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1. Introduction

As the title of this diploma thesis already reveals the mermaid as a literary, cultural and symbolic concept is the main topic of scholarly analysis. The aim of this thesis is to explore and analyse the mermaid motif in Irish, English and Scottish fairy- and folk literature. This encompasses the analysis of similarities and differences between the various regional representations of the mermaid in fairy- and folk tales of Ireland, England, and Scotland.

The second chapter will pay close attention to the magic realm the mermaid originates from. This includes the presentation of the cultural as well as mythological background of the fairy lore explaining the main theories about the origin of the established traditions and beliefs. In order to provide an appropriate insight into the magic environment of the mermaid different fairy types as categorized by scholars in the field of folk lore, will be presented. There will be a strong focus on the differentiation between the Irish, English and Scottish fairy traditions and beliefs. Differences in nature and character will be analysed and compared with each other. Apart from the examination of the fairies' origin, nature and cultural meaning the development of the fairy motif within other literary genres will be taken into account. Another aspect presented will be the investigation into the literary genre of fairy- and folk tales. In the third chapter the main differences between the fairy tale and the folk tale will be discussed with regard to origin, defining features and social relevance. The comments and definitions of selected fairy tales and folk lore of distinguished experts such as Max Lüthi and the Grimm Brothers will contribute to the clarification of various theories and scholarly studies outlined in this chapter. Further attention will be paid to the historical development in the field of fairy tale research. On the basis of, the specific theoretical premises, the typical fairy tale features will be analysed with the aim of relating theory into practice. As a result the distinctive features of this literary genre in the context of Ireland, England, and Scotland should become manifest.

The main part of this thesis is dedicated to the mermaid. Due to the fact that the figure of the mermaid appears in a wide variety of versions it requires a particularly differentiated approach. One of the central aspects considered in this chapter is the portrayal of the differences between representations of the mermaid in Ireland, England and Scotland.

Each country presents an individual variant of the universal motif of the mermaid. Depending on a country's folk tradition the mermaid figures differ in outward appearance as well as in character and nature. Several reference books and scholarly studies will be quoted dealing with various notions of the mermaid and her mythological functions. The aim will be to provide a concise overview of the mermaid lore as depicted in selected Irish, English and Scottish fairy- and folk tales. This encompasses the study of the mermaid's relationship to humans with a special focus on the liaison between human males and mermaids as well as her role as mother of earthly children. Furthermore the impact of the mermaid on folk belief, tradition and superstitions will be taken into account.

Because of the mermaid's enormous popularity in fairy- and folk tradition the question concerning the mermaid's mythological origin needs to be considered. It is not only in Celtic lore that mermaids, mermen and other sea spirits are a recurrent motif but they appear already in the ancient Greek and Roman mythology. Due to the fact that the ancient traditions and non- Christian religions made way for Christianity in the course of the Middle Ages, the perception of the mermaid changed. Christianity played a decisive role in the development of the mermaid myth as well as in the reception of the mermaid myth among the people. The fifth chapter will investigate the relationship between the mythological concept of the mermaid and its adaption or transformation in the Christian era.

The last chapter will relate the mermaid motif to such literary motifs as the 'femme fatale' or 'the helper'. As a 'femme fatale' the mermaid is described as a seductive woman destructive to humankind. As 'helper' the mermaid acts benevolently and caring towards the humans. Both motifs will be discussed by reference to selected tales. This thesis concludes with a summary highlighting the insights gained.

2. The Fairy World and its Inhabitants

The following chapter of this M. A. thesis, as the title already reveals, deals with the mysterious and fantastic world of the British fairies. Depending on the culture and mythological heritage of a country the belief in fairies constitutes a specific part of national identity. As it is the case in Ireland, England and Scotland the fairies play an important role in ancient traditions and beliefs as well as in every-day life and social interaction. This is due to the fact that the fairies and the stories which are tailored around them are a vital and prominent subject in Irish, English and Scottish literature and oral tradition. The fairy world is inhabited by many different creatures having specific magical powers at their disposal. These powers are used either to do good or to harm the humans. In order to gain a compact overview of this magical world, its inhabitants and origin the following pages will focus on the similarities and differences of the fairies in the different cultural and national traditions of the above mentioned countries. As in many other countries and cultures which apart from their national denomination also have ancient roots in pagan rituals and traditions the Irish people believe in supernatural creatures. As far as the origin of these beliefs and other traditions is concerned there are various versions of how the fairies came into existence, and consequently part of the Irish cultural identity and ethnic background. To start with, the word 'fairy' is closely related to the Latin word 'fata'; the equivalent to the English word fate.¹ Focusing on Irish folklore there are two main theories, besides many minor ones, which claim to know about the origin of the fairies. One of the most widely spread theories states that the fairies are fallen angels who are forced to stay on earth.² Due to her participation in the Irish nationalist movement, the Irish authoress Lady Jane Wilde took great interest in the fairies, their nature and origin.³

The following quote presents her point of view regarding the fairies' origin:

The islanders, like all the Irish, believe that the fairies are the fallen angels who were cast down by the Lord God out of heaven for their sinful pride. And some fell into the sea, and some on the dry land, and some fell deep into hell, and the devil gives to these knowledge and power, and sends them on earth where they work much evil.

¹ Cf. Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. *Encyclopedia of the Strange, Mystical, & Unexplained*. New York: Random House Value Publishing, Inc. 2001. 198.

² Cf. Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. *Encyclopedia of the Strange, Mystical, & Unexplained*. 198.

³ Cf. Silver, Carole G. *Strange and Secret Peoples. Fairies and Victorian Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 34.

But the fairies of the earth and the sea are mostly gentle and beautiful creatures, who will do no harm if they are let alone, and allowed to dance on the fairy raths in the moonlight to their own sweet music, undisturbed by the presence of mortals.⁴

In this quote the fairies are described as former angels who were thrown out of heaven. Consequently, they started to populate the earth, the sea and hell. Those fairies that were thrown into hell were given evil powers in order to haunt and harm the humans on earth. The others who fell into the sea or on dry land are described as being peaceful, shy and of good looks. This might be an explanation for the different types of fairies as well as their benevolent or maleficent nature. These differences in shape, form and nature will be discussed in more detail later on. The second theory about the origin of fairies is based on a mythological legend about a mysterious early Irish race called 'Tuatha da Danann'.⁵ The members of this race are said to be the children of the Celtic earth goddess Danu.⁶ According to Alfred Perceval Graves the 'Tuatha da Danann' became a people who lived in the hills because the Milesians conquered their territory. Due to the fact that these people were living in the hills they were also called 'Daoine Sidhe' which is Gaelic and means 'people of the (fairy) mounds'.⁷ They were described as being highly skilled in craftsmanship. Furthermore, they were used to dealing with herbs, the special powers of spells, and they knew about prophecy and shamanic druidism.⁸ Today, remnants of this race and their culture can be found in beautiful artefacts such as stone-inscribed spiral ornamentation, and bronze spearheads.⁹

Graves additionally refers to the view of William Butler Yeats who claimed that 'the minor deities of the early Irish [...] were the earliest members of the Tuatha da Danann dynasty'.¹⁰

⁴ Cf. Wilde, Lady Jane Francesca Speranca. "Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland". 5 July 2008. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/ali/index.htm>.

⁵ Cf. 1682, from Ir. Tuatha de Danann, lit. 'the people of Danann,' from pl. of "tuath" and "danann", mother of the gods. Quoted in 'Harper, Douglas. Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001. 5 July 2008. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=Tuatha+de+Danann&searchmode=none>.

⁶ Cf. Lindemans, Micha F. "Danu". Encyclopedia Mythica. 6 July 2008. <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/danu.html>.

⁷ Cf. Lindemans, Micha F. "Daoine Sidhe". Encyclopedia Mythica. 6 July 2008. http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/daoine_sidhe.html.

⁸ Cf. "Daoine Sidhe". Elftown. 6 July 2008. <http://www.elftown.com/Daoine%20Sidhe>.

⁹ Cf. Graves, Alfred Perceval. *The Irish Fairy Book*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005. xv.

¹⁰ Cf. Graves, Alfred Perceval. *The Irish Fairy Book*. xv.

Besides the mythological theories dealing with the relation between the superstitions and the Tuatha da Danann there are also some critical comments on this matter in Graves's book. It is supposed that the belief in the supernatural and its realness is much older than the Tuatha da Danann. Gradually, this race got on an equal level with the popular gods and deities at that time and finally became mythical figures with magical powers themselves.¹¹

Although there are so many different opinions and theories rivalling with each other about the origin of the fairies the folk tradition is still alive. It is a fantastic and fascinating world full of mystery and excitement. A selected number of these creatures and their specific powers, as well as their influence on humans and their lives will be the central topic of the following pages.

2.1. Fairy Lore

2.1.1. The Trooping Fairies

Considering the enormous number of fairies this category is probably the most widely known. A characteristic feature of these specific fairies is that they live together in big groups with a lot of members. Therefore, they are also called social fairies.¹² Katharine Mary Briggs applies a further subdivision of this type in heroic and homely trooping fairies. As the word heroic already reveals, these fairies are the noble ones. They are ruled by a king and a queen. They even behave like the human aristocracy because they indulge in hunting, dancing, singing and riding in big troops.¹³ The 'Dana O'Shee' of Ireland are one example of this type.¹⁴ In Ireland they are depicted as beautiful and elegant creatures of miniature size. They live in a world full of beauty and never ending youth. These fairies are always marvellously dressed and decorated with many jewels. A characteristic attribute of the heroic trooping fairies is their lovely singing and the eagerness to charm the mortals with their songs.¹⁵

¹¹ Cf. Graves, Alfred Perceval. *The Irish Fairy Book*. xv.

¹² Cf. MacKillop, James. *Celtic Mythology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 178.

¹³ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". *Folklore I*. (1957/68):270-287. 270.

¹⁴ Cf. Lindemans, Micha F. "Dana O'Shee". *Encyclopedia Mythica*. 8 July 2008.
http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dana_o_shee.html.

¹⁵ Cf. Lindemans, Micha F. "Dana O'Shee". *Encyclopedia Mythica*. 8 July 2008.
http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dana_o_shee.html.

This specific type is also known in Scotland and England. In Scotland the people believe in the fairies' ability to change their appearance and size although mostly they are depicted as being smaller than humans. Dealing with the looks of the fairies there is a difference between females and males the females habitually being described as beautiful but wicked.¹⁶ Compared to the Scottish type the English type is much smaller and commonly depicted as being of miniature shape. As well as in Scotland these fairies are also capable of changing their size.¹⁷

The second subcategory applied by Katharine Mary Briggs is the homely trooping fairies. Differently, to the heroic trooping fairies and their aristocratic interests the homely type is involved in domestic and agricultural issues. Considering the characteristic features ascribed to them they are prone to stealing and act rigorously against people who hide themselves and listen to their words secretly. Furthermore, they haunt people who do not respect their morality. On the other hand they react in a thankful manner when they meet people who treat them nicely and respectfully. They also help when somebody is in distress.¹⁸

2.1.2. The Solitary Fairies

The solitary fairies live for themselves and depend on nobody else. Unlike the trooping fairies they do not exist in clans or bigger groups. Characteristically, they favour a specific place and occupation. One member of this group is the Irish 'leprechaun'.¹⁹ The origin of the name 'leprechaun' may be related to the name 'luchorpan' which means 'Little Body' in English.²⁰ The name leprechaun may also originate from the Irish words 'leath bhrogan' which means 'shoemaker' in English and 'luacharma'n' meaning 'pygmy'.²¹ However, he usually appears as an old man slightly drunk due to the self-made poteen. Although he is really fond of this brew he does not drink too much because he is conscientious about his shoemaker's duty.²²

¹⁶ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins. An Encyclopedia of the Little People*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1996. 109.

¹⁷ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 108.

¹⁸ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 271.

¹⁹ Cf. MacKillop, James. *Celtic Mythology*. 177.

²⁰ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 196.

²¹ Cf. "The Leprechaun". Hidden Ireland a guide to Irish fairies. 9 July 2008. <http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/explorer/leprechaun.html>.

²² Cf. "The Leprechaun". Hidden Ireland a guide to Irish fairies. 9 July 2008. <http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/explorer/leprechaun.html>.

Furthermore, he also feels responsible for the treasures of the Danes which they left behind when they went on to invade Ireland. This he did by putting it into a pot. The leprechaun does not like humans and therefore always tries to get rid of them by promising them a lot of money when they set him free again. He usually has two small leather sacks with different coins at his disposal. One coin is a silver shilling which comes back again when the owner takes it out. In the other is a gold coin which the fairy man uses to get out of complicated and bothersome circumstances. However, if a mortal gets hold of a leprechaun he has to be extremely quick because the fairy man disappears as soon as he sees himself unwatched. The members of the leprechaun clan can be divided into two different groups. The leprechaun depicted above and the 'cluricaun'. This type is not above pilfering and is known for its nightly visits in human wine cellars. They also haunt the cattle of households and ride them in the country during the dark hours.²³

Another fairy belonging to the solitary group is the 'banshee'. In Irish this creature is called 'bean-sidhe' which means 'woman of the hills' in English.²⁴ Her duty is to cry for certain old Irish families when a member of their clan is going to die. These clans include the O'Neills, the O'Briens, the O'Connors, the O'Gradys and the Kavanaghs. Whenever the 'banshee' appears the people are warned. As far as outward appearance is concerned the banshee usually comes into view in three different shapes: 'a young woman, a stately matron or a raddled old hag.'²⁵

She is known as wearing a grey coat or the clothes of the person which is going to die. Most characteristic is her whining at night before the foreseen death is going to happen. Depending on the region in Ireland where the banshee's cry is heard the sounds vary from melodious to extremely unpleasant like the breaking of glass. There were also some known human banshees who foresaw the murder of a king or the death of members of important Irish clans.²⁶

The equivalent to the Irish banshee is the Scottish 'bean nighe' which means 'the Little Washer by the Ford'.²⁷ Usually her territory is a lonesome river where she washes the blood- soaked clothes of the foreseen corps.

²³ Cf. "The Leprechaun". Hidden Ireland a guide to Irish fairies. 9 July 2008.
<http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/explorer/leprechaun.html>.

²⁴ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*. 33.

²⁵ Cf. "The Banshee". Hidden Ireland a guide to Irish fairies. 9 July 2008.
<http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/explorer/banshee.html>.

²⁶ Cf. "The Banshee". Hidden Ireland a guide to Irish fairies. 9 July 2008.
<http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/explorer/banshee.html>.

²⁷ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 36.

Folk tradition claims that the 'bean nighe' are the ghosts of women who died during the process of child-birth. As far as the myth goes they have to do this until their dying day as a mortal human being.²⁸ Katharine Mary Briggs classifies the banshee as a tutelary fairy. According to her these fairies are strongly connected to humans. They foresee the future and also lend a helping hand to the mortals.²⁹

2.1.3. Water Spirits and other Fairy Types

As far as this category of fairies is concerned it includes water spirits such as the English and Irish mermaid and the Scottish 'kelpie'. The Scottish 'kelpie' either appears as a horse or as an old shabby man. He can be found in all types of waters. He is a mischievous creature who likes to drown lonely humans. As an old man the 'kelpie' walks behind lonely riders tearing them apart and eating them up.³⁰ He may also take the shape of a good looking young man. Taking this shape he tries to seduce innocent young women and wants to pull them under water.³¹ A spirit called 'shellycoat' who lives at the Scottish sea coast also belongs to this group.³² He is depicted as wearing a coat full of shells which make a strange sound whenever he appears. He likes to play jokes by giving wrong directions to humans who are on a journey. The 'shellycoat' is not a dangerous creature humans have to be particularly afraid of.³³

The mermaid is one of the water fairies of which numerous stories, folk legends and fairy tales exist in the British Empire. She is said to be half human half fish wearing a fish tail instead of legs. Because of her beauty the mortals are extremely drawn to this charming enchantress. In many stories and legends she is depicted as sitting on a rock combing her hair and singing melodious songs. As far as folk tradition goes seeing a mermaid is an omen of bad weather at sea. Depending on the nature of the mermaid she can fulfil wishes and help humans although the mermaid regularly demands some kind of reward for her service.

²⁸ Cf. Lindemans, Micha F. "Bean Nighe". Encyclopedia Mythica. 9 July 2008. http://www.pantheon.org/articles/b/bean_nighe.html.

²⁹ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 271.

³⁰ Cf. "Kelpie". Celtic Mythology. 10 July 2008. <http://www.answers.com/topic/kelpie>.

³¹ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*, 178.

³² Cf. Lindemans, Micha F. "Shellycoat". Encyclopedia Mythica. 10 July 2008. <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/shellycoat.html>.

³³ Cf. Lindemans, Micha F. "Shellycoat". Encyclopedia Mythica. 10 July 2008. <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/shellycoat.html>.

Apart from the sea they also haunt rivers and lakes inside the country.³⁴ There are also tales about mermaids who married mortals and gave birth to children who had some kind of fairy magic and power. The Irish equivalent is called ‘merrow’ which is the name of the Irish mer-folk.³⁵ A characteristic feature is their red cap which is a magical device enabling them to change their shape according to their surrounding depending on whether they are on the coast or in the water. In case they lose their cap they cannot return to the sea anymore.³⁶

The Scottish ‘Nuckelavee’ is an extremely ugly and frightening creature.³⁷ The sea is said to be his home. Whenever he comes out of the sea he rides a horse with one red eye. Sometimes it is not possible to differentiate between the creature’s body and its horse’s body. Another disgusting detail about the outward appearance of the Nuckelavee is the fact that it is skinless. He is of enormous strength and has a poisonous breath.³⁸ In Scotland his harmful breath was sometimes seen as being responsible for ruined fields and diseases. The Nuckelavee disapproves of fresh water and avoids it whenever possible.³⁹

Apart from the water spirits there are other fairy types such as the ‘Cailleach Bheur’ which means ‘the blue hag of winter’ in English.⁴⁰ In Scottish folklore she is connected to winter causing the snow fall and the winter storms coming on earth every All Hallows Eve. She has the power to freeze the earth by touching it with some kind of magical device. Furthermore she watches and takes care of the kettle and the animals during winter. On Beltane Eve she comes back to earth and takes the shape of a stone. Traditionally, the ‘Cailleach Bheur’ has two magical trees the holly and the gorse bush.⁴¹

³⁴ Cf. “Mermaids”. The Folklore of the British Isles. 10 July 2008.
<http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/folklore/mermaids.html>.

³⁵ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*. 218.

³⁶ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 218.

³⁷ Cf. “The Nuckelavee”. The Folklore of the British Isles. 11 July 2008.
<http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/folklore/nuckel.html>.

³⁸ Cf. “The Nuckelavee”. The Folklore of the British Isles. 11 July 2008.
<http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/folklore/nuckel.html>.

³⁹ Cf. “Nuckelavee”. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. 11 July 2008.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuckelavee>.

⁴⁰ Cf. Briggs, K.M. “The English Fairies”. 272.

⁴¹ Cf. “The Cailleach Bheur”. The Folklore of the British Isles. 11 July 2008.
<http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/folklore/calleach.html>.

According to K.M. Briggs the Scottish ‘Cailleach Bheur’ has an English equivalent called ‘Black Annis’. She is said to have a‘[...] sharp tearing teeth, long black claws and a blue face’.⁴²

The ‘Black Annis’ takes the shape of an old hag and lives in an old oak. One of her favourite meals is the flesh of young children part of the local community. She puts the skin of her victims in front of a huge dark cave called Black Anni’s Bower. Folk tradition says that she dug the cave herself.⁴³

2.2. Features, distinctive Characteristics and Costumes of Fairies

Starting with the size of fairies there are many different varieties roaming about in the fairy realm. Many tales speak of big creatures others tell about small ones about as small as a child or even smaller. In Wales the bigger fairies are said to be the malevolent group whereas the smaller ones are said to be virtuous and kind.⁴⁴ Apart from size they also may vary in terms of beauty and ugliness. In some cases the male creature is ugly whereas the female is extremely pretty. One example for this observation is the difference between the beautiful ‘merrow’ in Ireland and its ugly male equivalent the merman having ‘small eyes, and green hair and teeth’.⁴⁵ K. M. Briggs claims that the various differences in beauty, size and appearance might be connected to their magic powers which enable them to change their appearance as well as the appearance of others.⁴⁶

Focusing on the fairies and their time of existence they are most commonly said to be immortal or at least to become extremely old. Commonly, they are considered as creatures without a soul although folk tradition believes in their ability of gaining one. It almost seems as if they are in an intermediate state between eternal heaven and eternal hell.⁴⁷ The fairy world is inhabited by many different types of fairies. Like the humans themselves they live in all kinds of houses. Time does not matter in the land of the fairies.

⁴² Cf. “The Black Annis”. The Folklore of the British Isles. 11 July 2008.
[http:// www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/folklore/blackannis.html](http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/folklore/blackannis.html).

⁴³ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 41.

⁴⁴ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 108.

⁴⁵ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 218.

⁴⁶ Cf. Briggs, K. M. “The English Fairies”. 273.

⁴⁷ Cf. Briggs, K. M. “The English Fairies”. 273.

Furthermore, nothing unpleasant can be found in the fairy world because death, age, illness, and unattractiveness do not exist. Very often the fairies visit the earthly world and interact with the mortals.⁴⁸

Dealing with the morals and ethics of the fairies one feature appears to be common among almost all of them. They are always ready to steal no matter what or to what purpose. The mortals only have two possibilities of getting round these little thieves. Either they give them what the fairies are longing for on a voluntary basis, or they hide it in a particularly clever way and prevent the fairies from stealing it. In this particular case of stealing it does not make a difference whether a fairy belongs to the good or the evil group. It is their special love for playing tricks on the humans that they cannot resist the temptation of theft.⁴⁹

Another characteristic feature is the loathing for greed. Very often it is the greedy behaviour of the humans that gets punished by the fairies. On the other hand they are fond of fairness, benevolence and chastity. They are grateful for these virtues and show this to the humans by granting them what they want. The reward includes supernatural gifts such as curative powers and more human gifts such as silver, groceries and wealth.⁵⁰ However, fairies are also well up in physical issues knowing about certain healing treatments. Most widely known is the white powder the fairies use to heal and cure illnesses. K. M. Briggs furthermore mentions that in the seventeenth century during the days of witch persecution some of the witches claimed that they could only heal with the help of the white powder owned by the fairies.⁵¹ Apart from their talent of healing they also brought great pain to humans by stealing new born babies and nursing mothers. The reason for this evil action may be the fact that the fairy baby depends on the milk of a human woman. Midwives are highly respected and valued by the fairies because they need these women for their own females. Usually, the midwives receive a generous reward when their work is done.⁵² Another group of humans is particularly in danger of getting kidnapped by the fairy people. It is the group of artists such as dancers and musicians.

The reason for this is the fairies' love of music. From time to time fairies abducted human beings in order to get a ticket to hell.⁵³

⁴⁸ Cf. Funk & Wagnalls. *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*. Ed. Maria Leach. 4th ed. New York: Harper&Row, 1987. 363.

⁴⁹ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 274.

⁵⁰ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 274.

⁵¹ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 274.

⁵² Cf. Funk & Wagnalls. *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*. 364.

⁵³ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 274-275.

As far as their social and cultural life is concerned they are quite similar to humans because they like sports such as hunting and cultural entertainment such as dancing. The Irish fairies are also good fighters and soldiers. Concerning work the fairies are skilled craftsmen. Their favourite occupations are the production of shoes, spinning and weaving. They are capable of doing agriculture and any type of work in the household.⁵⁴ Dealing with the food of the fairies in fairy land it is said to be out of the ordinary and very tasty. Milk is what they like most whereas they loathe salt.⁵⁵ Their way of clothing is as variable as their size and nature. Sometimes they appear in clothes distinctive of the region or country they roam about. However, sometimes they wear pretty old clothes which are not fashionable any longer. The most widely known colour connected to fairies is green. Another well known piece of clothing is the red cap. However, some fairies favour the colour white for instance in Wales and the North of England. Green and yellow are colours preferred by Welsh fairies. Other pieces of clothing are skins and tartans, a kind of Scottish plaid, worn by the fairies located in the Highlands. Depending on the type of fairy and the region they live in they are either beautifully dressed or appear in old shabby rags.⁵⁶ Connected to mortals the fairies have to avoid specific situations or substances. The fear of holy water is what the fairies have in common with the devil. Apart from this the fairies avoid cold metal and the crossing of water. Giving information about their origin or even telling their names is dangerous for the fairy people. When they roam about they have to be careful because the cockcrow can expel them. Usually, the fairies have tiny bells and enjoy their sound although they do not like the sound of the bell high above in the church steeple.⁵⁷ As it has already been mentioned above, mortals should not take anything away from the fairies because they loathe greedy people. If a human gets a reward or any kind of gift he or she should act in an appreciative way. Speaking about Sunday is not considered sensitive by the magical creatures. Mortals who want to protect themselves from fairy magic need to have a cloak which is turned inside out, a knife, a small piece of bread, the Bible, and some milk.

⁵⁴ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 275.

⁵⁵ Cf. Funk & Wagnalls. *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*. 365.

⁵⁶ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 275.

⁵⁷ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 275.

Sometimes it is also useful to have a small piece of rowan or elder at hand because it is a hiding place for benevolent fairies but also a shield against maleficent creatures. Taking all these utensils together it is highly unlikely that a human baby is stolen by the fairies.⁵⁸

2.3. The Fairies' Role in British Literature through the Centuries

Focusing on the earliest pieces of literature where fairies are mentioned there is one interesting story which has been documented by Ralph of Coggeshall. He was the sixth abbot of Essex reporting about the mysterious story of the Green Children in the *Chronicon Anglicanum* between 1178 and 1224.⁵⁹ It is the story of two children who suddenly appeared in the small town Suffolk village of Woolpit, close to Bury St. Edmunds. They wore unfamiliar clothes, the color of their skin was green, and they spoke a strange language unknown to the inhabitants of the village. At the beginning they only ate beans until they got to know some other food. The boy could not adapt to the villagers' way of life and died soon after they came to the town. The girl who acclimatized better learned the English language and even got married. It is also reported that she became a lecherous and frivolous person.⁶⁰

K. M. Briggs claims that these children might be identified as fairies due to the strange clothes, the green skin, and their love of beans, which according to Briggs, is the meal of the dead, and the wild behaviour of the girl. Briggs interprets these features as characteristic of fairies although both children did not have any magic tricks at their disposal nor did they know anything about mythical rituals or spells.⁶¹

Despite the fact that this is a fascinating story, it is important to keep in mind that although it is recorded in the chronicles it need not necessarily be true. In the 12th century the chronicles were useful in terms of documentation as far as religious or political issues were concerned. But apart from worldly facts, also wonders and supernatural events were included which nowadays nobody would believe in. In those days no man or woman would have doubted the stories mentioned in the chronicle.⁶²

⁵⁸ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 276.

⁵⁹ Cf. Haughton, Brian. "The Mystery of the Green Children of Woolpit". 12 July 2008. <http://www.mysteriouspeople.com/Green-Children.htm>.

⁶⁰ Cf. Haughton, Brian. "The Mystery of the Green Children of Woolpit". 12 July 2008. <http://www.mysteriouspeople.com/Green-Children.htm>

⁶¹ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 280.

⁶² Cf. Haughton, Brian. "The Mystery of the Green Children of Woolpit". 12 July 2008. <http://www.mysteriouspeople.com/Green-Children.htm>.

Dealing with the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it is obvious that the time when people unconditionally believed in fairies is over. In those days people tried to approach the topic from a more critical point of view. Especially in the seventeenth century there are some pieces of prose literature where the authors tried to find some proof for the truthfulness of the folk stories. At that time there was a big gap between educated people who did not believe in these stories anymore and the people in the country who did not stop to take the fairy world for granted. However, at the end of the century the situation changed and some members of the educated elite revised their scientific attitude.⁶³ An author of the seventeenth century dealing with fairies is John Beaumont a British geologist and surgeon. He wrote *A Historical Physiological and Theological Treatise of Spirits, Apparitions, Witchcraft and Other Magical Practices* published in 1705.⁶⁴

According to him he was haunted by several spirits which followed him for several years. His description of his experience with the strange creatures is very detailed and full of magical elements. John Beaumont describes the spirits' clothes as well as their habits. According to him he only saw them during daytime or at night during moonshine and candlelight:⁶⁵

The two spirits that constantly attended myself appeared both in women's habit, they being of brown complexion, about three feet in stature; they had both black loose net-work gowns, tied with a black sash about the middle, and within the net-work appeared a gown of a golden colour, with somewhat of a light striking through it. Their heads were not dressed in top-knots, but they had white linen caps on, with lace on them about three fingers' breadth, and over it they had a black loose net-work hood.⁶⁶

Apart from the folk narratives there is another literary genre in which fairies play an important role. In William Shakespeare's plays, the fairies were reintroduced again. One example, besides some others, is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this romantic comedy Shakespeare creates a new type of fairy as regards outward appearance.

⁶³ Cf. Briggs, K. M. "The English Fairies". 281.

⁶⁴ Cf. "John Beaumont". Occultism & Parapsychology Encyclopedia. 14 July 2008. <http://www.answers.com/topic/john-beaumont>.

⁶⁵ Cf. "John Beaumont". Occultism & Parapsychology Encyclopedia. 14 July 2008. <http://www.answers.com/topic/john-beaumont>.

⁶⁶ Cf. "John Beaumont". Occultism & Parapsychology Encyclopedia. 14 July 2008. <http://www.answers.com/topic/john-beaumont>.

In Elizabethan England people thought of fairies as having the same height and form as the human beings. This stands in sharp contrast to the Irish fairy type because in Ireland the fairies are also called little people due to the fact that they are very tiny.⁶⁷ The fairies were thought to be associated with the colour green and believed to be of exquisite shape. Shakespeare changed some features of the traditional imagination and came up with another version of a fairy unknown to the people in those days. His fairies are small and delicately built. Additionally, they have wings and are of rare beauty.⁶⁸ Shakespeare not only changed the appearance and shape of the fairies but also their habits and manners. He depicted them as lovely, playful creatures without any serious intention to harm the humans. This was absolutely new to the audience of that time because they were only used to the wicked and malevolent creatures which are fond of teasing and doing harm to mortals.⁶⁹

What Elizabethan fairies and Shakespeare's fairies have in common is their fondness of dancing and singing. Both fairy types the one originating from folklore and the one created by Shakespeare are mainly active during night time. One of the most prominent figures in the play is the spirit Puck who is also known by the name of Robin Goodfellow. To the Elizabethan people he is not an alien character because he is also part of traditional fairy lore. Traditionally, he is depicted as a humorous creature drawn to unforeseen happenings and known as a permanent source of laughter. Very often Robin Goodfellow is presented with a broom because he does not like dirtiness. Due to his harmless manners he is not considered a conventional type of fairy.⁷⁰ In Shakespeare's play however he has reached the level of a fairy and is called Puck instead of Robin Goodfellow. In the play he is capable of producing a magical ointment, which is attributed to traditional fairy lore as well. According to the Encyclopaedia of the Celts this ointment helps the humans to break the magic spell the fairies apply to lead astray their perception. Stories featuring the topic midwife to the fairies deal with the use of this ointment.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 109.

⁶⁸ Cf. "Midsummer Night's Dream Essay: Fairies". About Shakespeare. 14 July 2008. http://www.about-shakespeare.com/midsummer_nights_dream_essay.php.

⁶⁹ Cf. "Midsummer Night's Dream Essay: Fairies". About Shakespeare. 14 July 2008. http://www.about-shakespeare.com/midsummer_nights_dream_essay.php.

⁷⁰ Cf. "Midsummer Night's Dream Essay: Fairies". About Shakespeare. 14 July 2008. http://www.about-shakespeare.com/midsummer_nights_dream_essay.php.

⁷¹ Cf. "Fairy ointment". The Encyclopaedia of the Celts. 14 July 2008. http://www.isle-of-skye.org.uk/celtic-encyclopaedia/celt_f1c.htm.

By using it he becomes a real fairy doing harm to other spirits or humans. While applying the ointment he crosses the borders between a harmless joke and a fatal disaster. On the other hand he does so accidentally because he could not clearly identify the lovers and the non-lovers involved. This might derive from his folkloric origin in which he is described as a clumsy spirit causing accidental incidents and confusion.⁷²

Oberon, [to Robin]

What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite
And laid the love juice on some true-love's sight.
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true-love turned, and not a false turned true.

Robin

Then fate o'errules, that, one man holding troth,
A million fail, confounding oath on oath.⁷³

Besides the extreme popularity of the traditional fairy lore throughout the centuries it was William Shakespeare who introduced a new version of the fairy world. He not only focused on the fairy belief but presented it in a totally different way. His fairies moved from the traditional point of view as bad-tempered and maleficent creatures haunting humans to harmless figures living in the woods mainly connected to dreams instead of reality. Therefore the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might be seen as one of the sources responsible for the English fairy type popular today.⁷⁴

2.4. Differences in Fairy Lore in Britain

As manifested in the preceding analysis of the fairies and their sphere of activity, there are many similarities as well as differences between the fairies of the countries Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. Very often there are several names or terms for one and the same supernatural spirit depending on the country and its dealings with fairy lore. In Wales there is of course the Welsh language which has a vital and strong influence on the spelling and pronunciation of the fairies' names.

Dealing with the similarities of fairy lore in the above mentioned countries there are some characteristic features which can be found everywhere on the British Isles.

⁷² Cf. "Midsummer Night's Dream Essay: Fairies". About Shakespeare. 14 July 2008.
http://www.about-shakespeare.com/midsummer_nights_dream_essay.php.

⁷³ Cf. Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1993.

⁷⁴ Cf. "Midsummer Night's Dream Essay: Fairies". About Shakespeare. 14 July 2008.
http://www.about-shakespeare.com/midsummer_nights_dream_essay.php.

In chapter 2.2. the most important and widely known attributes of fairies have already been discussed. Ireland has the most colourful and most specific beliefs in fairy lore. One of the most obvious characteristics of the Irish tradition is the enormous variety of different fairy types. The Irish depict them as magnificent creatures of very small stature. Depending on the form and shape they may appear to be good-looking as well as ugly and disgusting.⁷⁵

Furthermore, they are distinctively described as being fond of music and poetry. This might be due to the fact that Ireland is a nation where music constitutes a basic part of social and cultural life. Apart from the given differences between mortals and fairies this love of music is a tradition both parties share with each other and therefore may function as a linking part between human and fairy world.

K.M. Briggs argues that the Irish fairies hold a status which is similar to God because of their direct connection to the dead and the former gods of the country. This close relationship to the old traditions and spiritual beliefs makes the fairies so prominent and inevitable in Ireland.⁷⁶

Compared to the traditional beliefs in Scotland, especially the Highlands, many similarities in fairy lore can be observed. What is most prominent in the Scottish tales is the clear differentiation between good and bad fairies. Usually, they are called the 'People of Peace' or the 'Good Neighbors' although it is extremely dangerous to meet any of these solitary fairies which are said to be of extraordinary malice.⁷⁷ Although there are different fairy types divided into various groups all the Scottish fairies have one characteristic in common. They are likely to live in seclusion and at greater distance to the humans than in Ireland.⁷⁸ The Scottish Highlands are said to be inhabited by ugly creatures without clear cut shapes and forms appearing like shadows in the dark. The 'brollachan' which is part of Gaelic folklore is one of the spirits living in the Highlands.⁷⁹

According to ancient tradition this creature does not have a distinct shape. Instead of a whole face it only has a mouth and two eyes. Depending on the ground this creature sits on it can take the shape of the object or person.

⁷⁵ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 109.

⁷⁶ Cf. Briggs, K. M. *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967. 106.

⁷⁷ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 109.

⁷⁸ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 109.

⁷⁹ Cf. MacKillop, James. *Celtic Mythology*. 54.

It is also said that the 'brollachan' only utters two words: "Myself" and "Thyself".⁸⁰ Commonly, the fairies in Wales are called 'Tylwyth Teg' which means 'the Fairy Family' in English.⁸¹ Again, the Welsh 'Tylwyth Teg' share certain characteristics with the Irish fairies such as the fondness of music and dancing. Usually, they are good to the humans and bring them luck and wealth if the human acts in an appreciative way.⁸² There exists also another name for the 'Tylwyth Teg' called 'Bendith y Mamau' meaning 'The Mothers' Blessing' in English which is used in an euphemistic way by the people with the intention to please the fairies.⁸³ This term, especially the English translation might be directly connected to the mythical figures of the Neolithic goddesses of Europe called 'The Mothers'. These three mothers were known in the entire world of the Celts. Commonly, these women are presented as being of old age holding the goods of the earth such as 'fruits, barley-loaves and beer in their hands'.⁸⁴

Turning to the fairy tradition of Cornwall tales of giants and 'pixies' appear to be a popular topic. According to Cornish folk tradition the 'pixie' appears as an elderly man who may be dressed in a green suite.⁸⁵ Cornwall's fairy lore is also inhabited by 'spriggans' and 'knockers' which represent a specific group of fairies. The 'spriggan' is able to change his shape, from very small to enormously big. Like the pixies they may steal children away from their parents. This fairy type is about as popular in Cornwall as the pixies.⁸⁶ The 'knocker' is similar to a dwarf and does not harm humans in any way.⁸⁷ The knockers were closely linked to an ancient race of miners working in the depths of hills and mountains. These miners believed in the existence of the tiny little creatures which was probably due to the dark and narrow surroundings in the mines. According to folklore these little creatures were working in the mines as well, doing good and bad things to the humans.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ Cf. Matthews, John&Caitlin. *An Encyclopaedia of Myth and Legend*. British & Irish Mythology. London: The Aquarian Press, 1988. 39-40.

⁸¹ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 319.

⁸² Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 319.

⁸³ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins*. 319.

⁸⁴ Cf. Matthews, John&Caitlin. *An Encyclopaedia of Myth and Legend*. 32.

⁸⁵ Cf. MacKillop, James. *Celtic Mythology*. 324.

⁸⁶ Cf. MacKillop, James. *Celtic Mythology*. 346.

⁸⁷ Cf. MacKillop, James. *Celtic Mythology*. 254.

⁸⁸ Cf. "Piskies, Faeries, Knockers and the Small People". Cornish Folklore. 17 July 2008. <http://www.connexions.co.uk/culture/html/folklore.htm>.

Apart from the folklore traditions in Ireland, England and Wales there are two islands in the north of Scotland which, due to their geographical location, are closely connected to the traditions in Scandinavia. The Orkney and Shetland Islands incorporate Scottish as well as Scandinavian tales and legends. In Scandinavia almost every country has its myths of tiny, mysterious people who live side by side with the humans.

On the Shetland Islands this people is called ‘trows’. A ‘trow’ is a shy creature doing good or evil things to the humans. They are also famous for their love of music as well as their need for human musicians when celebrating a feast.⁸⁹ Another source of legends and myths on the Shetland Islands is the sea and its inhabitants. The seal people play a vital role in local folklore and tradition and will be dealt with in one of the following chapters in more detail.

To sum up the main concerns of this chapter on fairies it is important to bear in mind that these creatures are still a very vital part in British folk tradition. As mentioned above the superstition and belief in fairies is still alive amongst the people in Ireland, England and Scotland. No matter if something pleasant or unpleasant happened the power of the fairies is always in the mind of the people. Almost every good or evil event is connected to a specific fairy, which, due to its magic characteristics, might be responsible for a happy or disastrous ending. There are many different fairies in the fairy realm, and as many different theories about their origin. The quote from Lady Jane Wilde is particularly interesting because it refers to the co-existence of fairy beliefs including God and his angels as part of the Catholic tradition. This is not only typical of Ireland but also of England and Scotland. Therefore, it is not particularly surprising that there are so many similarities in folk tradition. Nevertheless, there are also some differences in fairy lore. One major difference in fairy lore is ascribed to the geographical characteristics of a country. In Scotland, the Highlands are a source of many different magical stories as well as the home of many different types of fairies dwelling in the rough climate of the north. Ireland is closely connected to the sea and maritime life. Therefore, many stories about the people of the sea are part of the Irish fairy world. Another significant aspect which has to be taken into consideration is the role of literature regarding folk traditions.

⁸⁹ Cf. “Shetland”. The Fairy Mythology: Northern Islands: Shetland. 17 July 2008. <http://www.theology101.org/neu/celt/tfm/tfm061.htm>.

In England it was Shakespeare who made up a different version of a fairy compared to the traditional fairy type for his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. By taking up the motif of the fairy in his work it is no longer restricted to folklore but became part of the genre of drama. Apart from the elaborate use in the skilful play of Shakespeare there are other forms of literary traditions in folklore which focus on the fairy world. It is the literary genre of the fairy- and folktale which holds a central position in folklore and will be dealt with in the following chapter.

3. Two Literary Genres: Fairy Tale and Folk Tale

This chapter will focus on the fairy tale as an acknowledged literary genre. The analysis will be based on the studies of several German folklorists and philologists who did a lot of research work in this field. The terms ‘Kunstmärchen’⁹⁰ and ‘Volksmärchen’⁹¹ will be analysed referring to their cultural origin, literary meaning and historical development within the field of fairy tale studies. An attempt will be made to find out about the differences and possible relations between the two English concepts ‘fairy tale’ and ‘folk tale’. Furthermore there will be a chapter presenting the main concepts included in a fairy tale referring to the studies of Vladimir Propp and Max Lüthi. Here, the main characters, actions, motifs constituting the narrative construct of a fairy tale will be in the centre of attention. The last part of this chapter will be a concrete analysis of a Celtic fairy tale called *The Sea-Maiden* which is part of a fairy tale collection edited by the English folklorist Joseph Jacobs. This analysis will be based on the findings of Max Lüthi trying to substantiate his theories. Additionally, the main motifs contained in *The Sea-Maiden* will be discussed in some detail contributing to the better understanding of this tale.

3.1. Fairy Tale versus Folk Tale: An Attempt at a Clarification of these Terms

The Encyclopaedia of Folklore and Literature gives the following definition of what a fairy tale is:

A fairy tale is “a long, fictitious narrative with a human main character; the narrative includes fantasy and it is told as a means of passing the time, as entertainment” (Apo 1995, p. 16) Fairy tales are episodic: the main character is separated from, or otherwise in trouble with, his or her family. He or she encounters severe or supernatural challenges and difficulties until, finally, all ends happily. Within this framework are set one or more extraordinary, usually magical, motifs, such as a character’s ability to assume another shape, to come back from the dead, or to summon supernatural aid. Some fairy tales involve a quest for a spouse or for a magic object, some tell of a confrontation with an ogre or an evil human adversary, and some integrate magical motifs into a humorous story.

⁹⁰ Cf. “literary fairy tale”. Translation from Collins Dictionary.
<http://dictionary.reverso.net/german-english/kunstmärchen>.

⁹¹ Cf. “folk tale”. Translation from Collins Dictionary.
<http://dictionary.reverso.net/german-english/Volksm%C3%A4rchen>.

Typically, the tale is set apart from everyday speech with formulas such as “Once upon a time” and “They lived happily ever after”.⁹²

As it becomes apparent from the given quote there are concrete features and characteristics defining how a fairy tale should look like in order to be recognized and understood as such. This definition draws to the fact that the supernatural and the magical person or object is one of the main defining features as well as the popular beginnings and endings of a tale mentioned in the quote. Although there are certain established features which are closely related to the fairy tale, problems turn up as soon as a clear cut definition is to be achieved.

In English there are two terms which are closely related with each other. First, the term fairy tale, also known as literary fairy tale, and second, the term folk tale. As far as the English language is concerned the literary genre of fairy tales is for the most part identified as an unknown territory and therefore less attention has been paid to it. Dieter Petzold claims that this is due to the fact that this genre is closely related to popular or trivial culture. This literary genre is directly connected to child literature which according to Petzold still holds, at least to a certain extent, the imagination of a banal and naïf genre.⁹³

Unlike the English tendency to neglect this scholarly realm in earlier days the Germans engaged into the exploration of fairy tales and finding definitions and useful expression for this literary field. This engagement is apparent when looking at the popular terms ‘Kunstmärchen’ and ‘Volksmärchen’. German philologists came up with these two terms in order to provide a basic guideline when working in the field of fairy tales providing appropriate definitions and expressions. In German the term ‘Kunstmärchen’ is opposed to the term ‘Volksmärchen’. According to Mathias Mayer and Jens Tismar this opposition, an old-fashioned point of view, is mainly based on the differentiation between oral and written tradition.⁹⁴

Furthermore, there is also a difference in terms of authorship. ‘Kunstmärchen’ are produced by a known author who is in the position to claim the skilfully created stories his intellectual property. Here, the formulation is fixed and the audience is not allowed to change it in anyway.

⁹² Cf. Brown, Mary Ellen, Bruce A. Rosenberg, eds. *Encyclopaedia of Folklore and Literature*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1998. 201-202.

⁹³ Cf. Petzold, Dieter. *Das englische Kunstmärchen im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*. Ed. Helmut Gneuss et al. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag. 1981. 1-2.

⁹⁴ Cf. Mayer, Mathias; Tismar, Jens. *Kunstmärchen*. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 1997.1.

Contrary to this type of narrative the ‘Volksmärchen’ is recognized as a piece of literature which can be changed by the audience without running the risk of getting punished.⁹⁵ It may be told and retold in several different versions which are called variants. Apart from the unpredictability in form it is the traditional way of communicating these stories which distinguishes the folk tale from the fairy tale. Traditionally, it is the oral tale which is identified as a folk tale although it is particularly difficult to get to know about the oral or written origin of a tale.⁹⁶

Furthermore, there is a difference between authors who wrote a fairy tale and people who tell a folk tale. The authors ply for the authenticity of their unique creation whereas the people retelling a folk tale are eager to give proof of the truthfulness of their story by referring to historical sources or influential people. In this context Stith Thompson gives the example of Chaucer who based his work on influential and well known people and referred to them in his stories.⁹⁷

Volker Klotz takes the line that the term ‘Kunst’ is somehow problematic because it identifies a piece of literature as artificial. It may imply that there is no possibility for this literary genre to demand authenticity.⁹⁸ Apart from this Volker Klotz gives another interpretation of the term ‘Kunst’ in connection to the word ‘Märchen’. He traces the expression to a derivation from an original source and the aim to make a distinction between them. Therefore, he draws the conclusion that originally the ‘Kunstmärchen’ is not an independent literary genre. The authors of this particular genre do not have to stick to a specific metrical or literary form as it is the rule in other genres such as the sonnet or a comedy.⁹⁹

Despite the misleading terms and the less clear cut literary form of the ‘Kunstmärchen’ there is one feature which unites all types of this genre. The ‘Volksmärchen’ is the shared source which relates to it. The exact extent and the means by which this is done by the author differs from story to story. Klotz argues that this is an uncharacteristic situation in terms of literary history. The common defining feature of all the story types is not part of the ‘Kunstmärchen’ corpus itself but based on the ‘Volksmärchen’ corpus outside.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Cf. Mayer, Mathias; Tismar, Jens. *Kunstmärchen*. 1.

⁹⁶ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. New York: The Dryden Press, 1951.4.

⁹⁷ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 4.

⁹⁸ Cf. Klotz, Volker. *Das Europäische Kunstmärchen*. 3rd ed. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002. 8.

⁹⁹ Cf. Klotz, Volker. *Das Europäische Kunstmärchen*. 8

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Klotz, Volker. *Das Europäische Kunstmärchen*. 8.

Therefore, it is not an independent genre in the traditional sense because it makes use of a system which does not belong to it originally. Despite of this sharing and borrowing of features it might be argued in favour of a closed system due to the fact that it works in an incomparable and unique way with these features.¹⁰¹ The development of the ‘Kunstmärchen’ is based on the traditions of the ‘Volksmärchen’. This interpretation mirrors the position of the author as a subject. It allows the reader to gain some insight into the author’s as well as society’s dreams and wishes. Nevertheless, the ‘Kunstmärchen’ and its author make use of the ‘Volksmärchen’s’ form and philosophy of life to create a reversed version of the original source. Depending on the point of view of the audience and the direction of the time based interpretation it may be analysed as a flight into an archaic idyll when seen from a past point in time. By looking at it from a present day point of view it may be seen as a parody and interpreted with regards to the future it may interpreted as a utopia of luck. Additionally, these stories reveal the contemporary social circumstances and the positive as well as negative emotions towards them.¹⁰² As a general rule it becomes obvious that authors of ‘Kunstmärchen’ take the ‘Volksmärchen’ as a basis for their working process. They do not focus on one single story but they work with the entire genre and its characteristic features. The author chooses a story and starts to reinterpret it according to his opinion by shifting significance of certain features. This is the way the specific genre of the ‘Kunstmärchen’ comes into existence. It is heavily dependent on the author and his poetic aim as well as his social attitudes.¹⁰³

Therefore, Klotz claims that a proper definition of the term ‘Kunstmärchen’ is only possible when it is directly related to the ‘Volksmärchen’. According to him the ‘Kunstmärchen’ is a variation, a continuation and a distortion of the original source.¹⁰⁴

Stith Thompson one of the most prominent American folklorists in the 19th and 20th century presents a slightly different point of view.¹⁰⁵ He is aware of the confusing state of affairs when dealing with the literary genre of fairy tales and the appropriate terms defining it.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Klotz, Volker. *Das Europäische Kunstmärchen*. 9.

¹⁰² Cf. Klotz, Volker. *Das Europäische Kunstmärchen*. 9.

¹⁰³ Cf. Klotz, Volker. *Das Europäische Kunstmärchen*. 9.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Klotz, Volker. *Das Europäische Kunstmärchen*. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. “Thompson Stith”. The Handbook of Texas Online. 24 July 2008.
http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/TT/fth26_print.html.

According to him, it is impossible to ignore the concept of 'Märchen', when analysing folk tales. This German concept is some kind of subordinate category which may be helpful to gain some insight into the realm of the various types of fairy tales. In English there is no suitable equivalent to the German terms apart from fairy tale or household tale. Thompson discerns some problems with the English translation into 'fairy tale' in that it indicates that the tale has some fairy protagonists which is not the case in many fairy tales. The term 'Märchen' encompasses various tales such as 'Snow White' or 'Hansel and Gretel' which do not feature any fairy, whereas the 'household tale' is a much broader concept which may include nearly all types of stories.¹⁰⁶ Thompson defines the term 'Märchen' as follows:

A Märchen is a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvellous. In this never-never land humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms, and marry princesses.¹⁰⁷

This quote substantiates the above mentioned fact that according to Thompson the term 'Märchen' is more suitable for the description of supernatural tales and its narrative characteristics than the term 'fairy tale' which literally involves the presence of any kind of fairy figure. Besides, this particularly popular German concept there are other tale types which Thompson takes under consideration. He furthermore refers to the novella which is closely related to the 'Märchen' in terms of structure. An example for this tale type is the story of *Sindbad the Sailor*.¹⁰⁸

Although magical events happen in these stories it appears to be much more realistic to gain the reader's trust in the story's authenticity than this is the case with the 'Märchen'. This may be due to the fact that the background of the action is based on concrete places and time spans. These two tale types appear to share many similarities and therefore the differentiation is not always consciously recognized. Occasionally, both terms are united and labelled as one expression called 'Novellenmärchen'.¹⁰⁹

The term hero tale literally reveals what is in the centre of attention in these stories. They included heroes such as Hercules struggling and fighting against evil powers. Also the terms local legend or local tradition clearly communicate what it is about.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 7-8.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 8.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 8.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 8.

In German the term 'Sage' is the equivalent to the just mentioned expressions.¹¹⁰ It focuses on an event which had happened around a particular place or location a long time ago. Very often supernatural beings such as fairies are part of the story. Usually, it is presented as a story which is said to be recollected from memory, plain in terms of structure and motifs.¹¹¹ Myth is another concept in narrative prose which Thompson mentions. According to him this tale type is intimately related to the church and religious beliefs of the people. It recounts about holy objects and heavenly beings and repeated events featuring gods.¹¹² Thompson concludes in his introduction to the folk tale that many of the above mentioned narrative classes converge in such a way that a clear cut differentiation between specific types is not easy to achieve if possible at all.¹¹³

Although a lot of scientific work has been done in the literary field of fairy tales, folk tales and various other related subgenres there is still much confusion going on. Partly, this may be due to the fact that it is particularly difficult to differentiate between the existing genres and, therefore, a complicated task to draw clear cut lines and provide the readers with useful definitions. Although many literary scholars have focused on this matter there is still no overall concept of the fairy tale. There is just a basic outline provided by these philological experts who try to define what should be incorporated in this genre and what should be excluded.

They are also eager to express that their theories are still at beginnings and far from being completed due to the fact that certain resentments towards the scholarly character of this field of research has hindered their studies. To get closer to the concept of the fairy tale it is important to identify its content, motifs and historical development as well as its form. These motifs, internal characteristics and the history of this genre will be taken under consideration in the following chapters.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 8.

¹¹¹ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 8-9.

¹¹² Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 9.

¹¹³ Cf. Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 10.

3.1.1 Historical Development in the Field of Fairy Tale Research

As far as the collection and analysis of fairy tales is concerned the Grimm Brothers were the leading authorities in this field crossing national borders. Their writings, letters and notes on fairy tales contributed to an extensive theory on the nature of this genre.¹¹⁴ Max Lüthi a Swiss literary scholar quotes in his book called *Märchen* the views of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm concerning the origin of the genre. According to them the fairy tale developed from myth although both genres differ in terms of their narrative form.¹¹⁵

The attempt of a far-reaching investigation of the origin of the fairy tale came about due to the fact that in the 19th century, origin and meaning of the fairy tales were in the centre of attention. In the 20th century the situation changed and its function within society and its typology, structure and style became central subjects in the academic debate. Apart from these features characteristic of the individual centuries there is another aspect which had been vital at any time focusing on the extensive distribution of fairy tales in the world.¹¹⁶

In the 19th century the research within the realm of myth was strongly related to the natural sciences which became extremely popular and acknowledged in those days. Therefore, the tales were interpreted in terms of allegories of nature. The sun, the moon and the stars and their movement in the sky were seen as stimulation for mythic stories and tales.¹¹⁷

Another more long lasting and influential attempt of interpretation was provided by ethnologists dealing with the relationship between morals, habits connected to thinking and dreams of primitive peoples and their fairy tales. These ethnologists took the standpoint that the essential confrontation with the earthly circle of dying and living as well as emotions, thoughts and beliefs have an impact on the way stories are shaped in terms of content and telling. This may be an explanation for the fact that certain tribes and peoples who depend on hunting, due to their traditional and cultural upbringing and lifestyle, mainly create stories featuring animals.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 8th ed. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1990. 62.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 62.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 63.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 63-64.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 65.

As far as the source of internationally distributed fairy tales is concerned it is India which is said to have been most influential and still is, today. Apart from the Indian source, there are also the European peoples, especially the Celts whose fairy tale culture is equally influential.¹¹⁹

What is still a source of conflict in scholarly circles is the exact time of the beginning of the fairy tale genre. Researchers have agreed on the fact that many motifs recurring in various versions of tales are much older than the tales themselves. Dealing with the European origin there is the assumption that the beginning was in the late Middle Ages. The fairy tale collections from India can be dated back till 1000 before Christ.¹²⁰ Due to the difficulties in determining a date of origin many controversial debates and hypothesis have become a vital part of scholarly research. Apart from the contradictory views on origin there is broader acceptance and agreement about the view that the 'Volksmärchen' should be identified as 'gesunkenes Kulturgut'.¹²¹

The artful and stylish structure of the fairy tale gave rise to the theory that the genre of the fairy tale was created by upper-class poets. These tales were then taken up and understood by the ordinary people as a narration characterised by an archetypal character.¹²²

By looking at this subject more closely, it appears to be obvious that all the assumptions made by literary scholars, ethnologists and folklorists are cautious attempts to pin down dates and facts which can be presented as the result of scholarly research. This is of course the foremost duty of any scholarly effort. At the other hand this is exactly the problem which brings the experts into trouble. The genre of the 'fairy tale' is more than a construct of dates, facts, motifs and types of structures. As it was presented by the Grimm Brothers a fairy tale is closely related to other genres such as legend or myth. Both genres as well as the fairy tale have some mythic and mysterious facets which are fairly difficult to grasp. It is precisely this inexplicable feeling which is not only experienced by the literary scholars doing their analysis but also by the reader engaging in the tale and its magic realm.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 69.

¹²⁰ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 77.

¹²¹ Cf. Lüthi, Max. "sunken cultural asset", my translation. 80.

¹²² Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 80.

The ordinary reader is simply fascinated and trapped by the events presented in the tale whereas the scholars want to find out about this feeling in more detail.

This is then the point where the experts meet with the limits of their knowledge. It is the emotion of the ordinary reader which cannot be explained in literary terms. There may be indications of certain theories but in the end, no sophisticated or academic explanation can do justice to a collectively shared emotion.

3.2. Analysing a Fairy tale's theoretical Premises in Depth

As well as any other literary genre the 'fairy tale' is a genre based on different functions, characters and narrative structures. Vladimir Propp is one of the leading figures dealing with the methodological analysis of fairy tales. He wrote the famous book *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* published in 1928 in which he presents thirty-one key functions being necessary to classify specific tale types in the fairy tale corpus. Defining the term functions more closely it identifies primary and regular elements which are closely connected to the characters and keep the action going. The main character or protagonist very often gets into trouble by infringing a given order or instruction. Thus, the protagonist needs to leave or is forced to leave his customary environment to sort out his problems connected to the breach of an order.¹²³

Focusing on the sociological aspect it is the rule that characters perform their role in line with their social statuses within the family or society itself. Usually, the main characters change their situation by altering themselves. This change makes the listeners and tellers of a story interested in it and arouse the feeling of hope among the audience and the person telling the story. What is predictable in the fairy tale structure is the contact between the protagonist and either enemies or friends. The counter part of the protagonist the so called antagonist may appear in different shapes or forms depending on the content of the story. Frequently, these antagonists are represented by witches, ogres, monsters or wicked fairies.¹²⁴ The well-meaning figures habitually have supernatural powers at their disposal. In most of the cases there are three friendly figures who provide a task for the protagonist which needs to be worked out.

¹²³ Cf. Zipes, Jack. *Why Fairy Tales Stick. The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 49.

¹²⁴ Cf. Zipes, Jack. *Why Fairy Tales Stick*. 49.

As soon as the solution is at hand the main character is rewarded with special gifts such as supernatural devices which he will require whenever a dangerous or difficult situation turns up. This problematic situation, which is usually part of the story and comes up without a warning, may be overcome with the help of the magical devices from his new friends. At the end of the story the protagonist is commonly rewarded with marriage, wealth, life or wisdom. However, in the end the protagonist appears to be totally changed and cannot be compared to the character presented at the beginning of the tale.¹²⁵

Max Lüthi holds a similar point of view as far as the internal characteristics of the fairy tale is concerned. His analysis focuses on the European fairy tale which he thinks to be the ideal tale type. According to him the most basic schema presented in the European fairy tale is the emergence of problems and the process of solving them. This schema gives rise to the expectation towards a positive ending which is one of the main characteristics of the fairy tale.¹²⁶

As far as the plot of the fairy tale is concerned the most essential and distinctive human patterns of behaviour are depicted. This is for example, a fight, murder, rescue, recovery, or marriage. Focusing on the most prominent themes there are some that are particularly often to observe. There is the conflict between reality and illusion, the victory of the weak over the mighty, the change of a situation into the opposite and self destruction. Two other basic constituents are the paradox and irony. In the case of the fairy tale the paradox is such a familiar concept to the reader that it even appears to be perfectly normal.¹²⁷

Lüthi furthermore describes the different characters as well as requisites which emerge in a classic tale. The characters which drive forward the action are female or male heroes who belong to the worldly human race. Additionally, there are some other supporting characters such as an assistant helping the hero, figures who make up a contrast to the hero such as anti-heroes and unsuccessful brothers, for example, and people who have been rescued or released by the hero. So it is apparent that every character in the tale is somehow related to the protagonist either positively or negatively.

¹²⁵ Cf. Zipes, Jack. *Why Fairy Tales Stick*. 49-50.

¹²⁶ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 25.

¹²⁷ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 26.

The characters are strictly divided into good and bad, beautiful and ugly, big and small, poor and rich and so on and so forth. Dealing with the requisites there is also a clear differentiation between magical devices and devices used in every-day life. Animals, plants, clouds and stars are essential elements in the fairy tale too.¹²⁸

Focusing on the way the European fairy tale presents itself to the audience it is clearly manifested that it is characterised by a great deal of action. Less attention is paid to a close description of the characters or environment where the action takes place. Other decisive features are pure colours and lines, extremes and contrasts and formulas, including verses, of all different kinds. Formulas such as ‘Once upon a time’ are fixed elements in the fairy tale as well as repetitions and numbers.¹²⁹

Unlike other literary genres, the fairy tale is a one-dimensional construct due to the fact that the characters and actions are flat. The actions happen one after the other and do not interconnect with each other. The same is true of the characters who appear one after the other instead of at the same time. The individual episodes of the plot are isolated and develop individually during the course of the action. Motifs without any distinctive function are also part of the narrative construct.¹³⁰

3.2.1. The Sea-Maiden: Putting Theory into Practice

The following chapter will provide a concrete analysis of the fairy tale *The Sea-Maiden*. This fairy tale is part of the collection of *Celtic Fairy Tales* which was edited by Joseph Jacobs in 1892.¹³¹ It is the story about an old fisherman who promises a sea-maiden his first son if she provides him in return as many fish as he wants. The son of the old fisherman did not go to the sea-maiden but went on a journey armed with a heavy sword. First he meets three animals a dog, a falcon and an otter which he helped to settle a dispute. In return they promise him their help whenever he needs it. Then he becomes a shepherd working for a king and taking care of his sheep. When two giants attack him and his sheep he kills both with his mighty sword. Another time he kills an old vicious hag living in a castle. Then there was great sorrow and grief because the king’s daughter should be sacrificed to a dreadful beast in a loch. Three times the young shepherd fights against the monster each time cutting off one of its three heads.

¹²⁸ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 27-28.

¹²⁹ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 29-30.

¹³⁰ Cf. Lüthi, Max. *Märchen*. 30-31.

¹³¹ Cf. Jacobs, Joseph, ed. *Celtic Fairy Tales*. (Place of Publication not available) DodoPress, 2007.

The princess gives him a ring and two earrings to recognize her disguised hero again. When the time came he could prove his heroic deeds against his rival by presenting the gifts from the princess. They got married and lived happily together. But one day the sea-maiden came and took the prince away. The princess played her harp near the loch to induce the sea-maiden to return her husband. So the sea-maiden did but she took the princess as a pledge instead of him. With the help of his three friends, the dog, the falcon and the otter he could save the princess and kill the evil sea-maiden.

To begin with, it is important to focus on the content as well as the stylistic form of the fairy tale in order to get an appropriate analysis. Motifs and characters play an essential role as well in fairy tale research because these are one of the most decisive building blocks apart from structure and will be dealt with more closely later on.

As it has already been mentioned in the previous section there are certain formulas which are typical of the fairy tale genre. 'There was once [...]' (Sea-Maiden, 105) is a representative example of this kind of fairy tale beginning. It anticipates a story without a clear cut time frame. 'On a day of days' (Sea-Maiden, 105) is another example for the omitted dates within the plot of the tale. As a matter of fact the tale becomes timeless and therefore relevant for any generation of readers. Apart from the lack of an exact dating and time placing the plot of the tale into a specific timeframe there are also place names missing. During the course of the action the setting shifts from one place to another without explicitly mentioning the names of the places. These places are only referred to as for example, 'castle' (Sea-Maiden, 107), 'king's house' (Sea-Maiden, 107), 'loch' (Sea-Maiden, 108). Due to the fact that the places of action within the plot are only referred to in general terms, the fairy tale gains universality as far as geography and explicit local regions are concerned. In this case the reader is free to interpret where and when the action has taken place according to his personal opinion. One might argue that in the case of the expression 'loch' the reader is less free to give way to his individual opinion because it is the Scottish equivalent for the English word lake. So, the setting of this tale is likely to be Scotland although no proper place names are mentioned.

Dealing with the beginning of this fairy tale the action starts off by an emerging problem the fisherman has to face. ‘There was once a poor old fisherman, and one year he was not getting much fish.’ (Sea-Maiden, 105).

As it has already been mentioned in the previous chapter quoting Max Lüthi the sudden emergence of a problem is one of the most distinctive features of the fairy tale genre. In the case of *The Sea-Maiden* it is the old fisherman who caught only a few fish during one year. The sea-maiden proposes a bargain to the fisherman in order to get out of his dilemma. She claims his first son as a reward for giving him as many fish as he wants. The fisherman agrees and the bargain is made. It is this deal which sparks off the action and functions as the background for the subsequent plot line.

Another important structural feature is the repetitions of certain actions. In this tale the number three plays an important role which is connected to actions as well as animals and characters. In the beginning the old fisherman goes to a smith to get a sword for his son. He has to go to see the smith three times before he could bring his son the best sword which will never break in combat. ‘His father went to the smithy, and the smith made a doughty sword for him.’ (Sea-Maiden, 105). ‘He asked his father to go to the smithy and get him another sword [...]’ (Sea-Maiden, 105) ‘Back went the old man to the smithy [...]’ (Sea-Maiden, 105).

Another example for the importance of the number three is the fact that the son of the fisherman has met on his journey three animals which turn out to be helpful friends during the course of the action. ‘And there were a great black dog, a falcon, and an otter [...]’. (Sea-Maiden, 105-106). He helps the animals to settle a dispute over the carcass of a sheep by dividing it into appropriate pieces depending on the size of the animals. Finally, the evil supernatural creature which likewise represents the importance of the number three by having three heads which the hero has to cut off. ‘There is a great beast with three heads in the loch [...]’. (Sea-Maiden, 108).

Focusing on the three valuable friends, the black dog, the falcon and the otter they are grateful to the fisherman’s son and, therefore, offer their help according to their specific possibilities whenever he is in peril. ‘If hardship comes on thee, where swiftness of wing or crook of a claw will do good, mind me [...]’. (Sea-Maiden, 106). Here, it appears to be obvious that these three animals represent goodness and thus belong to the positive and good assisting characters a type of character distinguished by Max Lüthi in his fairy tale analysis.

On the other hand there are also creatures in the tale which represent evil and the dark side of nature for example the two giants and the old hag who wanted to kill the fisherman's son. 'It is a drink of thy blood that will quench my thirst this night.' (Sea-Maiden, 107). The two giants and the old hag who is an old woman functioning as a negative counterpart to the three animals who promise their help at any time it is needed. Here, the opposition between good and bad figures is clearly manifest.

Furthermore, there is the dichotomy of rich and poor represented by the king versus the fisherman's son who works as a shepherd for the king. '[...] he reached a king's house, and he took service to be a herd [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 106).

Focusing on the character in *The Sea-Maiden* there is the young hero who sets out for a journey to make up for his father's wrong deed at the beginning of the story. There are no references to a specific time nor to place names, and the characters do not have proper names either. They are simply referred to by generic names like 'king', 'fisherman's son', and 'princess corresponding to their role and function in the tale. This supports Lüthi's above mentioned argument claiming that the characters in fairy tales are flat and one-dimensional. The sea-maiden definitely is the main villainess of the tale because she persuades the old fisherman to promise her his first son as soon as he is twenty years old. 'Will you give me the first son you have?' (Sea-Maiden 105). This supernatural creature is the major source of trouble in the tale. She is described as a violent, seductive and vicious character. '[...] the sea-maiden would sink each boat and raft that would go on the loch.' (Sea-Maiden, 111). At the climax of the action it seems as if the evil sea-maiden would win the fight against the brave hero taking him away from his bride. '[...] she came and took him away to the loch without leave or asking.' (Sea-Maiden, 110). At the end however, she was killed by the young hero. This action on the one hand enables a happy ending which is a main feature of the fairy tale and on the other hand it is another example for the eternal fight between good and evil and consequently the victory of the good over the evil powers.

The old fisherman, who is responsible for the unfortunate situation of his son, is only present at the beginning of the tale. He gives his son a magic sword in order to be able to defend his life against potential enemies. When the son hears the story of his destiny he goes for a journey armed with his magic sword.

This sword is particularly useful to him in everyday life. Firstly, he is able to satisfy the struggling animals by dividing the carcass into three pieces; secondly, he is able to defend his life against the attacks of the two giants and the old hag and, thirdly, he is able to kill the beast with three heads which endangers the life of the princess. The young male hero is the main character in the tale. He starts his journey as a fisherman's son and becomes a shepherd in a king's service. Then he moves on to be a hero who rescues not only the sheep of the king but also the king's daughter. At the end he marries the princess and kills the evil sea-maiden. He is the character that keeps the action going. Furthermore, he passed all the tests and trials he has to face during his journey and is rewarded with a lot of money '[...] he went to look for the giant's house [...] there was money in plenty [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 106) and, finally, with the king's daughter as his bride.

As a possible anti-hero the general who should have saved the princess in the first place, might stand in. But he hides himself as soon as he sees the horrible beast appearing in the loch. '[...] when the General saw this terror of a beast with three heads [...] he hid himself.' (Sea-Maiden, 108). He even forced the princess to tell the others that he killed the beast. 'I will kill you if you do not say that 'twas I took the head off the beast.' (Sea-Maiden, 109).

Dealing with the princess she is a character representing a virtue in distress, endangered by an evil beast, when the young hero meets her for the first time. She is saved by the young man and takes him as a husband. When the sea-maiden takes her husband she meets an old soothsayer who tells her what to do in order to save her husband. She gets close to the sea-maiden by playing the harp near the loch following the advice of the old soothsayer. '[...] and the sea-maiden came up to listen, for sea-maidens are fonder of music than all other creatures.' (Sea-Maiden, 110). With the help of the falcon she might save her mate but at the same time becomes the victim of the vicious creature herself. 'But the sea-maiden took the princess, his wife.' (Sea-Maiden, 111). The king, her father is a minor character who happens to give work to the shepherd. When the shepherd saves his daughter and the king finds out about the general's shameful behaviour he is not happy about the state of affairs. Nevertheless, he finally approves of the marriage between his daughter and the shepherd. 'The king was not so pleased [...] but he order that he should be put in a better dress.' (Sea-Maiden, 110).

As it is usually the case in fairy tales this tale too includes some supernatural creatures. There is of course the sea-maiden who is the main cause for the young man's problems, but there are also two giants and an old hag trying to kill the fisherman's son. These two giants appear to be extremely brutal and violent because both of them fight against him with the straightforward intention to take his life. When the shepherd is on the field with his cattle the first giant suddenly appears and attacks him but the shepherd slaughters him by cutting off the giant's head. 'The shepherd drew back his sword, and the head was off the giant in a twinkling.' (Sea-Maiden, 106). The second giant he killed together with the black dog. '[...] with one spring the black dog caught the giant by the neck, and swiftly the herd struck off his head.' (Sea-Maiden, 107). When the shepherd went to the castle of the second giant he met an old hag welcoming him. He did not trust her so he took her life again with the help of the black dog. 'In before me, thou crone; I like not flattery out of doors [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 107). She was the trickiest one of the three because she is able to put her head back on her shoulders by means of magic although it has been cut off shortly before by the shepherd. '[...] the crone gripped her head with both hands, and puts it on her neck as it was before.' (Sea-Maiden, 107). As a reward the fisherman's son got all the riches of the two giants. '[...] dresses of each kind in the wardrobe with gold and silver [...]' (Sea-Maiden, 106).

3.2.2. The Sea-Maiden: Main Motifs

Apart from the characters presented in this tale there are certain other motifs which are not only common in fairy tale literature but also part of other literary genres. Dealing with the character motifs it is important to point out that there are seven different types acknowledged within the fairy tale genre. These are 'the elder', 'the hero' who may be either male or female, 'true love' which may be either male or female as well, 'the villain', 'the helper', 'the friend', 'the messenger'. Depending on the tale all of these character motifs may be included or just some of them.¹³² Focusing on the old fisherman he may be identified as the character motif of 'the elder'. Characteristic of this motif is that it is commonly a father or a king who inhabits this position.

¹³² Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008. <http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

This figure is a static one because it usually does not leave his familiar surrounding but stays at home which stays in contrast to the hero who sets out to seek his fortune.¹³³

Concerning the old fisherman this is definitely the case. He watches his son leaving home while he stays behind. The second character motif mentioned above is 'the hero'. The fisherman's son clearly develops from an ordinary young man to a brave and mighty hero during the course of the story. He is the one who moves around in the tale's action, visiting different places and meeting different people.¹³⁴ This stands in a sharp contrast to the other characters in the tale because they are not mobile and seem to be waiting for the hero's arrival. 'On this he went onward till he reached a king's house [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 106).

'True love' is another motif usually contained in fairy tales in general as well as in *The Sea-Maiden*. Here, the true love is the princess, who the young hero is willing to fight for. 'And to meet the beast he went with his sword and his dog.' (Sea-Maiden, 108). The young hero even has to fight twice for his beloved princess. First, he kills the dreadful beast and then the sea-maiden who keeps her prisoner. '[...] he let his foot down on the egg, and the sea-maiden died.' (Sea-Maiden, 111).

Dealing with the evil figures in the tale there is 'the villain' who wants to harm and destroy the hero.¹³⁵ The sea-maiden herself is the main female villain in the tale. As has already been mentioned in the previous chapter it was the fatal bargain with the old fisherman which sparked off the action shortly before the story opens. 'What reward would you give me for sending plenty of fish to you?' (Sea-Maiden, 105). Besides the sea-maiden as the main supernatural villain there are some more evil characters included in the tale; the old witch and the giants.¹³⁶

¹³³ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008.

<http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

¹³⁴ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008.

<http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

¹³⁵ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008.

<http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

¹³⁶ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008.

<http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

Compared to the old hag who has some magical powers at her disposal, the two giants are physically strong and aggressive. '[...] a great giant with his sword [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 106). The old hag attacks the dog with a magical device proving her evil intentions. '[...] she struck the generous dog with the club of magic [...].' (Sea-Maid, 107).

The beast in the loch is a supernatural creature too although it happens to have a different status than the others because of the fact that the beast with three heads does not attack the young hero in the first place but it is the great general who provokes this action. Originally, it is the duty of the general to kill the beast and not the duty of the young shepherd. The young shepherd voluntarily decides to save the princess by slaughtering the wild monster. The giants and the hag attack him directly so he had to kill them.

Another character motif is 'the helper'. It is usually a mighty, magical figure that gives the hero useful instructions or precious gifts in order to enable the hero to reach his aims.¹³⁷ The soothsayer in *The Sea-maiden* might be seen as such a powerful and benevolent person. He tells the princess what to do when the sea-maiden takes her husband. '[...] he told her the thing to do to save her mate [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 110). Furthermore, he explains to the hero how to kill the sea-maiden. 'The old soothsayer told him that there was no way of killing the sea-maiden but the one [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 111). The three animals mentioned in the tale are helpers and friends at the same time. The motif of 'the friend' is characterized by the supporting intention.¹³⁸ Thus the dog, the falcon and the otter are clearly both, friends and helpers. They promise to help the hero as soon as he is in danger or in need of their help. Besides this favour, the three animals furthermore provide the hero with some powers attributed to their species. In the end all three of them keep their promise and help to kill the vicious sea-maiden. '[...] he called on the falcon and became one and flew on shore.' (Sea-Maiden, 111). The motif of the messenger is not employed in *The Sea-Maiden*.

¹³⁷ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008. <http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

¹³⁸ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008. <http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

Apart from the character motifs there are other motifs in the fairy tale. A category of motifs containing objects.¹³⁹ These objects appear to be not particularly important at first sight but assume an important function in the given content. In *The Sea-Maiden* the princess gives a ring and her earrings to the young hero to express her appreciation. 'She gave him a golden ring [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 109). When the princess is supposed to marry the alleged rescuer she wants to see the ring and the earrings which she gave to the man who has killed the beast. '[...] the man that took the heads off the beast, he has my ring and my two earrings.' (Sea-Maiden, 110).

At this point of action the crucial significance of the three objects becomes apparent. These objects unmask the false 'hero' and help to identify the actual rescuer, the shepherd. 'The herd put his hand in his pocket, and he threw them on the board.' (Sea-Maiden, 110).

Another typical object is the magic sword the young hero carries with him. At the beginning of the tale the smith made three swords for the young lad. Only the third one could satisfy the fisherman's son idea of a proper sword being heavy enough to stand a fight. '[...] gave it a shake or two, and it flew into a hundred splinters.' (Sea-Maiden, 105). Although it appears to be an ordinary sword at the beginning he wins the fight against the two giants, the hag and the three-headed beast. With the help of the sword he is able to kill supernatural creatures. As a result the young lad is extremely mighty and turns from a fisherman's son to a celebrated hero and prince. '[...] he drew his sword and whips her head off [...].' (Sea-Maiden, 107). The last group of motifs presented in this chapter is the motifs of action. They are mainly related to the actions and deeds of the hero.¹⁴⁰

As was already mentioned in the previous chapter the hero has to kill three supernatural creatures, a beast with three heads and the sea-maiden who takes three different shapes. These were the tasks he had to perform before he could live a happy and peaceful life. In order to be successful in his quest the hero needs to have certain characteristics such as cleverness, wit, courage and strength.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008. <http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008. <http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

¹⁴¹ Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008. <http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

The fisherman's son has enough courage to set out for a journey into the wild world and to fight against the evil creatures attacking him. He is also a clever fellow because he does not trust the old hag welcoming him in the castle of the giant. '[...] I like not flattery out of doors [...]' (Sea-Maiden, 107). As a reward the hero gets wealth, love and status.¹⁴² After the young shepherd has killed the two giants and the hag he becomes a rich man because all of his enemies owned an enormous treasure. 'Gold and silver, and each thing more precious than another, in the crone's castle.' (Sea-Maiden, 107).

Love is another reward which the young hero gets because he rescues the princess and marries her. 'They were now married, and everything went on well.' (Sea-Maiden, 110). Because of his marriage to a princess the young fellow rises socially to the ultimate rank of the nobility thus having advanced from a fisherman's son to a splendid and wealthy prince.

Summarizing the insights of this chapter on fairy tales it is important to keep in mind that the history of the fairy tale dates back to ancient times. This genre has always been and still is a lively object of contemporary literary culture. Although the fairy tale changed its form during the centuries its message still comes across.

Apart from the form its social status changed as well. In the beginning it was received as a certain form of entertainment passed on orally. Then literary scholars and authors became aware of the creative and influential potential, briefly described as its artful value, lying in the fairy tale and started to cultivate this genre by collecting and editing fairy tale collections. Various useful analyses and classifications have been made in order to shed some light on the huge number of tales. Due to these studies it is possible today to get to the heart of the fairy tale more easily. It is the key to a fantastic world full of meaning and archetypal features. The fairy tale is a literary concept bridging the gaps between different countries and cultures as well as classes and histories.

¹⁴² Cf. "Cap O'Rushes". A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008.
<http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

4. The Mermaid

In the following chapter the well-known and widely popular concept of the mermaid will be the centre of attention. Due to the fact that this concept is rather complex it appears to be necessary to provide a wide range of meanings and attempts of interpretation. In order to enable an appropriate start into the mythic realm of the mermaid several general definitions explaining the concept will be given at the beginning. This will include the outward appearance as well as specific characteristics typically ascribed to the mermaid. Additionally, some definitions and descriptions focusing on the regional differences between the folk literature of Ireland, England and Scotland will be presented. Selected fairy and folk tales will furthermore illustrate the distinctions and similarities between Irish, English and Scottish tales presenting mermaids. Different types of mermaid concepts will be analysed by referring to their specific regional background. One of the most important aspects will be the relationship between mortals and mermaids and the mermaid's nature and character. The mythological background explicitly communicated in some of the stories and the connection to Christianity will also be taken into account.

4.1. The Mermaid: Various Definitions

Due to the fact that the concept of the mermaid is a particularly popular and widely known one there are many diverse definitions. The following quote refers to the outward appearance of the mermaid: 'a fabled marine creature with the head and upper body of a human being and the tail of a fish [...].'¹⁴³ This quote represents the most common imagination people have in mind when thinking about what a mermaid looks like: a female creature with a human torso ending in a fish tail. In the *Encyclopedia of Folklore and Literature* the following definition is given:

The mermaid, or "sea woman," is usually associated with coastal areas, though these legendary humanoid, supernatural creatures can also live in lakes, rivers, and streams. Although the mermaid of current popular culture is a hybride-half woman and half fish-mermaids are also described in Western folklore as completely human or as shape-shifting seals [...].¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Cf. "Mermaid". Encyclopaedia Britannica. 21 July 2008.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/376200/mermaid>.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Brown, Mary Ellen, Bruce A. Rosenberg, eds. *Encyclopedia of Folklore and Literature*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1998. 412.

By looking at the second quote it becomes apparent that the first quote provides only a very narrow concept of the mermaid. The definition given in the *Eyclopedia of Folklore and Literature* mentions the watery areas where mermaids can be found as well as their mythical background. Furthermore, there is a hint towards the fact that mermaids might also be of human shape or take the shape of a seal in some tales of Western folklore.

In *A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts* mermaids are described as:

[...] bewitching creatures usually shown as beautiful long-haired women with a fish's tail from the waist down, holding a comb and a mirror. Like the SIRENS, their song was enchanting and alluring: it has become a poetic symbol for the power of music.¹⁴⁵

Here, the mermaid is depicted as a beautiful woman with long hair and a musical talent. One of her most prominent attributes is her wonderful voice which enchants all creatures. Two other devices connected to the mermaid are mentioned as well: a comb and a mirror. Very often the mermaid is presented as spending time on a rock near the ocean engaged in singing and combing her hair.¹⁴⁶

By comparing the three quotes, the view that there are various definitions of more or less informational value available of what a mermaid is, gains substance. All of the three definitions explain what a mermaid looks like and how she is shaped in terms of physical appearance. Only the second and the third sources give additional information about the mythical background as well as the typical talents and devices attributed to her.

Summing up, the imagination gained from the reference books quoted above suggests a positive and universally valid but not a highly specific point of view. In the following chapters other descriptions of mermaids and traditions will be presented in order to provide a more comprehensive insight into the supernatural beliefs associated with mermaids particularly on the British Isles. Different bodily shapes, character traits and relationships related to the mermaid will be in the centre of attention.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Barber Richard, Anne Riches, eds. *A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts*. London: Macmillan Ltd., 1971. 101.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*. 218.

4.2. Varieties of the Mermaid in Ireland

In Ireland the mythical equivalent to the mermaid is usually called ‘merrow’. In Gaelic the terms ‘maighdean mhara’ meaning ‘maiden of the sea’ or ‘murúch’ meaning ‘sea singer or siren’ are used whereas its male counterpart is called ‘murúch fir’ or ‘fear mara’ meaning ‘man of the sea’.¹⁴⁷ They are usually described as being extremely disgusting. Their hair, teeth, and skin are green whereas their nose is red and their eyes are small and narrow.¹⁴⁸ Focusing on the outward appearance of the Irish merrow two shapes can be discerned. The first variant is very similar to the human female besides the fact that their feet are flatter. Additionally, they have a thin web between their fingers which enables them to move within their watery spheres. In Ireland the merrows are said to be the inhabitants of ‘Tìr fo Thóinn’ meaning ‘land under the waves’ referring to an enormously huge country below the waves.¹⁴⁹ The Irish merrows furthermore use a special device when swimming in the water. It is a red cap made of feathers called ‘cohullen druith’ meaning ‘hood’ in English.¹⁵⁰ The merrow usually takes off this cap as soon as she steps on dry land. As a matter of fact this cap is of extreme value for parties, the merrows and the humans. In case a human male gets hold of the cap and takes it away from the merrow she cannot return to the sea anymore. Many tales feature this incident telling about a fisher who hides the cap inside his house, consequently keeping the merrow close by his side. Usually, the merrow gets hold of her cap in one way or another and immediately returns to the sea.¹⁵¹

Although, the merrows seem to be in close contact with humans they usually do not like the earthly creatures. One of the reasons why they consent to a marriage with a human male is the fact that the children resulting from this bond may have the chance to get a human soul. Generally, the merrow is seen as a bad omen when she appears to a fisher.¹⁵² The second variant of the Irish sea-creature corresponds to the more common imagination of a mermaid in terms of physical appearance. The upper part of their body is like the one of a young woman whereas below the waist she has a tail like a fish.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ó hÓgáin, Dáithí. *The Lore of Ireland. An Encyclopaedia of Myth, Legend and Romance*. UK, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006. 342.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*. 218.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Curran, Bob. *Kleines Handbuch der Irischen Elfen*. 4th ed. München: Eulenverlag, 2004. 43-44.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. “Cohuleen druith”. *Celtic Mythology*. 24 July 2008.
<http://www.answers.com/topic/cohuleen-druith>.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Curran, Bob. *Kleines Handbuch der Irischen Elfen*. 45.

¹⁵² Cf. Curran, Bob. *Kleines Handbuch der Irischen Elfen*. 47.

Usually, these creatures are extremely beautiful with pale skin, dark eyes, and long hair. This variant of the merrow is able to change its shape too. She may appear as a human female or with the help of the red cap as a fairy of the sea. Like the above mentioned merrow type this creature has a web between her fingers and depends on the human being who steals her cap.¹⁵³

Generally, mermaids and merrows are depicted as creatures of doom. Many stories tell about beautiful sirens drowning sailors and fishermen in the sea with the help of their singing and their extraordinary looks. They are said to keep the lost souls in cages beneath the waves.¹⁵⁴ In order to substantiate, or if required to refute the above mentioned features about the Irish merrow and its variant, selected Irish folk tales and legends will be analysed in the following chapter.

4.2.1. The Merrow as presented in selected Irish Folk Tales and Legends

4.2.1.1. The Lady of Gollerus

The first tale under analysis is part of a collection called *Fairy Legends and Traditions*.¹⁵⁵ These tales were collected by Thomas Crofton Croker, an Irish antiquary. The setting of the tale is Smerwick harbour in County Kerry. The main male character is Dick Fitzgerald who enters the scene smoking his pipe while looking out on the sea. ‘[...] just at day-break, stood Dick Fitzgerald ‘shogging the dudeen’, which may be translated, smoking his pipe. (Gollerus, 144). Although, he seems to enjoy his pipe and the wonderful morning “‘Tis just the pattern of a pretty morning” (Gollerus, 144) he appears to be a lonely fellow talking to himself “‘tis mighty lonesome to be talking to one’s self by way of company [...]” (Gollerus, 144) thinking about a female companion. “[...] what in the wide world is a man without a wife?” (Gollerus, 144). While watching the sea he suddenly notices a lovely young woman close to a rock at the shore. This young woman is the main female character in the tale. Dick Fitzgerald immediately identifies her as a merrow for two reasons: her green hair ‘[...] a beautiful young creature combing her hair, which as of sea-green colour [...]’ (Gollerus, 144) and the cohuleen driuth ‘[...] for he spied the cohuleen driuth, or little enchanted cap, which the sea people use for diving down into the ocean [...].’ (Gollerus, 144).

¹⁵³ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*. 218.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Funk & Wagnalls. *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*. Ed. Maria Leach. 4th ed. New York: Harper&Row, 1987. 710.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Croker Crofton, Thomas. *Fairy Legends and Traditions*. [Place of publication not available] BiblioBazaar, 2008.

Dick Fitzgerald knows about the magic power of the cap and takes it away from the merrow. '[...] she would lose the power of going away into the water so he seized it with all speed [...].' (Gollerus, 145). The merrow immediately recognizes that the human male has taken away her magic cap and starts to cry '[...] she began a low mournful cry [...].' (Gollerus, 145). The description of this particular mermaid corresponds with the typical characteristics presented in the previous chapter. She is the prototypical Irish merrow having long green hair and the magic cap. Her frightened reaction when Dick Fitzgerald takes her cap away is characteristic as well because she is aware of the fact that she cannot go back into the sea without her cap. Dick Fitzgerald reacts in a characteristic manner too because he also knows about the magic powers of the merrow's cap. For him the cap signifies power over the merrow. '[...] let her cry never so much, to see what luck would come out of it.' (Gollerus, 145). By trying to comfort her he discovers another characteristic typically ascribed to Irish merrows; the web between her fingers. '[...] only there was a small web between the fingers, as there is in a duck's foot; but 'twas as thin and as white as the skin between egg and shell.' (Gollerus, 145). The merrow who is terribly afraid of the man wants to know what he intends to do to her. Again Dick Fitzgerald acts in line with Irish supernatural tradition by thinking about the prospect of taking her for his wife. 'Dick's thoughts were running on a wife [...].' (Gollerus, 146). After a few moments of thinking Dick Fitzgerald tells the merrow about his plan and she agrees. "'I'm ready and willing to be yours, Mister Fitzgerald [...].'" (Gollerus, 146). Aware of the fact that she cannot go back to the sea and meet her fellows she addresses a few words to the waves explaining her situation. '[...] then bent down her head and whispered some words to the water [...].' (Gollerus, 146). Dick Fitzgerald now curious about her words wants to know whom she is talking to. The merrow explains to him that she is sending a message to her father so that he would not worry about her absence. "'I'm just sending word home to my father [...].'" (Gollerus, 146). Dick Fitzgerald even more curious than a few moments before asks his future wife who her father is. Rather astonished that Dick does not know her father she answers that he is the king of waves.

Now, it is Dick Fitzgerald who is surprised at the origin of the merrow. "'And yourself, then, is a real king's daughter?'" (Gollerus, 146). Although he is surprised by the unexpected news he is immediately aware of the financial advantages he may benefit from once they are married.

“[...] to be sure he has all the money that’s down in the bottom of the sea!’ (Gollerus, 146). Even though the merrow cannot give any exact information about the wealth of her father Dick Fitzgerald wants to marry her. ‘[...] money or no money, Dick Fitzgerald determined to marry the Merrow, and the Merrow had given her consent.’ (Gollerus, 147). In line with his plan he sets out together with his future wife to find a priest. The priest, called Father Fitzgibbon, as was to be expected warns Dick Fitzgerald not to marry the merrow and urges him to send the creature home.

“There are two words to this bargain, Dick Fitzgerald,” said his Reverence, looking mighty glum. “And is it a fishy woman you’d marry?” - the Lord preserve us! - Send the scaly creature home to her own people, that’s my advice to you, wherever she came from.” (Gollerus, 147).

Father Fitzgibbon is aware of the danger of the supernatural creature because she has no decent Christian background. Therefore, the priest tries to persuade Dick who praises the merrow’s greatest values, to set her free. “[...] she is as mild and as beautiful as the moon”.’ (Gollerus, 147). The arguments for a marriage presented by the future groom do not convince the priest. “[...] you can’t marry her, she being a fish!”.’ (Gollerus, 147). Still, the priest wants to prevent the marriage between a Christian and a pagan creature from the other world. Only when Dick mentions the wealth he is expecting from the bargain, Father Fitzgibbon changes his mind. “[...] marry her by all means if she was ten times a fish. Money, you know, is not to be refused in these bad times [...]”.’ (Gollerus, 148). So the couple gets married and everything seems to be working out fine for Dick Fitzgerald, when he is happily united with his wife. ‘[...] the Merrow made the best of wives, and they lived together in the greatest contentment.’ (Gollerus, 148). One day however, Dick has to go to Tralee, the County capital of County Kerry. He leaves the merrow and their three children, two boys and a girl, behind. Knowing her husband to be out of the way the merrow starts to tidy up the house. While cleaning up she comes across the fishing net in which her husband hides her magic cap. ‘[...] what should she find behind it in a hole in the wall but her own *cohullen driuth*.’ (Gollerus, 148). Now, the merrow is in a rather confusing situation.

As it is the case in many tales featuring merrows who have been captured by their human husbands she finds the magic cap which enables her to go back to the sea.

On the one hand she loves her children and feels attached to her husband but on the other hand she misses the sea and her former life beneath the waves.

She sat down on a little stool and thought over the happy days she had spent under the sea; then she looked at her children, and thought on the love and affection of poor Dick, and how it would break his heart to lose her. (Gollerus, 148).

This crucial situation of a moral choice is part of many tales and functions as a turning point in the course of action. As will be presented later on, the decision the merrow has to make, in the great majority of cases, is in favour of her life under the sea. Mrs. Fitzgerald tells herself that this won't be a farewell forever and that she only wants to go and see her family. '[...] "he won't lose me entirely, for I'll come back to him again, and who can blame me for going to see my father and mother [...]"'. (Gollerus, 148). She says good-bye to her children and walks to the shore. As soon as she hears the music of the sea she is reminded of her former life and her earthly family disappears from her memory. '[...] Dick and her children were at the instant forgotten, and placing the *cohuleen driuth* on her head, she plunged in.' (Gollerus, 149). When Dick Fitzgerald comes back he cannot find his wife. One of his neighbours tells him that she went to the shore with a strange thing under her arm. Coming home from his search he looks for the magic cap which is gone. At this moment everything is clear to him. '[...] the truth now flashed over him.' (Gollerus, 149). The husband is heartbroken and never took another woman for a wife, although the merrow never came back again. 'Dick never married again, always thinking that the Merrow would sooner or later return to him [...]' (Gollerus, 149).

Summing up *The Lady of Gollerus* may be seen as a prototypical Irish version of a tale featuring a merrow as a main female character. As mentioned in the previous chapter on the mermaid concept in Ireland there are certain characteristics attributed to the Irish merrow. *The Lady of Gollerus* contains all these features such as the *cohullen driuth*, the long green hair and the web between the fingers. Focusing on the plot of the story, the stealing of the magic cap by a human male is contained as well. All works out well until the day the merrow finds the hidden cap and she finally returns to the sea. Even though Dick Fitzgerald thinks himself a happy man when he gets hold of the cap, it is destiny that changes the situation entirely. The merrow leaves her earthly home as soon as she gets back her magic cap and returns to the sea.

Although the tale presents a loving mother and wife at first sight the merrow cannot resist the temptation. On the surface the merrow lives a homely life with her earthly husband and her children whereas beneath the surface she is still a creature of the sea willing to go back to the other world. The quickly given consent to marriage may have had two reasons. First, the obvious fact that she cannot return to the sea without her cap and second, her fear of the fisherman and the possible consequences if she does not consent to his proposal. The reader does not learn about the merrow's true feelings for Dick Fitzgerald in the beginning. "I'm ready and willing to be yours [...]." (Gollerus, 146) is her unemotional answer. This might suggest that she only does so because she wants back her cap and sees this as her only chance. When the couple talks to Father Fitzgibbon the merrow is still hoping for a chance to get hold of the 'cohullen druith' even though she has given her word to the fisherman. 'Dick had the *cohuleen driuth* in his hand, and was about to give it back to the Merrow, who looked covetously at it [...].' (Gollerus, 147). This wishful look of the merrow may substantiate the fact that she does not really want to marry Dick Fitzgerald because of emotional attraction but sees no other way out of the dilemma. In the middle of the story it appears as if the merrow has changed her mind about her plan and lives a peaceful life with her own earthly family. 'It was wonderful to see, considering where she had been brought up, how she would busy herself about the house, and how well she nursed the children [...].' (Gollerus, 148). However, in the end her true nature is revealed when the merrow gets the chance to return to the sea. She could have decided otherwise but the desire to return to her roots was stronger. '[...] she felt a longing to go back to them.' (Gollerus, 148).

4.2.1.2. The Wonderful Tune

Like *The Lady of Gollerus*, *The Wonderful Tune* is contained in *Fairy Legends and Traditions* by Thomas Crofton Croker. The setting of this story is Munster, which is the most Southern province of Ireland. Maurice Connor, a remarkable blind piper, is the main male character in this tale. Apart from his regular repertoire of songs and dances he knows one special song which appears to have magic powers. This song puts every creature in the mood of dancing. 'At the first note of that tune [...] old or young it mattered not [...] the feet began going [...] there was no halting while the music lasted!' (Tune, 157). With the help of his mother who takes care of her blind son he plays at every feast he is invited to.

When Maurice Connor is invited to play at Ballinskellig bay near the sea, people come from near and far to hear his music. '[...] a great gathering of the young men and the young women [...] for 'twas not every day the strand of Trafraska was stirred up by the voice of a bagpipe.' (Tune, 158). The dancing- master who is supposed to keep order while dancing asks the piper whether he wants to have a drink. Connor tells him that he drinks everything but if there is a chance to get a glass of whiskey he will be happy. The dancing master called Paddy Dorman hands over his bottle filled with whiskey and Maurice empties the bottle with one big gulp, which makes him rather drunk and puts him in the mood to play his wonderful tune. "'Twas really then beyond all belief or telling the dancing.' (Tune, 159). Everybody starts to dance even Maurice and his mother who moves her legs as light footed as a young maid. Apart from the people, the fish in the sea start jumping up and down in the water as well as the crabs on the shore which move their claws to the rhythm of the music. '[...] 'twas as if heaven and earth were coming together; and all out of Maurice Connor's wonderful tune.' (Tune, 160). Besides the humans on the shore and the animals in the sea a strange beautiful young woman is dancing too. She had a cocked hat upon her head; from under it her long green hair-just the colour of the sea-fell down behind [...]. Her teeth were like rows of pearl; her lips for all the world looked like red coral; and she had an elegant gown, as white as the foam of the wave, with little rows of purple and red sea weeds settled out upon it[...]. (Tune, 160-61). She approaches Maurice Connor and invites him to come to the sea with her. The blind piper not knowing whom he is talking to and feeling the effect of the bottle of whiskey tells her that he won't come to the sea with her. The merrow keeps on talking with the aim to persuade the piper to follow her into her kingdom. '[...] at last she over persuaded him to promise to marry her [...].' (Tune, 162). Maurice Connor's mother is full of fear and starts crying when she sees the two of them walking down to the sea. For her it is absolutely clear that her son is going away with an unnatural creature. Unfortunately, Maurice Connor keeps playing the wonderful tune all the time keeping the people busy with dancing. As a matter of fact nobody is able to step between him and the merrow. He promises his mother to send her a message every year to prove that he is alive. "'[...] for a token of luck, and a sign that I'm alive and well, I'll send you in, every twelvemonth on this day, a piece of burned wood to Trafraska".'(Tune, 162). Then, the woman from the sea takes him under her cloak and both disappear beneath the huge waves coming to the shore.

Every year Maurice Connor sends a piece of burned wood to his mother at the appointed date. Unfortunately, the piper's mother died three weeks after his disappearance and therefore did not get any of these luck-tokens. She got buried like a decent Christian among her own people.

These essential features of the merrow, although this term is not explicitly used in the tale, are similar to those of the merrow in *The Lady of Gollerus*. The long green hair and the cocked hat functioning as typical characteristics ascribed to the Irish merrow. Again she is depicted as extremely beautiful and of exotic appearance. 'Her teeth were like rows of pearl; her lips for all the world looked like red coral [...].' (Tune, 160). Further reference is made to her strange looking coat which may be identified as the magic cap used by the merrows. '[...] she had an elegant gown, as white as the foam of the wave, with little rows of purple and red sea weeds settled out upon it.' (Tune, 160-61). William Butler Yeats refers to this magic cap in *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* stating that it usually is of red colour and covered with feathers. According to him the colour red is closely related to fairies and magic in general.¹⁵⁶

Unlike in *The Lady of Gollerus* featuring a fisher man being enchanted by the looks of a merrow, here, it is a merrow who is fascinated and attracted by the music played by a human. Because of the piper's enchanting tune she comes to the shore and dances among the mortals. '[...] what should there be dancing among the outlandish set of fishes but a beautiful young woman [...].' (Tune, 160) Usually, it is the creature of the sea which captures or allures the humans with the help of her seductive voice. But there are several tales like *The Wonderful Tune* in which the situation is reversed. Another aspect referred to in this tale is the contrast between Christianity and pagan traditions. Maurice Connor believes the young woman and her telling about her origin and the kingdom under the sea.

“I'm a Lady of honour
Who live in the sea;
Come down, Maurice Connor,
And be married to me.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Butler Yeats, William. ed. *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*. New York: Dover Publications, INC., 1991. 61.

Sliver plates and gold dishes
You shall have, and shall be
The king of the fishes,
When you're married to me." (Tune, 161)

His initial doubts concerning a marriage to this mysterious woman are diverted by the merrow by way of speaking softly and gently to the piper. He is flattered by her words and imagines himself as king of the sea. 'Maurice was well fitted to be their king, if they wanted one that could make them dance [...].' (Tune, 162).

Unlike Maurice Connor, his mother is fully aware of the fatal consequences of his marriage. Thus, she tries to keep him from walking away with the merrow. She is aware that this creature is not part of the earthly community and according to her should also be treated as such. 'Lord help and pity me, but 'tis a mighty unnatural thing!' (Tune, 162). She is afraid of the mythical woman of the sea. At the very last she tries to remember her son of his Christian religion and upbringing. "'Oh Maurice, Maurice, if there's any love or nature left in you, come back to your own *ould* mother, who reared you like a decent Christian!'" (Tune, 162). In the end the merrow takes him to her kingdom both indifferent at Maurice Connor's mother and his soul.

4.2.1.3. The Soul Cages

Unlike in the first two tales *The Soul Cages* features a male merrow as main character. The *Soul Cages* is part of a collection of tales entitled *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*.¹⁵⁷ This collection was edited by William Butler Yeats an eminent Irish author. The setting of the story is county Clare, which is part of the province of Munster on the West coast of Ireland. The second main character in the tale is Jack Dogherty, a fisherman, who lives together with his wife close to the ocean like his ancestors did before. 'People used to wonder why the Dogherty family were so fond of that wild situation, so far away from all human kind, and in the midst of huge shattered rocks [...].' (Soul Cages, 62).

Due to the rough surrounding and the wild ocean, many ships break into pieces. This is then good luck for Jack Dogherty who collects the goods floating in the sea and if necessary rescues sailors in distress.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Butler Yeats, William. ed. *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991.

Although he is such a solitary person he wins the heart of his wife called Biddy Mahony. She left her family to live with the fisherman. 'But Biddy knew that Jack was the man for a woman who wished to be comfortable and happy [...]' (Soul Cages, 62). Jack Dogherty is a bold man who is used to being exposed to all kinds of strange scenes and noises. Unlike other fishermen he is not afraid of merrows; on the contrary, he is even looking forward to meeting one. '[...] the very first wish of his heart was to fairly meet with one.' (Soul Cages, 63). His father and grandfather had seen plenty of merrows and thus he wants to see one as well. The fisherman remembers his grandfather telling about a merrow with whom he was at close terms. '[...] his grandfather [...] had been so intimate with a Merrow that, only for fear of vexing the priest, he would have had him stand for one of his children.' (Soul Cages, 63). One day the fisherman discovers a strange figure sitting on a rock. Due to the great distance he cannot precisely identify what he is looking at. 'It looked green in the body, as well as he could discern at that distance, and he would have sworn, only the thing was impossible, that it had a cocked hat in its hands.' (Soul Cages, 63). Although Jack searches the spot carefully, he cannot find the merrow. On a stormy day the fisherman sets out to visit the rock again and this time he is lucky. '[...] he saw the strange thing cutting capers upon the top of the rock [...]' (Soul Cages, 64). Jack now knows about the habits of the unknown creature. He decides to come back on another stormy day to get acquainted with the creature. Then one day Jack Dogherty is forced to take shelter in a cave at the coast because of the raging storm. In the cave he sees the strange creature again. '[...] he saw sitting before him 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.' (Soul Cages, 64). Furthermore, the creature has no clothes on and a cocked hat beside itself. Jack takes all his courage and starts talking to the merrow. They get acquainted with each other and Jack learns that the merrow has already known his father and grandfather. The merrow and the fisherman have one liking in common, the passion for drinking brandy. Therefore, both of them like each other from the beginning. Finally, the merrow invites Jack to visit him in his house beneath the waves. Next time the merrow brings two cocked hats along and gives one to Jack. When the fisherman hears about the merrow's plan to go to the sea together he cannot believe it.

“Lord bless and preserve us! [...] Sure, I’d be smothered and choked up with the water, to say nothing of being drowned!’ (Soul Cages, 66). The merrow tells him about his grandfather who was brave enough to dive with him into the sea. Jack Dogherty pulls himself together and follows the merrow. Together they climb the Merrow’s rock and the merrow tells him what to do. “[...] just put this hat on your head, and mind to keep your eyes wide open. Take hold of my tail, and follow after me [...]” (Soul Cages, 66). After a long swim they reach the bottom of the sea and come to a house which is decorated with oyster shells. Inside the house two young merrows are cooking. His host guides him into a cellar which is filled with all kinds of things. ‘[...] he led Jack into a fine cellar, well filled with pipes, and kegs, and hogsheads, and barrels.’ (Soul Cages, 68). At dinner the merrow officially introduces himself to the fisherman telling him that his name is Coomara. After some shells of brandy Coomara leads Jack into a large room and shows to him his treasure. Jack cannot identify the strange looking pots so he asks Coomara about them. The merrow tells him that these are the pots in which he keeps the souls of drowned sailors. Jack does not know what to say so keeps his opinion to himself. After some more brandy he tells the merrow that it is time for him to return to his wife. Coomara hands over one of the cocked hats to Jack and so he could return to the same spot the two of them jumped in hours before. ‘[...] away he went up through the water, till he came to the very rock he had jumped off [...]’ (Soul Cages, 70). When he enters his house Jack does not initiate Bidy into his adventure but still keeps thinking about the poor souls beneath the sea. He ponders about the right method to release the souls without hurting the feelings of Coomara. The best idea which comes to his mind is to invite Coomara, with the secret purpose of making him drunk then being able to release the souls with the help of the merrow’s cocked hat. To put his plan into action Jack needs to be alone with Coomara. Therefore he suggests to his wife to go to Ennis to pray for both of their souls which Bidy is willing to do. Then Jack invites Coomara for dinner. Unfortunately, Jack gets drunk even sooner than Coomara and the merrow makes his way home in a good mood. ‘The brandy got into it, and did his business for him, and Coo reeled off home, leaving his entertainer as dumb as a haddock on a Good Friday.’ (Soul Cages, 72). Jack invites Coo a second time and promises the merrow that this time he will be the sober one. At dinner he asks Coo whether he knows poteen.

The merrow answers no to this question and Jack gives him this strong Irish alcoholic beverage. It does not take long and Coomara is fast asleep because of the poteen. This is now the chance for Jack to free the souls. He puts the cocked hat on his head jumps into the sea and makes his way to the merrow's house. In the house he quickly turns over the pots and releases the souls. '[...] nothing did he see, only he heard a sort of a little whistle or chirp as he raised each of them.' (Soul Cages, 73). Then he returns to the shore feeling happy about his deed. In the mean time, Bidy came back from Ennis being upset about the mess inside the house. Then she discovers Coomara lying on the floor whom she mistakes for her husband thinking that he was turned into a beast due to the effect of too much alcohol. '[...] I've often heard of a man making a beast of himself with drink!' (Soul Cages, 74). Meeting each other in front of the door Jack tells Bidy all about his adventure with the merrow. Then Jack wakes up Coomara who is really out of sorts leaving the house without saying a word. Although Jack freed the souls the merrow never missed them. He even manages to release many other souls without Coomara knowing it. Their friendship continued until the day when Jack did not get a reply from the merrow. Without the hat he could not go down to the land under the sea. '[...] his belief was, that the old man, or the old fish, or whatever he was, had either died, or had removed from that part of the country.' (Soul Cages, 75).

Unlike, *The Lady of Gollerus* and *The Wonderful Tune* this story presents a totally different version of an Irish merrow. The most obvious difference is the male sex of the merrow. The description of the male merrow corresponds to the one given in *An Encyclopedia of the Little People* by Rose Carol.¹⁵⁸ In this Encyclopedia as well as in *The Soul Cages* the male merrow is depicted as being extremely ugly: '[...] a thing with green hair, long green teeth, a red nose, and pig's eyes.' (Soul Cages, 64). Furthermore, it has a tail like a fish and legs covered with scales. Besides these typical features it also has a cocked hat at its disposal. The cocked hat has already been mentioned in *The Lady of Gollerus* enabling the merrow to dive into the sea. This is also the case in *The Soul Cages* where Coomara explains its function to Jack Dogherty. "[...] I want you to come down and dine with me, and I brought you the hat to dine with". (Soul Cages, 66).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*. 218.

The character of the male merrow he is good-natured and benevolent towards the living. Coomara speaks in a warm and respectful manner about Jack's grandfather. "Ah, Jack, Jack, I was fond of that grandfather of yours; he was a mighty worthy man in this time [...]" (Soul Cages, 65). Compared to the two female types of merrows, Coomara likes to be in contact with humans.

The merrow in *The Lady of Gollerus* was not looking for any kind of human contact but was forced to live with a man by accident. In *The Wonderful Tune* the merrow was bewitched by the lovely tune and, therefore, decided to take the piper as a husband. Unlike these two, Coomara, by contrast, does not bring any harm to humans but continues to care for the friendship between him and Jack Dogherty. Jack Dogherty very much behaves like the other two men in *The Lady of Gollerus* and *The Wonderful Tune*. He does not expect to be harmed by the merrow. On the contrary he sees them as a sign of good luck and fortune being aware of their powers. 'Jack had heard that they were mighty like Christians, and that luck had always come out of an acquaintance with them.' (Soul Cages, 63). Like in the two other tales a reference to Christianity is made. In this case it is the immortal soul of the humans which is the centre of attention. Coomara does not only take one soul, as it is the case in *The Wonderful Tune* where the merrow persuades Maurice Connor to come with her, but captures and stores the souls of numerous drowned fishermen in the other world keeping them in vessels. This however implies that he deprives these souls from salvation and the eternal life in heaven as conceived by Christianity.

[...] when the sailors are drowned and the souls get out of them under the water, the poor things are almost perished to death, not being used to the cold; so they make into my pots for shelter, and then I have them snug, and fetch them home, and keep them here dry and warm [...] (Soul Cages, 70).

By looking at this quote it almost appears as if Coomara is not aware of what he is doing. It seems as if he wants to save the souls from the cold water by giving them shelter in his pots. '[...] and is it not well for them, poor souls, to get into such good quarters?' (Soul Cages, 70). Jack Dogherty reacts according to his religious belief immediately understanding the significance of the situation feeling sorry for the poor souls. He even considers seeing a priest but changes his mind in favour of his reputation imagining himself telling the priest about his acquaintance with a merrow. '[...] it also might not be much to his own credit if it were known that he used to go dine with Merrows.' (Soul Cages, 71).

Like the merrow in *The Wonderful Tune* who does not care for the lost soul of Maurice Connor, the pagan Coomara does not see the spiritual consequences his doing has for eternal salvation.

Furthermore, Coomara is presented as a creature who is fond of brandy. Apart from their disgusting looks, heavy drinking is another character trait usually ascribed to male merrows.¹⁵⁹ This characteristic is also related to Irish men in general and happens to present the merrow in a human light. '[...] opening a little door, he led Jack into a fine cellar, well filled with pipes, and kegs, and hogsheads, and barrels.' (Soul Cages, 68).

4.3. The Mermaid in Scottish Tradition

Dealing with the mermaids of Scotland, two types will be focused on in the following chapter. But before going into further detail it is important to mention that in Scottish lore references to mermaids are not as clearly cut as in Irish folk tradition. A possible reason for this is the Gaelic language as well as the Orcadian dialect which are both used to describe similar or related concepts. One is known by the name of 'Maid-of-the-Wave', which is the Gaelic term for mermaid.¹⁶⁰ This creature is said to be of extremely good looks and capable of a sweet voice. Below the waist she has a fish tail instead of legs. Unlike the Irish merrow, who usually has green hair, the hair of the 'Maid-of-the-Wave' is copper-coloured. Usually, she is occupied with combing it while sitting on a rock and singing songs elaborating on her own beauty.¹⁶¹ Due to the Scottish topography with its wild coastal areas and high mountains surrounding deep lakes folk tales featuring mermaids plays are numerous. This is especially true of the folklore of the Shetland and Orkney Islands. Here the second group of sea spirits, the 'selkies' which means seal in English¹⁶² and the stories told and written about them are extremely popular.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Barber Richard, Anne Riches, eds. *A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts*. 103.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Mackenzie, Donald A. *Scottish Wonder Tales from Myth and Legend*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997. 161.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Mackenzie, Donald A. *Scottish Wonder Tales from Myth and Legend*. 161.

¹⁶² Cf. Towrie, Sigurd. "The Selkie-folk". Orkneyjar the heritage of the Orkney Islands. 19 August 2008. <http://www.orkneyjar.com/folklore/selkiefolk/index.html>.

¹⁶³ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres. Von Nixen, Nereiden, Sirenen und Tritonen*. transl. Klaus Birkenhauer. Hamburg: Marion von Schröder Verlag, 1962. 141.

They are the Fin Folk or Sea People who appear as beautiful doe-eyed humans but must assume the misshapen form and skin of the seal, keeping only the beauty of their eyes, in order to reach their underwater caverns.

[...] Sometimes they have been persecuted by humans, and if the blood of the Selkie is shed then this will result in a fierce storm and the loss of human lives at sea.¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, 'selkies' are said to be very shy. When the female 'selkies' take off their skin they appear to be very beautiful and resemble human females. A human man who gets hold of their skin might force her to live a human life close by his side. If she gets her skin back she will sooner or later return to the sea. Their male counterparts are less amiable because they are able to cause storms taking revenge for dead members of their clan.¹⁶⁵

Dealing with the removable skin of the Scottish sea fairies it needs to be mentioned that both the Maid-of-the-Wave as well as the 'selkie' have the magic ability to travel beneath the waves. The skin of the 'selkie' is easier to identify because the difference between the seal-shape and the human-shape is apparent. The skin used by the Maid-of-the-Wave is said to resemble the skin of a salmon which is depicted in one of the following Scottish tales. On dry land both creatures look like beautiful women. Contrary to the 'selkie' which undergoes a complete transformation into a seal, the Maid-of-the-Wave only exchanges her fish tail for legs.

Like the Irish merrow the Scottish sea-spirits need their magic skin to be able to return to the sea. Due to the fact that this magic device is so important for the Irish merrow as well as the Scottish sea-spirits it plays a central role in the tales of both countries. Its powerful meaning is valued equally by the supernatural creatures and the humans due to the fact that it may change the mermaid's or the human's lives considerably.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Rose, Carol. *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*. 287.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Lindemans, Micha F. "Selkies". *Encyclopedia Mythica*. 19 August 2008.
<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/selkie.html>.

4.3.1. The Mermaid as presented in selected Scottish Folk Tales and Legends

4.3.1.1 The Maid-of-the-Wave

This story is part of a collection by Donald A. Mackenzie called *Scottish Wonder Tales from Myth and Legend*.¹⁶⁶ It features a young crofter as a main male character who takes notice of joyous songs while walking along the cliffs. He climbs up a rock and discovers a group of mermaids dancing on the strand. ‘They had taken off their skin coverings and were gowned in pale blue, and as they wheeled round about, their copper tresses streamed out behind their backs [...]’ (Maid-of-the-Wave, 161-162). Enchanted by the beauty of the mermaids he climbs down the rock and takes away one of the skins lying on the sand. The mermaids which notice the young man grasp their skins and flee into the sea. The prettiest mermaid stays behind because she has lost her skin to the young crofter. ‘Her skin covering was gone, and so she could not return to her sea home.’ (Maid-of-the-Wave, 162). The young man runs home and hides the skin in a box putting the key in his pocket. Soon he hears a soft knock at the door. ‘A Maid-of-the-Wave, clad in sea-blue garments, stood before him [...]. Tears stood in her soft blue eyes as she spoke [...]’ (Maid-of-the-Wave, 162). Pleased by her beautiful appearance the crofter does not want to give back her skin although she begs for it. He suggests to her to become his wife but she turns away and walks back to the shore. Early on the next day she comes back and the crofter again asks her to be his wife. Finally, the mermaid agrees. “‘I cannot return to my fair sea home. I must live now among human beings, and I know no one except you alone [...]’” (Maid-of-the-Wave, 163). She advises him not to tell anyone who she really is and he promises to keep her secret. The couple gets married and the people of the town become fond of her too. ‘The people thought she was a princess from a far country who had been carried away by the fairies.’ (Maid-of-the-Wave, 163). The mermaid and the crofter have two boys and a girl together whom the mermaid loves a lot. After seven years of married life the crofter has to travel to Big Town because of business matters. In the mean time she often walks to the sea with her baby girl singing songs and looking at the sea. One day at evening time her eldest boy called Kenneth tells his mother that he has found a key belonging to a box of his father where a skin is hidden.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Mackenzie, Donald A. *Scottish Wonder Tales from Myth and Legend*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997.

“I found a key which opened Father’s box, and in the box I saw a skin like the skin of a salmon, but brighter and more beautiful, and very large.’ (Maid-of-the-Wave, 164). The mermaid feeling a subtle, joyous sentiment asks Kenneth to give her the key which he does. Happy about his mother’s positive response mother and son walk home in an airy mood. After putting her children to sleep the mermaid opens the box and takes out her skin covering. ‘She wished to return to her fair sea home, yet she did not care to leave her children.’ (Maid-of-the-Wave, 164). While she is sitting by the fire she suddenly hears some kind of singing coming from the sea.

Maid-of-the-Wave, the dew mist is falling,
Thy sisters are calling and longing for thee;
Maid-of-the-Wave, the white stars are gleaming,
Their bright rays are streaming across the dark sea.
Maid-of-the-Wave. Would thou wert near us!
Come now to cheer us-Oh, hear us! Oh, hear us! [...]
(Maid-of-the-Wave, 165)

Hearing the words of the song she kisses her two boys and her baby- girl good-bye. Then she takes her skin and hurries down to the sea where she plunges into the water. When the crofter returns he cannot find his wife and Kenneth tells him all about the box and the key. It is assumed that the mermaid-mother returned to the shore from time to time watching her children leaving behind salmon and trout. The boys ask their father whether their mother will come back again. “No, Mother will not return,” their father would say, “She now dwells in the home of her people, to which you and I can never go”.’ (Maid-of-the-Waves, 167). As descendants of a mermaid the two boys became brave seamen. They never got in any peril because their mother the mermaid protected them.

As presented in *The Maid-of-the-Wave* the Scottish mermaid is a creature who needs some kind of fish skin to live beneath the waves. In this story the use of such a skin is depicted. Unlike the Irish merrow, usually described as having legs which puts on a magic cap covering her entire body, the Scottish mermaid seems to use her skin only from the waist downwards. This fact is furthermore substantiated by the quote given above which states that half of the body of the Scottish mermaid is of fish shape.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Mackenzie, Donald A. *Scottish Wonder Tales from Myth and Legend*. 161.

Furthermore this skin is described as being similar to a salmon's skin. '[...] a skin like the skin of a salmon, but brighter and more beautiful, and very large.' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 164).

Due to the great beauty and the fish tail of the Scottish mermaid mentioned in *The Maid-of-the-Wave* it may be compared to the second mermaid type common in Irish folk lore. As explained in the chapter on Irish mermaids the Scottish 'Maid-of-the-Wave' has the upper part of a woman and a fish tail instead of legs. This type also uses a red cap as a magical device which enables the mermaid to swim in the sea and to get to the netherworld. These creatures are said to be of extreme beauty similar to the Scottish mermaid. 'She was so gentle and so beautiful that the crofter did not wish her to go away [...].' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 162).

As well as the cap of the Irish merrow the skin of the Scottish mermaid is a powerful device too. The young crofter seizes the skin and runs away with it although he does not exactly know what this act will bring about. 'He wondered what would happen next, and he had not long to wait.' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 162). As soon as he realizes what the skin means to the mermaid he does not want to give it back although she begs him to do so. "'Oh man, have pity and give me back my skin covering so that I may return to my sea home.'" (Maid-of-the-Wave, 162). Like in the Irish story *The Lady of Gollerus* the crofter wants her to be his wife. Unlike the Irish merrow, however, the Scottish mermaid does not consent immediately but turns her back on the young man. 'The mermaid turned away and wandered along the shore, but the crofter did not leave his house. In the morning she returned again [...].' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 163). She then admits that she cannot return to the sea without her skin which, however, is not as explicitly stated in *The Lady of Gollerus*. "'I cannot return to my fair sea home. I must live now among human beings, and I know no one except you alone".' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 163). In this case it is clearly stated by the mermaid that she depends on goodwill of the crofter due to the fact that he has her magic skin covering. Unlike in *The Lady of Gollerus* there is a comment about the reception of the mermaid within the town community. 'All the people of the township loved Maid-of-the-Wave, and rejoiced to have her among them.' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 163). Interestingly, the people furthermore suspect her to be a princess from a distant country who has been taken away by the fairies.

This may be due to the fact that she is presented as irresistibly beautiful and fair. Although the people do not know about her origin they subconsciously relate her to the fairies and, consequently, to some supernatural happenings.

Like the merrow and the fisherman in *The Lady of Gollerus* the couple shares a happy time at least on the surface. 'For seven years the crofter and his wife lived happily together.' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 163). They also have three kids together, two boys and a girl. Both the Irish merrow and the Scottish mermaid are fond of their children and care for them. They are the reason for the mermaid's reluctance to return to the sea when she hears the song of the sea. 'She wished to return to her fair sea home, yet she did not care to leave her children.' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 164). Finally, the call of the sea is more powerful than her feeling of responsibility towards her children and she decides to take leave. 'The weeping mother kissed her boys and her baby-girl once again. Then she puts on her skin covering and, hastening down the beach, plunged into the sea.' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 166).

Unlike the Irish merrow in *The Lady of Gollerus* who at least promises that she will come back the Scottish mermaid actually returns from time to time to look at her children secretly. 'It is told that the lost mother often returned at night-time to gaze through the cottage windows on her children as they lay asleep.' (Maid-of-the-Wave, 167). Unlike the merrow who has never come back again not even secretly the Scottish mermaid shows some kind of responsibility and care for her children at last. Therefore it might be argued that the Irish merrow is less human and tender-hearted than the Scottish mermaid who clearly has the human character trait of responsibility.

4.3.1.2. The Mermaid Wife

The next Scottish tale appears to be quite similar to the one analysed above. It is part of a collection which has been selected and edited by Sir George Douglas, with the title *Scottish Fairy and Folk Tales*.¹⁶⁸ The before mentioned similarity refers to the plot of *The Mermaid Wife* which happens to be almost identical with the one of *The Maid-of-the-Wave*. The story takes place in Unst at night time. A man is walking on the shore close to a hut used for drying fish. There he watches some mermen and mermaids dancing in the moonlight. They have taken off their seal-skins which lay on the sandy ground.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Sir Douglas, George, ed. *Scottish Fairy and Folk Tales*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000.

When he draws closer the sea people hurry back into the sea. ‘At his approach they immediately fled to secure their garbs, and, taking upon themselves the form of seals, plunged immediately into the sea.’ (Mermaid Wife, 189). The man discovers one seal-skin which has been left behind and takes it with him and hides it in a secret place. When he returns to the shore he meets an extremely beautiful young woman who tells him about her stolen skin. The man who has totally fallen in love with the strange fair woman offers to marry her instead of giving back her property. ‘[...] he offered her protection beneath his roof as his betrothed spouse.’ (Mermaid Wife, 190). Their marriage lasts for several years producing several children. The Shetlander loves his wife dearly whereas the mermaid does not feel any kind of true emotion. Frequently, she sets out for the shore meeting a seal and talking to it. ‘[...] on a signal given, a large seal would make his appearance, with whom she would hold, in an unknown tongue, an anxious conference.’ (Mermaid Wife, 190). One day one of the children gets hold of a seal-skin which has been hidden under a stack of corn. Happy about his discovery the boy runs to his mother. Being full of enthusiasm about the finding of her long lost property the mermaid embraces her children and starts to take leave towards the sea. The Shetlander tries to hold her back but it is too late. He can only watch his wife’s transformation into a seal. ‘[...] to see her, in the form of a seal, bound from the ledge of a rock into the sea.’ (Mermaid Wife, 190). The seal to which she has been talking during the years comes close to the shore and praises her return. Before she takes leave for ever she addresses the Shetlander one last time saying him good-bye and wishing him all the best. ““Farewell!” Said she to him, “and may all good attend you. I loved you very well when I resided upon earth, but I always loved my first husband much better”.’ (Mermaid Wife, 191).

Focusing on the mermaid in this story it is obvious that there is no clear cut distinction between ‘mermaid’ and ‘selkie’ terminologically. The borders between one concept and the other are blurred because the main female character is described and referred to by two different terms, which may be misleading. Taking the form of a human female, the main female character is referred to as mermaid. This is the case at the beginning of the story when the mermen and mermaids are dancing on the shore. ‘[...] mermen and mermaids dancing by moonlight, and several seal-skins strewed beside them on the ground.’ (Mermaid Wife, 189).

This situation is particularly confusing because usually mermaids are depicted as having either a fish tail only or as supernatural creatures which are able to transform their fish tail into legs by taking off their skin when coming out of the water.

This has also been the case in the Irish and Scottish tales analysed above. However, in *The Mermaid Wife* the situation is different and requires further attention. As mentioned above the main female character is referred to as mermaid when she takes the form of a woman. This fact corresponds with the mermaid featured in *The Maid-of-the-Wave* which uses a salmon skin for swimming in the sea and legs for walking on dry land. There is no difference in terminology although the mermaid significantly changed her physical appearance. In *The Mermaid Wife* the situation is completely different because the mermaid changes into a real animal.

In the shape of a seal it would be pointless to call the mermaid mermaid because she has a definite form which can be clearly identified. This is also the case by looking at the situation the other way round. It would be inappropriate to call the mermaid seal, even though she is able to walk on dry land resembling a beautiful young woman. Although the term mermaid seems to be wrong in this context especially when referred to the common concept of the mermaid there is another aspect which may provide a basis for an appropriate explanation. The term mermaid may be divided into two different words; 'mere' which is Old English for sea¹⁶⁹ and maid.

Focusing on the literal meaning of the compound it is apparent that it identifies a maid from the sea. Consequently, it may be reasonable to argue that in the case of *The Mermaid Wife* the literal meaning of mermaid is used to describe a maid of the sea who has the ability to change her shape into the form of a seal. Here, the main focus may be on the literal meaning instead of the abstract concept presenting a mermaid with a fish tail.

Apart from the morphological differences in meaning there are further disparities in terms of plot when compared to *The Maid-of-the-Wave*. In *The Mermaid Wife* the maid of the sea becomes the wife of the Shetlander, although she is already married. This fact is only pointed out at the end of the story. "I loved you very well when I resided upon earth, but I always loved my first husband much better". (Mermaid Wife, 191).

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Berman, Ruth. *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures. A Source Book and Research Guide*. Ed. Malcolm South. New York: Greenwood Press 1987. 133.

Some kind of relationship is already hinted at when the maid of the sea is depicted as talking to another seal. '[...] on a signal being given, a large seal would make his appearance, with whom she would hold, in an unknown tongue, an anxious conference.' (Mermaid Wife, 191).

Dealing with the emotional state of the relationship between the Shetlander and the maid of the sea the Shetlander appears to be very much in love with his wife. '[...] the man had drunk deeply of love [...].' (Mermaid Wife, 189). Unlike him his wife does not share the same emotional depth. '[...] he affection was coldly returned.' (Mermaid Wife, 190). This situation may have two possible reasons. First, the fact that he has stolen her seal-skin and second, her marriage with a man of the sea. Concerning her children she appears to be less affectionate towards them than the mermaid in the other Scottish tale. '[...] after hastily embracing them, she fled with all speed towards the seaside.' (Mermaid Wife, 190). For the Shetlander she seems to feel at least some kind of sympathy when she recognizes him in a desperate state at the shore watching her leave. '[...] she cast a parting glance at the wretched Shetlander, whose despairing looks excited in her breast a few transient feelings of commiseration.' (Mermaid Wife, 191).

4.4. The English Variety of the Mermaid

As a matter of fact English mermaids and sea fairies and the stories about them are as popular and widely known as the Irish or Scottish ones. In British folk tradition these mythic creatures play an important role. The fairy- and folk tales featuring them are very similar to each other due to the fact that these tales reflect the old oral traditions presenting what the people thought and felt about the creatures of the sea. Sometimes they are depicted as dangerous sirens endangering ships and mariners, another time they appear as mermaids looking for an immortal soul by marrying human males.¹⁷⁰ By cursing people she takes revenge for rejection or mistreatment. Furthermore she is able to grant wishes in return for good-natured people and their benevolent deeds. Compared to other regions of the British Isles or Ireland there are fewer sea creatures and stories about them on the shores of England. The largest number of English mermaids thus can be found on the shores of Cornwall. There the mermaids are known by the name 'merrymaids'.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 121.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 122.

4.4.1. The English Mermaid as presented in selected Fairy- and Folk tales

4.4.1.1. The Mermaid of Zennor

This tale was first published in 1873. It is part of a collection by William Bottrell called *Traditions and Hearthsides Stories of West Cornwall*.¹⁷² The following analysis will be based on a retold version by Shirley Climo contained in *Piskies, Spriggans, and other Magical Beings: Tales from the Droll-teller*.¹⁷³ The setting of the tale is Zennor a town close to the coast of Cornwall. The people of Zennor heavily depend on fish because fishing secures their survival. '[...] the sea was both the beginning and the end for the folk of Zennor.' (Mermaid of Zennor, 1). Furthermore, they pray each evening in the local church hoping for a good catch on the next morning. A young handsome man with a marvellously beautiful voice called Mathew Trewella is part of the choir. 'His voice pealed out louder than the church bells, and each note ran clear and true.' (Mermaid of Zennor, 1). One evening when all the fisher men and their families attended mass a mermaid came to the shore of Zennor.

'[...] though it seemed to be a girl, where the girl's legs should have been was the long and silver- shiny tail of a fish.' (Mermaid of Zennor, 1). While the mermaid called Morveren is sitting on a rock combing her hair she hears the sweet singing of Mathew coming down from the church. Morveren is fascinated by the sound of his voice. On the next day at evening time she returns to the cove, closer than the day before, to listen to the music again. "What bird sings so sweet?" (Mermaid of Zennor, 1). Following the beautiful song she swims close to the boats of the fisher men on the following evening. Morveren is determined to find out about the source of the singing. Therefore she lifts herself up on the shore where she is able to see the church and hear the singing coming from it. She dives down to the depth of the sea where she tells her father king Llyr about the story and her wish to see the man who is able to sing in such a manner. Llyr is not amused about his daughter's story. "To hear is enough, my child. To see is too much". (Mermaid of Zennor, 2). Morveren starts to cry because she is desperately longing for this voice. Finally, the old king consents to her wish and advises her to wear a dress like the women in town. Nobody should see her and she has to return by high tide otherwise she would be kept on dry land forever.

¹⁷² Cf. Bottrell, William. *Traditions and Hearthsides Stories of West Cornwall*. Penzance: Beare & Sons, 1873.

¹⁷³ Cf. Climo, Shirley. *Piskies, Spriggans, and other Magical Beings: Tales from the Droll-teller*. New York: Crowell, 1981.
<http://www.surfamerica.info/TALES%20OF%20WONDER/england.html>.

As a matter of fact it is not easy for Morveren to climb the path to the church equipped with a fish tail. 'But get there she did, pulling herself forward by grasping on the trees, until she was at the very door of the church.' (Mermaid of Zennor, 2). Morveren catches sight of Mathew Trewella singing the closing hymn. Completely enchanted by the handsome lad's singing she comes back again and again for one year. One evening Mathew recognizes the mermaid standing at the very back of the church. Noticing her shining hair he stops singing. 'He was struck silent by the look of her-and by his love of her.' (Mermaid of Zennor, 3). Remembering her father's words Morveren starts to get frightened. As she tries to run away Mathew follows her. He begs her to stay, but the mermaid answers that this is impossible because she has to go back to the sea. Mathew now recognizes the young woman's fish tail. But the fact that Morveren is a mermaid does not matter to Mathew. He takes her up and runs to the sea. Mathew's mother and all the other people from the church try to hold him back by telling him to stop but Mathew even runs faster. The clever mermaid takes off the pearls and corals from her dress and throws it on the ground. 'The fishermen were greedy, even as men are now, and stopped in their chase to pick up the gems.' (Mermaid of Zennor, 3). The only one still running after them is the young man's mother. Reaching the sea, Mathew's mother gets hold of him one last time before the waves close over them forever. Now they live beneath the waves in the land of Llyr. Although he has never returned to Zennor the people still can hear the love songs Mathew sings for his wife.

This story is probably one of the most famous ones of the canon in Cornwall. It became further popular because of a carved image of a saint in the church of Zennor. This carving was made in the 15th century. According to folk tradition the mermaid used to sit on this particular seat of the church bench regularly.¹⁷⁴

Focusing on the story itself the English mermaid type is similar to the Scottish or Irish one. She is described as female with a fish tail. While sitting on a rock she is occupied with combing her hair. 'Morveren sat upon the rock and looked at herself in the quiet water, and then combed all the little crabs and seashells from her long, long hair.' (Mermaid of Zennor, 1) She displays a typical feature: the love of music. As soon as she hears the wonderful sound of Mathew's voice she wants to find out more about the singer.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 123

Morveren even risks to be caught by the people of Zennor while listening to the music of Mathew Trewella. The driving force behind her curiosity is her love of music. ““What reed is there that pipes such music?”” (Mermaid of Zennor, 1). In *The Wonderful Tune* the situation is quite similar. In this tale it is the merrow who is enchanted by the piper’s magic tune. Unlike the merrow, Morveren does not actively persuade the young lad to come with her. Morveren does not even get the chance to talk to Mathew remembering her father’s advice and warning. When he finally notices her it is him who falls in love with her first. ‘He was struck silent by the look of her-and by his love for her.’ (Mermaid of Zennor, 3). Similarly to the piper and the merrow, Morveren and Mathew go to live in the kingdom beneath the waves. ‘They had gone to live in the land of Llyr, in golden sand castles built far below the waters in a blue green world.’ (Mermaid of Zennor, 3-4).

Another interesting aspect presented in *The Mermaid of Zennor* is the fact that the mermaid’s origin is explicitly mentioned. In this case it is the reference to her father, the king of the ocean, which establishes the mythological background of the story.

The king of the ocean is called ‘Llyr’ in Cornish meaning the sea in English and who is the Welsh sea god.¹⁷⁵ According to Welsh mythology he has three children Bran, Branwen and Manawydan.¹⁷⁶

In the tale Morveren is the daughter of Llyr although there is no such name mentioned in connection with King Llyr in Welsh mythology. Nevertheless, the name Morveren suggests another interesting fact about the meaning of the name itself. Morveren is a Cornish name which in translation means ‘girl of the sea’ in English.¹⁷⁷ This is completely different to all the other tales analysed so far. Compared to the other stories the mermaid of Zennor is the only one who is given a specific first name. This first name reflects her origin as well as her mythological background. Even though King Llyr and Morveren are father and daughter in Welsh mythological tradition it becomes apparent that both creatures as well as their names are openly connected to the sea. The meaning of the word mermaid as well as the name Morveren indicate the she-creature’s origin and nature.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. “The house and the children of Llyr”. Witchcraft Introductory Study Course. 1 September 2008. <http://www.dynionmwyn.net/dynionmwyn/lesson1/thirteen17.html>.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Lindemanns, Micha F. “Llyr.” Encyclopedia Mythica. 1 September 2008. <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/llyr.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Monk, Kate. “Kate Monk’s Onomastikon“. 1 September 2008. <http://www.gaminggeeks.org/Resources/KateMonk/Celtic/Celtic/Cornwall.shtml>.

4.4.1.2. Lutey and the Mermaid

The following tale is recorded in a book of fairy tales called *Cornwall's Wonderland* by Mabel Quiller Couch.¹⁷⁸ The story takes place in Cornwall at a coastal region called Lizard. Here lives an old man called Lutey together with his wife in a small farmhouse. He earns his living by fishing, farming and smuggling. One fine summer evening he is walking on the shore, waiting for his dinner, looking for a wrecked ship when he perceives a wailing cry. 'It was not the melancholy cry of a gull, but of a woman or child in distress.' (Lutey, 118). Although he hears someone crying he cannot see where the sound comes from. Then Lutey recognizes the rocks which are usually covered with water at high tide. He assumes that the wailing sounds come from these rocks. In the deep pool of the rock he finds a very beautiful woman with long hair crying loudly. '[...] the most beautiful woman his eyes had ever lighted upon.' (Lutey, 119). Even though Lutey tries to catch her attention she does not see him. Only when he addresses her directly she becomes aware of his presence. Horrified by his presence the woman dives deep down into the pool. Lutey who is afraid himself suddenly recognizes the woman's fish tail. 'His knees quaked under him, at that sight, for he realized that the lovely lady was no other than a mermaid!' (Lutey, 121). Fighting his fear he starts talking to her hoping that she will understand Cornish. The mermaid returns an answer telling him that the people of the sea understand all languages. Although she tells him that he cannot do anything for her Lutey keeps going. Finally, she tells him about her husband and her kids who are waiting for her. The mermaid explains about her love of earthly flowers and how she swam to the rock to smell the lovely scent of them. Then she wanted to rest on the rock but fell asleep and woke up when high tide was gone. "I sat on, dreaming of your world, and trying to picture to myself what it was like, until I awoke with a start to find the tide far out, beyond the bar". (Lutey, 123). Furthermore she describes her husband as being a glutton who would eat their children if she does not return soon and prepare some meal for him. Lutey who cannot believe what he is hearing assures her that the tide will soon be back again. But the mermaid does not want to wait and asks him to help her. As a reward she would grant him three wishes. She gives to him her comb which is richly decorated with pearls and tells him what he should do when he wants to see her.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Quiller Couch, Mabel. *Cornwall's Wonderland*. London & Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., [undated-circa 1914].

“When you want me, comb the sea three times with this, and call me by my name, ‘Morwenna’, and I will come to you”.’ (Lutey, 125). The old man takes her up and wishes for a gift the ability to heal other people, to have power over the spirits, and to be powerful enough to break the spells of witches. While walking closer to the sea with the mermaid in his arms the creature of the sea tells him what the world beneath does look like. She even asks him to come with her. Lutey who feels strangely drawn to the mermaid is tempted to come with her. The barking of his dog clears his mind immediately from her charming words and he tries to get rid of the mermaid. He even threatens to kill her if she would not let him go. The mermaid does so and swims away while singing a few words. “Farewell, farewell for nine long years. Then, my love, I will come again. Mine, mine, for ever mine!” (Lutey, 129). Lutey tells his wife about his meeting with the mermaid. As a matter of fact she is so impressed by her husband’s story that she walks around in the parish telling about the gifts her husband has got from the mermaid showing the comb to the people to prove the truthfulness of her words. Lutey heals a lot of people and becomes the most famous man in the country. His descendants were well off too.

Nine years after his meeting with the mermaid he sets off on a fishing trip together with a friend. Suddenly, Morwenna appears on a big wave in the middle of the foam of the waves. ‘Morwenna! As lovely as ever, her arms outstretched, her clear green eyes fixed steadily, triumphantly on Lutey.’ (Lutey, 132). In front of the eyes of his terrified friend Lutey jumps into the water joining the mermaid. “My time is come,” he said solemnly and sadly [...].’ (Lutey, 133). From that time old Lutey has never again returned to this wife. His family then had to cope with a lot of misfortune and every ninth year one of his descendants became a victim of the sea.

The mermaid in the Cornish tale is presented along the lines of the prototypical mermaid type. She has long golden hair, lovely eyes, and a fish tail. ‘Her skin was a delicate pink and white [...] her clear green eyes sparkled and flashed like the waves with the sun on them [...]’ (Lutey, 119-120). Apart from her outward appearance she behaves like other mermaids of folk tradition, granting her saviour three wishes.

Although Lutey is able to cure people after his meeting with the mermaid he has to pay for his gifts in the end. In this tale the dangerousness usually ascribed to mermaids becomes apparent.

Even though he saves her and consequently her children he is typically punished by the mermaid. The fear of mermaids, typical of country people, is explicitly presented in the tale. 'He remembered all the tales he had heard of the power of mermaids, and their wickedness, and grew more horrified.' (Lutey, 128). Unlike the other male characters presented so far, Lutey is the first one who finally becomes aware of the treacherous nature of the mermaid. He feels tempted to follow the mermaid into the sea but is at first saved by the barking of his dog and the thought of a decent meal. 'The thought of his nice hot meal broke the spell, and he saw the danger.' (Lutey, 128). Like in *The Mermaid of Zennor* the mermaid tells Lutey about her family mentioning her husband and her children. She does not appear to be a lonely creature dwelling beneath the waves but has a family she has to take care of. Lutey is appalled when he hears about the brutal husband and the endangered children. 'They are such gluttons, and will gobble up their children in a moment if their meals are a little late.' (Lutey, 124).

Another important feature mentioned in the story is the mermaid's comb which she hands over to Lutey. As these legendary stories are very often part of oral folk tradition there is a different version of this tale. In this version the male protagonist lives happily till his death. His descendants inherited his beneficial powers. According to folk tradition the comb of the mermaid is still part of the property of his family symbolizing the healing powers they once had.¹⁷⁹

Besides the mermaid's portrayal in the tale there is another aspect which needs to be taken into consideration. Like the mermaid Morveren in *The Mermaid of Zennor* the mermaid met by Lutey has a female first name. She calls herself Morwenna. This is a Welsh name derived from the word 'marwyn', meaning maiden in English.¹⁸⁰ The origin of the name Morwenna can be traced back to an English female saint who was born about 480 AD. She was one of the Welsh saints who came to Cornwall. At Hennacliff, which was later called Morwenstow, she put up a small hermitage. From the top of the cliff where the hermitage had been erected a wide view over the Atlantic Ocean is possible. It is said that she carried the stones which she needed for the church she wanted to build by herself. St. Morwenna took them from the bottom of the cliffs up to the top.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 126.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. "Morwenna". Edgar's Name Pages. 4 September 2008.
<http://www.geocities.com/edgarbook/names/m/morwenna.html>.

According to folk tradition a fountain of water came out of the stone where she had been resting.¹⁸¹ The Cornish version of the name is equally spelled and is derived from ‘mor’ meaning sea and ‘gwen’ meaning shining and holy in English.¹⁸² Both figures, the female saint as well as Morwenna, the mermaid are related to the sea. The female saint built a church close to the sea and Morwenna the mermaid is a creature living in the sea. Interestingly, there appears to be a connection between the pagan and mythological belief represented by the mermaid and the Christian and religious belief represented by a female saint. A possible explanation for this relation may be the fact that in Celtic pagan belief as well as in Christianity water plays an important role. According to the great religions and cultures water is the element where all things originate from. Due to its shapelessness and its mobility it symbolizes renewal and transformation. There is also a clear relation between water and womanhood. Like a woman it represents creative and purifying maternal powers. Therefore the role of water plays a vital part in legends and traditions of all different types of peoples.¹⁸³

Summing up the main concepts and theories presented in this chapter it becomes obvious that there are several varieties of mermaids. In the folk traditions of Ireland, Scotland and Cornwall the mermaid plays a vital part. The tales which have been analysed in this chapter originate from coastal areas. As a matter of fact it is the sea and its unpredictable nature which nourishes the tales and legends about mermaids. It is the mermaid who is held responsible for bad luck in fishing, storms, mysterious deaths, disappearances and wrecked ships. Apart from the material loss people may suffer from disregarding or disrespecting mermaids there are even more disastrous consequences possible such as death and the loss of the human soul. Besides people’s belief in the mermaid’s evil nature and her tendency to harm humans, it needs to be mentioned that in certain cases men are responsible for their own destruction. This is the case when men fall in love with the beautiful creatures from the sea forcing them to become an earthly wife without thinking about the consequences.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Nashford, David. “St. Morwenna“. Early British Kingdoms. 5 September 2008. <http://www.earlybritishkingdoms.com/bios/morwenna.html>.

¹⁸² Cf. “Celtic Female Names of Cornwall“. 5 September 2008. <http://www.amethyst-night.com/names/cornishfem.html>.

¹⁸³ Cf. Koester Gutiérrez, Isabel. *„Ich geh nun unter in dem Reich der Kühle, Daraus ich geboren war...“*. Zum Motiv der Wasserfrau im 19. Jahrhundert. Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2001. 18.

Even though everything appears to be working out fine in the beginning the fatal end of the story is inevitable. Of course this is another source for tales featuring heartless mermaids leaving behind their family thus acting in an uncivilized manner. However, the contact between humans and mermaids no matter if voluntary or involuntary, hardly ever involves a happy ending.

Still there are tales about mermaids who cultivate a harmonious friendship with a human being, but such tales are a minority. Even though they are mythological creatures their connection to people's every-day life as well as their religious beliefs is rather real. Christianity as well as the pagan Celtic beliefs share certain characteristics as depicted in some of the tales. Water and its symbolic meaning functions as a common ground in both traditions. The liquid element is seen as the ultimate source of life. This may be the reason why the mermaid concept is present in many different types of cultures and traditions. The belief in mermaids is much older than the Celtic tradition. Since the dawning of the earliest cultures the concept of the mermaid has played an essential role in various mythological creation myths. Consequently, it can be said that the mermaid is a valuable and relevant mythological concept which has survived thousands of years without losing its fascination.

5. The Mermaid's Development: from the Ancient Traditions to Christianity

As presented in the previous chapter the mermaid plays a vital role in Celtic folk tradition. Due to the fact that the mermaid myth is not exclusively restricted to Celtic lore the question as to its origin arises. The following chapter will focus on the beginnings and earliest records of the mermaid myth. A historical as well as cultural overview will be provided describing the earliest conception of the mermaid ancient myths tracing her development. This encompasses the ancient accounts of the Greeks and Romans throughout the centuries, the description in folk-narratives in the Middle Ages, and folk tales of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Furthermore, the relationship between the ancient, pagan beliefs worshipping and celebrating water spirits and the role of Christianity from the early Middle Ages onward will be taken into account. A special focus will be on the Christian influence reflected in fairy and folk tales featuring mermaids. In order to provide an appropriate overview selected tales will be analysed explaining the motifs and symbols used.

5.1. The Sunny South: Birth Place of the Mermaid Myth

According to historical records of the Early Babylonians the sea god 'Ea' is the first mythological figure related to the sea. There are various descriptions of his outward appearance. In *The Folklore of the Merfolk*, an article by Sir Arthur Waugh, the sea god 'Ea' is describe as following: 'The whole body of the animal was like that of a fish; and had under a fish's head another head, and also feet below, similar to those of a man, subjoined to the fish's tail.'¹⁸⁴ Furthermore 'Ea' is able to talk to humans. At day time he cultivated human kind by instructing them how to put up houses and how to work on the field. At night time he went back to the sea again.¹⁸⁵ As far as Babylonian folk tradition is concerned water played an important role because it is considered the ultimate origin of creation.¹⁸⁶

Focusing on the earliest ancestors of the mermaid there is a Syrian goddess called 'Atargatis' or 'Derceto' who might be identified as the first goddess depicted with a fish tail.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Waugh, Sir Arthur. "The Folklore of the Merfolk". *Folklore* 2. (1960/73): 73-84. 73.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Waugh, Sir Arthur. "The Folklore of the Merfolk". 73-74.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 17.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. De Mason, Scarlett. "Shadows of the Goddess- The Mermaid". 15 September 2008. http://www.whiterosegarden.com/Enchanted_Waters/mermaid_article.htm.

The people of Syria worshipped this goddess and therefore did not eat any fish. Her influence is also visible on Crete and Cyprus where fishponds are said to be the holy property of 'Atargatis'. 'Atargatis' furthermore is related to fertility as well as the negative powers ascribed to love which are able to cause destruction. After centuries 'Atargatis' was related to the Greek goddess 'Aphrodite' and her Roman equivalent 'Venus' both representing fertility. Various symbols such as the mirror and comb usually ascribed to 'Aphrodite' and 'Venus' are still related to the mermaid. The comb in particular symbolizes female fertility because the Greek words for comb 'kteis' and 'pecten' are also used to describe the female vulva.¹⁸⁸

In classical Greek mythology there is a god called 'Poseidon' who rules over the sea. Usually he is depicted as resembling a human male who carries a trident. The Roman equivalent to 'Poseidon' is 'Neptun' who shares all the powers usually ascribed to the Greek god.¹⁸⁹ The archetypal Greek merman is represented by 'Triton'. He is the son of 'Poseidon' and 'Amphitrite'. According to Benwell and Waugh he is the linking part between the Babylonian god 'Ea', also called 'Oannes', and the stories about mermen told in the following centuries. Usually, 'Triton' is depicted with long, flowing hair with the upper body of a man and the lower body of a fish. He was a strong warrior as well as passionate lover.¹⁹⁰

Apart from the major gods and goddesses ruling the sea and the watery element in general there are several minor deities present in the mythological realm of the Greeks. Coming back to the origin of the mermaid myth there are three different fabulous creatures who are linked to the mermaid. First, the disgusting female monster called 'Skylia', meaning bitch in English who is said to kill and eat the sailors who pass her cave.¹⁹¹ Second, the 'Sirens' who resemble birds, usually depicted with the head of a woman. These creatures are said to have wonderful voices in order to lure sailors into the depths of the ocean. Third, the 'Nereids' who are commonly described as having an entirely human shape. They are even more dangerous than the 'Sirens' because they have an enchanting voice as well as a capricious temper.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. De Mason, Scarlett. "Shadows of the Goddess- The Mermaid". 15 September 2008. http://www.whiterosegarden.com/Enchanted_Waters/mermaid_article.htm.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 27.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 28.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Mack, Carol K. and Dinah Mack. *A Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998. 10.

Furthermore, they are held responsible for wild storms and wrecked ships.¹⁹² Apart from the ‘Siren’s’ outward appearance which is said to resemble a bird, she is also depicted with a fish tail in the Hellenistic days.¹⁹³ The description as well as the meaning of the ‘Siren’ in the earliest Greek records is slightly different to the one given above. In those days the ‘Sirens’ resembled the disgusting ‘harpy’,¹⁹⁴ and are said to be nothing more than spirits. Homer who lived 850 B.C. changed the picture of the Sirens by providing them with an alluring voice establishing their reputation as temptresses of the sea known today.¹⁹⁵

The question as to when, how and why the ‘Siren’ changed her outward appearance from a bird-like to a fish-like shape has not yet been clearly answered. There are various hypotheses but most commonly the change is related to the artists of the late Grecian period. These artists were inspired by the assumption that the ‘Sirens’ lived in the sea and, therefore, pictured them with a fish tail.¹⁹⁶

At the beginning of the Christian era the Siren was transformed into a mermaid. This transformation occurred during the Middle Ages. Artists of the Middle Ages created images of Sirens with a fish tail as a symbol of bodily lust. Consequently, the two different traditions converged.¹⁹⁷

5.2. The Cold North: the Mermaid Myth in Europe

The European tradition of the mermaid myth in the Middle Ages shows quite clearly the blurred boundaries between the pagan beliefs and Christianity. In the early days of Christianity Latin bestiaries¹⁹⁸ depicted ‘nixies’ and other female sea-spirits. These creatures resembled the ‘Sirens’ of the antique Grecian days. The author of the bestiaries commented on these creatures and added some kind of moral along the lines of Christian traditions. Therefore it seems quite plausible to argue that Christianity took some effort to adapt pagan mythological beliefs.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² Cf. Mack, Carol K. and Dinah Mack. *A Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits*. 10-11.

¹⁹³ Cf. Otto, Beate. *Unterwasser- Literatur. Von Wasserfrauen und Wassermännern*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2001. 29.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. “Harpy: hideous, foul-smelling birds with the faces of women”. Quoted in Britannica Concise Encyclopedia. 23 September 2008. <http://www.answers.com/topic/harpies>.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 34.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 39.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 40-41.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Literary Dictionary. “Bestiary” . “A description of animal life in verse or prose, in which the characteristics of real and fabulous beasts (like the phoenix or the unicorn) are given edifying religious meanings. This kind of allegory was popular in the Middle Ages, and survives in some later children’s books”. 16 September 2008. <http://www.answers.com/topic/bestiary>.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Otto, Beate. *Unterwasser- Literatur. Von Wasserfrauen und Wassermännern*. 29.

A possible example for this connection is the tale of *The Mermaid of Zennor*. Historical evidence is provided by the carving of a mermaid on a church bench in Zennor. In the Middle Ages the mermaid cult reached its peak. According to Benwell and Waugh there are two possible reasons for this. First, the Christian Church supported the belief in the pagan creatures of the sea. Second, there was a strong tendency towards a revival of the seafaring tradition which the peoples of Western Europe had started to cultivate again.²⁰⁰

Due to the fact that the Church to a certain extent approved of the pagan creatures depicted in the bestiaries the ordinary people did not doubt the existence of the sea creatures. Therefore, the stories about alleged sightings and observations of mermaids gradually increased till the 19th century.²⁰¹ Besides the bestiaries there are other literary records of the Middle Ages commenting on mermaids and mermen. One of these records called ‘Otia imperialia’²⁰² written by Gervase of Tilbury reports about mermaids and mermen in British lakes and rivers. This book contains historical and geographical facts, folk tradition and political theory.²⁰³

Unlike the Middle Ages where the belief in wonders was common understanding the people of the 16th and 17th centuries started to investigate into the background of the so called wonders. Although the fishermen were busy holding on to the stories about mermaids various English poets and essayists tried to state the difference between reality and myth.²⁰⁴ Besides certain anonymous artists and writers who used the mermaid motif in their works Shakespeare refers to a mermaid in his romantic comedy *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Oberon

[...] Thou rememb’rest
 Since once I sat upon a promontory
 And heard a mermaid on a dolphin’s back
 Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
 That the rude sea grew civil at her song
 And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
 To her the sea-maid’s music.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 57.

²⁰¹ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 62.

²⁰² Cf. A Dictionary of English Folklore. “Otia Imerialia” . engl. translation.: “Imperial Relaxations” . Quoted in A compendium of history. 28 September 2008. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O71-GervaseofTilbury.html>.

²⁰³ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 64-65.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 75-76.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night’s dream*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1993. 45.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. of England the mermaid was commonly related to prostitution. There are various ways of interpreting Shakespeare's text. One possible interpretation is the connection to Mary, Queen of Scots and the rivalry between her and Queen Elizabeth I. However, the motif of the mermaid was frequently used in poetics and Elizabethan theatre.²⁰⁶

Even though the people of the 19th century were aware of the fabulous and less plausible stories of mermaids of the preceding centuries, the alleged sightings of and meetings with mermaids never stopped on the British Isles. Irrespective of the fact that the mermaid is a mythical and fabulous creature born from people's imagination people kept on believing in it. Interestingly, people started to write detailed reports about the sightings in order to further substantiate their experiences using the medium of the newspaper to spread their experiences. As a consequence, heated debates between believers and sceptics took place amongst the readers of contemporary newspapers and weekly papers.²⁰⁷

5.3. The Role of the Mermaid as a Symbol in Christian Tradition

Although the mermaid is originally a mythological figure originating from the Grecian and Babylonian traditions she also has a symbolic function within the Christian tradition. The moral as well as religious characteristics attached to the mermaid symbol by the representatives of the Church are reflected in folk tradition and literature. Therefore the position of the church concerning the mythological and symbolic meaning of the mermaid plays a vital role in people's art as well as everyday life.

In the early days of Christianity the pioneers of the new and upcoming religious tradition had severe troubles with the pagan beliefs and its diverse forms of manifestation in culture. The antique traditions still played an important role. In the course of the centuries the mermaid images were adapted to conform to Christian religion.²⁰⁸ As a basis for the Medieval images of the mermaid functioned the bestiaries. Due to the fact that in the Middle Ages the great majority of people was illiterate carvings made of wood or stone were used to present the Christian teaching.

²⁰⁶ Cf. De Mason, Scarlett. "Shadows of the Goddess- The Mermaid". 15 September 2008. http://www.whiterosegarden.com/Enchanted_Waters/mermaid_article.htm.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 102.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Bessler, Gabriele. *Von Nixen und Wasserfrauen*. Köln: DuMont, 1995. 30.

These carvings were particularly useful to the Church because their meaning was easy to grasp and explained the religious doctrine.²⁰⁹ In medieval Christian teaching the mermaid symbolized the temptress, the evil rival of the Virgin Mary and the opposite of chastity.²¹⁰ According to the Christian doctrine the mermaid is overtly related to lust and vanity, both Deadly Sins. Seduction and temptation were commonly understood attributes of the mermaid. This negative image is furthermore illustrated by the comb and the mirror the mermaid usually carries with her. Sometimes she is also depicted holding a fish in her hands. In this case the mermaid stands for temptation, and the fish symbolizes a human soul which could not resist the mermaid's seduction and is thus damned forever.²¹¹

Substantiating the above depicted interdependence of pagan beliefs and Christianity there are various legends and tales about mermaids and priests interacting with each other. One of these tales, written in the twelfth or thirteenth century, features a mermaid called Liban. Together with her family she was drowned when Lough Neagh flooded Ulster. Liban survived in her chamber because the water did not flood her room entirely. Because of her fatal situation amidst the water she wanted to become a fish and thus she was transformed into a salmon. For 300 years the mermaid was doomed to leave in the waters until the day when the monk Beoán came by. He heard Liban's singing and started to talk to her. She told him the story of her origin. Finally, they agreed on a meeting point called Inbhear Ollarbha which is part of the County Antrim. The mermaid promised to be there after one year's time. At the appointed day Beoán and another monk Fearghus, caught her in a fishing net. The two monks started to quarrel about the mermaid both considering her as their property. They could not agree on a solution so they started to fast hoping for a solution provided by God. An angel told the two monks that they should go and see the grave of Liban's sister. Out of this grave came two stags which were put in front of the monks' cart bringing the mermaid to a church. The monks conceded Liban two opportunities regarding her destiny. The first one was to die immediately and finally entering heaven or to roam about in the seas for another 300 years.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 198.

²¹⁰ Cf. Bessler, Gabriele. *Von Nixen und Wasserfrauen*. 38.

²¹¹ Cf. Radford, Patricia. "Lusty Ladies: Mermaids in the Medieval Irish Church". 17 September 2008. <http://homepage.eircom.net/~archaeology/three/mermaid.htm>.

Liban chose the first option and was baptised by St. Comhghall of Bangor. After the baptism she was called 'Muirghein' meaning sea- birth in English.²¹²

This legend is representative for the relationship between the Church and the pagan beliefs in Ireland and Britain in those days. Due to the fact that the clergymen could not get entirely rid of the mythological creatures they tried to include them in the Christian context. Here, the church presents itself as a charitable and tolerant institution baptising the pagan mermaid and thus opening the gates of heaven for her.

In the following chapter the influence of the Christian tradition on the depiction of the mermaid in selected folk and fairy tales of the British Isles and Ireland will be the centre of attention.

5.3.1. The Fisherman and his Soul

This tale was written by Oscar Wilde a famous Irish dramatist, poet and folklorist. This tale is contained in a fairy tale book entitled *The Happy Prince and other Stories*.²¹³

The tale features a young fisherman who caught a little mermaid in his net. She asks him to let her go telling the fisherman that she is the only daughter of an old king. The fisherman makes her promise to sing to him whenever he wishes to see her. This she does and the fisherman lets go of her. Every evening she sings beautiful songs to the fisherman about her home and the creatures beneath the waves. Because of the mermaid's wonderful voice the fish came quite close to the boat of the fisherman and finally filling his boat up to the top. Soon the fisherman fell in love with the little mermaid and tells her about his feelings. The mermaid answers him that a relationship between the two of them is impossible because he is an earthly being with a human soul. If he sends away his soul she could be with him. So the young fisherman decides to give away his soul. In his eyes his soul is not worth much compared to his bride and a life beneath the waves. On the next morning the young man went to see a priest to whom he spoke of his love of a mermaid. The priest tells him that the soul is the most precious gift of humankind and warns him not to pursue this disastrous idea. The young fisherman keeps on telling about the advantages of his bride and a life among her kind.

²¹² Cf. Ó hÓgáin, Dáithí. *The Lore of Ireland. An Encyclopaedia of Myth, Legend and Romance*. Woodbridge: The Boydwell Press, 2006. 342-343.

²¹³ Cf. Wilde, Oscar. *The Happy Prince and other Stories*. England: Penguin Books, 1994.

Finally, the priest loses his patience and sends him away. At the market place the man tries to sell his soul to a merchant. The merchant tells him that his soul does not have any value to him and makes fun of him. The young fisherman is confused because the words of the priest and the words of the merchant about the value of his soul could not have been more different. But the man does not give up hope and goes to see a witch. When he tells the witch about his plan the evil creature turns pale. Finally, she agrees to help him and a bargain is made. As a reward for her help she wants him to dance with her at Sabbath. He agreed and the same night the fisherman was dancing among many witches at the top of the mountain. When the fisherman urges the witch to tell him what he wants to know she gives him a knife and tells him to cut his shadow from his body if he wants to get rid of his soul forever. Because of fear the soul started to talk to the young man trying to stop him. When the soul was detached from the man's body it urged the fisherman to meet again in case he would need it for one reason or another. They agreed on a meeting point after a full year's time. After one year the two of them met again and the soul told fantastic stories about its journey to the East. The soul reported about the Tartars, Pygmies, Syria and Egypt. Finally, it promised all the experienced wisdom to the fisherman if it could enter his body again. The fisherman laughed at his soul and said that love is better than wisdom and returned to the sea again. When the second year was over the soul visited the fisherman again and told him about its marvellous adventures in the South. The adventurous soul spoke about the city of Ashter and the riches it brought from this city. Once more the young man did not accept the gift and tells the soul that love is better than riches. After another year the soul called the fisherman again and told him about a dancing girl it had seen in an unknown city. Now the fisherman is curious about the dancing girl because his little mermaid could not dance with her fish tail and he decides to go there with his soul. On their first day of travelling they came to a city where the soul told the fisherman to steal a silver cup from a jeweller. On the second day they entered another city where the soul told the fisherman to slap a child. On the third day they entered a city unknown to the fisherman. They took some shelter at a merchant's house. The soul told him to kill the merchant because he was a rich man. When they left the city the fisherman was furious and asked his soul what sense there is behind these evil deeds. The soul explains to him that it does not have a heart therefore it is used to acting badly.

Now the fisherman wants to get rid of his soul again but his soul tells him that this is only possible once. Once again his soul tried to tempt him by feasting about beautiful girls in a near-by city. The fisherman did not say another word to his soul and started his journey back to the sea. Back again the mermaid did not answer to his calls although he was shouting day and night. The fisherman settled himself close to the sea waiting for his little mermaid. For one year his soul tempted him again and again with the most evil temptations but the fisherman did not listen to it. The following year the soul tried to tempt him with the good on earth but the fisherman's love was stronger. When the soul gave up his fight the fisherman allowed his soul to enter his heart and body again. But the soul did not find a way to enter because the heart of the fisherman was full of love for the mermaid. Suddenly a great mourning came out of the sea and the mermaid lay dead on the shore. The fisherman sat close by his beloved confessing to her his evil deeds while the dark waves came closer and closer. His soul warned him to step back but the fisherman did not move. When the fisherman's heart broke because of grief the soul could enter his heart before he was drowned in the sea.

Clearly this tale of Wilde featuring a mermaid in many ways represents the relationship between the pagan world and Christian reality. The main theme of the tale rather is the temptation and the dangers of sensual love. The male protagonist wants to get rid of his soul because it keeps him apart from his beloved. "Of what use is my soul to me? I cannot see it. I may not touch it. I do not know it. Surely I will send it away from me, and much gladness shall be mine". (Fisherman's Soul, 133). In the Christian teaching this statement is a deadly sin. In line with the doctrine about the immortal soul it is the most valuable property of mankind. Therefore, this statement reflects the naïve opinion of the young man regarding this fact. From a Christian point of view this is a blasphemous point of view because for the fisherman the soul is not worth anything. He treats his soul like an obstacle he has to come over in order to become a happy man. The priest who gets to know the whole story behind the fisherman's idea is very much appalled by the wish of the young man. For the clergyman this love for a creature of the sea is intolerable. He explains his point of view to the fisherman.

“Alack, Alack, thou art mad, or hast eaten of some poisonous herb, for the soul is the noblest part of man, and was given to us by God that we should nobly use it.

There is no thing more precious than a human soul, nor earthly thing that can be weighed with it. It is worth all the gold that is in the world, and is more precious than the rubies of the kings. Therefore, my son, think not any more of this matter, for it is a sin that may not be forgiven [...]”. (Fisherman’s Soul, 134-135).

The mentioning of a ‘poisonous herb’ in this quote may be a symbolic reference to the mermaid who enchanted the young fisherman with her alluring voice. ‘And each day the sound of her voice became sweeter to his ears.’ (Fisherman’s Soul, 133). Considering the priest’s point of view he is aware that the creature of the sea is lost for ever and the fisherman will be lost too if he does not change his mind about the issue. ‘And as for the Sea-folk, they are lost, and they who would traffic with them are lost also.’ (Fisherman’s Soul, 135). With this statement of the priest it becomes apparent that he is aware of the existence of these unearthly creatures and does not deny this fact. On the contrary because he reports about his personal experiences with pagan beings. “‘I have heard them at night-time, and they sought to lure me from my beads. [...] They tempt me with temptations, and when I would pray they make mouths at me”.’ (Fisherman’s Soul, 135).

The priest’s attitude towards this issue mirrors the stand point of the Christian church mentioned in the previous chapter. The church cannot wipe out the people’s belief in mythological creatures and therefore tries to use them for their religious purposes by identifying them as evil. For the priest the mermaid symbolizes sexual temptation when the fisherman tells him about the beauty of the mermaid. “‘The love of the body is evil”.’ (Fisherman’s Soul, 135). The clergyman tries to warn the man by pointing out the fatal consequence his plan may have for salvation or damnation. “‘[...] thy leman is lost, and thou shalt be lost with her”.’ (Fisherman’s Soul, 136).

Apart from the mermaid there are other evil spirits presented in the tale. There is the witch who agrees to help the fisherman. First she is as appalled as the priest when she hears about the young man’s plan to give away his soul. Although the witch is a member of the dark side of the spiritual world she expresses her personal opinion first. “‘Pretty boy, pretty boy,” she muttered, “that is a terrible thing to do”.’ (Fisherman’s Soul, 138).

Finally, she decides to help him for an agreed reward. They meet each other again and the witch takes him to a Sabbath place. The chief of the witches, Satan, is present too. The young fisherman recognizes him by experiencing an evil power watching him. 'It was a man dressed in a suit of black velvet, cut in the Spanish fashion. His face was strangely pale [...]. He seemed weary [...].' (Fisherman's Soul, 142).

Although the fisherman wants to give away his soul he is afraid of Satan. He feels the dangerous powers of the evil spirit and seems to remember at least subconsciously his Christian origin and upbringing when he stood in front of Satan. 'But when he came close, and without knowing why he did it, he made on his breast the sign of the Cross, and called upon the holy name.' (Fisherman's Soul, 143). As a reaction to the fisherman's behaviour the witch wants to leave him but he urges her to tell him what he has to do with his soul. He threatens to slay her because of her falseness. Interestingly, Wilde makes a reference to the Judas tree at this point. 'She grew grey as a blossom of the Judas tree, and shuddered.' (Fisherman's Soul, 144)

According to Christian tradition it was Judas who had betrayed Jesus and therefore became a symbol for all cheats.²¹⁴ This comment may refer to both characters the witch and the young fisherman. In the case of the witch it may refer to her decision to live without Jesus and Christianity and to enter a bond with Satan. Although she supports the fisherman to put his plan into action her personal opinion is not clear because she seems to be aware of the value and great significance of the soul. "Be it so," she muttered. "It is thy soul and not mine. Do with it as thou wilt.'" (Fisherman's Soul, 144). The fisherman without doubt is a cheat regarding Christianity. Therefore the reference to Judas emphasizes his state of religious corruption.

Focusing on the soul the fisherman has sent away it reflects the development of the character in this tale. While the fisherman stays with his mermaid his soul travels around and makes its experiences. The soul comes to see him three years in a row and tries to win him back. The fisherman refuses to accept the wisdom and riches which the soul offers to him. "Love is better than Wisdom," he cried, "and the little Mermaid loves me.'" (Fisherman's soul, 154). The soul learns about different countries, peoples and religions during his journeys.

²¹⁴ Cf. Biedermann, Hans. *Knaurs Lexikon der Symbole*. München: Droemersche Verlagsanstalt, 2004. 222.

When the soul returns for the last time it is finally victorious because the young man follows it. Interestingly, it is the mermaid's fish tail which sparks off the fisherman's desire to go and see a dancing maiden. He thinks about the mermaid's inability of dancing. 'Now when the young Fisherman heard the words of his Soul, he remembered that the little Mermaid had no feet and could not dance. And a great desire came over him [...].' (Fisherman's Soul, 164). Neither wisdom nor riches could tempt the fisherman but the love of dancing a desire his beloved cannot satisfy. Riches and wisdom he may also acquire beneath the waves.

This is another example for the human weakness against temptation. Again the fisherman appears to be a cheat because he leaves behind his beloved because of his strong desire which she can not satisfy. Finally, he bitterly regrets his decision to follow his soul because it persuades the fisherman to do all kinds of evil such as theft and murder. He complains about this to his soul when he realizes what he has done. '[...] "thou art evil, and hast made me forget my love, and hast tempted me with temptations, and hast set my feet in the ways of sin".' (Fisherman's Soul, 169). The soul explains the situation to the man by telling him that this development is his own fault because he does not give a heart to it. "'Thou hast not forgotten that when thou didst send me forth into the world thou gavest me no heart".' (Fisherman's Soul, 169). Now, the fisherman realizes the full extent of his moral choice and wants to get rid of his soul again. He is devastated by the fact that he can only send away his soul once and that the witch did not mention this. His soul tells him otherwise. "'[...] she was true to Him she worships, and whose servant she will be ever".' (Fisherman's Soul, 170). Again the fisherman faces the consequences humans will face when they make a bargain with the devil's servants. When he returns to the sea the mermaid does not answer his calls. He builds a hut close to the sea living there for a year. The soul tempts him again and again but the fisherman does not pay any attention to it. After the second year of temptation and abundance the soul gives up its fight for the fisherman. "' Lo! now I have tempted thee with evil, and I have tempted thee with good, and thy love is stronger than I am. Wherefore will I tempt thee no longer [...]".' (Fisherman's Soul, 173). Now the fisherman feels sorry for the suffering soul and allows it to enter his heart. But because of the fisherman's great love for the mermaid the soul cannot enter his heart. Speaking these words the corps of the dead mermaid floats to the shore.

The fisherman's heart breaks by the sight of his dead beloved and the soul can enter it before the waves cover him. On the next morning the priest discovers the dead man and the mermaid and refuses to bury them in a decent Christian way.

“I will not bless the sea nor anything that is in it. Accursed be the Sea-folk, and accursed be all they who traffic with them. And as for him who for love's sake forsook God, and so lieth here with his leman slain by God's judgment, take up his body and the body of his leman, and bury them in the corner of the Field of the Fullers, and set no mark above them, nor sign of any kind, that none may know the place of their resting. For accursed were they in their lives, and accursed shall they be in their deaths also.” (Fisherman's Soul, 177).

This quote explicitly advocates the Christian teaching of damnation. Unearthly creatures as well as the people interacting with mermaids or satanic spirits will be doomed forever. They have forfeited eternal salvation. There is no chance of eternal salvation. According to the clergyman it was God who punished the fisherman and his beloved because they had provoked God with their blasphemous behaviour.

After the third year of their burial the priest is confronted with the past again because he is strongly moved by the sweet scent of some flowers on his altar. First he wanted to speak about God's wrath but then he decided otherwise and spoke about the love of God to the people. ‘But the beauty of the white flowers troubled him, and their odour was sweet in his nostrils [...] he spake not of the wrath of God, but of the God whose name is Love.’ (Fisherman's Soul, 178). The people as well as the priest had tears in their eyes when the ceremony was over. Finally the priest inquired about the origin of the flowers and learned that they came from the corner where the fisherman and the mermaid had been buried. Consequently, he went out to bless the sea, the fauns and all things in the world. Although the priest has a clear cut opinion about the sinful behaviour of the fisherman first, he makes peace with him when he realizes the change in him by smelling the lovely odour of the flowers. His point of view gets totally changed. His personal view of an angry, stern and wrathful God of the Old Testament changed into a God of love of the New Testament. In the early Middle Ages God's wrath was used as an instrument of the Christian Church to control people and their moral and religious behaviour.

It is obvious that this tale contains a great number of symbols and motifs connected to Christianity and Christian teaching. It starts with the fisherman's blasphemous desire to send away his soul to satisfy his sensual desires. Obviously, betrayal is one of the strongest motifs in this tale. The fisherman betrays God, his soul, and finally his beloved, the little mermaid. He almost also renounces eternal salvation. This is furthermore substantiated by the reference to the Judas tree named after the apostle who betrayed Jesus Christ. The mermaid is the archetypical seductive female creature who enchants the fisherman with her beauty and singing. This is the role the Christian Church typically ascribed to her.

Another aspect presented in the tale is the temptation of the soul. In this case the situation is reversed because it is the soul that tempts the human heart. First, it is the mermaid who tempts the fisherman and consequently is to be held responsible for his decision to give away his soul. Later in the course of the action the soul starts its fight to win back the fisherman and his heart. Due to the fact that the soul is not able to feel any kind of emotion neither positive nor negative its development is characterized by immoral and evil deeds. Finally, the soul of the fisherman realizes that existence without love is not possible and changes its mind. The motif of sensual love is central in this tale. At the beginning love is regarded less valuable than the possession of the soul because the priest considers the sensual love of the fisherman as vile, superficial and sinful because it is motivated by carnal lust. Later it becomes clear that the fisherman is not driven by a superficial emotion alone but willing to sacrifice his soul and, thus, eternal salvation to his love for the mermaid. Besides the fisherman who values his love more than his soul, the priest changes his point of view as well. During the ceremony at the church he is overwhelmed by a feeling of love which he cannot explain at first. However, in the end the priest understands that an emotion as great as the love of the fisherman needs to be acknowledged and valued. It seems that he has become aware of the fact that the fisherman is filled with a love given to him by God. This is furthermore substantiated by the fact that he talks about '[...] the God whose name is Love.' (Fisherman's Soul, 178). In the end reconciliation between the church and the pagan notion of love takes place. This ending conveys the late Medieval Christian doctrine of God as mercy and forgiveness.

5.3.2. The Soul Cages, The Lady of Gollerus and Flory Cantillon's Funeral

Although these stories have already been analysed in the chapter on mermaids further attention needs to be paid to them. Unlike Oscar Wilde's tale in which the Christian attitude to the mermaid is overtly presented, these tales are characterized by a more subtle approach to this issue.

In *The Soul Cages* the title already reveals one of the main topics of the story. Like in *The Fisherman's Soul* the most valuable property of a Christian plays a central role. In *The Soul Cages* it is a male merrow who keeps the souls of dead sailors in his house beneath the waves. Jack Dogherty the fisherman cannot believe his eyes when he sees the bowls and the souls in it. Here the dichotomy of a Christian fisherman and a pagan creature of the sea is clearly visible. The merrow represents the evil character who keeps the poor Christian souls beneath the waves barring their way to heaven whereas Jack Dogherty is a decent Christian character, feeling miserable for the caught souls. 'The state of the poor souls cooped up in the lobster-pots gave Jack a great deal of trouble [...].' (Soul Cages, 71).

He acts on the basis of Christian teaching because he is aware of the consequence the imprisoned state may have for the souls. His Christian consciousness tells him that he needs to save the souls by freeing them. '[...] how to release them cost him a great deal of thought.' (Soul Cages, 71). Although he thinks about seeing a priest he decides otherwise due to the fact that he does not know what to tell the priest. He is afraid of his losing his reputation because dining with a merrow is not an everyday occurrence. Jack Dogherty is evidently torn between two different worlds, the netherworld and earthly existence, pagan and Christian. On the one hand there is the Christian tradition with its rules and guidelines, and on the other hand, there is the merrow whom he considers a friend doing such evil deeds to the poor souls. 'Jack had a regard for him, too, and it also might not be much to his own credit if it were known that he used to go dine with Merrows.' (Soul Cages, 71). Apart from his torn state of mind concerning the imprisoned souls, Jack Dogherty seems to be very much in peace with the fact that merrows inhabit the sea. '[...] the very first wish of his heart was to fairly meet with one.' (Soul Cages, 63). This corresponds to the situation of a more or less tolerant co-existence between pagan beliefs and Christian tradition depicted above.

Another religious reference is made to Saint John's Well, near Ennis in County Clare in Ireland. This well was dedicated to St. John the Baptist at the dawn of Christianity. Many people used to travel to St. John's Well by walking on 'The Pilgrims Road'.²¹⁵ As it becomes apparent from this tale the co-existence of pagan beliefs and creatures and Christianity did not seem to pose a severe problem to the people.

In *The Lady of Gollerus* Dick Fitzgerald wants to marry a merrow. Therefore he consults a priest and tells him about his wish to marry a creature of the sea. Like Jack Dogherty, Dick Fitzgerald is not afraid of the merrow and the consequences a marriage with such a creature might have. Naturally, the clergyman called Father Fitzgibbon is appalled when he hears of Dick's plan. He advises Dick to do otherwise and to get rid of the merrow as soon as possible. '[...] "the Lord preserve us! - Send the scaly creature home to her own people, that's my advice to you, wherever she came from".' (Gollerus, 147). Father Fitzgibbon as a Christian priest cannot consent to a marriage between a man and a merrow. He states this clearly. "I tell you, you can't marry her, she being a fish".' (Gollerus, 147). Although the clergyman explains to Dick that he is not prepared to consecrate their bond at a wedding, Dick Fitzgerald keeps on persuading Father Fitzgibbon by pointing out the merrow's beauty. However, Father Fitzgibbon refuses to join them before Christ. But the situation changes immediately when Dick mentions the huge amount of money he is expecting from this bond and, consequently, the monetary gains Father Fitzgibbon would profit from by marrying him and the merrow effect a change of attitude in the priest. '[...] "I'm a made man if I marry her; and," said Dick, looking up slyly, "I can make it worth any one's while to do the job".' (Gollerus, 147). Now, the priest agrees to marry the two of them. "Oh!-that alters the case entirely," replied the Priest; [...] "marry her by all means if she is ten times a fish. Money, you know, is not to be refused in these bad times [...]".' (Gollerus, 148). This exposes the corruption of priests within the Christian Church. Father Fitzgibbon is obviously a corrupt priest who knows about the earthly advantages of money. At the beginning he acts according to a priest's morals by telling Dick Fitzgerald that a marriage with a creature of the sea is sinful and hence impossible.

²¹⁵ Cf. Brennan, Paddy. "The Rocky Road". Clare County Library. 22 September 2008. http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/places/ennis_rocky_road.htm.

At first he appears to be a traditionally-minded servant of the Christian Church, speaking out against such a blasphemous ambition. At the end, however, he reveals his true face and presents himself as a corrupt person who seeks his own fortune even against the laws of the church. Since the earliest days of Christianity there have been tales and accounts about corrupt clergymen using their power and influence to enrich themselves. Therefore, Father Fitzgibbon's changed opinion might be a reference to the clergy's secret ambitions people might have come across in everyday life.

The tale *Flory Cantillon's Funeral* presents a different aspect of the relationship between Christian traditions and pagan beliefs. On the British Isles as well as in Ireland there live certain families or clans who claim that mermaids or mermen have been members of their ancestry.²¹⁶ Consequently, there are also tales featuring mermaids which depict this relationship between the creatures of the sea and humans. One of these tales is *Flory Cantillon's Funeral*. The Cantillons' traditionally do not bury their deceased but put them in coffins on the shore. According to the tradition of the family the waves would take the coffin off the shore and would be carried away by the formerly deceased to the family's burial place. Connor Crow, a family member, is determined to find out the truth about the secret ritual. While waiting in the dark he suddenly made out some creatures coming from the sea taking away the coffin. These creatures were talking to each other about the story. "This comes of marrying with the creatures of the earth". (Cantillon's Funeral, 152). The sea-folk told the story about the sea king's daughter Durfulla who had been buried at the cemetery by her mortal husband. By listening to the sea-folk Connor Crow breaks the spell and the coffins of the Cantillon family were never again carried to their burial place beneath the waves. The story represents the close relationship between the two different cultural and religious traditions. There is no comment on the church's position concerning the mysterious ritual at the shore. It appears as if it is an old and well established tradition. The connection between the mortals and the creatures of the sea is obvious. One of the members of the Cantillon family married the sea king's daughter called Durfulla. When Durfulla died she was buried close to the mortals in their tomb.

²¹⁶ Cf. Benwell, Gwen & Arthur Waugh. *Töchter des Meeres*. 121.

Although the church does not approve of these marriages in general it seems that there have been at least some humans who intermarried with the creatures of the sea. Interestingly, the sea-folk carry away the dead bodies of the humans and conduct them to their final rest. Usually, the Christian tradition depicts the creatures of the sea as dangerous and fateful to men. In this case the situation seems to be reversed because the supernatural creatures are doomed to carry away the human's deceased. "The time is come [...] the sons of the sea are no longer doomed to bury the dust of the earth!" (Cantillon's Funeral, 153).

As a matter of fact the mermaid played an important role in mythological, cultural and religious issues since the earliest days of human kind. The predecessors of the mermaid figure, the sirens and nereids had paved the way for the mermaid as known today in various literary traditions. The Greek sirens aside, major female deities such as the Greek Aphrodite and the Roman Venus had a formative influence on the sea creature's development.

Later on in the Christian era the image as well as the outward appearance of the mermaid changed decisively. Traditional images were changed and lost as well as new ones added. The Christian Church imposed its preconceived idea about the mermaid on the people of the Middle Ages. Unlike the ancient traditions of the Greeks and Romans, the Christian Church used the mermaid as a didactic instrument. She became symbolic of carnal desire and vanity and an example for the temptations religious people are faced with. The mermaid was presented as a creature of doom longing for a human soul. This view is also reflected in the fairy and folk tales discussed above. However, there are also a few tales presenting the mermaid or mythical creatures of the sea as philanthropic and amiable beings. The last chapter of this thesis will focus on the impact of the mermaid motif on literary traditions. Selected fairy and folk tales will be analysed illustrating the mermaid's symbolic function.

6. The Role of the Mermaid as a Literary Motif and Symbol

Focusing on the mermaid's function as a literary motif and symbol it is apparent that the mermaid concept may be analysed in various ways. There is a choice of different motifs associated with the mermaid. The following chapter will pay further attention to the motifs related to the mermaid concept in selected fairy and folk tales. The main focus will be on the mermaid's roles as a 'helper' on the one hand and as a 'femme fatale' on the other. A definition of the 'femme fatale' motif will be presented at the beginning. The 'helper' motif will be analysed in the context of the discussion of individual fairy tales. In order to substantiate the given literary descriptions of the motifs a detailed analysis of the motifs contained in *The Mermaid's Vengeance* and *The Fisherlad and the Mermaid's Ring* which will then bring this chapter to an end.

6.1. The dark Lady, Femme fatale, Temptress

The motif of the dark-lady or the 'femme fatale' may be further identified as stock character or archetype in literary tradition. These stock characters feature specific character types which have become commonplaces due to its extensive and repeated use in literature.²¹⁷ The term 'archetype' originates from the Greek language meaning 'original pattern' in English which already indicates its function as a basic representation which may be reproduced individually by writers.²¹⁸ The term 'femme fatale' originates from French; the English equivalent is 'deadly woman'.²¹⁹ Due to the fact that the mermaid is able to enchant sailors and cause their death as a consequence the expression 'deadly woman' might be an appropriate term to describe the mermaid's dangerous nature.²²⁰

Focusing on the origin and history of this literary concept it needs to be mentioned that this motif is not restricted to the European literary tradition but is part of almost all cultures and centuries in the world.

²¹⁷ Cf. "Stock Characters" . The Department of English, University of Victoria, 1995. 24 September 2008. <http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/Pages/LTStockChars.html>.

²¹⁸ Cf. Cuddon, J. A. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 4th ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998. 53.

²¹⁹ Cf. "Femme fatale" . Dictionary from answers.com. 24 September 2008. <http://www.answers.com/topic/femme-fatale>.

²²⁰ Cf. Barber, Richard & Anne Riches. *A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts*. London: McMillan London Ltd., 1971. 102.

Each century has its legendary ‘femmes fatales’ depicting seductive females who endanger and seduce powerful and mighty males. Examples of famous historical as well as literary ‘femmes fatales’ are ‘Cleopatra’ the Queen of Egypt and ‘Morgan La Fay’ a popular character of the English medieval romances. The ‘femme fatale’ motif changed in the 19th and 20th centuries and developed into the established literary motif known today.²²¹

As a literary motif the ‘femme fatale’ is generally depicted as a threateningly charming female dangerous to men. Very often the victim of the deadly woman leaves behind his family, home and his intended destiny in order to indulge in unknown pleasures. Various myths, legends and folk tales tell about mysterious female figures who lure mortals into realms usually unknown to the humans. Usually, these figures present ideals, dreams and fears. ‘Femmes fatales’ might appear to be extremely beautiful, as for example, the goddess Venus or might announce as in the case of the siren by way of their character their dangerous nature.²²²

Furthermore there are certain characteristics and symbols ascribed to the deadly woman. There is the connection to the desire for power, the demon, the witch, Satan and sexuality. These characteristics lead to specific associations in literature connected to the ‘femme fatal’. First, the snake presented with a hypnotic look and a flickering tongue. Second, the imagery of water encompassing the vitality ascribed to the liquid element as well as the fear of the monsters of the sea. Very popular is the image of a mermaid enchanting a young man. Third, the mountains inhabited by witches. Fourth, the wilderness or woods which are difficult to access. Fifth, the hidden summer residence. The temptress satisfies the longing after sensation and promises the release from suffering.²²³

Apart from the disastrous consequences men might have to face by getting in contact with a deadly woman these relationships might also be characterized by a high degree of emotional and sexual satisfaction.²²⁴

²²¹ Cf. “Femme Fatale” . History from answers.com. 24 September 2008.
<http://www.answers.com/topic/femme-fatale>.

²²² Cf. Dämmerich, Horst S. und Ingrid. *Themen und Motive in der Literatur*. Tübingen: Francke, 1987. [2nd ed. 1995]. 150-151.

²²³ Cf. Dämmerich, Horst S. und Ingrid. *Themen und Motive in der Literatur*. 152-153.

²²⁴ Cf. Frenzel, Elisabeth. *Motive der Weltliteratur*. Ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte. Rev. 5th ed. Stuttgart: Kröner, 1999. 774.

The ‘femme fatale’ motif is furthermore related to a specific literary motif called ‘Mahrtenehe’. According to Elisabeth Frenzel, the term ‘Mahrtenehe’ reflects a marriage between a human male and a supernatural female such as a fairy, mermaid or other spiritual females.²²⁵ The German term ‘Mahr’ originates from the Old High German expression ‘mara’²²⁶ which is usually related to a specific female ghost or spirit roaming about at night time causing nightmares.²²⁷ As an English equivalent the term nightmare might be used.²²⁸ Unlike the fairies, the mermaid is a faithless creature leaving her husband behind when they find their hidden cap or skin.²²⁹ This situation has already been presented in the chapter on mermaids and the analysis of different tales featuring the relationships between human males and mermaids. The following part of this thesis will focus on the ‘femme fatale’ motif as presented in selected fairy and folk tales.

6.1.1. The Mermaid’s Vengeance

The following tale is part of a collection by Robert Hunt called *Popular Romances of the West of England*.²³⁰ The setting of the tale is the parish of Perranzabuloe in Cornwall. It is a tale about Penna the Proud, a farmer’s labourer, his wife Honour and their daughter Selina. Penna was an honest labourer working for a Squire. The Squire liked Penna very much and put great trust in him. His wife Honour was a very proud and good-looking woman but stern and naive. Tom Chenalls the hind of the Squire and Penna’s superior was once in love with Honour too. Since Honour was married to Penna and Penna was subordinate to him as an employee Tom Chenalls seized the opportunity to humiliate Penna and his family whenever he felt like doing it. Chenalls was an excellent farmer but the Squire preferred Penna. This situation was additionally fatal for the relationship between the Pennas and Tom Chenalls. Apart from Penna’s problems with his superior he also had some joy in life.

²²⁵ Cf. Frenzel, Elisabeth. *Motive der Weltliteratur*. 776.

²²⁶ Cf. *Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon in 25 Bänden*. 9th ed. Mannheim: Lexikonverlag, 1980. 462.

²²⁷ Cf. *Brockhaus. Enzyklopädie in 30 Bänden*. 21st ed. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 2006.

²²⁸ Cf. Kluge, Friedrich, Elmar Seebold. “Mahr”. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*. Rev. 24th ed. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002. 590. 29 September 2008. http://books.google.at/books?id=cWdy19Xx-5cC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_summary_r&cad=0#PPA590, M1.

²²⁹ Cf. Frenzel, Elisabeth. *Motive der Weltliteratur*. 776.

²³⁰ Cf. Hunt, Robert. ed. *Popular Romances of the West of England*. The Drolls, Traditions and Superstitions of old Cornwall. Rev. 3rd ed. London: Chatto and Windus, 1903. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/prwe/prwe064.htm>.

This joy was his daughter Selina who was a pretty girl, full of health. ‘Her features were regular, and had they been lighted up with more mental fire, they would have been beautiful; but [...] the want of animation, left her fact merely a pretty one.’ (Vengeance, 2). Naturally, this prettiness inspired gossip in the village concerning the real origin of Selina. One story told that Selina’s beauty is only a temporary one given to her by the fairies. The other story tells that Selina was not a pretty baby but her mother used to bath her in a pool close to the arched rocks of Perran which was said to be frequented by mermaids. Once her mother lost hold of Selina and the baby slipped into the water. Fortunately, it returned to the surface unhurt. Honour Penna did not recognize any change in her baby girl but the old women of the parish believed that a changeling was returned by the mermaids. Selina did not show any characteristics usually ascribed to fairies or mermaids when she grew older which consequently put an end to the constant rumours. However, Penna was very fond of his daughter and they used to walk on the shore for hours talking to each other. Because Selina was an only child she was a spoiled girl. Apart from the girl’s dislike of domestic duty she did not want to go to church which was another point to complain about. When Selina reached her eighteenth year she was very much admired by the young men in the parish although she seemed to keep a mysterious distance to her admirers. One day the nephew of the Squire came to the parish. He was wounded after fighting in the war. Although he was not in his best form, at the time he came to his uncle, he looked like a handsome young man full of strength. Walter Trewoofe, which was the name of the Squire’s nephew, was very fond of his own person expecting the others to admire him too. To quickly recover again Walter used to take regular walks at the shore before returning to the comfortable manor-house. One time the young soldier discovered Penna and his daughter walking on the shore. Immediately Walter was fascinated by the girl’s beauty and used every opportunity to get in contact with Selina. It almost seemed as if Walter had forgotten about his dissolute lifestyle he used to indulge in some time before. Unfortunately the acquaintance between Walter and Selina had been watched by Tom Chenalls who had already thought about a plan to deprive Selina of her innocence. Chenall made friends with Walter Trewoofe by showing him the beauties of the country life. They also talked about Selina from time to time.

Chenall was very much pleased about the fact that Walter did not think about any serious relationship but wanted to indulge in sexual pleasures only. Finally, Walter and the hind made a plan how to lead Penna away from his house and family. Chenall convinced the Squire to send Penna to a farm which needed some further attention. This farm was far away so Penna did not pose any further problem to their plan. Honour Penna was very fond of the young man because he flattered her whenever possible. Selina fell in love with him soon because she was a naive and less experienced, simple-minded girl who did not know anything about the evil intentions of the young soldier. As a matter of fact the gossip started again and the people suspected a fatal end. When Penna returned after three months to visit his family he could feel the dangerous spirit but could not make any sense out of it. An old fisherman said that he had watched Selina and the young man. '[...] he, in after days stated his conviction that he had seen "merry maidens rising from the depth of the waters, and floating under the billows to watch Selina and her lover".' (Vengeance, 6). Walter Trewoofe left the parish after another three months and returned to the city. Now Chenalls did not have any further reason to keep Penna from home. When Selina's father returned he could feel that something was wrong. Selina was only a shadow of the girl Penna had known before and his wife shared his daughter's secret. Penna got to know about the state of affairs by Tom Chenall who tormented him with evil sneers. Finally, Penna gave a strong blow to Chenall which was immediately reported to the Squire as well as a wicked story about Penna who supposedly wanted to catch the Squire's nephew as a groom for his daughter. The Squire dismissed Penna from his service but Penna was a hard working man and therefore he did not stay unemployed for a long time. Selina did not recover from her loss. 'Weaker and weaker grew Selina, and it soon became evident to all, that if she came from a spirit-world, to a spirit-world she must soon return.' (Vengeance, 6). Finally, Selina died and left behind a little baby. Walter Trewoofe returned to Perran-on-the-sands once again. Only a priest could calm down Penna by telling him about the Lord's justice, Walter would sooner or later have to face.

Tom Chenalls could not enjoy his triumph over the Pennas for long because Selina's death had fatal consequences on the crops as well as cattle which died without any obvious reason. The hated villain started to drink and the Squire dismissed him from his service.

Although Walter knew about his uncle's opinion towards Chenalls he still regarded him as a friend. The cottage of Tom Chenalls which was close to the sea became the meeting point of Tom and Walter both indulging in alcohol and vicious company. One night Walter lost his way and came down the shore. Before he directed his steps to the right way he heard a beautiful sound. He moved closer to the place he suspected the lovely singing to come from. Walter discovered the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. When the girl recognized his presence she tried to flee but Walter held her back. Realizing that the young maiden was Selina Walter was shocked. The maiden advised him to go. Back home he could not find any sleep. On the next day he went to see the grave of Selina shedding tears about his personal loss. He told the story to a priest who dismissed him with a blessing. Again he met the vicious company of Tom Chenalls at the hind's cottage although the mysterious event he had changed him dramatically. As a matter of fact Walter could not forget his experience with the beautiful maiden. When he returned to the sea he could hear another enchanting song. Walter climbed over a few dark rocks when he suddenly perceived a flute-like murmur. "Died this day, --died this day". These words remembered Walter of Selina's anniversary of death. The young man did not have any power over himself anymore. Therefore he walked to the entry of the cavern where he had seen the maiden first. Although the maiden, had Selina's voice and her features, her form was different. The maiden addressed him with his name and invited him to sit close beside her. "Come, sit beside me, Walter, and let us talk of love". (Vengeance, 10). By looking into the woman's eyes he could see the eyes of the woman he had betrayed. She kissed him on his forehead and explained to him that he belongs to her till death. From this moment Walter was aware of the dangerous situation. Although he was terribly afraid he could not move and sat for hours close by the maiden's side. A storm came up with all its might. Walter now started to beg for forgiveness but the woman did not let go of him. The young man watched a lightning stroke which threw down Tom Chenalls and his companions in the cottage. Then suddenly, Walter and the woman were lifted on a huge wave which tossed around the dying body of the young man.

Focusing on the 'femme fatale' motif in *The Mermaid's Vengeance* only the last part of the tale presents a female character who may be identified as such. There is a sharp contrast between the child-like woman Selina presented at the beginning and the passionate, deadly mermaid presented at the end of the tale. First, Selina is depicted as a pretty girl. 'Her skin was beautifully white [...] At times there was a lovely tint upon the cheek [...].' (Vengeance, 2). Although she appears to have a lovely outward appearance her character exposes certain weaknesses. According to her parents she is not to be trusted with housework. 'Honour Penna [...] did complain that Selina could not be trusted with the most ordinary domestic duty.' (Vengeance, 3). Additionally, Selina tries to avoid stepping into a church whenever possible. '[...] the increasing dislike Selina exhibited towards entering a church.' (Vengeance, 3). Apart from social conduct and outward appearance Selina is depicted as a single-minded, trusting and naive girl. 'Guileless herself, this child-woman suspected no guile in others [...].' (Vengeance, 4). By looking at this quote it may be reasonable to argue for Selina's innocent character who does not expect any evil by people.

Evidently, this presentation of Selina's character is the complete opposite of a 'femme fatale's' character. The chaste nature of the girl may have been used to further emphasize the change in character at the end of the tale. Due to the young man's betrayal the situation changed entirely. The supposed supernatural origin of Selina proves to be true. '[...] all the aged crones in the parish declared it to be a changeling.' (Vengeance, 2). She is not part of the human world but a member of the other world. Her death reveals her true origin. '[...] they mark the moment when the tide turned, in the full belief that she would be taken from them when the waters of the ocean began to recede from the shore.' (Vengeance, 6). At the end of the tale Selina is turned into the character of a real 'femme fatale'. First, she lures her former lover to a cave by way of singing beautifully. 'Walter, led by the melancholy song, advanced slowly along the sands.' (Vengeance, 7). Interestingly, Walter has mixed emotions when looking at the beautiful woman. 'Walter stopped, and gazed on the lovely image before him with admiration and wonder, mingled with something of terror.' (Vengeance, 7). This experience is typical of the victims of a 'femme fatale'. Usually, they are paralyzed by the woman's beauty when at the same time they feel terrified and endangered.

Apart from her beautiful singing which lures her victim into death, the 'femme fatale' exposes another characteristic trait. '[...] her dark eyes beamed with unnatural lustre upon him.' (Vengeance, 7). As presented in the chapter on the 'femme fatale' motif explaining the sexual aggressiveness of these women the mermaid exposes her sexual desire openly. This is another aspect which furthermore contributes to the 'femme fatale' motif. Once in her arms the young man could not escape again. 'The maiden wreathed her arm around his neck [...]' (Vengeance, 9). The mermaid talks about love and the lover's relationship to Selina. When she kisses him she tells him that he is now belongs to her forever. "'The kiss of a sea-child is the seal of constancy. You are mine till death".' (Vengeance, 10). In this situation it becomes apparent that the mermaid regards her lover as her property. Once in her arms a femme fatale would never let go of her lover. In many cases this means death for the male victim. This is the same with Walter who is forced to sit at the mermaid's side listening to love-talk. 'For hours Walter was compelled to sit by the side of his beautiful tormentor, every word of assumed love and rapture being a torture of the most exquisite kind to him.' (Vengeance, 9). Although Walter tries to persuade the mermaid of his change in mind and promises to live a life of penitence the mermaid does not let him go. She wants to take revenge on him because of his betrayal. Frenzel mentions the 'femme fatale' in connection with a seduced or abused girl who takes revenge on the enchanted man.²³¹ Selina was definitely seduced by Walter Trewoofe. The evidence of their sexual relationship is the baby whom Selina left behind after her death. '[...] the sunlight of a summer morning shone in through the small window of this humble cottage,--on a dead mother--and a living child.' (Vengeance, 6).

In the end, the betrayal and the mermaid's mercilessness caused the death of Walter Trewoofe. Eventually, the death of Walter is a cruel one because he was drowned by the deadly mermaid while she was tearing him by the hair. Happy about the successful revenge the mermaid starts to sing a joyous song forecasting Walter's eternal doom:

"Come away, come away!
Beneath the wave
Lieth the grave
Of him we slay, him we slay!"

²³¹ Cf. Frenzel, Elisabeth. *Motive der Weltliteratur*. 786.

“Come away, come away!
He shall not rest
In earth’s own breast
For many a day, many a day.

“Come away, come away!
By billows to
From coast to coast,
Like deserted boat
His corse shall float
Around the bay, around the bay.” (Vengeance, 11)

As presented above the ‘femme fatale’ may be responsible for both eternal pleasure and eternal damnation. Selina is a mermaid who took care of an earthly child looking after the child’s happiness. Walter betrayed the innocent girl, which enraged the mermaid and finally she caused his death. In this tale *The Mermaid’s Vengeance* once again the deadly qualities of the mermaids are depicted. Here, a mermaid slips into the role of a ‘femme fatale’ who takes revenge for her adopted child.

6.2. The Helper

A positive variety of the mermaid in contrast to the femme fatale is the portrayal of the mermaid as a ‘helper’ for humans. She supports humans who are unhappy or in severe danger. Usually, the helper motif encompasses different traits which determine the mermaid’s function within the tale. Very often, the helper is a powerful person with magical abilities. This person advises the hero what to do and if necessary provides him with a precious and useful gift. Besides the helper’s intention to do good this character may also initiate a trial the hero may or may not pass.²³² The mermaid as helper is inherently benevolent.

On the more beneficent side, there are stories of mermaids who warn of storms, or other future events (sometimes voluntarily, sometime under compulsion—a mermaid may be compelled to answer by the seizure of her cap or belt), grant wishes or bestow supernatural powers, bring up drowned treasure or show its location, or teach wisdom [...].²³³

The mermaid type who lends a helping hand to a mortal by granting him a wish is the central motif in the following tale.

²³² Cf. “Cap O’Rushes”. A Folkloric and Literature Resource for Teachers and Librarians. Fairy Tale Motifs. 20 June 2008. <http://users.rcn.com/cajs/Caporushes/Fairy.html>.

²³³ Cf. Berman, Ruth. *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures. A Source Book and Research Guide*. 135.

6.2.1. The Fisherlad and the Mermaid's Ring

Originally, this tale is part of a collection by Sorche Nic Neodhas called *Thistle and Thyme: Tales and Legends from Scotland*.²³⁴ The following version has been retold

by Elaine L. Lindy an American expert on ethnical and entertaining folk literature.²³⁵

According to Elaine L. Lindy the tale *The Fisherlad and the Mermaid's Ring* originates from the Western part of Scotland from a city called Tobermory.

This is also explicitly mentioned in the tale, presenting Scotland as a setting. 'Once in Scotland [...].' (Mermaid's ring, 1). It is a tale about a young man who fell in love with a pretty girl. Although he offered his heart to her she refused to marry him because she had already been promised to another one. The young man was so embarrassed by her rejection that he did not want to live among the people of the town any longer. Therefore he took all his belongings and sailed to a deserted island where he built a hut to live in. All the fish he caught he sold at a market where nobody knew about his story. One day things changed because the fisherman caught a mermaid in his net. 'To look at, she was just like any other girl up to the waist, but below that she flipped a long fishtail that glittered with shiny yellow-green scales.' (Mermaid's ring, 1). She asks him to let her go but the fisherman wanted to make a bargain with the mermaid because he knew that once a mermaid was caught she had to grant a wish. The mermaid offers money to the fisherman but he refused it telling her that he only had one wish: to get the pretty girl. The mermaid did not understand why he wanted this specific girl because in her opinion this girl she is not exceptional in any way. Finally, the mermaid handed over a magic ring to the fisherlad telling him that he should give the ring to his chosen bride. She also told him that he should go and see his future bride after a year and a day. Then he released the mermaid from his net. Coming back to his hut the fisher lad discovered a strange girl with dark hair. He asked her about the purpose of her visit. Then she told him the story of her father and her new wicked stepmother and asks him whether she could stay on his island. First the fisherlad refused to keep her on the island but when the girl started to cry he changed his mind and allowed her to stay. In return she promised to care for him. They got to know each other better over the time.

²³⁴ Cf. Neodhas, Sorche Nic. *Thistle and Thyme: Tales and Legends from Scotland*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1962.

²³⁵ Cf. Lindy, Elaine L. "The Fisherlad and the Mermaid's Ring". 2005. 25 September 2008. http://www.storiestogrowby.com/stories/fisherlad_scotland.html.

One day the dark-haired girl found the mermaid's ring. The fisherman was so furious that he screamed at her to give back that ring. After this unpleasant incident the girl put all her belongings together and bid the young man good-bye. The fisherman tried to hold her back speaking gently to her, but she refused to stay. On the next morning the young man realized that one year and a day had passed and so he set out to seek his love. But he did not sail to the village where the blond girl with the blue eyes lived. He directed his boat towards the land where the strange girl lived with her father. As a matter of fact she was very much surprised when she saw the fisherman and asked him about the chosen bride, the magic ring and whether he had reached his aim. The fisherman took her in his arms and the two of them were wed.

One day the young man happened to see the other girl again but he could not see the difference between her and other girls any longer. When they met the mermaid again she asked the fisherman about his true love. He answered her truthfully and the mermaid was never seen again.

Unlike to the mermaid in *The Mermaid's Vengeance*, who killed a human male, the mermaid in this tale helps the fisherman to find his true love. When the fisherman catches the mermaid he knows that it is her duty to grant him a wish. ““You know as well as I do that you must grant me a wish”.” (Mermaid's ring, 1). This corresponds with the above mentioned benevolent mermaid type. In this case the benevolent act originates from a desperate situation on account of the mermaid who has been caught in the net. The mermaid expected the young man to claim some money or hidden treasures. ““I suppose you want a bag of gold coins. I happen to know of a sunken ship not far from here with such treasure”.” (Mermaid's ring, 1). But instead of the monetary reward, the fisherman is looking for love. When he explains the situation to the mermaid she obviously can not see a point in longing for a girl who is not much different from other girls. ““Ah, she is not so different from the others [...]”.” (Mermaid's ring, 2). By telling the fisherman these words the mermaid already foresees the young man's destiny. In the end he marries a different girl and realizes that the girl he once longed for is not as specific as he originally thought her to be. ‘She had the same golden hair and blue eyes, and the same tall, slim frame, but there was nothing about her that seemed different or better than other girls.’ (Mermaid's ring, 5).

This may also be interpreted as a test the young man has to pass before living happily together with his beloved. The mermaid gives him the opportunity to prove his true love by giving him the magic ring and the advice to wait for one year and a day. During this time the fisherman is able to change his superficial thinking and attitude towards love. ““Her blue eyes. Her blond hair. The way she moves. She is what I want most in all the world and if I can’t have her, I want naught else!”.’(Mermaid’s ring, 2).

Generally, the ring symbolizes a vow between a man and a woman.²³⁶ In the case of the fisherman and the mermaid there is a pledge or bargain which is symbolized by the ring. She gives to him the magic ring and promises him that he will find his true love. The fisherman promised to set her free if she helps him to win his beloved. Finally, the situation changes and the ring becomes a symbol of marriage for the fisherman and his dark-haired girl.

Unlike the motif of the ‘femme fatale’ which presents the negative and dangerous characteristics frequently ascribed to the mermaid, the motif of the ‘helper’ appears to be a true fairy tale motif. As presented in *The Fisherlad and the Mermaid’s Ring* the mermaid is depicted as a character who brings luck and love to humans. In this tale the mermaid may be seen as being similar to the traditional fairy tale characters who have the intention to do good and who support the hero or heroine by way of their magic powers.

Obviously, the mermaid in this tale does not share any similarities with the ‘femme fatale’ depicted in *The Mermaid’s Vengeance* who is eager to take revenge for the betrayal of love. In this tale the mermaid wants to establish justice again by killing the murderer of an innocent young girl. She may be identified as a character who highly values innocent love. The disregard of this rule turned her into an avenging angel who felt responsible for the duty to establish the young girl’s reputation again. The mermaid in *The Fisherlad and the Mermaid’s Ring* enables the fisherman to experience true love. With the help of the mermaid the young man is able to see the nature of true love. She is the one who initiates the loving relationship between the fisherman and his bride. Apparently, the nature of the mermaid as presented in the folk- and fairy tales analysed is not confined to negative characteristics in the national traditions.

²³⁶ Cf. Ferber, Michael. *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*. Cambridge: University Press, 1999. 169.

This mermaid has a benevolent and kind nature but it needs to be mentioned that this is the exception to the rule. Usually, the character of the mermaid presented in Irish folk- and fairy tales is less amiable and related to destruction in connection to human beings. Therefore, it seems plausible to argue that the Scottish mermaid variant as in *The Fisherlad and the Mermaid's Ring* is able to act kindly and generously towards humans.

However, like the humans the mermaid displays positive as well as negative character traits. This may be another reason for the human's vital interest in this fascinating mythological creature and the tales and stories told and written about them.

7. Conclusion

Mermaids are and always have been of enormous interest to the people across cultural traditions. These creatures are mysterious, wild, alluring and seductive. Since the earliest days of mythological and cultural development the mermaid has featured as a mysterious being, associated with symbolic meanings. She is associated with destruction, death, love and eternity. Her relationship to humans is ambivalent. In folk lore the mermaid as a 'femme fatale' is a central motif. She is a supernatural seductress, embodiment of sexual temptation and passionate addiction. As depicted in various fairy-and folk tales the mermaid is responsible for bad luck, mysterious disappearances and death. Her alluring voice is dreaded because it is a harbinger of destruction, danger and consequently damnation.

Regarding her relationship to human males she is the epitome of desire. Because of her great beauty and seductive nature men cannot resist following her. Nothing can be more tempting than a beautiful mermaid sitting on a rock singing enchanting songs. This is the commonplace description of a mermaid as a fatal temptress.

In Ireland, England and Scotland this creature plays a vital role in folk lore. She is the main mythical protagonist in numerous fair- and folk tales. Usually, the description given above predominates in these tales. Occasionally, there are also tales about mermaids who act benevolently and kindly towards humans but this is the exception to the rule. Although the sea-creatures of the British Isles and Ireland may differ in terms of out-ward appearance and a region's mythological background the mermaid's dangerous and subversive nature is commonly attributed to all mermaid types. Human males are eager to take a mermaid for a wife regardless of her mysterious origin and the consequences which might arise from this bond. Usually, the male's desire is stronger than conscience or any religious dogma forbidding the marriage between a man and an unearthly creature. This situation is depicted in many Irish, English and Scottish fairy tales.

Besides the mermaid's capricious temper in relation to men she is a loving and tender person to her children. Like human females, mermaids feel responsible for their children. They dearly care for them as loving mothers are supposed to do, and yet, their yearning for 'home' is ultimately stronger than their love of children.

Because of the fact that the mermaid is commonly associated with evil powers it needs to be mentioned that mermaids do not always seek the destruction of human beings. In some texts she is depicted as a benevolent and supporting creature which is willing to help.

She has the power to save humans from peril and fulfils their dearest wishes if asked kindly and respectfully. Due to the fact that she is associated with the goddess Venus her close relationship to sensual love is obvious. Erotic love may be seen as the mermaid's most urgent concern. Depending on the human's behaviour she either gives love or destroys the person who does not value her love for him sufficiently.

However, the mermaid's nature encompasses a wide range of character traits. Like a human being she is able to experience both positive and negative emotions. She is a creature who is driven by desires. Like earthly men and women she may either be an egocentric or selfless character. Her actions are influenced by such basic feelings as love, desire, sympathy and hate. Furthermore, there are certain mermaids who have a distinct sense of justice which is particularly interesting when related to the moral norms of Christianity.

Consequently, it can also be plausible to argue that the mermaid as a semi-human being inevitably displays some features and character traits which are part of the human nature. However, unlike earthly beings the mermaid is not bound to the social conventions and moral norms of this world. This may be one of the reasons for her extreme popularity. Ultimately, the mermaid belongs by her origins to the supernatural world of fairies in the netherworld with its different rules and conventions which, strike humans as strange, mysterious, alluring and charming at the same time. It is the free and independent existence between two worlds which makes the mermaid a most fascinating creature and one of timeless appeal.

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Abstract

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem Motiv der Meerjungfrau in irischen, englischen und schottischen Märchen. Dieses Motiv wird aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven beleuchtet und anhand von ausgesuchten Geschichten analysiert und interpretiert. Das wissenschaftliche Ziel ist es, die Unterschiede zwischen den landestypischen Meerjungfrau Darstellungen in den irischen, englischen und schottischen Märchen zu beschreiben und zu erklären.

Zu Beginn wird der mythologische und folkloristische Hintergrund der Meerjungfrau, sowie anderer Feen und Elfen erklärt. Dies inkludiert eine ausführliche Beschreibung der unterschiedlichen Feen- und Elfentypen, welche in der Märchen- und Volksliteratur, jedoch auch in der Volkstradition und Kultur der Britischen Inseln und Irland ansässig sind.

Des Weiteren werden die literarische Gattung des Märchens und dessen gattungstypische Merkmale erläutert. Hier stehen die Beschreibung von verwandten literarischen Gattungen und die Unterscheidung zwischen Kunst- und Volksmärchen im Vordergrund.

Der Hauptteil der Diplomarbeit widmet sich, wie bereits oben erwähnt dem Meerjungfrauen Motiv. Die Meerjungfrau wird zu Beginn anhand von allgemeinen Definitionen vorgestellt und dem Leser näher gebracht. Ausgesuchte Texte werden dann die spezifischen Unterschiede in den Darstellungen der irischen, englischen und schottischen Märchen hervorheben und verdeutlichen.

Ferner wird die Entstehungsgeschichte der Meerjungfrau als mythologische Gestalt erläutert. Dazu wird die griechische und römische Mythologie und auch der Einfluss der Kirche, im Bezug auf die Bedeutung der Meerjungfrau in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung, analysiert und erklärt. Eine zentrale Rolle spielt die Wirkung der christlichen Religion auf die Darstellung der Meerjungfrau in der Märchenliteratur.

Das letzte Kapitel ist der Meerjungfrau und ihrer Verbindung zu ausgewählten literarischen Motiven gewidmet. Dies umfasst die Darstellung der Meerjungfrau als *Femme fatale*, als auch ihrer Rolle als gute Fee im Märchen. Wie auch in den vorherigen Kapiteln, wird die Bedeutung des Motivs der *Femme fatale* und der guten Fee anhand von ausgesuchten Texten verdeutlicht und begründet.

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