

Thomas Crofton Croker's Fairy Legends: A Revaluation

Heinz Kosok

Abstract: the aim of this paper is to reevaluate the achievements of Thomas Crofton Croker as a collector of native legends and traditions of the South West of Ireland and as one of the precursors of twentieth-century short fiction in Ireland. The publication of Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland in 1825 inspires the Grimms' to develop Comparative Folklore Studies. One of Croker's stories, "The Soul Cages" is analysed here to show the way he strategically shaped his narratives improving the traditional oral storytelling technique.

The year 1825 saw the publication of a small and unpretentious volume called *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*. It contained twenty-seven folktales and accounts of country beliefs grouped into five sections, "The Shefro", "The Cluricaune", "The Banshee", "The Phooka" and "Thierna na Oge", most of them situated in specific localities, supplemented with extensive explanatory notes which sometimes seemed to be a direct continuation of the narrative. Published anonymously by John Murray of London, the book appeared to lay little claim to literary fame or notoriety. Nevertheless, over the next hundred years (and beyond) it exerted considerable influence, both in Ireland and abroad. The present paper will discuss some aspects of this influence.

The author, Thomas Crofton Croker, was born in Cork in 1798. If one follows the biographical data in the *Dictionary of National Biography*¹, based on information that Croker himself had supplied, he had begun at the early age of fourteen to collect native legends and traditions in Southwest Ireland. He was therefore among the first of those numerous collectors of Irish folklore who, in the first half of the nineteenth century, began to tap the oral traditions in the Gaelic language with the purpose of making them available in English, both to the general British reading public and to those among their own fellow countrymen who by this time had become Anglicised and had lost contact with the native material transmitted in Gaelic. As a pioneer in the field, Croker needed to establish certain procedures both in collecting and in presenting his material, and it is hardly surprising that his practice caused some resentment, equally based on disapproval of his methods and on personal envy, among his successors. His reputation has suffered from such criticism to the present day.

Croker's first translation from the Irish appeared as early as 1815 in the *Morning Post*. In 1818 a collection of orally transmitted poems which he had gathered led to his acquaintance with Thomas Moore whose first two volumes of *Irish Melodies* had

appeared in 1808 and who by this time was considered by many as the outstanding authority on Irish poetry. In the same year, arranged by a friend of the family, Croker obtained a position in the British Admiralty which he held until 1850. It was, of course, the norm for Irish intellectuals of the time to aim for a position in London, and it would be quite unhistorical to blame them for such an attitude. It enabled them to come into close communication with the editors of periodicals, with publishers, theatre managers and academic societies and provided them with numerous useful contacts at the centre of the British Empire. However, collecting Irish folklore from a London base must have taken on an aura of the exotic and the adventurous, because Croker henceforth had to plan regular expeditions to Ireland.

In addition to his *Fairy Legends*, Croker published a number of books, including his *Researches in the South of Ireland: Illustrative of the Scenery, Architectural Remains and the Manners and Superstitions of the Peasantry with an Appendix containing a Private Narrative of the Rebellion of 1798* (1824). This impressive, if somewhat heterogeneous quarto volume, beautifully embellished with numerous etchings (some of them based on Croker's own sketches) can be seen as the theoretical foundation, what there is of it, of Croker's position as a folklorist, because it contains, apart from travel accounts, anecdotes and a variety of socio-cultural information, a chapter on "History and National Character" where the author makes a serious attempt to define, under the premises of European Romanticism, the national identity of Ireland, thus aiming at a deeper understanding in England for the specific position of Ireland. The same purpose still underlies the extensive notes in his anthology *The Popular Songs of Ireland* (1839). In his later years Croker published, in addition to some amusing narratives and travel accounts and numerous articles in periodicals, a number of textual editions for the Camden Society and the Percy Society; the *DNB* account lists about a dozen such editions.

The *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, however, remained by far Croker's most popular work. The first edition of 1825 was quickly succeeded by a second, newly illustrated issue (1826). The subsequent textual history is summarized quite unsatisfactorily in the *DNB* article: "A second series, under Croker's name, appeared in 1827, and a third edition of the whole, from which Croker excluded all his friends' work, was issued in 1834; reprints are dated 1859, 1862, and 1882" (p. 133). The *British Library Catalogue* (which cannot be considered as complete) lists no less than sixteen editions in English. It emerges that the second edition of 1826 was supplemented in 1828 by two further volumes, Part III containing legends from Wales. A new edition which collected most of the material from these three volumes, appeared in 1838 (irritatingly called "Second Edition") and another volume with forty stories in ten sections, which however lacks some of the texts from the 1825 edition, in 1840.

After Croker's death in 1854, a further edition was published that incorporated a biographical sketch by Croker's son; 1862 saw another issue, edited by T. Wright and designated "A new and complete edition" which again contained the memoir by T.F.D. Croker. Further editions appeared in 1870, 1882 and 1902. Around 1900 a volume called

Legends and Tales of Ireland printed Croker's *Fairy Legends* together with Samuel Lover's *Legends and Stories of Ireland*. As early as 1834 the first *selection* from the *Fairy Legends* had been printed, *adaptations* are listed for 1924 and 1929. At present, a reprint of the first (1825) edition, introduced by Francesca Diano and published by the Collins Press of Wilton, Cork, in 1998 is still in print.

This confusing, and probably incomplete, array of publishing data is further complicated by the fact that the volumes published under the same title are not simple reprints and do not by any means contain exactly the same material. Croker, and after his death his various editors, regularly reshuffled the contents, omitting some texts and adding others; at the moment it can only be conjectured that the complete *corpus* of the *Fairy Legends* encompasses nearly one hundred texts, as compared to the 27 contained in the first edition. A comprehensive survey of all the editions, including a collation of the individual items published under the same title, is a *desideratum* in Irish literary history. Even the present list of publication data, however, conveys evidence that the *Fairy Legends*, in one form or another, have been kept before the reading public for nearly two centuries.

Croker's book provoked various controversial reactions. Towards the end of the nineteenth century when, in the course of improved copyright legislation, the authors' prerogative concerning their texts was given increasingly higher importance, Croker was repeatedly accused of plagiarism. It appears that the first edition did, indeed, contain material that could have been claimed by other writers or collectors. The *DNB* article has a somewhat euphemistic explanation: "No author's name was on the title-page; for Croker, who was responsible for the bulk of it, had lost his original manuscript, and Dr. Maginn and other friends, to whom the legends were already familiar, helped to rewrite it" (p. 133). Later it was doubted whether their cooperation was quite as voluntary as is claimed here, and in his other publications Croker is also said to have been quick in omitting to mention his sources. An article by B.G. MacCarthy, published in 1943², is a particularly offensive example. Operating with personal slander, unproven statements and disconnected quotations, it claims that Croker owed practically all his better publications to others and merely succeeded in commandeering them for himself by his clever strategies of disguising his sources. Seen in historical perspective, such personal squabbles lose much of their significance; today it is much more relevant to discuss the *quality* of such texts than their biographical provenance.

The nationalistic phase in Irish literary history, which began before the founding of the Free State and lasted until the nineteen-sixties, furthermore accused Croker of (real or imagined) condescension towards the Irish country people, of a tendency towards comic simplification, and of the attempt to make himself popular with his English readership at the expense of his Irish subjects. At a time when the world of the tenants and small farmers in the West of Ireland had become the standard for a new concept of literature, radically divided from the literature of England, it must have appeared that any negative statement about such people, even if it was based on experienced reality

(as for instance their love of whiskey, their superstition or their delight in fantastic stories) came close to a betrayal of patriotic ideals. The foundation for this type of criticism was laid by William Butler Yeats who, in his early patriotic phase, published his own collection of *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888) and, in his Introduction, blamed Croker for an attitude that in truth was much more characteristic of Samuel Lover:

Croker and Lover, full of the ideas of harum-scarum Irish gentility, saw everything humorised. The impulse of Irish literature of their time came from a class that did not – mainly for political reasons – take the populace seriously, and imagined the country as a humorist's Arcadia; its passion, its gloom, its tragedy, they knew nothing of. What they did was not wholly false; they merely magnified an irresponsible type, found oftenest among boatmen, carmen, and gentlemen's servants, into the type of the whole nation, and created the stage Irishman³.

The Stage Irishman is, of course, a *bête noire* of the whole of recent Irish literature, and the slightest suspicion that an author has designed his comic Irish characters to confirm an anti-Irish prejudice in England, will suffice to condemn him as a traitor to his country.

The article by MacCarthy mentioned above (published in 1943, at the height of Irish nationalist self-isolation), also criticises Croker for his descent from a Protestant middle-class family that had settled in Ireland as late [!] as the sixteenth century, a descent seen by MacCarthy as an insurmountable barrier for an understanding of the 'true' Ireland:

He was shut out. Maybe ... for a moment, he had some inkling of an ancient race, of a people who cherished with a deep, secret, fierce tenacity an immemorial culture. If he had, the vision did not last. He determined to look into the matter of Irish poetry, since it might at least afford some curiosities that would interest the English public (pp. 540-41).

When MacCarthy further complains that Croker had attempted "to study the country folk in their habitat – rather as Fabre studied ants" (ibid.), he pigeonholes Croker as belonging to the rationalist/scientific tradition of literature that, in Irish eyes, was typical of the literature of England. Such a classification, however ridiculous it may appear from an international perspective, has sometimes persisted right until the present day; for instance it has evidently led to the unaccountable omission of Croker from the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*⁴.

From a wider historical and geographic distance, such accusations appear less than justified. It is true that Croker describes a number of amusing, sometimes exceedingly comic episodes; it is also true that many of his Irish characters show a preference for strong drink, a propensity to fabulation and an allergy to work, but it would require a

considerable degree of narrow-mindedness to overlook that they, in their contacts with the world of the 'little people', are described with a high degree of sympathy and that they become a focus of identification for the reader rather than an object of derision. The repeated reference to Croker's 'condescension' can, it seems, be explained only by an over-sensitivity caused by centuries of semi-colonial domination. The other side of the medal, the *English* attitude to such writers as Croker, was, of course, also informed by a supposed superiority of nation, race and accent. It appears that Croker posthumously experienced the typical fate of the mediator between two cultures: rejected by both sides whose understanding for each other he had tried to advance. If his detractors can be shown to be partially justified, it is in his attitude to the country people's belief in fairies. Croker, whose presence in several of his tales can be clearly felt, does not share his characters' credulity and sometimes even exploits it for comic effect. However, one can hardly expect an enlightened nineteenth-century intellectual to take the confrontation with the supernatural as seriously as his informants did.

Another, and much more relevant criticism that is sometimes levelled at Croker concerns the question of faithfulness to his informants. This is, of course, a problem that Croker shares with all the early collectors of folklore, not least the Brothers Grimm. Vivian Mercier observed correctly: "... neither he [Croker] nor anyone else at the time drew a firm line between recording folklore and writing fiction based on it."⁵ All the early collectors smoothed, revised, and sometimes enlarged the material that was related to them. In most countries, however, it is impossible to compare the texts collected in the early nineteenth century with phonographic recordings of the actual story-tellers, so that all discussion of the degree of revision in, for instance, the Grimms' *Fairy Tales* must remain speculative. In Ireland, on the other hand, many a *seanchaí* survived the invention of the tape recorder, and the contrast between the recordings by the Folklore Society of Ireland and the Irish Folklore Commission (originally Irish Folklore Institute) on the one hand and the stories printed by the early collectors like Croker on the other is immediately discernible. Croker's *Fairy Legends* offer considerable evidence for an authorial intervention, both where the style and where the structure of the texts is concerned, and the reduction or even elimination of the first-person narrator in a number of texts is also an obvious indication that Croker interfered with the stories he collected. The *Fairy Legends*, therefore, are hardly suitable as documents of unmodified popular beliefs in Ireland. However, the partial loss of authenticity can be seen as a *gain* in the field of fictional narrative, as will be discussed below.

In view of those largely futile squabbles over Croker's personality and his importance as a collector, it is time for a more dispassionate reevaluation of his achievements. It will be shown that the publication of the *Fairy Legends* had major consequences in at least three separate though closely interrelated fields.

The first of these is succinctly summarized by the 'elder statesman' of present-day Irish Studies, A. Norman Jeffares, when he emphasizes the pioneering character of Croker's book as "the first collection of oral legends to be made in the British Isles."⁶

This judgement is confirmed by the authoritative *Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* which sees in *Fairy Legends* "a significant contribution to the development of British folklore studies since its materials were collected in the field."⁷ While it is indubitably correct to see the Irish Renaissance around the turn of the century as the basis of all further developments in twentieth-century Ireland (not only in the cultural but also the political and social fields), it is also true to say that the 'great' representatives of the Renaissance, W.B. Yeats, Douglas Hyde, John Millington Synge, Lady Gregory and their contemporaries, built upon the material provided by the modest collectors of folklore, beginning with Croker in the early years of the century. Without their spadework it would have been impossible to create a generally accepted awareness of an independent national identity in Ireland which has to be seen, despite all subsequent dissension, as one of the great achievements of the Irish Renaissance. In the course of the eighteenth century the Irish language had largely been lost as a written and printed medium (though not as yet as an instrument of oral transmission), and with it the awareness of a specific cultural tradition encoded in it was also lost. With the one exception of Charlotte Brooke and her groundbreaking bilingual collection *Reliques of Irish Poetry* of 1789, the first attempt to make the heritage of Gaelic *verse* available to an English-speaking public, Croker was the earliest publicly effective mediator between the Celtic culture of the country population and a citified and Anglicised readership. Croker and his near-contemporaries Patrick Kennedy (1801-1873), William Maginn (1794-1842) and Samuel Lover (1797-1868), together with their immediate successors in the following generation, among them William Larminie (1850-1900), Edmund Leamy (1848-1904) and Anna Maria (Mrs. S.C.) Hall (1800-1881), provided the material and created the climate for the dawn of Irish literature in English: for the early poems of Yeats and AE; the plays of Synge and Lady Gregory, the short stories of George Moore and Daniel Corkery. This is *not*, it must be stressed, a matter of specific sources and influence; it would be futile to examine the literature of the Renaissance for direct textual links with the works of Croker and his successors. What they did was to initiate the consciousness of a native cultural heritage that could be reflected through the medium of English. In this way, they achieved an influence that could never be approximated by scholars like George Petrie (1789-1866), John O'Donovan (1806-1861) or Eugene O'Curry (1794-1862) whose strictly academic approach in the fields of physical and cultural archaeology prevented them from achieving the popularity of Croker and his followers.

Croker's second achievement, seen from a longer historical perspective, extended beyond the limits of Ireland and England. On 12 January 1826, less than a year after the publication of the *Fairy Legends*, a review of the book appeared in the influential academic periodical *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*. The reviewer was Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859), at the time librarian at Kassel and, together with his brother Jacob (1785-1863), the ultimate authority on the collection and presentation of folklore in the widest possible sense. Their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Grimm's Fairy Tales*), published in three volumes in 1812, 1815 and 1822, have assured their lasting popularity to the present

day, but the collection's success can obscure the fact that they, improving on the often irrational 'folk' enthusiasm introduced by Johann Gottfried Herder, must be credited with establishing the science of Comparative Folklore Studies as a serious academic discipline. Their numerous publications were a major contribution to the rediscovery of the past during the later Romantic Movement in Europe. When Grimm in his review praised the 'tangible authenticity' of Croker's collection and the anonymous author's 'obvious diligence' in its presentation⁸, this must have appeared to Croker as heaven-sent encouragement, which was intensified when, still in the same year, the *Fairy Legends* were published in Leipzig in German translation by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm as *Irische Elfenmärchen*, to which they had added a lengthy Introduction with a veritable typology and classification of fairies.⁹

Croker on his part, in a letter of 16 June 1826, made himself known to the Grimms as the author; Wilhelm Grimm replied on 29 July 1826, stating that he was already well aware of Croker's *Researches in the South of Ireland*. Croker seems to have been so delighted with the international prestige vouchsafed by the Brothers Grimm that he did not even resent that there had been no previous correspondence with his publisher concerning the translation rights (perhaps less surprising in view of the state of international copyright legislation than it would be today). The recognition by the Grimms was, for Croker, a major step on the difficult path from the obscurity of the Irish provinces into the limelight of the international literary scene. When, in 1828, he published a second part of the *Fairy Legends*, he acknowledged his gratitude in the Preface:

... I cannot but feel and express a considerable degree of satisfaction at observing my former volume translated into German by such eminent scholars as the brothers Grimm, whose friendship and valuable correspondence it has also procured me. Their version, which I had not seen when the second edition appeared, is, as might be expected, faithful and spirited; and to it they have prefixed a most learned and valuable introduction respecting Fairy superstition in general.¹¹

Part III of the 1828 edition was even dedicated "To Dr. Wilhelm Grimm, Secretary of the Prince's Library, Member of the Royal Scientific Society of Gottingen, &c. &c. &c. at Cassel, in Hessen", and in the Preface Croker entered into a detailed dialogue with the Grimms, describing the limited number of fairy legends he had been able to find in England as opposed to Ireland, Scotland and Wales. He then went on to reproduce, in English translation, the complete essay on fairies (145 pages of it!) that the Grimms had added to their German edition.

The Grimms' interest in the *Fairy Legends* was partly of a folklorist, partly also of a philological nature; it continued beyond the immediate occasion, as can for instance

be seen from their correspondence with Karl Lachmann, who in 1826 had received a copy of their translation.¹² As late as 1856 Wilhelm Grimm referred to it in the context of the discussion of Irish fairy legends and tales.¹³ If the German image of Irish folklore in the nineteenth century was largely shaped by the Grimms, it was Croker who had provided the basis for it. How far such an influence went can be seen, for instance, in a highly popular ballad called "Fingerhütchen" by Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, the great Swiss poet and novelist. "Fingerhütchen", as one would hardly guess from the title, is a faithful version of Croker's "The Legend of Knockgrafton" from the first edition of the *Fairy Legends* that Meyer had found in the Grimms' translation.¹⁴ However, Croker's influence in Germany did not end with the turn of the century. If one follows Patrick O'Neill, the best authority on Irish-German literary and cultural relations, it lasted far into the twentieth century: The Grimms' *Irische Elfenmärchen* "coalesced with Ossianic mists and the heroics of Lady Morgan and Thomas Moore to form the romantic image of Ireland which persists essentially unchanged in Germany down to the present day ..."¹⁵ This view is confirmed by the fact that reprints of *Irische Elfenmärchen* remained in print in various popular editions and are still available today in unchanged form, except that Croker himself has returned to the anonymity of his original publication: while the Grimms' popular name always appears on the title pages of such editions, Croker's is regularly relegated to a brief reference in an afterword.¹⁶ Even the terminological problems with the German title have done nothing to limit the book's continuing popularity: in the strict sense of modern folklore research, the stories are not *Märchen* (fairy-tales) but *Sagen* (legends) as Croker makes perfectly clear in his own title, because all of them are linked to precisely identified localities.

Croker's influence in Germany would perhaps be of less interest if it had not been for its repercussions in other areas. Through the Grimms' authority in the field of international folklore studies, Croker's name became known in many countries, and his book has continued to be seen as a major contribution to the exploration of the folk imagination in Europe. For instance, a new translation of Croker's book into Italian by Francesca Diano was published as recently as 1999.¹⁷

The third importance of the *Fairy Legends* – and one that deserves more detailed attention than it can be given here – concerns Croker's role as one of the precursors of twentieth-century short fiction in Ireland. The emergence of the Irish short-story around the turn of the century, nationally and internationally one of the major achievements of Irish literature, is, of course, due in part to a tenacious tradition of *oral* story-telling. However, it is also due to the fact that the whole of the nineteenth century saw the *publication* of a wealth of short narratives. This material is at best ignored, more often derided by literary historians, who regularly treat the beginnings of the short-story proper in Ireland as a burst of spontaneous creativity. In reality, one finds thousands of stories and tales before 1900, ranging from autobiographical anecdotes through character sketches, traditional accounts of country-life, travel sketches, idiosyncratic variations of mythological or legendary material and fairy-tales to the fictional recreation of basic conflicts in contemporary society or the projection of deeply personal problems. The

publication of this material became possible by the proliferation of Irish periodicals in the early nineteenth century¹⁸; a great deal of it was subsequently republished in book form in various collections. It foreshadows in many ways the modern short-story, although frequently the authors were not fully aware of the specific requirements of the short form. Among the better known writers were Sir Jonah Barrington, Mrs. S.C. Hall, Caesar Otway, Samuel Lover and Thomas Crofton Croker, a list that may suggest the great diversity of the material under discussion, while the outstanding masters of the short form, William Carleton, Gerald Griffin, Joseph Sheridan LeFanu and Somerville & Ross, not only produced a large number of tales but created frame narratives into which, with varying degrees of success, they integrated their individual stories.¹⁹

All of these writers, and many others, shaped specific strands which merged into the complex web that we know as the twentieth-century Irish short-story. When writers like Daniel Corkery, Seumas O'Kelly, James Stephens, together with George Moore and James Joyce and, slightly later, Liam O'Flaherty, Elizabeth Bowen, Sean O'Faolain, Frank O'Connor, Patrick Boyle, Michael McLaverty, Bryan MacMahon, Mary Lavin and their younger successors, created this genre, they had therefore a number of predecessors to fall back on. This is not only a matter of providing the narrative *material* but also of developing various stylistic and structural devices. Such principles as suggestion, compression, concentration and reduction, the introduction of credible narrative perspectives, the invention of unusual opening devices, the preservation of structural homogeneity, the presentation of symbolic landscapes, the creation of universality from realistic specificity are all prefigured, in varying degrees, in nineteenth-century texts; the great achievement of the short-story proper was not to have invented them but to have brought them together into one artistic whole.

Croker in the various issues of his *Fairy Legends* contributed to this development; many of them are not simple reproductions of oral tales taken down by a collector but strategically shaped narratives, or, as the great Vivian Mercier put it: "... neither he nor anyone else at the time drew a firm line between recording folklore and writing fiction based on it."²⁰ Some of his texts – for instance "Legend of Bottle-Hill", "Master and Man", "Daniel O'Rourke" and "The Crooked Back" from the 1825 edition or "The Soul Cages" and "Rent Day" from Part II of the 1828 issue would not cut a bad figure in the company of stories by Corkery, Moore or O'Kelly.

That Croker consciously and artistically revised his sources becomes immediately clear from the occasional use of striking metaphors or similes, as when he speaks of "a beautiful laughing red apple, smoking like a hard ridden horse on a frosty night" (p. 42).²¹ Similar examples in more detailed form can be found in certain passages where the setting of the events is not simply stated but recreated in poetic and metaphorical terms:

... the harvest nights came on, and the moon shone bright and brilliant over the hill, and the cattle were lying down hushed and quiet, and the herdsman wrapped

in his mantle, was musing with his heart gladdened by the glorious company of the stars twinkling above him, bathed in the flood of light bursting all over the sky ... (p. 4)

or

The air was hushed and still; and the sky, which was reflected in the serene lake, resembled a beautiful but deceitful countenance, whose smiles after the most tempestuous emotions tempt the stranger to believe that it belongs to a soul which no passion has ever ruffled (p. 355)

or again:

The moon was up; but though there wasn't a cloud to be seen, and though a star was winking here and there in the sky, the day wasn't long enough gone to have it clear moonlight; still it shone enough to make every thing on one side of the heavens look pale and silvery-like; and the thin white mist was just beginning to creep along the fields. On the other side, near where the sun was set, there was more of daylight, and the sky looked angry, red, and fiery through the trees, like as if it was lighted up by a great town burning below (p. 299).

Such passages, characteristic of a 'citized' and intellectually reflected concept of nature, will be found again and again in the modern short-story, especially in the works of Sean O'Faolain (who, like Croker, came from the City of Cork).

One striking feature of Croker's narratives is the use of the grotesque in the specific sense of the simultaneity of the comic and the terrifying. If, in "The Legend of Knocksheogowna", the herdsman gazes "at these terrible sights until the hair of his head would lift his hat half a foot over his crown" (p. 5), this may be amusing to the distant reader but also conveys, in the ridiculous exaggeration, the very real terror of the situation. Such elements, frequently echoed in the more recent short-story where nothing is purely comic any longer, abound in "Daniel O'Rourke". The mischievous eagle lands Daniel on the moon where he tries to hold on for dear life to a reaping hook sticking out of the side of the moon, "when all at once a door opened right in the middle of the moon, creaking on its hinges as if it had not been opened for a month before. I suppose they never thought of greasing 'em, and out there walks – who do you think but the man in the moon? I knew him by his bush" (p. 285). He succeeds in pushing Daniel off the moon who eventually falls into the sea "when a whale walked up to me, scratching himself after his night's sleep, and looked me full in the face, and never the word did he say, but lifting up his tail, he splashed me all over again with the cold salt water ..." (p. 290). If all this is finally revealed as the mere nightmare of a man close to *delirium tremens*, it is by no means less frightening in the intensity of his experience. Incidentally,

that Croker dramatized this story as a pantomime (performed at the Adelphi in 1826), goes to show how far removed it was for him from a simple story told by country people and how clearly he saw it as an artistic construct.

Another interesting aspect of the *Fairy Legends* is the invention of specific opening devices and the introduction of a fictional narrative perspective. While Croker eschewed, or was perhaps not aware of, the *medias-in-res* technique that many later authors pursued, he sometimes compressed his opening passage to such an extent that it was clearly distinct from the more leisurely beginnings of the traditional tale with its detailed exposition of setting, time, characters and theme. This is true, for instance, of "Legend of Bottle-Hill" (p. 85) and "The Spirit Horse" (p. 267), while in "The Little Shoe" (p. 211) one single subordinate clause suffices to set the scene for the subsequent narrative.

The variations in the narrative perspective have obviously been chosen to supply skilful variety to the volume. In "The Legend of Knockgrafton", Croker employs the traditional authorial approach familiar from thousands of tales: "There was once a poor man who lived in the fertile glens of Aherlow, at the foot of the gloomy Galtee mountains, and he had a great hump on his back ..." (p. 23). By contrast, the beginning of "The Little Shoe" establishes a frame situation in a dialogue between the story-teller and a third party: "'Now tell me, Molly', said Mr. Coote to Molly Cogan, as he met her on the road one day, close to one of the old gateways of Kilmallock, 'did you ever hear of the Cluricaune?'" (p. 211.). Another dialogical structure, introduced by a clearly defined first-person narrator who can quote Shakespeare and Spenser and in the end expresses his own feelings when the mother regains her lost child, prevails in "The Brewery of Egg-Shells". Only occasionally is it possible to identify the speaker as the author, as in "Fairies or No Fairies" which in the beginning establishes the narrator's intellectual superiority over poor Mulligan's credulity and ends with "I hould be sorry if all my fairy stories ended with so little dignity ..." (p. 145).

An interesting variation is the long tale of "The Confessions of Tom Bourke" which begins with a personalized I-narrator speaking in the present tense but after nine pages turns the story over to "my friend Mr. Martin, who is a neighbour of Tom's" (p. 113) who then conducts a dialogue with Tom in the course of which the story proper is narrated in the past tense. If this is damaging to a unified impression of the text, it at least shows Croker experimenting with various narrative techniques. Sometimes Croker introduces framing devices which are not always taken up again at the end, most clearly in "Daniel O'Rourke" where the scene is set with ironic over-precision: "An old man was he at the time that he told me the story, with gray hair, and a red nose; and it was on the 25th of June, 1813, that I heard it from his own lips, as he sat smoking his pipe under the poplar tree ..." (p. 277). "The Crooked Back" is perhaps the most successful tale in dramatizing the narrative situation before the story proper is told.

Croker's collection contains, it should be added, a gallery of interesting and, in some cases, memorable characters. Sometimes they are established at a leisurely pace,

with digressions and irrelevancies, as in the older story-telling tradition, but occasionally one finds portraits which are sharply defined, succinct and wholly to the point as on the first pages of "The Confessions of Tom Bourke".

All this evidence, it should be added, is not marshalled here to claim Croker as one of the great master of modern story-telling. For every successful stroke, one can also point to examples that are annoying in their thoughtlessness or carelessness. What can be claimed, however, is that Croker was at least groping for original and innovatory modes of expression that reemerged, employed with a higher degree of consciousness, in the twentieth-century short-story. It would be unjust not to acknowledge his partially successful steps on the difficult path to the art of O'Faolain and his contemporaries.

To conclude, Croker's achievements can best be summarized by a glance at what is probably his most accomplished story, "The Soul Cages" from Part II of the 1828 issue (pp. 30-52). "The Soul Cages" is the story of Jack Dogherty who lives in a lonely place on the Clare coast and exists as much by the goods he salvages from stranded ships as by his craft as a fisherman. One day, Jack makes the acquaintance of Coomara the Merrow, an ancient merman who had already been friends with Jack's father and grandfather. He invites Jack to a feast in his comfortable house below the sea, where Jack discovers to his dismay that his host keeps the souls of drowned sailors in cages like lobster pots. From then on Jack worries about the means to release the souls. His first attempt at inviting Coomara to his house and making him drunk on brandy fails because the merman is a much more experienced drinker than Jack and "reeled off home, leaving his entertainer as dumb as a haddock on a Good Friday" (p. 47). Then, however, Jack hits upon an infallible device: he invites Coomara again, this time treating his guest with Irish poteen, the "real Mountain dew" (p. 47), and this is something that even a hardened merman cannot stand up to. When the poteen has put him to sleep, Jack takes his cocked hat (without which one cannot dive down to the world below the sea), creeps into Coomara's house, finds the cages and releases the souls, noticing nothing but "a sort of a little whistle or chirp as he raised each of them" (p. 48), because souls, as Jack understands quite well, are invisible. In the course of the following years, Jack frequently repeats this feat until one day, quite unaccountably, the merman has disappeared.

The story is constructed upon the principle of contrast. On the most superficial level, it contrasts the two settings, the real world on the wild coast "in the midst of shattered rocks, with nothing but the wide ocean to look upon" (p. 30), and the surreal world below the sea where Jack finds "crabs and lobsters, of which there were plenty walking leisurely about on the sand. Overhead was the sea like a sky, and the fishes like birds swimming about in it" (p. 39). The contrast is continued in the persons of the two characters, Jack who is apparently an attractive fellow since he had succeeded in persuading his wife Bidy to leave her father's comfortable house in the town of Ennis to live with him, while the merman was "a thing with green hair, long green teeth, a red nose, and pig's eyes. It had a fish's tail, legs with scales on them, and short arms like fins: it wore no clothes, but had the cocked hat under its arm ..." (p. 34). Jack and

Coomara are not only contrasted in appearance but also in their characters: while both of them are good-natured and jolly fellows who enjoy each other's company, the merman is essentially a-moral and therefore quite incapable of understanding the terrible consequences he inflicts on the captive souls, whereas Jack is "thunderstruck" when he realises the secret of the merman's collection and, like a true Christian, immediately devises means to release them.

The story's plot hinges on two motifs, both of which are introduced right at the beginning and in immediate juxtaposition: the motif of strong drink, essentially a comic motif, and the motif of the caged souls which is of course deeply serious. The intertwining of the two motifs identifies the story as a *grotesque* one; while it is highly amusing to observe the two characters diving into the sea or carousing with each other, the presence of the trapped souls throws a dark shadow over their conviviality. In the final analysis, this, therefore, is a narrative about the conflict between humanity and inhumanity, where humanity, against all odds, is finally successful – a theme worthy of Frank O'Connor and his contemporaries, although the modern short-story would have been less optimistic about the outcome than Croker evidently was. In the present context it is also significant to find that it is true *Irish* drink and the courage and determination of a genuine *Irishman* who succeed in liberating the souls of *foreign* sailors: This story, therefore, would suffice to dispel the view that Croker had been hostile to Ireland and her people. It is not only both touching and amusing; it can also serve as testimony for the author's continuing attachment to the country of his birth.

A collection that contains such texts as this one fully deserves a reevaluation.

Notes

- 1 *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, ed. Leslie Stephen (London: Oxford University Press, 1921-22), vol. V, pp. 132-134. Another biographical sketch, somewhat more detailed but annoyingly gossipy, is the anonymous article "Our Portrait Gallery – No. LV. Thomas Crofton Croker, F.S.A., M.R.I.A., Member of the United Service Institution, of the Royal Antiquarian Society of Copenhagen, etc.", *Dublin University Magazine*, 34 (August 1849), pp. 202-216.
- 2 B.G. MacCarthy, "Thomas Crofton Croker: 1798-1854", *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 32 (1943), pp. 539-556.
- 3 William Butler Yeats (ed.), *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2nd ed. 1977), pp. 6-7.
- 4 Croker is dismissed in one short sentence in the Introduction. See Seamus Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), vol. II, p. 3. Earlier comprehensive anthologies did include Croker in considerable detail; see Charles A. Read and Katharine Tynan Hinkson (eds.), *The Cabinet of Irish Literature* (London: Gresham, 1902), vol. II, pp. 255-263; Justin McCarthy (ed.), *Irish Literature* (Philadelphia: Morris, 1904), vol. II, pp. 680-738.
- 5 Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature: Sources and Founders* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 8.
- 6 A. Norman Jeffares, *Anglo-Irish Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 125.
- 7 Jack Zipes (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), s.v. Croker.

- 8 The review is reprinted in: Wilhelm Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, ed. Gustav Hinrichs (Berlin: Dümmler, 1882), vol. II, pp. 370-373.
- 9 Cf. Eileen Fitzsimons, *Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's Irische Elfenmärchen: a comparison of the translation with the English original, Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* by T. Crofton Croker (Diss. Chicago, 1978) [not seen].
- 10 The letter is reprinted in the second version of T.F.D. Croker's memories of his father in the 1862 edition of *Fairy Legends*.
- 11 T. Crofton Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland: Part II* (London: Murray, 1828), pp. v-vi.
- 12 *Briefwechsel der Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm mit Karl Lachmann*, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Jena: Frommansche Buchhandlung, 1927), pp. 454, 455, 480, 483, 497-98, 501, 830-31, 847. Cf. also John Hennig, "The Brothers Grimm and T.C. Croker", *Modern Language Review*, 41 (1946), pp. 44-54.
- 13 *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, rev. by Johannes Bolte and Georg Polívka (Leipzig: Diederich, 1930; repr. Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1992), vol. V, pp. 55-57.
- 14 Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, *Sämtliche Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Bern: Benteli, 1963), pp. 44-48.
- 15 Patrick O'Neill, *Ireland and Germany: A Study in Literary Relations* (New York, Bern, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985), p. 150.
- 16 Editions available at present: *Irische Elfenmärchen: In der Übertragung der Brüder Grimm* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1987); *Irische Elfenmärchen: Übersetzt und eingeleitet von den Brüdern Grimm* (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 6th ed. 1988).
- 17 Thomas Crofton Croker, *Racconti di fate e tradizioni irlandesi/Irish Fairy Tales and Traditions*, tr. by Francesca Diano (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1999).
- 18 See Barbara Hayley, "Irish Periodicals from the Union to the Nation", *Anglo-Irish Studies*, 2 (1976), pp. 83-108.
- 19 Cf. Heinz Kosok, "Vorformen der modernen Kurzgeschichte in der anglo-irischen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts", *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 7 (1982), pp. 131-145.
- 20 Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature: Sources and Founders* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1994), p. 8.
- 21 Page references are to the first – 1825 – edition except where otherwise indicated.