

論文要旨

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A Study on Fairies in Irish Folktales

(アイルランド民話における妖精研究)

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A Study on Fairies in Irish Folktales

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The otherworld and its inhabitants, fairies, are depicted in various literary works in Europe. The idea of the otherworld and that of fairies is derived from oriental thought, Greek and Roman mythology, and above all, Celtic ways of thinking about them. A lot of research has been conducted on the Celtic otherworld and fairies. What seems to be lacking, however, is a more detailed and comprehensive examination of Irish folktales involving them. Besides, there is scope for further research into the plentiful materials available on folktales. This combination of motives has encouraged me to write this thesis on fairies in Irish folktales and clarify their characteristics.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to clarify the entire picture of concepts and details of the Celtic otherworld and fairies in Irish folktales, and to find out through these examinations how the Celts create the otherworld and think about fairies. This thesis is also expected to help further an understanding of how the examples and consequences of this research are transmitted to tales of the otherworld and fairies in later European literature, or how they are altered.

In order to grasp the image of the otherworld and fairies in Irish folktales, various points of view will be considered, but in this study, they are examined from the following five viewpoints: different terms for fairies, the appearance of fairies, the supernatural powers of fairies, the habitat of fairies, and plot patterns of Irish folktales involving fairies.

Firstly, in Chapter I, the definition of fairies and past theories about fairies are considered for the basis of this research.

Chapter II provides concrete examinations of Irish folktales. In this chapter, the

terms used for fairies are examined revealing that the different figures or manifestations of fairies consists of three main categories: human figures (261 cases, 75.4%), animal figures (41 cases, 11.9%), and other figures (44 cases, 12.7%). Then, the human figures are further classified into four types: female (101), male (119), child (7), and group (34).

Human-figured fairies directly referred to as “fairy/fairies” are found in forty-eight cases among all the 144 names seen in the folktales (48/144 cases, 33.3%). Besides, names including the adjective “wee” (19 cases, 13.2%), “airy” or a similar meaning (16 cases, 11.1%), “good” or similar terms (14 cases, 9.7%), and “immortal” (8 cases, 5.6%) are found (such as “wee folk,” “airy host,” “good people,” and “immortal host”). These names seem to be influenced by people’s conception of fairies. Names indicating their habitats, “hill” (28) and “sea” (3), are also referred to (such as “hill-folk,” and “sea-gentry”).

The percentages of three of the human types for the use of direct references to “fairy/fairies” are 46.9% (23/49 cases) in female figures, 23.0% (14/61 cases) in male figures, and 35.5% (11/31 cases) in group figures. If there is any truth in Narváez et al.’s assertion – namely, that people do not call them “fairies,” but use euphemistic names for fear of offending them – male fairies are more feared by people than female fairies, because the former are directly called ‘fairies’ in fewer cases than the latter. Accordingly, there is a coming need to find out whether euphemistic names using “good,” “wee,” and “airy” actually reflect people’s image of fairies or not.

In order to highlight whether fairies are good or evil, the results of Chapter IV and VI provide some useful explanations. The supernatural powers of fairies are examined in Chapter IV. Concerning power over people and objects, friendly powers are found in seventeen cases, and hostile powers are found in twenty-four: hostile power is used more frequently than friendly power. Additionally, the features of fairies’ actions are

examined in Chapter VI. The result indicates that benevolent actions are found in forty-four cases and malevolent actions appear in sixty-six. Here, malevolent actions are also committed more often than benevolent ones. Accordingly, the term "good" in a fairies' name is not quite suitable for people to use, because fairies are considered to do evil things slightly more often than good things (at the approximate ratio of three to two).

Secondly, for the feature of "wee" (little), the fairies which have the physical characteristic of "little" are found in eighty-eight cases of all the 261 human-figured fairies (88/261 cases, 33.7%, including child fairies), in Chapter III. So it can be considered that the term "wee" used as a fairy name is reflected by people's image of fairies.

Finally, for the term "airy" or ghostly, Chapter III reveals that the aural manifestations such as voice and noise, things found in the natural world such as waves and wind, and others, are picked up as fairies in forty-four cases (44/346, 12.7%). In Chapter VI, various means of disappearing, such as vanishing in fire or mist, are found in twenty-three cases (23/230, 10.0%). These features are considered to have an influence on people when they call fairies "airy." As a result, the terms "wee" and "airy" are suitable for people's actual images of fairies, but the term "good" is not. Therefore, it is proved that people do not call them "fairies" but euphemistic names for fear of offending them, as Narváez et al. maintain. Besides, male fairies are often referred to as "good" (7/14 cases, 50.0%), as well as a lower frequency of being called "fairies" directly, so that they are feared by people more than female fairies. Thus, the adjectives used for fairies' names are not always reflected by people's actual image of fairies, but it can be considered that the names used for human-figured fairies have these qualities of "wee," "good," "airy," and "immortal."

In Chapter III, their physical features and other accompanying features are examined to clarify the appearance of fairies. In these examinations, various features are found, but there are two important matters on their appearance to comprehend: questions concerning their size and beauty. Different speculations have been made between researchers concerning these points.

The descriptions of "little/small" are found in forty-six cases, amounting to 17.6% of all the human figures. This is surely one of the most important physical features of fairies in Irish folktales, but not suitable for all of them because almost eighty percent of the fairies are of a typical human size. If child fairies are regarded as little fairies, however, the number of little fairies increases to eighty-eight. It consists of 33.7%, so more than one-third of all the human figures are little. Then it makes sense that one-third of little fairies are so impressive for some researchers that they regard them as the general norm. But still, the normal-sized fairies amount to 63.4% and it is almost twice as high a percentage as that of the little fairies. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that fairies in Irish folktales are generally a normal human size, as O'Sullivan and Ó hÓgáin state.

Furthermore, attention is then directed to the frequency of small-sized adult fairies (46 cases, 17.6%). The fairies in medieval romance literature are depicted as being of a normal human size. In early modern literature such as Shakespeare's works, the adult fairies assume a normal human size while child fairies surrounding the adult ones are described as being diminutive. Accordingly, it is found that images of adult fairies of a normal human size and little child fairies, both of which had much older origins and are found in Irish folktales, are transmitted to these medieval and early modern literatures, but the diminutive adult fairies are not depicted in these literatures. Accordingly, this feature of adult diminutive fairies is considered to be derived from the

unique image of the fairies of Irish folktales, or from the image of Celtic fairies.

The second question is whether the fairies are beautiful or not. In order to find this answer, the frequency of physical descriptions on beauty and ugliness are compared in cases of female and male fairies. Beautiful female fairies are found in thirty-four cases, occupying 33.7% of all the female fairies (34/101 cases), while ugly fairies appear less frequently (20/101 cases, 19.8%). Additionally, normal female fairies, neither beautiful nor ugly, appear most frequently (47/101 cases, 46.5%). As Briggs and White state on the beauty of fairies in Irish folktales, the beautiful fairies are actually seen frequently, but from these examinations, it is found that plain fairies appear more frequently than beautiful ones in Irish folktales, as Ó hÓgáin states. The result is more explicit for male fairies (78/119 cases, 65.5%).

Furthermore, female fairies are depicted as a contrast between beautiful and ugly, while such a clear contrast cannot be seen for the male figure. It is possible to speculate that the contrastive figures are influenced by features of the ancient Irish goddesses, who have both figures of beautiful maidens and old hags. Additionally, such a large number of fairies in the normal human figure show us that the world of fairies might be confused with the world of the dead which people believed to be located near their own communities.

Along with human-formed fairies, animal fairies, aural manifestations, things in the natural world and traces of fairy actions are found. Such images of these fairies can be considered to be influenced by the people's awe of nature.

In Chapter IV, the supernatural powers of fairies are examined, being classified into eight categories: powers over people, over nature, animals, objects, transcending space and time, transformation, and omniscience. The powers over people, nature, animals and objects are found in 106 cases, occupying sixty-six percent of all the

powers (106/160 cases, 66.3%). It means that the power which operates on something is the principal power of fairies. Also, it is possible state that powers over something have been influenced to some extent by images of ancient gods or goddesses.

The powers of fairies relating to people's death are often enacted. Hostile powers over people include twelve powers relating to death, and one for those over objects. Furthermore, the power of prediction has five prophesies concerning people's deaths. Such a large number of powers relating to people's deaths seem to indicate that there is a connection between fairies and the dead.

Concerning the question of whether fairies use their power in a friendly, mischievous, or hostile manner, the power over people and that over objects is classified into these three types. Friendly powers are found in seventeen cases, mischievous in eighteen, and hostile powers in twenty-four. Thus, we find that each of these three types of power is operated nearly evenly, but hostile power is used slightly more often than the others.

We next inspect fairy habitats in Chapter V. Researchers mention several places as fairy habitats. Although their speculations differ from one another, they state that underground and ring-forts on the ground are most prevalent. Fairies in this research, however, live most frequently in the sea (53/145 examples, 36.6% of all the habitats). The sea is indicated as one of their habitats by several researchers but none of them regard it as the dominant one. Therefore, it is found that fairies have a close relationship with the sea. The second most frequent habitats are hills (24 cases, 16.6%). Fort/rath/lios appeared in eleven cases (7.6%), which is the third highest frequency. Although these places – fort/rath/lios – are closely related to the mounds which Irish “sí” [fairies] originally refers to, the frequency is not so high. Accordingly, the origin of the word “sí” must be more diverse. This diversity is also recognisable by the fact that

fairy habitats are located in various other natural places, such as fields, rivers, lakes, caves and woods.

As for the properties of habitats, buildings are described by adjectives such as "big," "large," "fine," "beautiful," and so on, with few concrete descriptions of gorgeousness. On the other hand, fairies are often depicted as being gathered in crowds (14 cases) and enjoying "music" (9), "singing" (7), "drinking" (5), "eating" (4) and "dance" (4). It is possible to say that people visualize fairies enjoying popular amusements rather than the gorgeousness of their habitats. Thus, fairy habitats are found in various natural places familiar to people such as in the sea or hills. In addition, it is fair to speculate that fairies lead lives similar to humans in their habitats.

The final chapter places specific emphasis on plot patterns of the tales to verify constructions of Irish folktales involving fairies. The plots of such tales, from fairies' initial appearance to their disappearance, are divided into four phases: entrance (how do fairies appear?), action (what do they do to human beings?), ending (how do they disappear?), and sequel (what happens to human beings after their disappearance?).

Regarding fairies' entrance, cases in which fairies appear in the shape of human beings is quite often found (146/230 cases, 63.5%). In such cases, fairies frequently encounter humans somewhere externally (92/146 cases, 63.0%). Cases in which fairies visit human houses follow next in terms of frequency (32/146 cases, 21.9%). Thus, more than eighty percent of fairies enter the human world in the human form (124/146 cases, 84.9%).

The actions of fairies are divided according to these three features: benevolent, malevolent, and neutral (neither benevolent nor malevolent). Consequently, neutral actions are seen in a hundred works (100/230 cases, 43.5%), malevolent in sixty-six (28.7%), and benevolent in forty-four (19.6%). Thus, although there is no great

difference, fairies tend to commit malevolent actions with slightly greater frequency than benevolent actions. Besides, while benevolent and malevolent actions are observed in high frequencies, there are more neutral actions including many cases where fairies either marry human beings or ask them for help. Therefore, it is speculated that there is a perception of fairies leading lives similar to their human counterparts.

As for the ending or exit of fairies from plots, in nearly sixty percent of all works cited (135/230 cases, 58.7%), fairies either leave for somewhere (106) or return to their home region (29). Accordingly, it is possible to say that fairies often come into the human world, then return to their own region. While an examination of fairies' actions shows that they spend their lives almost equally to people, fairies which interact with humans always go back to their world in the end. It probably suggests that fairies and humans exist close to one another, but the boundary between the otherworld and the human world is clearly recognised by people. Sequels after the fairies' exit are also considered. There are nineteen examples where the actions of fairies have a bad influence on humans, and in eleven cases fairies' deceptions are revealed. Thus, the sequel includes malevolent incidents more often than benevolent ones. This category of sequel is not considered for combinations of plot elements because the tales which included sequel episodes is not considerable in number (66/230 tales).

Considering plot patterns, the most frequent combination is that fairies enter in the shape of humans, commit neutral actions, and leave for somewhere. This plot pattern accounts for approximately eighteen percent of all works (41 cases, 17.8%). The second most frequent pattern is that fairies enter in the shape of humans, carry out benevolent actions, and leave for somewhere (19 cases, 8.3%). While the malevolent actions are found more often than benevolent ones, the second most frequent combination includes benevolent actions more often than malevolent ones. It is possible to suggest from this

fact that people believed that benevolent fairies occasionally acted in regular ways.

Accordingly, in Irish folktales, one finds a tendency for fairies to come into the human world in the shape of human beings, act similarly to them, and go back to their own regions. This dominating plot pattern demonstrates to us the depiction of fairies on behalf of the Irish people, which is to say that it indicates how people perceive fairies as leading daily lives similar to their own.

The fairies in Irish folktales are examined from the five viewpoints above. These examinations clarify to some extent the entire rubric of concepts of the Celtic otherworld and fairies in Irish folktales. In future, we have to find other viewpoints to further clarify images of fairies in Irish folktales.