There was a woman one time taken by the fairies. She was married. They took [her] away from the husband and left him another old yoke [thing] instead of her. The husband was in a terrible way over it, and he didn't know what he had best do to get her back. He went to a fairyman that lived somewhere in the County Kilkenny and he told him his story. The fairyman told him that [the fairies] would be passing by the end of his house on a certain night and that he'd see them—he gave him some herbs so that he could see them—and that his wife would be riding on a grand grey horse; and when she'd be passing him to seize and hold on to her, that if he missed her he'd never see her again. He came home, and on this certain night he went out to the end of the house, and he was no length there when the fairies came on, and they galloping. He saw the wife on the white horse and the minute she came up to him he grabbed her and held her. He put some herbs he was after getting from the fairyman into her hand, so that she'd stay with him, and begob he had his wife back again. When they went back into the house, the other yoke was gone off with herself.

Told by Mrs. John Carroll (65), Assegart, Foulksmills, Co. Wexford, December 1937, and written down by Tomás Ó Ciardha (IFC 437: 106–7). Used by kind permission of the Head of Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

1

Laborers, Priests, and Peelers

THE WINTER OF 1894/95 was exceptionally hard, with February 1895 the coldest yet recorded in many parts of Ireland and Britain. Farm work was seriously delayed, and agricultural laborers in Ireland were facing unemployment and destitution. In mid-March, though, both weather and economic prospects improved. It was a time of record keeping and centralized bureaucracy. At Birr Castle Observatory in King's County, as Offaly was then called, Robert Jacob kept scrupulous twice-daily weather records, which he entered by hand on large printed sheets supplied by the Meteorological Office in London. On April 2, 1895, in accordance with instructions printed on the form, he folded his March return four times to make a letter-sized packet, stuck on a red halfpenny stamp showing the head of a younger Queen Victoria, and sent it off. The back of the form had already been printed with the address: 63 Victoria Street, London. It arrived there on April 4, postmarked "Parsonstown 6.50 Ap 2 95."

According to Jacob's records, the temperature at Birr Castle at nine o'clock in the morning, Wednesday, March 13, had been 37.4 degrees Fahrenheit; twenty-four hours later it had risen to 50.5. By 9 o'clock on Thursday evening the weather was still mild and dry, with a temperature of 46.8. Fifty miles away, on a farm at Kishogue, near the village of Drangan, County Tipperary, Michael Kennedy asked his employer, Edward Anglin, for his wages, and set out on a three-mile walk along dark roads to give the money to his widowed mother. Mary Kennedy lived in a tiny, mud-walled, thatched house beside Ballyvadlea bridge, where Michael and his brothers and sister

had grown up. When he got there, however, she was on her way out. Her twenty-six-year-old niece Bridget Cleary had been ill for several days, and Mary Kennedy was going to visit her for the second or third time. Michael Kennedy decided to follow his mother to his cousin's house, across the bridge and up the hill. Bridget lived only half a mile away, with her husband, Michael Cleary, a cooper, and her father, who was Mary Kennedy's brother.

The Clearys lived in a slate-roofed laborers' cottage, built a few years earlier; though modest, it was a much better house than Mary Kennedy's, or indeed than many others in the area. When Michael Kennedy arrived there on the night of Thursday, March 14, it was full of people and activity. His cousin's illness seemed to have reached some kind of crisis. In the kitchen, where a group of neighbors waited, some green stumps of whitethorn were burning slowly in the fire grate, and a large oil lamp stood on the table. Just off the kitchen, Bridget Cleary lay in the front bedroom, where the only light came from a candle. Her bed almost filled the tiny room, but several men were standing around it, holding her down; another was lying across her legs.

Most of the men in the bedroom were Bridget Cleary's relatives, among them Michael Kennedy's brothers, Patrick, James, and William. The others were her husband Michael, her father Patrick Boland, and a cousin of his called Jack Dunne. A teenage boy, William Ahearne, was with them, holding the candle. The men were trying to make Bridget Cleary swallow herbs boiled in new milk—Michael Cleary was holding a saucepan and a spoon—but she was resisting them. Again and again, as though they doubted her identity, they demanded, in the name of God, that she say whether or not she was indeed Bridget Cleary, daughter of Patrick Boland and wife of Michael Cleary. The men were shouting as they questioned her and forced the mixture into her mouth. Eventually they lifted her out of bed and carried her through the door to the kitchen fire, about twenty feet away. There they questioned her again, holding her over the smoldering wood as they demanded that she answer her name. The neighbors who were in the kitchen heard them talk about witches and fairies.

When Bridget Cleary's death was being investigated in the weeks that followed, Michael Kennedy claimed not to remember much about the events of that evening. In Clonmel Prison, seven months later, it was noted that he had been tubercular ("phthisical") for years. He may also have had epilepsy, for he told the court that he was susceptible to fits, and that he had lost consciousness in the crowded and noisy house. When he woke up, he said, he was lying in bed in the second small bedroom at the back of the house, where his uncle, Patrick Boland, usually slept. He believed he had been unconscious for at least half an hour.

The house was quiet again by the time he woke. Bridget Cleary was in bed, and apparently resting, but at some point during the evening word had come that her husband's father had died. Michael Cleary was not from Ballyvadlea, but from Killenaule, about eight miles away, and several of the men were preparing to walk there to attend his wake. Wakes were all-night affairs, and major social events for the rural working class, with storytelling, games, and other amusements; they were prime occasions for the exchange of terrifying legends about ghosts and fairies, and for young men and women to meet. Patrick, James, and William Kennedy had wanted to go earlier—they had spent part of the evening shaving each other in the back bedroom in preparation—but Michael Cleary had delayed them by demanding that they stay and assist him with his wife's treatment until after midnight. Michael Cleary himself might have been expected to go to Killenaule, if only to see his bereaved mother, but he insisted on staying at home with his wife. Old-style wakes were increasingly frowned on by respectable society, and Michael Cleary was better educated than most of his wife's relatives; still, his decision not to attend his own father's wake was surprising.

Michael Kennedy's older brother Patrick was thirty-two, Michael himself was twenty-seven, James was twenty-two, and William twenty-one. All were farm laborers and unmarried, and only the younger two could read or write. They left the house in Ballyvadlea together at about one o'clock in the morning to walk to Killenaule. Eight miles was a considerable distance, but the night was fine and men of their class were used to walking. The moon had been full

three nights earlier, and had been up for over an hour by the time they set out, so they would have had no difficulty in finding their way. Several women and a few of the other men remained in the house for the rest of the night, carrying drinks to Bridget Cleary as she called for them. It was not unusual for people to stay up very late like this, talking and swapping stories, when they visited neighbors: the Irish word *airneán,* which has no precise equivalent in English, means just this sort of gathering.

The moon was high in the sky at about three in the morning when the Kennedys arrived at the wake. Their sixty-six-year-old uncle, Patrick Boland, joined them there even later. After a few hours, he returned to Ballyvadlea, where his daughter still lay ill, but the four Kennedys stayed all the next day in Killenaule. They walked back together as far as Drangan on Friday evening, then Patrick, James, and William continued home to their mother's house at Ballyvadlea bridge, while Michael returned to Anglin's farm at Kishogue.

Saturday, March 16, was warm and sunny, but as Michael Kennedy walked from Kishogue back into Drangan village, a shock awaited him. Thirty-six hours earlier, he had seen his cousin Bridget Cleary ill in bed in Ballyvadlea, but now he was told that she had disappeared from her home. More disturbing still was the suggestion that she had gone across the fields with two men in the middle of the previous night, wearing only her nightdress. Some people were even saying plainly that the fairies had taken her away.

Despite his protestations about having fainted in his cousin's house, Michael Kennedy must have known something of the treatment she had received on Thursday evening. According to the kind of stories often told at firesides and at wakes, certain illnesses were supposed to be the work of the fairies, who could abduct a healthy young person and leave a sickly changeling instead: herbal medicines and ordeals by fire were both said to be ways of banishing such a changeling.

In Drangan, Michael Kennedy spent a while outside Feelys' grocery shop and spoke to two men named Burke and Donovan, but he could get no further information. He had begun to walk back toward Anglin's farm when he met the two men most likely to know the

truth, Michael Cleary and Jack Dunne. Dunne had been one of the men gathered around Bridget Cleary's bed on Thursday night. He was Mary Kennedy and Patrick Boland's first cousin, and lived near Ballyvadlea, in the townland of Kylenagranagh.

Cleary and Dunne were both agitated when Michael Kennedy met them in the street, a little after midday. In fact Michael Cleary seemed distraught. He was wearing a suit of light gray tweed—jacket, waistcoat, and trousers—and a navy-blue cap, but his clothes had greasy marks and hung loosely, as though they were too big for him, and when Kennedy spoke to him he made no answer. Ignoring the younger man's questions, he kept on walking toward the large Catholic church in the center of the village, while Jack Dunne limped along behind. Dunne, according to his own later account, was gravely concerned about Cleary. Cleary had been talking wildly about strange men, and burning, and had threatened to cut his own throat, so Dunne had persuaded him to come to Drangan to talk to the priest. When Michael Kennedy could get no reply from either of the men, he turned and followed them, and together the three entered the chapel yard.

Drangan is a quiet village in the beautiful and fertile green rolling farmland of County Tipperary's South Riding, about fifteen miles northeast of Clonmel, and seven from the medieval walled town of Fethard. When the census was taken in 1891, it had 34 houses, and a population of 127. The village has one street, which begins where the road from Fethard enters from the southwest. Mullinahone is four miles to the east, but the main road between the two towns passes farther south, through the village of Cloneen. Drangan lies surrounded by hills, on the edge of the Slieve Ardagh range, roughly at the center of a quadrangle of major roads whose northern corners are at Killenaule and Ballingarry. It is a natural meeting place for a scattered rural population, at the head of a small valley which runs down to Mullinahone, but its importance is strictly local.

By far the most imposing building in Drangan is the chapel, as Catholic churches are usually called in rural Ireland. It stands on the north side of the main street, squarely in the center of the village, surrounded by graves dating from the nineteenth and twentieth cen-

turies. High iron railings and gates separate it from the street outside, and a plaque announces its dedication in 1850 to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.

In the years following Catholic Emancipation in 1829, "big chapels" like this one steadily replaced the humble buildings in which Catholics had previously worshipped. The earliest were rectangular and strictly functional, but by 1895, large, costly, and elaborately decorated cruciform buildings in towns and villages proclaimed the social and economic importance of the Catholic Church and its clergy. Drangan chapel was built of cut stone between 1850 and 1853, and Drangan, whose shops and houses flank it and look up to it, is a classic example of what has been called a "chapel-village," where the construction of a big chapel in the countryside in the nineteenth century generated the growth of other services, including the state apparatus of police station and post office.[1]

When Michael Kennedy, Michael Cleary, and Jack Dunne entered the chapel yard at about one o'clock, Michael McGrath, the fifty-nine-year-old parish priest of Cloneen and Drangan, was in the church. The Synod of Thurles in 1850 had laid down rules for the administration and regulation of Catholic practice in Ireland, reinforcing the Church's control of its members' daily lives. The Synod was the first formal meeting of the Irish bishops since 1642, and many of its prescriptions were designed to centralize religious activity in church buildings, and put an end to the tradition of administering the sacraments in private homes. The Synod had decreed that confessions should be heard regularly in all churches, and the faithful encouraged to attend the sacrament weekly; so on March 16, 1895, Fr. McGrath was hearing confessions. His curate, or coadjutor, Cornelius Fleming Ryan, known as "Father Con," was also in the chapel. Not only was this the day before St. Patrick's Day, it was a feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, to whom the building was dedicated.

Jack Dunne went into the building alone. Like Michael Kennedy and his brothers, he was a farm laborer. A short, fat, gray-haired man, who walked with a pronounced limp, he was described in contemporary accounts as old, although records show that he was fifty-five in 1895. The same pattern emerges again and again among the documents of this story, as people in their fifties and sixties, if they belong to the laboring class, are described as "old." Accounts of their physical appearance reflect the hardships and privations of working-class life in nineteenth-century Ireland, especially for those born before the Famine of 1845–49. Jack Dunne could read, but not write. He was missing several teeth; his eyesight was poor, and a fracture had left his right leg shorter than his left.[2]

Michael Kennedy stayed in the yard with the still-agitated Michael Cleary, while Dunne went into the chapel. Cleary, bearded and balding, looked older than his thirty-five years. He was easily the most educated of the three, able to read and write, and possessor of a skilled trade, for he was a cooper, a maker of the casks and barrels in which commodities of all kinds, both wet and dry, were stored and transported. Before coming to live with his wife and her father, Michael Cleary had worked for several years in Clonmel, and he had built up a lucrative trade of his own since moving to Ballyvadlea. As he waited outside the chapel, however, he was weeping and distressed. Michael Kennedy stood awkwardly beside him.

In the chapel, Jack Dunne made his way to where Fr. McGrath was hearing confessions.[3] When Fr. McGrath had listened to Dunne's story, he told him to send Michael Cleary in at once to speak to him.

Michael Cleary, still crying, went into the chapel, but instead of going to speak to Fr. McGrath, he approached the altar. There the younger of the parish's two priests, Fr. Con Ryan, found him kneeling, tearing out his hair and, as he put it later, behaving like a madman. Cleary seemed to be suffering, Fr. Ryan said, from remorse for something he had done, and wanted to go to confession, but the curate did not think he was "in a fit state to receive the sacrament" and asked him instead to come into the vestry. Fr. Ryan began to feel afraid of him then, however, and coaxed him back out into the yard, where Jack Dunne and Michael Kennedy were waiting. Cleary was still crying loudly.

Fr. Ryan moved toward Dunne, gesturing to Michael Cleary to leave him. "Go on," he said, according to Dunne's memory; "'tis this man I want to be talking to." Throughout the evidence given later to

the magistrates at Clonmel Petty Sessions, and again before a judge and jury at the summer assizes, witnesses who could not write told their stories with considerable dramatic use of direct speech.

The priest addressed Jack Dunne as Michael Kennedy took Cleary aside. "What's up with him?"

Dunne told him that Cleary had claimed to have burned his wife the previous night, and that three or four people had buried her. "I've been asking them all morning to take her up and give her a Christian burial."

Fr. Ryan had visited Bridget Cleary in her home only the day before. He was horror-struck: "How could three or four of them go out of their minds simultaneously?" he wondered in his evidence. His impression, he said, had been that Michael Cleary's mind was going astray. "He's in a bad way," he told Dunne. "It would be better to see after him [to do something about him]. We'll see the parish priest."

Fr. McGrath had come out of the chapel into the yard, and the younger priest went to speak to him. Jack Dunne watched the two priests talking, then both he and Michael Kennedy saw Fr. Ryan cross the street and go into the constabulary barracks.

In 1895, as now, Drangan's architecture proclaimed the importance of Catholicism in the life of rural Ireland, its centrality in the village, and the authority of its priests. In 1895, it also demonstrated the delicate balance between the church and a very different, equally centralized authority.

The "Peelers," called after their founder, Sir Robert Peel, lived and worked in the Royal Irish Constabulary barracks in Drangan. RIC men were the eyes, ears, and often the arms, of the British administration, based in Dublin Castle. Their training and discipline were military and, unlike other police forces in the United Kingdom, they were armed. They were engaged in surveillance of known or suspected subversives, but also had considerable civil and local government responsibility, to the extent that by the end of the nineteenth century their duties had become "more akin to house-keeping than to peace-keeping," and they rarely carried firearms. Their position

could still be ambiguous, however: their work did not endear them to the tenant farmers and shopkeepers, who constituted the increasingly nationalist Irish Catholic middle class, even though over 70 percent of the men recruited to the force after 1861 were Catholic. In the 1880s, members of the RIC were boycotted in County Tipperary, especially during the operation of the repressive "coercion" legislation, during and after the Land War of 1879–82.[4]

With a history of nationalist politics and agrarian conflict, County Tipperary's South Riding had the highest police presence of any county in Ireland in the 1890s: 47 per 10,000 of population, compared with the lowest figure of 12 each in the northern counties of Derry and Down, or 34 and 38 in North Tipperary and Meath respectively. According to the census of 1891, 7 district inspectors, 10 head constables, and 454 sergeants, acting sergeants, and constables comprised the force in South Tipperary.

A road guide published in 1893 for the use of members of the constabulary gives a flavor of the world in which the RIC was operating.[5] The agrarian disturbances and "outrages" that had characterized the Land War and its aftermath had largely ceased, although occasional incidents were still reported. Members of the constabulary had leisure to become proficient riders of bicycles: a new sport and mode of transport until recently available only to the gentry. The author acknowledges the help he has received from all ranks of the RIC, including "the junior constable, who, perhaps an enthusiastic cyclist, did his utmost to place his local knowledge at the service of the public." The book includes, among advertisements for corn cures, fishing tackle, insurance, and whiskey, several for bicycles, pneumatic tires, and cycling clothes, as well as for publications devoted to cycling. Intended for "the overcoat pocket, or the hand-bag of the tourist," this work was undertaken "with the view of supplying a great want of the Royal Irish Constabulary, and of kindred public services; and also of providing a 'Road Book' of a reliable and comprehensive character, for the use of cyclists and tourists, of Irish travellers and others of the public who may desire to travel through our beautiful island."

"Each Police Barrack in Ireland," the guidebook begins, "is the

centre of a circle of 'Circumjacent' Stations. Each Police Station has sent in a return, on identical lines, giving similar information as regards itself and circumjacent neighbouring Police Barracks which are printed in uniform style and sequence." Reduced to a system of abbreviations, each entry details the facilities available in the vicinity of a barracks: post, telegraph, and money-order offices, with their opening hours and times of delivery and collection; horse-drawn "post-cars" for hire; nearest railway station; markets, court sittings, and places of interest or beauty, if any. (None is listed for Drangan or Cloneen, although Fethard has several.) Directions to each of the "circumjacent" stations are given as part of every entry, with distances calculated to within a quarter of a mile. Every road mentioned is classified from A ("level broad roads, on which two four-wheeled vehicles can trot abreast") to D ("up and down hill, and narrow"), with a description of its condition, ranging from G[ood] or F[air], to I[ndifferent] or R[ocky and rutty].

Standardization and uniformity were hallmarks of nineteenth-century official thinking, gradually imposed throughout the countryside: police officers, soldiers, railway employees, and postmen wore uniform clothing, which immediately identified them; works of literature were published in identical bindings in uniform editions; administrators at every level of society filled out printed forms and returned them by post to central offices for filing; trains ran according to printed timetables, and standard time was gradually adopted even in the most remote areas. In Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe, these were the symptoms of profound cultural change. As the English language replaced Irish throughout most of the country during the same period, oral tradition gave way to print. A whole world of wakes, herbal cures, stories of kings and heroes, and legends of the fairies—the culture of those who had not learned to read and write—became increasingly marginal. Jack Dunne, Michael Kennedy, his older brother Patrick, and several others in this story, were among those people. They still lived in a symbolic universe very different from the one mapped by the RIC: centralization and uniformity had little relevance to their daily lives.

Even priests wore uniform in late-nineteenth-century Ireland. By decree of the Synod of Thurles, and partly as a strategy for safeguarding clerical celibacy, black clerical garb, including the Roman collar, had become standard for Catholic priests, who were also ordered to avoid undue familiarity with women.[6] The Catholicism the priests propounded in the towns and chapel villages of County Tipperary was modern minded, outward looking, literate, and essentially middle class. It sternly opposed attendance at wakes, and had no time whatever for stories about fairies. Highly centralized, with priests reporting to bishops, and bishops reporting to Rome, the church in Ireland was strongly influenced by Continental practice, especially the Marian devotions favored increasingly by the papacy in this period. The dedication of Drangan Chapel to the Immaculate Conception, four years before Rome defined that doctrine as dogma, was typical. Since 1870, the church hierarchy's authority had been strengthened by the declaration of papal infallibility, but such teaching had little effect on the landless, or on their oral culture. Folk religion was centered on holy wells, local saints, the kin-group, and the home, rather than on church buildings, and its teachings were transmitted through traditional prayers, songs, and stories, not through printed catechisms. Well into the twentieth century, this kind of uncentralized Catholicism, which sat more easily with unofficial traditions about a fairy supernatural than the official version could, was still strong in places where Irish was spoken.[7]

Most Catholic priests in Tipperary in the late nineteenth century were drawn from the increasingly prosperous class of English-speaking tenant farmers. Many held leases on farms of their own, and lived at least as well as the better-off farmers to whom they ministered.[8] Although the five, seven, or more years they spent in seminary training could not be described as a liberal education, it equipped them to take the lead in a society where schooling and literacy were steadily advancing. Many were involved in the politics of the Land League (1880–81), and of the Irish National League that succeeded it: most of the National League's ninety-six branches were centered on Catholic chapels.[9]

The RIC monitored the activities of the Land League and the National League, and reported regularly on the movements of the

many priests known to be politically active. By 1895, the political power of priests was less than it had been, and land agitation had died down, but Michael McGrath, parish priest of Drangan, had a history of political involvement, and his activities were still of interest to the members of the constabulary stationed across the street from his church.[10]

Cornelius Fleming Ryan, the priest who walked into the RIC barracks on Saturday afternoon, March 16, 1895, was a member of a prominent Catholic family from Murroe, in nearby County Limerick. He had been ordained at the Irish College in Rome in 1885, and had worked for some time in London before coming to Drangan. Several of his close relatives held important positions in the Cashel Diocese, but Con Ryan remained a curate until his death in 1916.[11] A tall ringed cross memorial above his grave in Drangan chapel yard records that "His charity and zeal endeared him to the people to whom he ministered for twenty-two years." In 1895, he was thirty-seven and had been in the parish for just two years. The provisions of the Synod of Thurles had generally had the effect of insulating the clergy from the lives of their ordinary parishioners, but Fr. Ryan knew the Clearys. Care of the sick was specifically mentioned as a reason for priests to visit parishioners in their homes, and on the previous Wednesday, and again on Friday morning, Fr. Ryan had visited Bridget Cleary, at her husband's request.[12]

In the barracks, Fr. Ryan met the acting sergeant, Patrick Egan. He told the policeman that "he thought Michael Cleary was off his head, and that it would be well to see him home and keep him under observation." He also mentioned that he suspected foul play, and suggested that Jack Dunne might be able to give the police more information.

Acting Sergeant Egan had probably already heard the same story as Michael Kennedy had about Bridget Cleary's mysterious disappearance from her home; he certainly knew that extraordinary stories were circulating. He accompanied Fr. Ryan out of the barracks, and together they watched as Cleary, Dunne, and Kennedy set off back down the street toward Cloneen.

Michael Kennedy's account of that Saturday is the sketchiest: his bewilderment and agitation show clearly in the short, disjointed sentences in which he later gave his evidence in court. He simply says that he thought Michael Cleary was out of his mind, so that, instead of returning to his employer's farm at Kishogue, he went with him and Jack Dunne back to Ballyvadlea. On the way he several times asked Cleary, "What about Bridget?" but received no reply. Jack Dunne, for his part, reported that Michael Cleary spent the journey trying to persuade him to go with him to Kylenagranagh, to rescue his wife from the fairies. Kylenagranagh was the name of the townland where Dunne himself lived. There was a big house there, whose deserted outbuildings he had helped Cleary to search that morning, but there was also a ringfort. Ringforts—roughly circular embankments—are known to archaeology as the remains of early medieval dwelling places; despite their name, few of them are thought to have had any defensive purpose. Long deserted, they were commonly referred to in their localities as places where the fairies lived. This was often suggested tongue in cheek, however, and Dunne insisted he had had no intention of going to the "fort" of Kylenagranagh. "It was only moonshine," he told the court.

Acting Sergeant Egan and another policeman followed Michael Cleary, Jack Dunne, and Michael Kennedy along the Fethard road as far as the turn for Cloneen. The policemen wore dark-green uniform caps, tunics, and trousers, with boots and belts of highly polished leather. A handcuff case and a baton hung from each of their belts; each man's whistle was ready on its chain.[13] The afternoon was fine: at almost 60 degrees Fahrenheit, it was unusually warm for March. After the turning, the two policemen walked on the opposite side of the road from the men, to keep them in sight as the road twisted and turned. According to details supplied for the RIC road book by Sergeant Patrick Furey of Cloneen, this was a B-class road (level and narrow), in "fair" condition; (the Drangan return, however, gave its condition as "indifferent"). Two miles from Drangan, the men reached Mary Kennedy's small cottage near Ballyvadlea bridge. At that point, Acting Sergeant Egan approached Michael Cleary and asked him about the extraordinary rumors concerning his wife's disappearance.

Cleary did not answer. He appeared, according to Egan, to be "in very deep trouble." Acting Sergeant Egan asked the question several times, and when Cleary still did not reply, followed him up the hill to his home, one of the laborers' cottages recently built by the Guardians of the Cashel Poor Law Union, under the terms of the Labourers (Ireland) Act of 1883.[14]

It was late afternoon, between four and five o'clock, when Egan reached the house. Again he asked Cleary about his wife. "She left about twelve o'clock last night," Michael Cleary replied, adding that he had not seen her going. He had been in bed, he said. He had not slept for the last seven or eight nights because of his wife's illness, but he had gone to bed the previous night before twelve.

As he came out of the house, Acting Sergeant Egan met Cleary's father-in-law, Patrick Boland, distressed and weeping. "My daughter will come back to me," he heard him cry, over and over.

Back at Ballyvadlea bridge, Michael Kennedy had not been long at his mother's house when he saw four more policemen. "There was crowds of people," he said later in court, "labouring boys and police also, searching rivers, dykes and lakes, and everything around, and I assisted them." There are no lakes as such in the vicinity of Ballyvadlea, although after the wet weather of early March there would have been deep pools and flooded fields. A number of small streams flow through the area, and the fields are divided from each other and from the roads by thick, tall hedgerows with drainage ditches running along them. The policemen whom Michael Kennedy saw near his mother's house were from the Cloneen barracks. Word had reached them that the missing woman had been ill-treated in her home on the night of March 14, and a search had been instituted.

The originator of this complaint was almost certainly William Simpson, who lived only a few hundred yards from the Clearys, between their house and Mary Kennedy's. Simpson was their neighbor, and, according to some reports, their friend; he and his wife had been in the Clearys' house on Thursday night when Michael Kennedy had followed his mother there, and had stayed until six o'clock the following morning. But his circumstances and background were very different from those of either the Clearys or Kennedys. An artist from the London illustrated paper the *Daily Graphic,* who sketched him two weeks later as he gave evidence in Clonmel courthouse, showed Simpson with hair carefully parted, wearing a wing-collared shirt and a neatly trimmed mustache; by contrast, Michael Cleary and the Kennedy brothers were shown standing in the dock, unkempt, wearing shirts without collars.

William Simpson described himself in a sworn statement as a "caretaker," employed by Mr. Thomas Lindsay of Passage West, County Cork, but, so soon after the Land War, this word was a euphemism. Thomas Lindsay is listed in Thom's *Directory* for 1895 as owning 2,397 acres in County Tipperary, with a rateable valuation of £1,663. "Caretakers," also known as property defense protectors, but colloquially called "emergencymen," were deeply unpopular; RIC reports, even as late as 1895, mention many attacks made on them and detail the protection afforded them by the police. William Simpson and his family occupied a farm from which Lindsay had evicted the earlier tenants some years previously. They paid a special low rent, for no local person would have taken up the lease on such a farm.

A William Simpson, almost certainly the same man, turns up again in the 1901 census. He has moved to Garrangyle, the next townland to Ballyvadlea, where he describes himself as a "Land Steward," living in a two-room house, the property of Paul M. Lindsay. Paul Lindsay lives alone in a much larger house in the same townland; he is thirty-six and unmarried and is also listed as the owner of several houses in Ballyvadlea. Lindsay describes himself as a farmer, and gives his birthplace as County Cork: evidently he is the heir of Simpson's former employer, Thomas Lindsay. In 1901, William Simpson gave his age as thirty, and his religion as Protestant Episcopalian. His wife, Mary, also a Protestant Episcopalian, was ten years older, and they had two daughters, Margaret, aged eleven, and Mary, nine. This would make him twenty-four at the time of Bridget Cleary's death; it also suggests a certain precocity, for his older daughter must have been conceived when he was eighteen and his wife twenty-eight.

"Emergencyman" was the term used by local farmer Patrick Power in 1997 to describe William Simpson. Evictions by landlords,

especially during and after the Land War of 1879–82, left lasting bitterness in the countryside. Although the poorest tenants had been evicted in large numbers earlier in the nineteenth century, many of those evicted toward its end were substantial farmers—often those who had refused to pay rent increases which seemed to them unreasonable—and the political reaction was correspondingly more intense. The term "boycott" was coined by a priest in County Mayo from a land agent's surname in 1880, when social and commercial ostracism became the standard—and highly effective—weapon of an outraged tenantry. In the same year in County Tipperary, Henry Meagher and his wife were evicted from a large farm at Kilburry, just south of Cloneen, for refusing to pay an increase in their annual rent from £300 to £500. A huge public meeting was held in protest, and several branches of the Land League were founded immediately in South Tipperary. Tension between farmers and agricultural laborers increased when laborers worked for landlords and their agents, but "land-grabbers," and emergencymen in particular, were especially detested, and frequently boycotted.[15] In July 1894, for instance, all fifty-four children were withdrawn from a school near Tullamore, King's County, when an emergencyman's children turned up there. And in June 1895, the RIC reported:

> Thomas Jordan of Brackleagh, Newport Dist[rict, County Mayo], surrendered the evicted farm which he had taken to the landlord last month for the following reasons:—viz—the refusal of the clergy to church his wife after her confinement, or to receive any dues from him while he held the farm.

In 1890, in Clonagoose, Mullinahone, less than eight miles from Ballyvadlea, complaints were made that an emergencyman's younger brother had been ill treated in the school.[16] William Simpson's daughters, aged five and three in 1895, would probably not yet have been sent to school, but local tradition around Ballyvadlea says that shopkeepers in Cloneen would not serve him.

When the search for Bridget Cleary got under way on Saturday, March 16, 1895, the day after her disappearance, it was not quite two weeks since the Liberal government had introduced a new Land Law Bill for Ireland. William Gladstone had retired as prime minister the previous year after the defeat of his second Home Rule Bill, but it finally seemed as though the grievances of Irish tenants were about to be effectively redressed under his successor, Lord Rosebery. John Morley, the chief secretary for Ireland, had moved the Land Bill's first reading in the House of Commons on March 4. The bill was wide ranging and comprehensive in its provisions, and despite strong opposition from the unionists, was expected to succeed. Farmers in Tipperary, as elsewhere in Ireland, were looking forward to its passage.

Meanwhile, spectator sports, rather than political meetings, were what attracted crowds. The Gaelic Athletic Association, founded in 1884, was part of an international phenomenon facilitated by railway travel: sport as entertainment for the masses. Sunday, March 17, St. Patrick's Day, was another fine day. In Mullinahone, a large crowd was expected to watch "a great display of hurling and football," sponsored by the GAA.[17] The Clonmel Emeralds football team would play Drangan at two o'clock, and other matches would follow. A notice in the *Nationalist and Tipperary Advertiser,* published in Clonmel on March 13, exhorted its readers to attend:

> All lovers of the Gaelic sports are expected to assemble in their thousands and show by their presence that they appreciate the fine old manly pastimes of their forefathers . . .
>
> God Save Ireland!

On the same night, also in Mullinahone, the death occurred of Thomas J. Kickham, draper, brother of Charles Joseph Kickham, the political activist and writer, whose 1879 novel, *Knocknagow, or the Homes of Tipperary,* had done much to propagate an ideal of rural Irish life. "No more ardent, or truer Irish nationalist breathed," according to Thomas Kickham's obituary in the *Freeman's Journal* of Thursday, March 21, which also noted that the Reverend Con Ryan had been among the several priests who attended his funeral on Tuesday, March 19.

William Simpson would hardly have been welcome at either the GAA tournament or the funeral, while the Clearys and the Kennedys would not have been expected. Neither Clearys nor Kennedys belonged to the class of tenant farmers who founded and supported the GAA, whose sons became priests and who attended the funerals of "ardently nationalist" shopkeepers. Their origin was among the landless laborers: the working class of rural Ireland, whose poverty until relatively recently had been squalidly abject, and whose contribution to the rhetoric of emergent nationalism was quite minimal. Nevertheless, the crowds that assembled in Mullinahone on Sunday and Tuesday would have begun to hear their names, for as the search continued for the missing woman, sensational rumors were circulating. The story that Bridget Cleary had gone away with the fairies had acquired a vividly memorable form: people were saying now that she would soon reappear, riding a white horse.

Mary Simpson, known as Minnie, lived with her husband William and their two small daughters in the farmhouse a few hundred yards from the Clearys. On Saturday morning, Patrick Boland had told her that his daughter had gone away. Minnie Simpson had visited the house later, probably while Michael Cleary was in Drangan with Jack Dunne, but had found only the old man, who had refused to leave his bed. Early on St. Patrick's Day she heard the missing woman's husband talk explicitly about the fairies: "I heard it said by Michael Cleary on Sunday morning that his wife was up at Kylenagranagh Fort, and that they would go for her on Sunday night, and that she would be on a gray horse, and they would have to cut the cords—the cords that were tying her on the horse, and that she would stay with them if they were able to keep her." Cleary had already mentioned Kylenagranagh Fort to Jack Dunne on the walk back from Drangan on Saturday. (The ringfort no longer exists, but it is clearly marked as an enclosure on the sites and monuments map of the area.)[18]

It was certainly odd for Michael Cleary to have spoken about his missing wife in these terms, but the imagery of a woman taken by the fairies and later seen riding a white or gray horse is quite common in the oral legends of the Irish countryside. To Minnie Simpson, however, a Protestant and an outsider in Ballyvadlea, it may have been unfamiliar as well as exotic. She told the magistrates in Clonmel that, although she had heard of the "fairy fort" of Kylenagranagh, less than a mile from her home, she had never seen it.

Kylenagranagh had another significance for local people, and for the police, as a place where illicit activities were sometimes carried out unobserved. Thirty years earlier, when revolutionary nationalism was at its height after the American Civil War, the RIC had penetrated some of the hill's secrets. Between June and October 1865, an Irish American named James Lynch, a private in the American army, lived at Cloneen. He was observed by the Mullinahone RIC drilling Fenians (members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood) on Kylenagranagh Hill on Sundays and holidays. The RIC kept him under observation until he returned to America in the spring of 1866.

Eighteen years later, the police again patrolled the hill, this time in connection with National League activities. Kilburry, the farm from which Henry Meagher and his wife had been evicted in 1880, was just south of Kylenagranagh. The Meaghers continued to live locally, and were known to consort with Michael Cusack, secretary of the National League in Drangan. Cusack was himself under constant police observation, having recently returned from America where he had learned how to manufacture explosives.[19] The farm at Kilburry had been taken over by a man named Bayley, from County Cork, who was described as "very obnoxious" (i.e., unpopular), and given police protection. Mrs. Meagher had been heard to say that she would personally shoot anybody who took over the farm, and the RIC were watching her closely. They set up a "protection post" with two constables in temporary residence at Kilburry, and in July 1884 Sergeant James Madden of Mullinahone reported:

> Mrs Maher [*sic*] sometimes carries a black handbag, but as she is reputed to be addicted to drink, I am informed that its contents is almost invariably a teacup and a bottle of whiskey. In my opinion she is too cautious to carry any compromising documents or weapons about with her.

The following October, Madden received orders from District Inspector J. B. Lopdell in Carrick on Suir:

> You will see that the two const[ables] at Kilburry P[rotection] P[ost] thoroughly understand what they are to do—also see that they are comfortable, and visit the post occasionally to keep everything regular—the party at Cloneen can patrol in that direction and through Kylenagranagh in particular, and also of course through the rest of the subDistrict.[20]

The fairy legends of oral tradition marked Kylenagranagh as important. The RIC mapped the territory differently, but in both systems Kylenagranagh was a significant reference point: the vernacular map of traditional narrative agreed with the police designation of the hill as a place apart from normal human habitation and legitimate interests. Anyone seen there could be suspected of being up to no good; anyone desiring privacy might seek it out.[21]

It was almost dark by seven o'clock on Sunday evening, St. Patrick's Day, when Michael Cleary went back along the road to the farmhouse where the Simpsons lived. He asked William Simpson for the loan of his revolver. Possession of such a weapon underlines Simpson's vulnerability and unpopularity as an emergencyman, but the Clearys had apparently taken no part in boycotting him. They were frequently in his house and he in theirs.

Simpson did not lend Cleary the gun. Cleary told him he wanted it in order to force some others to go with him to Kylenagranagh. He explained to Simpson that these others had convinced him that his wife had gone with the fairies, but that now they were refusing to come with him to rescue her. Cleary said that his wife had told him she would ride out of the fort on a white horse on the Sunday night, and that if he could cut the ropes that tied her to the saddle and keep her, she would stay with him.

Later that evening, William Simpson said, he saw Michael Cleary going toward Kylenagranagh with a big table knife in his pocket. James and William Kennedy were among a "crowd" he had gathered to go with him to the fort; they too had been told that Bridget

Cleary was to appear there on a white horse. Jack Dunne did not go with them. On Sunday, Monday, and again on Tuesday night, the young men went to Kylenagranagh Fort, but saw nothing, and on Wednesday they refused to go again. By Wednesday, however, James Kennedy and Michael Cleary were among nine people for whom arrest warrants had been issued. Alfred Joseph Wansbrough, the RIC District Inspector based in Carrick-on-Suir, had heard of Bridget Cleary's disappearance. He had ordered a full-scale search by police from Drangan, Cloneen, and Mullinahone, and had himself already visited the house in Ballyvadlea and taken notes.

On Monday, March 18, William Simpson swore "an information" before W. Walker Tennant, a justice of the peace, of Ballinard Castle near Cloneen, to the effect that he had seen Bridget Cleary ill-treated in her home on the previous Thursday night, and naming the people responsible. On Tuesday, a woman called Johanna Burke swore "an information" before the same magistrate, and the next day at Fethard, DI Wansbrough himself swore before Tennant and the resident magistrate from Clonmel, Colonel Richard Evanson, as follows:

> I have just and reasonable grounds for believing that the ill-treatment which Bridget Cleary was subjected to was in administering to her herbs prepared for her by Denis Ganey, of Kyleatlea, and that it was by his instruction she was placed over a fire, and wounded, and otherwise ill-treated. I charge Denis Ganey with causing Bridget Cleary to be ill-treated, and great actual bodily harm done to her.

Denis Ganey, known locally as a "herb-doctor" or "quack-doctor," was the ninth person arrested on March 21. The others were Michael Cleary; Patrick Boland; his sister Mary Kennedy; their cousin John (Jack) Dunne; Mary Kennedy's sons Patrick, Michael, and James; and sixteen-year-old William Ahearne, who had held the candle in Bridget Cleary's bedroom on March 14. The youngest Kennedy brother, twenty-one-year-old William, was arrested the next day.

Johanna Burke (sometimes spelled Bourke), who swore an infor-

mation on March 19, was Mary Kennedy's daughter and Bridget Cleary's first cousin. She was to become one of the most important figures in the story as it unfolded. She had visited the sick woman almost daily during her illness, and her sworn account of what had happened on the night of March 15 was transcribed to be read in court:

> I was at the house on the night of the 15th inst.; Bridget Cleary was raving; after some time she got up, dressed, and sat at the fire; she afterwards went to bed; I went out for some sticks; when I returned I met her at the doorway going out against me with her nightdress. I endeavoured to hold her and failed; since that time I have not seen her; her husband followed her for some time, and returned; he did not see her; she is missing ever since.

As it happened, Johanna Burke was lying: she knew that her cousin was dead.

On the same day as Burke swore her information, the midweek editions of Clonmel's two newspapers carried reports of Bridget Cleary's disappearance. In the unionist paper, the *Clonmel Chronicle,* read by the landlord class and its supporters, the Wednesday evening report was headed "Gone with the Fairies":

> A good deal of excitement has been caused in the district about Drangan and Cloneen by the "mysterious disappearance" of a labourer's wife, who lived with her husband, a farm labourer, in that part of the country. The poor woman had been ill for some time, and a few days ago she told her husband that if he did not do something for her by a certain time "she would have to be going." An old woman who had been nursing the sick woman was sitting up with her as usual one night last week, and, as she puts it, the invalid was "drawn" away. Search has been made everywhere and the police have been communicated with, but up to this afternoon no trace of the missing woman has been discovered. The country people entertain the opinion that she has "gone with the fairies!"

Evidently two competing narratives were at work in the countryside around Ballyvadlea, as some people stuck to their story of fairy abduction while the RIC conducted its methodical search. The *Chronicle's* account is short on detail, and inaccurate. Michael Cleary was a cooper, not a farm laborer, while Johanna Burke, who had given evidence about nursing Bridget Cleary before her disappearance, was no older than thirty-four.

The *Nationalist* for the same day is notably more accurate in its description of people and places, but its first account of Bridget Cleary's disappearance reminds us that in 1895 the Irish Revival was at its height, and that the reading public knew something of fairies. New books on fairies, and new editions of old ones, like Robert Kirk's *The Secret Common-Wealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies,* appeared throughout the 1890s to satisfy the appetite of a reading public which was reacting against industrialization and urbanization. The young poet William Butler Yeats had published his *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* in 1888, and three more books on similar themes since then. Lady Augusta Gregory, widowed and living at Coole Park in County Galway, had read his *Celtic Twilight,* stories from Sligo folklore, in 1893. They had made her "jealous for Galway" and eager to match them with her own collecting.[22] The two had met briefly in 1894, although their famous collaboration would not begin until 1896. Yeats had also begun to publish the poems that would appear in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), blending folk beliefs with the aristocratic magic of medieval Irish texts recently edited by scholars and helping to make Irish fairies fashionable among the reading public.

The language used by the *Nationalist's* correspondent in his opening phrases is borrowed from romantic nationalism, especially the use of "Erin" as the name of the country.

> MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF A YOUNG WOMAN
> The Land of the Banshee and the Fairy
>
> What would read as a kin to the fairy romances of ancient times in Erin, is now the topic of all lips in the neighbourhood of Drangan and Cloneen. It appears that a young woman named

Cleary, wife of a cooper, living with her father and husband in a labourer's cottage in the townland of Ballyvadlea, took ill a few days ago, was attended by priest and doctor, and believed to have been suffering from some form of nervous malady, she suddenly disappeared on last Friday night, and has not since been heard of. Her friends who were present assert that she had been taken away on a white horse before their eyes, and that she told them when leaving, that on Sunday night they would meet her at a fort on Kylenagranagh Hill, where they could, if they had the courage, rescue her. Accordingly, they assembled at the appointed time and place to fight the fairies, but, needless to say, no white horse appeared. It has transpired that her friends discarded the doctor's medicine, and treated her to some fairy quackery. However the woman is missing, and the rational belief is that in the law courts the mystery shall be elucidated. I need not say that the authorities have their own notions of the matter, but I shall reserve further comments until events more clearly develop themselves.

In the same edition, another correspondent, possibly a local person in Fethard or Mullinahone, wrote as follows:

A comparatively young couple, married and without a family, lived on a farm belonging to Mr Michael Quirke, T. C., Clonmel, in the Cloneen district, the wife being about 30 years of age.[23] She complained of illness some ten days ago, and got gradually worse, and ultimately the priest was sent for. Seeing the state the woman was in he anointed her, and prepared her for death. Last Thursday she called her husband, and solemnly informed him she was "going," and detailed certain events which she told him would take place the following night, but regarding which I do not think it necessary to tax the credulity of your readers. One event did take place, which has produced all the sensation—the woman did disappear at the hour and time specified, although her husband and father were within a few yards of where she had been lying ill, and, as far as I can ascertain, up to the present, notwithstanding the exertions of the police and numerous search parties, no account of her, alive or dead, has been found. Of course at the evening firesides wild stories of ghosts, fairies, and "good people" are, under the circumstances, devoured with an avidity that only a mysterious occurrence of this kind can produce. Possibly the appearance of the woman in the flesh, by-and-bye, may rob the case of all the romance. For this reason I purposely avoid giving names at present.

This writer, undoubtedly a Catholic, is familiar with fireside stories about "the good people," as the fairies of Irish oral tradition are generally called, but certainly gives them no credence.

On Thursday, March 21, the day after these newspaper reports appeared, nine people were brought under arrest to the Town Hall in Clonmel. Eight of them were charged with "assaulting and ill-treating Bridget Cleary" on March 14, 1895, "causing her actual bodily harm"; the ninth, Denis Ganey, the herb doctor, was charged with having caused the offense to be committed.

According to the *Cork Examiner,* Denis Ganey was a middle-aged man, somewhat stout, with a red-yellow beard and a slight limp. The *Daily Graphic* artist, a little over a week later, drew him as a tall man with high cheekbones, longish hair, and a full beard, standing straight and dignified, a little apart from the other defendants. Described as a farmer, and as able to read and write, he lived in a "thatched cabin" in Kyleatlea. This is a townland on the northern slope of Slievenamon, four miles from Ballyvadlea in the opposite direction from Fethard. As its name—in Irish *Coill an tSléibhe,* the wood on the mountain—suggests, the land around Kyleatlea is poorer than that around Drangan and Ballyvadlea. Ganey was certainly not wealthy, but the crucial difference between his position and that of most of the other accused was that he was a farmer, not a landless laborer. Evidently his physical condition was superior to theirs too, for although at fifty-eight he was three years older than Jack Dunne, journalists described him as middle-aged, not old.

Denis Ganey, or Gahan, who may never have met Bridget Cleary, would have to spend a further two weeks in Clonmel Prison, accused of being an accessory to her ill-treatment. Newspapers would refer to

him as a "medicine-man" and a "witch-doctor," and spin fantastic but tenacious theories about his part in Bridget Cleary's story. He was angry and indignant when DI Wansbrough's sworn information about him was read out. "Did he see me?" he demanded. "Does he say that I assisted in doing away with the woman?" Ganey's was perhaps the reputation worst injured, with least cause, by Bridget Cleary's death. The magistrates, when the case came before them, found no case against him, and promptly discharged him on April 5.

In Clonmel Town Hall, Patrick Boland still insisted that his daughter was alive and well: "I have three more persons," he said, "and they can say that she was strong the night she went away. She got up and dressed." But there was still no sign of Bridget Cleary. The male prisoners were remanded to Clonmel Prison, while the missing woman's aunt, Mary Kennedy, was sent by train to the nearest women's prison in Limerick, forty-nine miles away.

Bridget Cleary's body was found the next day, March 22. Guided by William Simpson, the RIC searched an area of swampy land in the townland of Tullowcossaun. In the corner of a field about a quarter of a mile from the Clearys' house, Sergeant Patrick Rogers of Mullinahone noticed broken bushes and freshly disturbed earth. Constables Somers and O'Callaghan helped him to dig, and soon, in a hole about eighteen inches deep, wrapped in a sheet, they uncovered a woman's body. It was badly burned, and lay in a crouched position, the knees drawn up and the arms folded across the breast. The head was covered in a sack, and was undamaged; there was a gold earring in the left ear. The only clothing, apart from some scraps of rag which were stuck to the body, was a pair of black stockings.

2

Fairies and Fairy Doctors

WHAT DID PEOPLE MEAN when they said that Bridget Cleary had left her home and gone to the fairy fort of Kylenagranagh? What were the herbs given to her on the night of Thursday, March 14? Why did the men carry her back and forth from her bed to the kitchen hearth that night, and why did she die of burns twenty-four hours later? The rest of this book is an attempt to answer these questions and others by untangling the various strands of narrative that survive about the death of Bridget Cleary. To understand the narratives' terms of reference, it will be useful to know something of Irish fairy legend, for in Ireland in 1895, just out of sight of the solid new Catholic chapels with their paved yards and stout iron railings and underneath the orderly grid of print which Victorian officials and administrators were conscientiously laying over every corner of the island, another world continued to exist whose ways of thinking were based on oral tradition, not on the printed word.

Oral cultures were found all over the world until well into the twentieth century, but in the heyday of European colonialism they were overwhelmingly interpreted, in the light of Darwinian ideas, as primitive and childish—charming, perhaps, but certainly incapable of any discriminating engagement with reality. Literacy had become the essential key to participation in the modern world. By the end of the twentieth century, however, a high standard of literacy has become less essential for economic survival. New technologies rely more and more on the manipulation of icons and images; voice transmission becomes steadily easier and cheaper, and perhaps for

these reasons, the linear and hierarchical ways of thinking that flourished in the nineteenth century have become less dominant: it is easier than it used to be to imagine a system of thought that does not rely on writing. Meanwhile, since the nineteenth century, scholars on all continents have been working with the intellectual and aesthetic content of oral traditions.

In the Arts Building of the National University of Ireland's campus at Belfield, on Dublin's southside, is the archive of the Department of Irish Folklore. Here, at the end of a corridor hung with portraits of storytellers and collectors, is a large room whose walls are lined with shelves. Most of the floor is occupied by metal card-index cabinets, and the shelves are filled with thick, bound volumes, almost all handwritten, though parts of some are typed. A number is stamped on the leather spine of each. These are the manuscripts of the Irish Folklore Collection, assembled and catalogued since 1927 by a dedicated team of professional and part-time collectors and scholars.

In 1927, the Irish Free State was five years old. Its civil service and administrative infrastructure had been inherited from the British, but its guiding spirit was strongly influenced by ideas of Ireland's cultural uniqueness. Douglas Hyde, son of a Protestant clergyman from County Roscommon, would be elected first president of Ireland under the new constitution ten years later. On the foundation of the Irish Free State he was Professor of Modern Irish at the National University, a post he had held since the university's foundation in 1908. His writings and lectures had been immensely influential in the cultural revival. *Beside the Fire* (1890) was a collection of folktales from Hyde's native County Roscommon; in 1892, Hyde's lecture to the National Literary Society, "On the Necessity for Deanglicizing Ireland," spelled out the implications of colonization for Irish society;[1] in 1893, his *Love-Songs of Connacht/Abhráin Ghrádh Chúige Connacht,* a collection of oral poetry in Irish with English translations, attracted enthusiastic praise from the young William Butler Yeats; in the same year, Hyde cofounded, and became president of, Connradh na Gaedh-ilge, the Gaelic League. Its goal was to revive Irish as a spoken and written language, and it soon had branches all over Ireland.

One of Hyde's students, and later his assistant at the university, was a young man born in County Antrim in 1899, James Hamilton Delargy. In 1923, Hyde sent him to learn Irish from native speakers in County Kerry. In Cill Rialaigh, near Ballinskelligs at the southernmost tip of the Iveragh peninsula, Irish-language activist Fionán Mac Coluim directed Delargy to the gifted storyteller, Seán Ó Conaill (1853–1931), who could neither read nor write, who knew no English, and who had never traveled farther from his home than Killorglin, thirty-five miles away. In the years that followed, Ó Conaill introduced Delargy to an intellectual life he had thought lost since the Middle Ages, and incidentally provided him with a design for his life's work.[2]

Delargy soon began to use the Irish version of his name, Séamus Ó Duilearga. In 1926, with Mac Coluim and others, he founded the Irish Folklore Society, and a year later became editor of its journal, *Béaloideas,* which was to be a vehicle for the publication of Irish folklore in both Irish and English; in 1935, three years after Éamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil government came to power, he became director of the new, state-funded Irish Folklore Commission. The commission had an annual grant of £3,200, and was given three rooms on the top corridor of the university building on Earlsfort Terrace (now the National Concert Hall), as office and archive space (it later moved to 82 St. Stephen's Green, and then to Belfield). A full-time staff was appointed, including six specially trained collectors.[3]

Delargy's focusing on oral storytelling was timely. The tradition was dying out, with fewer, smaller, and less discerning audiences available on whom a talented storyteller might test his or her art. Meanwhile, the new Irish state, led by de Valera, born in New York in 1882 but brought up in County Limerick, was forging a distinctive national cultural identity whose ethos would be strongly rural.[4] In other parts of Europe too, newly emergent nation-states were looking to oral tradition for a sense of their past, which would be independent of the narratives imposed by their colonizers. Delargy went to the universities of Lund and Uppsala in Sweden to learn more about the collecting and classification of oral traditions. In Ireland, the nineteenth-century romantic nationalism that had caused

the newly founded GAA to present its games as "the fine old manly pastimes" of its members' forefathers, and to find the roots of these pastimes in the pages of medieval sagas, also inspired the scholars who edited the sagas, and the founders of the Abbey Theatre who drew on them. Elsewhere, Finland's national epic, the *Kalevala,* published in 1835, was just one example of the sort of work constructed of oral materials in response to the demands of similar movements.[5]

The Scandinavian countries and Finland were at the forefront in the new discipline of folklore. To be sure, the name had been coined as early as 1848 in England, by William Thoms, but throughout the nineteenth century it was essentially an antiquarian, and an amateur, pursuit. Yeats and Lady Gregory, visiting cottages in the west of Ireland and writing down the stories told to them in English by deferential country people, were typical of the gentlefolk who interested themselves in such matters. Many of them joined the Folk-Lore Society, founded in London in 1878, and published their findings in the *Folk-Lore Journal.* The material the members of this and similar societies gathered and published was voluminous, and continues to be valuable, but it followed no scientific pattern, and they established no central archive or cataloging system.[6]

The system adopted by the Irish Folklore Commission for organizing and classifying the material recorded by its collectors is still used by its successor, the Department of Irish Folklore, in Belfield. Based on the Swedish model, and set out in Seán Ó Súilleabháin's *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* (1942), it divides the material into fourteen large categories. The first two, Settlement and Dwelling, and Livelihood and Household Support, reflect the great wealth of craft and domestic traditions in Scandinavia. In the Irish archive, however, by far the greatest concentrations of material are in the sections on Mythological Tradition and Popular Oral Literature. The Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century had had a devastating effect on ordinary people's material culture, but storytelling and patterns of behavior had survived well into the twentieth century, along with music and song.

Under Popular Oral Literature, in the *Handbook,* as in the IFC archive, we find the international folktales and hero tales that are the

pride of Irish oral tradition: long, episodic narratives, most of them in Irish, telling of bravery and magic in a world long ago. Here too are legends—stories purporting or seeming to be true, although their claims may be preposterous and their patterning may show the method of their making—along with songs and other oral poetry.

Under Mythological Tradition, Ó Súilleabháin's *Handbook* describes the features of fairy belief in Ireland by means of fifteen closely printed pages of sample questions designed to be put to informants by collectors. Thick bundles of index cards in the IFC archive's catalogue attest to the responses gathered over seventy years. Similar traditions are found in Scotland and, with variations, across much of Europe. From Ireland and Scotland they have been extensively transplanted to the Atlantic provinces of Canada, where immigrants found a landscape not unlike the one they had left, while people of Irish or Scottish ancestry all over the world are familiar with their broad outlines.[7]

Fairies are normally invisible, but they are there. They live in the air, under the earth, and in water, and they may be just a little smaller than humans, or so tiny that a grazing cow blows hundreds of them away with every breath. They had their origin when the rebellious angel Lucifer and his followers were expelled from Heaven, and God the Son warned God the Father that Heaven would soon be empty. Like figures in a film that is suddenly stopped, the expelled angels falling toward Hell halted where they were: some in mid-air, others in the earth, and some in the ocean, and there they remain.[8] They are jealous of Christians, and often do them harm, but are not totally malevolent since they still hope to get back to Heaven one day. To do so, however, they must have at least enough blood in their veins to write their names, and so far they have not even that much.

Fairies are not human, but they resemble humans and live lives parallel to theirs, with some significant differences: they keep cows, and sell them at fairs; they enjoy whiskey and music; they like gold, milk, and tobacco, but hate iron, fire, salt, and the Christian religion, and any combination of these mainstays of Irish rural culture serves to guard against them. Sometimes it is said that there are no women among the fairies. In any case, they steal children and young women,

and occasionally young men, and leave withered, cantankerous changelings in their place. They can bring disease on crops, animals, and humans, but by and large, if treated with neighborly consideration, they mind their own business and even reward favors.

Questions about fairies, if asked in the Ireland of today, may be greeted with amusement or derision, but if not accompanied by too much earnestness, they will still often elicit answers. It is rare, and perhaps always has been, to meet people who unequivocally believe that a race of supernatural beings lives invisibly alongside humans and shares their landscape. It is much less rare, however, for stories to be told about such beings, or for features of the environment, both physical and social, to be explained by reference to them. Quite hard-headed people may sometimes be seen to observe precautions that seem tacitly to acknowledge the existence, however marginally, of fairies.

Fairies belong to the margins, and so can serve as reference points and metaphors for all that is marginal in human life. Their mostly underground existence allows them to stand for the unconscious, for the secret, or the unspeakable, and their constant eavesdropping explains the need sometimes to speak in riddles, or to avoid discussion of certain topics. Unconstrained by work and poverty, or by the demands of landlords, police, or clergy, the fairies of Irish legend inhabit a world that is sensuously colorful, musical, and carefree, and as writers from Yeats to Irish-language poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill have observed, legends about them richly reflect the imaginative, emotional, and erotic dimensions of human life.

Legends of the fairies, told by skilled storytellers like James Delargy's friend Seán Ó Conaill, are complex works of art, often taking up several pages of manuscript or print when written down. Not everybody who tells them is such an artist, however, and most fairy legends are short. As Danish folklorist Bengt Holbek remarks: "What matters is not their artistic impact, but their function as arguments about reality . . . Legends *debate* the relation between our daily reality and some kind of possibly real 'otherworld.'"[9] One feature that makes fairy legends so tenacious in a changing cultural environment is the concision and vivid memorability of their central themes. Another is their connection to real, named people and to real places in a known landscape. Yet another reason why they survive is that their narratives interact so intimately with the practicalities and the emotional realities of daily life.

Viewed as a system of interlocking units of narrative, practice, and belief, fairy legend can be compared to a database: a premodern culture's way of storing and retrieving information and knowledge of every kind, from hygiene and child care to history and geography. Highly charged and memorable images like that of a woman emerging on a white horse from a fairy dwelling are the retrieval codes for a whole complex of stored information about land and landscape, community relations, gender roles, medicine, and work in all its aspects: tools, materials, and techniques. Stories gain verisimilitude and storytellers keep their listeners' attention by the density of circumstance they depict, including social relations and the technical details of work. Most stories, however, are constructed around the unexpected and therefore memorable happenings in people's lives. Encounters with or interference by the fairies in these stories reminds listeners (and readers) of everything in life that is outside human control. It is not surprising, then, that death and illness are among the preoccupations of fairy legends.

Almost any death, other than a gentle and gradual departure in old age, is open to interpretation as the work of the fairies. A person who spends some time in their company may waste away and die after returning home. Or they may abduct happy, healthy humans, whether children or able-bodied adults, and replace them with withered, sickly, evil-tempered or taciturn changelings, which either live for a while, or appear already dead. The changeling is usually an elderly member of the fairies' own community, and may sometimes even be substituted for an abducted farm animal. The events spoken of may be tragic, but they are presented in entertaining, often grimly humorous, stories. In this way, cautions against eating carrion, *feoil thubaiste* ("calamity meat"), are backed up by stories of the farmer who confronts the fairies when he discovers that they are responsible for the loss of his apparently dead cow. "We'll return your cow," they retort, "when you give back our old uncle whom you've salted and eaten!"

Any ill treatment meted out to a changeling may be visited in revenge on the abducted human, so a suspected changeling is supposed to be treated with cautious respect. Changelings' behavior is often intolerable, however, since they have the form of sickly babies who never stop crying, or adults who take to their beds, refuse to speak when spoken to, or otherwise conduct themselves in antisocial ways. A last resort is to threaten a changeling with fire. This is said to banish it for good and so force the return of the abducted human. Legend after legend recounts how what has seemed to be a baby in a cradle smartly takes to its heels and leaves the house when some adult, usually a visitor, builds up the fire and announces that the baby is to be placed on top.

The overwhelming message of the fairy legends is that the unexpected may be guarded against by careful observance of society's rules. These stories are important components of child-rearing practice, establishing the boundaries of normal, acceptable behavior, and spelling out the ways in which an individual who breaches them may forfeit his or her position. They recognize, however, that rules may be in conflict with each other, or with other imperatives in certain circumstances, and that accidents may happen. When accidents do happen, or when inexperience or inattention has led to a breaking of the rules, remedies are available.

Some remedies, prescribed by knowledgeable people known as "fairy men," "fairy women," or "fairy doctors," simply show how to avoid compounding the problem. They may use rest, measured and calibrated by ritual practice. Others involve herbal medicine, and an ethnobotany strikingly different in its organization from the Linnaean system, which superseded it in the nineteenth century. The tall purple foxglove, *Digitalis purpurea,* is perhaps the plant most heavily documented in Irish oral culture. It is a source of glycosides, which are at once a powerful cardiac medicine and a dangerous poison; called *lus mór* ("big plant") or *méaracán sí* ("fairy thimble"), it is credited with all manner of fairy associations. St. John's Wort, *Hypericum perforatum,* which has been widely adopted as a natural antidepressant in the developed world at the end of the twentieth century, is called, among other names in Irish, *luibh Eoin Bhaiste,* John the Baptist's

herb. Geoffrey Grigson calls this one of the most famous of European white-magic plants. It is known in several languages as a devil chaser—*chasse-diable* in French—and traditionally is picked before sunrise on the morning of June 23, St. John's Eve.[10] It features in Irish oral tradition as a remedy against interference by the fairies—specifically when experienced as depression.[11] In 1998, a Channel 4 television series, *Sacred Weeds,* investigated the psychoactive properties of plants revered in certain cultures. One of them, the hallucinogenic and poisonous *Hyoscyamus niger,* called henbane in English because of the danger it poses to free-range poultry, has long been associated with witches in European tradition. Called in Irish *gafann,* it was used in carefully measured doses as a sedative and painkiller.[12]

Fairy-belief legend, with its constant theme of ambiguity and danger, could teach both the hazards and the benefits of important plants, drawing attention to them and making them recognizable. But not all remedies prescribed in oral culture are similarly "scientific": many depend on sympathetic magic, or association of ideas. Taken individually, the stories, and the remedies, can seem like nonsense. Taken as parts of a system, as a kind of taxonomy, or as components of a model of the symbolic universe, however, they represent an elegant economy of reasoning, imagery and memory.

Nineteenth-century antiquaries in Ireland noted the prevalence of "fairy doctors," to whom country people resorted for the relief of illness and injury in both humans and animals. Best known among them was perhaps Biddy Early of Feakle, "the Wise Woman of Clare," about whom Lady Gregory collected many stories after her death.[13] Biddy Early never visited her patients, so did not see them if they could not come to her, but she prescribed by means of a magic bottle and seemed to know details about them without being told. Many illnesses, as we have seen, were interpreted as fairy abduction. Mental retardation, failure to thrive, or the onset of infantile paralysis (polio) could appear as fairy work, and often Biddy Early's advice to those who sought her help was that nothing could be done.

In adults, the sudden paralysis caused by cerebral hemorrhage is still called "stroke" in English, recalling the Irish *poc sí,* "fairy stroke." The symptoms of tuberculosis corresponded to what was understood

about fairy abduction, but so did lesser maladies, both mental and physical. Postnatal depression was called *an fiabhras aerach,* "airy [i.e., fairy] fever," though the term may have referred to puerperal fever, one symptom of which could be delirium. Descriptions of refusal of fairy food by human girls and women carry strong overtones of *anorexia nervosa.*[14] Sepsis, caused by splinters and other foreign bodies, was commonly known as "blast," and attributed to the fairies; it was noted that it happened more often to those who would not stop working long enough to attend to injuries. All this medical interpretation had a social dimension, with the fairies invoked as demanding behaviors whose short-term benefits might not be apparent. Unless Biddy Early's instructions were followed scrupulously, her prescriptions would not work. Like other fairy doctors, she was supposed to have gained her ability to cure through privileged acquaintance with the fairy world. Her moral authority was considerable—and it was diametrically opposed to that of the Catholic clergy, whom she is remembered as repeatedly outsmarting with dry wit and dignity.[15]

The first full and accurate census of population was taken in Ireland in 1841 and was repeated every ten years until 1911.[16] After the Famine, Sir William Wilde, the Dublin physician and later Oscar Wilde's father, was commissioned to interpret medical statistics gathered by the 1851 census. He was a noted antiquary and folklorist, who often bargained with his country patients for stories, instead of fowl or eggs, as payment for his services. After his death, his widow, "Speranza," published two volumes of the material he had collected.[17] Wilde's note on marasmus—emaciation and wasting in children—places scientific and vernacular taxonomies of illness side by side. It reflects his understanding of Irish fairy narratives in both languages and of how they were sometimes tragically implemented:

> No. 53, Marasmus
>
> *Tabes mesenterica, Anaemia, Atrophia, Tuberculosis mesenterica:* Synonymes [*sic*]:
>
> Atrophy, Emaciation, Wasting away, Decline and Decay (infantile), general Cachectic and Tubercular diseases of early life, Infantile Consumption, Fairy Stricken, "Backgone," Struck, a Blast; in Irish *Cnai* or *Cnaoidh,* wasting, with or without disease of the chest; *Cuirrethe* or *Millte,* fairy-stricken.[18]
>
> In the Census Report for 1841 the name Marasmus was accepted as a generic term, under which to class all those various affections of infancy and early youth returned on the different Forms as "consumption (infantile), wasting, decay, decline, emaciation, general debility and loss of strength." This arrangement became necessary from the multitude of deaths returned as consumption and decline under 1 year of age and from 1 to 10. There can be little doubt that the great majority of cases of infantile death, returned under the above popular headings were caused by scrofulous tubercular diseases, chiefly of the abdominal cavity, many of *tabes mesenterica* and very many of *chronic peritonitis,* a disease of frequent and fatal occurrence to young children in this country. It is this affection which has given rise to the popular ideas respecting the "changeling" and in this country to the many superstitious notions entertained by the peasantry respecting their supposed "fairy stricken" children; so that year by year, up to the present day, we read accounts of deaths produced by cruel endeavours to cure children and young persons of such maladies, generally attempted by quacks and those termed "fairy men" and "fairy women."[19]

In a book on Irish folklore which Wilde published about the time he was analyzing the census returns, he mentioned a recent case: "About a year ago a man in the county of Kerry roasted his child to death, under the impression that it was a fairy. He was not brought to trial, as the Crown prosecutor mercifully looked upon him as insane."[20]

In 1828, Thomas Crofton Croker had noted a similar story, reported from the Tralee assizes in July 1826 by the *Morning Post:*

> Ann Roche, an old woman of very advanced age, was indicted for the murder of Michael Leahy, a young child, by drowning him in the Flesk. This case . . . turned out to be a homicide committed under the delusion of the grossest superstition. The child, though four years old, could neither stand, walk, [n]or speak—*it was thought to be fairy struck . . .*

> Upon cross-examination the witness said it was not done with intent to kill the child, but to cure it—*to put the fairy out of it.*
>
> *Verdict—not guilty.*[21]

Several other accounts can be found in nineteenth-century newspapers and police reports of suspected child-changelings in Ireland being placed on red-hot shovels, drowned, or otherwise mistreated or killed. Only eleven years before Bridget Cleary's death, the *Daily Telegraph* of May 19, 1884, reported a case less than fifteen miles away from Ballyvadlea:

> SUPERSTITION IN IRELAND
>
> Ellen Cushion and Anastatia Rourke were arrested at Clonmel on Saturday charged with cruelly illtreating a child three years old, named Philip Dillon. The prisoners were taken before the mayor, when evidence was given showing that the neighbours fancied that the boy, who had not the use of his limbs, was a changeling left by the fairies in exchange for their original child. While the mother was absent the prisoners entered her house and placed the lad naked on a hot shovel under the impression that this would break the charm. The poor little thing was severely burned, and is in a precarious condition.[22]

Such incidents aroused horror and revulsion, but their perpetrators were usually treated leniently by the courts, which recognized the component of "superstition" in their actions. Here, as elsewhere, "superstition" meant a system of reasoning which was alien to those in power. Most of the accused were elderly women, and the children killed or injured were usually severely disabled. In County Kerry, on January 30, 1888, Joanna Doyle, aged forty-five and described as "a wild fierce Kerry peasant, scarcely able to speak English intelligibly," was admitted to Killarney Asylum, where a canvas camisole was used to restrain her from tearing her clothing. She had murdered her "imbecile" or "epileptic idiot" son, Patsy, with a hatchet, assisted by her husband and three older children. Her next son, Denis, aged twelve,

was also described as an "imbecile." She insisted that Patsy, aged about thirteen, "was not my son, he was a devil, a bad fairy." Doyle was later transferred to Dundrum Mental Hospital in Dublin. Oscar T. Woods, Medical Superintendent at Killarney, reported that her eighteen-year-old daughter Mary had said of her dead brother, "I was not shocked when I heard my mother kill him, as I had heard people say he was a fairy, and I believed them."[23]

Fairy-belief legend provided a way of understanding congenital and other disabilities, or at least an imaginative framework that could accommodate them. Before the coming of state- or religious-sponsored social services, when a large part of the population lived at subsistence level, it also afforded a way for people driven to desperate remedies to rationalize their actions and live with the consequences.[24] But in most cases, accounts of fairies and of people who consorted with them are simply stories: fictions designed to entertain, or to instruct. They have a beginning, middle, and end, and, like many of the art forms that enrich people's lives, are structured in such a way as to leave their audiences pondering the messages they carry. Hundreds have been published; thousands more, from storytellers all over Ireland, are in the manuscripts of the Irish Folklore Collection. And these are only the stories that have been written down.

Michael Leahy, Patsy Doyle, and Bridget Cleary died; Philip Dillon was severely burned. Reports by officials and journalists have preserved their names in print along with the dates of their deaths or injuries. Their histories retain a rawness not found in the more ephemeral and timeless legends about "a young married woman in this parish," or "an orphan child." This is one of the most pointed differences between oral and written culture, or, in Walter Benjamin's terms, between story and information. His celebrated essay "The Storyteller" points to the differences between artfully constructed stories and mere information:

> The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and

> concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.[25]

Bridget Cleary was labeled a fairy changeling, and died of burns shortly afterward. The only possible reaction to an account of these events is revulsion and dismay, but when stories were told at firesides or on hillsides about women abducted by the fairies and replaced with changelings, the audience's response might sometimes be more nuanced.

Stories are told of women swept away by the fairies as they gave birth, midwives called to attend such women inside fairy hills, and women restored to their husbands after fairy abductions have been foiled. In one such, told in Irish in County Donegal and published with English translation, a shoemaker rides to town to fetch a midwife, leaving his wife in labor. He buys some nails (made of iron) for his work and returns with the midwife riding pillion:

> It was a cloudy moonlit night and as they were going through a place called Ált an Tairbh he heard a sound as if a flock of birds was coming towards them in the air. It came directly in their way and as it was passing overhead he threw the paperful of nails up in the air. He was full of anger and spoke out from his heart:
>
> "May the devil take you with him!"
>
> No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he heard the sound of something falling at the horse's feet. He turned around and dismounted, and when he looked at the thing that had fallen, what did he find but a woman! He looked sharply at her and what did he find her to be but his own wife whom he had left lying at home. He took her up and put her on the horse with the midwife, who held her while he led the horse home by its head.
>
> Well. As they were approaching the house there was a hullabaloo there that they were too late, that his wife had died since he left, and there was great crying and clamour. The man led the two women he had with him into the stable with the horse and asked them to stay until he returned. He himself went into the house as if nothing had happened, and went over to the bed where the supposed corpse was lying. Everyone was astonished that he was not crying nor [*sic*] the least distraught as men usually are when their wives die. He turned on his heel and out with him and in again in a moment with the pitch-fork from the byre. He went up to the bed and made a swipe at the thing that was lying there, but, well for her, when she saw him drawing at her she rose and went out of the window like a flash of lightning.
>
> He went out then and brought his wife and the midwife. Everything went well then and in due time the child was born. He and his wife spent a long life after that at Gortalia and neither the wee folk nor the big people gave them any more trouble![26]

Order has been restored by the end of this story. Disruptions to social life are identified as coming from outside, and are forcefully repudiated. The protagonists live happily ever after, and the domestic violence the legend depicts has been contained, literally, within the fiction.

The many fairy legends which tell of women in childbirth being swept through the air are vividly metaphorical: narratives of passage—analogous to rites of passage. Stories like the one quoted above reflect the dangers and anxieties of childbirth, and the fact that women do sometimes die, or almost die. They also express the anxiety that can surround the whole question of human fertility, often compromised in post-Famine Ireland by late and selective marriage. Such stories express aggression against women in coded form: the husband's pitchfork attack on the changeling-corpse is justified by the terms of the narrative, but even the innocent wife is dropped from horseback in midair while in the last stages of pregnancy, and is then left in the stable.[27]

Fairy legends carry disciplinary messages for women as well as for children, warning them about behavior considered by a patriarchal society to be unacceptable. Undoubtedly, too, some of them have been used as euphemisms for domestic violence. Roddy Doyle's novel *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* takes its title from such a euphemism in modern life. A woman in nineteenth-century rural Ire-

land who had obviously been beaten might explain the marks of violence as having been inflicted by fairy abductors, while a violent husband might account for his actions as loss of patience with a fairy interloper. This is not to say that such explanations would normally be accepted, or taken literally. Fairy legend charts the territory of no-man's-land. It carries with it an air of the preposterous, the nod and wink, that allows one thing to be said, while another is meant. It permits face-saving lies to be told, and disturbing narratives to be safely detoured into fiction if children are found to be listening, or if the complex web of family relationships means that someone may take offense, or threaten retaliation.

The most powerful narratives thrown up by the idiom of fairy belief have an emotional resonance that allows the oral tradition's verbal artists to refine and polish them continuously. One such is the story of the woman taken by the fairies, who tells her husband, brother, or lover that he may rescue her if he can pull her off her horse when the fairies ride out together, usually at Halloween. With genders reversed, it is the story of the Scottish ballad "Tam Lin," to which Sir Walter Scott devoted many pages in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,* first published in 1802 and revised and added to throughout his life.[28] Emily Lyle has discussed eight Irish versions of the legend and has referred to several others, describing it as "among the commonest of the tales of the fairies." Many of these stories, like the one above about the shoemaker, tell of women abducted while giving birth. Roughly half tell of successful rescues, the others of disastrous failure. One version, where the wife apparently dies in labor, reminds us that the marital calamities spoken of may be physical as well as interpersonal:

> She said that if he was not a good soldier and didn't hold her, the walls of the house would be red in the morning with her blood. He did meet the horses and he pulled her off the third horse. Whatever devilment and tricks they started he let her go anyway. The next morning the walls of the house were covered with blood.[29]

There was nothing exotic or unusual in the suggestion that Bridget Cleary, ill in bed with bronchitis in her home in Ballyvadlea, County Tipperary in 1895, was a fairy changeling. Such language was common all over Ireland, and still is in places, although its weight and import may vary considerably. At its most innocuous, it is simply metaphor—a dismissive comment on someone's appearance: "he's like something the fairies left!" or general competence: "she's away with the fairies!"

The story of the white horse is different: it draws on a higher register of fairy narrative, a more elaborately wrought verbal art, and presupposes an intimate knowledge not only of fairy legend, but of the secret places of the local landscape. If Bridget Cleary did tell her husband that she would ride a white horse out of Kylenagranagh Fort on the Sunday night, she would have been trumping the card played by the men who had called her a fairy changeling. Many versions of the fairy fiction offered married women a fantasy of power and glamour: they showed the hapless husband gaping as his wife appeared, surrounded by all the trappings of nobility, only to disappear again forever. When local people around Ballyvadlea told inquirers that the missing woman had gone away with the fairies, however, and would come back on a white horse, they may have been almost anywhere on a scale between total belief and near-total disbelief in fairies. Their response may simply have been a way of saying, "Your questions are intrusive and embarrassing; we don't choose to answer them!"

The connotations of changeling-labeling are never positive, and a quick-tongued woman might well counter such a label with an alternative fairy narrative. Neighbors who might not assign a label themselves could nevertheless use one already assigned as euphemism or evasion. What was highly unusual, given that before her illness Bridget Cleary had been healthy, was that the label should be taken literally and used as a charter for action. Among the documented cases of changeling-burning in Ireland in the nineteenth century, Bridget Cleary's is the only one that involves an adult victim.