

# Eoin Colfer's Magical Fairies

The depiction of fairies in Artemis Fowl compared  
to folklore and other literature

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# EOIN COLFER'S MAGICAL FAIRIES



-THE DEPICTION OF FAIRIES IN *ARTEMIS FOWL* COMPARED TO  
FOLKLORE AND OTHER LITERATURE-



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## **Abstract**

The name fairy has been surrounded with mystery and excitement for as long as people have been telling stories about strange and supernatural beings from this world and others. This essay endeavours to find similarities and differences in the magic and portrayal of fairies created by a present day author, Eoin Colfer, compared to the fairies of Celtic legends and Victorian beliefs. In order to fully understand the length of Colfer's imagination his fairies will be compared to creations from a few of the fantasy genres biggest names; J.R.R Tolkien, James Barrie and William Shakespeare. In addition this essay aims to discover peculiarities and other distinguishing features in an advanced technological society living just a few kilometres below our feet, where the fairy residents do everything they can to keep mankind from knowing they exist.

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## Introduction

Interest for this topic arose while listening to an audio book of Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl: the time paradox*. It occurred to me that Colfer had invented this whole world which was open for everyone to discover. Therefore the curiosity to find out more about his inspirations for writing about one of the literary world's most used topics was born. Colfer has said that he will keep writing until people stop reading or he runs out of ideas, but he hopes that neither of those will happen any time soon<sup>1</sup>. When trying to decide what subject in *Artemis Fowl* to write an essay about, I remembered hearing three young teenagers sitting in the library discussing Colfer's fairies with such passion, which led me to believe that the books were essential in every child's life in order to make it meaningful. This devotion and interest inspired me to devote this essay to Colfer's magical fairies.

The essay is divided into two chapters and will begin with a short introduction to Eoin Colfer and *Artemis Fowl*. The first chapter then talks about the origin of fairies according to folklore and legend. The books referenced in this chapter are books on mythology, ancient Celtic history and British history. Also the Victorian era is of importance when it involves fairies, since they became increasingly popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the historical background the essay moves on to the second chapter dealing with the depiction and analysis of fairies in *Artemis Fowl* compared to the findings in the previous chapter. Also, J.R.R. Tolkien, James Barrie and William Shakespeare will be mentioned as part of the analysis, especially Tolkien as he devoted his life to giving his elves, dwarfs and other creatures a detailed history and separate origin.

The aim of this essay therefore, is to investigate the similarities and differences of fairies in Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series compared to folklore and other literature, to discover peculiarities and other distinguishing features. All six books in the *Artemis Fowl* series will be mentioned.

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<sup>1</sup>:Web source: <http://www.eoincolfer.com/about/>. Retrieved on January 17<sup>th</sup> 2009.

## Background

Eoin Colfer was born in Ireland in 1965, and had an academic and artistic upbringing since his father was an elementary teacher, historian and artist and his mother was a drama teacher. Colfer appears to have had every ingredient for writing in his blood since birth. He was interested in history in his younger years and wrote stories about Vikings. Colfer later graduated as a primary school teacher, working in his hometown of Wexford<sup>2</sup>.

He found inspiration and material for his first book, *Benny and Omar* published in 1998, while working in Tunisia. It was an immense success in Britain and has now been translated into several languages. A sequel followed in 1999, which was immediately followed by other books. It was in 2001 that the first *Artemis Fowl* book was published and the success from that enabled Colfer to resign from teaching and focus on writing full time<sup>3</sup>. His most recent task has been appointed to him by the widow of author Douglas Adams. She has asked him to write the sixth book in the *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* series, and he has accepted<sup>4</sup>. There is also a graphic novel of *Artemis Fowl* which is the first book in the series in comic book form.

As of this moment the *Artemis Fowl* series has sold over 9 million books worldwide, and is considered a leading force in children's fiction<sup>5</sup>. By the end of 2008 there were six books in the series; *Artemis Fowl*, *the Arctic Incident*, *the Eternity Code*, *the Opal deception*, *The Lost Colony* and *the Time Paradox*. The main character is Artemis Fowl, a ten year old genius mastermind trying to outsmart everyone and everything. Artemis gets hold on information which claims that fairies are real and living amongst humans and this information makes him convinced that he can exploit them for his own gain. This journey of exploration leads to wondrous adventures and discoveries. The *Artemis Fowl* books are filled with mythical creatures; elves, dwarfs, pixies, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> ---.

<sup>3</sup> ---.

<sup>4</sup> Web source. <http://eoincolfer.com/news/events/30th-anniversary-of-the-hitchhikers-guide-to-the-galaxy/157/>. Retrieved on January 18<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Web source: <http://www.artemisfowl.com/>. Retrived on January 18<sup>th</sup> 2009.

Colfer has found a way to incorporate these creatures into the real world of human belief; that fairies are among us seems natural. The reader will be taken on a journey of magic, friendship, love, fantasy, sorrow and technological amazement.

# 1. Historical Overview

## 1.1 Celtic and medieval origin

The ancient Celts relied mostly on oral presentations instead of written accounts; therefore there is little evidence to form a clear picture of their myths and legends. Nevertheless there are a few inscriptions and several texts that have survived,<sup>6</sup> but only half of the four hundred tales in existence have been published. These tales have been divided into four main cycles, and it is in the first of these cycles that the ancestors of the Celtic Fairies first appear.<sup>7</sup>

The Celts believed that the Fairies were a previously conquered society called the Tuatha De Danann. They were the civilization that gave to Ireland some of its many names, for instance Eire, Fodhla, and Banbha. Another name given to Ireland by the Tuatha De Danann was Inis Fail, the Island of Stone. They also called it, in succession, Isle of Mists, Scotia, Hibernia, and finally Irlanda.<sup>8</sup>

The Tuatha De Danann was an ancient Irish society who, according to legend, left Ireland some time after the fall of Conaing's Tower. It is also said that they settled in Greece where they learned the art of magic and became very skilled<sup>9</sup>. Athenian legends tell us that the Tuatha De Danann were able to resurrect dead soldiers; however after a period of time their magic was outwitted and they were forced to flee. The land they settled in next was called Lochlann, which is to say Norway. Here they built four cities; Fallias, Gorias, Findias, and Murias.

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<sup>6</sup> Juliet Wood. *The Celtic Book of Living and Dying*. (London: Duncan Baird Publishers. 2000)

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Cotterell. *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends*. (London, BCA and Marshall Editions Ltd. 1989)

<sup>8</sup> Michael Foss. *Celtic Myths and Legends*. (London, Michael O'Mara Books Ltd. 1995)

<sup>9</sup> ---.

After remaining in these cities where they taught their magic to the natives, they travelled on to Scotland and then back to Ireland. Here they battled over the country against the Firbolg and won.<sup>10</sup>

When the Firbolg of Ireland heard of their arrival they went to find the invaders, they spied on the camp and saw the most handsome of mankind, well and fiercely armed, skilful in music and playing, the most gifted man that ever came across the sea. "Then the Firbolg were afraid, for the Tuatha De Danann – the tribe of gods of the family of Danann – excelled all the other peoples of the world in every art".<sup>11</sup>

The Tuatha De Danann ruled for over one hundred and ninety years, until the coming of the sons of Mile. Then at the battle between the Tuatha De Danann and the Fennians (the son's of Mile), the Fennian leader Finn Mac Cool lead his army to victory and the Tuatha De Danann wrapped themselves in a magic mist and melted away. The Tuatha, skilled in construction and the supernatural, went underground to live in the tombs and mounds they had built and out of sight, they grew smaller in the popular belief until they turned into small fairies.<sup>12</sup>

In Wales, fairies were thought to be a race of invisible spiritual beings living in a world of their own, local gods or nature spirits that reduced in splendour and size over time. This belief can be directly contrasted with the myth about the Tuatha De Danann as they also were a majestic race who dwindled in size as well as importance.<sup>13</sup> The Celts talked about a place called the Otherworld, a strange and supernatural dimension where there was no passing of time. It was thought to be a series of islands and the mounds where the Tuatha De Danann went into hiding are included in this world<sup>14</sup>. These are called fairy mounds, and according to medieval legends fairies emerge from them to kidnap good-looking men and women, apparently to make them their own<sup>15</sup>. For instance, on moonlit nights captives can be seen dancing with the fairies. If humans enter this place they do so at their own risk, but according to legend humans have found it very difficult to keep away.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> ---.

<sup>11</sup> ---. 12

<sup>12</sup> ---.

<sup>13</sup> Juliet Wood.

<sup>14</sup> ---.

<sup>15</sup> C S Lewis, *The discarded image: an introduction to medieval and renaissance literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press. 1994)

<sup>16</sup> Juliet Wood



One night a well-dressed gentleman appears at a midwife's door, asking for help because his wife is in labour. Together they reach a magnificent hall where a woman is giving birth, the father asks her to rub a special ointment on the infant, but, while performing this task, she touches her own eye by accident. Suddenly the fine hall changes into a dank cave, but the woman says nothing and leaves with her reward. On unexpectedly meeting the man again, she asks after the mother and the baby. The man replies courteously but then enquires how it is that she can see him. Rashly, she points to the anointed eye, prompting him to put out the eye so that she can never again see fairies.<sup>17</sup>

If the woman had acknowledged that she saw the man and the woman for what they really were, she probably would not have been free to leave their realm. According to myth you can break the fairies and chance an escape by using an iron knife, which would send the fairies running in fear of their lives<sup>18</sup>.

In Medieval times the popularity of fairies diminished considerably. This was mostly due to the influence of Christianity and the medieval culture could be said to have been very strict. Writers in the middle ages based their stories on earlier, already existing, literature from popular authors and these were mainly written in Latin and had serious overtones about heroism and regulations. Although fairies managed to survive in some literature and songs of the time, the influence of the church was too strong and they diminished greatly in the minds and culture of the time<sup>19</sup>.

At his most characteristic, medieval man was neither a dreamer nor a wanderer. He was an organizer, a codifier and a builder of systems. He wanted a place for everything and everything in the right place. Distinction, definition, tabulation were his delight. Though full of turbulent activities, he was equally full of impulse to formalize them. War was formalized by the art of heraldry and the rules of chivalry; sexual passion by an elaborate code of love.<sup>20</sup>

According to C.S Lewis<sup>21</sup> there was nothing medieval people liked better than sorting out and tidying up. Each way a poet wrote was predetermined by the Arts of Rhetoric. However some historians suggest that the Celtic inheritance was as great as it had once been, only now it was less flaunted and more disguised.

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<sup>17</sup> ---. 53

<sup>18</sup> ---.

<sup>19</sup> C.S Lewis

<sup>20</sup> ---. 10

<sup>21</sup> ---.

Fairies have been subject to so many interpretations and characteristics that it is difficult to assign just one. If we look at the following statement through the eyes of literature we can see the complexity. “Within the same Island and the same century (the sixteenth century) Spencer could compliment Elizabeth I by identifying her with the Faerie Queene and a woman could be burned at Edinburgh for ‘repairing with’ the fairies and the ‘Queen of Elfame’”<sup>22</sup>

There have been several discussions between authors and historians concerning whether if the myth about fairies finally claims them to be ‘good’ or ‘evil’. Even though thoughts on this issue are divided, it is a fact that they are generally described as having the appearance of humans and possessing magical powers. Much of the medieval folklore talks about the malice of fairies and many of the legends tell us how to prevent being sabotaged by them. When it comes to wings, the Celtic and medieval folklore hardly mentions them. On the other hand fairies were known to shape shift into different kinds of birds and they used to ride on the backs of different animals<sup>23</sup>. Many myths are told of fairies, and they are seen in medieval tales of chivalry, in Victorian fairy tales, and up to the present day in modern literature.

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<sup>22</sup> ---, 124

<sup>23</sup> ---,

## 1.2 The Victorian era

Under the general designation of fairies and fays, these spirits of the elements appear in the myth, fable, tradition, or poetry of all nations, ancient and modern. Their names also form many different sub groups – peris, devs, djins, sylvans, satyrs, fauns, elves, dwarfs, trolls, norns, nisses, kobolds, brownies, and many more. They have been seen, feared, blessed, banned, and invoked in every quarter of the globe and in every age.<sup>24</sup>

The Victorian era lasted from 1837 to approximately 1901 and was a period of prosperity and peace for the English inhabitants. Though England was greatly expanding its empire during the eighteenth century, England itself was in a proud and peaceful state. This could be one of the reasons why they focused much of their energy on rediscovering their history and culture. This era is filled with narratives of times past, archeology, mythology and traditions. They were very inspired mainly by nationalism and Shakespeare; there was a continuing staging throughout the era of his fairy plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. That fairies were intensely popular in Victorian times is very evident by the fact that they were even depicted in the interior design of Victorian homes. They were on wallpaper, chairs, vases, etc. It is said that they tried to create “the Golden Age of Children’s Literature, and to begin the passion of the twentieth century for fantasies for grownups”<sup>25</sup>

The Celtic religion and mythology shaped the modern fairy myth and the roots of the Victorian fascination with fairies lies in English romanticism, as the poets and antiquaries even tried to conduct analytical studies of their types, traits, and origins. They began exploring their own supernatural heritage. “There was a sense that fairies – utilized by Chaucer and redesigned by Shakespeare – were part of England’s precious heritage. Nostalgia for a fading British past was yet another factor”<sup>26</sup>. Some English writers believed that the fairies were leaving England because the land had been too urbanized and materialistic for them to be able to survive.

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<sup>24</sup> Carole G Silver. *Strange and secret People: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000) 38

<sup>25</sup> ---. 4

<sup>26</sup> ---. 10

Because of this people wanted to find them and record their history before they had left England all together, probably for somewhere greener and less industrial<sup>27</sup>.

Scientists thought that this would be a simple affair and that fairies would soon be discovered by some scientific and reliable method and during this time there were several photographs taken of what were considered to be fairies. This deprived them of their grandeur and status, thus taking away their mystery and their power to be frightening. Physical phenomenons and artefacts were found almost constantly which added to their diminishing status.<sup>28</sup> “Rural folk still collected elf-shots or fairy bolts (prehistoric flint shards or arrows), as well as fairy pipes (small pipes often found near prehistoric monuments), fairy rings were located and examined, though most scientists believed that they had been produced by fungi rather than by fairy feet”<sup>29</sup>

When reading books concerning the thoughts and ideas of the Victorian man, what surprises is the large amount of belief devoted to the supernatural side of life. Many “educated Victorians speculated at length on whether fairies did exist or had at least once existed”<sup>30</sup>. For the Irish, belief in fairies was almost mandatory from a political and cultural standpoint<sup>31</sup>.

Victorians often claimed that fairies showed themselves in dreams, trances or out of the corner of an eye. Many believed that they had little regard for human emotions. Instead they had a gleeful appearance and manner which never faltered no matter what occurred. The darker aspects of a fairy’s manner were often highlighted, they were frequently associated with mischief, thievery, kidnapping, etc.<sup>32</sup>

There were at least three main theories about where the fairies came from. The first one claimed that fairies had a religious explanation. They were thought to be spiritual beings. Many believed them to be fallen angels trapped on earth during Lucifer’s fall. This is also where the idea originated that fairies were the souls of the dead who were not good enough for salvation or evil enough for damnation. Here the size of the fairies played a role as well; souls have traditionally been depicted as smaller than the bodies of the persons they inhabit.

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<sup>27</sup> ---.

<sup>28</sup> ---.

<sup>29</sup> ---. 36

<sup>30</sup> ---. 33

<sup>31</sup> C S Lewis.

<sup>32</sup> Carole Silver.

Many Victorians also claimed that fairies often were seen in graveyards or rising from cemetery grounds<sup>33</sup>

Others believed that fairies had originated in ancient societies and that the lore concerning them was a reflection of their savage ideas and customs. Charles Darwin believed them to be invisible life-forms which had developed on a different branch of the evolutionary tree. Sir Walter Scott claimed that fairies were fictional creatures derived from other cultures such as the Gothic tribal traditions of elves. This community was given an Eastern influence and eventually formed what the Victorians now called fairies. He continued by stating that the prototype for these magical beings were dwarfs, which he essentially believed had derived from Lapps, Letts, and Finns, who were alleged to have been small in stature, and had gained their reputation as supernatural by foretelling the weather. (Although he believed they probably achieved this with careful observations and not with magical powers)<sup>34</sup>

Mythical dwarfs on the other hand became mixed with the belief about the more attractive and social Celtic fairies, in order to form the modern variety. Some on the other hand “trace fairy origins to the Peris of the Arabs and Persians, later blended with gothic mythology”<sup>35</sup>. Dwarfs were also called gnomes and these were described as being the same as pixies, corrigans, leprechauns, and other elves which inhabited the rocks, caves and soil. Dwarfs were depicted as short, ‘stodgy’, dark, hairy smiths and magicians. They lived in the earth and were the rulers of metals and mines. They were hump-backed, had long crooked noses and twinkling mischievous eyes; their build was almost that of a compressed giant. They were also thought to be the oldest of the fairy tribes in Norse mythology. Dwarfs were very shrewd and cunning and could on rare occasions be gentle and almost kind, but most commonly they were associated with evil fairies<sup>36</sup>.

The third theory was presented by the occultists of the Victorian era; they claimed that elfin tribes evolved from grasses, reptiles, birds, the sea, and fauna. Fairies were said to be constantly evolving, just as humans continue to do, and ultimately they became higher-angels.

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<sup>33</sup> ---.

<sup>34</sup> ---.

<sup>35</sup> ---. 14

<sup>36</sup> ---.

Occultists and naturalists believed that fairies could assume any size they wanted and any shape, though they preferred 'natural' forms and colours of their own to form separate species. "Mountain fairies and plains fairies do not mate or mingle"<sup>37</sup> They had the appearance of small creatures with short hair and butterfly wings. Their bodies were made of a matter lighter than gas, and therefore, appear invisible<sup>38</sup>.

They were also believed to have little or no language or individuality, but the floral world is a result of the fairies diligent creation. Fairies were believed to live in the mountains, hills and mounds of the earth. The Victorians had the idea of a world within the earth. The fires that shone from the tops of their underground dwellings were believed to be the persistent myth of fairy-lights. When it came to the Flower fairies, they had evolved just so much as to perform their task and enjoy it. They were classed as subhuman because of their microscopic size and lower functions<sup>39</sup>.

As far as the popular appearance of fairies is concerned, Shakespeare has had a lot of influence in their portrayal. He can be said to be the discoverer of flower fairies, at least in appearance. Victorian painters used his plays as inspiration when painting the fairy-folk. When the first paintings, influenced by him, came out they started a huge trend and soon almost every established and non-established painter in the land used his plays and ancient Celtic folklore as inspiration for their motifs<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> ---. 54

<sup>38</sup> ---.

<sup>39</sup> ---.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Wood. *Fairies in Victorian Art*. (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd. 2007)

## 2. Analysis of Fairies in *Artemis Fowl* Compared to Folklore and Other Literature

### 2.1 Historical background

In *Artemis Fowl* the author's familiarity with Irish mythology is unmistakable, although Colfer was determined to make his fantasy different by forming non-stereotypical characters that lived in an advanced technological society<sup>41</sup>. In *Artemis Fowl and the Lost Colony*, Colfer briefly mentions a significant period of the fairies' history. In this text he depicts the reason why fairies no longer live above ground<sup>42</sup>. It is a clear parallel to the Celtic myth about the fate of the Tuatha De Danann. Colfer writes that 10.000 years ago fairies lived above ground amongst humans and other mythological beings, for instance centaurs and trolls. However a war broke out between the Mud People (humans) and the fairies. This was called the Irish War or the Battle of Tailte.<sup>43</sup>

Colfer further explains that fairies are not one species but actually eight, called the eight families. These families are elves, dwarves, pixies, gnomes, gremlins, goblins, sprites, and demons<sup>44</sup>. They are known as 'the People' and live their lives according to the book of the People, which will be mentioned more at length in paragraph 2.2. Although the fairies are much more technologically advanced they are defeated and forced to retreat. They reside underground to escape the destructiveness of the human race, where they have now resided for almost 10.000 years<sup>45</sup>.

In contrast to, for instance, J.R.R Tolkien and William Shakespeare, Colfer created a world underground for his fairies while the other two writers placed their fairy realm above ground in forestry surroundings connected to the earth instead of living under the earth.

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<sup>41</sup> Web source: <http://www.eoincolfer.com>. Retrieved on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>42</sup> Eoin, Colfer. *Artemis Fowl; the Lost Colony*. (London: Puffin Books. 2007)

<sup>43</sup> ---.

<sup>44</sup> ---.

<sup>45</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*. (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 2002)

The legend of the Tuatha De Danann explains that they also were defeated in war and forced to retreat underground. Here the connection to Colfer's cultural heritage concerning Celtic legends is very apparent. You can also see the inspiration from earlier fantasy literature, for instance William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and J.R.R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we are not privileged to know the origin of the fairies but it is very evident in *Lord of the Rings*. Here J.R.R Tolkien was adamant in creating a living history for all his characters, and especially his magnificent elves. In *the Return of the King* he writes that by the end of the third age the elves were leaving Middle Earth because the Age of Man was beginning<sup>46</sup>. Here you can clearly see the link to Colfer's fairies, which also leave earth but not in such an amiable fashion. As a result it is seen that both races of fairies gave the humans sole government over the earth, as did the Tuatha De Danann when they went underground to live.

## 2.2 Society and living

A great deal of the narration in *Artemis Fowl* takes place in or around Ireland; it is a vital background because of its vast amount of fairy legends<sup>47</sup>. Colfer state that when the fairies were driven from the surface 10.000 years ago they settled several hundred miles underground. Its inhabitants call this area the Lower Elements. Most of the fairies and other magical beings reside in a crowded urban city called Haven City, which is the capital of the Lower Elements. It is regarded as a great metropolis although it has less than 10.000 citizens. Haven City gets its name from the fact that it is considered to be one of the last havens for magical creatures<sup>48</sup>.

In the Lower Elements they enjoy the warmth of the Earth's core and artificial lightning illuminates the tunnels and chutes that make up their main road-system, which stretches to several different places all over the world with underground platforms at each end before reaching the surface of the Earth<sup>49</sup>. These chutes are filled with shuttles, functioning much like our public transportation.

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<sup>46</sup> J R R Tolkien. *Lord of the Rings; the Return of the King*. (London: Harpercollins Publishers. 2001)

<sup>47</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl Akten*. (Trans. Lisbet Holst. Sweden: Richters Förlag AB. 2004)

<sup>48</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

<sup>49</sup> ---.



They are used for guided tours, common transportation, and the Police. The shuttles are also used above ground to seek out other fairies or for reconnaissance missions<sup>50</sup>.

Fairies are very technologically advanced but still rely a great deal on their history, beliefs and magic. They live by a sacred book called ‘the Book of the People’ or ‘the Book’, which is the written history of their race and it contains the secrets of their magical powers. It is written in gnommish<sup>51</sup>, which is the fairy language. Originally it was written in spirals but this gave the readers migraine so it changed into our western version of reading, left-to-right and top-to-bottom. If a human touches the book without permission it will disintegrate and a fairy’s magic will fade<sup>52</sup>. Even though Colfer invented a functioning language to his fairies<sup>53</sup>, Tolkien gave his elfish languages more time and concern. He devoted his life to the creation of the magic of Middle Earth; he wrote extensively about the linguistics, mythology, and history of that world<sup>54</sup>, whilst Colfer simply invented a basic structure for his fairy language. Also he concentrated on a joint language for all species in the fairy family<sup>55</sup>, while Tolkien invented different languages and dialects for almost every creature he created<sup>56</sup>.

### **The Booke of the People**

Being instructions to our magicks and life rules.

Carry me always, carry me well.

I am thy teacher of herb and spell.

I am thy link to power arcane.

Forget me and thy magick shall wane.

Ten times ten commandments there be.

They will answer every mystery.

Cures, curses, alchemy.

These secrets shall be thine, through me.

But, fairy, remember this above all.

I am not for those in mud that crawl.

And forever doomed shall be the one,

who betrays my secrets one by one.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> ---.

<sup>51</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>52</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

<sup>53</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>54</sup> Verlyn Flieger & D A Anderson. *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*. (London, Harpercollins Publishing Ltd. 2008)

<sup>55</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

<sup>56</sup> Verlyn Flieger & D A Anderson

<sup>57</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*. 28

### 2.2.1 Government

The Lower Elements is a democratic republic with a council equivalent to our ‘Mud Men-politicians’, although council members are not voted in but are inaugurated on their merits and experiences from their field of work<sup>58</sup>. Evident here is another similarity to Tolkien’s elves that also depend on a counsel, which can be seen in *the Fellowship of the Ring*, when the fellowship destined to destroy the ring is formed<sup>59</sup>.

Haven City Council members are chiefly chosen from the Lower Elements Police (LEP), which is the official law enforcement agency and military force. Just like Mud Men, the LEP is divided into several units. They have the LEPrecon, which is the Lower Elements Police Reconnaissance. Their job consists of tracking down fairies that wander off to the surface without permission. They are the elite division in the LEP. Members of the squad are often called LEPrecons<sup>60</sup>; a word that Colfer used as a pun on the commonly used word for leprechaun. Leprechaun is one of the many names used for fairies throughout history; especially in Irish folklore<sup>61</sup>.

Another division in the LEP is the LEPretrieval (Lower Elements Retrieval Team); their job is to act upon information given to them from the LEPrecon and retrieve rouge fairies and trolls. It is said that every young fairy wants to work in LEPretrieval and wear their stealth black jumpsuits. Section Eight is a division which is a secret branch in the LEP similar to CIA or FBI. Their main job is to rehabilitate and look to the welfare of demons that materialize from Limbo<sup>62</sup>, a subject which will be mentioned more later in this essay. It is probably called Section Eight because demons are the eight family of fairies. Other divisions are the Telekinetic division, Internal Affairs, and LEPtraffic.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Eternity Code*. (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 2003)

<sup>59</sup> J R R Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring*. (London: HarperCollins Publishers. 2001)

<sup>60</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Foss

<sup>62</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Lost Colony*.

<sup>63</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl; the Arctic Incident*. (London; HarperCollins Publishers. 2003)

## 2.3 Characterisation

Colfer's fairies resemble the characters in traditional fairy tales or fantasy novels but they are an extremely stubborn and organized race. Action is the predominant theme associated with the supernatural characters in the *Artemis Fowl* series. This is in contrast to Tolkien's elves which chiefly rely on reflection and non-interference. Below, in the next few subchapters, most of the races within the fairy family will be described, with emphasis on elves and dwarfs.

### 2.3.1 Elves

In *Artemis Fowl* it is explained how elves are the first of the eight families and considered the most evolved. They are described as similar in appearance to humans but smaller. They reach a height of exactly 1 meter and 1 centimetre and they have pointy ears and chestnut-coloured skin<sup>64</sup>.

“Holly hooked the wings over a low branch, entrapping the helmet to give her ears some air. You had to be careful with elfin ears – a few hours in the helmet and they started to flake. She gave the tips a massage. No dry skin there. That was because she had a daily moisturizing regime, not like some of the male LEP officers. When they took off their helmets, you’d swear it had just started to snow”.<sup>65</sup>

Even though Tolkien's first fairies were traditional Victorian dancing fairies he later developed them into the grand and beautiful elves seen in *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings*<sup>66</sup>, Colfer's fairies still originate in the popular view of the Victorian age. He has depicted them as small, organised and joyful, also in the books they show no sign of evolving into the ancient depiction of the grand Tuatha De Danann or the elves of Middle Earth.

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<sup>64</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*

<sup>65</sup> ---, 72

<sup>66</sup> Verlyn Flieger & D A Anderson

Colfer's elves are believed to have had wings at one time in history but that they evolved and lost them<sup>67</sup>. This shows an even greater resemblance to the Shakespearian image and the Victorian ideal. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains "flower fairies"; tiny fairies with transparent wings that are depicted as mischievous and joyful<sup>68</sup>. Here we can also note similarities to James Barrie's fairies in the *Peter Pan* series; most notably Tinkerbell, with her small size, wings and stubborn nature<sup>69</sup>. Colfer's fairies now rely on artificial wings created by the centaur Foaly, a LEP technician and inventor. They also have the gift of tongues which allows them to speak any language and to any species<sup>70</sup>. Here again there is evidence of Shakespeare's influence in that his fairies are able to communicate with different species of animals and flowers<sup>71</sup>. Colfer's fairies can also vibrate at high speeds, which make them look invisible to other species.

Similar to Tolkien's elves they have a very long lifespan, although they are not immortal but very resistant to aging. Another similarity to Tolkien's elves is that they have the ability to heal themselves and others, but their magical powers can be depleted. When this happens, elves have to perform a ritual to replenish their powers, this is preferably done near Tara in Ireland which is considered to be the most magical place above ground<sup>72</sup>.

Among their other magical skills is the Mesmer. This is similar to hypnosis and enables elves to control their subjects. It takes very little magic to achieve this so elves are able to mesmerize someone even if their magical supply is all but depleted<sup>73</sup>. Here again there are similarities to Tolkien and Shakespeare. They both depicted their fairies and elves as having magical abilities, although these were mostly connected to the nature around them.

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<sup>67</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*

<sup>68</sup> William Shakespeare. "A Midsummer Night's Dream". 1592 or 1596. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. (New York: Avenel Books. 1975)

<sup>69</sup> James Barrie. "Peter Pan". 1904. *Peter Pan and Other Plays*. (Ed. Peter Hollindale. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1995)

<sup>70</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl; the Time Paradox*. (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 2008)

<sup>71</sup> William Shakespeare.

<sup>72</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

<sup>73</sup> ---.

Shakespeare describes the weather as being affected when Oberon and Titania argue in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*<sup>74</sup>, and Tolkien's elves are able to communicate with the gods of nature<sup>75</sup>.

Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea  
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land  
Have every pelting river made so proud  
That they have overborne their continents:<sup>76</sup>

Two elf characters that are frequently present in *Artemis Fowl* are Captain Holly Short and Commander Julius Root. Root and Holly worked together in the 'LEP' where Root was Holly's superior officer. Root is grumpy, strict and tough. While Holly is almost incapable of following rules, she is very talkative, stubborn, and sarcastic. Unfortunately the only description of Root's appearance is that when he gets angry and frustrated (which is often) his face always turns completely red. Therefore he is nicknamed "Beetroot". Holly on the other hand is portrayed as pretty, having auburn hair and hazel eyes. She has one inferiority complex and that is that she is only one metre tall, which is one centimetre shorter than other fairies<sup>77</sup>.

Holly dislikes most of her male superiors (except Julius Roots who she regards as almost a father figure), she feels that they are sexist and stupid. When it concerns the relationship between Root and Holly we can see two different sides of seriousness and merriness<sup>78</sup>. This can be seen as similar to Tolkien's more serious elves, such as Elrond, and the more frivolous elves, such as those at Rivendell<sup>79</sup>. In *Artemis Fowl* Holly Short represents the merriness and Commander Root the gravity between the two elves.

Holly Short has a lot working against her at the workplace, being the first ever female officer on the 'LEPrecon' squad. One of the reasons that she has a hard time following orders is that she does not agree with the rule that fairies live underground and humans above ground. Holly feels that fairies and other magical creatures should feel free to live on the surface.

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<sup>74</sup> William Shakespeare.

<sup>75</sup> J.R.R Tolkien. *Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring*. (London: HarperCollins Publishing. 2001)

<sup>76</sup> William Shakespeare. Act 2 scene 1.

<sup>77</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

<sup>78</sup> ---.

<sup>79</sup> J R R Tolkien. *Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring*.

She refers to the Lower Elements as a technologically advanced cave, although she would never do anything that would compromise the safety of her people<sup>80</sup>.

A work-ethic is very important to fairies. Though they may complain and argue they would all be willing to sacrifice their lives for each other<sup>81</sup>. Ironically, the magical beings appear to have more human traits of sympathy and solidarity than their human equivalents<sup>82</sup>.

### 2.3.2 Dwarfs

In *Artemis Fowl* they look like humans but are several decimetres shorter. They are also less proportional than elves and their traits are quite unusual. They love digging tunnels, and in order to do this they unhinge their jaws in order to chew the ground before them. They dig quickly and can cover vast distances in just a few minutes. Also, their spittle can be a sedative, when aimed at the right creatures. The spittle also has the peculiarity of hardening when it leaves the mouth; it also glows in the dark. This enables dwarves to light the tunnels as they dig<sup>83</sup>. Although they are part of the fairy family they are unconsciously looked down upon by the elves and the other species. Here Colfer may have deliberately joined dwarfs with the fairy family to distinguish them as worthy creatures in the eyes of others. The reason for his decision can be found in Tolkien's explanation to the origin of dwarfs. In his legendarium he states that elves and men were created by the god Illúvatar but dwarfs were not included in this and instead created by Aulë; they are therefore called the adopted children of Illúvatar<sup>84</sup>.

Dwarves also have very hoarse beard hair, which they can use as keys and antennas. They are able to do this because after a hair is plucked it goes into rigor mortis and stiffens, which makes it perfect for picking locks. However when the hair is still attached it can be used to detect vibrations around it, therefore acting like an antenna<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: The arctic incident*.

<sup>81</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: The Opal deception*. (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 2005)

<sup>82</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl Akten*.

<sup>83</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

<sup>84</sup> Verlyn Flieger & D A Anderson.

<sup>85</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Eternity Code*.

When it comes to the intake of water, dwarves absorb their fluid through pores on their body, and if they are without water for too long their pores will create a vacuum effect that allows them to scale high walls by sticking to it from the suction effect created<sup>86</sup>. This appearance of dwarfs can be traced back to folklore and the Victorian theories stated earlier.

Dwarves are particularly well-known for their enormously profound flatulence and their body odour is quite awful. They are extremely sensitive to sunlight and if they are exposed to it directly for more than three minutes they can self-combust. In addition to this they also hate fire and ice.<sup>87</sup> This is in contrast to Tolkien's dwarfs who are able to withstand both heat and cold<sup>88</sup>.

One of the characters that appear in every one of the six *Artemis Fowl* books is the dwarf Mulch Diggums. He is a kleptomaniac dwarf on the run from the LEP. Stealing from Mud Men in particular is his specialty. Dwarves are especially adept at thievery because of their tunnelling capabilities, and because many of their body parts can be used in various strange ways aiding them in their profession<sup>89</sup>.

Most dwarves work as builders and diggers in the Lower elements, where they do what they are asked and have no real interest in anything other than digging beautiful tunnels and finding deliciously tasting soil which dwarves consider a delicacy<sup>90</sup>. Here Colfer's connection to ancient myths and legends concerning dwarfs is evident, he has taken the myth that dwarfs are mine builders and rough creatures and developed them somewhat in order to contemporize the story and give them a less grave demeanour.

In the series some dwarfs long to be able to roam among humans and live above ground. This is the cause of many of the conflicts Diggums has had with the LEP. In the second book, *the Arctic Incident*, he creates an alias and calls himself "the Grouch". Under that name he becomes infamous for trying to steal all Academy Award trophies from Mud Men actors and nearly getting away with it. He undertakes this endeavour because he feels the need to be notorious and legendary<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl; the Eternity Code*.

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<sup>88</sup> Verlyn Flieger & D A Anderson

<sup>89</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

<sup>90</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: The Opal deception*

<sup>91</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Eternity Code*.

### 2.3.3 Pixies

Pixies appear to be more child-like and shorter than elves. They have large brains and as a result most of them are very intelligent. Their skulls are also very fragile which makes them extremely careful about what they do with their heads and how they carry themselves. Because of this bodily defect they are more susceptible to maladies such as catatonia, amnesia and narcolepsy<sup>92</sup>. Pixies also have the same magical powers as elves.

The most prominent pixie in the *Artemis Fowl* series is Opal Koboi, she is the antagonist and arch-enemy of Artemis Fowl who is the protagonist of the series. Opal is described as an evil genius and an insane, power-mad pixie. She is extremely self-assured, which most pixies are, and loves to brag about how smart she is<sup>93</sup>. Opal contributes to Colfer's idea that fairies basically are as bad as us but fight dirtier. The name Koboi actually sounds like "cowboy" and "Kobold". Kobold is a temperamental sprite in German folklore who becomes outraged when he is not fed and he is also referred to as a spirit of caves and mines. This illustrates why the name perfectly fits the gold-digger Opal Koboi<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> Ryle, Cameron. *Opal and Artemis on the run*. (Toronto Star. April 28, 2005). Retrieved December 13<sup>th</sup> 2008.

<sup>93</sup> Eoin Colfer., *Artemis Fowl; the Eternity Code*.

<sup>94</sup> Katarina Lindve. *A Study on the Artemis Fowl Series in the Context of Publishing Success*. (Mälardalen University 2007)



### 2.3.4 Goblins and Demons

Goblins are the most dim-witted of all fairies; they are described as incapable of thinking up brilliant schemes. They are very easily manipulated and are often seen as henchmen to ‘bad guys’. In folklore the word ‘goblin’ has been used to describe all small mischievous creatures; fairies being one of them<sup>95</sup>. In Western folklore they are described as naughty and malicious sprites<sup>96</sup>. The goblins in *Artemis Fowl* are violent and power hungry and have the ability to conjure fireballs in their hands or shoot fire from their nostrils. They generally have green skin and horrid breath and no eyelids which forces them to lick their eyes in order to keep the eyes from dying and falling out.<sup>97</sup>

Demons are introduced a few books into the series; they are present in the fifth and sixth book. They are born as small elf-like beings with grey skin, stumpy tails and some of them have reddish runes on their heads and bodies. When they are at this stage of development, they are called imps, but when they reach a certain level of bloodlust, they transform through a cocoon procedure called warping, and then turn into large beasts (demons) with horns, pointy ears, tough plates on their skin, and extreme physical strength.<sup>98</sup> In folklore demons are believed to be fallen angels of a malevolent nature<sup>99</sup> and Colfer has taken this myth and made his demons both good and evil; he gave them a conscience. A separate set of demons are Warlocks, which are imps that never evolve through the warping process. These warlocks possess the strongest magic of all fairies<sup>100</sup>.

When the fairies were defeated at the Battle of Tailte the demons, which are the eighth fairy family, decided not to follow their fellow comrades underground, but instead transported their island, Hybras, to Limbo. Qwan, the mightiest of the warlocks, set out to do a spell in order to lift Hybras out of time but something went wrong and the demons were transported without the warlocks. They have now lived in Limbo for over 10.000 years without knowing their full history and without having the knowledge of a better life<sup>101</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> Arthur Cotterell

<sup>96</sup> Web source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/236584/goblin>, retrieved on January 18th 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Arctic incident*.

<sup>98</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Lost Colony*.

<sup>99</sup> Carol K Mack. Dinah Mack. *Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits* (USA: Arcade Publishing. 2007)

<sup>100</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Lost Colony*

<sup>101</sup> ---.

### 2.3.5 Gnomes, Sprites, and Gremlins

Gnomes are known to be short and overweight in *Artemis Fowl*, but on rare occasions tall and skinny gnomes have been known to exist<sup>102</sup>. In European folklore gnomes are described as dwarf-like creatures, usually small and hunchbacked<sup>103</sup>. Gnomes appear very rarely in the *Artemis Fowl* series, therefore we are not privileged to too much information about them.

Sprites and gremlins are also mentioned rarely, although sprites are described as elflike creatures with wings and green skin. They have the fastest reflexes of any type of fairy, they also posses limited healing abilities and the gift of tongues<sup>104</sup>. In folklore a sprite is a common name for many elf-like creatures such as fairies, dwarfs, etc. Sweden has a myth about “Näcken” (Water Sprite or Sea Sprite) who is often seen near water and has many appearances, the most common of which is a naked man playing beautiful music on his violin, luring people down into the water.<sup>105</sup> Colfer however made his sprites good and kind instead of malicious<sup>106</sup>.

In *Artemis Fowl* we are not privileged to any information about Gremlins except that they work in one of the divisions in the LEP.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Opal Deception*

<sup>103</sup> Web source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/236317/gnome>. Retrieved on January 18th 2009.

<sup>104</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Opal Deception*.

<sup>105</sup> Web source: [http://www.morion.com/morion/wood/english/FRAME\\_english.html](http://www.morion.com/morion/wood/english/FRAME_english.html). retrieved on January 18th 2009)

<sup>106</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl: the Opal Deception*.

<sup>107</sup> Eoin Colfer. *Artemis Fowl*.

## Summary and Conclusion

The Celts believed that fairies were an ancient Irish society called the Tuatha De Danann which left Ireland to settle in Greece, where they learned the art of magic. They then returned to Ireland and ruled for many years until they were defeated in battle. The Tuatha De Danann then went underground to live in the tombs and mounds they had built. Out of sight they became less significant in the popular view until they turned into small fairies. Eoin Colfer's fairies also fought in a grand battle in Ireland 10.000 years ago and lost. They then went underground to live near the core of the earth where they remain even to this day. One difference between the Tuatha De Danann and Colfer's fairies is the difference in appearance. Here Colfer took information from the ancient Celts and information from Shakespeare and the Victorian era and created his own fairies. They were shorter than the Tuatha and taller than the Victorian flower fairies that became increasingly popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Colfer included eight different mythological species into his fairy family, these were; elves, dwarfs, demons, goblins, sprites, pixies, gremlins, and gnomes. This inclusion depicts Colfer's imagination in view of visualizing something new and exciting in the world of fiction. He also developed a common language for all species, called Gnommish. In this we see both differences and similarities to J.R.R Tolkien's languages present in Middle Earth. To every species imagined by Tolkien he created a different language and dialect, which could signify a sense of self and not of inclusion. I believe that Colfer gave his characters something in common, a shared family and history, while Tolkien's characters have shared history but not a shared family or a shared sense of belonging.

If we again look at the Tuatha, they were believed, in Wales, to be a race of invisible spiritual beings. Here we see the connection to Colfer's elves, who also can appear invisible. Although the Tuatha probably could become completely invisible while Colfer's elves rely on their ability to vibrate at very high speeds which makes them look invisible.

The Celts also talked about a place called the Otherworld, which was a series of Islands which contained mounds called "fairy mounds", where according to medieval legends fairies emerged to kidnap and tease men and women.

Colfer also uses “mounds” in *Artemis Fowl* but instead of being prehistoric dirt hills, they are highly technological platforms and shuttle exits situated directly under the surface. These shuttles are the means of transportation for Colfer’s fairies stretching from the tunnel-chutes down to the underground cities of Haven City and Atlantis in the Lower Elements.

When it comes to the appearance of fairies they are described, throughout history, as having the appearance of humans and especially during the Victorian era they were described as small humanoids with tiny butterfly wings. Colfer’s elves have the appearance of humans but with pointy ears and chestnut coloured skin. When it comes to wings, the elves are believed to have possessed them at one point in time but they evolved and finally lost them, they now rely on artificial wings. Colfer’s sprites on the other hand still have their wings and are smaller than the elves. This shows the big influence that the Victorian era has had on modern myth.

The Victorian era lasted from 1837 to approximately 1901 and was a period much focused on history, culture and the supernatural. Many famous people and scientists believed that there were fairies living among them. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the darker side of a fairy’s manner was highlighted, they were frequently described as mischievous. This changed slowly and by the middle of the century the most popular belief was that they were flower fairies, living in the forests talking to animals and experiencing a joyful existence. This was mostly due to Shakespeare’s depiction of fairies in his popular plays staged throughout the century. Tolkien also placed his elves in forest surroundings, linking them to the earth. Colfer on the other hand has situated his fairies in the middle of the Earth but made them very technologically advanced. They reside in very humanistic environments, within a democratic republic. Keeping the safety of the Lower Elements are the police and military called LEP (Lower Elements Police). This underground society can also be found in the beliefs of the Victorians. They believed that lights seen on top of mounds and hills were fairy-lights from their underground dwellings.

Some Victorian scientists believed that fairies had originated in ancient societies. Sir Walter Scott claimed that their prototype were dwarfs, also called gnomes and these were described as being the same as pixies, leprechauns, and other elves living in the rocks, caves, and soil. Dwarfs were depicted as short, hairy smiths and magicians living in the earth and were the rulers of metals and mines. Both Tolkien and Colfer have taken this myth and made it their own.

Tolkien had a more literal interpretation, making his dwarfs mineworkers and keeping the appearance much as it originally was, except that instead of including dwarfs in the fairy family he divided their origin. Colfer on the other hand included dwarfs in the fairy family much like the Victorian belief. He also kept the appearance of dwarfs as it was but evolved their occupation somewhat. He still made them earth-workers but they live in the Lower Elements working with digging tunnels for the inhabitants. They are also quite mischievous and prone to thievery because of their special skills and bodily functions.

While writing this essay I found several similarities between Tolkien and Colfer, so as a suggestion for future research it would be interesting to do a comparison between Tolkien's Middle Earth and Colfer's Lower Elements.

As mentioned before, Eoin Colfer's cultural heritage is very present when it concerns his depiction of fairies, even if he has developed some new traits for them and moved them into the present, giving them a technological base and democratic view of the world. When reading *Artemis Fowl*, magical fairies flying all over the world in advanced shuttles, using sophisticated weapons, and mingling unseen among the human population, seems like a natural event. You feel forced to read one book after the other, since the characters will mesmerize you and draw you into their fascinating world. Colfer found inspiration in many places and eras but still reinvented fairies to fit the modern world.

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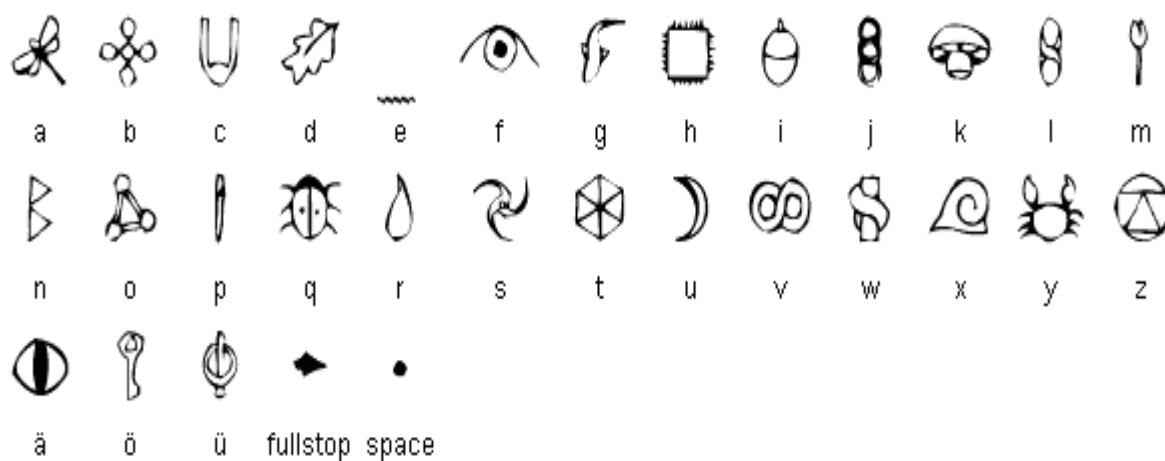
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## Appendix

### Appendix 1:

#### The Gnomish Alphabet



(<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/gnommish.htm>) 2008-12-14