FOLKTALES AND FAIRYTALES IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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The world's best known collection of folktales is the Grimms' *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, which grew to its final shape over some forty-odd years in the first half of the nineteenth century (1st edn. 1812–15, 7th edn. 1857). It contains over 200 tales which in their simple, but far from artless prose have come to be regarded as a formal norm of the folktale. About a quarter of these tales have either direct sources or analogues in material dating from before 1600. Some of this is in German, some in Latin, in verse as well as prose. It is far more varied in form and quality than that which the Grimms published.

There is no single collection of folktales in English comparable to that of the Grimms in national scope and reputation. British compilers often drew in material of a kind that the Grimms had excluded – folk legends, for example, and nursery rhymes. The major compilations from the late nineteenth century – E.S. Hartland's *English fairy and other folk tales* (1890) and Joseph Jacobs's *English fairy tales* (1890) and *More English fairy tales* (1894) – are rather a hotch-potch of folk literature, consisting of chapbooks, ballads, extracts from historical works, and printed versions of recently collected oral tales. A handful of tales have a venerable ancestry. The figure of Tom Thumb is mentioned as early as 1579, although our first extant text dates from 1621.[1] The *Merie tales of the mad men of Gotam* goes back to c.1565,[2] while 'the foles of Gotham' are actually alluded to in the fifteenth-century *Towneley first shepherds' play*.[3] Hartland uses Thomas Keightley's *Fairy mythology* (1st edn. 1828, 2nd, revised edn. 1850) for episodes from medieval writers testifying to folk legends, such as 'The green children' from Ralph of Coggeshall, but neither he nor Jacobs really begins to deal with the body of medieval folktale material.

Folk legends, which incorporate matters of folk belief, must be left on one side as beyond the scope of this article. The massive range of folktale types is systematized in Antti Aarne's and Stith Thompson's

[1] Stanley J. Kahrl and Curt F. Bühler (eds.), *Merie tales of the mad men of Gotam* and *The history of Tom Thumbe* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern U.P. for The Renaissance English Text Society, 1965), v, xvi, 1–27.

[2] Kahrl (ed.), *Merie tales of the mad men of Gotam*, ix–xii, 1–20.

[3] G. England and A.W. Pollard (eds.), *The Towneley plays*, EETS, ES, 71 (London, 1897), 106, line 180.

indispensable index, *The types of the folktale*.[4] This covers animal tales, ordinary folktales, jokes and anecdotes, formula tales, and unclassified tales. The English word 'fairytale' is sometimes used in a broad sense as a virtual synonym for 'folktale', covering the whole Aarne–Thompson range. However, it is better used in a narrower sense to encompass only what Aarne and Thompson term 'ordinary folktales', which they subdivide into 'tales of magic', 'religious tales', 'novelle (romantic tales)', and 'tales of the stupid ogre'. In this article I shall be primarily concerned with the narrower sense and discuss tales that appear in nos. 300–1199 of the Aarne–Thompson (AT) classification.

Fairytales were not collected as a definable genre in the Middle Ages. (The earliest collection that contains a substantial proportion of fairytales is the Italian Straparola's *Piacevoli notti* (1550–53), while his compatriot Basile's *Pentamerone* (1634–36) is the first collection to consist almost exclusively of fairytales.) In the Middle Ages many folktales circulated in compilations of stories. Some of these were collections of fables, deriving ultimately from the Aesopian corpus. Several of these animal tales were linked in a coherent sequence in the *Reynard the fox* cycle, which became popular in England through Caxton's translation from the Dutch (1481). Perhaps the most famous of such animal tales is Chaucer's brilliant burlesque of the story of Chanticleer and Pertelote in the Nun's Priest's Tale (AT6).

The majority of folktales that are to be found in large compilations are exemplary in character and were often used in sermons to illustrate a particular point of Christian doctrine or morals. Much of the material is monkish and may appear artificial to modern ears, but it does contain a fair number of genuine folktales of a popular kind. Important collections were made by Jacques de Vitry (*c.*1180–*c.*1240) and Étienne de Bourbon (died *c.*1261), although probably the most extensive compilation was the *Summa praedicantium* of the English Dominican, John of Bromyard (died 1418), of which the 1614 folio edition runs to 971 pages.[5] There are, of course, many other similar collections. As they were written in Latin their circulation was not confined to any one country. New compilations naturally drew on the work of their predecessors.

From our present point of view a particularly interesting collection is the *Scala celi* of the French Dominican, Johannes Gobii junior, written *c.*1300. This contains summary versions of eleven folktales or important incidents included in them.[6] Four of these are tales of magic – *The girl without hands* (AT 706), *The water of life* (AT 551), *The*

[4] Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The types of the folktale: a classification and bibliography*, second revision (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1973).

[5] T.F Crane (ed.), *The exempla of Jacques de Vitry* (London: David Nutt for the Folk-lore Society, 1890), ci.

[6] Johann Bolte and Georg Polívka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- u. Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, 5 vols. (repr. Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1982), iv, 133.

grateful dead man (AT 506B) in a form in which the role of the dead man is taken by St Nicholas,[7] and *The three skilful brothers* (AT 654). The other seven tales include an *exemplum*, three *novelle* and three jocular tales. The range of tale-types is thus quite wide, though none of the tales is narrated in more than rudimentary fashion.

Not much later than the *Scala celi* we find the most famous of all medieval collections of *exempla* – the *Gesta Romanorum*[8] – of which the earliest dated manuscript comes from 1342. The *Gesta* is extant in numerous manuscripts and early printed books in both Latin and western European vernaculars. Certain features suggest that both German and English scholars had a hand in compiling it. It uses both European and Oriental sources, although it is classical history and legend which provide the dubious Roman context, giving a minimal narrative thread for its heterogeneous substance. The corpus is fluid in content and the number of items which each manuscript or printed text contains. In comparison with the well over 100 Latin manuscripts the English versions of the *Gesta* are small in number and narrower in scope. There are three separate manuscripts, each with a different number of tales, ranging from thirty-two to ninety-six in number. Two date from *c*.1440, the third from the late fifteenth century. A printed edition by Wynkyn de Worde, undated but *c*.1510–15, is based on these manuscripts and contains some forty-three stories.[9] Further editions and adaptations followed and continued until the mid-eighteenth century.[10]

The tales and anecdotes that comprise the *Gesta* are of both religious and secular provenance. All are provided with allegorizations according to the usual medieval pattern. The collection is noteworthy also for containing versions of such otherwise popular material as *Apollonius of Tyre* (the source of Shakespeare's *Pericles*), *Guy of Warwick* (which had a long life in English chapbooks up to the nineteenth century), and the incest legend of *Gregorius* (better known from Hartmann von Aue's poem and the satirical novel *Der Erwählte* which Thomas Mann based on it). The many manuscripts of the *Gesta* combine to produce nearly 300 items, and from these Johannes Bolte singled out twenty which can be characterized as folktales.[11] Quite a number of them are concerned with riddles or the fulfilment of tasks requiring unusual rather than magical skills. There are, however, five tales which can quite properly be called fairytales.

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[7] Ibid., iii, 510.

[8] For more detailed information on the *Gesta Romanorum* see the article in K. Ranke (ed.), *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1977 ff.), v. cols. 1201–12.

[9] Sidney J.H Herrtage (ed.), *The early English versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, EETS, ES, 33 (London, 1879), xxi–xxii.

[10] John Weld (ed.), *Gesta Romanorum: a record of auncient histories newly perused by Richard Robinson (1595)*, (Facsimile reproduction) (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1973), vi.

[11] Bolte and Polivka, *Anmerkungen*, iv. 136–41.

The first of these, *De filio forestarii, quem rex nitebatur occidere*,[12] reproduces the theme found in the Grimms' *The devil with three golden hairs* (AT 930; KHM 29). It does not include the second part of the Grimms' tale, but is concerned only with the prophecy made to the emperor who has lost his way in the forest, namely, that the child just born to the forester's wife with whom he has gained shelter will succeed to his throne. The emperor attempts to nullify this prophecy by having the child killed, but the men entrusted with this task save the child and substitute the heart of a wild animal to 'prove' that they have done their job. The then abandoned child is discovered by a nobleman, who brings it up as his own son. When he is grown-up he attracts the emperor's suspicious attention again. The latter attempts once more to get rid of him by sending him to the empress with a letter which instructs her to have him instantly killed. On the journey, while the young man is asleep, the letter is read by his host and altered to instruct the empress to have him married to their daughter. The emperor then recognizes that the purposes of God cannot be gainsaid. The so-called Uriah letter motif is extremely widespread in fairytales. One other instance of it which has interest for English-speaking readers occurs in Saxo Grammaticus's account of Amleth, the original of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in the *Gesta Danorum*.[13]

The second of the fairytales in the *Gesta Romanorum* is *De medicis exocculatis et restitutis*.[14] This corresponds to the Grimms' *The three surgeons* (AT 660; KHM 118), although it centres only on the skill of two doctors in removing and replacing each other's eyes without causing either pain or damage. When the second doctor is attempting the task, a crow seizes one of the eyes, so he has to replace it with one from a goat. The first doctor then finds himself afterwards looking upwards with one eye to the trees from which the goat is accustomed to eat. In this particular instance the allegorization makes sense of the story's oddness:

My beloved, the two physicians are the new and the old law. Thus the Jews and Christians contend: the extracted eyes denote those parts of the old law which Christians retain. The crow is the devil; and the goat's eye typifies those ceremonies of the Jews to which they attach so much importance, and by which they are not able to discern the truth.[15]

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[12] W. Dick (ed.), *Die Gesta Romanorum nach der Innsbrucker Handschrift vom Jahre 1342 und vier Münchener Handschriften* (Erlangen and Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1890), no. 149, 106–11. English translation by Charles Swan, *Gesta Romanorum* (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1824), i, no. 20, 'Of tribulation and anguish', 100–5. Herrtage (ed.), *Early English versions*, 206–19.

[13] Peter Fisher and Hilda Ellis Davidson (ed. and trans.), *Saxo grammaticus: the history of the Danes*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer; Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), i, 87.

[14] Dick (ed.), *Gesta Romanorum*, no. 211, 224–5; Swan, *Gesta Romanorum*, i, no. 76, 'Of Concord', 264–7. Not in Herrtage.

[15] Swan, *Gesta Romanorum*, i, 267.

The third fairytale in the *Gesta*, *De ingrato et gydone*,[16] focuses on the theme of *The grateful animals* (AT 554), a tale-type of extremely wide diffusion and variety.[17] The version given in the *Gesta* is taken from John of Capua's *Directorium vitae humanae* and is the only true fairytale in that work. The *Directorium* is a Latin translation of the Hebrew version of the Indian story-book known as the *Panchatantra*, a work known in a multiplicity of recensions in various Oriental and Western languages. John of Capua was a converted Jew and made his translation between 1263 and 1278.[18] The many tales of the *Panchatantra*, all with the didactic function of the fable, are presented in a number of incapsulated frameworks exemplifying the search for wisdom. Because the second chapter names two animal brothers who recount the various tales instilling caution and prudence, the book is known in some Oriental recensions as *Kalila and Dimna*. It became known in English as the *Fables of Bidpai (Pilpay)*. The seventeen chapters contain many tales that belong to popular tradition, but only the one fairytale in chapter 14.

The Oriental origin of this story in the *Gesta Romanorum* is plain from the fact that the grateful animals are a lion, a monkey and a serpent. The story opens by telling of a proud, oppressive seneschal who gets caught in one of his own pits along with the animals just mentioned. A poor man comes along and rescues all of them, but the seneschal, instead of rewarding him, has him beaten half-dead. Later, the animals come to his assistance in various ways, the serpent providing the climax by producing a marvellous precious stone whose beauty comes to the emperor's attention. The poor man refuses to part with it and tells his story to the emperor, who is so incensed at the seneschal's ingratitude that he strips him of his office and bestows it instead on the poor man.

The fourth *Gesta* fairytale bears the heading *De nigro equo, cane, falcone et cornu*.[19] It is related to the tale-type *The man persecuted because of his beautiful wife* (AT 465). It turns on the greed of an emperor to possess the lands of a certain knight. He demands that the knight should bring him a black horse, a black dog, a black falcon and a black horn within a week, otherwise he will forfeit his lands. The knight returns home in despair, but is told by his wife to go to confession. After this he meets an old man who gives him a wand and directs him to a black castle where he is to ask for the horse, dog, falcon and horn in the name of the owner of the wand. He is expressly

[16] Dick (ed.), *Gesta Romanorum*, no. 145, 86–92; Swan, *Gesta Romanorum*, ii, no. 39, 'Of ingratitude', 141–7; Herrtage (ed.), *Early English versions*, no. 65, 279–94.

[17] Another version of this tale-type, entitled *Adrian and Bardus*, is provided by John Gower in his *Confessio amantis*, book v, ll. 4937–5162, in G.C. Macauley (ed.), *The complete works of John Gower* (Oxford, 1901).

[18] F Geissler (ed. and trans.), *Beispiele der alten Weisen des Johann von Capua* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960), xii.

[19] Dick (ed.), *Gesta Romanorum*, no. 176, 164–6; not in Swan or Herrtage.

forbidden to mount the horse, blow the horn or use the dog and falcon for hunting whatever encouragement he is given to do so, but he is to return the wand to the old man. It takes the knight three days to reach the castle, but everything goes to plan. The emperor rejoices at receiving what he has demanded, and when he hears the hounds barking at a stag which has appeared he mounts the black horse, blows the horn and is immediately carried off to hell and never seen again.

Finally we come to *De Jonatha, qui habuit III^a iocalia a patre Dario pre aliis fratribus*,[20] which is a version of the tale-type *The three magic objects and the wonderful fruits* (AT 566). This is of interest for both later English and German literature. The story concerns a young man called Jonathan whose father bequeathes him a ring, a necklace and a cloth. The ring will gain him everybody's favour, the necklace will give him his heart's desire, while the cloth will enable whoever sits upon it to travel immediately wherever he desires. Jonathan takes these three gifts in turn, but is cheated of each of them through the wiles of a woman with whom he has become infatuated. On losing the cloth he finds himself abandoned in a forest. On his sad wanderings he discovers water that separates flesh from bones and water that will heal such an injury, so he takes a phial of each. (The magical waters of life and death crop up in many fairytales the world over.) Jonathan also comes across a tree whose fruit makes the eater leprous, and another with fruit that cures the disease. Armed with all these things he eventually makes his way back home, where he finds his former mistress on the point of death. Disguised as a doctor he declares he can heal her, extracts a full confession of her tricks and regains his magic gifts. Thereupon he administers the fruit that will make her leprous and the water that will separate her flesh from her bones, at which she painfully dies.

This story was rendered into undistinguished English verse by Thomas Hoccleve (1368/9–*c*.1450).[21] Using a stanzaic form Hoccleve does no more than versify the tale and add his own prose moralization, modelling himself on the pattern of the *Gesta*, but treating the subject more expansively. The *Gesta* tale also underlies the German *Volksbuch* of *Fortunatus*, first published in Augsburg in 1509.[22] There, however, it merely forms a part of the whole work, which, despite its use of fairytale themes, is considered to be a forerunner of the modern bourgeois novel. Fortunatus gains a magic purse which provides him with endless money and a wishing hat which will take him wherever he desires to be. After his death his son Andolosia manages to lose both to the English princess Agripina, who leaves him stranded in an Irish

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[20] Ibid., no. 147, 94–100; Swan, *Gesta Romanorum*, ii, no. 40, 'Of feminine subtlety', 148–56; Herrtage (ed.), *Early English versions*, no. 46, 180–96.

[21] Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.), *Hoccleve's works, I: The minor poems*, EETS, ES, 61 (London, 1892), 215–42.

[22] Hans-Gert Roloff (ed.), *Fortunatus* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981).

wilderness. There Andolosia discovers apples that cause horns to grow from the eater's forehead, together with their antidote. With the aid of these devices he succeeds in regaining what he has lost and has the princess first incarcerated in a nunnery and later married to the king of Cyprus. But Andolosia and his brother have neglected to follow their father's instructions as to the proper use of their magic gifts and suffer the dreadful consequences. Andolosia is murdered, and his brother commits suicide. The fairytale here has been adapted to the demands of a much more complex story. It became a European hit and was translated into English as well as many other languages. In straight translation probably in the late sixteenth century, then drama, chapbook and children's tale, it remained popular up to the nineteenth century and survived into the twentieth.

Hoccleve also adapted another tale from the *Gesta Romanorum*, using the same stanza form as for the story of Jonathan.[23] The tale does not belong to the basic stock of the *Gesta* and is not actually a fairytale in the form in which it occurs, but it is distantly related to *The girl without hands*, of which we have already noted a version in the *Scala celi*. This *Tale of Jereslaus's wife and her false brother-in-law*[24] lacks the motif of the severed hands. Its chief interest lies in the repeated assaults by four different villains on the heroine's virtue, their subsequent affliction with dread diseases, and the heroine's healing of them after they have made a full confession of their crimes.

The tale-type of *The girl without hands* seems to have exercised a strong appeal in the Middle Ages. Before Hoccleve Chaucer, in the Man of Law's Tale, had composed a poem somewhat closer to the central form of the tale-type. Dame Custance, daughter of the emperor of Rome, is first married to the sultan of Syria. His vengeful mother not only kills her own son, but sets Custance adrift in a rudderless boat, which eventually fetches up on the Northumberland coast, where Custance marries the king. When she gives birth to a fine boy in the king's absence, a second jealous mother intercepts a message to the king and informs him that his offspring is a monster. She also intercepts the king's cautious reply and instructs the constable to send Custance and her child away again in the boat in which she had originally arrived. In due course both Custance and the king, her husband, land up in Rome, where the latter is reminded of his lost wife by seeing their child in the emperor's palace. All are then happily reunited.

The Man of Law's Tale has its sources in an episode from Nicholas Trivet's Anglo-Norman *Chronicle*, written in the early fourteenth century,[25] but the tale-type that it incorporates is docu-

[23] Furnivall, *Hoccleve's works*, 140–78.

[24] Hermann Oesterley (ed.), *Gesta Romanorum* (Berlin, 1872), no. 249, provides the Latin source.

[25] Text of Trivet in: Margaret Schlauch, 'The Man of Law's Tale', in W.F Bryan and Germain Dempster (eds.), *Sources and analogues of Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 165–81.

mented throughout western Europe from c.1200 to the early sixteenth century in a variety of languages and literary forms.[26] John Gower provides another version of the tale of Constance in Book 2 of his *Confessio amantis*, also using Trivet and probably ante-dating Chaucer.[27] The tale of Constance found its way later into the English *Gesta Romanorum*.[28]

We know from Chaucer's burlesque Tale of Sir Thopas and from comments at the beginning of the Wife of Bath's Tale that he did not think much of romances that dealt in fairy lore, so it is no surprise to us to note that the element of magic is entirely absent from the Man of Law's Tale, as it is also from Trivet, Gower and Hoccleve. In fact the motif of the maimed hands, which is characteristic of the basic tale-type of *The girl without hands*, is lacking from almost half of the nineteen medieval versions of the tale listed by Bolte.[29] Chaucer's version, in stanzaic form, is by far the most subtle and ambitious form of the tale dealt with here. He might well have not been as successful if his source had contained the motif of the severed hands which is the main feature of the orally collected fairytale. But it is extraordinary that the tale-type is so well attested in the Middle Ages.

In addition to the Man of Law's Tale and the Nun's Priest's Tale Chaucer provides evidence of the currency of the religious tale *The devil as advocate* (AT 1186) in the Friar's Tale. No direct source for Chaucer's tale has been found, but the existence of close analogues in three Latin *exempla* from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and the German poet Der Stricker's *Der Richter und der Teufel* from the thirteenth century makes it clear that the tale-type was widely known.[30] The three folktales that Chaucer chose to recast in poetic form represent widely differing kinds of material. What is most emphatically apparent, however, is the way in which Chaucer's highly self-conscious literary art transcends the simple prose which is the usual medium of the folktale. Verse as such is no guarantee of superior quality, as we have already seen with Hoccleve.

Two further late medieval fairytales have come down to us in English verse form. Both are anonymous as to authorship, and both are comic in impact. These are *A mery geste of the frere and the boye* and *The enchanted basyn* (also known as *The tale of the basyn*). *The frere and the boye* was first printed by Wynkyn de Worde and later by Edward Alde, but it is also found in a corrupt manuscript form from the fifteenth century with the title *The cheylde and hes step-dame*.[31] The

[26] Bolte/Polivka, *op. cit.*, i, 298–300.

[27] Schlauch, *op. cit.*, 155–6. Text from *Confessio amantis*, book ii, lines 587–1612, printed in Schlauch, 181–206.

[28] Herrtage, *op. cit.*, no. 69, 311–22.

[29] Bolte and Polivka, *Anmerkungen*, i, 300 n. 3.

[30] Archer Taylor, 'The friar's tale', in Bryan and Dempster (ed.), *Sources*, 269–74.

[31] Text and brief introduction in Joseph Ritson (ed.), *Pieces of ancient popular poetry* (London: T. and J. Egerton, 1791; 2nd end. London: W Pickering, 1833), 31–56.

subject proved popular, and chapbook versions are known up to the eighteenth century.[32] *The frere and the boye* is the oldest known version of the tale-type named after the Grimms' story *The Jew in the brambles* (AT 592; KHM 110). The protagonist of the story, the boy Jack, is ill-treated by his stepmother, but gains three magic gifts as a result of sharing his meagre supply of food with an old man. These are a bow that never misses its target, a pipe that forces people to dance when it is played, and the faculty of causing his stepmother to fart loudly when she looks at him in anger. With these gifts Jack is able to cock a snook at all in authority. When his stepmother tries to get him beaten by a friar whom she has been entertaining, Jack plays his pipe and gets the friar thoroughly torn and bruised among the thorns. In similar fashion he is able to avoid the attempts of the friar and his stepmother to have him arraigned before the legal authorities. The poem has no high aesthetic merit, but it is an amusing example of its kind. Surprisingly, it was translated into Dutch, and the Dutch version gave rise to a couple of German adaptations, with further versions in Czech and Danish based on the German.[33] Only in the Czech and later in the orally-collected German tale from the nineteenth century does a Jew replace the original friar.[34]

The enchanted basyn, extant in a single fifteenth-century manuscript,[35] is composed in a more complex stanza form than *The frere and the boye*. It is the earliest example of the tale-type to which it gives its name as *The tale of the basin* (AT 571A), a subdivision of 'All stick together' (AT 571), of which the most famous representative is the Grimms' *The golden goose* (KHM 64). The English story begins with two brothers, one rich, wise and a good husband, the other weak and subject to his wife's whims. The latter learns that his debts are being caused by his wife's involvement with a priest. His brother helps him to get the better of the situation by enchanting his chamber-pot for him. In the weak husband's absence the wife has her lover round, and during the night he is forced to get up to use the chamber-pot. His hands stick to it and cannot be freed. The adulterous wife sticks to him when she tries to get him loose. The naked maidservant suffers the same fate, as does a clerk in the morning and a carter with his shovel. Ultimately they are disenchanted by the wise brother, and the priest flees the country, leaving the man and his wife now able to live happily ever after. *The enchanted basyn* is a splendid romp and focuses simply on the discomfiture of the priest as an authority figure. Clerics, of course, are a common butt of humour in the many comic tales of

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[32] John Ashton (ed.), *Chap-books of the eighteenth century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1882), 237–44.

[33] Bolte and Polivka, *Anmerkungen*, ii, 491–3.

[34] Ibid., 493, 495.

[35] Text in Robert Jamieson (ed.), *Popular ballads and songs* (Edinburgh and London, 1806), 272–82; also W. Carew Hazlitt (ed.), *Remains of the early popular poetry of England*, 3 vols. (London, 1866), iii, 42–53.

adultery and lechery that form part of an international stock in the late Middle Ages and beyond.

Although *The enchanted basyn* does not seem to have circulated in print, the theme can be traced in a number of later forms. A prose version entitled 'Of the gentylman that bare the sege bord on hys necke' crops up as no. 24 in *A.C. mery tales*, printed c.1525.[36] This is not dependent on *The enchanted basyn*, but the ballad of *The Lancashire cuckold; or the country parish clark betray'd by a conjurer's enchanted chamber pot*, printed for J. Blare at the end of the seventeenth or beginning of the eighteenth century, is an adaptation of the earlier poem.[37] W.C. Hazlitt comments that a wealthy Quaker takes the place of the priest in a similar episode in the chapbook editions of *The history of Jack Horner* (late eighteenth century), but the episode is more closely related to *The frere and the boye*.[38] However, in their treatment of friar and priest the two tales are quite close, although their magic devices differ.

The number of fairytales in the narrow sense which can be traced amidst the large amount of medieval English and Latin story material is modest. Quite a few more tale-types could be added if the search were extended to other European vernaculars, but the proportion of fairytales would still remain small. Of course, very many fairytale motifs found their way into episodes of the romances, and this may account for the paucity of fairytales as a separate genre. The many medieval collections of short tales are richer in other kinds of folktale than the fairytale, especially fables, exemplary and comic tales. T.F. Crane hazards the opinion that fairytales are absent 'possibly because they did not lend themselves easily to the moral purpose of the preacher, possibly because they were not widely diffused until a much later date'.[39]

These comments relate to European story generally rather than specifically to English, but our knowledge of fairytales in medieval England is quite similar to what is known on the Continent. It comes basically from clerical sources (collections like the *Gesta Romanorum*) or from literary versions (Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve). Hardly anything dates from earlier than the fourteenth century. The protagonists of fairytales come mainly from the lower ranks of society or are disadvantaged youngest or only sons and daughters. Except in the sphere of saints' lives, this is not the social class which usually provides the heroes and heroines of literature designed for the aristocracy and well-to-do townsfolk and the higher clergy. However,

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[36] Hazlitt, *Remains*, iii, 43. Text in W. Carew Hazlitt (ed.), *Shakespeare jest-books, I: A hundred mery talys* (London, 1881), 44–7

[37] Hazlitt (ed.), *Remains*, 42. Information on Blare from Victor E. Neuburg, *Chapbooks: a guide to reference material on English, Scottish and American chapbook literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (London: Woburn Press, 1972), 50.

[38] Hazlitt (ed.), *Remains*, 42–3.

[39] T.F Crane, 'Two medieval folk-tales', *Germania*, xxx (1885), 203.

in the fifteenth century the social structure is changing, and the invention of printing gradually brings about a more broadly based readership and audience for the shorter forms of literary entertainment. Such early prints as *The frere and the boye* are self-evidently within the buying range of a far greater number of purchasers than, say, Caxton's more ambitious books. In this more favourable social and literary climate, as the romance became more nostalgic or ironic and eventually yielded to the forerunners of the novel, the fairytale began to emerge from the mists of oral culture. From the beginning of the sixteenth century individual fairytales pick their way in ballad or chapbook form through the years, but it is not until the nineteenth century that proper collections are made of this popular, but unregarded literature.