



# Traditional Irish Fairy Tales

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**Traditional Irish Fairy Tales** James Stephens , Arthur Rackham

**1 Tuan Mac Cairill** recounts his time with first settlers of Ireland to priest who tries to convert him

**2 The Birth of Bran**

**3 The Little Brawl at Allen**

**4 The Enchanted Cave of Cesh Corran**

**5 Becuma of the White Skin**

**6 Mongan's Frenzy**

.. and more

## Traditional Irish Fairy Tales Details

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Author : James Stephens , Arthur Rackham

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## From Reader Review Traditional Irish Fairy Tales for online ebook

### Theo says

This was an enjoyable collection to read. Stephens' writing was much better than I was expecting -- for some reason I thought it would be a very flowery, wordy, forced-archaic style, but it turned out to be clean and lively. The tales are broken down weirdly, in that each "chapter" of a tale is short and hardly worth the page break. And in some of the tales the author wedges in some kind of "old gods vs new christianity" motif that contributes little to the overall story. But those are minor gripes.

I'm not that familiar with Irish tales or mythology, so I can't say how close the author sticks with the tradition, but it did inspire me to dig further into that area, as well as make me interested to read more of Stephens' work.

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### Nisha Whitehead says

"Indeed, Fionn loved Saeve as he had not loved a woman before and would never love one again. He loved her as he had never loved anything before. He could not bear to be away from her. When he saw her, he did not see the world, and when he saw the world without her, it was as though he saw nothing or as if he looked on a prospect that was bleak and depressing. The belling of a stag had been music to Fionn but when Saeve spoke, that was sound enough for him....his wife's voice was sweeter to Fionn than the singing of a lark. She filled him with wonder and surmise. There was magic in the tips of her fingers. Her thin palm ravished him. Her slender foot set his heart beating; and whatever way her head moved, there came a new shape of beauty to her face. 'She is always new,' said Fionn. 'She is always better than any other woman; she is always better than herself.'"--James Stephens

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### Shauna says

*'In truth we do not go to Faery, we become faery, and in the beating of a pulse we may live for a year or a thousand years.'*

A good collection, very funny and with that uniquely Irish feel to it. And I should say that this is not so much a collection of Irish fairy tales as a collection of Irish sagas, interactions with the daoine sídhe woven through them.

A few of the tales are beautifully told, in particular The Story of Tuan Mac Cairill,

*'The green tides of ocean rose over me and my dream, so that I drowned in the sea and did not die, for I awoke in deep waters, and I was that which I dreamed.*

*I had been a man, a stag, a boar, a bird, and now I was a fish.*

*In all my changes I had joy and fulness of life. But in the water joy lay deeper, life pulsed deeper.*

*For on land or air there is always something excessive and hindering, as arms that swing at the sides of a man, and which the mind must remember. The stag has legs to be tucked away for sleep, and untucked for movement, and the bird has wings that must be folded and pecked and cared for.*

*But the fish has but one piece from his nose to his tail.*

*He is complete, single and unencumbered.*

*He turns in one turn, and goes up and down and round in one small movement.*

*How I flew through the soft element: how I joyed in the country where there is no harshness: in the element which upholds and gives way, which caresses and lets go, and will not let you fall.*

*For man may stumble in a furrow; the stag tumble from a cliff; the hawk, wing weary and beaten, with darkness around him and the storm behind, may dash his brains against a tree.*

*But the home of the salmon is his delight, and the sea guards all her creatures.'*

In case the lengthy excerpt didn't give it away, onto the favorites shelf goes the story of Tuan mac Cairill, a recluse who retains his memories from his previous incarnations going back to the beginning of time in Ireland. Compelling stuff.

I did feel as though much of the beauty of the language was lost in translation, sadly. The most obvious example being the terms of endearment, 'my pulse' just doesn't have the same ring to it that 'a chuisle' does.

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## Ajengpuspita says

its good to begin an ireland's adventure!

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## \*Giulia\* says

3.5

La storia di Tuan mac Cairill: \*\*\*

La fanciullezza di Fionn: \*\*\*\*

La nascita di Bran: \*\*\*\*

La madre di Oisín: \*\*\*

Il corteggiamento di Becfolá: \*\*\*

La piccola rissa ad Allen: \*\*\*

Lo zotico dalla palandrana stinta: \*\*\*\* 1/2

L'antro incantato di Cesh Corran: \*\*\* 1/2

Becuma dalla bianca pelle: \*\* 1/2

La follia di Mongan: \*\* 1/2

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## B.C. says



I recently read an excellent book of some less well known fairy tales (*'The Fairy Ring'*, free online at Gutenberg) and glibly joked that the four Gaelic stories included were a little disappointing because none of them featured a leprechaun!

I resolved to find a book dedicated solely to Irish fairy tales.

Well, *'Irish Fairy Tales'* by James Stephens doesn't have any leprechauns either, but that is hardly a let down. No, these stories are steeped in the very depths of Irish folklore, from the same sources that Yeats immersed himself in, going right back to the recorded beginnings.

That means historical and spiritual fairy tales of ancient Tara, those heard, adapted and written by the monks and priests of Ireland as Christianity came to the land and proceeded to convert the indigenous pagans to the new creed.

'The Story of Tuan, the son of Cairill', is the tale of one of the original Ulsterman, the brother "of Partholon, the son of Noah's son", who had lived through the centuries as both man and beast until being gladly converted by Finnian, the Abbot of Moville.

Next is the story of 'The Boyhood of Fionn', whom Saint Patrick called 'a king, a seer and a poet ... He was our magician, our knowledgeable one, our soothsayer', who became the Chief Captain of the Fianna and is more commonly known as Finn MacCool.

Raised in secret by female druids, traveling poets, a robber, a king, and a wise man, Fionn (pronounced to rhyme with 'tune') becomes a mighty man of both knowledge and action, defeating the deadly faery god Aillen mac Midna on the Feast of Samhain, our Halloween.

His upbringing is truly the stuff of legend. When debating the best music with friends, his answer is very apt for a hero:

"The music of what happens," said great Fionn, "that is the finest music in the world."

'The Birth of Bran' tells of the origins of one of Fionn's beloved dogs, which was also one of his cousins thanks to an interfering faery whose jealous plans turn a fair maiden into a hound.

'Oisín's Mother' relates the birth of Fionn's poet son, born to him by his faery love Saeve, who was turned into a fawn and stolen from her husband by The Dark Man of the Shi.

The story of 'The Wooing of Becfola' takes us briefly away from the adventures of Fionn to illustrate the judgement of the new religion on adultery, as the wife of the monarch Dermot becomes infatuated with two other men in turn.

Then it's back to Fionn and his entourage for three largely comic tales that feature, in turn, a drunken scrap ('The Little Brawl at Allen'), a foot race ('The Carl of the Drab Coat') and a starring role for Fionn's fierce ally and enemy all in one, Goll mor mac Morna, who fights four faery hags and delivers 'one of the three great sword-strokes of Ireland' ('The Enchanted Cave of Cesh Corran').

The penultimate tale, 'Becuma of the White Skin' turns attention to the High King, or Ard-Rí of Ireland, Conn the Hundred Fighter, who has to choose a new wife and chooses badly. The story contains much of interest, including the quest of the king's son Art and an isle of apples - Arthur and Avalon perhaps?

It also contains an obvious Christ-like figure, Segda, who the people wish to be sacrificed, as well as this simply brilliant opening sentence:

"There are more worlds than one, and in many ways they are unlike each other. But joy and sorrow, or, in other words, good and evil, are not absent in their degree from any of the worlds, for wherever there is life

there is action, and action is but the expression of one or other of these qualities.'

The collection closes with 'Morgan's Frenzy', which brings back the Abbot of Merville as a framing device and introduces another aspect of Fionn in a meandering spouse swapping story.

I can't tell you how glad I am to have discovered this book. The author, James Stephens, a friend of James Joyce, clearly knew and revered his subject, yet is bold and gifted enough to retell these stories in his own way.

There is more poetry, wit and wisdom in this collection than you could ever hope to find in any book.

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### **Brian H says**

awesome stories. some my grams told me.

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### **Nigel says**

We've managed in the space of three volumes to run the available gamut of titles for books of tales of Irish fairies and come full circle, as it were. These aren't even the sort of fairy tales I was looking for, being mostly about Finn and the Fianna, but actually, there's a good deal of fairy stuff in here, so I think it was worthwhile from that point of view.

So it opens with the story of a man here since the first people came to Ireland after the flood and follows on down through mythical settlements and invasions, with the man transforming into a beast at each juncture and enjoying a long exuberant life as king of that species, until finally he becomes king of the salmon, gets caught by a fisherman of the King of Ulster, is eaten by the queen and born to her as a son. There's a lovely giddy logic to it.

Next comes the Boyhood of Fionn, a justly praised literary masterpiece, gorgeously lyrical, and I began to question why this wasn't part of a work with the stature of something like *The Once And Future King*. It's a work for grown-ups, maybe, more so at least than *The Sword In The Stone*, but it has flashes of rare wit here and there and is extremely readable. The Irish, however, have a complicated relationship with our mythical heroes. Like leprechauns they're to be pitied for the way in which they have become embarrassing cliches and caricatures, and of course the inevitable association of a glorious warriors past doesn't help, but neither does the humiliation of hundreds of years of defeat and foreign rule. There's that speech in *Trainspotting* about what is there to be proud of in being Scottish. Most Irish people internalised that lesson long ago.

Nonetheless, there is something here that surely transcends national ambivalence, something that surely should be part of the canon of fantasy literature. Except this is not a novel, despite containing the start to a great novel within it. Once Fionn becomes leader, his nature changes, the stories become episodic, Fionn is sidelined or barely present, and often powerless and even humiliated. The final story doesn't mention him at all, and one assumes it isn't a Fionn story until a line at the end which is the sort of cheat no 20th century audience would put up with for a moment.

No doubt someone has written a novel about Fionn - I remember Rosemary Sutcliffe's book fondly - but it's an awful pity James Stephens didn't because it would have been definitive and influential. Though it should

be noted that there appear to be issues with women that are hard to parse. Most of the major female roles are negative, and it's hard to say whether it's because of the source material or the author, or even at times the author poking fun at the misogyny of the source material, though by the end he seems to embrace it fully. On the other hand, the relationship between Fionn and Goll mor mac Morna is an amazing one, uniquely Irish I would have thought.

A rich book, product of the great Anglo Irish Celtic Revival, it's just a pity he decided to let the fragmentary nature of the ancient oral tradition dictate the form, leaving us with yet another book of tales, rather than a brilliant novel.

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### **Joy says**

A collection of short Irish fairy tales, mostly centred around Fionn and the Fianna.

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### **Sarah says**

Horrendously slow.

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### **Carol says**

This was weird. I was expecting Irish Fairy Tales that hopefully could be traced back to other books and so, or that I could match with the few I know myself, it was not. It was mostly tales mixed with Christian beliefs (which looks weird), and mostly about the amazing Fionn.

They don't seem to be together, even though they reccount the life and adventures of Fionn, but every now and then there are stories who have nothing to do with him and that seem disjointed, because I can't put them in.

And then... after realising I probably couldn't take this as proper fairy tales, I decided to take it more lightly, kinda like comedy mixed with tales. It works far better like that, it got funny, it was hilarious and boy I had a laugh.

I particularly like the last story, and the killer sheep. Brownie points for originality there, I would have never thought of it. XD Sheep killing a whole army. Boy those Irish sheep are sure dangerous.

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### **Boots says**

I think I'm going to preface this review with how this came about.

So a good friend of mine recently bought me an eReader, which I'm pretty happy about. The online store for this eReader has a free section that I have taken full advantage of, and this eBook just happened to be one of them. I realized something after I started reading it, that it is highly unlikely that I would have bought this book in a store, and it's also unlikely that I would have picked it up from my local library. So apparently the stars were aligned for this one, all five of them.



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