

The Hare and Femininity in Folklore: An Analysis of the 'Hare-Hag' Story.

Visual Culture

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The Hare and Femininity in Folklore: An Analysis of the
Hag-Hare Story.

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Contents

Introduction.....	4
Chapter One.....	6
i)What is Folklore?.....	6
ii)The National Folklore Collection.....	7
Chapter Two.....	10
i)Women and Folklore.....	10
ii)The Hare.....	12
Chapter Three.....	15
i)James Muarry’s Telling of the ‘Hare-Hag’.....	15
ii)Mrs. M. MacCarthy’s Telling of the ‘Hare-Hag’.....	18
Conclusion.....	20
Bibliography.....	23

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Introduction

The topic I will be discussing in the following research essay is Irish folklore and gender. In particular I will be discussing the folklore story I will now refer to as the 'hare-hag'. It is generally about a farmer that is having his milk stolen by a hag or *cailleach*, which would be a witch. They have the ability to turn into a hare to steal this milk. The reason I chose to analyse this story is because of the connection between the hare and women throughout history across many different cultures. My aim is to further understand the link this creature has with women and femininity. I would also like to explore the possibility that this story has been used as a way for humans to perpetuate gender roles or personal beliefs. There has been much research done on the topic of femininity in folklore and the representation of women. *The Leaping Hare* is an extremely important source that delves into the connections between the hare and all the fascinating rituals and stories that have been inspired by them. There is not however, as much research done on this particular story. I will analyse and apply feminist theory to this particular story to explore the possibility of folklore being used as a conductor of gender ideas.

The questions I am exploring are; Is it possible folklore is a tool to inform an audience about acceptable behavior and societal expectations surrounding women? Is the relationship between women and the hare significant or impactful on the perception of women? Do women use folklore as a way to spread a powerful impactful image? Rather than looking for a direct answer to these questions I am

looking to explore these ideas from a number of perspectives and form a well rounded view of the subject.

The main methods I used to research this topic were multiple visits to the National Folklore Collection. I had access to primary source information on stories, songs, remedies and much more. The team at the collection were also extremely helpful in providing a number of articles and books on the topics of women in folklore. For information on the hare I relied heavily on the book, *The Leaping Hare*, as it was the best and most in depth information on this topic.

In chapter one I will attempt to break down and interpret the meaning of folklore. I will do this in order to give context as this is a complex and broad field of study. I will then go on to explain one of my most valuable resources for this essay which was the national folklore archive located at UCD campus in Belfield, Dublin.

In chapter two I will briefly discuss the role women played within the world of storytelling. This will also involve the representation of women in stories and legends. I will also discuss the hares behaviour as well as rituals and superstitions surrounding the hare. Then I will continue to dissect the relationship between the hare and femininity.

In chapter three I will present two primary source stories of the 'hare-hag' sourced from the schools collection at the National Folklore Collection. The first story was collected from a 93 year old man named James Muarry, the second, from a woman called Mrs. M. McCarthy. I will analyse each story in order to see if there are differences to how the hag is portrayed.

Chapter 1

i.)

Before delving into the story of the hare hag itself, I would like to analyse further the definition of folklore. Many people have a notion of what folklore is, or rather what topics it includes, however through deeper research and more understanding it has become evident that the term folklore is not so clearly defined. Folklore is an all encompassing term used to describe the collection of stories, customs, rituals, superstitions, music and much more. The term became known around the twentieth century “as an analogy to primitivism”. (Green, 1997, pp. 337) This analogy led many people to believe that folklore was something that could only be constructed and circulated by the lower classes of society. However, it is present no matter what corner of the globe you travel to or what class of society you belong to.

There are many definitions of folklore and there is some debate on what should be included under this umbrella term. “Many folklorists, however, dispense with definitions. Concerned that folklore not be regarded as lists of things, they prefer to look at it as one of several perspectives from which “a number of forms, behaviours, and events may be examined.”” (Green, 1997, pp. 331) This view allowed many folklorists to shift their perspective to include the views of not only common folk but also every other member of society. More and more folklorists are viewing folklore as a collection of humanity, the influence from all perspectives on the tales, music, poetry, superstitions and many more cultural behaviours. Another interesting aspect of folklore is that, to be considered folklore, whether it be an idiom, song, poem or whatever else, it must stand the test of time.

Due to the repeated themes, formats and aesthetics of folklore it has influenced our modern day culture much more than many people perceive. Thomas A. Green points out in his encyclopaedia that the success of many films, comic books and even advertisements can be attributed to these ancient and widely circulated themes. For example Superman being found as a child in a vessel alone is similar to the story of Moses and other heroes found abandoned at infancy. These themes have such a presence in the psyche of almost all of humanity are what leads us to become so enamoured with these tales, as well as recreating and reshaping them. (1997, pp. 333)

The origins of metamorphosis within folklore, which are integral to the 'hare-hag' story, began within pagan ritualistic practices. It is thought that many of the beliefs that we hold in relation to animals actually come from religious practices which worshipped or revered the animal as a spiritual entity. "It has been suggested that many if not all the animal myths stem from this early palaeolithic period, directly or indirectly, for the reason that early man linked the beast with a higher form of existence." (Ewart Evans, Thomson, 1972, pp. 108) However, as we evolved, communities grew and stories spread, "The changing of man into animal and back again into man became dissociated from its symbolic role in the context of the ancient ritual; and ordinary people came to assume that a real physical change took place by which a man or a woman could actually take the shape of an animal, a hare for instance." (Ewart Evans, Thomson, 1972, pp. 145)

ii.)

It is important to understand where this information and these concepts are coming from. As Ireland was a colonised country by England, the collection and preservation

of these ways of life have become vital in reclaiming our national identity. Many other countries that were victims of colonisation also have a strong relationship with folklore as it is a way of connecting with our heritage and roots before colonisation. This is not to say that other countries such as England don't have a culture of folklore, it is that folklore is a way of reclaiming identity after independence. The National Folklore Collection was created in order to do just that.

The main body of my research material, which includes books, journal articles and first hand accounts, came from the National Folklore collection of Ireland over multiple visits. I also had access to a number of resources through dúcas.ie. This website was an initiative to digitise the National Folklore Collection and make it accessible to the public. "To date, almost 500,000 manuscript pages of folklore compiled by schoolchildren in the 1930s have been digitised and published on the website. The majority of parishes in what was then known as the Irish Free State are represented in the collection." (National Folklore Collection, n.d.) The Schools Collection was one of extreme importance to this research essay as it contained primary source information, collected from 1937-1939. School children were asked to go to their grandparents, elderly neighbours for example, and collect any traditional remedies, games, stories, superstitions and songs which were then transcribed by the National Folklore Collection. Many were collected in *Gaeilge*, some of these were translated, but for the most part they remained in the original text. This valuable resource allowed me to gain a better understanding of the variables within the story of the hare-hag throughout different regions of Ireland as well as different associations and customs surrounding the Irish hare.

Whilst reading these stories, riddles, songs etc. it became evident how few female collectors, as well as informants contributed to these collections. In Ireland, at the

beginning of the twentieth century, women were heavily involved in cultural and political organisations and other roles beyond the family. That all changed after Ireland gained their freedom and began to reclaim their identity. One key value that was held above all was recognising family as the foundation of Irish society. The role of women in this society was to be caregivers, whether that be of children, spouses or parents. This led to women having less freedom and involvement in activities that contributed to this re-shaping and reclaiming of Irish culture. Circa 1920 there were a number of acts introduced to Ireland which limited women's employment rights. "The fact the Irish Folklore Commission did not employ any women full-time collectors can, in part, be explained by the restrictions placed on female employment at the time and the official attitude towards women working outside the home." (Briody, 2008, pp. 58) This does not explain the lack of representation of female informants, which could have led to the collection being skewed towards male perspective. This is especially important in folklore documentation as there is no clearly defined story. Each narrator presents an almost identical account, yet there may be minor details, changing of phrases, emphasis on one character over another that could lead to these tales being interpreted in a whole different light.

It is pointed out that in earlier times folklore was generally shared within same sex groups. Whilst women would generally not intrude or impose on a man's narration session, "men might occasionally intrude on, or participate in, such gatherings of women, but their presence would most likely affect the atmosphere of the gathering in some way." (Briody, 2008, pp. 463) From this it is fair to assume that men did not exactly have a clear picture in mind of the method and specifics women used to narrate stories. Due to this and virtually no women contributing to the collection of

this folklore, it is possible that the perception of Irish folklore today is missing a significant portion of material.

It is essential to understand that although women were restrained in terms of employment and were not held in as high regard as men were, they were and still are an integral part of Irish society. Irish societies can be very matriarchal, in the sense that mothers and grandmothers were extremely well respected and often the disciplinarians rather than the father figure like other cultures. This sense of respect and power generally did not seep past the boundaries of family life.

Chapter 2

i.)

The idea of a man's presence altering the atmosphere and scope of the story leads me on, to another topic which is referred to as coding. "Coding, is the expression or transmission of messages potentially accessible to a (bicultural) community under the very eyes of a dominant community for whom these same messages are either inaccessible or inadmissible." (Newlon Radner, 1993, pp. 3) Whilst this form of informal communication has been practiced for an exceptionally long period of time, it became recognised within African American cultures that were imprisoned during the slave trade. It is evident that coding became almost a tool of survival, not only of the individuals themselves but also their heritage, culture and customs that were being washed away by colonisers. This passage of messages is extremely difficult to document as the whole idea is them being subverted so only certain groups of people could decipher them. It is reasonable to assume that such coding occurred whilst men were present while women narrated these tales.

I believe that it is possible to infer that such coding existed within folklore across many groups. Whilst I believe this coding was not used as a mechanism for survival, rather an alternative ideology being spread under the guise of traditional storytelling. Rachel H. Saltzman's article, 'Folklore, Feminism, and the Folk: Whose Lore Is It?', presents an extremely important view about the, sometimes contradictory, telling of stories, jokes and singing of songs that at first seems to oppress women. She interviews a feminist woman, named Rose, who was 83 years of age. As she conducted these interviews and listened to the often sexist jokes Rose told, she was given an explanation which opened her eyes to the possibility that these were in fact feminist gestures. She concluded that these seeming contradictions are explained once their,

“performance context and their use-value are considered and understood. We shouldn't therefore dismiss what some may call rationalization-for if we truly listen to our informants and hear what they say, we may well come to appreciate and learn from their theories about the ways in which women (and men) use and interpret their own folklore.” (Saltzman, 1987, pp. 559)

Very rarely had women been respected storytellers themselves. Traditionally men were the official storytellers of Ireland, otherwise known as “*seanchaí*”. There is one Irish storyteller that has become quite well known throughout the country as her biography of sorts was introduced as part of the national secondary school curriculum for a number of years.

Peig Sayers, the great storyteller of Ireland's Blasket Islands, owed part of her renown among folklorists to the fact that having learned much of her repertoire from her father, she told many of the long and intricate kinds of

tales normally told only by men. Since her father's versions of these stories were never collected, we cannot be absolutely sure that Peig's tellings represent alterations of them; but judging from some versions collected from male neighbours and kin, it seems likely that she made major changes of pace, tone, and emphasis in the stories to focus attention on the hard lot of women, their courage, and their need to stand by one another in a patriarchal world. (Newlon Radner, 1993, pp. 11)

From the above extract it is fair to judge that many women, like Peig, used a form of coding and changed their stories in order to best serve and educate the audience it is being spoken to. This is important to note as the audience is just as essential to folklore as the narrator, after all they do carry the stories forward, each in their own unique fashion.

ii.)

To fully grasp the peculiar and otherworldly aura that surrounds the hare, specifically the Irish hare, you must understand behaviours and habits of these mystical creatures. The Irish hare is unique, in that it is one of the oldest, truly native animals to this country. It has been around for hundreds of centuries, influencing our early ancestors. Their coat is generally a rusty brown colour with a white tail and squared off ears rather than pointed, unlike the brown hare their coats don't usually change to white during winter. The females are larger than the males which is unusual. However, even more interesting than their appearances is their unique behaviour. Opposed to rabbits, hares do not burrow, instead they create forms, which are shallow depressions in dense vegetation. They can often be found in open yet sheltered areas such as meadows, rushes and even in peat or bog, for example

plough fields. (Dingerkus, 2022) This method allowed the hares to seemingly vanish into thin air. They are also exceptionally quick and agile, taking sharp turns to lose their pursuer, disappearing into the distance at speeds of up to 70 kilometres per hour. Whilst these are usually solitary beings, "It is said that Irish hares are more inclined to congregate in large numbers than either the Scottish or common hare, and this is not only in the spring, but at all times of year, most noticeably in winter." (Ewart Evans, Thomson, 1972, p. 45) During March the hares leap and spring about in erratic motions due to it being mating season. This seemingly unprovoked, wayward behaviour was the origin of the phrase 'mad as a march hare'. This association of the hare as a crazed creature seeped into the psyche of many countries as well as influencing Lewis Carroll's character of the march hare. The character appears in a tea party scene and is portrayed as irrational and bizarre. This depiction of the hare raised the idiom to a level of prominence throughout various countries.

Another common practice surrounding the hare is the refusal to eat the meat of hare, which is common practice in many regions across Ireland, however whilst collecting stories for the archive it became apparent that this custom may have originated from the Kerry region. "In county Kerry many people believed that hare meat should not be touched, because the souls of their grandmothers were supposed to enter them." (MacCoitior, 2010, pp. 153) Most stories of deceased grandparents inhabiting the bodies of hares came from this county and surrounding ones. The link, once again, of femininity and the female form being so closely entwined with the figure of the hare is displayed here as it was in particular grandmothers who possessed these beings.

Irish beliefs surrounding the hare varies. Many believed in their curative powers, in particular, their foot was considered quite powerful, from curing rheumatism to banishing evil spirits from babies. The most widely known story, which I will analyse, was that witches often took the form of a hare to steal their neighbours milk and leave the remains sour. In most of the variations of the story the hare is only injured and is often found as a hag bleeding in her home from the injury.

These witches are referred to as "hags" or "*cailleach*" in *Gaelige*. The term *cailleach* comes from the old Gaelic word *Caillech* which translates to "veiled one". Whilst any woman can now be referred to as *cailleach*, she was first known as the Celtic goddess of winter. (Wright, 2019) Whilst she was not viewed as explicitly good or evil, as the image of the *cailleach* as a goddess disappeared, the more misogynistic view of an old, evil, ugly hag took hold of the Irish psyche. In general a *cailleach* tends to be an older woman living on their own, however the term has also evolved into a term to describe the final harvest of the year.

In Ireland, finishing the harvest was also called 'putting out the hag (or *cailleach*)'. The story was that the hag hid (often in hare form) in the last sheaf, and was driven from farm to farm as the farmers finished the harvest, until she reached the field of the last man in the parish to cut his corn. In many parts of Ireland the last sheaf was itself called the hag or *cailleach* for this reason.(MacCoitior, 2010, p. 154)

Apparently the last farmer to drive the hag from their crop would have a year full of misfortune and would reap very little from their crop. Yet again this is another negative association with the hare and women. Rather than viewing the hare as a symbol of abundance, as it often was throughout history, it is viewed as a bad omen that could give no benefit to the farmer.

Associations between the hare and the female are prevalent across many different cultures throughout the centuries. Many characteristics now commonly affiliated with

the rabbit were actually originally attributed to the hare, such as, fertility and vitality. Marion Davies writes in her book "The Teutonic lunar goddess Holda was accompanied by hares carrying torches, Freya, the Scandinavian goddess associated with fertility, marriage, prophecy and the Otherworld was also attended by hares. Anglo-Saxon Oestra or Eostra was a lunar deity and hare headed." (1998, pp. 131)

The power the celtic woman possessed in myth is something that is to be celebrated and not devalued or lessened in any sense. Celtic goddesses often had quite a prominent role in stories and also had great magical abilities. According to Helen Lanigan Wood, "it has also been observed that female characters in Irish literature tend to play more active and independent roles than in other literatures of the mediaeval period." (Ní Chuilleanáin, 1985, pp. 16) It can be said that these myths and legends did not have much sway in the perception and treatment of women in Ireland, especially as there are many female goddesses and warriors that are extremely well known to this day. This is evident as women were viewed as inferior in a number of ways, one of which was the act of storytelling itself.

Chapter 3

i.)

I chose the following story as it references the method which the hare-hag can be murdered, whitethorns which were said to give the hare their powers and symbolism of the devil. Please note that the following story was collected as part of the school children collections. Whilst there is no date given it was collected roughly around the late 1930's. James Murray is the man that dictated the following tale while his

grandson, who is not named transcribed it. James Murray was 93 when the following was recorded.

About ninety years ago there lived a man called Murray in the townland of Lisalea. There are Murrays there yet and I suppose they are descendants of his. He had a cow and every morning when he went to the field he saw a hare beside the cow. Soon the cow stopped giving milk and the man got suspicious of the hare. At last he took it into his head to kill the hare. He gathered a crowd of men with guns and hounds and surrounded the hare but she miraculously escaped. She was surrounded again and fired at but it seemed that lead would not kill her. That night the hare was seen in the field again. Next day the men surrounded the hare again but without success. When evening came the hare got tired and the men got round her in a bog. Every man but one fired at her but she escaped. This man had quicksilver in his gun so he fired at her and broke her leg. There was a ring of whins near and inside the ring of whins was a ring of whitethorns and inside the whitethorns was a little house covered with the whitethorns. The wounded hare crawled into this. The men followed and found an old woman with her leg bleeding. They could not kill her because she was an old woman. A month later she died and a hundred black hounds were seen to go round the house three times and disappear. The cow then gave milk always and the man lived in peace ever after. (Murray, n.d.)

The tale begins as the farmer, Murray (not the informant but a character in the story), becomes suspicious when his cow stops producing milk. He recollects that there is a hare that comes by each morning to visit the cow. It seems as though he believes the hare is a true one, yet it is somehow responsible for the lack of milk he is receiving. "The hare that is thought to be enchanted is rare and is spoken of as one that is not 'right'. 'It was not a right hare' people will say after a miraculous escape and even if it is killed by the help of magic - the silver coin with a cross on it or the black hound which represents the devil." (Ewart Evans, Thomson, 1972, pp. 161)

This phrase "not right" could be interpreted in a number of different ways. It could be referring to the powers people believed these creatures possessed, however in association with femininity and women, referring to the animal in such a way seems to add a negative association. Before the idea of the hare being a shapeshifter is

even introduced, the image of a farmer, with pure drive and intent to disseminate this hare, surrounded by other farmer men with guns and blood thirsty hounds is a powerful and violent one.

It is intriguing to point out that there have been no recorded incidents of a woman seeking out to kill a hare-hag, this may be due to the fact that women were not regarded as hunters. In each and every story a man seeks to kill the hare by a number of violent means. This story, widely recognised, solidifies the physical power of the male and the use of violence as a means to resolve their predicaments. In almost every version of the story the man or a group of men make use of spears, guns or hounds in an attempt to murder this hare. In each variation the cailleach either trespasses or steals. This could lend to the notion that women living on their own must resort to these criminal activities in order to survive without the aid of a man. Men are regarded as powerful and fierce hunters that do not need magic to assert their dominance, women of independence must have the assistance of some form of magic, for they could never achieve this prowess of their own volition. This could explain why often in folklore men remain in human form yet women must morph into wild creatures to outsmart or out run men.

It is said that when the woman died one hundred black hounds ran in a circle around her home. Rather than an ambiguous attitude that some variations of the story take towards witches or the hare, this one has a quite direct link to evil powers. Once again portraying the woman as capable of hellish evil, a cruel callous character. This link between hell and the process of metamorphosis is stated in Marina Warner's book, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds*,

As a philosophical and literary trope, as a theological principle, as cosmic and biological explanation, it (metamorphosis) distinguishes good from evil, the

blessed from the heathen and the damned: in the Christian heaven, nothing changes, whereas in hell, everything combines and recombines in terrible amalgams, compounds, breeding hybrids, monsters- and mutants. (2002, pp. 36)

This idea of morphing or mutating into another creature has an atmosphere of unholiness about it, especially in a catholic dominated country. This gastly mutating occurs specifically to women across a number of other Irish legends, for example selkies.

ii.)

Once again this story was collected from the National Folklore Collection. The following story was collected by John MacCarthy, aged 15. The informant was Mrs. M. MacCarthy, age unknown. The story was collected in county Tipperary. It will be interesting to see if having a female narrator would alter the perception of the hag or *cailleach*.

Long ago before creameries were started, the country folk made their own butter. Therefore, if the cows died or if they did not give milk the farmer would be at a grave loss. A man lived in the glen of Aherlow who owned a small farm. Therefore, he was very dependant upon the four cows he possessed. One morning, having milked the cows, he found that he had less than half the usual supply of milk. He got even less the next day and, therefore, he concluded that the cows had been milked during the night. At two o'clock the next morning, the farmer, accompanied by a friendly labourer and a dog, hid in a bush from which he could watch the cows. Just as the sun was rising and casting its rays through the foggy glen the watchers saw an old woman hobbling towards them. With quick steps she walked to the cows, and, placing the bucket and stoll, which she carried in her shawl, on the ground she began to milk the cow nearest to her. The dog, not being muzzled, barked and sprang forward. "Unleash her, unleash her," yelled farmer to the labourer who was holding the dog's leash and being dragged along in the dog's wake. The labourer had the presence of mind to obey. The woman, now aware of their presence leaped up from the stool on which she had been sitting. Then the watchers - no longer hidden - saw her turn herself into a hare. Then the woman - now a hare - turned ran like the wind. The dog followed the hare and the two amazed men followed in the dog's wake. Having run about a hundred yards at a great rate both dog and hare began to tire but the dog - a greyhound - began to gain on the hare. The hound was soon only two yards from the hare and he prepared to jump. Just as he leaped the hare doubled

back and ran towards the two pursuing men. The dog nearly lost his balance and the hare had regained the lead. The hare ran to the shack where the two men stood and, leaping to the window, the hare got in by the window. But, while the hare had been running to the window the dog had once again caught up with her, and now, as the hare leaped on to the window, the greyhound bit the hare's leg. The dog's head would not fit in through the broken pane, so the two men pushed in the door, and, there, sitting at the fire with her leg bleeding profusely, was the woman they had seen milking the cows. They bandaged her foot, and, knowing that she was at death's door, they brought her to a priest. She then told them that her two cows had died and being short of milk to make butter she had asked the devil for the power of witchcraft and her wish had been granted. She died two days after. (MacCarthy, n.d.)

The first intriguing remark to note, is that the farmer enlists the help of a 'friendly labourer and a dog'. This seems to be a much softer remark than the previous story in which a mob of men with rifles as well as dogs were gathered in the hopes of murdering this hare. It is an unusual telling of this story as the *cailleach* is seen sitting down beside the cow and proceeding to milk it. In many other tellings it is the hare that is seen teething on the cows udders. The woman is described as old and hobbling. It seems as though she is frail and vulnerable. However, once the woman is startled by the hound pacing towards her, in plain sight she transforms into a hare. This is a peculiar scenario as the woman is witnessed by the farmer transforming into a hare. At first glance this could be seen as a daring symbol of the woman's indifference to the men that are seemingly hunting her. It is important to note that the narrator, Mrs. MacCarthy, states the men follow their hound in amazement at what they just saw. This air of respect and astonishment is very different to the vengeful tone of James Murray's story discussed earlier. Ewart Evans and Thomson also argue a similar point to this when they discuss the hag; "she is in modern terms, an introvert who probably has a highly developed intuitive faculty as many women indeed have; and she may well have a faculty that is something more than intuition and could best be described as extra sensory perception." (1972, pp. 143)

Transformed to a wild animal, the woman has a freedom she would not possess in her own shape. Mrs. MacCarthy describes the woman as running like the wind. This speed and agility, that the hobbling old woman we viewed earlier lacked, could be viewed as a type of otherworldly strength and power that many other celtic figures possess. Ní Dhuibhne states the hag “has violated his property and stolen his goods by the use of guile. The man violates her not by using guile, but with violence.” (Ní Dhuibhne, 1993, p.79) It could be argued that women’s intelligence, although overlooked at times, is celebrated at least momentarily in this story as she evades capture and astonishes the two pursuing men. Whilst the only tool the man has to combat her is brute force and physical harm.

Whilst both the stories conclude with the elderly woman dying, due to the narration both seem to display very different perspectives of the woman. James Murray's story which had imagery surrounding the devil, as well as the farmers being at ‘peace’ after her death portrays her as a nuisance, an evil presence in their sacred home. Mrs. MacCarthy’s portrayal however is of a woman that was left to fend for herself which led her to bargain with the devil. This allows us to view the hag as a person with struggles that led them to this unfortunate situation. This story does not seem to have the same vicious and aggressive undertones that some of the other variations do. This is apparent at the end of the story. The fact that the two men bandage and bring the woman to a priest suggests that it was not their intention to cause grievous harm.

Conclusion

Before beginning this essay I asked myself questions such as; Does the portrayal of women and the hare in the ‘hare-hag’ tale tell us anything about perceptions and

expectations of women? Does the symbolism of the hare connected with women have positive or negative connotations? Can folklore be used as a way to reclaim power and celebrate femininity?

From the analysis of these two particular stories I believe it is fair to say that some women used the same familiar stories told to perhaps enlighten or change certain beliefs that were perpetuated by Irish society across a number of different mediums.

The nuanced changes between stories are so slight that at first glance it is not always clear there is an ulterior meaning behind it. However from the knowledge collected about women in storytelling; the lack of respect for them in this field, the representation of women from a mans perspective versus a womans as well as the role they played in the collection of these folk tales, remedies, song and superstitions, it can be concluded that folklore is used as a tool to educate audiences about social opinions of gender, femininity and many other topics too.

As I was researching and analysing the particular story of the 'hare-hag', and only two variations at that, there are many limitations. Due to this it is important to note that this research essay is only a very brief introduction to the possibility that folklore has a tremendous amount to tell us about the biases and beliefs we have today.

Some examples of the limitations are, the word count. I would have liked to go further in depth about what exactly folklore is and look at more folklorists work around the idea of gender in other aspects of folklore. Also I believe comparing more stories as well as stories collected from different times would have given me a larger perspective on how the tales mutate over time.

Some aspects of the topic I was unable to discuss due to certain constraints was the influence and symbolism of the hare throughout other cultures in detail. I believe a

greater understanding of the origins of the hare as a mystical being could further clear the link between the hare and women across a number of cultures, not just Ireland. It would be extremely interesting in the future to further this study by collecting more primary source information on the hare in different regions of the world.

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