

Twilight of the Godlings: The Shadowy Beginnings of Britain's Supernatural Beings

Francis Young

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Nuanced and complex, *Twilight of the Godlings* is Francis Young's history of pagan deities and supernatural creatures in Britain, where ancient British, ancient Roman, and medieval Christian beliefs melded and took on numerous forms. Fauns, nymphs, elves, and fairies populate the book alongside various renditions of the three Fates and their folkloric reimaginings.

Though some periods in ancient history are characterized by scant evidence, Young uses a variety of academic disciplines and their tools to trace the evolution of "little gods" in British history, beginning with the pre-Roman time period. Young discards certain hypotheses, such as the notion that contemporary fairy folk are direct preservations of pagan gods, citing a lack of evidence. Instead, Young argues for a less linear descent, whereby earlier folkloric beings were transformed through their contact with Christianity, sometimes occupying demonic spaces in the interim. Literary and theological influences also gave shape to contemporary fairy folk, with Arthurian legends and medieval encyclopedias of creatures contributing in turn.

Packed with keen observations and insights, each chapter traces a particular epoch of history: ancient Britain, Roman Britain, early Christian Britain (which nonetheless maintained some very non-Christian beliefs in nymphs), medieval Christian Britain, and the transformation of fairy beliefs in a contemporary context. Ending with ruminations on the relationship between fairy folk, aliens, and cryptids, Young asserts that people's relationships with godlings can reveal much about humanity and its relationships with the natural world (as godlings are often associated with springs, hills, and groves).

Twilight of the Godlings utilizes centuries' worth of folkloric, literary, and archaeological evidence to provide as complete an accounting as possible of the demonic, godly, and faerie creatures thought to populate Britain's forests.

JEANA JORGENSEN (July / August 2023)

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