

KATHARINE BRIGGS: COLLECTED WORKS

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ABBEY LUBBERS, BANSHEES
AND BOGGARTS

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An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Fairies

Katharine Briggs

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VOLUME XII

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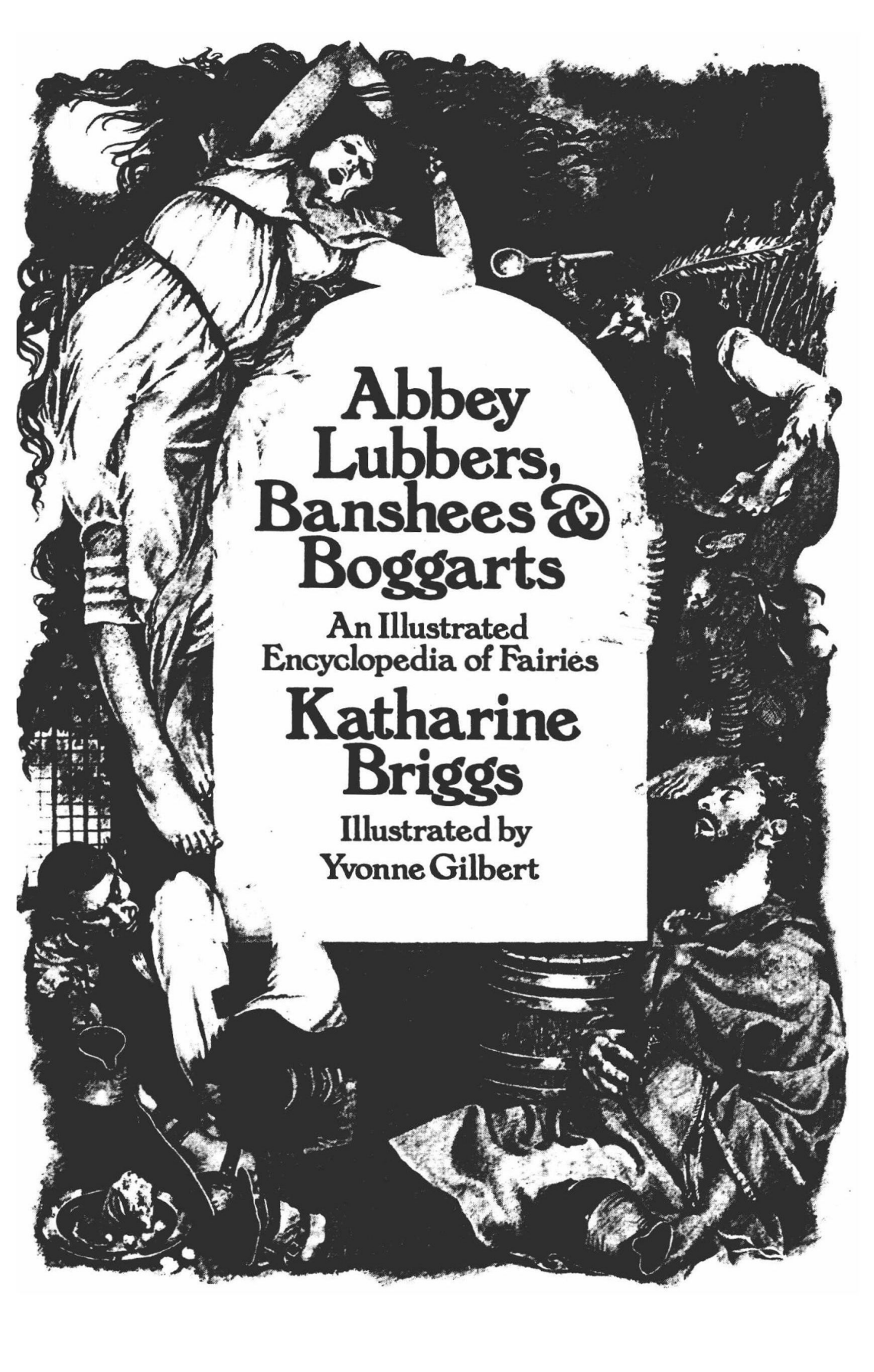
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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original book may be apparent.



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*I dedicate this book to you
Dear Katharine Law, who always knew
How best to cheer and bear me through
An author's toils;
And to say true,
She cheered and helped the artist too.*

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is a shortened form of *A Dictionary of Fairies* (published in the U.S.A. as *An Encyclopedia of Fairies*). There are fewer articles but some of them are longer than those in the Dictionary, because there are more anecdotes and tales about the fairies in this book than in the earlier one. If you want to know something about the people who researched into fairy beliefs, or about the opinions held about them by the folklorists, or by the country people who really believed in fairies, you will have to look in the *Dictionary of Fairies*.

The Fairies of these Islands are of all kinds. There are good and bad. (In Scotland these are called the “Seelie Court” and the “Unseelie Court”.) There are the big and the little, the beautiful and the ugly, the trooping fairies and the solitary fairies. Some of them only look beautiful by glamour – that is the magical power by which fairies can make humans see what they want them to see by a kind of optical illusion – but they are thin and wizened to anyone whose eyes have been opened by rubbing them with fairy ointment. Even the appearance of fairy food and fairy houses is sometimes changed by this power. According to the old beliefs there were quite a lot of things one had to be careful about if one met even a good fairy. For instance, the passage of time was different in fairyland, and people who thought they had been dancing in a fairy ring for about half an hour would find when they got out that a year had passed, or it might even be two hundred years. If they ate food in fairyland they might never be able to get out at all, because they had become fairies themselves.

Introduction

The kind fairies would often give mortals precious gifts; but if people told about the gifts they would disappear. Fairies, too, would sometimes work for mortals and help them in all sorts of ways; but if they were watched or spied upon they would go away and never come back. They were secret people.

In old days nearly all country people believed in fairies and thought it wise to be very cautious about offending even the good ones. Against the bad ones they used every kind of charm and protection they could devise: holy things, a cross and a Bible or even a page of Scripture, holy water and a piece of bread because the fairies were pagans, and iron, particularly a knife or a pair of scissors, for the fairies came from the Stone Age. And there were certain trees and plants that were a protection against them: rowan – that is, mountain ash – and ash trees and St John's wort and verbena and a four-leaved clover. Then the fairies could not cross southward-flowing water, and evil fairies were put to flight if one knelt down and prayed, as little Gerda did in "The Snow Queen". You will find many of these protections used in this book and you will see that one could make mistakes even with the good fairies; but, though they were frightened, people were fond of them and loved them and their merry ways, and many well-known dances and airs are said to have been learned from listening outside the fairy hills. The Londonderry Air is one which most people know.

The fairies on their side seem to have been dependent on humans. They needed human nurses and doctors to help in the birth of their children. Their own food too was not very nourishing, and they had to take the goodness out of human food, or actually steal it. They may have felt that they had a right to it, for they were fertility spirits who made the corn spring and fruits set and ripen, and they brought the flowers out of their buds and gave them their bright colours. There are some people who still believe this, but for the most part when we say, "That's not a real fairy story", we mean that it is not one that was ever really believed; it was just made up as a pretty fancy. There were a good many stories of that kind made up at the beginning of this century, and they had no solidity about them, but those that were made up by people who had

heard the old stories told by countrymen, or who had studied the subject seriously, like George Macdonald or Professor Tolkien, are very different. The stories told by this kind of writer have a sense of reality about them, as if they gave your mind something to bite on.

Some of these fairy beliefs are very old, and we find good stories about them in the medieval chronicles, written down by the monks as early as the twelfth century. One of these is the story of King Herla, which you will find in this book, and which tells of the different rate of time in Fairyland. Another is about a bogey-beast called the Grant, and there is one about a little boy called Elidor who was playing truant from school and was taken by some kind little fairies into a fairyland under a waterfall, where he came and went freely until he stole a golden ball to show to his mother, and after that he never found his way back. Years after, when he had become a priest, he would tell all about the fairyland, and the little dogs and horses they had, and he was deeply grieved to think how ungrateful he had been to the kind little people.

At the end of this book there is a short list of books in which the originals of the tales I tell are to be found, including a few which tell us more about fairy beliefs.

I hope that you will enjoy the book, and perhaps become a folklorist, collect stories for yourself, and tell them to other people.

KATHARINE BRIGGS

Note: Every now and then in the articles you will find a fairy's name written all in capitals. This means that there is an article about that fairy, and you will find it in its proper alphabetical position if you want to read more about it.

Abbey Lubbers, Banshees & Boggarts

A



Abbey Lubber. In the later days of the monasteries, about the fifteenth century, when people generally believed that the monks had become worldly, lazy and corrupt, tales were told of abbey lubbers, minor devils who came where the monks were greedy and drunken and given to all sorts of jollity instead of praying and good works. Abbey lubbers feasted in the cellars and the kitchens and tempted the monks to all kinds of evil. A famous one was Friar Rush, about whom a chapbook was written. He was unmasked and driven out by the Prior, and after various adventures became a Will o' the Wisp. The monks were so shocked by what had happened that they reformed themselves and led virtuous lives ever afterwards, so Friar Rush had done good instead of evil,

Aiken Drum

which must have been a disappointment to him. Tales were told too about the BUTTERY SPIRIT, who haunted inns where the innkeeper was dishonest, and ate up all his profits. In the Highlands of Scotland in the nineteenth century they still believed that evil spirits only had power over goods that were accepted unthankfully, or dishonestly got, so this belief was probably held in England, and indeed in the whole of Europe, in the Middle Ages.

Aiken Drum. Aiken Drum is best known as the subject of a nonsensical Scottish Nursery Rhyme:

There cam' a man to oor toun,
To oor toun, to oor toun,
There cam' a man to oor toun,
An' his name was Aiken Drum.

