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"Ill Met By Moonlight": Shakespeare and Elizabethan Fairies

Context is essential to the proper understanding of literature. The reader of any work must exercise caution when reading to understand the allusions and assumptions of the author, a task which increases in difficulty the greater the distance separating the author from the reader. This distance impedes the twenty-first century reader of Shakespeare, for though his works are frequently read, most of his modern readers know little of the common assumptions and intellectual framework of Elizabethan England. Without this knowledge many serious elements of Shakespeare's plays can strike the modern's ear as unrealistic flights of poetic fancy or utter nonsense.[1]

Shakespeare's numerous and memorable fairies fall into this category. The tooth fairy, Tinkerbell, and other childish sprites of diminutive proportions and friendly dispositions flit through the twenty-first century reader's mind when he encounters a fairy, yet these images differ significantly from the fairies of Shakespeare's time. In Elizabethan England many, if not most, adults believed in the existence of a large variety of fairies and spirits with whom men could and did interact. Some have contended that Shakespeare invented a new fairy lore for England, which eventually led to the collapse of English fairy beliefs. Nevertheless, a careful examination of the common place fairy beliefs of Elizabethan England reveals that Shakespeare faithfully adapted the fairies of contemporary folklore for his plays.

[1] For more on the importance of context to literary and historical interpretation, see C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans: 1967), 100-113; Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: Norton, 1965); and E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

Prior to any discussion of Elizabethan fairies one important qualification must be made: early modern thought, even when expressed by the educated, was seldom systematic. The Elizabethan fairies do not fit into one tidy system and therefore defy definition. The inability to define fairies, however, neither precludes their description nor discussion of their attributes and relations to each other and cosmology generally. The inability to define fairies may lead to apparent tensions, but these did not disturb most early moderns. The first attempt systematically to categorize fairies, undertaken by Robert Kirk in 1691, occurred a century after the time of Shakespeare and cannot be assumed to be indicative of Elizabethan thought.[2] Nevertheless, the significant amount of material available from Shakespeare and his more immediate contemporaries enables one to investigate the popular understanding of fairies among his contemporaries.

Shakespeare's portrayal of fairies has fascinated many, though early commentators did not attempt a thorough investigation of Elizabethan folklore. In 1880 Thomas Alfred Spalding wrote an essay on Elizabethan Demonology in which he considered Shakespeare's fairies, drawing upon some contemporary works, including James I's *Daemonology* of 1597. His analysis of Shakespearean fairies, however, benefited little from such external sources.[3] Another early essay written by J. Paul S. R. Gibson describes Shakespeare's fairies, ghosts, and witches, without any consideration of other Elizabethan sources on popular belief.[4] At the turn of the century Alfred Trübner Nutt examined Shakespeare's fairies in light of earlier English writers of folklore, including the fairies of Gervase of Tilbury and Gerald the Welshman. Nutt concluded that

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[2] Robert Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth, or a Treatise displayeing the chiefe Curiosities as they are in Use among diverse of the People of Scotland to this Day; An Essay of The Nature and Actions of the Subterranean (and, for the most Part,) Invisible People, heretofioir going under the name of ELVES, FAUNES, and FAIRIES, or the lyke, among the Low-Country Scots* (1691).

[3] Thomas Spalding, *Elizabethan Demonology* (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Press, 1970, 1880), 134-149.

[4] J Paul S R Gibson, *Shakespeare's Use of the Supernatural* (London: Folcroft Library Editions, 1973, 1908).

Shakespeare had perfected the English fairy tradition by uniquely synthesizing various strands of fairy lore in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[5]

Nutt's analysis was challenged several years later by Minor White Latham's doctoral dissertation on the origins of Shakespeare's fairies. Latham examined a copious amount of Elizabethan poems, plays, and other documents to ascertain the common understanding of fairies in Shakespeare's time. He found Shakespeare's fairies to be remarkably consistent with those of popular belief, yet he argued that:

> Shakespeare's recognition of the traditional fairies of his time and his representation of the traditional fairy world, complete and detailed as it was, were eventually ignored for his conception of the poetic and imaginary fairyland of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the native fairies of the folk were ultimately superseded by the fanciful beings that he invented for an appearance in one play.[6]

Latham found no precedence for the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which were "diminutive, pleasing, and picturesque sprites, with small garden names and small garden affairs, associated with moon-beams and butterflies."[7] Latham believed that the subsequent cute and tiny fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* supplanted the darker and more powerful traditional fairies, eventually leading to general disbelief in fairies.

Katherine Briggs rejected Latham's argument for Shakespeare's fairy innovation. While noting the *prima facie* plausibility of Latham's argument, Briggs discarded it because of the prior tradition of tiny fairies in England and elsewhere. Her examples included Gervase of Tilbury's portunes, Grimm's tiny fairies, the ant-sized Danish troll, and the Scandinavian light elves,

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[5] Alfred Trübner Nutt, *The Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare* (Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1974, 1900), 11.

[6] Minor White Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies: The Fairies of Folklore and the Fairies of Shakespeare* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972, 1930), 178-9.

[7] *Ibid*, 180.

which were reportedly as tiny and harmless as Shakespeare's fairies.[8] Though some of her examples are easily found, such as Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*, Briggs did not clearly indicate the sources of some of these tiny fairies in her initial book on of fairylore. Subsequent investigations of Shakespearean fairies have discounted the contributions of Katherine Briggs on this point, often entirely failing to mention her argument for the tradition of tiny fairies. For example, Keith Thomas attributed the shrinking fairy to Shakespeare without argument or footnote to back his claim in *Religion and the Decline in Magic*.[9]

More recently Mary Ellen Lamb has explored the use of fairy agency in early-modern England as a means to obscure agency in societal conflict between the "weak" and the "strong" in *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson*. She argued that the social marginalized frequently attributed illicit sexual acts to fairies to deflect scandal, or claimed to find fairy gold to mask the proceeds of theft, both of which would be understood by the oppressed in society and misperceived by the powerful authorities who would think it foolish superstition, or possibly even believe them.[10] She argued that Shakespeare undercut the foundation of this social institution by inventing new and "cute" fairies:

> By engaging in the conceptualization of a popular culture, defined within a mutually constitutive relationship with a more elite culture, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* represents a precondition for the denigration of and eventual rejection of popular culture as vulgar by the eighteenth century.[11]

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[8] Katharine Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (New York: Routledge, 2003, 1959), 13. See also K. M. Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1967), and K. M. Briggs, "The English Fairies," in *Folklore* 68 (1957): 270-287.

[9] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 606-609.

[10] Mary Ellen Lamb, "Taken by the Fairies: Fairy Practices and the Production of Popular Culture in A Midsummer Night's Dream" in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51 (2000): 281-302; and Mary Ellen Lamb, *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29-44, 93-124.

[11] Lamb, "Taken by the Fairies," 303.

This deconstruction of socially-useful fairy beliefs was largely attributed to the diminution and domestication of fairies in the play. Lamb noted Briggs's objections to Shakespeare's invention of tiny fairies, yet she dismissed it because "The changes in Shakespeare's fairies from native tradition have been well noted by Latham… and by most editors" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[12]

Diane Purkiss seems to have reiterated Latham's argument that Shakespeare transformed fairy belief in *At the Bottom of the Garden Well*, a survey of English fairy belief from the ancient world to the modern. Though she did not cite Latham, and may not have been directly aware of his argument, Purkiss contended that Shakespeare fabricated the "sweetly tiny fairies" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, occasionally drawing on published sources of folklore as he had little or no exposure to oral tradition.[13] Interestingly, she failed to address Briggs's argument though she frequently referred to Briggs's work in her book.

The points of disagreement among these authors on most aspects of Shakespearean fairies are remarkably few—the same catalogue of their attributes can be found in many sources, and was already commonplace when Nutt wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century. The primary point of contention is the tiny fairies most prominently apparent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Commentators since Briggs have rejected her defense of the tiny-fairy tradition, which was admittedly poorly handled in *The Anatomy of Puck.*[14] The monolithic assumption of Shakespeare's innovation, though ill-founded, has been remarkably durable. Nevertheless, the

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[12] *Ibid*, 308.

[13] Diane Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden Well* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 158-185.

[14] Briggs lists many examples of tiny fairies in the folkloric tradition without describing them, explaining how they might have influenced Shakespeare, or even clearly indicating where she found them. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, 13. Later Briggs argued more compellingly for its existence in *The Fairies in English Tradition*, 3-7. Nevertheless, I suspect that Briggs's initial sloppiness has discredited her in the eyes of many scholars, especially when it is coupled by the nagging impression that she believed in literal fairies instilled by her books.

prior existence of a tiny fairy tradition appears to have informed Shakespeare's writing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and his other plays, contrary to the prevailing opinion of modern critics.

Knowledge of the larger Elizabethan world picture is essential to this project as it provides perspective on the role of fairies in the larger early modern understanding. As E. M. W. Tillyard explained in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, much of the Medieval synthesis had survived the Reformation, though the synthesis had been pared of the intricate detail of Thomistic theology.[15] They recognized a divine order permeating creation, made manifest in three forms: a chain of being, a plane of correspondences, and a cosmic dance.[16]

The chain of being ordered the world vertically, uniting everything linearly from God to the basest inanimate object. The different orders include: the inanimate; the animate having existence; the vegetative having existence and life; the sensitive class having existence, life, and feeling; humans having existence, life, feeling, and understanding; and finally the purely spiritual orders of angels which had understanding without the encumbrance of the lower faculties. Each of these broad groups were divided and subdivided into categories, so that the chain gave each genus its own unique place and excellence in which it is better than the other classes. Rocks excel at durability and strength, plants excel at gathering nourishment and growing, beasts excel in strength and the power of their desires, humans excel in the faculty of learning, and the angels, already as perfect in knowledge as their nature allows, excel at adoration. In this model nothing is extraneous and everything has its own dignity and role in the universe. Although it appears neat and tidy, this system had inconsistencies and incongruities. For example, four elements

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[15] E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 4-8, whom I depend upon for this discussion.

[16] *Ibid*, 25.

composed all of the sublunary material of the universe, and do not fit neatly into the inanimate class. Though early modern thinking was ordered, it must again be emphasized that it was not systematic.[17]

As the chain of being united creation vertically, the horizontal planes of correspondence meaningfully related similar things in different classes. Correspondences can be understood as "strong" analogies, reflecting profoundly significant relationships between the various orders of creation. For example, each of the classes of the chain of being had a primate at its top connecting to the lowest creature at the bottom of the next class. These primates corresponded to one another in the regal or kingly dignity which they shared, and included elephants among animals, dolphins among fish, eagles among birds, and emperors among humans. Many of the most commonly invoked correspondences relate the macrocosm (the cosmic order of the celestial bodies), the body politic (the order of the political unit), and the microcosm (the human being). For example, the head is the highest and most dignified part of the body, contains the rational faculty, and makes decisions for a man or woman, just as the head of state, whether emperor or monarch, makes the decisions for the body politic and the highest celestial bodies are the most dignified. Again, the correspondences were not systematic, and yet they deeply informed Elizabethan thought.[18]

The third order, that of dance, is possibly the hardest for the modern to grasp. It comprises the harmonious cyclical movement of the universe, and is visible in the macrocosm, body politic, and microcosm. For example, the movement of the planets is closely related to that of courtiers orbiting the head of state and the circulation of blood throughout the body. The cosmic dance brings order to motion, permitting the existence of variation and mutability without the onset of

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[17] *Ibid*, 25-38.

[18] *Ibid*, 83-100.

chaos. Dance orders the dynamic movement in all of creation, uniting it in a divine harmony of inconceivable scope.[19]

These three interpenetrating manifestations of divine order comprised the organizational structure for the Elizabethan world picture. It naturally informed their understanding of what moderns would term the supernatural. Spirits, fairies, and witches had their own place within this order. They had real power, but only through their understanding of the intimate workings of the natural order, much as modern scientists use their understanding of the world to make rockets, cellular phones, central heating.[20] In the modern world one can fly to the moon, talk to people thousands of miles away, and enjoy a warm living room in the cold of winter, all without violating the natural order. Similarly, in the early modern world witches and devils were believed to have great powers through their understanding of the natural order:

> For he may through long and great experience, vnderstande the effectes & force of naturall things, as of herbes, stones, &c. and by meanes hereof woorke maruellous matters. And then he is a suttle and quick spirit, which can redyly take things in hande, whiche in eache thing is of no small weight. By his quicknesse, & by his knowledge in naturall things, he may easily deceyue the eye sight, and other senses of man, and hide those things which are before our face, and conuey other things into their places. Whereof the holy Scriptures, and histories, & continual experience beareth record…[21]

Though witches and devils could act in impressive ways, they frequently claimed powers belonging only to God. Christians were not supposed to go to either witches or devils for aid, for to do so would be a form of idolatry, as Reginal Scot of Kent warned: "He that attributeth to a witch, such divine power, as dulie and onelie apperteineth unto GOD (which all witchmongers doo) is in hart a blasphemer, an idolater, and full of grosse impietie, although he neither go nor

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[19] *Ibid*, 101-7.

[20] Stuart Clark, "The Rational Witchfinder: Conscience, Demonological Naturalism and Popular Superstitions," in *Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, edited by Stephen Pumbrey, Paolo L. Rossi and Maurice Slawinski (New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 224.

[21] Ludwig Lavater, Robert Harrison, John Dover Wilson, et all, *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght, 1572* (Oxford: Printed by the Shakespeare Association at the University Press, 1929), 167.

send to hir for assistance."[22] Though spirits and witches often falsely abrogated divine powers to themselves, they did possess real power and had impressive actions attributed to them. Speaking of devils, Robert Burton explained that:

> They can produce miraculous alterations in the air, and most wonderful effects, conquer armies, give victories, help, further, hurt, cross and alter human attempts and projects… as they see good themselves. When Charles the Great intended to make a channel betwixt the Rhine and the Danube, look what his workmen did in the day, these spirits flung down in the night.[23]

Devils could frustrate human affairs, even those of Charles the Great, indicating that these beings were to be taken seriously. Ignoring their existence would be foolish, yet forgetting their inferiority to God would be both ludicrous and idolatrous.

Fairies fit within this larger understanding of the world, though not as spirits, which had no bodies, but rather as corporeal beings. Though there were some skeptics who rejected belief in fairies and spirits, many more believed in their existence. Reginald Scot disbelieved that any man could see spirits or fairies:

> But in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in his breech, eies like a bason, fanges like dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a Niger, and a voice roring like a lion, whereby we start and are afraid when we heare one crie Bough: and they have so faied us with bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchins, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors, nymphes, changelings, *Incubus*, Robin good-fellowe, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hell waine, the firedrake, the puckle, tom thombe, hob gobblin, tom tumbler, boneless, and such other bugs, that we are afraid of our owne shadowes: in so much as some never feare the divell, but in a darke night; and then a polled sheepe is a perilous beast, and manie times is taken for our fathers soule, speciallie in a churchyard, where a right hardie man heretofore, scant durs passe by night, but his haire would stand upright. For righ grave writers report, that spirits most often and speciallie take the shape of women appearing to monks, &c: and of beasts, dogs, swine, horses, gotes, cats, hairs; of fowles, as crowes, night owles, and shreeke owles; but they delight most in the likenes of snakes and dragons. Well, thanks be to God, this wretched and cowardlie infidelitie, wince the

[22] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964, 1584), 33.

[23] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, I (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961, 1932, 1651), 186.

> preaching of the gospel, isn in part forgotten: and doubtless, the rest of those illusions will in short time (by Gods grace) be detected and vanish awaie.[24]

Reginald Scot's skeptical rejection of these spirits and fairies led him to expose the myths believed by his contemporaries. His description of our mothers' maids' tales indicates that these were commonplace and led many a "hardie man" to fear the appearance of one of the spirits, fairies, or devils enumerated. The list is interesting, and Purkiss has argued that Scot's "they" is intentionally not equated with "mothers maids" and that the list is purely a product of Scot's invention informed by his classical education.[25] Though seven of the creatures enumerated are classical, it seems far more likely that Scot was importing names from the classical world for those local beings he invoked—after all, his large book exposing the fraud of witchcraft would not have been read by any maids, but by those with at least a moderate degree of education.[26]

At this point the reader may wonder why early modern fairies were so closely associated with devils and witches. There are many themes or recurrent elements in Elizabethan descriptions of fairies, and they paint a picture very different from that of the modern fairy invoked by Walt Disney artists. Rather than cute, friendly, and harmless creatures, Elizabethan fairies were powerful and dangerous.[27] According to Reginald Scot, the fear of witches was very similar the fear of fairies.[28] Not all fairies were malevolent, but they tended towards capriciousness and often punished human inquiry or interference in their business. Human encounters with fairies frequently entailed trouble for the mortal with sufficient bravado, or misfortune, to meet them.

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[24] Scot, 139.

[25] Purkiss, *At the Bottom*, 160-161.

[26] Clark, 229.

[27] Thomas, 607.

[28] Scot, 123.

Aerial spirits, which were often considered distinct from devils proper and frequently considered a particular kind of fairy, were believed to work with witches and deceive men for evil ends.[29] They had the power to transfigure themselves into most any shape they chose, as Lavater noted, "No man is able to rehearse all the shapes wherein spirites haue appeared, for the Diuell, who for the moste part is the worker of these things, can (as the Poets faine of *Proteus*) chaunge himselfe into all shapes and fashions."[30] Reginald Scot, though clearly of the minority opinion, firmly denied this power, maintaining that "Whosoever beleeveth, that anie creature can be made or changed into better or woorsse, or transformed into anie other shape, or into anie other similitude, by anie other than by God himselfe the creator of all thing, without all doubt is an infidel, and woorsse than a pagan."[31] Robert Burton accepted Scot's point, but concluded that through their knowledge of the natural world:

> They may deceive the eyes of men, yet not take true bodies, or make a real metamorphosis… they have understanding far beyond men, can probably conjecture and foretell many things; they can cause and cure most diseases, deceive our senses; they have excellent skill in all arts and sciences; and that the most illiterate devil is… more knowing than any man… they deceive all our senses, even our understanding itself at once.[32]

Spirits, although unable to actually transform themselves, could mimic transformations such that no human could tell otherwise. In some cases these spirits would "instruct men, and communicate their skill," sometimes as a reward, at other times to "terrify and punish, to keep them in awe."[33] While many of these spirits were closely associated with witches, others

[29] For example, James I lists fairies as one kind of aerial spirit haunting Scotland: James I, *Daemonology* (1597), <http://www.zerotime.com/lostbook/james.htm> (15 February 2007), 57.

[30] Lavater, 96.

[31] Scot, 97.

[32] Burton, I, 185-6.

[33] *Ibid*, 184.

unassociated with evil powers also sought knowledge from fairies and spirits. Village wizards often claimed to act by fairy aid. The Christian astrologer William Lilly, who coauthored the preeminent Latin grammar in English with Erasmus of Rotterdam, made several attempts to contact the Queen of the Fairies, whom he believed could teach knowledge on any subject.[34]

Shakespeare described aerial fairies and their pedagogical kin in several of his plays. The spirit Hecate apparently taught the dark arts and aided the witches in Macbeth, identifying herself as "the mistress of your charms, / The close contriver of all harms."[35] Similarly, Titania, Shakespeare's fairy queen from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, seems to have dispensed wisdom to her worshipers, including one she described as, "a votaress of my order: / And, in the spiced Indian air, by night, / Full often hath she gossip'd by my side."[36] Shakespeare also portrayed the better sort of spirit in Ariel, who was "but air," and "a spirit too delicate" to enact the Witch Sycorax's "earthy and abhorr'd commands."[37] In *The Tempest* Ariel served the more benign Prospero happily until Prospero granted his freedom at the end of the play.

Terrestrial fairies also performed some horrific activities including the theft of human babies. They would leave sickly elves, commonly called changlings, in place of the human child they stole. This belief is remarkably old, Purkiss tracing it to the legend of the lamiae in ancient Mesopotamia, and one of the most persistent of English fairy beliefs. Unchristened children were especially vulnerable to the fairies, and the presence of bread and iron, the latter being generally

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[34] Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*, expanded edition (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1995), 100; Thomas, 608.

[35] Shakespeare, *Macbeth* in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Edition, 2002), 3.5.6-7 (all subsequent references are to this edition).

[36] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.126-8.

[37] *The Tempest*, 5.1.23; 1.2.272-3.

despised by fairies, were common means to defend children against fairy theft.[38] Sometimes parents could save their child in the midst of the theft, as Robert Willis wrote concerning his own near escape from the fairy world:

> Such an accident (by relation of others) befell me within a few daies after my birth, whilst my mother lay of my being her second child, when I was taken out of the bed from her side, and by my suddain and fierce crying recovered again, being found sticking between the beds-head and the wall; and if I had not cryed in that manner as I did, our gossips had a conceit that I had been carried away by the Fairies they know not whither, and some elfe or changeling (as they call it) laid in my room.[39]

The Scottish minister Robert Kirk described the changeling as "a lingering voracious image of their being left in their place, like their Reflexion in a Mirror."[40] Generally changelings were ancient elves, often deformed, shriveled, and mentally retarded, and they frequently died shortly after the real child was stolen away. If a parent found a changeling in place of its child, there were several methods to recover the stolen infant. One proscribed that the changeling be set on or near a pile of dung until it ceased to cry, at which point the parent could return and find their child restored. Another recommended placing the child on a hot shovel.[41] Latham noted that the fairy child suffered the most from the exchange, living as a deformed, sickly, and often mentally retarded child if it survived, while the human child thrived under the attentive care of the fairies.[42] Changelings were a pervasive element of Elizabethan fairy lore, even appearing in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[43]

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[38] Briggs, *Fairies*, 114-5; Latham, 161-2.

[39] Lamb, 142.

[40] Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves and Fairies*, as quoted in Purkiss, 185.

[41] Briggs, 117; Purkiss, 156-7; Latham 160-161.

[42] Latham, 158.

Though their deeds may be horrific, many fairies were moral creatures which rewarded good behavior and punished bad. Maids and housewives who failed to keep a tidy house sometimes suffered a pinching from fairies, while the maid who performed her duty well might find a coin in her shoe the next morning.[44] The fairy pinching may be an Elizabethan innovation, though it rapidly became commonplace, and by the time of Shakespeare's writing it was considered a serious punishment—Corsites in Lyly's *Endymion* declared he would rather "breake into the middest of a maine battaile, than againe fall into the handes of those fayre babies."[45] Fairies would pinch those who broke any of their customary rules, including invasion of the fairies' dancing circles, observing fairy activity, conversing with fairies, or acknowledging fairy agency in any gift they might choose to bestow.[46] Besides these rules and their passion for cleanliness, fairies also despised unchastity, as shown by their treatment of Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*:[47]

> Corrupt, corrupt, and tainted in desire!
> About him, fairies; sing a scornful rhyme;
> And, as you trip, still pinch him to your time…
> Fie on sinful fantasy!
> Fie on lust and luxury!
> Lust is but a bloody fire,
> Kindled with unchaste desire,
> Fed in heart, whose flames aspire
> As thoughts do blow them, higher and higher.
> Pinch him, fairies, mutually;
> Pinch him for his villany;

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[43] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene: Book One*, edited by Carol V. Kaske (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 1.10.65; *A Winter's Tale*, 3.3.119; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.124-140. Admittedly, the child is misidentified as a changeling in *A Winter's Tale*, yet Shakespeare assumes familiarity with changelings in his audience, indicating its prevalence.

[44] Thomas, 609; Latham, 129-33.

[45] Lyly, *Endymion*, 4.3, as quoted in Latham, 122.

[46] Latham, 122-9.

[47] *Ibid*, 133-4.

Pinch him, and burn him, and turn him about,
Till candles and starlight and moonshine be out.[48]

The fairies role in maintaining order and moral behavior was widely recognized and their apparent departure caused concern of rampant disorder in Richard Corbett's poem, "The Fairies' Farewell":

Farewell, rewards and fairies,
Good housewives now may say;
For now foul sluts in dairies
Do fare as well as they,
And though they sweep their hearths no less
Than maids were wont to do,
Yet who of late for cleanliness
Finds sixpence in her shoe?…

A tell-tale in their company
They never could endure,
And whoso kept not secretly
Their mirth was punished sure;
It was a just and Christian deed
To pinch such black and blue.
Oh, how the commonwealth doth need
Such justices as you.[49]

Fairies, for all the trouble they caused, often encouraged virtuous and orderly behavior among men and women.

Some fairies actually performed chores for those they favored, often in exchange for a little milk or cream, so long as no one attempted to watch them or appeared overly grateful for their aid. There were a variety of names for these house elves, though it is usually unclear if they are fairies of similar yet distinguishable types, or several names for the same kind of fairy. Robin Goodfellow, also called Hobgoblin, sometimes associated with the Cobaldi, and named brownie

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[48] *Merry Wives of Windsor*, 5.5.91-93, 96-105.

[49] Richard Corbett, "The Fairies Farewell," in R. E. Pritchard, *Shakespeare's England: Life in Elizabethan & Jacobean Times* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 126-8.

in Scotland, would perform housework for bread and a bowl of cream each night.[50] Burton described Robin and his fellow house elves as:

> Fairies… which have been in former times adored with much superstition, with sweeping their houses, and setting of a pail of clean water, good victuals, and the like, and then they should not be pinched, but find money in their shoes, and be fortunate in their enterprises… [some are called] hobgoblins, and Robin Goodfellows, that would in those superstitious times grind corn for a mess of milk, cut wood, or do any manner of drudgery work.[51]

King James I of England believed the brownie an evil spirit, though most of his fellow Scots subscribing to "Catholic" superstitions considered him a helpful and welcome guest:

> And yet the Deuill for confirming in the heades of ignoraunt Christians, that errour first mainteined among the Gentiles, he whiles among the first kinde of spirits that I speak of, appeared in time of *Papistrie* and blindnesse, and haunted diuers houses, without doing any euill, but doing as it were necessarie turnes vp and down the house: and this spirit they called *Brownie* in our language, who appeared like a rough-man: yea, some were so blinded, as to beleeue that their house was all the sonsier, as they called it, that such spirites resorted there.[52]

Robin Goodfellow also had the power to transform himself, of which he boasted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:[53]

> I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,
> Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier:
> Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
> A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire;
> And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
> Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.[54]

Robin, though quite willing to perform domestic service for bread and cream, refused to aid those maids who "sluttish lie." He took particular interest in those who were truly besotted and

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[50] Thomas, 609-610; Latham, 232-3, 246-248.

[51] Burton, I, 192-3.

[52] James I, 65.

[53] Latham, 241-2.

[54] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.1.105-110.

chaste, often aiding their romantic pursuits as a matchmaker.[55] It was the departure of these friendly and playful house elves that worried Corbette in "Farewell of the Fairies."

Though Shakespeare united Puck and Robin Goodfellow in one character, they were often considered distinct. Puck was more of a prankster than Robin in general, loving to lead travelers down false paths at night, as Burton recorded:

> And so likewise those which Mizaldus calls *ambulones*, that walk about midnight on great heaths and desert places, which (saith Lavater) "draw men out of the way, and lead them all night a by-way, or quite bar them of their way"; these have several names in several places; we commonly call them Pucks… if one lose his company by chance, these devils will call him by his name, and counterfeit voices of his companions to seduce him… If a man curse or spur his horse for stumbling they do heartily rejoice at it; with many such pretty feats.[56]

Robin and Puck were both well known for their laugh, "ho ho hoh!" which may validate Shakespeare's uniting them in one character in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: [57]

> Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
> Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
> Call'd Robin Goodfellow: are not you he
> That frights the maidens of the villagery;
> Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern
> And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
> And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
> Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
> Those that Hobgoblin call you and sweet Puck,
> You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
> Are not you he?[58]

Whether Robin himself or merely very similar, Shakespeare united them successfully, emphasizing their close similarities if nothing else.

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[55] Latham, 249-250.

[56] Burton, I, 195-6.

[57] Latham, 250-253.

[58] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.31-41.

Besides housework, fairies sometimes helped people by giving them fairy gold. The simple mentioning of fairies and their gold might cause a house to ring with the sound of clinking money. Sometimes a brownie or other fairy would reveal the location of treasure hidden in the earth.[59] Shakespeare adopted the fairies close association with mysterious treasure in *A Winter's Tale*, where the supposed changeling is found with treasure immediately identified as "fairy gold."[60]

The fairies of England did not live in an anarchic Hobbesian state of nature, but in a kingdom corresponding, in the profound early modern sense, to those of men. The queen of fairies appeared with great regularity in Elizabethan literature and thought—it was she Lilly hoped to find and question and she for whom Spencer named his epic. In the latter example, if not others, the Fairy Queen's prominence may be a reflection of the impact of Elizabeth's reign on the popular conscience. The king of the fairies had existed long before the reign of Elizabeth, however, as evidenced by Oberon's presence in the fifteenth-century poem *Huon of Bordeaux*.[61] Con-artists capitalizing on the credulity of rural English folk sometimes invoked the fairy monarchs, including Alice and John West, who impersonated them and extorted cash for promises of fairy gold, and Goodwin Wharton, who claimed a visitation from the fairy queen and ascendance as the fairy king through political turmoil in the fairy realm.[62] Nevertheless, belief in the fairy court persisted. James I attempted to counter the superstitious belief in this fairy court:

> That fourth kinde of spirites, which by the Gentiles was called Diana, and her wandring Court, and amongst vs was called the Phairie (as I tould you) or our good neighboures, was one of the sortes of illusiones that was rifest in the time of Papistrie: for although it was holden odious to Prophesie by the deuill, yet whome these kinde of Spirites carryed

[59] Latham, 144-5; Briggs, *The Anatomy*, 145.

[60] *A Winter's Tale*, 3.3.124.

[61] Briggs, *The Fairies*, 9.

[62] Thomas, 613; see also, Lamb, *Popular Culture*, 40.

> awaie, and informed, they were thought to be sonsiest and of best life. To speake of the many vaine trattles founded vpon that illusion: How there was a King and Queene of Phairie, of such a iolly court & train as they had, how they had a teynd, & dutie, as it were, of all goods: how they naturallie rode and went, eate and drank, and did all other actiones like naturall men and women.[63]

The fairie court of Oberon and Titania from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is probably the best known description of the fairy court, though the court is split between King and Queen when it first appears on stage. Disorder in the fairy Kingdom brings consequences for the entire earth, however, causing disorder in the cosmos as the seasonal order collapsed into chaos because of dissension between Queen Titania and King Oberon:

> And never, since the middle summer's spring,
> Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
> By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
> Or in the beached margent of the sea,
> To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
> But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
> Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
> As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
> Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
> Have every pelting river made so proud
> That they have overborne their continents:
> The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
> The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
> Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;
> The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
> And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;
> The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,
> And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
> For lack of tread are undistinguishable:
> The human mortals want their winter here;
> No night is now with hymn or carol blest:
> Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
> Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
> That rheumatic diseases do abound:
> And thorough this distemperature we see
> The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
> Far in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
> And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
> An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds

[63] James I, 73-4.

> Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,
> The childing autumn, angry winter, change
> Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
> By their increase, now knows not which is which:
> And this same progeny of evils comes
> From our debate, from our dissension;
> We are their parents and original.[64]

The weather, the orbit of the moon, and the seasons are altered because of the "debate" between Oberon and Titania. The cessation of the fairies' dance disordered the blowing of the wind, the progression of the seasons, and the movement of the planets, all of which increased disease and inhibited the proper activities of man, beast, and crop, including the ox and the ploughmen whose toil yielded no harvest. The entire play shows the impact of this disorder upon the human realm, as the mortals caught in the crossfire of the fairies' courtly spat suffered a variety of trials before the restoration of order in both the fairy and human realms.

As implied by Shakespeare's emphasis on the fairy court's dance, fairies loved music and had great power through their song and dance. Burton reaffirmed this belief, describing its manifestations across Europe:

> These are they that dance on heaths and greens, as Lavater thinks with Trithemius, and, as Olaus Magnus adds, leave that green circle, which we commonly find in plain fields… they are sometimes seen by old women and children. Hieronym. Pauli, in his description of the city of Barcino in Spain, relates how they have been familiarly seen near that town, about fountains and hills.[65]

Scot also mentioned the "old women which danse with the fairies,"[66] and Lavater recorded:

> That euen in these our days, in many places in the North partes, there are certaine mo[n]sters or spirites, whiche taking on them some shape or figure, vfe [*sic*] (chiefly in the night season) to daunce, after the sounde of all manner of instruments of musicke : whome the inhabitants call companies, or daunces of Elues or Fairies… in *Mauritania* beyond the mount *Atlas*, many times in the nighte season are seene great lightes, and that

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[64] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.81-117.

[65] Burton, I, 193.

[66] Scot, 106.

> tinkling of Cymbals and noyses of Pypes are also heard, and when it is daylight no man appeareth.[67]

Fairies were closely associated with music and dancing in Scotland, with legends such as the master piper trained by the fairies.[68] Shakespeare knew the fairies' musical skill, and employed it extensively in his plays. In *The Tempest*, Ariel leads Ferdinand with her song, music accompanies the fairies while they present the feast to the marooned king, and a soft fairy tune interrupts Alonso and Sebastian as they nearly murder their king.[69] Similarly, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Oberon and Titania employ music to induce sleep and then to awaken the human characters.[70] In the court's final exit, they break into their long-absent song and dance:

> OBERON
> Every elf and fairy sprite
> Hop as light as bird from brier;
> And this ditty, after me,
> Sing, and dance it trippingly.
> TITANIA
> First, rehearse your song by rote
> To each word a warbling note:
> Hand in hand, with fairy grace,
> Will we sing, and bless this place.
> OBERON
> … Every fairy take his gait;
> And each several chamber bless,
> Through this palace, with sweet peace;
> And the owner of it blest
> Ever shall in safety rest.
> Trip away; make no stay;
> Meet me all by break of day.[71]

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[67] Lavater, 93.

[68] Briggs, *The Anatomy*, 88, 101.

[69] *The Tempest*, 1.2.377-386; 396-402, 3.3.20-21, and elsewhere throughout.

[70] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 4.1.23-5, 27.

[71] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.381-388, 404-411.

Thus Oberon and Titania skipped off of the stage in a play which some believe forever altered the English fairy.

Most modern academic commentators on fairy lore have identified Shakespeare as the originator of the tiny fairy. This idea has become sufficiently commonplace that several prominent modern commentators have failed to acknowledge the dissenting position taken by Katherine Briggs.[72] Diane Purkiss is among those authors, yet in a recent essay on Shakespeare's ghosts, she noted the care that must be taken in studies of popular culture:

> The fact is that folklore is notoriously difficult to date. Folklorists commonly use the historic present for everything they write about, because although it is possible to date the moment when a piece of folklore *surfaces*, in print or in a piece of oral storytelling that happens to have been recorded, this is obviously not the same date when it was first composed or created.[73]

This difficulty has been largely overlooked in the discussion of Shakespeare's fairies. Since Latham wrote, the tendency has been to regard Shakespeare's fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as radically innovative because he found no antecedent for harmless fairies which could hide in acorn shells.[74] Latham rejected the portunes of Gervase of Tilbury because he "did not identify the Portunes with fays, or lamiae, or fauns or satyrs, of whose existence he was cognizant."[75] He similarly dismissed the other examples of small fairies presented by Geraldus Cambrensis and Walter Map as more likely races of pygmies, concluding "The stature and measurements of these beings… could not have been regarded as the typical racial proportions of

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[72] Both Keith Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of Science* and Diane Purkiss in *At the Bottom of the Garden Well* argued for Shakespeare's innovation without mentioning the counter-position. Mary Ellen Lamb did note Briggs' argument in "Taken by the Fairies," but more recently in *Popular Culture*, 104, she cites Briggs, with Latham and Purkiss, failing to recognize that Briggs believed the tiny fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were "not new to folk-lore, but nearly new in literature." Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, 45.

[73] Diane, Purkiss, "Shakespeare, Ghosts and Popular Folklore," in *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture*, edited by Stewart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 140.

[74] Latham, 187-91.

[75] Latham, 189.

the elves or the fairies during this period."[76] Shakespeare's fairies were therefore deemed new, and other examples of tiny fairies were regarded as descendents of Puck, Titania, and Oberon.

There are several problems in Latham's argument, however, which considerably weaken it. First, he failed to consider the remarkably foreign thought of Elizabethans, especially in the realm of popular culture. To the frustration of Reginald Scot and others, the residents of rural England continued to hold "popish superstitions," including belief in fairies and ghosts.[77] The fairies described in this paper reflect the tremendous variety among the creatures numbered among the fairies. Though Latham rejected the portunes described by Gervase of Tilbury, they sound remarkably like the fairies of Shakespeare's contemporaries:

> Just as nature produces certain marvels in the world of humans, so spirits perpetrate their jokes in human bodies made of air, which they put on with God's permission. For instance England has certain demons (though I admit that I do not know whether I should call them demons, or mysterious ghosts of unknown origin), which the French call neptunes, and the English portunes. It belongs to their nature to take pleasure in the simplicity of happy peasants. When peasants stay up late at night for the sake of their domestic tasks, suddenly, though the doors are closed, they are there warming themselves at the fire and eating little frogs which they bring out of their pockets and roast on the coals. They have an aged appearance, and a wrinkled face; they are very small in stature, measuring less than half a thumb, and they wear tiny rags sewn together. If there should be anything to be carried in the house or any heavy task to be done, they apply themselves to the work, and accomplish it more quickly than it could be done by human means. It is a law of their nature that they can be useful but cannot do harm. However, they do have one way of being something of a nuisance: when on occasions English men ride alone through the uncertain shadows of night, a portune sometimes attaches himself to the rider without being seen, and when he has accompanied him on his way for some time, there comes a moment when he seizes the reins and leads the horse into some nearby mud. While the horse wallows stuck in the mud, the portune goes off roaring with laughter, and so with a trick of this kind he makes fun of human simplicity.[78]

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[76] Latham, 190.

[77] Several books were written in this time period to counter such beliefs among the literate members of English society: Lavater; Scot; James I; and John Deacon and John Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Divels*. (London: 1601. Reprinted: Norwood, NJ: Walter J Johnson, 1976).

[78] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, edited and translated by S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (New York: Clarendon Press, 2002), 675-7.

This description conforms with many elements of Shakespeare's Puck, who "frights the maidens of the villagery," and would "Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm."[79] Gervase's description of the portunes as spirits with airy or ariel bodies again would conform with Elizabethan belief in fairies. Even if Gervase did not consider them fairies, his Elizabethan readers would have recognized many characteristics of their own fairies in these tiny creatures. Latham's claim that Elizabethans would not have considered portunes fairies is ultimately uncompelling.

Further, Latham failed to recognize the important point raised by Purkiss that elements of folklore may long lie unmentioned in literary sources, for we only know when they "surface" in a text. The evidence of portunes indicates that tiny creatures that closely resembling fairies existed in England long before the writing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. That we have no extant records of belief in these tiny fairies between Gervase of Tilbury and Shakespeare's lifetime is no evidence that this element of folk belief disappeared following Gervase's writing. Elizabethan literature must now be examined to see if it appears to draw on Shakespeare when it portrays tiny fairies, or if it seems to share a common folkloric source instead.

In 1594, six years prior to the publication of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Thomas Nashe published a description of fairies which is so similar to one by Scot, that it appears to be borrowed. He also wrote a fascinating passage describing tiny spirits attending druids:

> The *Druides* that dwelt in the Ile of *Man*, which are famous for great coniurers, are reported to have been lo[u]sie with familiars. Had they but put their finger and their thumbe into their neck, they could have pluckt out a whole neast of them.[80]

Nashe also suggested that mustard contains a devil, which Briggs suspected of inspiring the name of the fairy Mustardseed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[81] In 1597 more tiny fairies

[79] Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (II.i.34, 40).

[80] Thomas Nashe, *Terror of the Night* (1594) as quoted in Briggs, *Anatomy*, 23.

appeared in Christopher Middleton's *The Famous Historie of Chinon of England*, which described "'armies of many little Elues' as speciall attendants' on Oboram's 'traine… whose busie fingers woulde gladly haue beene pinching' Chinon's and Lancelot's and several other knights' legs, 'for higher they coulde not reach.'"[82] These diminutive fairies, unable to reach higher than the legs of knights, are expressly identified with Oberon, as are the tiny fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

Several more works mentioning tiny fairies were published around the same time as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Sometime between 1596-1600 *The Wisdome of Doctor Dodypoll* was published anonymously, describing the fairy kingdom in colorful terms:

> …the light Fairies daunst vpon the flowers,
> Hanging on euery leafe an orient pearle,
> Which stroke together with the silken winde,
> Of their loose mantels made of siluer chime.[83]

Again, these fairies appear quite tiny and are found in close proximity with flowers, much like those of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *The Maydes Metamorphosis*, published anonymously in 1600, frequently uses the adjective "little" pertaining to fairies, compares them to "the little bee" and "a flea," and has one fairy mounting a housefly, though Briggs deemed the conversation of the three fairies Penny, Cricket, and Little Little Prick too similar to one in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to have been written independently.[84] One more poem also published that year demands attention. In Edward Fairfax's translation of Tasso's *Godfrey of Bulloigne: or The Recovery of Jerusalem*, Fairfax described tiny fairies as devils pouring out of hell to torment the world:

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[81] Briggs, 23.

[82] Latham, 197. This, Latham acknowledged, might be an example of tiny fairies prior to the publication of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

[83] As quoted in Latham, 198.

[84] *Ibid*, 198; Briggs, *Anatomy*, 48-50.

Before his Words the Tyrant ended had,
The lesser Devils arose with gastly rore,
And thronged forth about the World to gad,
Each Land they filled, River, Stream and Shore,
The Goblins, Fairies, Fiends and Furies mad,
Ranged in flowery Dales, and Mountains hore,
　　And under every trembling Leaf they sit,
　　Between the solid Earth and Welkin flit.

About the world they spread forth far and wide,
Filling the thoughts of each ungodly Heart,
With secret Mischief, Anger, Hate and Pride,
Wounding lost Souls with Sins impoison'd Dart.[85]

While Latham noted the "incongruity of fairies sweeping from hell with ghastly roar, ranged in flowery dales, and sitting, with the most infinitesimal figures, under every trembling leaf," this poem seems to unite the tiny fairies and fairies common association with evil spirits.[86] That the translator chose to name fairies among the devils who swept from hell would seem to distance his tiny fairies from those of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, inclining one to suspect their independent origin in a traditional strain of folklore. Though it may not tell us much about Elizabethan fairy beliefs, the very incongruity that Latham detects seems to demand influences beyond Shakespeare.

The many works published contemporaneously with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* conform to what one would expect if Shakespeare drew upon popular culture for his tiny fairies. Only *The Maydes Metamorphosis* appears slavishly to copy Shakespeare in its depiction of the fairies. Also, the Elizabethan period was the high point of fairy literature, with a tremendous amount of fairy lore being published in a short period. As such, if there were a strain of relatively unpopular tiny fairies in the countryside, one would expect it to surface in print at this time. Gervase of Tilbury's portunes and the tiny fairies in plays published around the time of *A*

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[85] As quoted in Latham, 199.

[86] *Ibid*.

Midsummer Night's Dream all seem to indicate that Shakespeare did not invent his fairies, but rather drew upon a strain of popular thought infrequently adapted to literature prior to the 1590s.

One must also establish that Shakespeare was clearly well aware of the popular Elizabethan fairies. Though Diane Purkiss insists that he only knew popular folklore through the writings of skeptics like Reginald Scot, this assertion seems highly doubtful.[87] Shakespeare lived in Stratford-upon-Avon, a town of about 1,500 residents, until he was over twenty, giving him ample opportunity to become acquainted with folk beliefs.[88] Even after he moved to London, Shakespeare continued to maintain a connection with Stratford-upon-Avon, where he returned for the final six years of his life.[89] More importantly, Shakespeare's writings reflect Elizabethan popular beliefs, including those concerning fairies, as has been shown throughout this paper. Even Latham recognized Shakespeare's intimate familiarity with fairy lore, noting that, "of all the Elizabethans who made mention of them [fairies], there is no one who showed himself more cognizant of the belief in their existence, and no one who featured more prominently their traditional power and activities."[90]

Shakespeare's fairies reflect the sprites existing in English popular religion at the turn of the seventeenth century. Though many have posited that the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are the products of his unique invention, there is sufficient evidence for the existence of tiny fairies in Elizabethan folklore to dismiss their theory. That the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* strike the modern reader as fantastic is no reason to dismiss them from the realm of

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[87] Pukiss asserted that Scot was "Shakespeare's chief and often his only source for English folklore," yet cites no other works and provides no argument to support her surprising claim, Purkiss, *At the Bottom*, 158-9.

[88] Roland Mushat Frye, *Shakespeare's Life and Times: a Pictorial Record* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 7, 15-6.

[89] *Ibid*, 102.

[90] Latham, 177.

popular belief, for early modern thought differs significantly from our own. Shakespeare was well aware of rural folk belief, and this knowledge informed his playwriting as he took familiar fairies and placed them in new settings to the delight of his audiences.

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