



# Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness

*Carole G. Silver*

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Teeming with creatures, both real and imagined, this encyclopedic study in cultural history illuminates the hidden web of connections between the Victorian fascination with fairies and their lore and the dominant preoccupations of Victorian culture at large. Carole Silver here draws on sources ranging from the anthropological, folkloric, and occult to the legal, historical, and medical. She is the first to anatomize a world peopled by strange beings who have infiltrated both the literary and visual masterpieces and the minor works of the writers and painters of that era.

Examining the period of 1798 to 1923, *Strange and Secret Peoples* focuses not only on such popular literary figures as Charles Dickens and William Butler Yeats, but on writers as diverse as Thomas Carlyle, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Charlotte Mew; on artists as varied as mad Richard Dadd, Aubrey Beardsley, and Sir Joseph Noel Paton; and on artifacts ranging from fossil skulls to photographs and vases. Silver demonstrates how beautiful and monstrous creatures--fairies and swan maidens, goblins and dwarfs, cretins and changelings, elementals and pygmies--simultaneously peopled the Victorian imagination and inhabited nineteenth-century science and belief. Her book reveals the astonishing complexity and fertility of the Victorian consciousness: its modernity and antiquity, its desire to naturalize the supernatural, its pervasive eroticism fused with sexual anxiety, and its drive for racial and imperial dominion.

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