

## **On the Images of Queen Mab in English Literature (from William Shakespeare to Suzanna Clarke)**

When in 1947 professor J.R.R. Tolkien published his essay titled *On Fairy-Stories* his avowed purpose was to rescue the notion of the fairyland and that of the fairies themselves from the weight of popular misconception which had accumulated over the concepts in the previous two hundred or so years. The misconception was precisely that, according to a widely held opinion the use of the idea of the fairies and the fairyland in literature must entail a deliberate limitation on the shape of the artistic endeavour because by their very nature fairies and fairyland can effectively function solely in literary works either meant for children (and consequently modelled to suit an unsophisticated sensibility), or chiefly concerned with the comic mode, or else with some form of literary pastiche. While such a transformation of the concept of the fairies was in itself a natural consequence of the profound change of artistic sensibility which Europe underwent between 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, at the core of Tolkien's argument lay the conviction that, by degrading the status of the fairies, modern culture has lost contact with a substantial part of some very profound literature composed before the Renaissance. Even more crucially, Tolkien argued, the failure to retrieve the cast of mind which caused the fairy-story to become a vehicle for the most formally ambitious literary creation has cost contemporary culture the inability to give artistic expression to some of the central spiritual issues which concerned mankind<sup>1</sup>.

Looking, after sixty years, at the legacy of Tolkien's essay, which has since achieved the status of one of the most crucial critical publications of the last century<sup>2</sup>, one will have to say that, while it did not succeed in redirecting popular culture towards accepting, or even learning about, the classic idea of the fairy-story, it did nevertheless fully succeed in reinstalling the old image of the fairie to the newly rediscovered genre of fantasy which has been developing flamboyantly in the course of the last fifty years<sup>3</sup>. This means that the argument pursued in the essay has traditionally met with basically two approaches. On the one hand it met with indifference coming from the unlearned as well as those attached to the literary heritage of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, who did not see a reason or a way to incorporate the fairie into the literary tradition created on the basis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century formal realistic prose. On the other hand it created the standard and the norm for the imagery of modern fantasy writing because it expressed the literary theory behind the cornerstone of the modern incarnation of the fantasy genre which is *The Lord of the Rings*.

The present argument proposes to take Tolkien's essay as the vantage point to observe just one small fragment of the history of the literary presentation of the fairies in the course of the last four hundred years – the image of Queen Mab.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the topic see Rosebury 2003: 158–192; Swinfen 1984; 100–122.

<sup>2</sup> For more context see Wood 2000; 95–108; Flieger 2003; 26–35.

<sup>3</sup> For more on this aspect see Rosebury 2003: 134–157.

This might appear a bizarre exercise since, as may be remembered, Tolkien recalls Queen Mab in the most negative context. Within the line of the argument Tolkien develops, the appearance, in the 1590s, of the character of Queen Mab embodies everything that went wrong with the literary fairies at that historical juncture, of which process the most symbolic feature is that the creatures suddenly become diminutive of stature:

I do not deny that the notion [of the fairies' diminutive size] is a leading one in modern use. (...) The diminutive being, elf or fairy, is (I guess) in England largely a product of literary fancy. (...) Yet I suspect that this flower-and butterfly minuteness was also a product of "rationalization," which transformed the glamour of Elfland into mere finesse, and invisibility into a fragility that could hide in a cowslip or shrink behind a blade of grass. (...) In any case it was largely a literary business in which William Shakespeare and Michael Drayton played a part. Drayton's *Nymphidia* is one ancestor of that long line of flower-fairies and fluttering sprites with antennae that I so disliked as a child, and which my children in turn detested. (...) Drayton's *Nymphidia* is, considered as a fairy story (a story about the fairies), one of the worst ever written. (On Fairy-Stories, p. 35- 36).

It would be in fact difficult to find two writers who would be farther apart in terms of literary sensibility, understanding of tradition, and general outlook than Shakespeare and Tolkien, so some of Tolkien's perceptible disgust with Shakespeare seems almost unavoidable. It seems also that Shakespeare and Drayton are here treated jointly since the incomparably lower cultural standing of the latter makes him a more convenient target.

Despite this, in commenting on the two poets, we need to treat them separately as their respective ways of presenting of Queen Mab differ considerably, if only because of the different literary context of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Nymphidia*.

To follow chronology let us first discuss Shakespeare's Mab. *Romeo and Juliet* marks in fact the introduction of Queen Mab as a character into English literature. What Shakespeare does here is apparently adopting an English derivative of the Irish fairy named Mab, which had been circulating in popular and folk culture of the period. The famous speech describing the Queen and her customs is delivered by Romeo's friend – Mercutio when the company of friends are on their way to the masquerade party during which Romeo will for the first time meet Juliet. When Romeo admits to having had a disquieting dream Mercutio follows promptly with his own analysis of its causes:

O then I see Queen Mab has been with you.  
 She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes  
 In shape no bigger than an agate stone  
 On the forefinger of an alderman,  
 Drawn with a team of little atomi  
 Over men's noses as they lie asleep.  
 Her chariot is an empty hazelnut  
 Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,

Time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers;  
 Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners' legs,  
 The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,  
 Her traces of the smallest spider web,  
 Her collars of the moonshine's watery beams,  
 Her whip of cricket's bone, the lash of film,  
 Her waggoner a small grey-coated gnat,  
 Not half so big as a round little worm  
 Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid;  
 And in this state she gallops night by night  
 Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;

*Romeo and Juliet*, act I, sc. IV, ll. 53–94.

The tone and imagery of the speech are in fact so heavily dependent on the dramatic context of the scene that one cannot, for instance, take it, as Tolkien seems to attempt to do, as an expression of Shakespeare's preferred aesthetic taste. In fact Queen Mab answers here not to Shakespeare's idea about the fairies but to that of Mercutio – a young man of no profound taste and fairly shallow intellectual vistas, intoxicated by the prospect of the imminent adventure. The Queen Mab of his imagination is to serve as a contrastive backdrop to the psychological sophistication of the real human relations which develop in the play.

Another reason for the transformation of the fairy characters into minute creatures, which Tolkien so bewails in the context of the passage, is the Renaissance microscope syndrome, so evident in the Metaphysical poetry – the fascination with the new possibilities offered by access to the new optical devices did usher in a temporary fashion for conveying the idea of refinement through the notion of the delicacy of small objects. While this tendency disappeared from European aesthetics by the second half of the seventeenth century (and in fact its sole lasting effect was the miniaturising of the fairies) it enjoyed its heyday at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> c, and it seems that Mercutio is an early victim of the vogue.

What Tolkien is right about is the fact that what underlies the description of Queen Mab in the context of the whole play is the conviction not just about the fairies non-existence, but of the inadequacy of the concept of the fairie for conveying anything profound about human existence. Queen Mab remains a shadowy presence in the overall context of the play; one cannot but notice the almost septic quality of the phrase "fairies' midwife" which indicates no princely glamour and is reducible to a term like "the usher in of things unreal". What Queen Mab brings to the consecutive dreamers is precisely the kind of dreams medieval science identified as *insomnium* or *enypnion* – a dream which is a confused replay of the customary daily activities of the person sleeping (one which Chaucer depicts in similar terms in the *Parlement of Fowles* (99–105)); it is emphatically not the kind of dreams from which any spiritual; significance may be gauged.

If we look now at Drayton's *Nymphidia* we may observed a very different context for the introduction of Queen Mab. First we have here a narrative poem which was composed some thirty years after Shakespeare's play and which gathers together various strains of literary trends and motifs (all of them long out of fashion) to perpetuate the tradition of the allegorical mock-heroic epic modelled

on Spencer's *Muiopotmos: or the Fate of the Butterfly*. In both cases muniturising the characters was a practice designed to highlight the comic dimension, and Drayton repeats the trick combining Spencer's tradition with *Romeo and Juliet*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the medieval ballads of fairy abduction, as well as the medieval allegorical tradition to create a highly derivative and conventional narrative where the aim is more the bawdy innuendo than Tolkien's Eucatastrophe.

The narrator claims to have received news of events in the Fairyland from a fairy called Nymphidia. Mab is there the royal wife of Oberon – the king of Fairies (through Jove is mentioned at the beginning). The king rightly suspects his wife of betraying him with a fairy knight called Pigwiggen – courtly love situation. They exchange letters and gifts and later on the queen leaves in the chariot for a secret midnight meeting. Oberon gets news about it and, in a fit of rage, runs at a wasp whom he mistakes for the queen's lover, which extricates itself with the threat of stinging the king. Oberon subsequently attacks a glow-worm, a hive of bees, and an ant. Then he falls into a lake. Meanwhile the Queen hides her lover in a nut, while Nymphidia – her chambermaid is on the look-out for Puck, who may tell on them to the king, the nymph does some herb magic to confuse Puck's senses. Puck is subsequently led into a muddy ditch where he nigh drowns. Meanwhile Pigwiggen cries defiance at Oberon for allegedly slandering the queen. Tomalin, a loyal knight of the king's is sent to parley and hears more defiance. A single combat between Pigwiggen and the king results. To prevent a bloody outcome Mab goes to Proserpina to ask her to use the water of Lethe to stop the fight. Proserpine arrives and produces mist which separates the combatants and gives them the water to drink. Both forget everything and peace is restored.

The action of the poem is set in a world where the minute dimensions of objects no longer convey the air of fashionable novelty but are, by now, a tedious reiteration of what has, in the meantime, become a dull, predictable and conventional elaboration on the Shakespearian passage:

Her Chariot ready straight is made,  
 Each thing therein in fitting layde,  
 That she by nothing might be stayde,  
 For naught must be her letting,  
 Foure nimble Gnats the Horses were,  
 Their Harnasses of Gossamere,  
 Flye Cranion her Chariottiere,  
 Upon the Coach-box getting.

Her chariot of a Snayles fine shell,  
 Which for the colours did excell:  
 The faire Queen *Mab*, becoming well,  
 So lively was the limming:  
 the seate the soft wooll of the Bee;  
 The cover, (gallant to see)  
 The wing of a pyde Butterflee,  
 I trowe t'was simple trimming.

The wheeles composd of Crickets bones,  
 And daintily made for the nonce,  
 For feare of ratling on the stones,  
 With Thistle-downe they shod it;  
 For all her Maydens much did feare,  
 If *Oberon* had chanc'd to heare,  
 that *Mab* his Queene should have bin there,  
 He would not have aboad it.

(*Nymphidia*, ll. 129–152)

In fact the unimaginative quality of the whole poetic exercise, together with the halting character of the verse, is the reason which determined the fate of Queen Mab henceforth, relegating her, together with the whole fairy nation, now diminished and degraded to the role of the machinery of the comic epic (as may be witnessed in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, for, while she herself does not make an appearance there the Queen of Spleen takes much after her).

In fact it was the fate of Queen Mab to wait for her another major incarnation until the second generation of the English Romantic poets<sup>4</sup>. Thus in 1813 the eighteen-year-old Percy Bysshe Shelley publishes, with some difficulty and apprehension, his first long narrative poem titled *Queen Mab*. The poem is a daring exercise in the youthful exuberance of the poet's teenage spirit and it combines a framework of the medieval dream allegory with a message of unrelenting vindictiveness and hatred for the Christian religion, especially in its institutional context.

The poem opens with a young woman called Ianthe falling asleep. Her spirit separates itself from the body to meet queen Mab who takes the spirit on an interstellar journey and they enter the Halls of Spells situated in the middle of the galaxy. From there the Queen presents the the spirit of the dreamer a vision of the past, present and future. The instinctual following of the natural inclination of the free spirit, which remains in contact with the universal spirit of light, is contrasted in the Queen's long tirade with the evils of following Christianity, which is described as responsible for social injustice, poverty, fanaticism and any instance of state suppression of all forms of free expression throughout European history. A utopian vision of freedom and happiness, which will come after the final rejection of Christianity by mankind, ends the poem.

As we can observe, the core of the poem's appeal was meant to lie in its forceful ideological message and not exploiting any deep dimension of the literary tradition of the faerie. Queen Mab steps here into the Beatrice kind of role of the supernatural medium conveying to the central character all manner of existential truth, but the choice of this particular character for the role stems not, it seems, from Shelley's interest in the poetic context of the fairyland but from his fascination with Spencer and the English Golden Renaissance narrative poetry (which in turn is caused by the young poet's fascination with the literary heritage of the Antiquity, which for him constitutes an example of a noble culture unpolluted by Christianity). The fact is that the Golden Elizabethan school of poetry had by then been forgotten and disparaged long enough to merit a revival. Here Shelley updates the imagery to make it convergent with the Romantic fascination with space travel

<sup>4</sup> Compare in this context Zipes 1992: 41–92; Zipes 2006: 41–89.

(parallel to Byron's *Cain*) and, interestingly, does not make Queen Mab small of stature, but rather conveys the idea of the Queen's chariot being enormous:

Behold the chariot of the Fairy Queen!  
 Celestial coursers paw the unyielding air;  
 Their filmy pennons at their word they furl,  
 and stop obedient to the reins of light:  
 These the Queen of Spells drew in,  
 she spread a charm around the spot  
 and leaning graceful from the aetherial car,  
 Long did she gaze and silently,  
 Upon the slumbering maid.

(ll. 59–67)

The reason why Tolkien would not consider the poem to merit a footnote in his argument is twofold. First he would consider the piece's overall message to be beneath contempt and only dignified silence would for him be the proper response. Secondly the poem takes the character of Queen Mab out of the context of the fairie altogether (except possibly that the poem utilises the notion of the fairies as outsiders to Christian order) and her dominant intertextual and cultural context is that she may may be here taken as an antagonistic opposite of the allegorical character of the Christian Church, tutoring the dreamer in the shape of a beautiful woman (in accordance with the established allegorical reading of the Song of Songs) in the second Passus of Langland's *Piers Plowman*.

If we now disregard the offshoot of the Queen Mab's tradition which is the character of Queen Maeve in the poetry of W.B. Yeats<sup>5</sup>, we will pass Tolkien's essay and come to another incarnation of Mab done some years later by the author of the essay himself.

Thus in 1962 there appeared Tolkien's publication titled *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, which in some small way augments *The Lord of the Rings* for it contains hobbit folk poetry, collected from the oral tradition of the Shire's peasants:

The present selection is taken from the older pieces, mainly concerned with legends and jests of the Shire at the end of the Third Age, that appear to have been made by the Hobbits, especially Bilbo and his friends, or their immediate descendants. Their authorship is, however, seldom indicated. Those outside the narrative are in various hands, and were probably written down from oral tradition. (*The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* 1962: from the Preface, p. 191).

The overall idea is thus that the hobbit poetry offers a crude echo of the history of Middle-earth and a distant echo of the Elven culture reflected in a society existing on its far outskirts. Among the pieces in the collection one finds under nr 4 a little poem in a mock stanza resembling tail-rhyme

<sup>5</sup> In fact the strongest direct connection is Yeats's conviction that Shakespeare's Mab was directly inspired by the Celtic mythology whom he occasionally recreated in his poetry and drama (see *The Old Age of Queen Maeve*).

describing a character called a little fairy princess named Mee, who is much bewildered and confused on encountering her own reflection in a lake.

Little Princess Mee  
Lovely was she  
As in elven-song is told:  
She had pearls in hair  
All threaded fair;  
Of gossamer shot with gold  
Was her kerchief made,  
And a silver braid  
Of stars about her throat.  
Of moth-web light  
All moonlit-white  
She wore a woven coat,  
And round her kirtle  
Was bound a girdle  
Sewn with diamond dew.

She walked by day  
Under mantle grey  
And hood of clouded blue;  
But she went by night  
All glittering bright  
Under the starlit sky,  
And her slippers frail  
Of fishes' mail  
Flashed as she went by  
To her dancing-pool,  
Of windless water played.  
As mist of light  
In whirling flight  
A glint like glass she made  
Wherever her feet  
Of silver fleet  
Flicked the dancing-floor.

Here Tolkien returns to the essence of his argument from *On Fairy-Stories* seeking to incorporate the Queen Mab tradition into the world he himself created with a view to obliterate the tradition of the Victorian elves<sup>6</sup>. Thus full context of the poem may be only appreciated if one accepts that the

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<sup>6</sup> In this context see also Jackson 1995: 141–156.

notion of the fairies as quaint innocent creature of microscopic stature is a product of a culture so far removed from the centre of Middle-earth's civilisation that the echo of the majesty of Galadriel is so faint when it reaches the Shire that it becomes transformed into a children's song. In this way the idea of the incomprehension of something reflected underscores the extraneous message stemming from the poem in the context of the Tolkienian epic. The idea of smallness of stature and extrahuman beauty is here again inextricably bound with harmlessness and innocence and is as such again opposed to the true glamour and menace of the real literary Fairyland and no attempt is made to combine the two. Instead the quaintness of the fake Victorian fairies is here given a relatively kinder perspective – it turns out that this sort of aesthetics may be capable of providing a very distant and distorted glimpse of something real – it is not so much a mystification but a miscomprehended reflection.

The issues addressed here by Tolkien concerned the central question of the underlying philosophy behind the literary notion of the fairie, which is one of the most fundamental points in the formal ramifications of the genre of fantasy. Because of this and because Tolkien himself provided the major stimulus for the re-emergence of the modern form of fantasy, authors continuing the genre in the last half-century have been decisively conditioned by Tolkien's overall philosophy. For this reason whenever the character of Queen Mab cropped up as it did occasionally in contemporary fantasy fiction, her role was limited to providing little more than a formal intertextual link with this particular strain of the fairy tradition.

It was thus only in 2006 when Susanna Clarke published her collection of short stories *The Ladies of Grace Adieu* that the literary history of Queen Mab received a major new twist. Among the stories in Clarke's collection we encounter one titled *Mrs. Mab*. As is the case with most of Susanna Clarke's writing, the stylistics of the story revolve around merging the genres of modern fantasy and the formal realist nineteenth century novel, and in this particular story the fantasy element centres around the tradition of Queen Mab.

The narrative is set in nineteenth century England and tells the story of a courtship between Miss Venetia Moore and Captain Fox of the nearby stationed military regiment. When, on receiving news of the illness of a lady of close acquaintance, Venetia leaves for Manchester, Captain Fox inexplicably shifts his attention to another lady of the neighbourhood – one Mrs. Mab. On returning home Venetia learns that the officer mysteriously disappeared after being invited to a game of cards at Mrs. Mab's. Intrigued by this the young woman approaches the vicinity of Mrs. Mab's mansion:

It was a quite and an empty place. The grass which covered the hills and the valley was as unbroken as any sheet of water and, almost as if it were water, the sunshiny breeze made little waves in it. On the opposite hill stood an ancient-looking house of grey stone. It was a very tall house, something indeed between a house and a tower, and it was surrounded by a high stone wall in which no opening or gate could be discerned, nor did any path go up to the house.

Yet despite its great height the house was overtopped by the bright sunlight forest wall behind it and she could not rid herself of the idea that she was actually looking at a very small house – a house for a field mouse or a bee or a butterfly – a house which stood among tall grasses. (*Mrs. Mab*, p. 75).

The woman subsequently regains consciousness at home, wearing a torn dress and remembering nothing but a vague and absurd sensation of being attacked by a whole army. While the affair is treated by her relatives and the neighbourhood as an evidence of an mild derangement caused by Captain Fox's apparent rejection of her, Venetia develops an obsessive interest in the identity of Mrs. Mab, who seems to have lived in the vicinity longer than any one can remember yet no one has apparently seen her, and there is no agreement as to the exact location of her house. Thus when the young woman tries to approach Mrs. Mab's place for the second time it is in fact located somewhere else:

Majestic trees of great size and height stood about a great expanse of velvety green lawn. The trees had all been clipped into smooth rounded shapes, each one taller than Kissingland church tower (...)

Yet there was something; at the one end of the lawn stood a round tower built of ancient-looking, grey stones, with battlements at the top and three dark slits for windows very high up. I was quite a tall tower, but in spite of its height it was overtopped by a monstrous hedge of pale roses that stood behind it and she could not rid herself of the idea that the tower was actually very tiny – a tower for an ant or a bee or a bird. (*Mrs. Mab*, p. 86).

The view is in fact all that Venetia manages to see before she hears music playing and she again regains consciousness at home with her shoes torn to pieces and her feet bleeding. From now on Venetia is assumed to rapidly develop signs of mental illness caused by the shock she must have received due to Captain Fox's abandonment of her. When the woman manages, after a couple of days, to sneak out of the house, she wanders in the countryside until she meets a group of children and proceeds to ask of them the location of Mrs. Mab's mansion. Venetia is informed by them that Mrs. Mab is to be found "the bottom of Billy Little's garden, (...) beneath a great heap of cabbage leaves" (p. 92). She straight away proceeds to the place:

Beyond the heap of cabbage leaves and other dark, decaying matter, the path led past a sad-looking pond and up a steep bank. At the top of the bank was a smooth expanse of bright green grass, at the end of which a dozen or so tall stones and slates were piled together. (...)

Venetia looked round and saw a quivering in the air. "A moth," she thought. She approached and the shadow of her gown fell across the stones, A dark, damp chill hung about them, which the sunlight had no power to dissipate. She stretched both hands to break apart Mrs. Mab's house, (...) (*Mrs. Mab*, p. 94).

After a vicious fight with butterflies Venetia is again taken home and the affair only adds to the generally held conviction about the woman's deranged mental condition, but it turns out that Venetia's destruction of the butterflies in due course prevails upon Mab to release the captain back into the human world.

What Susanna Clarke succeeds in achieving in her short story is, in the cultural sense, very substantial. The author is able to redefine the understanding of the fairie across the very deep cultural divide, which Tolkien's argument in *On Fairy-Stories* at once defined and helped perpetuate. In Clarke's story the neat recreation of the formal conventions of nineteenth century realistic prose incorporates into itself the fairy characters, as they were aesthetically conceived of in the Victorian period, and then invests them with the whole weight of the dread, menace, cold inhuman glamour and the despair of a forced madness which had been the fairies' characteristics when the concept of the fairie was enjoying its literary heyday during the medieval period<sup>7</sup>.

In this context the Victorian notion of the fairies' diminutive size becomes for the very first time incorporated into the traditional picture of the fairies and it becomes a key element in highlighting the precise quality of the danger the fairies may traditionally pose towards the humans. Thus the ability to seem small and big at the same time both deranges the most basic principles of human cognition and induces the victim with the desire to reach out against the more powerful opponent and consequently bring more madness on oneself.

It is difficult here not to be put in awe at the apparent easiness with which Susanna Clarke, in a sense, outwits Tolkien by creating an artistic statement which renders the argument in Tolkien's essay obsolete. In doing so the author mercilessly exploits all the possible conceptual limitations which Tolkien's argument, for all its sophistication and depth, cannot be free of.

It turns out, quite disquietingly for someone attached to the viewpoint expressed in *On Fairy Stories*, that it has been possible, through an author of great formal mastery, for the nineteenth century literary heritage not merely to reevaluate its relationship with the more classic literary heritage, but to virtually incorporate it into its own aesthetics. This goes an incredible way into bridging the gap between the literary culture which developed the notion of the fairie and the quite divergent literary culture of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> c, which had once nearly obliterated the literary taste and the mental apparatus behind the concept of the faerie.

An important thing is that both of the two separate realms of literary experience appear to gain by the intersection of the imagery and that Clarke's *Mrs. Mab* spans such an incredible breadth of cultural experience never for a second descending into pastiche, or the mannerism of predictable intertextual games<sup>8</sup>. It turns out instead that, with Susana Clarke, Queen Mab is able to reappear once again, this time arrayed in all the incredible magic great literature has to offer.

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<sup>7</sup> See also in this context Todorov 1975: 41–57.

<sup>8</sup> As opposed to the finesse which which Clarke incorporates into the story motifs from Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*.

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STRESZCZENIE: Przedmiotem analizy jest ewolucja jaką przechodzi w literaturze angielskiej przedstawienie postaci królowej Mab na przystrzeni ostatnich czterystu. Argument rozwinięty jest w kontekście słynnego artykułu J. R.R. Tolkiena zatytułowanego *On Fairy -Stories*. Celem wyводу podjętego Przez Tolkiena w eseju było przywrócenie koncepcji *Faerie* i *Fairies* ich pierwotnego znaczenia i konotacji kulturowych, które w ciągu poprzednich dwóch czy trzech stuleci uległy w przeważającym stopniu zapomnieniu lub przekręceniu. Na tym tle artykuł omawia prezentację postaci królowej Mab w *Romeo i Julii* Szekspira, poemacie *Nymphidia* Michaela Draytona, jak również w *Królowej Mab* P.B. Shelleya i w twórczości samego Tolkiena. Kulminację argumentu stanowi analiza opowiadania Suzanny Clarke *Pani Mab*, które reewaluuje tolkienowską tradycję patrzenia na prezentację postaci Elfów w literaturze.