

## **Fairies Frequented Several**

### **Adam Warne**

this happened in the  
old house and  
behind the hop  
garden and on  
Tavern Street near  
a former inn  
along Bury Street by  
the new bridge  
over the steep  
bank at the stroke  
of midnight in  
the early morning  
when the sun was  
beginning to set  
about eighty years  
ago and a couple  
of months since and  
just the other day

there was a  
special way we  
were taught by  
those who know  
who told us what  
to look for if  
we were well behaved  
and didn't speak  
to earn coins  
we used to lie  
hid on the floor to

see between the  
comings and goings  
of the people

and some have seen  
near the estate where  
the new homes are  
tall and handsome  
in the nineteenth century  
it was green fields  
in the sunshine stood  
a pair of gates that  
would open though  
bolted and locked  
when taking his dog  
my father had  
to restrain him

either herself or her sister  
she forgets which  
kept the secret for  
forty years and  
every morning  
on getting up with  
a feeling like  
pins and needles  
the light was  
for a crucial moment  
a milky mist  
she would find  
a gift in  
her pocket at  
the foot of the bed

the bed in which  
old nana now lives  
who always muttered  
how she was a  
fool to marry  
another fool for  
months after  
hoarding broken shoes  
and this and that  
under the pillow  
he always  
when asleep  
found it made  
mended and cleaned

as sure as you  
are reading this  
he told me  
as he heard tell  
in the perishing  
winter evening in  
his cottage by  
the fire when the snow  
came down thick  
his father when  
a lad would  
often expect  
drumming his fingers  
in anticipation

for some days I  
was not alone  
toiling with a heavy  
load on my back

that I could  
not account for  
in another time  
after a stroke  
I could feel  
a sensation by  
my face I am  
sure I knew  
it was better  
to keep my  
eyes closed  
but I opened them

I had such  
a sense of joy  
for about a  
minute as I stared  
and a feeling  
of the loveliness  
of being alive  
I have all  
kinds of experiences  
that other people  
aren't alert to  
it was the  
summer solstice  
I am healthy and  
I never take drugs

all the grass  
in a circle  
had been burnt  
where my mum  
and sisters had stood in

the meadow and  
I took a photo  
with the flash  
a little way  
beyond the spot  
we didn't notice  
anything until  
I blew it up

there are few who  
haven't heard of me  
I linger among ancient  
books to rekindle  
the sacred fire  
that helped me see  
to the north-west  
of the island  
far from the rocky  
inlets and sea-birds  
where the pine  
forest in summer  
was made famous  
after I told the  
papers and people  
still come having  
heard my story

a man alone  
across the moor  
absconding from  
the barracks about  
to drink from  
a well or a peasant  
was ploughing

on examination  
he found the furrow  
already done  
soon after a  
hot cake appeared  
as plain as can be  
in the furrows  
near him  
which he ate

we had parked  
the car and were  
walking up the hill to  
the ruins of the  
abbey when all of  
a sudden  
I had to stop  
I pinched myself  
and my husband  
says he made  
a wish then insisted  
we drive home  
in a distant voice

speaking in songs  
or rhymes was  
a child's thing  
the frightened men  
threw down the sack  
yellow and pink  
you mustn't blink  
yellow and pink  
pick me, pick me  
don't pinch, don't pinch

but nowadays  
or during a picnic  
I don't give  
too much thought

but one Thursday  
at the market  
not to tell  
anyone of it  
the whole place  
seemed to shiver  
as if shaken  
in a mirror  
and she dropped  
her basket  
into the rut  
from that time  
she never  
had the good luck

whereupon much  
surprised I took  
to my heels  
and ran  
the way home

One of the key qualities of a story about encountering fairies is that we, as the audience, are never there to see the fairies ourselves. They are always out of sight for us. 'Fairies Frequented Several' is a poem that focuses on this absence. Fairies are never explicitly mentioned except in the title of the poem. Instead, the fairies are a palpable absence as the poem describes elements such as when and where the fairies were seen, how the person or people reacted, what their emotions were, or how the experience changed their perception of the world around them. Such details can tell us important things about belief in fairies. For example, Francis Young has argued that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century most tales of fairylore were projected back into the past due to the tellers feeling 'reluctant to share it with educated people (including folklorists) in case they were met with ridicule'.<sup>i</sup> In contrast, after the First World War, encounters with fairies were 'more often reported as personal experiences, and seem to be situated with specific mystical, Theosophical, Spiritualist, Neo-pagan, or 'New Age' frameworks of belief'.<sup>ii</sup> 'Fairies Frequented Several' does not offer a systematic account of such differences, or offer interpretations of them, but aims to find something interesting and moving in the way people use differing conventions and frameworks to position themselves in relation to the story and the experience described while the fairies themselves are always just out of reach for us across the various tales and anecdotes.

The poem draws on various accounts of fairy sightings. These include historical accounts from books such as Walter Evans-Wentz's *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911) and A. G. H. Hollingsworth's *The History of Stowmarket* (1844) and modern sightings reported in newspapers or collected in Simon Young's *Fairy Census, 2014-2017* (2018). To produce the poem, I rewrote, rearranged and mixed together accounts to create a montage of encounters, maintaining the diction and perspectives of the different encounters, but using various techniques to counter this continuity with ordinary language so that the way these stories are told no longer seems completely normal or natural. As Andrew Duncan has argued, 'Montage can act like the conscious artificiality in Brechtian plays, anti-realistic gaits and gestures, which make us conscious of the rules of genre, directing attention away from the poet and towards the way social institutions and symbolism are constructed'.

The poem also uses other techniques to further foreground the artifice of the tales of fairy encounters. John Wilkinson has argued that 'poetic identity increasingly is composed of multiple pronouns, of part-people whose intersection and interaction develop a populace, deposing both the regal author and the puppet persona'.<sup>iv</sup> The pronouns in 'Fairies Frequented Several' have shifting referents, so that there is no consistent 'I' or 'he' or 'she' that exists as a recognizable character throughout the poem. Instead, the reoccurrence of these pronouns acts

as a structural device, allowing for a range of different perspectives and experiences to be placed in succession without centering any one voice.

Another way in which the poem foregrounds how the tales are told is through the use of jolting short lines to disrupt the flow, a technique that draws on the short *vers libre* lines of William Carlos Williams. The short lines of 'Fairies Frequented Several' slow down the poem and fragment the reading process, a process aided by the lack of punctuation. This hinders the reader from smoothly and clearly seeing 'through' the language to some world external to the words of the poem, but without making the language impenetrable or abstract.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Young, Francis, *Suffolk Fairyllore*, Norwich, Lasse Press, 2018, p3.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

<sup>iii</sup> Duncan, Andrew, *The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry*, Cromer: Salt, 2003, p86.

<sup>iv</sup> Wilkinson, John, *The Lyric Touch*, Cromer: Salt, 2007, p166.

## List of References

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Evans-Wentz, Walter Yeeling. *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries: The Classic Study of Leprechauns, Pixies, and Other Fairy Spirits*. Citadel Press, 2003 [1911]

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