

Fall 12-5-2018

The Wailing Spirits: How Banshees Reflect an Ever-Changing View of Women in Society

Brianna Leonard

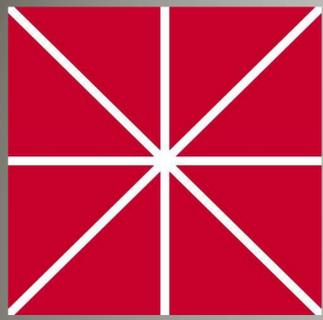
Chapman University, brleonard@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts

 Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Works Cited Byrne, Vincent. "Legend of the Banshee." Celtic Wedding Rings, www.celtic-weddingrings.com/celtic-mythology/legend-of-the-banshee. Claddagh Design. "Ireland's Best Known Spirit – The Banshee." Claddagh Design, 12 March 2018, <https://www.claddaghdesign.com/history/irelands-best-known-spirit-the-banshee/>. Crofton Croker, Thomas. Bunworth Banshee. 1825. *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, p. 110. Geller. "Banshee." Mythology.net, <https://mythology.net/mythical-creatures/banshee/>. Hewitt, Les. "The Banshee – Celtic Messengers of Death." *Historic Mysteries*, 13 Dec. 2015, <https://www.historicmysteries.com/banshee/>. rareAdmin. "The Banshee." *RareIrishStuff.com*, 29 Oct. 2017, <https://www.rareirishstuff.com/blog/the-banshee-.5543.html>. "The Banshee." *Irish Fairies*, <http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/explorer/banshee.html>.



The Wailing Spirits: How Banshees Reflect an Ever-Changing View of Women in Society

Presenter: Brianna Leonard
Advisor: Dr. Eileen Jankowski
Course: FFC 100-27

Origins and History

The legend of banshees began with **keeners**, women in 8th-century Ireland who were hired to sing lamentations at funerals to inspire others to grieve. The good keeners were paid handsomely, but the best were reserved for Ireland's most powerful families, who claimed they were "bean sidhe," or fairy women, who came out to sing only for their families. Some keeners, however, accepted alcohol as payment for their services, and were seen as sinners for doing so. Some sources believe that because they were seen as sinners, they were doomed by society to become banshees after death. However, according to most cases, banshee lore did not become popular until the 14th century.



Appearance Over Time

Over time, banshees have been interpreted as appearing in many different ways, often looking 2 opposite ways during the same era. In Celtic lore, banshees have appeared as many of the following:

- Ugly, old, gray-haired hag with rotting teeth
- Young, pale, red-haired woman
- Stately matron-type

These are the 3 main appearances of banshees in Celtic lore, and these represent the triple aspects of the Celtic goddess of war and death, Morrigan.

Reflection On Women

Now, banshees vary in depictions from being living, powered teenagers ("Teen Wolf," pictured to the left) to being monsters to who eat brains ("Supernatural"). Back in medieval times, women were there to take care of the family, not themselves, and if they defied this, then they were outcast by society. The way banshees appeared in medieval lore represented the main stereotypes of women at the time: young and beautiful, then a mother, then old and haggard, but always wailing and crying. Banshees nowadays can be anything from powerful women to cannibalistic monsters, a shift that shows us how the stereotypes of women have changed over time, for better or for worse.

