from the crowd’s anger. When he speaks to her the next day, she tells him that her actions were not extraordinary: “It was only a natural instinct; any woman would have done just the same. We all feel the sanctity of our sex as a high privilege when we see danger” (ch. 24, 192).

Margaret’s attempt to speak for all women falls flat when set alongside the attitudes of Mr Thornton’s own mother and sister, who were scandalized at Margaret’s conduct in front of the crowd. The chivalric sanctity of women that Margaret describes is effectively absent here in Milton, refuted both by the men who refuse to grant Margaret the protection she expects, and by the women who are appalled at Margaret’s involvement in the riot. This feminine sanctity amounts to nothing more than a story that Margaret tells herself, and where the story is not believed, it resembles a bit of obsolete folklore, something that is taken for granted in Margaret’s rural home, where the past is palpably alive, but rejected in Milton.

Even London’s magic of wealth is absent in Milton. Gaskell can give a fairy-tale veneer to a home in London—the same city that in *Barnaby Rudge* is intensely real—perhaps because the family there has a sense of its age and

belonging to its home; after generations of wealth, the family at Harley Street possesses such a sense of entitlement that they can see their lives as charmed by right. By contrast, the interior of the Thornton family's home is blank of family history and shows hard work in its place:

There was no one in the drawing-room. It seemed as though no one had been in it since the day when the furniture was bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava, and discovered a thousand years hence. . . . The whole room had a painfully spotted, spangled, speckled look about it, which impressed Margaret so unpleasantly that she was hardly conscious of the peculiar cleanliness required to keep everything so white and pure in such an atmosphere, or of the trouble that must be willingly expended to secure that effect of icy, snowy discomfort. (ch. 15, 112)

Mrs Thornton keeps her house in such a way as to call attention to her hard work, rather than creating the comfortable, pseudo-magical environment of Harley Street.

Helstone's magic, the imbuing of physical objects with emotional power, is in Milton evoked only in grief. When Mr Thornton brings the ailing Mrs Hale some fruit, Mr Hale asks "Do you remember the matted-up currant bushes, Margaret, at the corner of the west-wall in the garden at home?" (ch. 27, 212); Margaret cannot bear to answer him. Similar importance is attached to the cup that Margaret later takes as a memento of Bessy Higgins after the latter's death (see ch. 43, 359). Bessy herself, when alive, is so tenaciously pious and speaks in such vivid imagery from the book of Revelation that she seems to view the world with some of the expectation of magic that might be found in Helstone. But the supernatural aid to which she looks forward is an escape from life in Milton to

“the land o’ Beulah” (ch. 11, 90), rather than any kind of magic to be found in her present life.

The more lighthearted, creative sort of magic is absent from the narrative until, in the midst of Margaret’s loss of her mother and uncertainty about Mr Thornton, her godfather Mr Bell appears. Mr Bell is an Oxford don, an old friend of Mr Hale, and Mr Thornton’s landlord; it is he who first recommended that the Hales move to Milton. His entrance into the story brings with it the enchantment of wealth that was last seen in the house on Harley Street. As Mr Hale comments, Bell has the power to accumulate wealth without the hard work inherent in Milton life: “It is not everyone who can sit comfortably in a set of college rooms, and let his riches grow without any exertion of his own” (ch. 40, 323). Beyond this materially charmed life, Mr Bell’s dialogue is peppered with a hodgepodge of references to literature, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and mythology, with no particular preference for one form of storytelling or another. Half of what he says is filtered through a reference to fiction. These references constitute a personal folklore, a set of references on which it is as natural for him to draw as it is for Henry Lennox or Mr Hale to speak, more conventionally, of Cinderella. Mr Bell imagines an argument with Mr Thornton about the relative merits of Milton and Oxford after which “there would be nothing left of us but an opinion, like the Kilkenny cat’s tail” (ch. 40, 325); he calls all Milton people “worshippers of Thor” (ch. 40, 326); he offers to find Margaret a husband in Oxford, “just as the

genie in the Arabian Nights brought Prince Caralmazan to match with the fairy's Princess Badoura" (ch. 40, 330). Mr Bell is Margaret's genie, her fairy godfather.

But most of the gifts he offers are lacking in one way or another. Mr Hale goes to visit him in Oxford for a rest-cure but dies there; the offer to find Margaret an Oxford husband goes unfulfilled. Mr Bell does try to take care of Margaret as a godfather when both her parents have died: he tells Mr Thornton, "I would take a live dragon into my house to live, if, by hiring such a chaperon, and setting up an establishment of my own, I could make my old age happy with having Margaret for a daughter. But there are those Lennoxes!" (ch. 41, 343). The Shaws and Lennoxes have more persuasive power than Mr Bell—and more wealth, their own brand of enchantment—and Margaret ends up going to live with them. Even Mr Bell's engagingly allusive speech, cheering though it is, seems to Margaret like a kind of nothing. When, during the visit to Helstone, he tries to distract her with a conversation comparing himself to Hamlet, Margaret wishes he would remain silent: "Margaret felt all Mr Bell's kindness in trying to make cheerful talk about nothing, to endeavour to prevent her from thinking too curiously about the past. But she would rather have gone over these dear-loved walks in silence" (ch. 46, 379-80). Mr Bell's way of understanding life by placing himself in the context of fiction belongs solidly to the South and to a happy life. Margaret did the same when she lived in Helstone and London, but after living in Milton and suffering the loss of both her parents, she no longer turns to stories to describe her own experience.

The visit to Helstone—an episode that was not included in the original, serialized form of the novel and was added when it was first published in book form—is the best illustration the novel offers of how Margaret has changed. Mr Bell expects Helstone itself to have remained unchanged since he last saw it. He tells Henry Lennox, “It is years since I have been at Helstone—but I’ll answer for it, it is standing there yet—every stick and stone as it has done for the last century, while Milton! I go there every four or five years—and I was born there—yet I do assure you, I often lose my way—aye, among the very piles of warehouses that are built upon my father’s orchard” (ch. 45, 372). He dreams about the village as suspended in time: “Time and space were not, though all other things seemed real. Every event was measured by the emotions of the mind, not by its actual existence, for existence it had none” (ch. 45, 372-73). Bell proposes the trip to the village in direct response to this dream, as if hoping to find the village will be frozen in time and his youth will be there waiting for him. Margaret does not or cannot articulate what she hopes to find in Helstone—“It’s no use my trying to say how I shall like it,” she tells Mr Bell (ch. 45, 374)—but she looks forward to the journey with such anxiety that it seems she, too, is hoping to reclaim some youth or innocence that she lost when her family moved to Milton.

She has some success. For the first time since the rare happy moment in Milton when she was compared to Leezie Lindsay, Margaret starts to think of herself as part of a poem: “The hot air danced over the golden stillness of the land, farm after farm was left behind, each reminding Margaret of German

Idyls—of Herman and Dorothea—of Evangeline. . . . Every mile was redolent of associations . . . which made her cry upon the ‘days that are no more,’ with ineffable longing” (ch. 46, 376). Herman and Dorothea are from a Goethe poem, Evangeline from Longfellow’s poem of the same name, but the most significant of these references is “the days that are no more,” a quotation from the song “Tears, idle tears,” in Tennyson’s “The Princess.” Long ago, conversing with Henry Lennox, Margaret said that Helstone was “like a village in a poem—in one of Tennyson’s poems” (ch. 1, 14). Returning to the village reawakens this old sense of the place as a story. What is more, for the first time Margaret sees Helstone as belonging to the past, not only her personal past but also an older part of history. Tennyson’s song is about both personal nostalgia and, in its dramatic context, the longing of a young person for something she never knew—“so sad, so strange, the days that are no more.”⁷ It is the kind of longing that, though it may be powerful, is easily mocked by anyone with progressive leanings. The song’s original context, “The Princess,” is a fairy tale of sorts about a university for women; in it this song is sung by a young girl, not somebody old enough to yearn for a long-gone personal past. The Princess, founder of the university, scoffs at her: “let the past be past,” she says (IV.58). In fact “Tears, idle tears” is an anachronism within an anachronism; as Elizabeth Barrett wrote when she first read “The Princess,” “I don’t know what to think—it makes me open my eyes. Now isn’t the world too old and fond of steam, for blank verse poems, in ever so

⁷ “The Princess” IV, 35, from *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1969).

many books, to be written on the fairies?”⁸ For Margaret to associate Helstone with this poem suggests she has come to think of the village as part of a long-gone past, one that sometimes seems painfully immediate but is, in practice, irretrievable.

Margaret is not entirely prepared for Helstone to have become part of a poem too old-fashioned for a world “fond of steam.” She reflects that her life has changed utterly, while the village has not altered: “It hurt her to see the Helstone road so flooded in the sunlight, and every turn and every familiar tree so precisely the same in its summer glory as it had been in former years. Nature felt no change, and was ever young” (ch. 46, 376). When she was describing the village to Henry Lennox, Margaret resisted the idea that the village was perpetually the same, with roses blooming even on Christmas Day. Such enchanted, sealed-off stillness can only belong to a place that is not real. Now, estranged from the village and trying to rediscover something of her own past there, Margaret is hurt to discover that the forest surrounding the village is the same as when she left, after all; her own attachment to the place has not amounted to much of an effect on the village upon her departure. In this context, the similarity between the village and the poetry it evokes for Margaret is painful: it makes Helstone more like part of a story, and consequently more removed from her reality, than Margaret was willing to consider it when it was still her home.

⁸ Letter from Elizabeth Barrett to Robert Browning, January 30, 1846. Elvan Kintner, ed., *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 427.

It soon becomes clear that the village has in fact changed, and when Margaret walks through the village with Mr Bell, she alternates between noticing changes and feeling that the place is essentially unchanged, not knowing which is more painful. But the most shocking encounter she has in the village is with a very old and brutal belief, one that must have existed in the village when Margaret lived there but which she never knew about before. One of the old women Margaret used to visit mentions that her neighbor stole her cat, and Margaret insists on an explanation:

By dint of questioning Margaret extracted from her the horrible fact that Betty Barnes, having been induced by a gypsy fortune-teller to lend the latter her husband's Sunday clothes, on promise of having them faithfully returned on the Saturday night before Goodman Barnes should have missed them, became alarmed by their non-appearance, and her consequent dread of her husband's anger, and as, according to one of the savage country superstitions, the cries of a cat, in the agonies of being boiled or roasted alive, compelled (as it were) the powers of darkness to fulfil the wishes of the executioner, resort had been had to the charm. The poor woman evidently believed in its efficacy; her only feeling was indignation that her cat had been chosen out from all others for a sacrifice. (ch. 46, 380-81)

This is the only time the novel contains an explicit example of such horrific folklore; the inhumanity of the crowd at the Thorntons' house pales by comparison. The story forces Margaret to realize that the changelessness of Helstone is not altogether idyllic, and the stories told there are not necessarily like the romantic poems that the journey evoked.

This conversation with the woman whose cat has been boiled does more than any other occurrence to end Margaret's feeling of belonging to the South, for it undermines the fairy tale of the place that she has carried with her through her

travels. When Margaret left Helstone, she remembered it as her home, the forest populated with her people. Even while she grows to appreciate Milton, taking an interest in its industry and starting to speak in its slang, and even while she appreciates the shortcomings of the South enough to discourage Higgins from moving there, her comprehension of Helstone is always based on her memory of it, the assumption that it is a place she knows and understands. The stories she has told herself about Helstone, the stories that she told Bessy Higgins about it, are not complete representations of the place, and neither is any poem by Tennyson. The tale that would describe Helstone completely is one Margaret would not care to hear.

This realization does not lead her to abandon her affection for the place, and her parting impression is a happy one: “But as she returned across the common, the place was reinvested with the old enchanting atmosphere. The common sounds of life were more musical there than anywhere else in the whole world, the light more golden, the life more tranquil and full of dreamy delight. . . . ‘Oh, Helstone! I shall never love any place like you’” (ch. 46, 391). Margaret in her rapture once again equates enchantment with beauty and wonder, not with the sort of spell that Betty Barnes would work by killing a cat. But Margaret’s goodbye to Helstone is not a declaration that she will always belong there, simply a statement of its singularity in her life. Seeing it again and realizing that it goes on without her, in the ways that it changes and the ways that it does not, allows Margaret to leave Helstone behind.

Here, the narrative seems to offer to leave enchantment behind with the departure from Helstone. Mr Bell dies and leaves Margaret his money, so that she at once loses the charm he has brought to her life and gains the material power that her wealthy relatives have always had. There is the possibility of a Cinderella ending: Margaret's godfather endows her with enough money that she once again attracts the attention of Henry Lennox, whose proposal she rejected at the beginning of the novel. But Margaret rejects this potential charmed ending, choosing instead marriage to Mr Thornton. It would be possible to read this ending as a triumph of the most prosaic parts of the story: by marrying Mr Thornton, Margaret chooses the unmagical town of Milton and a man who thoroughly belongs there. But the way in which Gaskell narrates the final scene, in which Margaret and Mr Thornton acknowledge their love for one another, works against this reading. Mr Thornton has come to see Margaret ostensibly on a point of business, and she is rummaging through her papers in a flustered manner when Mr Thornton suddenly cuts through her businesslike demeanor by saying her first name. What is more, he says it three times, and each time she is drawn closer to him:

“Margaret!”

For an instant she looked up; and then she sought to veil her luminous eyes by dropping her forehead on her hands. Again, stepping nearer, he besought her with another tremulous eager call upon her name.

“Margaret!”

Still lower went the head; more closely hidden was the face, almost resting on the table before her. He came close to her. He knelt by her side, to bring his face to a level with her ear; and whispered—panted out the words:—

“Take care. —If you do not speak—I shall claim you as my own in some strange presumptuous way. —Send me away at once, if I must go; —Margaret!—”

At that third call she turned her face, still covered with her small white hands, towards him, and laid it on his shoulder, hiding it even there. . . . (ch. 52, 424)

This scene comes straight from a mind well educated in folklore, where the power of names and of repeating an action three times is commonplace. Mr Thornton goes further: when Margaret has laid her head on his shoulder he gives her some dried roses that he picked in Helstone, the roses that Margaret spoke of when she first described the village, and which she recognizes even dried: “They are from Helstone, are they not? I know the deep indentations round the leaves” (ch. 52, 425). In a novel where plants have carried an almost magical power in courtship, the conclusion is sealed by a handful of dried flowers—what is more, of roses, the flowers that seal more than one fairy-tale courtship. Most importantly, by giving her this gift, Mr Thornton preserves Margaret’s connection to her enchanted home village within her acceptance of life with a Milton manufacturer, even while the token of dried rose petals carried in a wallet sets Helstone definitively in the role of a memory, a part of “the days that are no more.”

The reappearance of magic at the happy ending of *North and South* reinforces what has seemed to be Margaret’s belief throughout the novel: that enchantment properly belongs side by side with happiness—and vice versa. All the characters have considered magical those parts of their lives that might be called charmed: wealthy people have an easy life that seems magical only from their own perspective; rural people have the magic of folklore; the poor in Milton

have either grim storylessness or religion that offers to take them elsewhere.

Gaskell gives examples of less positive manifestations of magical thinking—the fierce crowd of striking mill workers, the woman boiling a cat alive—but these are treated as aberrations, as are the horrors in Gaskell’s ghost stories. Margaret tries to disbelieve both of them, and the only antidote to such occurrences is realistic, cooperative thinking, an insistence on treating them as belonging solidly to the real world. But however terrible folklore has come to seem, however tempting modernity, positive enchantment remains, and Gaskell ends by affirming the role of enchantment—the name called three times, the dried rose petals carried even into a new life in an industrial city—in creating a happy life or a complete narrative.

*“In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance
that Fairy tales should be respected.”*
—Charles Dickens

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