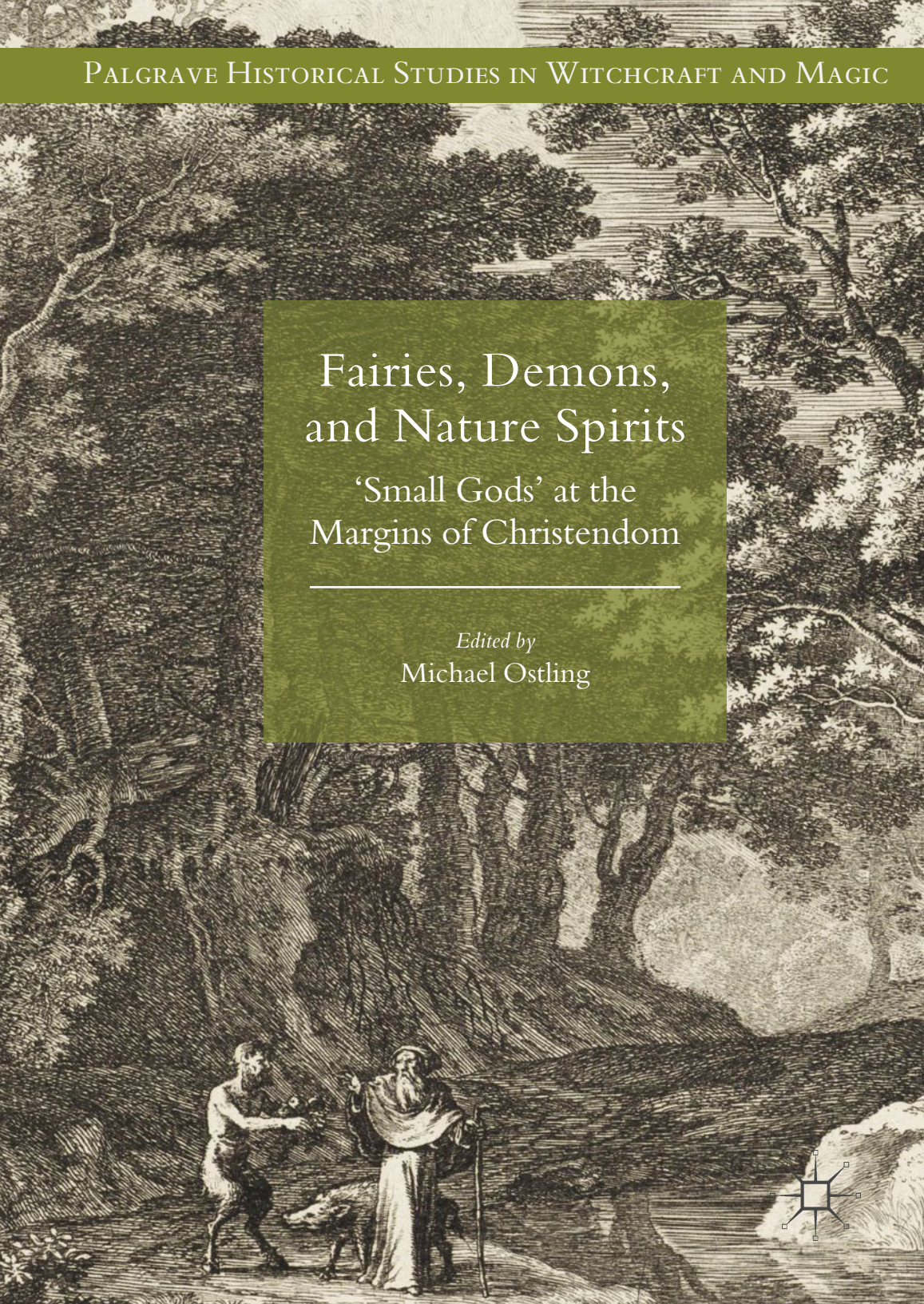
Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic

Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits

'Small Gods' at the Margins of Christendom

Edited by
Michael Ostling



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Michael Ostling
Editor

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'Small Gods' at the Margins of Christendom

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For Kosma, Abraham and Eliasz

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Editors and Contributors

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Where've All the Good People Gone?

Michael Ostling

They now commingle with the coward angels,
the company of those who were not rebels
nor faithful to their God, but stood apart
The heavens, that their beauty not be lessened,
have cast them out, nor will deep Hell receive them—
even the wicked cannot glory in them

—Dante, *Inferno* 3.39–44

They don't exist
Except in our imaginations
Which aren't any less real
Than the lives that we're making.

—Nathan K., "Ghosts"

Introduction

A fairy tale haunts the foundation of my discipline, religious studies. In a central passage of the book which was to set the agenda for religious studies for the next half-century, Mircea Eliade recounts the story of a

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south Slavic villager who had slipped and fallen from a cliff on the eve of his wedding, dying from his injuries. A few decades sufficed to transform this "commonplace tragedy" into a ballad rich in mythic allusion: the young man had been loved by a *vila*, a mountain fairy, who pushed him from the cliff in a jealous rage. Everyone in the village except the would-be bride—including several eyewitnesses to the events in question—preferred the eternal, archetypal, mythic version embodied in the folk ballad to the prosaic incidents of actual history: "It was the myth that told the truth: the real story was already a falsification."[1]

Eliade draws from this anecdote wide implications about the "resistance to history exhibited by traditional spirituality" and thus by *homo religiosus* more generally.[2] His fairy story is intended to illustrate the ahistoricism of the mythic mode, which folds the ephemeralities of contingent events into timeless structures of meaning. We need not follow Eliade's lead on this point. The present volume intends to inject fairies (and goblins, brownies, *huacas*, *motobil*, *seti*, *huldufólk*, *tont*, *banakaka*, etc.) firmly back into space and time and context—into history and culture. Whatever other ontological status they may or may not have, for the purposes of this book such creatures are created in discourse; through argument, ritual, gossip, and sermon; by scientific, theological, and magical contestations of their being. Discourses both religious and scholarly tend to expel them from this temporal world, but by focusing on these indubitably human discourses themselves we return the small gods to the ever-changing human world.

In examining "small gods," we explore an unfrequented scholarly backwater. Compared to the vast ocean of demonology, which Stuart Clark has demonstrated to have been an inexhaustible resource for thinking about history and politics and science and gender in early modern Europe, fairy lore resembles a nymph-haunted forest pool, reed bordered and shallow. Few of the rituals, texts or traditions examined in the present volume put fairies and their ilk at center stage: instead one finds allusions, illustrative examples, metaphors, asides. Small gods are found in the margins. And yet these margins illuminate not only the folklore of fairies but also larger questions of continuity and change, tradition and modernity, indigenous religion and its redefinition, under Christianity, as paganism, diabolism, or old wives' tale.

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[1] Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 145–146.

[2] Ibid.

Scholars from a number of disciplines have begun to ask interesting questions of the "small gods" in recent years. David Frankfurter's ground-breaking work on the ancient Mediterranean area has illuminated the importance of scribal practices (Babylonian, Judaic, and especially Christian) for the condensation of demonic taxonomy from the ephemeral mists of folk belief.[3] The discipline of "monstrophy" has allowed Medieval Studies to cast fresh eyes on the social, racial, and religious geographies of Christianity in the age of the Grail romances (and the Crusades).[4] Early modernists have found angels, demons, and ghosts especially helpful for understanding the European Christian colonial imagination and indigenous resistance to it;[5] a similar dynamic of mission or reform characterizes Catholic and Protestant clerical encounter with vernacular culture in Europe itself.[6] Bringing things up to the twenty-first century, anthropologists of Christianity are following paths pioneered by Charles Stewart and Joel Robbins, finding in Christian reformulations of indigenous "small gods" a fertile ground for inquiry about the nature of Christianization across the globe.[7] Scholars in these wide-ranging fields have not always talked to each other: one goal of this book is to initiate such a cross-disciplinary conversation. But first we must ask (and fail to answer) a basic question: What is a small god?

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[3] Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*; "Where the Spirits Dwell."

[4] Cohen, "Monster Culture"; Mittman, "Introduction"; Steel, "Centaurs, Satyrs, and Cynocephali."

[5] Brauner, "Cannibals"; Cervantes, *Devil in the New World*; Mills and Grafton, eds., *Conversion*; Marshall and Walsham, eds., *Angels*; Redden, *Diabolism*; Braham, "Monstrous Caribbean."

[6] Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf*; Green, *Elf Queens*; Goodare, "Seely Wights"; "Boundaries"; Hutton, "Witch-Hunting"; "Early Modern Fairy"; Marshall, "Protestants and Fairies"; Ostling, *Devil and the Host*; Ostling and Forest, "Goblins, Owles and Sprites"; Wilby, *Cunning Folk*.

[7] Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*; "Creolization"; Stewart and Shaw, eds., *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*; Robbins, "Dispossessing the Spirits"; "Globalization"; "Enchanting Science"; Chua, "Conversion"; Harvey, ed. *Contemporary Animism*; Blanes and Espírito Santo, eds., *Social Life of Spirits*; Wood, "Spirits of the Forest"; Telban, "Struggle with Spirits."

What Is a "Small God"?

This book was inspired by a failed attempt at translation. While researching the representation of witches and witchcraft in early modern Poland, I happened across a peculiar line of verse from the picaresque drama *Nędza z Biedą z Polski idą* (*Poverty and Dearth Depart from Poland*, ca. 1624). An old woman is chasing away the titular personifications of misfortune with a curse:

Wędruy do wszystkich skrabłów, piekielny kozubie	Be off with you to all the *skrabłów*, you infernal smokestack
A to was lada zły duch po zadnicy skubie	Where any old evil spirit can bite you in the ass [8]

The untranslated word above (its reconstructed, unattested nominative singular would be **skrabeł* or **skrzabeł*) seems to have been formed as a portmanteau of *diabeł* (devil) and *skrzatek* (hobgoblin, house-elf, brownie).[9] This untranslatable *skrzabeł* came to embody an issue central to my work on Polish witchcraft: the complex and contradictory ways in which indigenous, local folklores articulate with cosmopolitan Christian demonology.[10] The present project explores such hybrid articulations across a wider European and indeed global arena, and through two millennia of Christianization. Ever since the earliest Gospel repurposed Jesus's exorcism of a local ghoul as a symbolic expulsion of the occupying Roman legions,[11] the redefinition of indigenous spirits has been a fruitful method of Christian self-construction.

The *skrzabeł*'s conflation of goblins and devils also calls to mind a more famous failure of translation: Margaret Murray's derivation of *devil* not from its true root in the New Testament or Septuagint διάβολος ("accuser, slanderer"), but from a diminution of the Latin root *div*

8Anonymous, *Nędza z Biedą*, 4r.

9We find a similarly hybrid "skrzatek czart" [hobgoblin devil] in an early eighteenth-century witch trial: see Pilaszek, *Procesy*, 439. For the range of overlapping meanings of *skrzatek* in Polish folkloric materials, see Dżwigoł, *Słownictwo mitologiczne*, 23–24.

10Ostling, *Devil and the Host*, 195–237.

11Mark 5:9, and see Crossan, *Jesus*, 88–91.

(whence "divine" and "divinity"). The devil was thus, on Murray's interpretation, a "small god," affectionately so named by his devotees, the witches.[12] Though her etymology was faulty and her conclusions untenable, Murray's assertion points toward a fruitful field of inquiry: the "ontological preservation" of local ghosts and goblins within the universalizing Christian framework.[13] Although *devil* never really meant *small god*, Christian thinkers have characteristically re-labeled small gods as devils. This book attempts to transcend the usual modes of understanding such conflation of devils with local small gods: the theological mode of collapsing the distinction entirely into its infernal component, and the folkloric mode of disambiguation, recovering the indigenous fairy from underneath its devil mask. In preference to such attempts to capture the thing itself, we will want to analyze such strategies of categorization as moments in Christian and post-Christian self-definition. We will attempt to listen with equal care to those voices tending to venerate, negotiate with, or appease the small gods as to those which demonize them—confining them to hell, marginalizing them in the past or the countryside, or denying their real existence altogether.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen declares that a related type of creature, the monster, is an object of "pure culture," that it "always signifies something other than itself."[14] This goes too far: elves and their ilk are often metaphors, allegories, indices for credulity or exoticism or evil or the wild; but they are also, sometimes for some people, real beings with whom real people understand themselves to interact. From the subjectively real experience of sleep paralysis that may lie behind some accounts of incubus and nightmare attack, to the "tangible, embodied, felt experiences" by which contemporary Borneans sense the presence of local spirits, small gods are often less believed in than encountered as real.[15] Nevertheless, Cohen is right to emphasize that monsters (and fairies,

[12] Murray, "Witchcraft," 91.

[13] Robbins, "Crypto-Religion," 421.

[14] Cohen, "Monster Culture," 4.

[15] Sacks, *Hallucinations*; Davies, "Nightmare Experience"; Dudley and Goodare, "Outside In or Inside Out"; Chua, "Soul Encounters," 7; Aragon; "Missions and Ommisions"; Magliocco, this volume. I take this subjective reality to be the point of Nathan K.'s "Ghosts," noted in the epigraph.

skrzatkowie and *vile*) are *more* cultural than are many other culturally constructed objects of taxonomy. Unlike a river[16] or a bird[17] or even so culturally mediated an entity as a witch,[18] small gods cannot, in general, be pointed to: whatever private self-revelation they might occasionally vouchsafe to this or that person, their interpersonal reality exists *only* insofar as they are culturally categorized and conversed about. As Roger Lohmann notes, "We cannot show our friends a spirit the way we can show them a rock."[19] For Diane Purkiss, this inherent indeterminacy of the small gods is what makes them so useful for insider metacultural reflection and for scholarly analysis of that reflection: "The ontological dubiety of fairies is precisely what makes them natural and even inevitable symbols of other things that cannot be said, or cannot be acknowledged, or cannot be believed."[20] As Olivia Harris argues in a related context, uncertainties and contestations (both emic and etic) on such points should be treated as an opportunity not an obstacle, as pointing toward something interesting about fairies as such and about Christianity itself as the site of their perennially repeated denial and revival.[21]

The chapters below encounter fairy-like beings in a bewildering array of contexts: from fifth-century Egyptian exorcistic charms to twelfth-century German vernacular poetry, seventeenth-century Scottish natural history, nineteenth-century Estonian folkloristics, thence back again to exorcism, this time in twenty-first-century Zambia and the Amazon. The variety of beings considered and the diversity of sources used—philological and demonological, folkloric and ethnographic—threatens to mire the project in insurmountable methodological difficulties before it is fairly begun. The first and most pressing question raised is also the simplest: What counts as a "small god"? What commonality justifies treating,

[16]We have known since Saussure that *river* ≠ *fleuve*, the English term contrasting by size to *stream* while the French contrasts by outflow to *rivière*; yet speakers of both languages have only the most trivial difficulties understanding the semantic extension of the two terms.

[17]Avian taxonomy cannot be separated from symbolic systems, as Bulmer reminds us in his seminal "Why Is a Cassowary Not a Bird?"

[18]From a vast literature, see Christina Larner's classical statement about the witch as ascriptive category: Larner, "Crime of Witchcraft"; cf. Jackson, "Witch as a Category."

[19]Lohmann, "Supernatural," 178.

[20]Purkiss, "Sounds of Silence," 83.

[21]Harris, "Eternal Return," 52; cf. Ostling and Forest, "Goblins, Owles and Sprites."

say, the mischievous Scottish brownies and Polish *skrzatkowie* alongside the Sicilian "ladies from outside," the French forest *follets*, or the noble courts of *áes síde* in the fairy mounds of Ireland—to say nothing of the *motobil* and *bataliya* of Papua New Guinea, the *seti* of Sulawesi, the Andean *huacas*, the demon snakes of Zambia? It will be difficult to proceed, or indeed to begin, without some preliminary answer to this question.

We have here to do with what G. S. Kirk has mischievously described as the problem of the red-headed girls. Confronting questions about what stories should count as myths, scholars often propose Platonic Ideas of "true myth" that misleadingly, Kirk argues, allow them to:

> go straight for the essence without first consciously considering and delimiting the instances. That is one sort of defining process, but not one to which we can resort in the case of myths. It might be possible so to approach, say, the character of red-headed girls, because at least there is no doubt (if we ignore the problem of marginal cases) about what red-headed girls are and which are the red-headed ones. In the case of myths we do not know that to begin with.[22]

All the more so with goblins, fairies, and the many other beings that I have so far lumped together under the umbrella term "small god." Attempts to find the "essence" of such beings lead very quickly into trouble. Consider the example of a concrete (if fictional) red-headed girl: Pippi Longstocking. It would not be difficult to show that Pippi fits many standard definitional characteristics of the goblin: she appears and disappears suddenly, spends a great deal of time in a hollow tree, guards vast hordes of treasure with which she rewards those who show her proper respect; she abducts children, displays disproportionate strength, combines capricious destructive tendencies with an inclination to clean house, and so on.[23] And yet one might doubt the value of a definition, or even a constellation of motifs, which places a character such as Pippi into the "small god" category when no one has traditionally so treated her.

It won't do to confine ourselves to "supernatural spirits," a recondite Christian theological category foreign to many vernacular Christians. As

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[22] G. S. Kirk, *Nature of Greek Myths*, 20.

[23] Astrid Lindgren, *Pippi Longstocking*. With just a little imaginative work, similar arguments could be made for other red-headed girls, such as Anne of Green Gables.

Lorraine V. Aragon has argued, the beings with whom the Indonesian Tobaku people interact are locally conceived of as having thoroughly "natural" powers: a *seta*'s animal metamorphosis, for example, is no more (or less) extraordinary than a caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly.[24] Turning from supernature to "nature spirits" seems more promising: the *motobil* and *isan-ese* and *aiyalma* of New Guinea, the Russian *leshii*, the French *follets*, the ancient *satyrs* and *fauns* and *silvani*, the Biblical *sĕʿīrīm*, the *selkies* and *finnfolk* of Scotland, the Cornish *pixie*—all inhabit forests or deserts or swamps, wild mountains or turbulent seas; all represent the dangers but also the bounty of undomesticated wilderness. However, the beings studied here are as often domestic as wild, more comfortable behind the stove or in the attic or a roadside shrine than in the desert or forest or ocean. For if fairies and their ilk are marginal or exotic in some senses, in others they stubbornly remain within domestic space (conceptual and otherwise): they are "distant strangers in the very vicinity of home, living across the field from the farmhouse and yet in another world."[25]

One is tempted to make their indefinability definitional of the small gods. As David Frankfurter has cogently argued, "in the local landscapes where people really tangle with demons […], there is actually little or no organization or system to these beliefs" until they are systematized under the influence of scribal elites.[26] Mark Harris makes a similar argument concerning the *encantados* of riverine Brazil: they do not form a "stable cosmological order. Instead there are a range of entities around which meanings gather."[27] The same is true elsewhere. Despite the cataloguing tendencies of missionaries, exorcists, demonologists, anthropologists, folklorists, and historians, folk demons "flow into one another";[28] their characteristic "motifs wander quite freely" between various named beings,[29] to such a degree that "very often taxonomic categories misrepresented the beliefs of a given area."[30]

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[24] Aragon, "Missions and Omissions"; see also Espírito Santo and Blanes, "Introduction," 13–15.

[25] Hafstein, "Elves' Point of View," 89.

[26] Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, 13.

[27] Harris, "Enchanted Entities," 114.

[28] Brückner, *Mitologia polska*, 218.

[29] Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa*, part 1 vol. 2s. 494.

[30] Young, "Against Taxonomy," 223.

Even within relatively circumscribed literary traditions and despite scribal efforts at consolidation and organization, "small gods" tend to remain ambivalent and ambiguous. As Noel Williams argues through a painstaking study of the word "fairy" and its cognates in medieval English texts, the term "exists as a fuzzy point on not one but several intersecting continua"; so much so that analysis of that fuzzy point "serves only to disguise the continua and distort the object of study."[31] Jacqueline Simpson, reviewing a much narrower set of sources than here assayed, reminds us that the "range and contradictoriness" of fairy beliefs is a partial artifact of too wide a comparative framework: "no single community held all of them at once."[32] But she also notes that the "contradictoriness" of the fairies across many cultures and centuries forms, as it were, one of their most stable attributes: they consistently escape the procrustean categories into which demonologists, poets and folklorists attempt to place them. Simpson emphasizes the theodicean utility of these evasive beings. And yet if "the ambiguity of elves had its uses,"[33] these extend well beyond theodicy. Indeed, as I will endeavor to demonstrate, the question "What is a small god?" cannot be answered even tentatively without engaging far larger questions such as "What is Christianity?"

Keeping such problems in mind, a few parameters might nevertheless be offered. Katharine Briggs provides a concise definition of fairies that fits many other "small gods" as well: they are "a race of creatures, either superhuman or slightly sub-human, who are neither gods nor, strictly speaking, ghosts and who have much in common with humanity, but who differ from men in their powers, properties and attributes."[34] Catherine C. Tucker's characterization of the *angeles de tierra* is even more concise and useful: they are "generous but easily annoyed spirits"[35] with whom human beings interact with trepidation and care.

Such interaction is integral to the mode of religiosity still unfortunately labeled "animism"; wherein "natural beings possess their own

[31] Williams, "Semantics of *Fairy*," 471.

[32] Simpson, "Ambiguity of Elves," 81.

[33] Ibid., 82.

[34] Briggs, *Vanishing People*, 26; cf. Green, *Elf Queens*, 4.

[35] Tucker, "Syncretism and Conservation," 115.

spiritual principles and [humans] establish with these entities personal relations of a certain kind—relations of protection, seduction, hostility, alliance, or exchange of services."[36] If this book is not to range endlessly through vast catalogs of "animistic" beings, we must limit our scope. We will do so, perhaps counter-intuitively, by treating demonization and contestation as necessary (but not sufficient) conditions of the definition of "small gods": *they are found within the encompassing, totalizing framework of a world religion that tends to find problematic the relationships characteristic of animism, and therefore seeks to condemn, contest, or marginalize continued belief in "small gods" among some adherents of the world religion in question.*

Our focus on Christian contestations removes from notice the minor *devas* and *peey* of Hinduism and popular Buddhism, the *kami* of Shinto, or the *jinn* of Islam[37]—not to mention the innumerable "other-than-human persons" of shamanistic, animistic and totemistic cosmologies of indigenous traditions worldwide.[38] Such beings draw our attention only insofar as they enter into (or trouble the margins of) Christian or post-Christian cosmologies. This is not to say that a non-Christian *peey* or a pre-Christian *motobil* or *satyr* lack fairy-like qualities (most would fit both Briggs's and Tucker's definitions quoted above), but rather that they become what we here call small gods only when their relationship to the hegemonic religion becomes problematic.[39] Like the allergic itch by which a body becomes aware of insignificant trace elements in its environment, "small gods" become objects of critical reflection only as symptoms, as animistic "survivals" problematically present within a Christianity that attempts to exclude them. Small gods are (imperfectly) definable as objects of an endless effort at exorcism by which some Christians seek to expunge them beyond the margins and to locate them firmly in hell, in the pagan past, or in the foolish minds of babbling "old wives." A "pagan" or folkloric itch; they get noticed in the act of theological scratching.

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[36] Descola, "Societies of Nature," 114; cf. Schneider, "Spirits," 27.

[37] Similar ambivalences beset Islamic understanding of the *jinn* and their mode of intermixture with local preternatural beings: see, e.g., Parkin, "Entitling Evil"; Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits.*

[38] I borrow the term "other-than-human persons" from Hallowell's classic "Ojibwa Ontology."

[39] On the hegemonic domestication, classification, and demonization of amorphous and ambivalent "nature spirits" see especially Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, 19–30.

Narrations and classifications of the small gods are here treated, therefore, primarily as occasions for metacultural reflection—for insider comparative thinking about "the way things are now" in relation to "the way things were then" and thence "the way things should be."[40] The marginalization of the small gods is re-enacted continually as a Christian mode of imagining Christianity: the border they mediate is the border between Christendom and its imagined pre-Christian past.

Vanishing

This introduction surveys typical strategies of such Christian self-reflection by focusing on a peculiar paradox of "small gods" within Christian (and post-Christian) cosmologies: their extraordinary longevity and their chronic imminent demise. As Katharine Briggs noted long ago, the fairies are "always vanishing and always popping back up again."[41] An examination of this tendency within Christian thought and practice will provide occasion to consider the origins of the "small gods"—not indeed their original origins in the misty prehistory of human consciousness, a topic about which we must admit total ignorance, but their origins in Christian strategies of dealing with local spirits during Christianity's two-thousand-year history of mission and conversion. Indeed, the vanishing and survival of the fairies is of a piece with the vanishing and survival of "paganism" as such. Within Christianity, João Pina-Cabral has suggested, paganism undergoes a "perpetually impending demise": it has been anachronistic, old fashioned, and on its way out the door for the past two thousand years.[42]

To examine this effort of expurgation and its after-effects, let us turn to a more or less recent, more or less secular poetic image: T. S. Eliot's Prufrock strolling melancholy on the beach, trousers rolled:

> I have seen the mermaids singing, each to each.
> I do not think that they will sing to me.[43]

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[40] Tomlinson, *In God's Image*, 19 and passim.

[41] Briggs, *Vanishing People*, 7–8; cf. 49–51.

[42] Pina-Cabral, "Gods of the Gentiles," 46.

[43] Eliot, *Prufrock*, 16.

Eliot's mermaids are present but inaccessible, audible but beyond the reach of communication. They are on the point of vanishing; they indicate a path it is already too late to take. They are also, of course, metaphors: neither really mermaids nor objects of Christian concern—one is not intended to suppose that either Prufrock or Eliot himself believes in their physical reality. They represent an impossible nostalgia. If we go back another hundred years or so, we find a similar nostalgia, now tinged, if not with belief, than at least with the belief that belief was once possible, and perhaps desirable—I have in mind such poets as Keats, who worries that "cold philosophy" will "Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine,"[44] or Wordsworth, who in a passage on which Eliot seems to be commenting, declares:

> Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.[45]

It is tempting to disregard such poems as embodiments of Romantic longing for a sublime and terrific paganism of their own imagining, but then one finds similar sentiments in surprising places, such as Milton's impeccably pious *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*:

> From haunted spring and dale
> Edg'd with poplar pal
> The parting Genius is with sighing sent.
> With flower-inwov'n tresses torn
> The Nimphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.[46]

Here we clearly see the small gods: minor "pagan" spirits caught within a Christian matrix and thence expelled, albeit not without a trace

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[44] Keats, *Lamia*, Part II vv. 230, 236; in his *Poetical Works*.

[45] Wordsworth, "The World Is Too Much with Us" vv. 9–14; in his *Poems*, vol. 1.

[46] Milton, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (1645) vv. 184–188, in his *Poems*. The "Ode" follows a tradition going back to early Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr, who "presented Christ's birth as a moment of triumph over magic" (Bailey, "Age of Magicians," 4).

of regret. But of course Milton's eviction of the nymph from her thicket is not entirely successful: across reformed Europe, fairy ladies continued to comb their hair and entice unwary menfolk into the water well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—as they still do in Christian West Africa.[47]

One might attribute the fading of the fairies to a process of Weberian disenchantment: the double process by which peasant ghosts and nature spirits were first demonized, then ridiculed and denied existence altogether. Several chapters below examine such processes of disenchantment in detail. But such processes are extremely long term, not necessarily associated with enlightenment or modernization, and often ambivalent. As Jane Schneider has argued, Western social scientists and historians (and I might add, western poets), themselves the inheritors of Reformation and Enlightenment, are left with two contrasting accounts of the enchanted world left behind: a romantic model celebrating "the permeation of everyday life by the sacred," and an enlightenment model decrying "superstition and idolatry—the 'idiocy' of rural life."[48] In Milton we see both models inextricably mixed: something is lost when the oracles go dumb, but for Milton, at least, far more is gained—a purer and a better faith. And yet this purer faith needs to measure itself against something, needs to prove itself against some negative standard. Here the small gods come into play as the sort of thing rejected but nevertheless ever-present among the under-reformed—old wives, peasants, Catholics, crypto-pagans. The vanishing of the fairies, like other sorts of vanishing, instantiates "the movement of something passing away, gone but not quite, suspended between presence and absence, located at a point that both is and is not here in the repetitive process of absenting."[49] This repetitive process characterizes not only recursive self-construction but other sorts of metacultural reflection as well. Milton's

[47] See Pócs' chapter, this volume, and Meyer, "Mami Water."

[48] Schneider, "Spirits," 24. Not least among the virtues of Schneider's argument must be counted her insistence on continuities between demonological and Enlightenment discourse, despite their seeming opposition. Both, she reminds us, made condemnation of what Schneider calls "rural animism" a central concern (48).

[49] Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing*, 20; quoted in Tomlinson, *In God's Image*, 207.

verses hint that the use of small gods to reflect on modern absences ought perhaps be recast as a particular instance of a wider pattern: vanishing fairies as opportunities for the thinking of Christian conversion—what it gives up, what it gains, its inevitable incompleteness.

Valdimar Hafstein notes the similarity of a 13th-century story about the *huldufólk* departing Iceland at the coming of Christianity (the story is set in the tenth century), and a nearly identical story from the same island in the 1960s: the fairies are always leaving but always still around.[50] Barbara Rieti calls this phenomenon the "perpetual recession of the fairies," and argues that it functions as a motif through which to reflect on "how times have changed."[51] But times have been changing forever, and so does fairy recession. As Lizanne Henderson argues, "The notion that the fairies were slightly out of reach, slipping beyond human ken as they vanished into the mists of time, is exceedingly tenacious and of long duration. Almost every generation has apparently been convinced that the fairy belief was stronger among its predecessors."[52]

We find the conviction well before Milton: Chaucer reminisces in the *Canterbury Tales* that the elf-queen used to dance in England, but thanks to "the grete charitee and prayeres" of monks and friars, "This maketh that the ben no fayeryes." A century and a half later, Reginald Scot reminds his reader of the various "urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens" other creatures that terrified bygone generations—his implication is that nobody fears them anymore, and in like manner one should not believe in witchcraft.[53] Two centuries after Chaucer and half a century after Scot, William Cleland explicitly connects Christian reform with the fading of the fairies:

> About mill-dams, and green brae faces,
> Both Elrich elfs and brownies stayed,
> And green-gown'd fairies daunc'd and played:
> When old John Knox, and other some,

[50] Hafstein, "Elves' Point of View," 96–98.

[51] Rieti, *Strange Terrain*, 51, 181.

[52] Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 24; cf. Purkiss, "Sounds of Silence," 83; Swann, "Politics of Fairylore," 451; Magliocco, this volume.

[53] Scot, *Discouerie*, 153.

Began to plott the Haggs of Rome;
Then suddenly took to their heels,
And did no more frequent thes fields.[54]

Driven out by Chaucer's monks, Scot's mockery, and Cleland's reformers, the fairies hung about the British Isles, as Henderson notes, to be exorcised anew by Methodist preaching in the nineteenth century, or to be revived as symbols of a re-enchanted world in the 20th and 21st.[55] As W. B. Yeats put the issue in his usual portentous manner, "the faery and ghost kingdom is more stubborn than men dream of. It will perhaps be always going and never gone."[56] And yet even if Elfland is a place where nothing, nothing ever happens, the sort of nothing not happening changes over time: nostalgia has a history.[57] What is noteworthy about the fairies is less their ever-deferred vanishing than the shifting modes in which that vanishing is recurrently re-imagined.

Survival

The Polish folklorist Aleksander Brückner argued almost a century ago that pre-Christian "pantheons" of major gods tend to disappear almost immediately at conversion, but minor preternatural beings—fairies and nature spirits, nymphs and goblins, ghosts and tutelary ancestors—survived in devil form.[58] Karen Jolly has made a similar point: at conversion "the macrocosm … shifted to a Christian monotheism," while the microcosm displayed less change—a continuity visible "in the belief in invisible spiritual agents such as demons or elves."[59] Although literary elites might continue to worry about the worship of "larger" gods and goddesses (for example, the nocturnal journeys with "Diana" that so exercised European demonologists for six centuries), practicing Christians tend

[54] William Cleland, *Effigies Clericorum*, quoted after Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 25.

[55] Ibid., 28.

[56] Yeats, *Celtic Twilight*, 208.

[57] Hafstein, "Elves' Point of View," 94–95.

[58] Brückner, *Mitologia polska*. More recently, Bruce Lincoln has suggested that organized pantheons themselves are often the product of the rationalizing or Christianizing critique that accompanies the demise of the gods they comprise: see Lincoln, "Nature and Genesis."

[59] Jolly, "Medieval Magic," 16–17.

to quickly forget the cults of such deities or to transform their veneration into more-or-less orthodox practices directed toward an appropriate saint. In contrast, minor deities and nature spirits tend to stick around in ways that haunt Christian consciences for decades or centuries. As Eva Keller says of Christians in Madagascar, "Although they profess that the ancestors are but the devil in disguise, they remain concerned with ancestral power precisely by demonizing it."[60] Ironically, Christianity preserves "pagan" spirits through worried reflection over the threat to Christianity represented by their survival.

Consider, for example, the confession of Elspeth Reoch, on trial for witchcraft in Orkney in 1616. She testified that a "blak man cam to her [… a]nd callit him self ane farie man quha wes sumtyme her kinsman callit Johne Stewart quha wes slane be Mc Ky at the doun going of the soone." In its summation of Elspeth's testimony, the court redefined her terms: "she confest the devell quhilk she callis the farie man lay with her."[61] The court transformed what had been for Elspeth both a fairy and the unquiet ghost of her kinsman into an unambiguous "devell."[62] Such recategorizations feature frequently in the witch trials of England and Scotland, contexts in which—as Emma Wilby has well noted—"the reductionist glare of the law courts" inexorably constrained the ambiguities of peasant belief: an accused witch's "fairy which could be a familiar which could be a devil which could be *the* Devil" becomes, decisively, the latter.[63] The courts thus recapitulate in miniature the world-historical redefinition insisted upon by Eusebius in the fourth century: "All the gods of the gentiles are demons."[64] On one reading Elspeth's fairy lover, like all fairies, represents what Katharine Briggs described as "undigested matter" left over from the pagan past.[65] The Orkney court then "digested" or Christianized this pagan remnant through demonization. And yet the evidence from other Scottish witch trials renders so simple a

[60] Keller, "Comment on Robbins," 23.

[61] Quoted after Wilby, "Witch's Familiar," 284. For a similar case in Scotland, see Martin, "Devil and the Domestic," 83.

[62] For a differing interpretation of this famous trial, see Goodare, "Boundaries," 148–149.

[63] Wilby, "Witch's Familiar," 302.

[64] Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 4.16.20 (Eusebius here mistranslates Ps. 96:5, "For all the gods of the nations are idols").

[65] Briggs, *Vanishing People*, 8.

narrative untenable: in demonizing the fairies, courts also goblinized the devil—like a fairy, he could appear in the likeness of "ane prettie boy, in grein clothes," or he "could not abide iron."[66] And thinkers as illustrious as King James VI, in his very attempt to insist that fairies and their ilk are "all one kinde of spirites" identical with the infernal devils, becomes an inadvertent folklorist recording for posterity the habits of house spirits:

> [T]he Diuell [...] appeared in time of *Papistrie* and blindnesse, and haunted diuers houses, without doing any euill, but doing as it were necessarie turnes vp and downe the house: and this spirit they called *Brownie* in our language, who appeared like a rough-man; yea, some were so blinded, as to beleeue that their house was all the sonsier, as they called it, that such spirites resorted there.[67]

As Richard Firth Green argues: "If fairies are demons, it follows that demons, or at least some demons, are fairies."[68] We will find this to be true of the Urapmin *motobil*, the Sulawesi *seta*, the Polish *uboże* discussed below. The same may be said of the Andean god *Supay* or *Çupay*, identified with Satan in ways that both diabolized the indigenous god and indigenized the Devil; or with the Andean *huacas* which, as Kenneth Mills drily notes, refused "to be essentially diabolic"; or of the Greek *exotiká* which, despite nearly two millennia of Orthodox reclassification as *diávoloi* or *satanádes*, tend still to be conceptualized "together as one fluid category" complexly combining Christian and local motifs and ameliorating Satan's absolute evil in the process.[69] Remaining briefly within the British Isles, consider the enigmatic *puck*.[70] Thanks

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[66] Wilby, "Witch's Familiar," 287; MacCulloch, "Mingling"; Macdonald, "In Search of the Devil." Similarly in Poland, the devil not infrequently appeared to accused witches in suspiciously fairy-like form—in red boots and a red cap like a gnome: see Ostling, *Devil and the Host*, 200; Wojcieszak, *Opalenickie Procesy*.

[67] James VI, *Daemonologie*, 57, 65.

[68] Green, *Elf Queens*, 14.

[69] Redden, *Diabolism*, 97–98; Mills, *Idolatry and its Enemies*, 240; Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*, 105.

[70] In some ways *puck* might be an unfair example, his ambivalence attributable to creolization. Like the *fairy* and the *goblin*, he is the product of the conflation of (at least) Germanic and Romance antecedents (Williams, "Semantics of *Fairy*"; Hutton, "Making of the Early Modern," 1142). But similar situations of creolization (on which see Stewart, "Creolization") underlie the imagination of fairylike beings worldwide.

to Shakespeare, we tend to think of the puck as "that shrewd and knavish sprite" whose penchant for harmless mischief drives the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Yet in the very same year, Spenser's *Epithalamion* places the "Pouke" with witches, ghosts, screech owls, and "other evill sprights." And indeed, across a wide swath of northern Europe the various cognates of *puck*—*puuk*, *puķis*, *pwc*, *puka*, and so on—usually denote devils or dragons or, in Ireland, a sort of demon horse. Although *pouke* and *puke* meant the Christian devil in Middle English poetry, by the sixteenth century *puckes* and *puckerels* are listed among the amiable spirits in the play *The Buggbears*.[71] If we treat *puck* as identical to *Robin Goodfellow* (a debatable point), his status becomes even murkier. He can be a house elf, an "honest plain country spirit, and harmless," grinding the "malt or mustard, and sweeping the house at midnight" in exchange for a bowl of milk; but also the target of an apotropaic prayer:

> Saint Francis, and Saint Benedight,
> Blesse this house from wicked wight,
> From the Night mare and the Goblin,
> That is hight good fellow Robin.[72]

Intermediary between these, *puck* can be simultaneously infernal and friendly: "a good fellow deuill / So called in kindness, cause he did no euill, Known by the name of Robin."[73] Minor White Latham, the great scholar of Elizabethan fairies, notes that although puck and his fairy companions had been categorized theologically as devils, "a curious uncertainty is evidenced in regard to the exact nature of the fairies' wickedness, and in some cases, a perceptible reluctance to condemn them utterly or to brand them irretrievably with the stigma of infernal spirits."[74]

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[71] Latham, *Elizabethan Fairies*, 227–228; Ostling and Forest, "Goblins, Owles and Sprites."

[72] William Cartwright, *The Ordinary* (ca. 1635) act 3 scene 1, in his *Life and Works*.

[73] Ben Jonson, *Love Restored*; Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), 85; Rowlands, *More Knaues Yet?* (1613).

[74] Latham, *Elizabethan Fairies*, 37.

What the puck? Why do *brownies* and *huacas* and the *exotiká* both invite and resist diabolization? Why and how do these seemingly non-Christian beings remain so thoroughly themselves, so decidedly at odds with standard models of the devil despite centuries of attempts to relocate them to hell? And why do even elite and sophisticated traditions sometimes hesitate to insist upon that relocation? One might posit, with Reidar Christiansen, a near-universal human tendency to attribute sudden, mysterious or undeserved misfortune to a class of amoral, mischievous supernatural being.[75] Or we might want to diagnose fairy belief as a manifestation of the "Lilliputian hallucinations" common to certain forms of neurological stress.[76] Or the longevity of fairies might be sought in Stuart Guthrie's account of religion as the accidental by-product of an evolutionarily adaptive tendency to anthropomorphism—to the ascription of intentional dispositions and volitional behaviors to inanimate entities and imagined beings.[77] Without discounting such explanations, one must note that their universalism overburdens the small gods: although such beings may be found always and everywhere, their function, evaluation, and cultural salience varies enormously in time and space.

In contrast to such universalizing explanations of the persistence of "small gods," I would reframe "survival" as the flipside of "vanishing." As already noted, the fairies are products of their problematization, created by Christian attempts at expulsion. Whereas Valerie Flint has emphasized "demonization"—the transformation into beings of pure evil, under Christianity, of originally ambivalent pagan *daimones*—David Frankfurter has suggested that Christian "demons" come into being through Christian consolidation and standardization of ephemeral,

[75] Christiansen, "Some Notes." For a recent version of this argument, see Simpson, "Ambiguity of Elves."

[76] Sacks, *Hallucinations*, 6, 39. Note however that "small gods" are frequently of human size or larger, their "smallness" a matter of ontological rather than physical stature.

[77] Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*; "Spiritual Beings"; cf. the "spontaneous animism" imagined by Edward Tylor (Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived," 374). Although Guthrie's cognitive theory provides too thin a soil to ground the complex theologies, cosmologies and ethical systems of world religion, it might help to explain the background hum of animistic, anthropomorphizing experience from which beliefs about fairies and their ilk might arguably arise.

ambiguous, local conversations.[78] Such beings might be said thus to have been promoted to the rank of small god. In an opposite process, Christianity provokes demotion from the high or middle ranks of "pagan" cosmologies, taking up newly ambivalent roles.[79] For example, in Christian Iceland the *álfar*, originally godlike beings associated with the Norse *Vanir*, fell to the rank of nature spirits (*landvættir*) or even trolls and fiends.[80]

Thanks to the work of Lorraine V. Aragon, we can observe such processes of demotion in detail. Before their conversion to Protestant Christianity, the Tobaku people of highland Sulawesi acknowledged three types of spiritual being. At the top were the *pue'* (owners, lords) of various spheres—the owner of trees, of rice paddies, of rivers, of the sky. Below the *pue*' and sometimes acting as their intermediaries came the *anitu* or deified ancestors. A third group, the *seta* (satans) or *ji'i* (jinn), included a wide variety of ambivalent tricksters, ghosts of the untimely dead, and familiars—these were generally harmful, but could be capriciously kind.[81] Today, there are just two owners or lords, God (assimilated to the pre-Christian *Pue' Langi'* or "owner of the sky") and the new *Pue' Yesus*. All the other *pue'* and *anitu* have been cast down to the status of the *seta*, as devils or demons. Formerly the *Pue' Tana'*, "Owner of the Land," would punish field-border violations by making a child sick; now God does this, and the violation is a Christian sin demanding confession and atonement. Previously an *anitu* would punish with sickness a son who provided an inadequate funeral to his parents; now, again, God does this. The shift in ontological status and function can be roughly pictured as in Figure 1.1, below.

A pattern emerges wherein the high and middling ranks of supernatural being empty out, most of them "falling" to the level of demon.

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[78] Flint, "Demonization of Magic"; Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, 1–26; cf. Lincoln, "Nature and Genesis."

[79] Those pre-Christian beings that manage to remain "big" after Christianization (the Great Goddess assimilating to the Virgin Mary in Rome; Pachamama following a similar trajectory in the Andes; St. Michael and St. Nicholas taking on aspects of the thunder-god Perun in the east Slavic world; the principle Yoruba *orishas* hiding behind the masks of Catholic saints in Santería and Candomblé) remain largely outside the purview of the present volume.

[80] Gunnell, "How Elvish?"

[81] Aragon, "Reorganizing the Cosmology," 360–363.

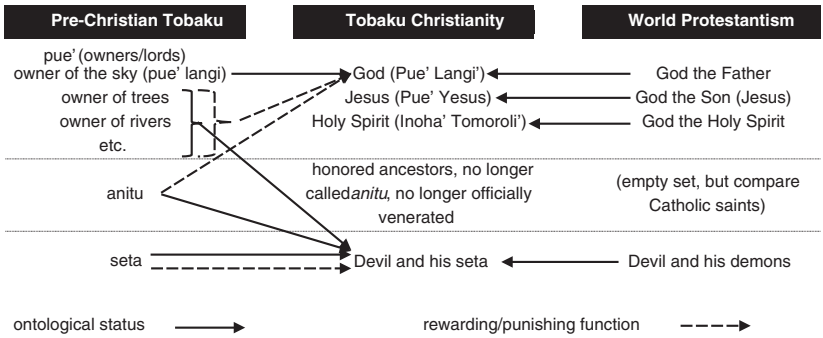

Fig. 1.1 Tobaku Christian reorganization of the cosmos

But this downward collapse of ontological status is accompanied by an "upward" collapse of theodicean function: the *anitu*'s reward/punishment role becomes God's prerogative. The *seta* remain a residual category, now swollen with the influx of demoted *pue'*; as before they dole out luck and misfortune with characteristic capriciousness.[82] The Tobaku case provides a model for the formation of fairylike beings, while adding empirical heft to Brückner's intuition that "small gods" survive—or are even created—while major deities disappear at Christianization.

Joel Robbins, whose theorization of Christian conversion is indispensable to any understanding of the place of small gods within Christendom, concisely sums up the model here proposed: "a shift toward Christian values has determined that those traditional ideas that remain are elaborated only to the extent that they do not contradict Christian ideas."[83] Conversion does not involve the replacement of one set of propositional beliefs with another, but rather proceeds by a transvaluation of values. Any number of beings can still command belief insofar as such belief does not directly conflict with core Christian precepts or themes. Before conversion to Pentecostal Christianity, the Urapmin

[82] Cf. Tomlinson, *In God's Image*, 40. Methodist missionaries in Fiji appropriated the term *kalou* (spirit being) for their god, now rendered paramount with the addition of a definite article: *na kalou*—"the Spirit-being." The other *kalou* are recategorized as *tevoro* and *timoni* (devils and demons), against whose depredations one invokes God's help.

[83] Robbins, "Conversion," 78.

people venerated Afek, a female divinity who created human beings and provided human culture with its major rules and taboos; they also venerated ancestors, whose bones were kept in the men's cult houses; finally, they maintained an uneasy reciprocity with the *motobil* or nature spirits who "owned" the forests and the fruits and game animals these forests contained. At conversion, Afek and the ancestors were "thrown out," as the Urapmin say—the sacred bones quite literally tossed into communal latrines. One could not continue to believe in them while also accepting the central assertion of Christian monotheism, that God created all things. In contrast, the *motobil* remain as semi-demonized *sinik mafak* (bad spirits) or *debil* (devils) because it is possible to "think" them without unthinking Christianity. However uncomfortably, ambivalently, and marginally, they have found a place within the new Christian order.[84] The same is true of the *exotíka* among Greek Orthodox Christians, who survive to trouble the boundaries of orthodox Christianity for centuries because they don't contradict that religion's core "salvation idiom."[85] Or again in the colonial Andes, where important deities such as Pachacamac prove incompatible with Christianity and are discarded, while the *huacas* of the landscape and the ancestor *saxras*, despite condemnation by evangelizing preachers as devils, often managed to sneak into Andean Catholicism as ambivalently evil devils and purgatorial ghosts and even as Catholic saints.[86] The point may be generalized in two directions: first, small gods survive because, though problematic, their existence does not contradict centrally valued tenets of the new religion; second, this survival often takes the form of an ambivalent demonization that, as Regina Buccola argues for early modern English fairies, "paradoxically served to preserve and propagate the traditions." [87]

Variations on a Goblin Theme

The remainder of this introduction will trace several modes of such survival-in-vanishing, adducing examples from the historical and ethnographic literature and connecting these to the chapters that follow. The modes of survival of "small gods" might usefully be placed along a

[84] Ibid., 69–74; "Crypto-Religion," 419.

[85] Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*, 11; "Syncretism and Its Synonyms," 57.

[86] Mills, "Naturalization," quotation at 507; cf. Gose, "Converting the Ancestors."

[87] Buccola, *Fairies*, 84.

continuum from belief in (and experience of) their full reality, through ambivalence about their ontology, to certainty that they are mere illusions—finally to a willed re-enchantment, primarily in post-Christian contexts, of small gods as "real" in a post-modern, playful sense. A rough outline of such a continuum, with its typical correlates, is provided in Figure 1.2.

Negative Cults

Small gods can constitute what Birgit Meyer calls a "negative cult," a framework for the expression of demonic energies to be dramatically exorcised through spiritual warfare.[88] We have encountered this mode of survival repeatedly above, as missionary or reforming Christians diabolize and thus preserve indigenous goblins and nature spirits. Before the advent of modern folkloristics and ethnography, very nearly all our source material for "small gods" derives from such Christian construction of a negative cult with which to damn indigenous religiosity, and

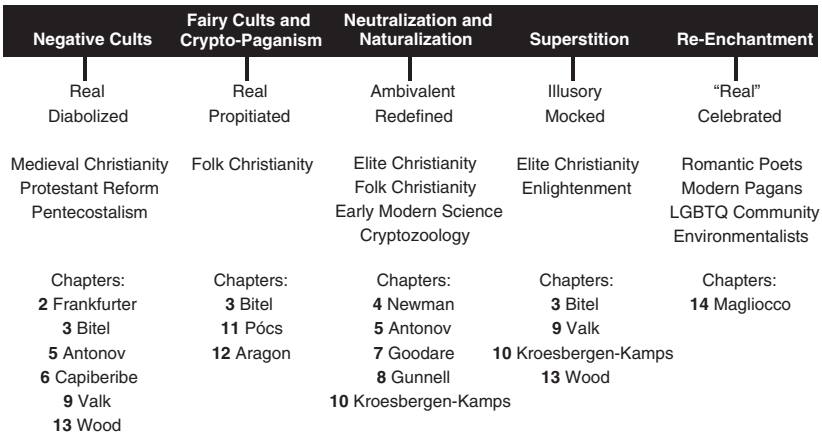

Fig. 1.2 Modes of survival

[88] Meyer, "Mami Water," 289.

against which to measure Christian purity. As Jean-Claude Schmitt says of an inquisitorial account of medieval fairy tradition, the text makes of this tradition "an object of both a description and a repression."[89] In the contemporary period, such "negative cults" are especially typical of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity, and help account for its explosive global growth in the last few decades. As Joel Robbins suggests, Pentecostalism "accepts local enchanted cosmologies only to attack them."[90] By fighting demonized indigenous cosmologies, Pentecostals acknowledge and maintain their categories and ontological commitments. "Having demonized the indigenous spirit world, [Pentecostal] dualism then leads people to devote much of their energy to struggling against it, an activity that has the effect of further proving its existence and demonstrating its relevance to post conversion life."[91] The traditional preternatural beings remain in place, but people's attitudes toward them undergo radical change. Indeed, such radical change can be the point of conversion, as new Christians look to their new god to free them from bonds of reciprocity and care—toward neighbors, toward the environment—bonds previously policed by the small gods themselves.[92]

For example, prior to Christianization, the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea understood the *motobil* to be owners of game animals and the products of the forests. When their ownership was disrespected, their taboos broken, the *motobil* punished transgressors with illness, removing the illness only when reciprocity had been re-established through sacrifices of pigs. Today "God owns everything," the *motobil* own nothing and are owed nothing—their taboos have been superseded. Or so people say. And yet villages are fenced around against their incursion with fences of crosses—not unlike the crosses, blessed herbs, and statuettes of the virgin by which European Christians separate the realm of fairies and demons from the safe domestic sphere. [93] Demonized, they are

[89] Schmitt, *Holy Greyhound*, 7; cf. Green, *Elf Queens*, 11–41.

[90] Robbins, "Globalization," 127.

[91] Ibid., 128–129; cf. "Conversion," 68; Meyer, "Beyond Syncretism."

[92] This is the provocative thesis of Jane Schneider's foundational "Spirits and the Spirits of Capitalism"; see also Robbins, "Dispossessing the Spirits"; "Continuity Thinking"; "Enchanting Science"; and Meyer, "If You Are a Devil"; "You Devil." Michael Wood explores a case of such severed reciprocity in his chapter below. For a portrait of a society that regrets having severed such ambivalent ties, see Brunois, "Dream Experience."

[93] Robbins, "Conversion."

Christianized, brought within the logic of Christianity and dealt with in Christian ways, as when the "spirit women," Urapmin Christian ritual specialists who can become possessed by the Holy Spirit, invoke the power of that spirit to "tear the [nature] spirit off of the client, chase it from the Urapmin territory, and bind it in hell."[94]

A similar negative relation toward small gods obtains elsewhere in New Guinea, such as among the Kamula people who, as Michael Wood shows in this volume, find some of their former "small gods" preserved as Christian devils through recent translations of the Bible. So too in contemporary Amazonia, where (as Artionka Capiberibe shows in her chapter) Christianity's incomplete appropriation of indigenous shamanism has led to a "crisis" of spirit possession and vampirism. Africa has long been a site of "negative cult," as anthropologists and others have interpreted the popularity of Christian witch-finding movements and deliverance ministries as continuations of traditional religion with the signs reversed. Protestant Christian redefinition of the Ewe *trõwo* (gods and ancestor spirits) as demons integrated traditional religion into Christianity as witchcraft,[95] while the mermaid-like West African "pagan goddess" Mami Wata receives more attention among demonizing Christians than in her (rather marginal) indigenous cult.[96] Johanneke Kroesbergen-Kamps finds a similar pattern in her chapter on snakes in contemporary Zambia: venerated in traditional religions and naturalized as psychological symbols in Catholic pastoral work, they become the Satanic subject of Pentecostal radio ministry, constantly re-emphasized because they "function as proof for [a Christian] worldview and power."

But such negative cults are by no means confined to Christianity's recent global expansion. David Frankfurter finds them in the first centuries of Christianity: "tree- and house-spirits," transformed into "evil demons, devils, and opponents of Christ," and yet "their acknowledgement in ritual and possession demonstrates to the community that a

[94] Robbins, "Crypto-Religion," 417–418.

[95] Meyer, "Beyond Syncretism," 58; cf. "If You Are a Devil."

[96] Meyer, "Mami Water," 387–390. The literature on Christian "negative cults" in Africa is vast: in addition to sources already cited, see Comaroff and Comaroff, eds., *Modernity and its Malcontents*; Stewart and Shaw, eds., *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*; Meyer, *Translating the Devil*; "Witchcraft and Christianity"; Engelke, "Discontinuity"; "Past Pentecostalism."

spirit world remains."[97] Frankfurter's chapter provides a detailed case study of his general thesis, showing that the "headless demons" found in amulets of Christian Egypt are less remnants of Osiris than Christian consolidations of folk goblinology. Lisa Bitel's chapter makes a similar point for early medieval Ireland, where the *áes side* provide a necessary foil for the missionizing miracle tales of Saint Patrick, and where the repurposing of fairy mounds as Christian shrines preserves their sacred power. The same is true in the late-Medieval sermons condemning belief in "Eluysche folke" and "Eluenlond" [Elvish folk and Elfland] explored by Richard Firth Green,[98] and (as already explored above) in the early modern European witch trials. "Thinking with fairies" occurs precisely among those who oppose them—and so facilitate their survival.

"Crypto-Paganism" and "Fairy Cults"

Beings like Mami Wata may survive in part because her "negative cult" maintains her as a chronic threat to Christian purity; but some real people really do propitiate Mami Wata for help in childbearing or to gain access to the consumer products she controls and whose danger she symbolizes.[99] Similarly, the widespread trope of the alluring female fairy of the forest or the streamside (the *skogsrå* or woodwife of Sweden, the *naiades* of Greece and the *rusalka* in Ukraine, the *nuk wanang* or marsupial women of the Urapmin) functions primarily as a warning: she may grant both luck in the hunt and the favor of her body, but at a price—she makes her lovers lame, steals their newborn children, or lures them to drown in the marshes. Her negative cult is as easily accommodated into orthodox Christianity as is the Faust-motif of devil pact. Nevertheless, some people really do (imagine themselves to) make pacts with the devil, and some hunters really do brag about their woodwife lover in the forest.[100] Or again: the motif of ritually feeding a house spirit can be maintained through the discursive mode of superstition that derides and contains it as the curious folkway of "old wives," thereby constructing

[97] Frankfurter, "Where the Spirits Dwell," 45.

[98] Green, *Elf Queens*, quotation at p. 1.

[99] Meyer, "Mami Water."

[100] E.g., Liliequist, "Sexual Encounters with Spirits"; Robbins, "Properties of Nature," 181.

an image of pure Christianity in opposition to it. But of course some people really did feed their house spirit, and indeed continue to do so. So perhaps Margaret Murray is less wrong than she first appears—perhaps, etymology aside, the creatures called "devils" by some Christians were simply the objects of veneration by crypto-pagans engaged in a fairy cult? I will argue, in contrast, that such cults are maintained within and encompassed by Christianity: like the Urapmin engagement with the *motobil* through the help of the Holy Spirit, fairy cults are part of a Christian cosmology.

It has been possible to imagine otherwise ever since Carlo Ginzburg famously discovered accounts of the early modern Friulian *benandanti* who, in spirit form, flew out four times a year to do battle with witches on the astral plane.[101] Although the Friulian cult had little to do with anything recognizable as a fairy or small god, Ginzburg's work inspired others to look for, and find, semi-shamanistic fairy cults throughout Europe. Gustav Henningsen discovered the dream cult of the *donas de fuera* [ladies from outside—compare the Greek *exotiká*], in which members use their contacts with the fairies to divine and to cure fairy-caused illness.[102] In recent years we have become accustomed to the Dalmatian *vilenice* with their spirit guide *Tetka Vila* ["aunt fairy" or "aunt nymph"]; to the shamanistic fairy-venerating "order of St. Ilona" in Hungary; to a healing cult of the *seely wights* in Scotland; even to a re-reading of English witch familiars as shamanic spirit animals.[103] The evidence for some of these cults is fragmentary indeed, often starting on the solid ground of inquisitorial records before wandering pixie-led through vast thickets of Celtic, Scythian, and even pan-Eurasian traditions of trance-vision, the double soul, and animal familiars.[104] Nevertheless, such "cults" do exist, as demonstrated through Éva Pócs's ethnographically rich contribution to the present volume: throughout southeastern Europe, Christian women have long turned to the fairies for divination and healing.

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[101] Ginzburg, *Night Battles*.

[102] Henningsen, "Ladies from Outside"; "Witches' Flying."

[103] Čiča, "Vilenica and Vilenjak"; Pócs, *Fairies and Witches*, 243; "Order of St Ilona"; Goodare, "Seely Wights"; Wilby, *Cunning Folk*.

[104] One can observe such a journey in Ginzburg's trajectory from the strictly delimited *Night Battles* to the millennium-traversing speculations of his *Ecstasies*. For critique, see Willem de Blécourt, "Return of the Sabbat."

Julian Goodare has suggested a shift from the language of "cult" to "craft"—not an organized group who venerate the fairies but rather a loose occupational network of healers sharing an amorphous lore about helpful spirit beings.[105] Thus loosened, we can treat more seriously Emma Wilby's claims for shamanistic cunningfolk in England and Scotland who interacted with the fairies in their rituals of divination and healing.[106] We also lose much of the point of labeling such practices "crypto-paganism" at all, since practitioners would usually understand themselves to be good Christians. The Sicilian *donas de fuera*, for example, knew that their confessors condemned their trance journeys with the fairies, but they insisted quite disingenuously that they were good Christians, and produced arguments to this effect—unlike demons, the fairies were not "afraid of the Cross and Holy Water."[107] Similarly, a 15th-century English cunningwoman explained that she got her healing arts from "God and the Blessed Virgin and the gracious fairies," while the fairy helpers of a later cunningwoman quoted the Bible to demonstrate their accommodation within Christianity. Ann Jeffries's fairies asked her:

> What, has there been some *Magistrates* and *Ministers* with you, and disswaded you from coming any more to us, saying we are evil Spirits, and that it was all the Delusion of the Devil? Pray desire them to read that Place of Scripture in the 1st Epistle of St. *John, chap.* 4 *ver.* 1. *Dearly Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits, whether they are of God.*[108]

Similarly, twentieth-century Catholics in the Philippines insist that "while other spirit mediums may deal with evil spirits, they themselves deal only with good, Catholic ones."[109] Or consider the pious nineteenth-century Polish cunningwoman who made use in her healing rites of "helpful devils" in the form of spirits of the drowned and the hanged, condemned to penance on earth (she rewarded their service with intercessionary prayer

[105] Goodare, "Seely Wights," 211.

[106] Wilby, *Cunning Folk*.

[107] Henningsen, "Witches' Flying," 64.

[108] Moses Pitt, *Account of one Ann Jeffries*, 19; quoted after Buccola, *Fairies*, 171.

[109] Green, *Elf Queens*, 19–20; Cannell, "Introduction," 27.

on their behalf). As she explained concerning a colleague, "Marynka had only good devils, for that reason she also went to church."[110]

Even where Christians interacted with not-so-good devils, practitioners in "fairy cults" can encompass their interactions with such beings in Christian ways. Andean Christians, for example, sometimes make offerings to the *yawlu* (from Spanish *diablo*)—the wild but fertile spirits of the earth and of chaos. But the devotees at such shrines do not understand themselves to be crypto-pagans or devil worshipers: at the end of their nocturnal propitiatory feasts, they emerge from the *yawlu*'s cave and greet the sun (in Andean terms, God the Father), reinserting themselves into orthodoxy after a regrettable but necessary absention.[111] Even the Urapmin *motobil*—last encountered as a prime example of the "negative cult" by which nature spirits are redefined in Pentecostal Christianity—even the *motobil* can be approached, carefully and ambivalently, in Christian terms. When exorcism by the power of the Holy Spirit fails to cure a child made sick by the *motobil*, people still sacrifice pigs to them despite deep ambivalence about such ritual. But the sacrifice is framed in Christian prayer, which denies its demonolatrous efficacy, assigning all power to God. The Urapmin still practice what can look entirely like a pre-Christian ritual of animistic reciprocity, but they do so within a framework which renders it ambivalently Christian.[112]

Similarly, when peasant women in the region of Lyon in the thirteenth century wished to negotiate the return of their babies from the *follets* of the forest who had stolen them, they made use of the tools of their Christian faith to do so. The ritual of exchanging a changeling for the real baby certainly looked pagan in many ways—the passing of the child nine times between two trees, leaving it in the forest out of eyesight during the time it took a candle to burn down fully, dunking it nine times in the water of a nearby spring. But the site of all this "paganism" was the shrine to St. Guinefort the greyhound, protector of children: the dog who, Christlike, had died a martyr's death after saving its master's young child from a serpent.[113] The Dominican inquisitor Stephen

[110] Ostling, *Devil and the Host*, 236; Kolberg, *Dzieła wszystkie*, 15.117–118, 42.

[111] Harris, "Eternal Return."

[112] Robbins, "Conversion."

[113] Schmitt, *Holy Greyhound*.

de Bourbon, cutting down and burning the grove dedicated to St. Guinefort, was quite sure he was, in so doing, "combatting the survival of paganism."[114] His exemplum on the subject, with its condemnation of the pagan/diabolical invocation of "*diaboli alias fauni*," belongs to the genre of negative cult—of fairies surviving through their condemnation. But we need not concur with Stephen's assessment of the peasants as crypto-pagans: the peasants themselves, after all, armed themselves with what they took to be Christian materials and rituals in order to negotiate the dangerous but potentially beneficial interaction with fairies. What Stephen called a *lucus*, a pagan "sacred wood" such as Charlemagne had destroyed in his campaigns against the Saxons, was from the peasant perspective a Christian shrine to a Christian saint. Thus "fairy cults" emerge as the flipside of negative cults: unlike the latter they reflect real practices, but also remain within or at the edge of Christianity—at least from the perspective of their practitioners.

The attitude summed up in the proverb "a candle for God, and another for the Devil"[115] is exemplified in the offerings of food and drink left out for the brownie (or *pooka*, or *domovoi*, or *angel de tierra*, or *yaula*); it is a pragmatic attempt to cover every base. Even Evangelical Christians in West Africa, having redefined the indigenous *trõwo* as devils, still turn to the *trõwo* when God seems too far away.[116] As Lorraine V. Aragon explains in her contribution to this volume, Southeast Asian Christians are reluctant "to extirpate their small gods" because "it can never hurt to appease all possible gods."[117] Where diabolization has successfully removed the possibility of such appeasement (as among Bidayuh Christians of Borneo, who sometimes miss the "old spirits, who could be bargained with, cajoled, and berated," unlike the absolutely good God and absolutely evil Devil), this marks a move from relationalist ontology to an ontology of essentialized, permanent characteristics.[118] This is perhaps best seen in Walt Disney's transformation of the "bad

[114] Ibid., 21.

[115] The proverb goes back at least to the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (ca. 730 CE) chap. 15. It is current in Poland, Russia, and Greece, and perhaps elsewhere: Krzyżanowski, *Mądrej głowie*; Ivanits, *Russian Folk Belief*, 43; Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*, 160.

[116] Meyer, "Beyond Syncretism."

[117] Aragon, this volume.

[118] Chua, "Conversion," 516; cf. Schneider, "Spirits."

fairy" of Sleeping Beauty. In Disney's film, this fairy (helpfully named Maleficent or "evil-doing") was not invited to the princess's christening *because* she is evil: she shows up anyway, and curses the princess. In contrast, in both Perrault's and the Grimms' versions the cursing fairy is neither worse nor better than her sisters; they bless and she curses simply because the former were invited politely to the christening while the latter was (inadvertently) neglected.[119] Christian success replacing reciprocity with essence has been, at best, equivocal—"small gods" still act like scary monsters or nice sprites depending on the propriety and care with which humans treat them.[120] Much of the horror evinced by the anti-superstition literature of the medieval and early modern periods can be explained, less by elite discovery of resurgent paganism among their flock, but rather of the conflict between reciprocity and essence: "the people" may have been in full agreement with their pastors that fairies were dangerous, and may have been very glad of the protection against fairy malice afforded them by crosses, holy water, bells, and the name of Jesus. They resisted what their pastors saw as an obvious corollary, that any interaction with such beings amounted to diabolical idolatry. Where Stephen de Bourbon could perceive nothing but the idolatrous invocation of devils at the shrine of St. Guinefort, his flock saw an opportunity to carefully negotiate the return of their stolen children from the *follets* in a place sufficiently protected by a Christian saint as to make such negotiations possible. Such medieval French Christians, like Andean or Urapmin Christians today, could agree with their pastors that attempted reciprocity with fairies/devils involved peril, and they sought to use the sacred tools of the church during fairy negotiations to mitigate that peril. Such negotiated interactions suggest that for some Christians, the "small gods" are non-Christian but not anti-Christian. As the Scottish ballad puts it, the road to Elfland is neither the straight and narrow path to heaven nor the highway to hell, but a "bonny road / That winds upon the ferny brae."[121] Orthogonal to the binaries insisted upon by Christian

[119] The traditional tale follows a pattern first seen in medieval romances such as *Le Jeu d'Adam* and *Huon of Bordeaux*, in which a fairy curses a young child because it was improperly summoned. Briggs, *Vanishing People*, 141–142.

[120] Ibid., 151–161.

[121] *Thomas Rymer*, quoted after Harte, *Fairy Traditions*, 129.

theology, it provides an alternative to those binaries for some Christians, sometimes.

Neutralization and Naturalization

As should already be eminently clear, "small gods" survive in Christianity because they are talked about by Christians. Although small gods are almost always ambivalent and ambiguous, the mode of survival I am rather awkwardly calling "neutralization and naturalization" aims to capture those discourses that reflect upon and attempt to resolve that ambivalence. Historically, we can find this happening in at least two ways.

First, there are the Christian conversations that depart from the usual binaries, placing "small gods" on a moral and ontological spectrum somewhere other than in heaven or hell. One such locus is the afterlife, with Faerie as purgatory or with goblins and their ilk as ghosts wandering the earth till Judgement Day.[122] Less well known are traditions speculating about the Christianity of the "small gods" themselves—about whether they are capable of salvation. An early example of such speculation forms the subject for the cover illustration to this book: Anthony of Egypt's encounter with a satyr or faun who requests the saint's prayers for its soul.[123] While most Christians surveyed in the chapters below treat small gods as pre-Christian, non-Christian, or anti-Christian, a minority find piety in Elfland. In the medieval romance *Huon de Bordeaux*, the fairy-king Auberon is a good Christian; in late twentieth century Iceland, the *huldufólk* attend church on Sundays just like their human neighbors; and the fairy-like inhabitants of the underwater *encante* in Amazonia are imagined as constantly at prayer.[124] A possibly related tradition finds the origin of fairies in the "neutral angels" who, as Dante puts it, "were not rebels / nor faithful to their God, but stood apart";[125] as a punishment they were cast down from heaven but

[122] See e.g., Briggs, "Realms of the Dead"; Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*.

[123] The story first appears in Jerome's fourth-century *Life of St Paul*. See Steel, "Centaurs, Satyrs, and Cynocephali," 257–258. As a migratory legend (Christiansen ML 5050, "The Fairies' Prospect of Salvation") it can be found throughout the folklore of Christian Europe; e.g., Lindow, "Näck." I thank Terry Gunnell for this reference.

[124] Hafstein, "Elves' Point of View," 89; Hutton, "Making of the Early Modern," 1141; Green, *Elf Queens*, 2; Harris, "Enchanted Entities," 119.

[125] Dante, *Inferno* 3.39–44.

excluded also from hell. This often-overlooked motif is extremely widespread, cropping up in medieval theology, early modern natural-magical speculation, the folklore of northern Europe, and most recently among the Oksapmin people of Papua New Guinea.[126] Coree Newman's chapter in the present volume explores the rich material generated in medieval *exempla*, hagiography, and vernacular literature at the confluence of these various traditions: the pious devil, the semi-fallen angel, the ambivalent fairy.

A second conversation has to do with the materiality of the small gods. As Espírito Santo and Blanes argue, calling such beings "spirits" often adds more confusion than it removes, though their own preferred label—"intangibles"—only deepens the problem.[127] In the present volume, Dimitriy Antonov's chapter examines the materiality of early modern Russian devils, which through admixture with local small gods become thoroughly tangible: they eat and drink, marry, procreate and die. Nor is there anything intangible about the manikins of mandrake root or bryony, kept as fortune-hauling familiars and bathed in milk across northern Europe,[128] or the coins baptized as treasure-bringing "spirits" in contexts of incipient capitalism from Columbia to Poland,[129] or the Scottish *selkies* (both seals and fairy women), or the Amazonian *botos* (both freshwater dolphins and siren-like fairy woman); or Mediterranean *strix* or *strega* or *stregha* (simultaneously a screech-owl, a vampiric night-demon, and a witch); or the English witches' cat or dog or toad familiar (simultaneously domestic pet, goblin-like treasure-bringer, and demon lover).[130] No distinction between intangible and tangible, or between supernatural and natural or spirit and matter can be detected in an early modern English apotropaic prayer—

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[126] Green, *Elf Queens*, 23–27; Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*, 3.18 [400]; Gunnell, "How Elvish?"; Briggs, *Vanishing People*, 30–31; Valk, "Descent of Demonic Beings"; D. Simonides and J. Ligęza, *Gadka za gadką*, 57–58; Macdonald, "Always Been Christian," 156–157.

[127] Espírito Santo and Blanes, "Introduction," 13–15.

[128] Michael Ostling, "Witches' Herbs" s.v. *pokrzyk* and *przestęp*.

[129] Taussig, *Devil and Commodity Fetishism*; cf. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa*, 2.2.7: "it was often impossible to determine, whether one had to do just with a coin or with the demon (evil spirit) 'hidden in the coin.'"

[130] Goodare, "Boundaries"; Harris, "Enchanted Entities," 119–123; Maxwell-Stuart, "Strix"; Serpell, "Guardian Spirits."

> Keep [this house] from all evill Spirits,
> Fayries, weezels, Rats and Ferrets[131]

—nor, more generally, in the equivalencing association between "goat-demons" and ostriches and jackals, or between "poukes" and storks and ravens, in a tradition ranging from the Book of Isaiah to Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion*.[132] We should not, in this context, be surprised to learn that among the methods for naturalizing the fairies from the seventeenth century onward one finds the speculation that they might be hybrids between humans and animals, no less natural than "people with harelips [or with] feet like horses and cattle."[133]

Terry Gunnell's contribution to the present volume looks at such naturalizing discourse in early modern Iceland, where sophisticated Christians struggled to reconcile theology and scientific naturalism with reports of what the Englishman John Webster called "middle creatures" who "because of their strange natures, shapes, and properties, or by the reason of their being rarely seen, […] have been and often are not only by the common people but even by the learned taken to be Devils."[134] Julian Goodare's chapter takes on the greatest pre-modern theorist of the small gods: the Reverend Robert Kirk of Scotland, whose *Hidden Commonwealth* presents the high tide of seventeenth-century naturalizing speculation.[135] Finally, Johanneke Kroesbergen-Kamp finds "small

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[131] William Cartwright, *The Ordinary* (ca. 1635), Act 3 scene 1, in his *Life and Works*.

[132] Isaiah 13:20–21; Spenser, *Epithalamion* (1595), in his *Minor Poems*; cf. Ostling, *Devil and the Host*, 230–232; Ostling and Forest, "Goblins, Owles and Sprites." Similar blurrings of "real" animals with "intangible" nature spirits could be multiplied, even if one restricts oneself to avifauna: the nightjar or goatsucker, a bird associated with milk-theft and witchcraft throughout its European range—also called a *puck* in England, and associated in an early modern Polish text with the house-elf or *uboże*; the German *Nebelkrähe*, both a nocturnal bird and a vampiric demon; the Celtic *badhb*, both a hooded crow, a witch, and a fairy woman; the owl/witch/night-demons common in African witchcraft belief, and so on. See Williams, "Semantics of *Fairy*," 460–461; Sowirzalius, *Sejm piekielny*, vv. 1161–1162; 56–57; Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons*, 481, 85; Needham, "Synthetic Images."

[133] Liliequist, "Sexual Encounters with Spirits," 160; see also Green, *Elf Queens*, 13–14.

[134] Webster, *Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*; quoted after Clark, "Demons and Disease."

[135] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this speculation tended to be replaced with racialist speculations—e.g., about the supposed origin of fairy belief in an alleged race of pigmies inhabiting the British Isles before the Celts, or in Linnaeus's suggestion that "Hottentots" might be hybrids of chimpanzees (*homo troglodytes*) and *homo sapiens*: see Briggs, *Vanishing People*, 33; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 20–25; Liliequist, "Sexual Encounters with Spirits," 164.

gods" naturalized in contemporary Zambia in a rather different way: consigned neither to heaven nor hell nor the hidden places of the earth, small gods retreat to the only place remaining—the dreaming human mind.

Superstition

Although Kroesbergen-Kamp's cultured Catholic pastors are too respectful of their flocks to call them "superstitious," their dismissal of Faerie from the real world (whether natural or supernatural) fits comfortably within this mode of labeling the small gods. The category "superstition" ghettoizes fairies, or rather belief in fairies, as the domain of the unlettered, the rural, the credulous: fairies are cordoned off and managed (but thereby remain safe from more direct attempts at extirpation) as the property of old wives. Charles Stewart has noted that fairies fade by becoming embarrassing, not by being inconceivable: they "are vanishing amidst sounds of mockery; they are being blotted out by emotions such as embarrassment, *not* by the action of silent contemplation leading to enlightenment."[136] And yet this mockery and the final fading it effects can last for centuries.

Ever since Hobbes, "ghosts and goblins" have been paradigmatic of the sort of thing in which serious people cannot seriously believe, the sort of belief deserving only mockery. For Hobbes, "the Religion of the Gentiles in time past, that worshipped Satyres, Fawnes, Nymphs, and the like; and now adayes the opinion that rude people have of Fayries, Ghosts, and Goblins" both arise from "ignorance of how to distinguish dreams and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense."[137] Hobbes drew on a rich tradition of Protestant anti-Catholic polemic, which dismissed the fairies as "delusions or idle tales" typical of "the times of blind popery and ignorance."[138] For Reginald Scot, "This wretched and cowardly infidelity [of fairy-belief], since the preaching of the gospel, is in part forgotten: and doubtlesse, the rest of those illusions will in short time (by God's grace) be detected and vanish away."[139] For Richard Corbet, Fairies:

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[136] Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*, 119.

[137] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 7.

[138] Oldridge, "Fairies and the Devil," 1–4.

[139] Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 113.

Were of the old profession;
Theyre songs were Ave Maryes;
Theyre daunces were procession.[140]

This rhetorical use of the fairies to mock Catholicism has been very well explored in a host of recent works.[141] Often less appreciated is the fact that pre-Reformed Catholics worked with equal vigor to dismiss fairy belief as the foolish provenance of "old wives." I will trace the fate of the Polish *uboże* to illustrate this mode, though Robin Goodfellow, for example, would have done as well.[142] The earliest surviving Polish-Latin dictionary (c. 1420) lists *vbosze* as the Polish for Latin *manes* or *penates*,[143] tutelary spirits of the household. Early texts concur that these beings are also, in the terms of a gloss from 1466, "infernal spirits, fantasms, *vbozą*."[144] Tracing out the subsequent fate of the *uboże* provides us with a trajectory from condemnation through accommodation, from demonology to superstition.

A mid-fifteenth-century Benedictine sermon describes the worship accorded such spirits:

> There are not a few, who don't wash their bowls after dinner on Great Thursday, so as to feed the spirits otherwise called *ubosshe*: foolish ones, believing a spirit to require things of the flesh, whereas it is written "A spirit has neither flesh nor bones." Others leave remainders on purpose in their bowls after dinner, as it were to feed these spirits or rather those demons who are commonly called *ubosche*, but this is laughable, for the vain and the foolish often imagine that this food which they left was consumed by the aforesaid *ubesche* (whom they nurture for the sake of good

[140] Richard Corbet, *Faeryes Farewell*, quoted after Latham, *Elizabethan Fairies*, 63.

[141] Buccola, *Fairies*; Marshall, "Protestants and Fairies"; Hutton, "Making of the Early Modern"; Oldridge, "Fairies and the Devil."

[142] Thus several early modern plays (*Wily Beguiled*, *The Devil Is an Ass*, *Grim the Collier*, *The Bugbears*) feature Robin Goodfellow as a "Pug," a harmless devil, even an "amiable spirit." See Latham, *Elizabethan Fairies*, 224.

[143] Urbańczyk, "Wokabularz," item 360, 25.

[144] Brückner, "Średniowieczna poezja," 25.

fortune), but then often a puppy comes along, and when nobody's looking, devours these leftovers.[145]

Textual sources from the next few centuries are clearly indebted to this late-medieval tradition. The *Infernal Parliament* cleverly inverts the motif of offering food to the *uboże* when a minor devil explains that "they don't give food to the poor [*ubodzy*] on Thursdays, instead, with their unwashed dishes, they leave it all for us."[146] Although the tutelary ancestor has now become, unambiguously, a sort of devil, feeding him raises a smile rather than condemnation. Even the *Witch Denounced*, a theologically more rigorous text with the explicit aim of rooting out the superstitions that are "as numerous as grains of sand" among ignorant peasant women, nevertheless takes a similar mocking tone: women "don't wash the dishes after Thursday dinner. Why? They know, I also know but I won't say."[147] The demonolatrous offering of food is reduced to humorous anecdote, trivialized because its practitioners are only foolish old women who know no better. The next time we meet an *uboże* is in the Silesian blacksmith Walenty Roździeński's versified treatise on metallurgy; like the more familiar cobbler's elven helpers of Brothers Grimm fame, the *uboże* now helps with the smithy work in return for a gift of food, but disappears if offered clothing.[148]

The superstitious mode of imagining fairy survival, lacking as it does the thunderous denunciation associated with negative cults, can be taken to describe (while deriding) real practices—and indeed it remained usual both in Poland and in neighboring regions to feed the house demon with a bowl of milk or porridge. However, the trope of the foolish old women feeding their house elf exists and is maintained quite independently of ethnographic reality: the Polish sources for the *uboże* support each other intertextually and require no outside empirical support from folk practice even where such support exists. The same is true elsewhere: Milton's goblin, who "swet / To ern his Cream-bowle duly set / When in one night, ere glimps of morn / His shadowy Flale hath thresh'd

[145] Brückner, "Przesądy i zabobony," 345. Cf. a second sermon suggesting that such offerings of food were made every Thursday: Ibid., 341. Both anonymous sermons paraphrase Stanisław of Skarbimierz, "De superstitionibus."

[146] Sowirzalius, *Sejm piekielny*, vv. 1161–1162; 56–57; cf. Anonymous, *Postępek*, 117.

[147] Anonymous, *Czarownica powołana*, 5–6.

[148] Roździeński, *Officina ferraria*, vv. 1472–1476; 64.

the Corn," draws as much on prior literary depictions as on the realities of rural English practices.[149] This should be kept in mind when one encounters milk-fed familiars in the Polish or the English witch trials—it is not a priori clear whether such familiars represent a discovered folk practice or the imposition of a literary trope. More to the point of the present argument, superstition is an attributive not a descriptive category, a strategy of disdain that tells us more about the labeler than the person labeled.[150]

The superstitious mode, no less than the "negative cult," provides for its users a chronic reminder of an ever-present past into which, without taking care, Christians can relapse—it also constructs the proper, restrained, spiritualized Christianity that avoids such falls into foolishness.[151] The present volume finds this mode at play in Lisa Bitel's chapter, where the awesome *áes síde* become the subjects of semi-comical love stories: "the once mighty pantheon of the Otherworld stumbled around Ireland until they all fell asleep under influence of magical birdsong." Ülo Valk's chapter traces a similar development many centuries later, when sophisticated Estonians sought to silence folkloric devil stories through derision. Wood finds superstition in Papua New Guinea, where some small gods are preserved as devils but others survive "only when you tell stories to little children." As Joel Robbins argues, "by positing the meaningless, unbelievable qualities of the traditions and customs from which it breaks, Christianity retains meaninglessness and uncontrolled unbelief as major threats to its status in people's lives."[152] Fairies survive not least as a reminder of such foolishness. Today this may be their main function, as when the philosophical provocateur Donald Wiebe dismissed the scientific bona fides of theology by comparing it to "Leprechaun Studies."[153]

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[149] Milton, "L'Allegro" vv. 105–108, in his *Poems*. Cf. e.g. Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.

[150] Smith, "Introduction."

[151] Gordon, "Superstitio."

[152] Robbins, "Continuity Thinking," 33; cf. Pina-Cabral, "Gods of the Gentiles."

[153] Personal memory of a symposium on the "Nature of God" at Trinity College, University of Toronto, in the Fall of 2000. On the semantics and pragmatics of the phrase "ghosts and goblins," see Ostling and Forest, "Goblins, Owles and Sprites."

Re-enchantment

A final mode of survival remains—one also grounded in Christian discourse, though current today primarily in post-Christian spiritual movements such as the New Age and contemporary paganism. At about the same time that Robert Kirk sought to naturalize the Scottish fairies, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More turned to fairies, ghosts, and demons with an opposite aim: to re-affirm the reasonableness of Christian faith. In a letter appended to his much-expanded edition of Joseph Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus*, More wrote that it is imperative to convince people "that there are bad spirits, which will necessarily open a door to the belief that there are good ones, and lastly that there is a God."[154] This fairy road to the veracity of Christianity has fallen into disrepair—and yet see Kroesbergen-Kamp's comments in this volume concerning a similar strategy in present-day Zambia. But variations of such a strategy have resurfaced outside mainstream Christian circles: for example, in the poetry of Keats and Wordsworth and Eliot quoted near the beginning of this chapter. In the early twentieth century the "Cottingley fairies"—a series of faked photographs juxtaposing English children with cut-outs of diaphanous Victorian winged pixies—found their champion in the novelist and spiritualist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who hoped that "the recognition of their existence will jolt the material twentieth-century mind out of its heavy ruts in the mud, and will make it admit that there is a glamour and mystery to life."[155] Later advocates of such re-enchantment have also celebrated fairies' "glamour and mystery," without insisting, as Doyle did, on the certainty of the reality of the fairies. J.R.R. Tolkien, for example, who is not usually thought of as a post-modernist, created (or "sub-created") a whole fairy world, neither real nor fictional, drawing on what Diane Purkiss has called "the essence of fairy beliefs," their "play between belief and disbelief."[156] Tolkien might be surprised to find himself in the company of the "Radical Faeries" of 1970s gay culture, who reappropriated a homophobic slur to reimagine themselves as inheritors of a putative medieval cult of same-sex nature worshippers;[157] he would

[154] Glanvill and More, Saducismus, 14.

[155] Quoted after Roden, "Coming of the Fairies."

[156] Purkiss, "Sounds of Silence," 83; Tolkien, "Fairy-Stories."

[157] Thompson, "This Gay Tribe."

likely feel more comfortable among those Irish and Icelandic environmental activists who have invoked worries about the habitat of the fairies and *huldufólk* to block the construction of highways.[158] Our book closes with the fullest modern celebration of the fairies, a celebration indirectly inspired by figures such as Tolkien while decisively departing from his Christianity: Sabina Magliocco's ethnography of the playful-yet-serious revival of fairy belief among contemporary pagans.

Conclusions

Joel Robbins notes that he *could* have constructed his ethnography of the Christian Urapmin in ways that stressed the survival of tradition or even the practice of crypto-paganism: he could do this by focusing on the continued importance of the *motobil* nature spirits. But such an account would have missed the Urapmin's own understanding of themselves as fully (though imperfectly) Christian, and their reorientation toward the *motobil* as demons to be exorcised.[159] As Robbins has argued repeatedly and at length, anthropologists find "most satisfying" those arguments that "find some enduring cultural structure that persists underneath all the surface changes" brought on Christianization.[160] By disposition and training, they prefer to search "for traditional religion behind the Christian mask"[161]; to treat Christianity as "a kind of secondary phenomenon or top coat," something "merely dusting the surface" of more authentic, ingrained traditional beliefs and practices.[162] The language of a Christian "appearance" covering an indigenous "essence," of "hidden traditional depths and evanescent novel surfaces,"[163] is indeed very widespread in the literature of popular Christianity, and is by no means confined to anthropologists: David Frankfurter notes the scholarly tendency to see aspects of Egyptian Christianity "as a simple veneer"

[158] Christiansen, "Some Notes," 101; Swatos and Gissurarson, *Icelandic Spiritualism*, 48–49; Hafstein, "Elves' Point of View"; Gander, "Road Project."

[159] Robbins, "Crypto-Religion," 416–417; "Paradoxes of Global Pentecostalism," 228.

[160] Robbins, "Paradoxes of Global Pentecostalism," 221; cf. "Continuity Thinking"; "Crypto-Religion."

[161] Robbins, "Crypto-Religion," 412.

[162] Barker, "Christianity," 165; Cannell, "Introduction," 12.

[163] Robbins, "Crypto-Religion," 412–414; cf. "Continuity Thinking," 6.

covering "a perennial Egyptian mythological worldview"[164]; while Kenneth Mills finds an ironic convergence between colonial Spanish theologians and their contemporary historians—both use a language of "veils covering pagan foundations, of tops and bottoms, layers and matches," construing "Christian elements as a superficial covering over a persistent autochthonous religious base."[165]

Whence the attraction of such themes of deep and abiding continuity, of (in the present case) fairies and other small gods as the timeless representatives of still vital pre-Christian practices? Sometimes, though rarely, the facts support the case: one thinks of the eastern European fairy cults explored by Éva Pócs (this volume), or of Gustav Henningsen's discovery of late twentieth-century Sicilians dreaming the fairies just as their foresisters did in the early seventeenth century.[166] More often, an emphasis on continuity arises from more-or-less avowable motivations such as the anthropological concern to recover cultures endangered by globalizing forces such as Western Christianity, or the residual romantic nationalism that nudges Henderson and Cowan toward their treatment of Reforming Christianity as "a mere veneer upon beliefs which in some cases had been in existence for thousands of years."[167] At its worst, this timeless impulse leads toward the sort of ahistoricism with which this chapter began, or with Claude Lecouteux's putative discovery of pre-Christian astral doubles underlying fairy narratives everywhere and everywhen.[168] One might as well give credence to the tongue-in-cheek derivation of *elf* and *goblin* from the medieval Italian factions of Guelph and Ghibelline—a derivation at least amenable to historical verification.[169]

One easily overlooked and deeply problematic source for the language of pagan continuity is Christianity itself. As Karen Jolly has argued, "the difficulty with examining the continuity of pre-Christian practices into the Christian era as evidence of magic or of the survival of 'paganism'

[164] Frankfurter, "Amente Demons," 97.

[165] Mills, "Bad Christians," 211.

[166] Henningsen, "Witches' Flying."

[167] Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 213. See also Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*; and Gunnell's and Valk's chapters, this volume.

[168] Lecouteux, *Witches, Werewolves, and Fairies.*

[169] Spenser, *Shepheardes Calendar*, 31; cf. Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie*, 1.113.

is that this approach assumes the binary thinking" of Christian theology itself.[170] Fairy survival permanently haunts the Christian imagination: the continuity thinking to which scholars are prone reflects a Christian hermeneutic of suspicion under which protestations of piety always potentially mask the "natural man" or the "old Adam" into whose habits the Christian, despite baptism and conversion, is always liable to relapse. And anything less than the pure and perfect Christian soul (or the pure and perfect Christian society) is adjudged, under Christian theological terms as much as by social-scientific categories, through this language of relapsarianism. Magic and superstition, negotiation with "small gods," pagan revival are ever-possible choices in a cosmology conceived in terms of a war of the worldly flesh against the never-quite-successfully spiritualized self.[171] In other words, among those who construct narratives of survival and vanishing on the thin and shifting evidence of the small gods we must include ourselves: the discursive deployment of fairy survival is both a (problematic) scholarly strategy and the object of our study.

Christians encompass aspects of their prior paganism both by inversion and revaluation. But where traditional spirits remain salient to a Christianized culture in encompassed or inverted form, their ongoing reality ought not to be counted *by scholars* as a pagan survival—though it is likely to be so construed by Christians themselves.[172] Such "surviving" spirits are not just marginalized or diabolized pagan remnants, they are continually re-performed, recreated through Christian ritual and Christian discourse. We find such re-creation of the small gods throughout Christian history, and throughout this volume: when the Urapmin drive out the *motobil* by the power of the Holy Spirit, when Andean people frame their propitiation of the *yawlu* with devotion to the Christian God, when Mami Water appears primarily as a trope of Pentecostal deliverance ministry, when thirteenth-century Frenchwomen see, in an unofficial Christian saint, their best hope of negotiating the return of their

[170] Jolly, "Medieval Magic," 15; cf. Ostling, *Devil and the Host*, 183–192. Robbins makes the same argument from an anthropological perspective in many places, perhaps most fully in his "Continuity Thinking."

[171] Stewart, "Syncretism and Its Synonyms"; Styers, *Making Magic*; Sahlins, "Western Illusion"; Keane, *Christian Moderns*.

[172] Robbins, "Ambivalent and Resistant Christians," 77.

stolen babies from the *follets*, when the brownie and Robin Goodfellow appear in prayers of protection against them, in assertions of their diabolical status, or in tolerant mention of superstitious old wives who still believe in such "harmless devils," when cunningwomen insist that they only use "good devils" or that the fairies who facilitate their divination have no fear of the cross, this is because the beings involved have succeeded in taking up a niche within Christian discourse. The "good people" have not departed, have not been driven out by the sound of church-bells or the smell of gasoline. There are no pagan survivals: small gods are Christian creations with which to think the limits of Christianity.

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PART I

Demonization and its Discontents

CHAPTER 2

The Threat of Headless Beings: Constructing the Demonic in Christian Egypt

David Frankfurter

Introduction

It was a contention of my 2006 book *Evil Incarnate* that premodern cultures did not hold static, polarized, and systematized beliefs about an organized realm of demons uniformly malicious. Rather, I argued, the supernatural beings responsible for misfortune were not "evil" in a modern Christian dualistic sense. In popular, local culture their natures were fluid and unsystematized: one could propitiate some for favors and avoid others by steering clear of their habitats or avoiding actions that brought them near. Thus the "demonic" is properly understood less as a specific category of supernatural being than a collective reflection on unfortunate occurrences, on the ambivalence of deities, on tensions surrounding

Abbreviations used in the notes: *GMPT* = Betz ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*; *PGM* = Preisendanz ed., *Papyri Graecae Magicae*; *ACM* = Meyer and Smith eds., *Ancient Christian Magic*.

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social and sexual roles, and on the cultural dangers that arise from liminal or incomprehensible people, places, and activities.[1]

So who is it who defines and arranges a culture's sense of the demonic—who gives them origins and eschatologies, delimits their habitats and depicts their attributes? Jeanne Favret-Saada's study of sorcery in modern rural France has taught us to consider the agency of a specific social role in a community: the expert in the discernment of evil. This is a person who, through family heritage, profession, or charisma, has developed the authority to identify sorcerers or sorcery, or the work of specific demons, and even to construct comprehensive demonologies for the benefit of locals beset by misfortune. This authority and creative systematization by the local expert in turn has influence on local experiences of the demonic.[2]

The following excursion into the conceptualization of spirits in a premodern culture concerns Egypt in the fifth and sixth centuries. This was a time when the temples, priests, gods, and devotions of ancient Egyptian religion had largely collapsed, and when a Christianity prevailed in the countryside through such forms as martyr-shrines, churches, monasteries, and their various functionaries. One of the most interesting questions of this period is, what did people actually *believe*? Were there abiding traditions about the old gods, the temple gods, and if so what forms did they take? Did Christianity influence the folklore and quotidian customs of Egyptians, and if so, with what sort of exclusivity? These are extraordinarily difficult questions to answer, given that our sources—mostly literary—emerge at some remove from the world of local religion and its folklore. I will address these questions later; but for now it is important to focus on one phenomenon that is certain for the period I am discussing: that is, the role of *monks* as freelance religious and ritual authorities, giving blessings and amulets, healing and cursing, and sharing with layfolk their acumen with writing and liturgical speech.

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[1] See Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, Chap. 2. See in general Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 94–113. As applied in recent historical/anthropological studies see Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*, 15, 98, 107–108, 114–115, 172–173, 189–190, and Flint, *Rise of Magic,* 102, 147–57 (esp. 153–154).

[2] Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words*; see also Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*. For antiquity see especially Frankfurter, "Dynamics of Ritual Expertise" and Gordon, "From Substances to Texts."

There is abundant documentation for this charismatic function among monks: charms, incantations, prayers, and scripture quotations, inscribed on papyrus, leather, parchment, or potsherd, that bring the world of the liturgy and scripture to bear on the everyday crises of nonliterate people.[3] Essentially one comes to view the monk as a mediator between the monastic world of scripture, liturgy, and asceticism on the one hand, and on the other hand the laity: participants in a world of domestic crises, social stresses, and traditions inspired by ancient landscapes.

But this mediation seems often to have taken the peculiar form of a preoccupation with demons—demons as a cause of bodily or social temptation, as the chief denizens of the surrounding environment, and as principal causes of illness in ritual healing. It is in that context that monks often emerged in Egyptian culture of late antiquity as experts in the recognition and expulsion of demons. And those monks who were credited with this authority, with exorcistic powers, were able to construct and define demons as an extension of their authority, their familiarity with the traditions of the landscape, and their overall creative agency.[4]

The artifacts that motivate this chapter fit clearly into this religious context. Two papyrus amulets from the sixth century CE seek to protect their wearers against "clashes" or "conflicts" (Greek *dikasmos*) with particular demons. First published together in 1931,[5] one resides in the Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts in Tblisi, Georgia, while the other disappeared from London's Petrie Museum during the Second World War, making it impossible to compare the two amulets paleographically. Still, given that the two amulets use almost identical invocations to the archangels and the Trinity to oppose a particular kind of demon, I presume—and will proceed from the hypothesis that—both amulets come from the same scribe: a monk versed in the use of liturgical language to create a protective object.

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[3] See in general, Kropp, *Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte*, vol. 3; Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, *passim*; Siegfried Richter, "Bemerkungen zu magischen Elementen"; and Van der Vliet, "Literature, Liturgy, Magic."

[4] Frankfurter, "Syncretism," 351–564; Brakke, *Demons*, 236–239; Aufrère, "L'Égypte traditionelle."

[5] PGM (1931 ed.) 2: 204, ##P15a–b.

P15a[6]
Angels, Archangels, who restrain
the floodgates of the heavens,
who bring forth the light from the four corners of the cosmos:
Because I am having a conflict with **certain headless beings**—
seize them and release me
through the power of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
The Blood of my Christ, poured out in the place of the skull,
Spare me and have mercy
Amen, Amen, Amen

P15b[7]
Angels, Archangels, who guard
the floodgates of the heavens,
who bring forth the light over the whole world
Because I am having a conflict with a **headless dog**—
if it comes, seize it and release me
through the power of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
Amen AΩ Sabaoth
Theotokos, incorruptible, undefiled, unstained Mother of Christ,
Remember that you have said these things!
Again, heal her who wears (this) Amen

It is this monk's identification of *headless beings* as the singular problem of his clients that will concern this essay. This demonic entity is quite unique among late antique Egyptian Christian protective amulets. Where would the monk have gotten such an image of a demon? In the pages that follow I will examine this question, making sense of these charms as documents of the Christianization of Egypt, to show the authority and creativity of monastic scribes in defining demonic beings and to situate "headless" demons in relationship to the evolution of gods and spirits in Egypt after the collapse of the major regional cults.

Scribality and Demonological Authority

Concluding as they do with rich liturgical details—invocations to the Trinity, the Theotokos (P15b) or the Blood of Christ (P15a)—the two charms must come from the pen of a scribe with some ecclesiastical or, more likely, monastic affiliation. The liturgical customs and training of

[6]Tblisi, Museum Dzanasia 24, ed. Zereteli, *Papyri russischer und georgischer*, #24, 164–166; ed. Preisendanz, *PGM* ²2 #P15a, 223–224; tr. *ACM* 23 (emended). My gratitude to Tamara Zhghenti for providing me with an image of this papyrus.

[7]London, University College [lost], publ. Quibell, "A Greek Christian Invocation"; ed. Preisendanz, *PGM* ²2, #P15b, 224; tr. *ACM* 24 (emended). I am indebted to Alice Stevenson, Nikolaos Gonis, and Stephen Quirke of University College London for their extensive, if fruitless, efforts to track down this papyrus.

monks would not lead to precise replications of orthodox formulae. Rather, their thorough acquaintance with the kinds of formulations that made language and chant efficacious—with a body of performative lore that could be improvised and adjusted—would inspire various improvisations on liturgy. That improvisational capacity extended to demonology: the monastic scribe is no passive recorder of his client's anxieties and magical formulations but an agent in the definition of demonic forces and in the performance of repelling them. The headless demon must be, then, the monastic scribe's construction.

How should we imagine monks' mediation of demonology to folk supplicants and clients? Hagiographical sources suggest that layfolk regarded many monks as experts in the discernment and understanding of a demonic world.[8] An extensive demonological lore had developed *within* the Egyptian monastic environments to articulate the challenges of asceticism and the temptations that would take a monk off the path, reflected in the writings of Antony, Athanasius, and Evagrius.[9] It is likely that outsiders imputed to monks special authority over the identification of the demonic. People visited monks not simply to resolve crises they already understood as demonic in nature but to appeal for discernment into the supernatural context of crisis: w*hy is it* that my wife is cold or my animals die or we can't have children? This is not to say that layfolk had no idea themselves about supernatural threats but that one who is already locally invested with authority in the identification of evil forces will assume the role of defining them according to his particular received notions.[10] It is for this reason that I attribute the identification of this "headless" demon first and foremost to the monk who inscribed these amulets. Whether he knew of the epithet from his own background, or had learned of it in some monastic context, or picked it up in passing, the monk here serves as the ultimate identifier and "inscriber" of the problem demon. He also constructs or implies a resolution to the crisis in casting the demon's assault as a "conflict [*dikasmos*]," a juridical

[8] Frankfurter, "Syncretism," 351–564; Brakke, *Demons*, 236–238.

[9] For Antony, see Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 86–88, 139–141, 216–224; and cf. Palladius, *Lausiac History* 15.1; 22, on exorcistic disciples of Antony. For Athanasius, see his *Life of Antony*. In general see Brakke, *Demons*.

[10] Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 88; *History of the Monks in Egypt*, 15; Jerome, *Life of Hilarion*, 28. See Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, Chap. 3.

term. The amulet he writes implicitly summons the just intervention of the angels and archangels to settle this *dikasmos*.

This does not mean that the clients had no role in conceptualizing this demon. At the very least "headless being" must have had—or subsequently gained—some local salience as an image of threat. In any case, such an identification is the end result (or temporary result) of a protracted process or dialogue, from the client's initial experience (a dream?) to fixing on a peculiar demonic character and the ritual process for its expulsion.[11] It is a dialectical process: between the initial subject, her family members and neighbors, and ultimately the monk or scribe, as everybody discusses "What is it you saw? I know someone who saw one of those! Maybe it was another demon? Maybe it's not a demon but a good omen! What did you do when you saw it?" Or: "What has happened to you? Did it happen before? My mother consulted the monk Enoch up by the tombs." The monk or scribe may be credited with ultimate authority, but such supernatural diagnoses occasion much local discussion, as we know from modern cases of ritual experts.[12]

In this way, folk supplicants to monks are no passive recipients of Christian demonology but, through their own instigation in approaching monks with crises, mobilize a process that requires the creative mediation of a monk, acceptance by the supplicant, and subsequent discussion back home. Through the interplay of liturgical and scriptural tradition, acts of writing, folk retellings, and the sheer journey to and from the monastic dwelling, individuals come to participate in practices and traditions much bigger than themselves.

Akephalos Theos

So why "headless"? Is this just a nightmare motif, to accentuate the demon's monstrosity and liminality? When he published his study of *The Headless God* in 1926 Karl Preisendanz gave due attention to the

[11] Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* 1.35, 38 refers to dreams of headless people.

[12] See Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*, Chap. 3. On protracted diagnostic conversations on supernatural possession and affliction see Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, and Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*.

pervasiveness of headless monsters in European folklore and beyond.[13] For example, the *Testament of Solomon*, a compendium of demon lore from approximately the same time as these amulets (but probably from Asia Minor), describes a demon that had "all his limbs, but no head."[14] Thus he goes around "devour[ing] heads, wishing to get a head for [himself]."

> When infants are ten days old, and if one cries during the night, I become a spirit and I rush in and attack (the infant) through his voice.... I grab hold of heads, cut (them) off and attach (them) to myself; then, by the fire which is continually (burning) in me, I consume (them) through my neck.[15]

This is a fairly typical portrait of a folk demon, by which I mean a supernatural being described in such a way as to mitigate dualistic malevolence ("evil") and to reflect a more intimate relationship to folk culture—as trickster, for example. In this case, the author depicts the demon with subjectivity and "needs" that motivate its maleficence and danger to infants. Of course, we should remember that "folk demons" may be the literary construction of a monastic or ecclesiastical scribe; they do not need to come straight out of folklore. But it does seem to have been the very concept of a headless demon that inspired this author in *Testament of Solomon* to come up with a rationale for the demon's maleficent acts.

Yet we get none of these narrative details in the two Greek charms: only the demons' headlessness and the elaboration of one demon as a dog. It is difficult to derive a nature or character for these demons from such minor details. But could the "headless" epithet have meaning within the amulets' Egyptian provenance? In fact,

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[13] Preisendanz, *Akephalos*, 1–11. Americans know best Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1819), about a ghostly headless horseman in a small town in New York State. Irving's story incorporates various stories of headless monsters from northern Europe and Ireland.

[14] The *Testament of Solomon* is often taken as an early Jewish text, but its manuscripts are considerably late, and there are few indications within the versions of a pre-Christian form. See Klutz, *Rewriting*, and Schwarz, "Reconsidering."

[15] *T. Sol.* 9.1–2, 5–6, tr. Duling, "Testament of Solomon," 971. Delatte, "Akephalos Theos," brings together two Greek texts from the *Testament of Solomon* and an early modern exorcism, 234–238.

"headless"—*Akephalos*—was an archaic epithet of the god Osiris, which not only derived from the myth of this god's dismemberment but also implied that his missing head is the sun itself.[16] Among the extensive Greco-Egyptian ritual formularies from the early Roman period (second-fourth centuries CE) that are grouped by convenience as the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM), a number invoke a "headless god" in ways that maintain the mythology of Osiris. These ritual formularies and invocations are now known to be the compositions of Egyptian priests and so bear a historical and cultural continuity with Egyptian temple literature of much earlier times.[17] Thus one begins,

> I summon you, Headless One, who created earth and heaven, who created night and day, you who created light and darkness; you are Osoronnophris whom none has ever seen; you are Iabas; you are Iapos; you have distinguished the just and the unjust; you have made female and male; you have revealed seed and fruits; you have made people love each other and hate each other.
>
> …
>
> I call upon you, awesome and invisible god with an empty spirit, … Holy Headless One, deliver [my client] from the spirit which restrains him ….[18]

Another group of texts from the PGM corpus uses the epithet *Akephalos* for the god Bes, a giver of oracles, here invoked for his association with Osiris's corpse:

> I call upon you, the headless god, the one who has his face upon his feet; you are the one who hurls lightning, who thunders, … you are the one who is over Necessity … You are the one lying on a coffin and having at the side of the head an elbow cushion of resin and asphalt. You are not a spirit but the [blood] of the two falcons who chatter and watch before the head of Heaven. Rouse your nighttime form, in which you proclaim all

[16] Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 115–16. Cf. Delatte, "Akephalos Theos," 232–234; Preisendanz, *Akephalos*, 12–13, 49.

[17] On the social context of the Greek Magical Papyri see Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice"; Frankfurter, "Consequences of Hellenism"; and Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*.

[18] PGM V.98–139, tr. Aune, *GMPT* 103 (emended).

> things publicly. … You are the headless god, the one who has a head and his face on his feet, dim-sighted Besas.[19]

These incantations, composed and collected several centuries before our Christian "headless being" charms, clearly invoke a form or extension of Osiris, although in an ambiguous form—as a spirit, not as the august temple god we imagine Osiris to have been in places like Abydos. The epithet "headless [*akephalos*]" seems to have been an esoteric priestly epithet for acclaiming a god's solar nature at a time when identification with the sun was a form of ultimate glorification for gods all around the Roman empire.[20]

Clearly our two Christian charms do not use *Akephalos* in any such positive or mysteriously potent sense. One might say that the Christian headless demons had lost most or all sense of filiation with Osiris traditions. And yet the category is unique in Egyptian Christian demonology, which tended to improvise on biblical demons—a topic to which I now turn.

The Demons in Egyptian Christian Apotropaic and Aggressive Charms

I am concerned here with the imagination of demons in Egyptian Christian culture as it emerges in charms and amulets, rather than the more entertainingly fictionalized demons of hagiography. These material, even embodied, textual responses to demonic threats put us closer to the lived religion of people "on the ground" than hagiographical images. As one might expect, a Christian concept of Satan and his demons of impurity informs a number of protective charms from late antique Egypt.[21] This is a demonology borne of monastic and apocalyptic culture, in which demonology was systematized by reference to scriptural tradition. Here, in fact, we see the impact of monastic culture and scriptural tradition on "lived" demonology. We also, notably, see the

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[19] PGM VII.233–245, tr. Grese, *GMPT* 123. Compare PGM VIII.64–110; CII.1–17; and Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts,* #134 (=P. Harris 8.5–9.5), with Kákosy, "Der Gott Bes," and Frankfurter, "Ritual Expertise," 122–125.

[20] E.g., Nock, "A Vision of Mandulis Aion," esp. 374–377.

[21] E.g., ACM 62.35ff; 22.

Devil occasionally invoked as a potent trickster figure to help bind a love object. It is not surprising to see Christian arch-demons—images of utter evil in Christian apocalyptic literature—thus "reduced" to trickster figures that might themselves be coerced into service or to master-demons who might be invoked for protection against chaotic subsidiaries. Cross-culturally there is a perpetual cycling of monstrous arch-demons into tricksters or protectors—in Himalayan Buddhism, for example, but also in cultures in which a polarized, scripturally conceived Satan figure dominates demonology, such as early modern Latin America.[22]

Quite often the demonology of misfortune can be a function of the scribal technique of *listing*: "Cast forth from [this pregnant woman] every evil force. … Cast forth from her every doom and every devil and every Apalaf and every Aberselia and every power of darkness and every evil eye and every eye-shutter and every chill and every fever and every trembling. Restrain them all."[23] This scribal technique aims to present the impression of comprehensiveness, of completeness, and it finds fascinating parallels in (for example) ancient Egyptian "amuletic decrees," in which a temple god promised protection against a long list of ghosts, demons, and supernatural dangers.[24] The list often reflects popular notions and locations of demonic threat in the everyday world, as for example in this protective charm from the same period as those against headless beings:

> I adjure [you], unclean spirits, who do wrong to the Lord. Do not injure the one who wears these adjurations. Depart from him. Do not hide down here in the ground; do not lurk under a bed, nor under a window, nor under a door, nor under beams, nor under utensils, nor below a pit. … I adjure all you spirits who weep, or laugh frightfully, [or] make a person have bad dreams or terror, or make eyesight dim, or teach confusion or guile of mind, in sleep or out of sleep.[25]

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[22] See Frankfurter, "Demon Invocations," and "Master-Demons, Local Spirits"; Lucarelli, "Demonology." On Latin America see Cervantes, *Devil in the New World*.

[23] ACM 64 = Lond. Or. Ms. 5525, tr. Smith, *ACM* 121.

[24] See Edwards, *Oracular Amuletic Decrees*.

[25] PGM P10 = ACM 20, tr. Meyer, *ACM* 44–45.

In their conjuring of more and more *categories* of demons these lists are really a function of the scribal impulse to arrange and systematize.[26] In this last case, what is listed are the various domestic sites popularly regarded as susceptible to demonic presence as well as the effects wrought by demonic beings in proximity.

Apart from demons that have some relationship to scripture and those that are a function of listing, there are very occasionally unique categories that seem to reflect the interests of individual scribes. Two charms in the corpus of Egyptian Christian apotropaic spells adjure the mysterious "Artemisian scorpion": "I bind you, Artemisian scorpion, 315 times. Preserve this house with its occupants from all evil, from all bewitchment of spirits of the air and human (evil) eye and terrible pain [and] sting of scorpion and snake. …"[27] The Artemisian scorpion is not linked to any text or mythology. If anything, since it is "bound [*denō* = *deō*]" rather than warded off, this figure seems to be a demonic "chief" over venomous fauna and other demons, the invocation of which might bring protection against a range of dangers.[28] Like the headless beings, the Artemisian scorpion may be the idiosyncratic category of a scribe or local scribal tradition, or it may be a folk category.[29]

Overall, the demonology of the Christian charms and invocations of late antique Egypt derives from Christian literary and monastic traditions of Satan and his demons, scribal techniques of listing, the predilections of individual scribes, and—although more difficult to discern—local or folk traditions of demonic authorities. The imagination of demonic presence in late antique Egypt (as in many cultures) often took animal forms, and it is likely that the "headless dog" in P15b draws on this widespread folk notion of demons' assuming canine or wolf-like appearances.[30]

Against this range of demonological types and sources the "headless being" charms are unique. It may be merely a local folk category—but

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[26] Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, Chap. 2; Gordon, "'What's in a List?'"

[27] PGM P3 = ACM 26, tr. Meyer, *ACM* 49–50; compare ACM 25 = PGM P2.

[28] Compare Mark 3: 22, where the author imagines people in Jesus's time accusing him of expelling demons by appeal to a chief demon.

[29] PGM P2 = ACM 25 concludes with "St. Phocas is here!" suggesting some connection between the scribe and the Christian shrine of St. Phocas in Oxyrynchus.

[30] See Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*, 180–191; Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, 14–15, and "Scorpion/Demon," esp. 14.

embedded as it is in liturgical language by a monk, how would we know? Should we presume some lineage with the ancient great god Osiris, his mysterious "headless" epithet inverted according to Christian ideology? Yet how would we make sense of the reuse of an Osirian epithet several centuries after Osiris cults had collapsed? Had the god Osiris become somehow diminished and inverted as a mere headless dog, or is it really the *epithet* that has come loose through the agency of scribal tradition? And more generally, what does the appearance of headless beings in these two exorcistic amulets say about the transformation of major cult gods in a culture undergoing Christianization—that is, the spread of a religion (Christianity) that could, at least officially, be uninviting to local veneration of these gods?

Recalling Old Gods in Christian Culture

How can old gods continue to be remembered in a Christianizing culture? If we take the epithet seriously as Osirian—that the "headless beings" and "headless dog" in these charms derive in some way from the god Osiris in popular belief—then the god's demonization and fracturing into multiple beings may follow the historical collapse of cult locations: *outside* the space of his temple or of proper ritual presentations the god can gain an ambivalent, even malevolent, nature. There is evidence for this model in a Coptic saint's life from about the sixth century CE, which tells the story of an exorcism by Apa Moses of one of the Abydos temples haunted by a demon it names Bes. The temple appears to be the one in which a major oracle cult of the *god* Bes actually persisted into the mid-fourth century, according to the witness of the fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus and to graffiti at the site: prayers to the god Bes appear on outer walls of a temple there.[31] The saint's life, however, renders him a "demon": "The citizens of … two villages came and prostrated themselves before our father Apa Moses and pleaded with him, for an evil demon, named Bes, had entered the temple north of the monastery. He would come out and afflict those passing by. … Indeed, many saw him leaping down from the temple and transforming his appearance

[31] See Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 19.12; Dunand, "La consultation oraculaire en Égypte tardive"; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 129–130, 169–174.

[*efšibe mmof*] many times. Thus that demon did much harm …"[32] The text gives the name of a real locative deity of a century or so earlier, but in the form of a demon.

The use of an actual Egyptian god's name is unusual here, since the Christian polemic against old gods tended to use names like Apollo or Aphrodite or Dionysus, Hellenic names that signified a high-minded resistance to Christianity.[33] But beyond Egypt too we find monks battling traditional gods with ancient names. The holy man Theodore of Sykeon, who performed many exorcisms in Galatia, Asia Minor, went to "a certain place called Arkea" that no one could approach, "especially at the midday hour, because it was rumored that Artemis, as men called her, dwelt there with many demons and did people harm." Theodore went and spent "the whole afternoon there in the places supposed to belong to Artemis. And as no evil manifestation showed itself to him," he returned.[34] Like Bes, Artemis is a locative (and temporal) *presence*, neither the object of illegitimate heathen worship nor a transregional figure like Satan.

It is important to note, even in the dramatically literary character of these stories, that the real crime of the demons lies in *haunting* liminal zones (including decrepit cultic zones), not in physical harm—that is, not in threatening harvest or children, like the demons in the *Testament of Solomon* (above). And in fact, this phenomenon of gods (or forms of gods) haunting or afflicting outside of their cult environments is well known in the history of religions. The goddess Artemis, for example, is repelled along with "all evil" in a bronze amulet solicited by one Judah, a Jewish resident of third- or fourth-century CE Sicily.[35] Here it may well be the man's local Jewish culture that encouraged the perception of this traditional Greek goddess as demonic. More likely, however, Artemis was locally regarded as a goddess occasionally capable of great malevolence,

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[32] *Life of Moses of Abydos*, ed. Till, *Koptische Heiligen-*, 53, tr. Moussa, "Coptic Literary Dossier," 83. See also Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 128–131.

[33] Although compare Emmel, "Ithyphallic Gods," and Frankfurter, "Illuminating the Cult of Kothos," 178–180, for examples of the gods (respectively) Min and Agathos Daimon/Shai preserved in Coptic texts.

[34] *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*. 16, tr. Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 97–98.

[35] Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets* (P. Col. 22), #33.

regardless of religious affiliation or point of view. Either way, Judah (or the crafter of his amulet) regarded the goddess by her name as a demonic force; others might have regarded the goddess more positively.

The danger of Artemis outside of cultic context is akin to the danger that some Egyptian gods presented outside of their temple appearances. The oracular amuletic decrees from the Third Intermediate Period, each inscribed in the name of a god, promise their bearers protection from such dangers as "the *manifestations* [*bꜣ.w*] of Amun, Mut, Khons,…. Mont, and Maet…. We shall keep her safe from every god and every goddess who assume manifestations when they are not appeased."[36] These decrees offer good evidence that cult gods were never considered "all good" and could indeed shift into nefarious forms, with or without the institutional opposition of a religion like Christianity. Here, then, might be reason to view the diminished "headless beings" that the two charms were meant to repel as the last stage of the god Osiris in his solar form, as popularly imagined beyond his ancient cult sites.

A far simpler context for the perpetuation of individual gods in an evolving religious world is that a name or character is simply "remembered" in everyday life through its embeddedness in spatial and social activities.[37] I am referring to the diverse performative worlds of folklore, in which a particular activity can give rise to songs, charms, or epithets as kinds of verbal gesture. For example, it seems that the context of *lullaby* maintained a particular kind of song describing a dialogue between the goddess Isis and her son Horus, both by name, where Horus is imagined as bereft and lonely. These songs are preserved in at least four Coptic texts of the seventh and later centuries, whose scribes refitted the form of Isis/Horus lament song to serve as charms for stomachache, sleep, and sexual conquest.[38] Another song, invoking Amun and Thoth by name, is preserved in a sixth-century Coptic codex in the Michigan collection and is meant to bless cattle, much as Dinka and Nuer boys in modern times

[36] B. M. 10083r, tr. Edwards, *Oracular Amuletic Decrees*, 1: 4–5.

[37] See in general Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.

[38] See Frankfurter, "The Laments of Horus," referring to ACM #47–49, 72, 82.

would sing to their cattle.[39] It is preceded by verses invoking Amun, Thoth, and the "three of Isis" that seem to be oriented towards successful lactation.

These texts derive from oral traditions once embedded in their life-worlds that monastic scribes collected and edited, often adding Christian names and liturgical formulas. They reflect neither temple cults—institutional anchors to folk narrative—nor "pagan survivals," but the richness of the folklore of particular life-worlds and particular performative contexts, whether healing, herding, or soothing fussy babies. In these life-worlds and performative contexts the names bespeak stories, traditions, characters, even holidays, but not the august priestly and processional world of temple cults. The notion that this development implies a god's diminishment is our own bias and does not reflect the ways that local communities maintain and even modernize the performative traditions and folklore in which divine names maintain cultural salience.

While a rich context for the memory of older gods, does this model allow us to make sense of the "headless being" as a persisting form of Osiris? The examples of Christian charms that referred to or invoked Egyptian gods like Isis and Horus imagined them not as dangers but as paradigmatic, mythic characters with which a singer might identify. The headless beings, in contrast, are demonic, as befits a Christian exorcistic charm with liturgical features; but then how can we be sure, beyond the epithet "headless," that Osiris is in any way recalled?

On Epithets and Scribal Experts

What does it mean to speak of a divine epithet? Do such terms always maintain the heritages of ancient gods or only the most distant associations with potency or mystery? What differentiates the *agency* in the folk perpetuation of an epithet from its scribal perpetuation: Are there different traditions and permutations for creativity in scribal worlds?

It is important not to overstate the connection between the "headless beings" and the god Osiris. Even in the Greek Magical Papyri *Akephalos* was an epithet that circulated among other gods and may even have spawned its own distinct innovation, the *Akephalos Theos*, with little relevance outside the priestly world of these ritual manuals.

[39] ACM #43 = Michigan Coptic ms. 136, 5–7.

It points not to cult tradition or iconography, nor to popular belief, but to the specific esoteric constructions of Egyptian priests in the Roman period. The best model for conceptualizing a relationship between the god and the demon, then, is one that addresses not a god or myth in some general sense, but the epithet itself as a practical memory. And this model would be ritual expertise itself. Those people in culture who claimed expertise in demonology—say, a Christian monk or, at one time, Egyptian priests—would be in the professional position to transmit certain categories of evil spirit over time: categories like "headless being" or "Artemisian scorpion."

This context seems to fit the history of "headless" gods and demons. We know from the invocations quoted earlier that this esoteric epithet for Osiris had mutated into a god of dream divination in some instances (PGM VII.222–49), and of the control of cosmic spirits in another (PGM V.96–172). It even inspired a rudimentary iconography of headless anthropoids (PGM II.11–12, 166–175) notable for its lack of consistency and dubious relationship to Osiris: in a Berlin papyrus it is a framework for potent vowels and *voces magicae*;[40] in an Oslo papyrus a crouching, headless torso has divine attributes sticking out from every side, recalling the *pantheos* iconography especially popular in the Greco-Roman period.[41] *Akephalos* had become an ambiguous epithet by Christian times but also a potent epithet, something strange and archaic, that a monastic scribe could recall as a category or feature of supernatural being: in the plural or even as a dog. In the *Testament of Solomon* the epithet seems to have become a demon's odd attribute, which proved a problem for some author, inspiring him to compose a narrative about its craving for infants' heads. The memory of the epithet, such that it could be recalled for a type of demon, can thus be linked to the role and status of the scribal expert—indeed, with these two unique charms, a *particular* scribal expert—whose social role involved the discernment of evil and the organization of the experience of misfortune.

[40] PGM II.11–12, 166–175.

[41] *Akephalos* iconography: PGM XXXVI.49–65 = P. Oslo I.1, on which see Eitrem, *Magical Papyri*, 46–48.

Conclusions

This chapter has revolved around a particularly bizarre type of demon distinctive for being "headless." The image brings to mind a monster especially frightening for not having the will or control or even sight with which heads endow us (and other animals). We need to understand a being, whether anthropomorphic or zoomorphic, whether monstrous or simply strange, through its expressive features; without access to those features we are terrified. As philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it, "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, ... to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it."[42] Hence the common terror of people in masks. What does a headless being want, and how do we discern it? How would a headless body know to stop whatever it starts to do? Folklores from Europe to Asia Minor and beyond have tales of such monsters because there is something perennial about them: from the headless demon in the *Testament of Solomon* who seeks the heads of babies to the headless horseman in Washington Irving's story who throws his "head" at poor Ichabod Crane—a pumpkin, it turns out.

But the perennial or archetypal nature of these headless monsters should itself caution us against assuming a simple and direct ancient Egyptian origin for the headless demons that some Christian scribe, some monk, helped some clients identify as their supernatural afflictors in the sixth century CE. This pair of charms should steer us toward the agency and creativity of the monastic scribe, functioning as ritual expert in the discernment and exorcism of evil *and* as craftsman in the ritual process. That is, I have suggested, people in sixth-century Egypt were *not* uniformly aware or frightened of headless demons but, rather, open to (even desperate for) the discernment and authority of the monastic scribe in identifying these headless demons. The agency of this scribe extends to the word he uses for the headless demon's aggressive haunting of an individual: *dikasmos*, dispute or conflict, as well as in the liturgically inflected invocations to the *Theotokos* and the Trinity to resolve this "dispute."

[42] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 257, as quoted in Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xii.

How would the scenarios that produced these charms unfold? The charm protecting against the headless dog (P15b) is meant to function in a healing capacity, as indicated in the last line, for an affliction that was capricious ("If it comes,…"): a fever? A headache? Convulsions? We imagine the female client proceeding out to the monastery where she knows there are ritual experts with authority over such capricious afflictions, and who can discern their sources. Perhaps she already has an acquaintance with canine demons. But in consultation with the monastic scribe she lays out the problem; he probes her dreams and her experience of ailments; and through dialogue a demonic agent materializes (as it were): a headless dog—a combination of folk demonology and an archaic epithet for a mysterious and potent being the scribe recalls from the internal demonological traditions of his monastic world. He does not think of it as "Osirian," only as the very image of the demonic: something one might encounter, perhaps, in an apocalyptic vision of hell. Thus an ancient priestly epithet has been reassigned securely to a new, monastic Christian category of supernatural being, the demon.

The monastic scribe knows well that the agents of exorcism, protection, and healing are the high archangels, the Mother of God, and the power of the written word; and thus he prepares an amulet that recasts affliction as a "conflict (*dikasmos*)" that implies resolution, and he directs formulas he (and probably his client) know from Christian liturgy against this headless dog. But the composition is spontaneous; so when the next client arrives, believing she also may be afflicted by similar demons that he cannot define any more specifically, the monk must compose ad hoc (rather than from a template) a more generic spell (P15a) against "certain headless beings (*meta tinōn akephalōn*)," against which demons he deploys not the Mother of God but the Blood of Christ. That is, I propose that the construction of the demonic headless dog (P15b) came first, as the dialectical product of folk and monastic demonology through their individual agents; and subsequently the notion or category of the headless demon *either* led someone else in the same village to claim this type of demonic affliction *or* inspired the same monastic scribal expert to maintain this category for writing additional exorcistic spells. Yet the threat of headless beings did not, as far as the data shows, spread much further than this scribe and these clients.

In general, the monastic scribe's role for the local community is to shape the nature of crisis through his knowledge of traditions, through verbal expertise, and ultimately through the *material* mediation of the

written amulet. In fact, the "headless dog" charm was folded around a sprig of some three-lobed plant, affirming the concrete over the semantic value of the inscribed papyrus.[43] In the end, what mattered to the client was not the peculiar identification of a headless dog but the wonderful assemblage that some monk presented to her that would keep her afflictions at bay.

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[43] Quibell, "A Greek Christian Invocation."

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CHAPTER 3

Secrets of the Síd: The Supernatural in Medieval Irish Texts

Lisa Bitel

The Irish have never had small gods. Their local spirits and ancestral heroes have always been larger than life. "Do not think the fairies are always little," W.B. Yeats cautioned, "everything is capricious about them, even their size."[1] The fairies, though—along with leprechauns, *púcai*, and the dullahan—are relatively recent immigrants to Ireland.[2] The native spirits of Ireland are the *aos sí* or, as the earliest sources spelled it, *áes síde*—the folk of the *síd* (pl. *síde*). The *síd* was at once an Otherworld, its inhabitants, and earthly portals to that unearthly place. The *síd* originated before the Irish learned how to write, and tales of it continue to be written, told, and sung today.[3]

The medieval Irish built a rich culture of enchantment around their not-so-small gods, much of it derived from two sources: indigenous oral learning and the Bible, which arrived in the fourth or fifth century.

[1] Yeats, *Irish Folk Stories*, 2.

[2] Silver "On the Origins of Fairies," 141–156; Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition*, 3–13.

[3] Ó Súilleabháin, *Folklore of Ireland*; Lysaght, *Banshee*; Uí Ogáin, *Otherworld*.

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Most Irish were nominal Christians by 650 or so, when their intellectuals began to write Latin grammars and Christian hymns, hagiographies, and other explicitly religious texts. Within a century, Irish authors were producing a prodigious literature of laws, liturgies, monastic rules, genealogies, narrative histories, and stories, all swarming with *áes síde* and other ancient, uncanny creatures. In manuscripts, side by side with saints' biographies and theologies, church-trained men (and possibly women) inscribed tales of deities and ancestors of the Iron Age.[4]

Drawing on existing oral typologies as well as biblical and classical models, they devised sophisticated narrative genres dedicated to human interactions with the Otherworld. There were *echtrai* (adventures in the Otherworld), *físi* and *baili* (prophetic visions by otherworldly figures), *immrama* (sea voyages to the Otherworld), and *aislingi* (dreams of otherworldly figures). Christian scribes related the history of the Túatha Dé (Tribes of the Gods) that had supposedly governed the island long before mortals arrived in Ireland. Even more prosaic texts, such as royal genealogies, legal tracts, monastic annals, and especially onomastic literature, referenced the *síd*.[5]

Some Celticists have argued that the literary *síd* is a repository of religious beliefs from the Iron Age (ca. 700 B.C.E. to ca. 400 C.E.) or even the Bronze Age (ca. 1500–700 B.C.E.), which infiltrated Christian writing.[6] Other modern scholars have argued that medieval writers judiciously selected material from their oral heritage in order to craft a syncretistic interpretation of their collective past and its supernatural. In this latter view, early medieval stories about the *síd* were part of a larger intellectual project aimed at locating Ireland in universal Christian history and European culture.[7] These modern interpretations emphasize the fundamental antiquarianism of the early medieval literati. Both interpretations also assume an evolutionary model of religion, whereby druidic paganism and its Otherworld was superseded by Christianity, its saints, and its heaven and hell. Saints' lives from the period emphasize exactly

[4] Ní Bhrolcháin, *Introduction*, 5–25.

[5] Ibid., 78–92; Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*; Toner, "Reconstructing the Earliest Irish Tale Lists"; Byrne, *Airec Menman Uraird Maic Coisse*.

[6] Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*; Carey, "Native Elements"; Waddell, "Cave of Crúachain"; O'Connor, *Destruction*.

[7] Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature*; McCone, *Pagan Past*; Nagy, *Conversing with Angels*.

this process of Christianization in their stories of mass baptisms and the destruction of druids.[8]

Many scholars of religion have rejected the historicity of evolutionary and teleological models, in which primitive polytheism inevitably led to ritualistic monotheism.[9] Similarly, historians of Late Antiquity and medievalists no longer depict the Christianization of Europe as an invasion of preachers who systematically attacked idolatry and superstition. Many students of the period have become wary even of using the word "pagan" to represent the variety of local religions that flourished before Christianization.[10] Instead, academics have begun to investigate the long, slow changes of religious habits that eventually led to Christian hegemony in later Europe.[11]

Ireland's *síd* offers a unique case study of historical religious change in indigenous religious terms at the ground level, and not only because the Otherworld is well documented. Landmarks of the Otherworld were visible to medieval viewers and remain so today as the abodes of fairies, ghosts, and other small, supernatural interlopers. Just as modern tourists visit fairy mounds today, men and women of the early medieval period passed by or went to prehistoric burial mounds and monuments, wells, hillforts, and sacred woods that led to the Otherworld underground, undersea, in lakes, on islands, in rivers, and in mysterious halls that appeared out of nowhere. Christian Otherworlds offered obvious points of access too—churches, cemeteries, baptismal wells, and pilgrimage sites, some of which were also markers of the *síd*.[12] The *síd* was at once familiar and exotic, unavoidable and yet impenetrable by most humans except at the invitation of its *áes*.

Early medieval authors wrote within view of the *síd*, more or less literally. They conveyed the complexities of this inherited supernatural in tales of the *síd*, set in the immediate past—just before Christians arrived on the island, at the moment when the dynastic kingdoms of the early Middle Ages were taking shape. Writers of sagas, romances, and king tales depicted the *síd* and its folk as immortal; yet they also pinned the

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[8] Ní Bhrolcháin, *Introduction*, 26.

[9] Nongbri, *Before Religion*.

[10] Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 34–38.

[11] Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious."

[12] Carey, "Sequence and Causation"; Hogan, *Onomasticon*.

heyday of *áes síde* to a particular moment in Christian teleology, between the post-diluvian peopling of earth and the arrival of saintly proselytizers such as Saint Patrick.[13] With a few important exceptions in hagiography, no one wrote about the *síd* as a home for ancient deities. Even in the saints' lives, holy men and women confronted the supernatural in the shape of idols, druids, or demons, rather than *áes síde*.[14] The earliest hagiographers wrote in the same years that Christian leaders were colonizing the landscape with churches and monastic communities; and royal dynasts were occupying ancient necropolises for symbolic purposes, capitalizing on their antiquity and prehistoric sacrality.

Here I investigate a few early tales of the *síd*, drawn from two genres, written between about 700 and 850 C.E.: episodes from the seventh-century hagiographies of Saint Patrick and a story about a man of the *síd*, called *Aislinge Oenguso* (The Dream of Oengus). These narratives, set on landscapes famous to both medieval authors and modern tourists, by no means represent the breadth and depth of the literature of the *síd*, nor the available evidence about religious change and the supernatural in early medieval Ireland. However, these tales echo important themes found elsewhere in the diverse literature of the Irish Otherworld, such as the strange timelessness and, paradoxically, the explicit historicity of the *áes síde*. They also share as their main theme the disappearance of the *síd,* at least in two of its meanings—not its extinction, but the decreasing visibility of its inhabitants and its decreasing accessibility to mortals over time.

These stories were read on multiple levels, partly because not everyone believed the same things about Christianity or the *síd*. The narratives reflect the instability of supernatural landscapes during the long period of Christianization. They also reveal intense localism and changing perceptions of the *síd*, but also its undeniable endurance. When read together with relevant material evidence, these selected texts suggest the pace and texture of religious change in early medieval Ireland, and sketch the ways that ordinary people made and remade their religion on the ground.

[13] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*; Gray, *Cath Maige Tuire*.

[14] Sharpe, *Life of Columba*, sec. II. 10–11, 16, 17, 33, 34, et passim.

How to Find the Síd

Let's begin in the soil—and under it—at two prehistoric burial sites: Brug na Bóinne, the "hall" or "fort" of the Boyne River, and Temair (mod. Tara) about ten miles away. Initial construction at both sites took place in the Neolithic period. Both places became *síde* to the medieval Irish.

The Boyne River curls around a fertile territory between Slane and Drogheda where, beginning around 3300 B.C.E., teams of laborers began to build enormous circular passage tombs.[15] They raised three round, flat-topped mounds circled by massive curbstones hauled from the Mourne Mountains; many of the curbs were carved with spirals, zig-zags, cupmarks, and other enigmatic symbols. The exterior of one mound was decorated with white quartz pebbles quarried 60 kilometers to the south. The mounds are now called Newgrange, Knowth, and Dowth; in the seventh and eighth centuries they were known as Síd in mBroga, Cnocba, and Dubad. Within the mounds were passages and chambers, some carved like the curbstones, carefully roofed with corbelled stones.[16] The same builders and their descendants also constructed close to 40 smaller passage tombs near the three main mounds, thus completing a vast complex of ritual monuments. Acres of land north of the Boyne were cleared of forest and existing farms, both for building materials and to enhance the visibility of the ritual structures, which were meant to be seen from miles around.[17] They were also built to endure.[18]

Three or four centuries after construction, when access to the mounds' passages had collapsed, local people revised their ritual use of the monuments with new ceremonial enclosures of stone and timber, pits for votive offerings, and possibly a timber henge at Knowth. East of Newgrange they constructed a ceremonial avenue for processions. All of these later monuments rose in relation to the earlier tombs. When the culture changed again during the Bronze Age—possibly under the influence of invaders or immigrants—construction in Brug na Bóinne halted,

[15] Stout, *Newgrange*, 18–22.

[16] O'Kelly and O'Kelly, *Newgrange*, 102–108; Stout, *Newgrange*, 40–57.

[17] Aalen, Whelan, and Stout, *Atlas*, 37–38; O'Kelly and O'Kelly, *Newgrange,* 122–124.

[18] Stout, *Newgrange*, 70–71.

although people continued to dwell nearby and to visit the sacral sites.[19] Beginning in the second century B.C.E., the region once again became a place for the very special dead. At Knowth, thirty-five burials were dug around and near the main mound. A few graves were actually cut into the ancient decorated passages beneath the mound. Newgrange alone lay unmolested but became a site for exotic votive deposits including Roman coins and an African ape's skull.[20]

Much later, sometime in the seventh century C.E., the tribal group Síl nÁeda Sláine exploited the ancient sacrality of Knowth when they occupied it. They called themselves Christian kings of Brega (most of modern County Meath, north County Dublin, and southern Louth) and *ríg Cnogba*, kings of Knowth. The ancient necropolis became a monument to their political control of the region as well as a defensive site, featuring a new ringfort with ramparts below the main mound. The natural ravine on the Boyne side offered additional protection. Their people began to build houses nearby, so that the ancient hall of the dead became one of the largest population centers of the early medieval period. Farms spread out from the royal center across the valley, supplying food for its kings and men for its armies.[21]

Multiple dramatic histories for the monuments of the Brug appeared in toponymic tales called *dindsenchas*, written and collected across four centuries (about 900–1200 C.E., but drawing on much earlier medieval sources). *Dindsenchas* wove evocative connections between pseudo-historical events and the supernatural inhabitants of the prehistoric Boyne Valley, thus blending local traditions with new interpretations of ancient places and monuments. Many episodes referenced specific cairns, rings, mounds, and stones within larger, more complex sites. The story of Dowth, for example, combined biblical motifs with local lore: The men of Ireland gathered there in olden times to build a tower similar to Babel. A female magician offered to stay the sun's course so that the workers might finish the tower. She could not maintain the light against oncoming darkness, however, so the project was abandoned. Ever

[19] Ibid., 38–39; Cunliffe and Koch, *Celtic from the West*; Cassidy et al., "Neolithic and Bronze Age Migration"; Forster and Toth, "Toward a Phylogenetic Chronology."

[20] Stout, *Newgrange*, 72–73.

[21] O'Sullivan, *Early Medieval Ireland*.

since, the nameless author explained, the site has been called Dubad or "darkness."[22]

Time collapsed at Knowth, Dowth, and Newgrange because medieval viewers did not distinguish Iron Age burials from Bronze Age pits or Neolithic passages tombs. They knew nothing of sun boxes or solar alignments, but they recognized the antiquity of existing monuments and earthworks at these *síde*. They understood that such places had been ritually used and reused for as long as anyone could remember. That is why ambitious dynasties such as the Síl nAeda Sláine chose to associate their political futures with the mysterious mounds and hillforts of the distant past on the great plain of Brega. It is also why churches began to appear in proximity to ancient forts, and why hagiographers mentioned these important sites. In fact, dozens of hills and mounds initially created as burial sites later served as tribal capitals and ritual centers before and after the Middle Ages, although not all were as famous as Newgrange.[23] The mounds were not typically royal residences, but rather assembly places for the making of kings and the gathering of troops for battle. From their heights, rulers could survey the countryside; from the plain below, the people could see and hear their leaders.

The most important and mysterious of royal capitals was Temair (modern Tara). It lies about 15 km south of Newgrange and features a hill topped by a large Iron Age enclosure called Ráth na Ríg (Fort of the King.) The enclosing ring consists of an earthen bank lined internally by a ditch, instead of the more typical defensive works with external ditches—at Temair, the defenses were designed to keep something *inside*. Near the main mound are more enclosures, a cursus, ring barrows, and a Neolithic passage tomb built ca. 3400 B.C.E., but called since medieval times "The Mound of the Hostages." More than 250 cremation deposits were placed in the tomb as part of its ritual construction, followed by over 1500 skulls and burials inserted into the mound above.[24] The mound and the hill were part of a larger area of dense prehistoric religious use along the Gabhra River, renovated and revived repeatedly for several millennia before flourishing as a royal

[22] Stout, *Newgrange*, 68; Gwynn, "Dubad," 270–273.

[23] Schot, "Monuments, Myths, and Other Revelations"; Gwynn, "Dubad," 38–45.

[24] O'Sullivan, "Resting in Pieces."

center for the southern Uí Néill, among other aspirants to island-wide kingship, beginning in the early centuries C.E.[25]

The density of Temair's monuments helped generate powerful legends of its ritual importance to later generations of Irish rulers. Within Ráth na Ríg there are two smaller enclosures, along with a standing stone, which was reportedly used in prehistoric inaugural ceremonies. (The stone there today is not the original.) According to medieval texts, a candidate for kingship of all Ireland would drive his chariot between Lia Fáil and a second standing stone; if Lia Fáil screeched, he was the rightful ruler. The new king also symbolically mated with the land in a ceremony called *féis Temra*.[26] For centuries, poets praised Temair and its kings; historians recorded the bloody battles fought for it. Traditional *gessa* (taboos) guided its kings through the ritual use of Temair's mounds and stones.[27] Storytellers set tales of king-making and king-killing at Temair, whose ramparts, patrolled by druids, were charmed against the malicious supernatural. The fact that Temair was a famous *síd*, once controlled by otherworldy kings, made it crucial to the discourse of Christianization—although writers of saints' lives, unlike authors of other genres, never explicitly named it as a *síd*.

Temair: Christianizing the Síd

When Christian converts and proselytizers landed in Ireland during the fourth and fifth centuries, they quickly learned about the *síd* and its principal landmarks. Yet they encountered no transregional centers of worship, no clearly articulated religious doctrines, or administrative religious hierarchies, so far as we know. A class of priestly officials—the druids (Lat. *druid*, *druides*; Old Ir. *druí*, *druad*)—worked for kings and chieftains as prophets, spell casters, keepers of culture, and wise counselors. They acted as liaisons between humans and the supernatural. In the literature, they conducted rituals related to death and burial, reading omens, offering protection in battle, and calculating seasonal holidays. They were scientists of a sort, interpreting both natural and supernatural

[25] Newman, "Sacral Landscape"; Newman, "Re-composing."

[26] Binchy "Fair of Tailtiu"; Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature*, 333–338; McCone, *Pagan Past*, 107–137.

[27] Byrne, "Irish Kings," 48–69.

phenomena for their people.[28] They kept track of the passage of time. Much of their reputation depended on their ability to see what ordinary mortals could not: the Otherworld, its folk, the past and future, and the dead.

Muirchú moccu Machtheni (fl. ca. 700) wrote about druids and their control of invisible supernatural forces within the landscapes traveled by Christian missionaries. Muirchú was a bishop, likely from somewhere near Ard Macha (Armagh) and the nearby ancient royal assembly site of Emain Macha (Navan fort), which features in Ireland's most famous epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. He was a student of Bishop Áed of Sléibhte (Sletty, County Laois), to whom he dedicated his biography of Saint Patrick (fl. fifth century) written just before 700 C.E. His account of Patrick's mission is one of the earliest surviving hagiographies in Ireland, although composed about 250 years after the saint lived. One of his aims was to promote the ecclesiastical leadership of Patrick's main foundation at Ard Macha, but he also had much to say about the relation of self-identified Christians to old religious places. He argued explicitly for Christian priestly control of existing ritual landscapes.

Muirchú began his hagiography with Patricius's birth in Britain, then went on to describe Patrick's kidnapping by Irish pirates, years of captivity in Ireland, and escape to Britain.[29] He described Patrick's return and mission to Ireland, recounting the saint's mass conversions and miraculous deeds until his death at Sabul (Saul, County Down). Muirchú's history emphasized dramatic encounters of biblical magnitude between the fifth-century Christian proselytizer, whom he often framed as the Moses of Ireland, and druids, who played scriptural villains in the narrative.[30] Muirchú set a series of clashes at the ancient complex of Temair. In order to write the episodes, he must have climbed the hill and marveled at the surrounding countryside visible from Temair's main mound, just as Lóegaire, Patrick, and their men do in the *vita*.

In Muirchú's story, Temair was both a royal capital and the sacral center of Irish paganism, thus by implication a *síd*, though he never declared so. Muirchú must have been aware that ritual inaugurations had

[28] Slavin, "Supernatural Arts."

[29] Biele, *Patrician Texts*, 61–122.

[30] McCone, *Pagan Past*, 33–34, 88–91.

only ceased at Temair with the last *feis Temra* in 539.[31] He referred to Patrick's adversary, King Lóegaire of Temair, as *imperator barbarorum*, thus translating the king's ancient transregional authority into ambivalent Latin terms as an "emperor of the pagans." Lóegaire surrounded himself with "sages and druids, fortune-tellers and sorcerers, and the inventors of every evil craft who, according to the custom of paganism [*gentiliatis*, lit. "gentile-ism"] and idolatry, were able to know and foresee everything before it happened" (I.10).[32] In fact, the king's favorite druids, Lochru and Lucet Máel, predicted Patrick's coming. They "prophesied frequently that a foreign way of life was about to come to them, a kingdom, as it were, with an unheard-of and burdensome teaching brought from afar over the seas." The new teaching would "overthrow kingdoms, kill the kings who offered resistance, seduce the crowds, destroy all their gods, banish all the works of their craft, and reign forever" (I.11).

The druids' anxieties proved true. Patrick and his followers came to Ireland intending to drive "an irresistible wedge" into "the head of all idolatry with the hammer of brave action joined to faith." Muirchú recounted the preachers' trek into the Irish interior after docking their ship at the Boyne estuary. The Christians decided to celebrate their first Easter in Ireland on a hilltop in the "great plain of Brega" near Temair. This was actually a well-known strategy of late antique proselytizers: head for the symbolic center of religious and political power and see the man in charge. The Christians hiked to their first camp at a place called *ferti uirorum Fecc* (Fertae Fer Féic or Mound of the Men of Fíacc). Muirchú explained that according to legend (*ut fabulae ferunt*), the mound was dug by the servants of an ancient druid named Fíacc (*unus e nouim magis profeti*) (I.13). Any large mound named after a druid obviously had otherworldly potential, though Muirchú refused to say so. The Christians pitched a tent and lit a fire atop the mound that could be "seen by almost all the inhabitants of that flat plain" (I.15).[33]

Meanwhile, King Lóegaire had assembled his warriors and "wizards, enchanters, soothsayers and devisers and teachers of every art and deceit"

[31] Stokes, *Annals of Tigernach*, under 559.

[32] Numerals refer to text sections as edited and translated in Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, 61–122.

[33] Swift, "Tírechán's Motives," 59–60; Hollo, "Cú Chulainn," 13–22.

for what Muirchú called "superstitions and magic rites" (I.15). Muirchú portrayed Lóegaire as another Nebuchadnezzar in his revels, with Temair as his Babylon. In the midst of the heathen celebration, however, Lóegaire's lookouts spotted the light atop a hill at the southwest edge of the plain. The druids reminded Lóegaire that no one was supposed to kindle a ritual fire for the celebration before the king did, on pain of death; further that Patrick's fire, once lit, would never be extinguished. "When the king heard this," wrote Muirchú, "he was greatly alarmed as once was Herod" (I.16.15). Muirchú consistently presented "pagan" behavior in biblical terms—Lóegaire was a Babylonian idolator or a Jew of the Second Temple—replacing the landscape's long religious history with that of Scripture.

In Muirchú's first reference to non-Christian Irish worship, Lóegaire took action "according to tradition received from the gods" (*secundum deorum traditionem*) and summoned thrice nine chariots with drivers and warriors, his queen, and his druids to accompany him to challenge Patrick. (I.16) The druids warned Lóegaire against approaching Patrick's fire, lest the king begin to "adore him who lit it," so they awaited the saint in darkness. When Patrick arrived they all refused to rise as was customary because, again, they might come to "believe afterward and reverence him" (except one druid who later became a saint and whose relics, in Muirchú's day, were "worshipped at the city called Sláine") (I.19).

The druids had already arranged for a disputation with Patrick, with the king presiding. The druid Lochru began with a criticism of Christian ideas. The saint—compared by Muirchú to Saint Peter in contest with Simon Magus—then preached "with power and with a loud voice" to Lochru, clamoring to God that the druid "quickly perish." Lochru was lifted into the air and then dashed to the ground, splattering his brains on a rock. Then things got truly nasty. Lóegaire ordered an attack; Patrick conjured darkness and earthquake, causing the horses to bolt and the warriors to fight each other. Afterward, only Lóegaire, his queen, and two other Irishmen were left alive. Meanwhile, Patrick and crew "suddenly disappeared from the king's eyes; instead the pagans merely saw eight deer with a fawn going, as it were, into the wilds" (I.18).

The next day, Patrick and five companions visited Lóegaire's hall at Temair for a rematch. It was Easter day as well as the pagans' "greatest feast of the year," so the meeting was charged with the conflicting spiritual powers of two religions. The Christians barged into the king's hall on the enclosed ritual mound. After a druid unsuccessfully tried

to poison Patrick's drink, Lóegaire decreed a miracle contest pitting Christian priest against pagan, similar to Moses's trials with the magicians of Pharaoh. First, Patrick and Lucet Máel worked combative weather spells; the druid used *incantantiones magicas* to bring snow and then fog upon the great plain between Temair and Fertae Fer Féic, while Patrick deployed *benedictiones* to clear away both.

The outcome was ambiguous, so the king ordered a new contest: Patrick and the druid would throw their books (*libros*) into water; he whose book survived preached the superior doctrine. The druid objected on the grounds that water was one of Patrick's gods. Muirchú was mocking ignorant pagans who mistook Christian baptism for water worship (*aquam enim deum habet*; *certe audiuit baptisma per aquam a Patricio datum*, I.20), but he also consistently emphasized the druids' fear of Patrick's unfamiliar magic. So instead, Lóegaire decided that one priest and one druid should exchange symbolic religious garments and together enter a house that would then be set aflame. They did. The druid lost. Lucet Máel was burnt to a crisp while Patrick's favorite adjutant, Benignus, emerged healthy but naked after the druid's costume had been scorched off him. Lóegaire conferred with his noble advisors and quickly accepted baptism.[34] Muirchú never explained why Benignus rather than Patrick went into the burning house.

Although Muirchú rejected druidic magic and "idolatry" and never actually named Lóegaire's gods, he nonetheless confirmed the druids' sacral efficacy. His druids inscribed their accumulated wisdom and spells in books, just like Christians did. They correctly forecast the future. They could summon rain and snow and mist. They knew their potions and poisons. They were at ease with local spirits and territorial deities, as well as the archaic protocols for the use of sacred sites, such as Temair. As in many heroic tales of the same period, Muirchú's druids commanded and interpreted the supernatural for the benefit of king and tribe, particularly at ancient sacral places and on important seasonal holidays.[35] Although Muirchú documented Patrick's superiority in conflicts with pagans, he also acknowledged the supernatural character of Fertae Fer Féic and the complex at Temair. He invited his readers to envision the two ritual fires twinkling above the plain in the darkness of a spring night. In this

[34] Stevenson, "Literacy and Orality," 11–22.

[35] Smyth, "Word of God," 23–44.

and other stories, when druids and kings inevitably yielded to Patrick, Muirchú and other hagiographers reinterpreted old holy places as landmarks in the history of Christian triumph.

In a different account of Patrick's mission written around the same time by the hagiographer Tírechán, the Temair incident is briefer. Yet Tírechán was even more attuned to shifting religious uses of the landscape than Muirchú.[36] For instance, after the magic contest with Lóegaire's druids, according to Tírechán, the king refused to convert. When he died, he was buried "on the ridges of Temair," armed and standing, facing his Leinster enemies to the south. "The pagans," Tírechán explained, "have their weapons ready until the day of *erdathe* (as the druids call it, that is, the day of the Lord's judgment)" (12). Although Tirechán's translation of *erdathe* continues to puzzle modern scholars, the word seems to denote a religious concept of restoration or afterlife, or a ceremony celebrating the same.[37]

Tírechán wrote about the many churches that Patrick supposedly founded, describing grants of properties made to the saint by converts. Many of the saint's adventures took place at ritual sites that landmarked *síde*. One episode well known to modern scholars treats the conversion of King Lóegaire's daughters, Ethne and Fedelm. The two young women were being fostered by druids at the prehistoric ritual complex and symbolic capital of Crúachu (Rathcroghan, County Roscommon). Crúachu's sacral history rivaled those of Temair and Emain Macha, for it had once belonged to King Ailill and Queen Medb (a thinly disguised territorial goddess in many tales of Connacht, and protagonists in the great epic, the *Táin*). The princesses were surprised to find Patrick and his retinue loitering at the well of Clébach where they bathed every morning. Given the setting, it was predictable that the girls did not know, as Tírechán explained, "whence [the missionaries] were or of what shape or from what people or from what region, but thought they were men of the Otherworld or gods of the earth or a phantom" (*sed illos uiros side aut deorum terrenorum aut fantassiam estimauerunt*) (26). The women distinguished among *áes síde*, local divinities, and mere phantoms, but

[36] Swift, "Tírechán's Motives," 53–82.

[37] *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* (eDIL) under *erdathe*; Carey, "Saint Patrick," 42–53. Numbers in parentheses represent sections of Tírechán's *Itinerary* in Bieler, *Patrician Texts.*

were unable to read the visual cues of Christianity.[38] Tírechán knew tales in which an otherworldly man or woman met a potential lover at a well—who else would appear there at dawn except *áes síde*?

After Patrick preached a simple creed to the women, describing Christ as a desirable husband, the women were eager to be baptized and meet their supernatural spouse face to face in heaven. Patrick veiled them and they fell dead. Two druids related to the girls quickly converted too.[39] A traditional burial mound was raised over the princesses' bodies, described by Tírechán as "a round ditch after the manner of a *ferta*, because this is what the heathen Irish used to do, but we call it *relic*, that is, the remains" (26). To medieval writers, *fert* often meant a chambered tomb from the distant past. Later, Patrick had an earthen church built on the site. The association of druids with death and its monuments—at Fertae Fer Féic and Clébach—was purposeful. Tírechán turned two of them from death fetishists into monks. Similarly, the saint transformed two pagan princesses into virgin martyrs. Most important, the writer also translated a traditional burial place into a Christian landmark.

Just as the daughters of Lóegaire struggled to discern what manner of supernatural figures accosted them at the well, so early medieval travelers to the mound at Clébach struggled to determine what kind of supernatural lay beneath, in order to react appropriately. Those familiar with Crúachu's history experienced the place in one way. The small church atop the *fert*, left behind by the saint like graffiti on a carved burial stone, suggested another way. The church at Clébach was Christianized monument among the prehistoric rings and burials of Crúachu. Nearby was Uaimh na gCat, a cave that later gained a reputation as an entrance to both the Otherworld and Christian Hell.[40]

Tírechán, like Muirchú and other hagiographers of the seventh and eighth centuries, responded to living traditions about the meanings and uses of historic supernatural sites. Before Patrick's arrival, according to an eighth-century hymn attributed to Fiacc of Sléibte, "There was darkness upon the *túath* of Ireland, the *túatha* worshipped the *side*" (Fiacc was the same convert mentioned in Muirchú [I.19]).[41] By around 800

[38] Borsje, "Monotheistic to a Certain Extent," 53–82.

[39] Nagy, *Conversing with Angels*, 100–109.

[40] Waddell, "Cave of Crúachain," 77–92; Waddell "Rathcroghan," 21–46.

[41] Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, 317.

C.E., however, as the scholar Óengus mac Óengobann asserted in his martyrology, "The ancient fortresses of the pagans, long occupied, are deserted, without followers/Paganism has been destroyed, though it was famous and widespread."[42] Was Óengus mac Óengobann pretending or misguided about the disappearance of the *síd* and its druids? He was aspirational.

Secrets of the *Síd*

Among the many narratives about the prehistoric inhabitants of the Boyne *síde*, one of the most enigmatic is *Aislinge Óenguso* or "The Dream of Óengus."[43] The story dates from around 800 C.E., when the dynasty of Áed Sláine of the southern Uí Néill ruled the midsection of Ireland, including Brug na Bóinne.

The story begins when Óengus, not otherwise identified, dreams that a beautiful woman has visited his bedside during the night. The approach by night of an alluring woman of the *síd* appeared in other tales, both older and later than this one, although this *aislinge* seems more humorous than others. Óengus tries to grab his visitor and pull her into bed, but she resists and disappears. The next night he sees her again; this time she carries a drum (*timpán*) and sings to him.[44] For a year, she visits him every night,[45] singing and drumming but vanishing before dawn, never speaking. Óengus falls ill for love (or perhaps lack of sleep). All the healers of Ireland are summoned but are of no help. Finally Fergne, the physician to King Conchobar of Ulster, diagnoses him: "You have grown sick at heart and you have not dared to tell anyone," he informs the prince.

Óengus's plight was clear to the audience of the story, of course. His status as someone of consequence became obvious from the medical attention provided to him. Still, in case readers or listeners could not identify him, the author revealed the patient's identity by bringing Óengus's mother Bóand to his beside in order to help find the

[42] Stokes, *Martyology of Oengus*, 26–27.

[43] Shaw, *Aislinge Óenguso*; Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, 108–112.

[44] Plate, *History of Religion*, 104–114.

[45] Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*.

mysterious woman who caused his condition. Óengus (a.k.a. Macc Óc), Bóand, and Óengus's father, the Dagda, were all from the Túatha Dé, well known in other tales of the *áes síde*. When summoned, the great Dagda demands, "Why call me?" Fergne responds, "To advise your son." "I don't know any more than you," the Dagda complains, but Fergne reminds him (and the audience) that he is the wise "king of (all) the *síde* of Ériu." Fergne further suggests that they send for Bodb, the king of the *síde* of Munster, because "everyone in Ireland has heard of his wisdom." Bodb, who lives at Síd ar Femuin, agrees to help search for the mystery woman.

Having established that otherworldly rulers from different regions have joined to find the cure for Óengus, the author related how Bodb's messengers finally discover the suspect at Loch Bél Dracon in Cruitt Clíach, in the province of Connacht. Messengers hurry to the Dagda, who sends Óengus with Bodb to identify her. After feasting at Bodb's *síd*, the two go to the lake where they find "three fifties" of women linked in pairs by silver chains. Óengus recognizes the one who is taller than the rest. "Who is she?" Óengus asks. "Cáer Ibormeith, daughter of Ethal Anbúail from Síd Úamuin in Connacht," Bodb responds. They agree that Óengus cannot approach the woman without securing permission from her guardians (although she certainly took the same liberty with Óengus). The men return to Brug in Maicc Óic—Hall of the Macc Óc, another name for Newgrange—and consult Óengus's parents. The solution seems not only to elude physicians but also to be beyond any otherworldly individual's powers, or even the combined efforts of multiple kings of the *síde*. Everyone decides that they need the assistance of Ailill and Medb, the human King and Queen of Connacht whose capital was the fort or *ráth* atop Cruachú (although audiences probably recalled Medb's otherworldly reputation as a fertility figure, war goddess, and heroine of the *Táin*).

So Óengus and his parents visit the royal couple's Ráth Crúachan—the same Crúachu where, centuries after Óengus's quest, Patrick would baptize and bury princesses among the existing *fertae*.[46] King Ailill sends for Cáer's father, Ethal Anbúail, but the latter refuses to yield his daughter to the son of the Dagda; so Ailill and Medb, along with the Dagda, destroy Ethal's army and *síd*. Ethal claims that he cannot hand over Cáer

[46]Waddell, "Rathcroghan," 21–46.

Ibormeith because her power surpasses his—she who began the entire tale, it seems, is the only one able to end it. Cáer has the special ability to take bird shape in alternate years. When Ailill threatens to take Ethal's head, the captive discloses where and when Cáer would once again take bird form. At the next Samain—November 1, when the Otherworld traditionally opened its portals to humans—she would be at Loch Bél Dracon.

Óengus finally appears at the right place at the right time. He appeals to the largest swan in the water, who answers formally, "Who is calling me?" He politely (re)introduces himself. She promises to speak with him if she can remain in the water. This is a challenge tor Óengus, which he answers by taking bird form and embracing her swan style. They mate as swans, circle the lake three times, then fly to Óengus's *síd* at Brug in Maicc Óic, where their happy twitterings put people to sleep for three days and nights. After that, Óengus and Cáer remain together. "And that," the author concluded, "is how the Macc Óc became friends with Ailill and Medb and why he brought three hundred men to help them in the Cattle Raid of Cuailnge."

As Celticists have suggested, *Aislinge Óenguso* may be a pre-tale (*remscél*) to the great epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. It could also be a Christian allegory, as others have argued.[47] Yet the tale also rehearses the waning influence of the *síd* upon ordinary life. Although all the characters in the story are *áes síde*, they seem unable to understand and respond to Cáer's ritualized antics. The author never explained why Cáer chose to visit Óengus, why she carried a drum, or why only he could see her. Although they live in *síde* strewn over a magical landscape, the characters are never named as members of the Túatha Dé, who ruled Ireland long before Medb and Ailill dwelt at Crúachu. They were all clueless about Óengus's ailment and Cáer's identity. If only they had read more stories of the *síd*, they would have known that one of the *áes síde*'s most impressive and oft-mentioned skills was the ability to control their appearance by taking bird shape; they could appear and disappear at will, and travel through space and time. In this sly tale of supernatural nearsightedness, then, no one could see Cáer clearly except the writer and audience, who viewed the supernatural action from a safe historical distance. Meanwhile, the once mighty pantheon of the Otherworld stumbled around Ireland until they all fell asleep under influence of magical birdsong. At the story's

[47] Gray, "Reading *Aislinge Óenguso*," 16–39.

end, all the bother about otherworldly seduction and shapeshifting is reduced to a footnote to the tribal warfare between Connacht and Ulster captured in the epic *Táin*.

Aislinge Óenguso is a tale full of poorly kept secrets. The tale offered a strategy for negotiating with the abiding presence of the historical supernatural on the same medieval landscape that harbored thatched houses and wooden churches, ploughed fields and pasturage, and political territories with shifting boundaries. When the author disguised the *áes síde* as humans with ordinary problems such as lovesickness, he commemorated and, at the same time, de-idolized the ancient supernatural. More important, his story emphasized the willful invisibility of the supernatural, and its mutable nature, as well as the irresistible human desire to locate, know, and interact with otherworldly creatures. *Aislinge Óenguso* was neither a leftover pagan myth nor a Christian parable, as some modern scholars have argued. It was a story written by a man who lived near the long-settled landscape of Crúachu or Brug na Bóinne, and was trying to explain how to identify and respond to the numinous resources that lay just beneath his feet. If the author inherited an ancient version of the story from previous generations of tellers, he nonetheless chose to shape his Otherworld as a simple human community composed of fallible families and love-smitten youngsters.

The Disappearing *Síd*

"We see everyone everywhere/And no one sees us:/The darkness of Adam's sin/Prevents our being discerned." Thus chanted another otherworldly lover to the object of his affection in the tale *Tochmarca Étaíne* (Courtship of Étaín). The Otherworld, the lover pointed out, had excellent weather, bountiful food and drink, and perpetual music; what's more, the *áes side* were uniformly beautiful, "without blemish, conceived without sin or crime." They preceded religion and would outlive it. However, he admitted, although the *áes síde* could see "everyone everywhere," humans could not see the *áes síde*. "The darkness of Adam's sin prevents our being discerned."[48]

As with the Christian Heaven, everyone knew the *síd* was there, but they could not find it with living human eyes. "*Nem*, [heaven]," wrote

[48] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, 56.

the scholar Cormac in his eighth-century glossary of Irish terms, "comes from [Latin] *nemo* [no one], because no one can see heaven."[49] Poets and storytellers, hymnists, hagiographers, and theologians all tried to describe the invisible kingdoms.[50] *Aislingi* and *tochmarca* hinted at the unimaginable pleasures of the *síd* while accounts of near-death experiences, such as the "Vision of Saint Fursa," offered maps of heaven and hell.[51] Vision and adventure tales (*fisi*, *baili*, *aislingi*, *echtrai*, *immrama*) kept images of invisible worlds fresh in human minds. The *áes síde*, along with angels, demons, and the many Christian saints of early medieval Ireland, maintained their presence in the unseen heavens; yet they also emerged from supernatural portals to lurk on earth. They came and went as they pleased, undetected by unsuspecting mortals. Churches, tombs, and relics marked their places on earth, as did venerable mounds and the ruins of older sacral landscapes. By the early Middle Ages, the ability to see the Otherworld was rare. According to hagiographers, only saints could spot and identify otherworldly phenomena as druids once did.[52]

Irish writers developed tests and proofs for discerning the supernatural in new locations, such as Christian graveyards and churches. They constantly refined their vocabularies and tools for describing the natural and supernatural worlds, struggling to convert a burial site from pagan *fertae* to Christian *reilicc*, and prehistoric mounds into royal capitals. The scholar called Irish Augustine knew about unseen realms that coexisted with daily reality; he wrote in the later seventh century that "in that original making of all things, it was the invisible, spiritual creation which came forth first; but then, lest that which was kept within should not emerge outwardly in God's works, the visible, bodily creation began to be."[53] God would never violate the basic principles of a Nature that He himself had designed—He would not, for instance, turn bread into a stone or a man into a bird. "To believe such nonsense," he declared, "would be like agreeing with the laughable tales told by the druids who say that their ancestors flew through the ages in the form of birds."[54]

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[49] Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic*, 85.

[50] Bitel, *Land of Women*, 25–26.

[51] Stapleton and Kin, *Baedae Opera*, vol. 1, 417–425.

[52] Bray, *List of Motifs*, 91, 97–100, 111–112.

[53] Augustinus Hibernicus, *De mirabilibus*, 2164.

[54] Ibid.; Carey, *King of Mysteries*, 58; Smyth, "Word of God," 112–143.

Yet the druids flew when Patrick commanded. The *áes* took bird shape whenever they wished.

In the same period, another Irish churchman composed a prayer soliciting God's protection against visual deceptions by supernatural forces, which later readers attributed to Saint Patrick. Save us, the writer begged, from the predictions of false prophets, the black laws of non-Christians, the traps of idolatry, and the "spells of women and smiths and druids, and against every secret knowledge that afflicts human body and soul."[55] The prophecies might be false and the idols illusionary, but the writer of this *lorica* feared all invisible forces. He wanted to see as sharply as the druids once had, with vision unobscured by original sin. He prayed for guidance as he moved through his day on the same landscape that his ancestors had signposted with forts and burial mounds named after *áes síde*.

In later centuries, the fairies would come to occupy wells, mounds, and caves of the *síd*. They also invaded Irish folk literature as *aos sí*, probably in the early modern period, replacing the ancestors of the mound-builders and the *áes síde* of early medieval centuries. Yet when Christianization was only beginning, angels, dead saints and *áes síde* mingled invisibly on the same local landscapes. At the right place, at any moment, a portal might open to Heaven or an older Otherworld. Writers of saints' lives and *aislingi*, theology and saga period revealed the diversity of supernatural creatures and, what's more, suggested how best to react to each kind. Their audiences were neither pagans nor Christians in the modern sense, but dwellers on a land constantly revised to accommodate religion and the supernatural—and whatever a soul believed about God and the *áes síde*, he knew where to look for both.

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[55] Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus*, vol. 2: 354–358.

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CHAPTER 4

The Good, the Bad and the Unholy: Ambivalent Angels in the Middle Ages

Coree Newman

In the early thirteenth century the German monk Caesarius von Heisterbach (1180–1240) recorded a story about a demon who disguised himself as a handsome young man.[1] In this guise the demon offered to work as a servant for a Christian knight. The knight, unaware of the servant's true nature, accepted the offer and found his new servant to be extremely helpful, respectful, and faithful. Because of the demon's preternatural powers, he was able to serve the knight in remarkable ways. When the knight and his demonic servant were being chased by enemies, the demon ensured that only his master and he could cross a river, which was previously known to be unfordable. Also, when the knight's wife became deathly ill, the demon procured a remedy from a remote location on the Arabian Peninsula in less than an hour.[2]

Shocked by the servant's ability to accomplish such impossible tasks, the knight demanded to know his true identity. Reluctantly, the servant

[1] The entire *exemplum* can be found in Caesarius, *Dialogus* 5:36 [1: 319–321].

[2] Ibid., 5:36 [1.320].

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eventually admitted: "I am a demon, one of those who fell with Lucifer."[3] The knight inquired: "If you are diabolical by nature, why is it that you serve a man so faithfully?"[4] Despondently the demon answered: "It is the greatest consolation for me to be among the sons of men."[5] Uncomfortable associating himself with a fallen angel, the knight explained that he could no longer accept the demon's service. Protesting, the demon promised, "You should know this for certain, if you keep me, nothing evil from me or on account of me would befall you."[6] The knight, however, could not in good conscience keep the demon in his service, adding, "No man had ever served a man so faithfully and so usefully."[7] He handed the demon five silver coins for his service, which the demon immediately returned, saying, "I ask that you buy a bell with those [coins] and that you hang it from the roof of that poor and desolate church, so that it will call the faithful to the divine office on the days of the Lord."[8] Caesarius related this story in order to provide further examples of how many demons were not to be trusted, but "not all demons are equally bad."[9] He concludes that "it is said that certain ones [angels] simply consented to join the proud ones [angels] with Lucifer against God, these certain ones fell with the rest, but they are less evil, and they do less harm to men, as the following *exempla* explain."[10] Those angels who had actively rebelled against God were, according to Caesarius, proud and malicious. However, Caesarius and other Christian authors asserted that those angels who were perceived as passively complicit or consenting were "less evil." In fact, medieval authors and scribes often characterized these neutral or passive angels as penitent, respectful, and helpful to Christians.

The demon presented in this *exemplum* was just one of several demons whom Caesarius described as "less evil than others."[11]

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 5:36 [1.321].

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 5:35 [1.319].

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., This fifth book of the *Dialogus Miraculorum* is titled *De daemonibus*, and it includes stories of wicked demons as well as helpful demons. Caesarius usually refers to all of the fallen angels, even the ones who were "less evil," as demons, while in other texts, these expelled angels are often referred to as the neutral or passive angels.

Indeed, throughout diverse collections of twelfth- through fifteenth-century medieval *exempla*, Christian writers related stories of demons who served Christians faithfully, offered to repair churches, carried and guided Christians along pilgrimages, saved Christians from danger, earned reputations for their sense of justice and fairness, removed evil from towns, helped root out heretics, praised God, and ultimately led Christians closer to God.[12] These demons, it seems, fit within a much more complex Christian cosmology than the traditional orthodox binary allowed.

Though Scripture offered the primary source from which Christians drew their interpretations and definitions of the devil and demons, textual and visual evidence demonstrate that there were other sources informing their beliefs. The circulation of these sources, oral and written, pre-Christian and biblical, contributed to the way Western Christian medieval men and women understood the nature and role of the demonic. Throughout the Middle Ages, Western Christian European culture developed and transformed as different cultural communities encountered, reacted, influenced, and negotiated with one another.[13] These exchanges left their mark in ways that often render it impossible for the modern scholar to trace the source of ideas, beliefs, and practices. The exiled passive angels, who were "less evil than others," were demonized through their exile and distance from God, and yet some medieval clerics and scribes characterized these fallen angels holy in their dispositions.[14] An overview of medieval Christian literature suggests that these neutral angels occupied a liminal space in the Christian mind and

[12] For a detailed discussion and analysis, see Newman, "God's Other Angels" and "Quest for Redemption."

[13] In his *City of God* (8:22, 9:13), Augustine reveals some of the important details of these negotiations. Augustine uncompromisingly asserted: "… we are by no means to accept what Apuleius tries to persuade us to believe—as do certain other philosophers of the same opinion: that the demons are placed between the gods and men as intermediaries and interpreters. … Rather, they are spirits whose sole desire is to harm us. …" For Augustine, and many subsequent Church Doctors, the possibility that demons might serve as helpful intermediaries was anathema.

[14] In his commentary to his translation of Dante, Hermann Gmelin has suggested that the earliest reference to passive angels can be found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215 CE). In his *Stromata*, book 7, Clement notes that "some of the angels, through carelessness, were hurled to the earth." See Gmelin, *Die Hölle*, 67; Clement of Alexandria, 536.

cosmological map. They were banished from Heaven and barred from Hell. They could, through God's grace and mercy, dwell on mystical islands of plenty. They could trespass into the world of human beings, who, in their earthly, mortal existence, seemed to occupy their own liminal space.

Who, then, were these passive angels who appear in a variety of religious and lay literature who were neither denizens of heaven nor of hell? This chapter will survey several different popular medieval stories including several versions of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Dante's *Inferno*, and a variety of popular *exempla*. While it is impossible to untangle the disparate components and possible origins of these morally ambiguous angels, the goal of this chapter is to reaffirm and attempt to explain the importance of God's other angels in medieval Christian culture.

Some of the earliest and most detailed accounts of these passive angels appear in different versions of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*. The many versions of this narrative relate the story of the sixth-century Irish saint, Brendan, and a few members of his monastic community, who sailed the ocean in search of Paradise.[15] In a journey both liturgical and penitential in structure, they traveled to an island filled with beautiful, white sheep, onto shores that turned out to be the body of a giant fish, sailed past hell, then on to a liminal place occupied by the passive angels, before, finally, ending up in Paradise.

In the early Latin versions (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani*) it was during Easter when Brendan and his brothers reached that spiritual and geographical border of Paradise where the neutral angels lived. Navigating through a narrow channel to a beautiful, verdant island, Brendan found an enormous tree covered in white birds situated next to a spring. Brendan implored God to reveal the nature of these creatures. One of these birds, ordered by God, flew directly to Brendan, its wings making the sound of a "hand-bell," and spoke:

[15]The earliest surviving manuscript of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* is likely from the tenth century, but most scholars agree that it was first written down in the eighth century and likely circulated much earlier in oral tradition. More than 125 medieval manuscripts containing the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* survive. See Gardiner, *Medieval Visions*, 51–52; O'Meara and Wooding, "Introduction," 13–18.

> We survive the great destruction of the ancient enemy, but we were not associated with them (the rebel angels) through any sin of ours. When we were created, Lucifer's fall and that of his followers brought about our destruction also. But our God is just and true. In his great judgment he sent us here. We endure no sufferings. Here we can see God's presence. But God has separated us from sharing the lot of the others who were faithful. We wander through various regions of the air and the firmament and the earth, just like the other spirits that travel on their missions. But on holy days and Sundays we were given bodies such as you see now so that we may stay here and praise our Creator.[16]

The bird then returned to her[17] companions and "when the hour of vespers had come all the birds in the tree chanted, as it were with one voice … 'A hymn is due to thee, O God …' To the man of God [Brendan] and his companions the chant and the sound of their wings seemed in its sweetness like a rhythmical song."[18] Brendan and his fellow monks then led the birds through the canonical hours. At Vespers the birds "responded with wing and mouth, saying: 'Praise the Lord, all his angels, praise him, all his powers.' The birds praised God according to the monastic hours, and at Sext, chanted: "'Shine your countenance, Lord, upon us, and have mercy on us.'" The chanting of the birds "revived their spirits," and as the monks departed the birds chanted: "'Hear us, God, our Saviour, our hope throughout all the boundaries of the earth and in the distant sea.'"[19]

These fallen angels who praised God with sweet voices were neither the denizens of heaven nor the outcast angels in hell. Their geographical location seems simultaneously preternatural and accessible, and even their final call "throughout all the boundaries of the earth and in the distant sea" suggests they perceived a world with elusive borders. These fallen angels seem to defy any characterization articulated by orthodox, medieval theologians, and yet the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* was widely

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[16] John J. O'Meara, trans., *Voyage*, 36.

[17] This story is the only instance where I have found that the female pronoun is used for the fallen angels. This is probably simply because *avis* [bird] is a feminine noun. It is interesting though that in cases of human possession, when the demon is speaking or is addressed; the demon is always referred to in the masculine, even if the human he possesses is female.

[18] John J. O'Meara, trans., *Voyage*, 37.

[19] Ibid., 38.

circulated throughout monastic and lay communities.[20] The popularity of these stories outside of the theological treatises suggests that many Christians would have been exposed to stories of demons who were "less evil" than others.

The neutral angels of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* inhabited a spiritual and geographic liminal space. The world of demons and angels seemed clearly circumscribed by medieval theologians, but these neutral angels complicate this binary system. Significantly, the neutral angels seemed to occupy the same liminal regions as pagan fairies and other preternatural beings.[21] As mediators of these borders, do they help define and reinforce these seemingly diametrically opposed spiritual communities, or do they directly challenge an exclusively binary understanding of them? For Christians to think with these fallen angels was to contemplate the limits of God's mercy and forgiveness. Indeed, in the Christian worldview, it would seem that human beings shared much in common with the passive angels. Christians and the passive angels expressed similar feelings of regret, grief, and desire for reconciliation with God—both anxious about the possibility of salvation and both occupying a liminal space between Heaven and Hell.[22]

At the same time, these neutral angels also seem to share much in common with a variety of preternatural entities that originated in

[20] O'Meara and Wooding, "Introduction."

[21] For more on the geography of fairies, sprites, and similar supernatural beings see Flint, *Rise of Magic*; Jones, "Fairies," 128–130; Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*; Ostling and Forest, "Goblins, Owles and Sprites," 547–557. An even earlier *imram*, or Irish voyage narrative, is *The Voyage of Bran*. Most scholars believe that the original textual source of the *Voyage of Bran* was composed in the seventh century. Scholars have pointed out some interesting similarities between this story and Brendan's. One significant similarity is that after a long voyage, Bran encounters beautiful birds singing the canonical hours on an ancient tree. However, the significant difference lies in the itinerary. Bran travels to the otherworld, a fairyland. See Meyer ed. and trans., *Voyage of Bran*. Meyer's notes and an accompanying essay by Alfred Nutt provide examples of other *imram* to otherworldly locations that blend a belief in fairies with a Christian worldview. Daston and Park provide significant insight into twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologians' discussions of the definitions of natural, supernatural, and preternatural. For many of these theologians, the preternatural was charged with elements of instability, ignorance danger, and demonic trickery. Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 109–133.

[22] *Exempla* of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries contain stories of both Christians and demons using confession to express their regret for distancing themselves from God: see Newman, "God's Other Angels"; Newman, "Quest for Redemption."

pre-Christian mythologies. While holy angels wandered the heavenly and, on rare occasions, earthly realms, and demons were bound in hell, except when they ventured out to communicate messages, tempt, or trick earthly humans, the neutral angels were excluded from both heaven and hell. Occupying a liminal space, passive angels, much like fairies and elves, could more readily interact with humans. These interactions tended to be positive in nature for all involved, with the neutral angels inspiring piety in and offering to help the Christians they encountered.

In the Latin versions of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, composed between the eighth century through the later Middle Ages, the fallen angels whom Brendan encountered were compassionately condemned by God to live outside of heaven, without suffering the infernal punishment of those who had actively sinned. They were fallen angels, but God had not allowed them to fall as far as those who had actively rebelled against him. These passive angels identified themselves as wandering spirits who, on holy days, were embodied as beautiful white birds with which they could sing the praises of God. This embodiment was for them evidence of God's mercy and compassion. This is striking for several reasons. First, the color white almost always represented purity and innocence for medieval authors and artists. Second, in Christian imagery, a bird, particularly a white bird, often represented the physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Third, the traditional Christian image of heavenly angels—dressed in white, with feathered wings, singing the praises of God—is almost intact in this avian form. In fact, in the Anglo-Norman version of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, Brendan exclaimed: "'Did you hear how these *angels* welcomed us?'"[23] Here, Brendan actually addressed the fallen, passive angels simply as "angels." Fourth, in Celtic traditions, like Brendan's, the white bird was a common guise for fairies.[24] Finally, a seemingly minor detail is worth noting here: when the bird first approached Brendan, her wings made a sound "like a hand-bell." Bells play an important role in Christian communities. In fact, it is interesting, and perhaps intentional in the narrative, that the demon servant in Caesarius's *exempla* refused to accept the knight's payment and instead implored the knight to use the money toward the

[23] Burgess trans., *Voyage*, 83. The Anglo-Norman description of the neutral angels is in general very similar to the Latin versions.

[24] Jones, "Fairies," 129.

purchase of a bell for the local church. During the Middle Ages, bells were frequently used to ward off evil spirits, to offer prayers to the saints, and, especially in the case of larger church bells, bearing the inscription, *Vox Domini*, they spoke as the voice of God.[25] The white avian bodies and bell-like voices of these neutral angels reflect their link to God and the heavenly angels, while their exiled state leaves them spiritually closer to the devil. In terms of the allegorical, penitential nature of the text, the neutral angels remind Christians of their eternal regret for their fall and speak with authority about the sublimity of God and heaven. These fallen angels then did not tempt Christians away from God; as intermediaries they tried to guide them closer toward him.

The liminal location and specific form of the passive angels seem to indicate their marvelous preternatural state. They appeared to Brendan and his brothers as sublimely beautiful and angelic creatures who inhabited a liminal space but respected God's boundaries. It is unclear whether or not these theological outsiders were born out of some creative Christian and pagan compromise, or were conjured as a unique Christian invention, or were the result of something inextricably entangled in history, religion, magic, and imagination. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century folklorists recorded evidence of long-standing Celtic mythologies, which held that fairies were in fact fallen angels who had been cast out by God because of their great pride.

> The islanders, like all the Irish, believe that the fairies are the fallen angels who were cast down by the Lord God out of heaven for their sinful pride. And some fell into the sea, and some on the dry land, and some fell deep down into hell, and the devil gives to these knowledge and power, and sends them on earth where they work much evil. But the fairies of the earth and the sea are mostly gentle and beautiful creatures, who will do no harm if they are let alone. …[26]

All of these fallen fairies seemed to have sinned, however, some were believed to be less evil than others in temperament and deed. The mythologies, which developed alongside orthodox theology, provide evidence for a desire to resist the strict binary that coded preternatural beings as either sinister demons or holy angels. In her survey of

[25] Price, *Bells and Man*, 118, 122, 127; Coleman, *Bells: Their History*, 74–75.

[26] Lady Wilde, *Legends*, 89.

scholarship on the origins of fairies, folklorist Katharine Briggs provided several sources indicating that stories had circulated throughout the British Isles, which classified fairies as fallen angels, spirits of the dead, or, quite literally, as "small gods."[27] The syncretic nature of the neutral angels seems so thoroughly interwoven that it cannot be viewed as originating from one original source or another, but rather is part of an alternative Christian belief system that was neither fully acknowledged nor condemned by medieval theologians.

In later versions of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, such as the fifteenth-century Dutch and German narratives, the authors gave the passive, neutral angels a much more complicated appearance and backstory. Brendan and his brothers sailed to the *Multum Bona Terra*, a perpetually verdant and fertile land that "lies far beyond human ken."[28] Here, they discovered a jeweled castle, which the authors describe as being more beautiful than anything ever seen on earth.[29] The palace was surrounded by inanimate animals, and enormous trees, which hosted birds that were perpetually singing. As they set off from this land, Brendan and his fellow monks were followed by hybrid creatures, identified by name in the Dutch version as Walserands,[30] a term probably derived from the German word for an evil forest demon or goblin: Waltschrat.[31] These hybrid creatures are the neutral angels and seem to more closely resemble the chaotic and grotesque anatomies of the fallen angels damned to Hell. They were "… quite extraordinary: they had boars' heads and teeth like wolves, human hands but dogs' legs, human bodies, but long necks

[27] For example, the *daoine sidhe* were Celtic fairies who were "generally supposed to be the dwindled gods of the early inhabitants of Ireland …". Briggs, *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, 90–91; 318–320; 393–394; 418, but compare Lisa Bitel's chapter, this volume. Also see Simpson, "On the Ambiguity of Elves," 80; Tok Thompson, "Hosting the Dead," 197–200.

[28] Gerritsen and King trans., *Voyage*, 123. This land seems similar to the otherworldly, fairylands of plenty. Brown, "Cauldron of Plenty to Grail," 385–404; Meyer, ed. and trans., *Voyage of Bran*.

[29] Tales of helpful demons living in material splendor also appear in Jewish folklore. One such story recounts a tale of a demon king who saves a Jewish man, studies the Torah with him, and invites him to live in his enormous palace and even rule in his stead. Frankel, *Classic Tales*, 432–437.

[30] Gerritsen and King trans., *Voyage*, 123–124.

[31] Briggs, *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, 194, 223; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* Vol. 2, 478, 502, 517.

like cranes. They wore silk clothing above their shaggy legs. … They had long beards and growled like bears."[32] One of these beasts explained to Brendan that they had been with God in Heaven before Lucifer's rebellion.

> We are angels, consisting of such radiant light that we could look upon God. … Then it happened that Lucifer was planning to gain by force a higher place in Heaven than he had, but we took no notice. Yet, when Lucifer fell, we all had to fall too. Then God spoke to us Walserands, saying that we had behaved like swine. For swine with their evil nature do not strive after good, lying as they do in the mire or other muck, and feeling as much at home there as in a clean place. … Half of us is shaggy, like a dog; we could hardly be more extraordinary. We deserved that because in Heaven we behaved like dogs. A dog after all, never attacks someone it knows, who calls the animal by its name. However fond it is of its master, it will not attack anyone threatening him, but will stand quietly by. And because we did him no harm and took no part in the rebellion, God gave us this country as a reward. That is why we are so fortunate; we are spared Hell and will not be tormented by Lucifer's evil fellows, who torture souls. Our hope is in God in Heaven.[33]

Physically, these creatures mimic the chaotic, shape-shifting appearance ascribed to demons, and some aspects of their bodies mark them with evidence of their failings. Banished from Heaven for their inaction, but rewarded with a fertile landscape and palace of material treasures, the creatures are nevertheless tormented by occasional attacks from the Devil's dragons and, of course, by their eternal separation from God.[34]

Medieval writers, such as the authors and scribes of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, manifested complex views of liminal beings in contemporary folklore and religion. Their descriptions of the neutral angels give some insight into the way these writers negotiated the identity, behavior, and power they assigned to angelic and demonic beings. The passive angels provide a lens through which one might view the entangled web of "competing systems [pagan and Christian], actively chosen to mediate

[32] Gerritsen and King trans., *Voyage*, 125.

[33] Ibid., 126–127. The Germanic text is similar, with an additional statement by the neutral angel that: "We also lacked discernment of what was good and or bad for us to do." See Gerritsen and Strijbosch trans., *Voyage*, 148–149.

[34] Gerritsen and King trans., *Voyage*, 126–127.

a supernatural message" by Christians and for Christians.[35] While these narratives seem to function in opposition to the orthodox binary of good and evil, blessed and damned, angelic and demonic, they seem to exist syncretically and harmoniously in the minds of some medieval clerics and laypeople.

Evidence of widespread belief in the neutral angels also can be found in an early thirteenth-century poem from Germany. Composed by the *Minnesanger* Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* is one of the earliest literary grail legends. A religious tale told through a vernacular, knightly narrative, *Parzival* resembles the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* in its account of a personal, religious journey. The pilgrimages of both Brendan and Parzival end with each man feeling a greater sense of faith and trust in God. Though briefly mentioned in the poem, the neutral angels play a significant role in *Parzival* as the immortal guardians of the Holy Grail. Their exile for their lack of vigilance and incomplete loyalty to God, however, is intrinsic to the overall theme of the narrative. Just a few lines before introducing the neutral angels, Parzival's host explained that God is "incapable of deserting anyone. … be on your guard against deserting Him!"[36] Further foreshadowing the guilt of the passive angels and emphasizing the similarity between humans and the fallen angels, the host explains: "Consider now the fate that befell Lucifer and companions. … When Lucifer had travelled Hell's road with his host, a man [humankind] succeeded him."[37] Parzival and Wolfram's medieval audience were reminded that Christians were constantly witnesses to that same battle between good and evil, and that they must actively renew and defend their commitment to God. The host then informs Parzival that only a select few humans can have access to the Grail.

According to Wolfram, the Grail is a "pure stone," with miraculous powers to bring the dead back to life and to grant eternal youth and health. On Good Friday, a pure white dove would deliver a white wafer (the Eucharist) from Heaven and leave it on the stone.[38] The host then

[35] Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 398.

[36] Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival and Titurel*, 195.

[37] Ibid., 195. Scholars have argued that connections exist between beliefs in fairyland "cups of plenty" and Christian conceptions of the Holy Grail. Brown, "Cauldron of Plenty to Grail," 385–404.

[38] Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival and Titurel*, 198.

offered the following description of the "angels" who were sent by God to guard the stone:

> Those [angels] who joined neither side,
> When their great battle began—
> All the neutral angels
> Full of glory, worth and dignity
> Had to come to earth
> To the previously named stone [the Grail];
> This stone always remains pure.
> Whether God forgave them, whether He
> Continues to condemn them to damnation, I know not.
> He was entitled to it, so he took them up.
> And since they [the mortals who received the stone from the angels]
> guard this stone,
> They who God had convened thereto
> And to those He dispatched his angels.[39]

Wolfram's neutral angels are characterized as dignified in spirit and duty. As guardians of the Holy Grail, they served as intermediaries between humans and God; mortality and eternal life. They guarded God's grace manifest on earth. The *Voyage of Saint Brendan* and *Parzival* provide Christian imaginations with evidence that Paradise and eternal life can be found right here on earth, with the neutral angels as spiritual guides.

Just as the belief that fairies, goblins, and elves permeated the earthly realm, thus blurring and shifting the boundaries defining the mundane and preternatural worlds, the neutral angels seem to have fulfilled a similar role. Neither holy nor wicked, they were liminal creatures who were quite accessible to humans. Singing in praise of God, guiding Christians closer to their Creator, and serving as custodians for the sacred grail, these exiled angels are described as steadfastly loyal to God, and humans, despite the uncertainty of their ultimate fate. That the author suggests that one might wonder whether God will forgive these fallen angels for their passivity is perhaps evidence of Christian speculation and anxiety

[39]Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* vol. 1, 780; Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival and Titurel*, 199. There might be some connection between pagan myths featuring sacred trees and stones and the Christian belief in sacred trees (as in Brendan) and stones.

about the terms and limits of God's mercy. The author presumably leaves it to the theologians, or to God, to answer this question.[40]

Like the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, Wolfram's work was extremely popular throughout the Middle Ages.[41] The neutral angels appear briefly in other medieval texts, including the Old German version of the Vienna Genesis, the *Christherre Chronik*, Jansen Enikel's *Weltchronik*, Heinrich von München's *Weltchronik*, and *Salman und Morolf*.[42] In each of these contexts, the neutral angels appear to be an accepted and important part of medieval cosmology. Indeed even so canonical a text as Dante's *Inferno*, composed in the early fourteenth century, made a contribution to the literary legacy of the neutral angels. Standing at the vestibule of Hell, Dante inquired of his guide, Virgil, as to the identity of the entities who haunted this region:

> "Master, what is this I hear? And what people is this who
> seem so overcome by grief?"
> And he said to me: "This wretched measure is kept by
> the miserable souls who lived without infamy and
> without praise.
> They are mixed with that cowardly chorus of angels
> who were not rebels yet were not faithful to
> God, but were for themselves.
> The heavens reject them so as not to be less
> Beautiful, nor does deep Hell receive them, for the
> wicked would have some glory from them."[43]

Dante observed that their punishment was to follow behind an unmarked banner, while continually being stung by insects, for all eternity. The threats and stings of the insects force them to be in perpetual, and aimless, motion.[44] Passivity in Heaven was met with the punishment of exhausting and pointless perpetual activity. The neutral angels

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[40] Most medieval theologians rejected this possibility. The exception were Origen and Johannes Scotus, whose controversial and often condemned beliefs held that after a thorough process of purification even the devil might return to God.

[41] Over 80 manuscripts of Wolfram's *Parzival* survive today.

[42] Dunphy, "On Neutral and Fallen Angels," 9–13.

[43] Dante, *Divine Comedy*, 31–42, 57.

[44] Ibid., 31–42, 57.

mentioned in all of these tales suffered a separation from God. However, out of all of the descriptions of the neutral angels discussed in this chapter, the fate of Dante's passive observers was clearly the most torturous and hopeless. Virgil describes these neutral angels as cowards who failed to use their supernatural intellect to choose God.

John Freccero has devoted much attention to these neutral angels, remarking that: "Angelic neutrality was unthinkable in orthodox medieval theology. … It would appear, then, that Dante departed from the tradition when he created the angels of Hell's vestibule, for the description of their sin implies a third alternative open to angelic choice."[45] Dante certainly departed from contemporary orthodox theology, but his neutral angels were not wholly original. Instead they existed for centuries in the literal and figurative margins of Christian texts. Even in much of the modern scholarship on medieval demonology, the *Inferno*, *Parzival*, and the popular *exempla* collection, the *Dialogus Miraculorum*, the neutral angels are marginalized in footnotes if mentioned at all.[46] Though they did not fill the pages of medieval Christian texts quite like the heavenly and damned angels, their eternal regret for being deprived of God's presence would serve as a constant reminder to Christians of the danger of taking no action when it was necessary to defend their faith and God. In fact, this is the only instance in Dante's poem in which the angels and humans were described as mixing.[47] Similarly, in all of the other medieval tales of the neutral angels, these marginalized figures are often described as keeping the company, and often enjoying the company, of humans. The condition and concerns of these neutral angels, in many ways, mirror that of medieval Christians and provide them with simultaneously accessible and supernatural guidance and support.

The physically and morally marginalized condition of these passive angels made them guardians and mediators of the supernatural world. Like the pagan preternatural spirits that navigated comfortably in otherworldly and mundane environments, the neutral angels continued to serve wondrous, but not always miraculous, functions in people's

[45] Freccero, *Dante*, 110.

[46] Two outstanding exceptions are found in Elliott, *Fallen Bodies* and Barbara Newman, "Possessed by the Spirit."

[47] Martinez, "Notes," in Dante, *Divine Comedy*, 64.

everyday lives.[48] According to Caesarius von Heisterbach, the fact that "not all demons are equally bad" left room for these fallen angels to perform good works.[49] Those angels who were passively complicit were punished for not actively siding with God, and yet, they continued, in their exile, to serve and praise their Creator. The words and deeds of the passive angels made them seem remarkably angelic. In fact, these fallen angels often seemed more like saints and archangels delivering miracles from God than passive or demonic figures.

Throughout the twelfth century, and well into the later Middle Ages, stories of this sort of "diabolical goodness" proliferated as *exempla* collections and vernacular literature became more popular.[50] It is no coincidence that the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries also saw a pronounced increase in the attention theologians paid to the Devil and demons. Whether it was out of a need to clarify the nature of the Devil and demons in the wake of contemporary heretical dualistic beliefs, or to counter the ambiguity introduced through the revived interest in pagan texts with their harmless and helpful *daimones*, or to combat the clerics who claimed that "not all demons are equally bad," theologians and clerics throughout Europe became increasingly interested in reasserting a clearly defined orthodox definition of the Devil and demons, which did not allow for the possibility of "diabolical goodness" or the salvation of the fallen angels.[51]

Caesarius's *Dialogus Miraculorum*, with its didactic stories intended for sermons, continued to be consulted and copied as an authoritative text for centuries. Theologians could demonize fairies, elves, and sprites, and cast all the fallen angels as unholy and unsalvageable, but they could not completely rid their communities of a little sympathy for the damned. Another of Caesarius's exempla reveals the ambivalent attitude toward these fallen angels. Caesarius began his story by situating it in the chronicles of history: "In the year in which King Philip first rose against Otto, who later became Emperor, a certain honorable knight named Everhard, who was born in the village called Ambul, became

[48] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 109–133.

[49] Caesarius, *Dialogus* 5:35 [1.319].

[50] Ibid., 5:36 [1.321].

[51] Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*, 94–110; Dinzelbacher, "'Von der Hinterlist und den Tücken," 99–113 and Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter*, especially 81–123; Newman, "God's Other Angels."

gravely ill."[52] The knight's illness made him so insane that he began to detest his wife whom he had so dearly loved. One day a demon in human form appeared to the ailing Everhard and asked if he wished to be separated from his wife. When Everhard, in his delirious state, replied that he desired this more than anything, the demon suggested that the knight travel with him to Rome where he could obtain the Pope's permission for a divorce.[53] This is the sort of behavior Augustine and Aquinas might expect from a demon, but then Caesarius's story takes a turn. With the divorce granted, "it seemed to the demon that the knight rejoiced too much," and so the demon suggested: "Would you now like me to take you to Jerusalem, where your Lord was crucified and buried, and also to the other sacred places, which Christians desire to see?"[54] Wishing above all else to see these holy places, Everhard allowed the demon to carry him across the ocean.

The demon took Everhard to the Holy Sepulchre and other sacred places where he prayed.[55] While in Jerusalem, the demon showed Everhard "… [his] enemy …" Sephadin, who stood before his entire army.[56] The demon finally asked the knight if he would like to return to his home. Everhard replied that it was indeed time to return. As the demon transported the knight home, the demon observed a man from Everhard's parish, who was entering a forest in which there were robbers who would kill him. The demon asked the knight: "Would you like to save him?"[57] Everhard and the demon protected the neighbor so that he could pass through the woods safely. Finally returning home, Everhard's spirit reentered his almost lifeless body. Upon his return, the knight discovered that he was no longer ill and again felt great love for his wife.

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[52] Caesarius, *Dialogus* 5:37 [1:321–323]. The "year in which King Philip first rose against Otto" seems to be 1198. See Keller, *Zwischen regionaler Begrenzung*, 427–431.

[53] Caesarius, *Dialogus* 5:37 [1:321].

[54] Ibid., 5:37 [1:321–322].

[55] Ibid., [1:322].

[56] Ibid. Everhard's journey takes place during the Fourth Crusade (1198–1207). Sephadin likely refers to the brother of Saladin. This detail was perhaps included to give the story a greater sense of veracity by grounding it in real events, but it also might have served as an important reminder to Christians to tenaciously and violently defend their faith and God.

[57] Caesarius, *Dialogus*, 5:37 [1:322].

In the end, the *exemplum* turned out to be another one of several accounts of demons who wished to help Christians and guide them closer to God. Nevertheless the story of Everhard and the demonic guide is somewhat unique. Often these spiritual guides were angels or the spirits of the deceased; even Dante chose a long-dead Roman poet as his guide.[58] In these tales, the conventional purpose of the numinous visitor was to expose a mortal to the realms of the afterlife (heaven, hell, and occasionally purgatory). Since they had access to all realms, angels would seem to be the most appropriate guides. Eventually during this otherworldly tour the mortal would become aware of the underlying purpose of his or her journey. Witnessing both the unbearable torments of the sinners and the happy repose of the good, the mortal would be convinced of the benefits of a virtuous life and desire to avoid the eternal punishments of a wicked life. Most importantly, the audience hearing or reading about the account would vicariously participate in the traveler's experience.

At first glance, Everhard's interaction with the demon is hardly surprising; the demon was simply taking advantage of Everhard's delirious state and convinced him to obtain permission to divorce his wife. The demon, however, proving that he was not wholly wicked, sees "… the knight rejoicing too much on account of the divorce …", and suggests a holy pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Recognizing that Everhard was moving too far from God, the demon intervenes and tries to lead Everhard on a more righteous path. Like a helpful fairy, consecrated saint, or holy angel, this demon ultimately served the Christian knight as a supernatural intermediary. Caesarius's *exemplum* has yet another unique quality that set it apart from many of these soul-searching journey stories in medieval Christian literature. While such journeys typically involve a glimpse into the afterlife, Everhard's journey was entirely terrestrial, but fulfilled in an entirely preternatural way. From Rome to Jerusalem to Lombardy and back to Germany, the demon revealed to Everhard the existence of good and evil in the world, rather than in the afterlife. Throughout their travels, the demon constantly reminded Everhard to maintain a high degree of vigilance, and to always choose and stand up for good; for God. The trip to Jerusalem manifested the presence of good and evil in this sacred city. Confronted with the sight of the holy (the sacred Christian places and monuments) and the unholy

[58] Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur*.

(the Christian enemy Sephadin and his army of infidels), Everhard immediately was made aware of the imminent threat to Christendom. Drawing attention to the danger threatening the man from Everhard's parish, the demon directed Everhard to another type of evil in the world. In the end, Everhard did not want to renounce his marriage sacrament. By directing this journey, the demon provided Everhard with an opportunity to strengthen his relationship with his faith and God through the active pursuit of goodness. The neutral angels, referred to as demons on account of their fallen state in Caesarius's text, also actively pursue goodness, but their ultimate salvation was just as uncertain as it would have been for most Christians.

The neutral angels seem inconsistent with the teachings of the Church doctors. They act like saints and heavenly angels, they occupy a liminal space outside of orthodox cosmology (often even outside of purgatory), and they enjoy the company of Christians. Sometimes these neutral angels appear in disguises such as birds, humans, and hybrid beasts, all of which recall the panoply of physical descriptions of preternatural pagan entities. Their actions—helping out in domestic spaces, guarding and protecting, moving and acting in ways that challenge the laws of nature, and defining, confusing, and mediating the boundaries that they are barred from—all suggest that the neutral angels took up the occupations that had previously been carried out by pagan beings such as gods, fairies, sprites, and elves. Much like these pagan entities, the neutral angels were cast out of their spiritual dominion, and yet, these unorthodox, and persistent, neutral angels were always charged with reinforcing the bond between humans and God. The neutral angels frequently appear in stories that describe situations in which the human souls are in peril and help advise and guide these souls to spiritual safety. Humans and the neutral angels lived in exile from their Creator. When the neutral angels in the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* revealed to Brendan and his Christian companions, "Our hope is in God in Heaven," this hope, and implied uncertainty, was no doubt shared by their audience as well.

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CHAPTER 5

Between Fallen Angels and Nature Spirits: Russian Demonology of the Early Modern Period

Dmitriy Antonov

The image of bodiless spirits in the literature and vernacular beliefs of medieval Byzantium and Western Europe tended to meld together Christian motifs and those rooted in archaic heritage. Christian demons acquired various traits of other mythological creatures, and sometimes got transformed into ambivalent spirits who live side by side with people. The motifs and images that appeared on the borderline between theology and vernacular cultures influenced booklore and iconography. However, in contrast to their Western European counterparts, the characters of Russian vernacular demonology did not really appear in medieval texts. This is easily explained by the milieu in which learning and literacy developed in Russia (among monks, church dignitaries, nobility) and by the absence of mass witch trials that served to codify notions

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about witches, sorcerers and spirits.[1] The information we have is quite scarce and fragmented.

In Early Modern Russia, the situation began to change as interest in eschatology and the devil started to grow. In the late fifteenth century, Russian iconography saw the emergence of new motifs and scenes illustrating the apocalypse, the afterlife and the torments of hell. In the sixteenth century illuminated apocalypses came into use. Finally, the seventeenth century saw the flourishing of visual demonology in Muscovy as figures of demons, apocalyptic and infernal monsters, and detailed pictures of hell started to fill icons, frescoes and manuscripts dedicated to the afterlife of the soul. The influx of such images and motifs considerably transformed Old Russian book illumination and the churches' visual program, the public "space of images."

Similar process can be traced in literature. Until the seventeenth century the image of *bes* (demon) remained relatively homogenous in Old Russian hagiography, chronicles, compositions by church dignitaries and other texts (barring some translated stories and "forbidden" apocrypha). It was only in the second half of the seventeenth century that new, unusual descriptions of demons began to appear. Some of these were imported from Europe through translation; others, more relevant to the present volume, originated from the oral tradition. This influx of vernacular demons into booklore may be attributed in part to the "social mobility" of the seventeenth century, when people from different walks of life started to take up the quill. Not less important were the seventeenth-century trial records that reflected, albeit in an edited form, the voices of interrogated peasants and townsfolk. In contrast to the records generated by the western European witch trials, the inquests in Muscovy were often conducted by officials who were close in their cultural background to the people they were interrogating, and as there was no "theology of witchcraft," there was no pressure on the prisoners to conform to a preset idea of Satan and his earthly minions.

In this chapter I will focus on those features that distinguish demons of the seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries from their Old Russian counterparts. It is clear that as we study trial records, manuscript spellbooks or hagiography, we deal with several distinct classes of texts.

[1] Smilianskaja, *Volshebniki*, 41–44. See also Lavrov, *Koldovstvo*, 347–375; Ryan "Witchcraft Hysteria," 591–625.

However, as we shall see, they represent similar ideas and motifs concerning spirits. All these sources, different as they are, will be relevant insofar as they introduce the notions found among the "silent" mass of common peasantry, virtually inaccessible to researchers of earlier periods.[2]

Bodiless or Material? The Demon's Body

As we compare the *bes/demon* described by Old Russian clerics to the evil spirit *chyort* of East Slavic folklore (the word has been used in Russian literature since the early seventeenth century as an analogue of *bes*), we can notice that the latter seems to be more like an earthly creature: he can eat, drink, fight a human physically, be maimed or feel pain. However, this first impression is misleading: we cannot say that the dichotomy of "bodiless/material" corresponds to theological and vernacular traditions as both of them include a variety of quite different descriptions of the spirits.

Christian authors have tended to claim that the angels of heaven and the fallen angels of Lucifer are non-material. However, this has been understood variously: most of the time, theologians agreed on the spirits having "subtle" bodies that, though not material like human bodies, still limit them in space. Many Fathers of the Orthodox and Catholic Church (Basil the Great, Augustine, John Cassian, John of Damascus and others) described the invisible bodies of angels as ethereal, made of light, fiery, wind-like or simply "spiritual." John the Exarch asked: "What are angels but spirit and fire?"; the unknown author of *Life of St Andrew, Fool for Christ* mentioned the "bodiless bodies" of angels.[3] In Western Europe ideas about the spirits' total bodilessness had been discussed since the thirteenth century, but this notion was not widely accepted even in theological literature.[4] Complete bodilessness would make the messengers of God omnipresent, an attribute of God alone: angels can act only in one place at a time. As John of Damascus wrote, in the eyes of the Creator

[2] I have outlined the influence of vernacular tradition on the Old Russian image of fallen angels in Antonov, "Padshie angely." The present chapter draws on the materials from that article.

[3] Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreja Jurodivogo*, 208; Barankova and Mil'kov, *Shestodnev Ioanna exarkha*, 550.

[4] Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 31–32.

the spirits are endowed with a material body, while from the point of view of the material world they are bodiless. This idea was recognized in 787 by the Second Council of Nicaea, and became one of the foundations for depicting angels in human form: as a human soul is endowed with a "subtle" corporeality that can look like a body, so can the iconic image of an angel look like the figure of a human being (cf. Acts 12: 15). Such thinking provoked occasionally naïve speculation concerning the "true" body of an angel. According to the apocryphal *On All Creation* (probably late fifteenth century), "no saint has ever seen the naked substance of an angel, except the Holy Mother of God who saw the naked substance of Gabriel."[5] In the second half of the seventeenth century, father Lazar, one of the famous leaders of Russian Old Believers who opposed the church reforms of Patriarch Nikon, wrote that angels look like winged men not only on icons but also in reality.[6]

If angels have an invisible body, then the demons are even more material, since they have lost many of their heavenly traits and become more "earthy" in every respect. Augustine of Hippo wrote that the fallen spirits had acquired a particular kind of body, and Gregory of Sinai stated, "Each of the demons has a certain material stoutness."[7] As Satan lost his spiritual connection with God, he became "the most material" of all spirits.[8] The eleventh-century Constantinople theologian Michael Psellos introduced the boldest theory on the material properties of demons, according to which the lower orders of evil spirits cannot even pass through solid objects, and their bodies differ from human or animal ones only by their invisibility. Demons have internal organs, they eat and digest: "Some of them feed as if breathing into their vessels and nerves, others use liquids, but instead of imbibing them, they take in liquids like sponges or oysters, leaving the solid parts outside." Psellos even argued that the former angels "pass a certain type of waste out of their bodies."[9] Authoritative theologians like John Chrysostom and Basil the Great believed that the demons worshiped as gods by Greeks and Romans could derive nourishment from the smoke rising from heathen

[5] Tikhonravov, *Pamjatniki* vol. 2, 349.

[6] Subbotin ed., *Materialy dlja istorii raskola*, 117–118.

[7] Brjanchaninov, *Zhisn' i smert*, 387.

[8] Makhov, *Srednevekovyj obraz*, 50.

[9] Makhov, *Hostis Antiquus*, 127–128; Russell, *Lucifer*, 40.

sacrifices.[10] Several Christian authors supposed demons to enter human bodies to get the ability to eat, drink and have sex: for example, Palladius of Helenopolis wrote in his *Lausiac History* (fifth century) about a demon who, possessing a man, "was so strong that he could eat three measures of bread and drink a pail of water, and afterward vomited it out in the shape of steam. All that he ate and drank was consumed as if by fire."[11]

Nevertheless, in most Christian texts demons are bodiless tempters, urging human beings toward sin. They appear in visible form to frighten or deceive a person; they can actively operate in the material world but once revealed and overpowered, they disappear like smoke, running from the cross, prayer, holy water and other holy objects. Only rarely in hagiography could saints hit demons as they would a creature of flesh, cause them pain, trample on them, maim them and even, as with Margaret (Marina) of Antioch, pull out their "hair" and "beard."[12] Few of these texts were known in Russia[13] and no real "killing" was implied, nor were other "fleshy" features of the demonic bodies presented.

In vernacular traditions, in contrast, mythological characters easily combine a visible and often solid body and a non-material substance in ways that correspond to the widespread "archaic experience of translating 'spiritual' notions into the terms of the material world."[14] The borderline between the spiritual and the material is conditional and shifting. An evil spirit can be driven away with Christian/magical means such as prayer or incantation, a crucifix and holy water or herbs, roots and smoke, but if it appears in a visible form, it can be engaged in physical contact, harmed and even killed (see below). It is not surprising that if even doctrinaire Christian authors assumed demons to have "a certain material stoutness," in Slavic and Western European folklore their bodies were described much more sharply—the widespread legend tells, for

[10] Smith, "How Thin?"

[11] Chapter 18, on Macarius of Egypt; see also Makhov, *Hostis Antiquus*, 129.

[12] On other instances of this kind in Old Russian booklore, see Antonov, "'Besa pojmav, muchashe …'"

[13] Although four apocryphal Saints Lives translated in Russia—of Marina of Antioch, Juliana of Nicomedia, Ipatius of Gangra and Nicetas of Goth—include similar descriptions of beating a demon.

[14] Nekliudov, "Kakogo rosta demony?" 85–86.

instance, that after the fall, demons acquired solid and ugly bodies with humps and limps, caused by their fall on the ground.[15]

From Folklore to Booklore: New Abilities of Demons

The *chyort* of East Slavic folklore is not only a separate personage but also a universal substitute character: frequently the word *chyort*, along with *djavol* (Devil) and their many euphemistic circumlocutions, are used as a general denotation of other mythological creatures, from the *Domovoy* (house spirit or brownie) to a *Khodiachiy mertvets* (walking dead). As a result of this coexistence, even in those narratives where the *chyort/djavol* displays clear features of a Christian demon, it sometimes shares characteristics with its mythological neighbors, such as gender (she-devils: *chertovka*, *Satonida*), age (old and young demons), the ability to be born, to procreate and to die. Such characteristics of an unclean spirit started to infiltrate Russian texts of the seventeenth century. It was then that the traditional image of a *bes/djavol* attained new motifs borrowed from folklore.

In the trial records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, demons may act or look like earthly creatures. A certain Afon'ka Naumenko, accused of consorting with evil spirits in a case under investigation in 1642–1643, claimed he was served by "old and young" devils.[16] The different age of demons had not heretofore been mentioned in Old Russian texts, though it appears rarely in Greek and Western European texts.[17] However, such writings were hardly known to the peasants on trial, in contrast to oral tales of Slavic folklore, in which such abilities of spirits—to be born, have progeny and grow old—are represented widely. Demons in vernacular beliefs copulate with women and have children by them or are born by other means: from the souls of the dead if those had been sinners, witches, or unbaptized children; from animals—a 7-year-old black rooster or a rooster's egg. A *chyort* can even

[15] See for instance Russell, *Lucifer*, 80; Valk, "On the Descent," 311–332; Belova, *"Narodnaja Biblija,"* 58–60, 63, 64–65.

[16] Zertsalov, "K materialam o vorozhbe," 7; Zhuravel', *Sjuzhet o dogovore cheloveka*, 114–115.

[17] For instance, *The Great Mirror*, which was translated into Russian from Polish at the end of the seventeenth century, mentioned a "gray-haired" demon who instructed his younger, inexperienced colleague: see Derzhavina, *"Velokoe Zertsalo,"* 386.

appear as a result of a human *faux pas*—if one spits and does not rub the spit into the ground with the foot; if one shakes water droplets off his or her hands onto the ground or, on meeting a demon, strikes it twice in fear or anger (the second blow gives birth to a new demon).[18]

Already in the sixteenth century, but even more so in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, different Russian authors defined evil spirits not only by their age but also by their gender. A *Lechebnik* (a manuscript book of semi-popular medicine) of the seventeenth century told of a she-devil (*chertovka*).[19] The *Life of St. Sergius of the River Nurma* of the same period mentioned a "demonic woman."[20] A "dark-visaged demoness" and her newly born demon babies were described in the *Tale of the Demoniac Solomonia* (1670s).[21] Such infernal families call to mind Slavic mythological tales about the wife and children of a *Domovoy* or a *Leshy* (the spirit master of the woods); or a spell in which the spell caster addresses "the king of the forest and his queen and his little children … the king of the water and his queen and his little children."[22] This spell formula, known since the seventeenth century, also includes names from Christian culture, like feminine variants of the name of Satan—"Queen Satonida" or "Sadomitsa," sometimes described as a "fat woman," "Satan's pleaser."[23]

The ranks of female demons include other characters from the vernacular tradition who penetrated into the texts and iconography of the

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[18] On the motif "like two devils" (the Russian phrase equivalent to the English "the hell" as in "The hell I will!") see *Slavianskie drevnosti*, vol. 5, 520; Tolstoj, "Otchego perevelis' bogatyri na Svjatoj Rusi?" 466.

[19] Toporkov and Turilov eds., *Otrechennoe chtenie*, 380.

[20] Iurganov, *Ubit' besa*, 282.

[21] Vlasov, *Zhitijnye povesti i skazanija*, 322.

[22] Turilov and Tchernetsov, "Otrechennye verovanija," 19. On she-devils in folklore, see for instance Novichkova ed., *Russkij demonologicheskij slovar'*, 579, 585, 615.

[23] Smilianskaja, "Zagovory i gadanija," 160; Smilianskaja, *Volshebniki*, 111, 133, 138, 178; Zhuravel', *Sjuzhet o dogovore cheloveka*, 82, 106, 116; Majkov ed., *Velikorusskie zaklinanija*, 17. At this time *chertovki*—demons with breasts—started to appear from time to time in Russian book illumination as well. Such an attribute sometimes denoted their embodiment of the sin of fornication (as in a late seventeenth century—early eighteenth century woodcut called *The Feast of the Devout and the Sinners*: see Sokolov, *Khudozhestvennyj mir*, ill. 5; Buseva-Davydova, *Kultura i iskusstvo*, 82); sometimes it does not seem to be connected to the plot illustrated, as in a mid seventeenth-century print depicting demons tormenting St. Isaac of the Caves (State Historical Museum [SHM], Manuscripts Department, Muz.# 2832, fol. 162v.).

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Illness-spreading *tryasovitsy* (lit. "shakers," also known as Fever sisters and daughters of King Herod), who were often found in Russian healing incantations, for the first time appeared in icons in the seventeenth century.[24] *Kikimora*, an East-Slavic female domestic spirit, often malicious, was first mentioned in an inquest record of 1635: the sorcerer Nikifor Khromoy was accused of attacking people with the help of a demon who played pranks on them at home and scattered the cows, "and the name of that evil spirit was Kikimora."[25] At the same time the protagonist of Nikodim Tipicarius's *Tale of a Certain Monk* (1640s–1650s) tells us that he saw "a devilish image, looking like a woman, with her head uncovered and not wearing a belt"; he goes on: "Methinks it was the Kikimora that was recently seen in Moscow."[26] Nikodim does not describe the demon in detail, but its hair let loose and the absence of a belt are key markers of the unclean, demonic female in Slavic folklore.[27]

Another motif, more usual for East Slavic belief narratives than for Old Russian literature, appeared in seventeenth-century texts: demons eating and drinking like human beings. Never before had this action been presented as a demon's inherent need, but in the aforementioned *Tale of the Demoniac Solomonia* the demons try to make a girl their own by offering her the food they eat daily. We can find a similar motif in the *Tale of Savva Grudtsyn* (1660s).[28]

The idea of a demon cohabiting with a woman is completely alien to Old Russian Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the questionnaires for penitential confession, which became very long in the seventeenth century

[24] Toporkov, "Ikonograficheskij sjuzhet."

[25] Russian State Archive of Antique Documents, F. 210# 95, Fol. 25; Zhuravel', *Sjuzhet o dogovore cheloveka*, 48.

[26] Pigin, *Videnija potustoronnego mira*, 246; *Biblioteka literatury drevnej Rusi*, vol. 15, 64.

[27] On the magical and symbolic functions of belts in Slavic cultures see *Slavianskie drevnosti*, vol. 4, 230–233. In Medieval Russia, the wearing of a belt was an indispensable symbol of reservedness, piety and the ability to suppress one's base instincts (compare the Russian word *raspoyasatsya*—lit. to undo one's belt—meaning to become wild and infringe on the norms of behavior). The belt was also to be worn during sleep: breaking this rule, as well as sleeping naked, was a sin meriting penance (see Korogodina, *Ispoved' v Rossii*, 286–287).

[28] Pigin, *Iz istorii russkoj demonologii*, 141–142; Zhuravel', *Sjuzhet o dogovore cheloveka*, 166–168.

and varied depending on the social standing and gender of the confessor, feature questions about sexual relations with demons: Had a maiden gone to bed with "a *nechistyj* ['unclean' spirit] or a *Leshy*?"[29] The cleric who compiled this questionnaire was apparently quite certain of feasibility of such sins. An inquest from 1632 recorded the words of the peasant girl Olenka, who said that she had cohabited "with an unclean spirit, a *chyort*."[30] Moreover, the *Lechebniki* offered different means to defend oneself from the amorous intentions of demons: for instance, when a she-demon was attacking a man his best bet was to tie peacock feathers around himself.[31]

Eventually, this sexual motif infiltrated the hagiography of the epoch. The best-known example is the *Tale of the Demoniac Solomonia* included in The Life of Sts. Prokopii and Ioann of Ustyug. The long story of Solomonia's sufferings started when a demon appeared in the guise of her spouse and made love with her while the real husband had gone outside to piss. The sexual relations were necessary to make Solomonia pregnant with infernal children. A similar story, about a woman called Matrona who was the victim of a demon's attentions, was also included in the *Life of St. Procopius of Ustyug*.[32]

A related motif typical for East Slavic vernacular tradition—the story of a flying fiery serpent that visits a woman and makes love with her—had entered Russian booklore even earlier.[33] The demonic dragon lover appeared first in the *Life of Peter and Fevronia of Murom*, compiled by Hermolaus-Erasmus in the mid-sixteenth century.[34] A century later, the famous leader of the Old Believers, Protopope Avvakum, claimed that many women were visited by such a demonic serpent, and that Antichrist himself was going to be born out of such an unclean union: "… the enemy, or the Antichrist, will be the fruit of fornication of a Jewish woman of the tribe of Dan. I think that Satan himself will enter

[29] Korogodina, *Ispoved' v Rossii*, 232, 489.

[30] Shvejkovskaja, "Kriminalnaja drama," 127.

[31] Toporkov and Turilov eds., *Otrechennoe chtenie*, 380.

[32] Pigin, *Iz istorii russkoj demonologii*, 109.

[33] On the flying serpent lover in Slavic cultures, see *Slavianskie drevnosti*, vol. 2, 330–333; Popov, *Vlijanie tserkovnogo uchenija*, 192–193; Vinogradova, "Sexualnye svjazi tcheloveka."

[34] On the difference in the description of the serpent in various versions of the text see Iurganov, *Ubit' besa*, 366–373.

her in the same shape as the serpents now visiting women, the demonic spirit."[35] A late seventeenth-century text recently found in the archive of the Posolsky Prikaz (Foreign Affairs Agency) stated that demons turn into fiery serpents and fornicate with maidens.[36] To crown it all, a Synodal case of 1746 claimed that a fiery serpent had visited the wife of the Belgorod president, O.S. Morozov.[37]

It is not surprising that Russian sources of the late seventeenth century often mentioned the physical extermination of demons. In the 1670s, this was vividly described by the author of the *Tale of Solomonia*. According to the Tale, many demons were killed by lightning striking in a swamp where they tried to hide; later in the story Sts. Procopius and Ioann pulled out and destroyed the demon babies inhabiting Solomonia's womb one by one, like harmful animals—the procedure similar to a long-lasting surgery rather than miracle. Another example comes from the autobiography of Epiphanius the Monk, an Old Believer and the confessor of Protopope Avvakum (the text was written during their confinement in an underground prison). Epiphanius claimed that once he had attacked and beat up a demon who appeared before him—the monk punched the evil spirit heavily until he got tired and had his hands wet with "the demon's meat." When another *bes* attacked and thrashed the monk, Epiphanius took his revenge and tortured the demon, leaving him "for dead"—however, the demon got up "like a drunk" and walked away.[38]

As with the other motifs already mentioned, such ideas were practically absent from Old Russian booklore but widespread in folklore. In many belief narratives, a sacred character—the prophet Elijah or God Himself—strikes and kills the unclean spirits with a lightning bolt (a motif popular also in Greece and Western Europe). The Southern Slavs especially had the idea that a demon could be killed with a simple blow of a fist, taking care to strike once, as the second blow will either resurrect the demon or produce a new one.[39] In a tale written down in the early twentieth century by N.E. Onuchkov, a peasant saw a demon who

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[35] *Drevlekhranilishe Pushkinskogo Doma*, 90.

[36] Korolev, Mayer, and Shamin, "Sochinenie o demonah," 120–121.

[37] Pigin, *Iz istorii russkoj demonologii*, 106.

[38] *Pamyatniki literatury Drevney Rusi*, 315–316.

[39] Tolstoj, "Otchego perevelis' *bogatyri na Svjatoj Rusi?*" 465–467; Novichkova ed., *Russkij demonologicheskij slovar'*, 610–611.

was mumbling to himself: "Each year is worse than the last, each year is worse than the last," on which the peasant gave him a blow with an oar saying "This year is your worst!" and the demon died on the spot.[40] It is quite natural that some authors of late Muscuvite Rus believed demons not only to eat, drink, have babies and grow old but also to be vulnerable to human violence, as creatures of flesh and blood.

Herbs and Hooves: Vernacular Exorcism

An important factor facilitating the coming together of Christian demons and the evil spirits of the vernacular tradition was undoubtedly village magic. Analyzing the trial records for sorcery, we find that the functions of the demons that the defendants confessed to have in their service often fall within the range of traditional Slavic magical practices: these consist mostly of divination and malefice (including love magic).[41] The demons were set with the tasks usual for peasants' sorcerers: to go and see what a person in another place was doing, to create attraction in the heart of a man or to harm enemies. Thus, the alleged witch Katerina Ivanova admitted in 1764 that she used herbs and bewitched water to make demons attack her fellow villagers.[42] Afon'ka Naumenko claimed that he sent a demon down on the wind to attack a man, beating the victim to death.[43] Depending on the social position and needs of a person demons could be used for very different tasks—thus, in a 1736 trial record, they are presented as universal helpers who aid a man in hunting, in war, and "in horses," as well as in riches, on the road, in beekeeping and "in every good and evil cause."[44]

Similar magic strategies were linked with the phenomenon of demonic possession. Still today the behavior of "possessed" people (speaking with different voices, acting wild) is conceptualized in traditional communities

[40] Pigin, *Iz istorii russkoj demonologii*, 116.

[41] The trial records of the eighteenth century also present a famous mythological motif: once demons start to serve a person, it is necessary to keep them constantly busy lest they do harm: the demons should be given unending tasks, like carrying stones to the river or gathering up sand. See Zhuravel', *Sjuzhet o dogovore cheloveka*, 117; Smilianskaja, *Volshebniki*, 91–92.

[42] Smilianskaja, *Volshebniki*, 91–95.

[43] Zertsalov, "K materialam o vorozhbe," 7, 36.

[44] Zhuravel', *Sjuzhet o dogovore cheloveka*, 93.

across Russia as either an effect of certain mythological forces and creatures (curses, a spirit called *ikota*, etc.), or a demon that has entered a person.[45] The "Christianization" of the ancient cultural, social, and mental phenomenon of spirit possession went along the same lines as Christianization of vernacular demonology—the Christian demon took the place of a mythological actor who had personified the possession before. Sometimes the two explanations coexisted: sorcerers could use magic to send the *demon/devil* down on the wind and make him enter a human, thus producing the illness—this is exactly what the above-mentioned Afon'ka Naumenko claimed he had done. The author of the *Tale of the Demoniac Solomonia* also says that the demons who possessed Solomonia might have been sent "by an evil and false man," thus conflating Christian demonology with older discourses of cursing.[46]

Magic tools could be used not only to curse but also to cast the demon away and thus to heal. Prayer and churchgoing, even partaking of the Holy Communion, did not guarantee getting rid of demons in vernacular beliefs. For example, Katerina Ivanova claimed in 1764 that all the while that the "devils" had served her, she went to church, prayed and had no intention of rejecting Orthodoxy.[47] Magical means could be perceived as more effective.

Some descriptions of magical procedures with various stones, animal bones, and more came to Muscovite Rus' from the West, where everyday magical practices were both well developed and well described. According to the encyclopedic *Breezy Garden* (a seventeenth-century translation of a Polish version of Johann Wonnecke von Cube's fifteenth-century *Hortus sanitatis*), a diamond could help against demonic attacks and help the possessed.[48] Likewise, coral could be used to fight the unseen enemy: finely ground and mixed with rainwater, it would keep a person from temptation and the evil spirit.[49] If a demon has taken up residence in a house, the *Lechebniki* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recommend flushing it out with smoke coming from burned

[45] See, for instance, Melnikova, *"Voobrazhaemaja kniga,"* 87–91; Khristoforova, *Ikota*, 2013.

[46] Pigin, *Iz istorii russkoj demonologii*, 112.

[47] Ibid., 95–96.

[48] Florinskij, *Russkie prostonarodnye travniki*, 152.

[49] Toporkov and Turilov eds., *Otrechennoe chtenie*, 382.

bones of an owl.[50] An even more cruel and unusual method of protecting oneself against a devil was to wear rings carved from hooves that had to be removed from a live elk—and only the right-foot hooves would do.[51]

An important trend in the magical fight against demons included the use of local herbs—in contrast to the exotic recipes from translated books, it would seem to reflect the actual practices. Many texts recommend botanical exorcism; for example, *postrel* (most probably spp. of *Pulsatilla*, windflower or wolfsbane, though all such identifications are a little risky) drives the devil away; *plakun* (*Lythrum salicaria* L., loosestrife) will keep the demon away from a house, and its roots will protect a person; *tchernopyl* (*Artemisia vulgaris* L., mugwort) also helps to drive the demon away from a building; the "hairy grass" *paramon* (*Leucanthemum vulgare* L., ox-eye daisy) is useful against evil spirits and the falling sickness if given to drink mixed with milk.[52] Herbs could also drive the demons out of animals: if a cow was restive, a dab of wax with a bit of *tsar Murat* (*Carduus* spp., thistle) was to be attached to its hide, so that the unclean spirit should leave it.[53] A certain I. Lepyokhin reported that in 1768–1769 a former army officer tried to convince him that *plakun* overpowered demons and made them weep (suggested, apparently, by the name, *plakun-trava*, lit. weeping herb).[54] Similar botanic motifs also appear in hagiography: Sylvester of the river Obnora, in his *Life*, gives an herb to a demoniac woman to heal her, whereas Cyril of Beloozero tells another demoniac to eat unspecified berries.[55]

Incantational prayers used to cast away a demon appeared not only in the magical manuscripts of the eighteenth century but also in anthologies of prayers and in the translated Greek euchologies.[56] The spells commanded the demons to withdraw ("get thee hence into a desert

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[50] Ibid., 386.

[51] Ibid., 385.

[52] Florinskij, *Russkie prostonarodnye travniki*, 3, 7; Toporkov and Turilov eds., *Otrechennoe chtenie*, 385; Ippolitova, *Russkie rukopisnye travniki*, 401.

[53] Florinskij, *Russkie prostonarodnye travniki*, 7.

[54] Lavrov, *Koldovstvo*, 326.

[55] Pigin, "Narodnaja mifologija," 333.

[56] A. I. Almazov points out that the Russian prayer books had fewer anti-demon incantations but many more specialized apocryphal prayers to various saints to help against particular diseases: Almazov, *Vracheval'nye molitvy*, 94–95.

place where no water is, which the Lord cares not for"),[57] and even threatened them as creatures of flesh and blood. One of the spells against an evil spirit, written down in the eighteenth century, was supposed to transfer the illness to the demon himself, as one would do against the curse of a sorcerer: "Let the sickness turn against thy head, and let thy sin strike thy upper, unclean and wicked devil."[58] A spell against hemorrhage included in a seventeenth-century *Lechebnik*, tells the demon not to "sit" on the spell caster's body on pain of death.[59] In a spell recorded in 1758, the sorcerer referred to the death of a demon as a factor for the power of his magic: "As the arrow shoots, breaking the stone and killing the devil, so do I, God's servant Gavrila, speak away from God's servant Vasiliy his sickness and afflictions."[60] In other magic texts, the devil appeared as the agent of disease, and threats against him were similar to those that are used in spells telling a sickness to annihilate, drown or stab itself.[61]

Fusing Demons and Nature Spirits

As *cherti* and many of the East Slavic nature spirits are often believed to dwell in natural terrestrial boundaries (field borders, gullies, forests, swamps, whirlpools), it is clear why in Old Russian homilies, canonical books of law and confession questionnaires there was a special ban placed on prayers given to "demons" near wells, rivers, in copses, near barns, washing houses and other "transitional" places.[62] The Church did it best to fight against vernacular rites. Still the idea that demons live in

[57] Almazov, *Vracheval'nye molitvy*, 129. This formula is reminiscent of that in the well-known prayer of St. Basil the Great for the casting out of Satan (see in the Prayer-book of Petr Mogila: RSL, F. 304. II# 40, fol. 236–236v., Arabic pagination). It is similar to the incantation formulas that tell the illness to go into an empty, deserted place or to a place where nothing grows. For more on these motifs see Agapkina, *Vostochnoslavjanskie lechebnye zagovory*, 117–121, 122–130.

[58] Almazov, *Vracheval'nye molitvy*, 128. On the formulae of counter-curses, see Agapkina, *Vostochnoslavjanskie lechebnye zagovory*, 141–142.

[59] Lakhtin, *Starinnye pamjatniki*, 33.

[60] Smilianskaja, "Zagovory i gadanija," 163–164.

[61] This motif is mostly found in Byelorussian and Ukrainian spells: Agapkina, *Vostochnoslavjanskie lechebnye zagovory*, 145.

[62] See, for instance, Anitchkov, *Jazychestvo i Drevnjaa Rus'*, 312–313; Gal'kovskij, *Bor'ba hristianstva*, 201–205; Korogodina, *Ispoved' v Rossii*, 230, 284, 445, 546, etc.

the ground, in the forest or in the water influenced Christian booklore. The tale about the fall of Satan's angels, who were scattered everywhere as they fell, and therefore started to inhabit air, earth and hell, was widely spread in oral narrations all over Europe and also penetrated in some written texts: Michael Psellos bases his hierarchy of demons on this idea; it can also be found in a few Old Russian writings.[63] In late Muscovite Rus this motif flourished and gave birth to new, unusual stories.

The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Russian trial records and magic texts described both "demons" and spirits of vernacular beliefs who lived in different places in nature. A spell from the Olonets collection (after 1625) mentions "*Leshii* from the forest and *Vodyanye* [spirit masters of the water] from the water,"[64] and in 1723 the false fool for Christ Vasiliy Voitinov testified at his inquest that "water demons" helped him destroy mills, and "air demons" carried him around and brought him some riches from other countries.[65] A case recorded in 1730 presents long list of demons: dark kings and dark princes; devils and demons of earth and of water; demons winged, furry, airborne and swamp-dwelling, demons of forests and of houses.[66] A similar list (which adds different "nationalities" of demons: Crimean and Mari, Saxon and Overseas) was used in a black spell recorded in 1728.[67] Such localization makes the demons really close to the traditional characters of East Slavic beliefs, the spirits masters of places. The boundary between a forest demon, water demon or house demon on the one hand and *Leshy*, *Vodyanoy* and *Domovoy* on the other is negligible: for the Church all of these are equally devils, and in the syncretic "vernacular Orthodoxy" they are often perceived as closely related.[68]

However, this coming together of Christian demons and mythological personages was no mere peculiarity of simple people who wrote down magic spells or were interrogated. In the seventeenth century such hybrid characters—half-fallen angel, half-Slavic local spirit—started to appear in the hagiography of the North of Russia. This geography can be explained in at least two ways: firstly, the dwellers of Northern

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[63] As in *Tolkovaja Paleja*: Riazanovskiy, *Demonologija*, 17–18.

[64] Toporkov and Turilov eds., *Otrechennoe chtenie*, 40.

[65] Smilianskaja, *Volshebniki*, 98; Zhuravel', *Sjuzhet o dogovore cheloveka*, 114–115.

[66] Zhuravel', *Sjuzhet o dogovore cheloveka*, 48–50.

[67] Ryan, "Witchcraft Hysteria," 60.

[68] Ibid., and see *Slavianskie drevnosti*, vol. 1, 165; Vol. 2, 121.

Russia were in direct contact with the neighboring Finno-Ugric peoples and their system of beliefs, where local spirits played an important part; secondly, the North itself being far from the center regions was not under such strict control of the Church authorities as other, more accessible and populated dioceses. Consequently, in the latter half of the seventeenth century, several *Lives* of saints written down in the Northern towns featured "forest demons" or "spirits of water." Again, the range of their functions and the particular dwelling place make them almost identical to the *Leshy*, *Vodyanoy* or *Bannik* (the spirit master of the Russian sauna). For instance, in one of the miracles of St. Nicodemus of Kozheozero (1688), a shepherd met a forest demon in the woods, who was very similar to a *Leshy*: ringing a small bell, it led the traveler into its home in the deep forest, where he found several other wayfarers who had lost their way.[69] In the *Life of St. Job of Ushchelye*, a water demon not only attacked a boat but also tried to drown a horse (one of the favorite animals of the Eastern Slavic *Vodyanoy*).[70] The *Tale of John and Longinus*, first compiled in the seventeenth century, tells the story of a man who unwisely decided to take a swim in the lake; as soon as he entered the water, the unclean spirit possessed him so that he saw people "shaking like trees, and among them one who was frightful and misshapen, who threatened me and wanted to drown me."[71] One of the posthumous miracles of Dmitry of Uglich describes a similar case: the devil tempted a man who was drunk to take a swim in the Volga,[72] after which he struck the man in the water with his left hand and pulled him "into the depth of the demonic whirlpool."[73] We also find "water demons" and "forest

[69] Pigin, *Iz istorii russkoj demonologii*, 98; Wigzell, "Russian Folk Devil," 61.

[70] Kliuchevskij, *Drevnerusskie zhitija svjatyh*, 464.

[71] Dmitriev, *Zhitijnye povesti*, 220.

[72] Risking one's life—including entering water in a storm, or in a dangerous place, etc.—was considered to be a sin: the person who died as a result of such an action was considered a suicide, and was denied a funeral service in church and burial in consecrated ground. However, if a person does not consciously mean to risk their life; for example, following others into the water, "and if Satan then catches his foot or causes him in another way to fall and drown in the water, then he dies a martyr." See: *Prolog. Mart-May*, fol. 123; *Biblioteka literatury drevnej Rusi*, vol. 10, 110.

[73] See in an early nineteenth-century manuscript: Library of the Russian Academy of Science, Department of Manuscripts, 1.5.98, fol. 101–101v. On fol. 101, a yellow wingless and tufted demon is depicted.

demons" in the *Tale of the Demoniac Solomonia* (1670s).[74] These stories do not really include anything that is canonically unacceptable or even controversial (in contrast to the tales about demons in a woman's womb, or aging and dying spirits); still they are very much out of the context of Old Russian booklore and demonstrate the strong influence of vernacular belief narratives.

Conclusions

It goes without saying that the process described in this chapter is generally typical for vernacular traditions—the motifs and characters of the Christian theology get adopted to and fused with pantheons of local "small gods." Still it is a tough task to trace the process, as the culture of the lower classes most often remains hidden from historical research.

In the seventeenth century, the rich complex of vernacular notions about demons began to actively influence the book genres that had previously been closed to them: the images and motifs of the Slavic demonology appeared in hagiography, autobiography and in various texts with clearly defined social and religious aims, such as confessional questionnaires. It would be risky to compare the new motifs only with the late folklore records of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, but the incantations put down in writing as early as in the seventeenth century and magical practices described in trial records help to prove their vernacular roots. Under the influence of belief narratives demons were becoming more and more fleshy and acquired non-characteristic physical abilities (to create objects, to change the natural course of events, to get women pregnant with new demons, etc.), but at the same time they became more vulnerable and, like many characters of Slavic mythology, mortal: spirits could age and be killed.

Similar tendencies can be observed in iconography, in the images used among common peasants first and foremost. From the seventeenth century we can find *tryasovitsy* in icons, whereas popular prints feature *Baba Yaga* and some other mythological characters. In Old Believers' book miniatures of the eighteenth century, demons become weird creatures

[74] Vlasov, *Zhitijnye povesti i skazanija*, 321, 326. "Water demons" on eighteenth-century miniatures (depicted as dark-colored men): SHM Vakhr.# 432, fol. 73v., 74v.; Published in Pigin, *Iz istorii russkoj demonologii*, 73, 81.

endowed with unusual attributes and put in an unusual visual context.[75] Strange as it may seem, this bringing together of the Christian demon and the folklore *chyort* very rarely became the object of attention and displeasure of church dignitaries. In 1707, Job the Metropolitan of Novgorod wrote a rejoinder to an anonymous letter on the birth of the Antichrist, where the Son of Perdition (if the account of the Metropolitan is to be believed) had been presented in the mythological way, as a monstrous child.[76] But the main reason for the Metropolitan's displeasure was not so much the imagery as the apocalyptic expectation itself coupled with non-canonical idea of the Antichrist.

However, after a short invasion, Russian vernacular demonology soon ceased to infiltrate literature of "high genres." If in the Middle Ages this infiltration had been mostly prevented by the social filters, which weakened considerably in the seventeenth century, in the eighteenth century the secularization of the official culture would build new walls between the high and the vernacular traditions. The second advent of Slavic demonology into Russian literature would begin only in the nineteenth century as the elites turned to the national cultural heritage.

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[75] For more details on Old Russian visual demonology see Antonov and Maizuls, *Demony i greshniki*.

[76] Iov, mitropolit Novgorodskij. *Otvet kratkij*; Antonov and Maizuls, *Demony i greshniki*, 171.

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CHAPTER 6

Crisis at the Border: Amazonian Relations with Spirits and Others

Artionka Capiberibe

This chapter has as its central theme a phenomenon that the indigenous peoples living in the Amazon region of the lower Oiapoque, in the borderlands between Brazil and French Guiana, have called in Portuguese, very suggestively, *Crise* [Crisis]. It is an outbreak of attacks by spirits occurring inside and outside the Christian churches in the indigenous area; primarily affecting young people, it drives them to a radical behavioral change: they become violent and indiscriminately attack friends and relatives.

This case brings into focus sociabilities that are constituted in the conjunction of aspects of Christian religions and local shamanisms, but also, fundamentally, through interpersonal, interspecific, interethnic and intergenerational relations. The case complicates current models of Christianization, highlighting the importance of relations both within groups (ethnicities, religious communities) and between them (including between human and non-human persons).

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Over the past 20 years anthropological investigation into the Christianization of native populations has become an important topic of theoretical debate and often conflicting interpretations.[1] These discussions emphasize the complexity of this phenomenon, marked by the encounter between the internal diversity of Christianity and the local contexts in which it operates and develops.[2] This lack of a monolithic model leads one to suspect that local peoples are not the only ones transformed in the encounters produced by Christianity. The recognition that churches afford to the diverse forms of Christian religiosity sustained by native peoples indicates that a sort of two-way transformation is underway.

In Amerindian societies, this transformation is expressed in the creation of meanings produced in the relation between Christianity and the native sociocosmology.[3] This encounter produces an "intellectual bricolage" in the sense made famous by Lévi-Strauss: a constant (re)arrangement of elements, as at each turn of a kaleidoscope, creates new shades and meanings from the original set. It can be said, with Lévi-Strauss, that "the signified changes into the signifying and vice versa."[4]

In the "intellectual bricolage" of religious conversion, the mobilized signifiers are both symbolic and material elements. The latter—introduced mainly in the form of goods, technologies, and medicines—arrive with the agents of conversion and serve as an enticement to conversion. However, the significance and weight of objects in the conversion process is limited, because, as proposed by Joel Robbins, the reason for the

[1] See the introductions to Hefner ed., *Conversion to Christianity* and Cannell ed., *Anthropology of Christianity*. The Americanist context alone has generated at least four collections dedicated to this theme: see Wright ed., *Transformando os Deuses* (two volumes); Montero ed., *Deus na Aldeia*, Vilaça and Wright eds., *Native Christians*. For indigenous Christianity in Brazil, see de Almeida, "Religião em transição."

[2] This plasticity is a subject of discussion both in mission Churches and in anthropological studies. As argued by Cannell ("Introduction," 25–30), the central question involves considering how far Christianity can go without losing its identity.

[3] I borrow the term *sociocosmology* from Viveiros de Castro's ethnography of the Araweté, in which he demonstrates the existence of an overlap between sociology and the indigenous cosmology such that these two domains cannot be thought separately. See Viveiros de Castro, *Araweté*.

[4] Lévi-Strauss, "Science of the Concrete," 21.

natives to seek these exchanges is independent of the missionaries' expectations. Moreover, interpretations emphasizing utilitarian inducement often mask researchers' own desire that "that traditional religion survives very much intact beneath a veneer of Christianity or some other world religion."[5]

On the other hand, interpretations that seek to understand the value of introducing symbolic elements run the danger of understanding indigenous social reality as an order disturbed by some external agent (Christianity, the market economy, a religious war), and in need of reordering.[6] Again, I corroborate Robbins's critique of this approach, which rests on the assumption that the religion of conversion would be seen as a coherent whole obliged to make sense of and give (new) sense to the reality set in crisis by its presence. If "crisis" is both a conversion and the crisis that precipitates that conversion, we enter, as Pedro Pitarch has suggested, into a tautological explanation.[7]

In short, neither utilitarian nor intellectualist accounts of conversion suffice to explain the creation/re-creation of the symbolic universe that constitutes a new, native Christian religion. This recreation can only be understood through an examination of the modes by which the subjects who assume and prefigure the Christian religiosity verbalize their reconfigured sociocosmology.

To understand the re-creation set into motion by Christianities in the Amazon, it must be said that among Amerindians, relations produce sociologically significant differentiations; they distinguish human from nonhuman persons; they separate blood relatives from in-laws, establish age categories, they underwrite differences between genders.[8] In many Amerindian societies, human and nonhuman beings (animals, animal spirits, founding heroes, etc.) hold the same status of "person":

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[5] Robbins, *Becoming Sinners*, 85. For an example of the utilitarian approach in an Americanist context, see Gallois and Grupioni, "O Índio na Missão."

[6] For the defense of this "intellectualist" approach, see Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," especially his notion of "dissolution of borders of the microcosm."

[7] Pitarch, *La cara oculta del pliegue*, 144.

[8] The use of "relation" adopted here takes into account the proposition of Marilyn Strathern, that "one does not only see relations between things but things as relations." See Strathern, *Relation*, 19.

their humanity or nonhumanity is not only relative but relational.[9] Thus, if a jaguar encounters a human in the woods, this human is an animal prey from the feline's point of view, as the jaguars are animal prey from the humans' point of view.[10] Consequently, being a person and having culture are not prerogatives exclusive to men and women, but qualities extensive to nonhumans.[11] In such a context, what would happen when other types of beings enter these relations—beings such as God and the devil?[12]

The Context of the Crisis

Since the sixteenth century, the lower Oiapoque region has been populated by a multitude of non-indigenous peoples (primarily the Portuguese and the French) and by an even greater diversity of indigenous peoples.[13] The current occupancy of lower Oiapoque is testimony of the massacre inflicted by colonization. Nowadays, only four peoples live in the region: the Palikur, who speak a language of the Maipure-Arawak family; the Galibi-Kali'na, whose language is affiliated to the Carib language family; and the Galibi-Marworno and the Karipuna, both

[9] In the Americanist context, there are two main theories proposing a shared humanity between humans and nonhumans: the "animism" of Descola (*Par-delà nature et culture*), and the "perspectivism" of Viveiros de Castro ("Cosmological Deixis") and Lima ("O dois e seu múltiplo"). Their main difference is that "perspectivism" proposes that, in some situations of interspecific relation, it is possible that one of the subjects "capture" the point of view of the other, becoming the human (or predator) of the relation.

[10] Palikur mythology is fraught with narratives about a humanity that is more a condition than a state, which is defined in context, from different points of view and with the possibility of capturing the point of view of the Other: see Capiberibe, *Batismo de Fogo*. This notion of person is related to a conception of body that is eminently transformational: for understandings on the meaning of the body in the Amerindian sociocosmology see Seeger, Da Matta and Viveiros de Castro, "A construção da pessoa"; and Vilaça, "Making Kin."

[11] This goes far beyond the limits assigned to the notion of person in the classic essay by Mauss, "Une Catégorie de L'Esprit Humain."

[12] This is a question posed by the Nuti-Pronex project (2003), in which I took part. Lead by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Carlos Fausto, the project brought together over 30 anthropologists researching indigenous populations in the Amazon and elsewhere in Brazil. The project resituated "identity" as "alteration," "agency" as "subjectivization," and "change" as "transformation."

[13] See Nimuendaju, *Les Indiens Palikur*, and F. Grenand & P. Grenand, "La côte d'Amapá."

speakers of varieties of Créole or Patois derived from French. All these peoples understand or speak, to different extents, the languages that come from relations with nonindigenous peoples: Portuguese, French and *Créole*.

Other indigenous peoples living closer to upper Oiapoque River also circulate in the region, but here I will analyze the Crisis as it was reported to me by interlocutors of the Galibi-Marworno and, especially, of the Palikur and Karipuna. The focus of the analysis will also be delimited to the territory in which I established contact with the subject under discussion, that is, the Terra Indígena ("Indigenous Land," a constitutionally guaranteed Indigenous Territory comparable to a Native American Reservation in the US or a First Nation Reserve in Canada) and its immediate environs on the Brazilian side of the border, south of the Oiapoque River catchment area.[14] On the Brazilian side of the border, the Palikur number approximately 1300 people living in more than a dozen villages. The Karipuna, with a population of approximately 2500, are also distributed in many villages. By contrast, the approximately 2400 Galibi-Marworno are almost all concentrated in a single village, Kumarumã.[15] These peoples also have families living in the small city of Oiapoque, located on the south (Brazilian) shore of the river that separates the two countries.

Setting aside the fleeting existence of French Jesuit missions in the eighteenth century, the Catholic Church was established in the region with the installation of the Mother Church of Oiapoque, in 1948.[16] However, until the 1970s priests visited the indigenous area rarely and irregularly, primarily to conduct religious services. A major change occurred in the mid-1970s, when the parish of Oiapoque became linked to the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI). The CIMI combined

[14] Although my field research focuses on the Palikur, I visited Galibi-Marworno, Galibi-Kali'na and Karipuna villages, and I keep frequent contact with persons of these populations in the city of Oiapoque. The information presented here are data from my direct observation, in conjunction with the ethnographic reports of anthropologists with field research in the region. The main references are Vidal, "Outros viajantes" and "O modelo e a marca"; Tassinari, *No Bom da Festa*; Dias, *O bem beber*, Green and Green, *Knowing the Day*, Mussolino, "Migração," and Andrade, *O real que não é visto.*

[15] The populational data come from the Enciclopédia dos Povos Indígenas no Brasil, at https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/c/quadro-geral. Access on: May 27, 2016.

[16] Rufino, "The Indigenist Missionary Council"; Almeida, "Tradução e mediação," 283.

religious service with political and social action, and follows the theology of enculturation, emphasizing the notion that fundamental Christian values such as love, fraternity, and solidarity are already present in local cultures.[17]

The Catholicism present among the Karipuna and Galibi-Marworno is characterized by celebrations for the saints. Among the Galibi-Marworno, Catholicism is related primarily to lifecycle rites: baptism, church marriage and a proper funeral. Their Catholicism culminates in the celebration to Santa Maria, composed of processions, masses and litanies but also soccer tournaments, profane party music, visits by regional politicians, and the presence of non-Indigenous tourists (French, Brazilian, French Guianese). Both among the Galibi-Marworno and the Karipuna, the Catholicism of saint-veneration coexists readily with shamanistic rituals.

More recently, from 2000, a Baptist Church (Evangelical, non-Pentecostal) settled among the Galibi-Marworno. In the Karipuna, the Pentecostal Assembly of God established itself. The activity of both churches among the indigenous populations is guided by a salvationist drive strongly related to an eschatological expectation. This end-times expectation provides fertile ground for the development of the "spiritual revivals" observed today in this indigenous area, marked mainly by behavioral changes, emotivity, an impulse to evangelize, spirit possession and (among the Pentecostals), religious ecstasies.[18]

However, the indigenous population whose history of relations with Christianity has been most distinct are the Palikur. Until 1965, with the arrival of a couple of American linguist missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), the Palikur had not been targets of intensive or coordinated Evangelical religious proselytism. Although they had been inserted into the Catholic system of saint celebrations, they look back on this past negatively, as observed in the following dialogue:

[17] Rufino, "The Indigenist Missionary Council"; Almeida, "Tradução e mediação," 283.

[18] On the massive influx of Evangelical and Pentecostal missions in the indigenous areas of Brazil, and on their geneological roots in the "revivals" of nineteenth-century United States Protestantism and in English Methodism, see de Almeida, "Traduções do Fundamentalismo."

Mbagui: Artionka, you are a believer?
Artionka: No.
Mbagui: I am a believer, but before I was Catholic, I believed in the saints. One day, I had a dream, and in my dream a man came and told me: "Do you think the saint speaks to you? He doesn't. He has a mouth but doesn't speak, he has ears but doesn't listen." (Kumenê, 1996)

Reports of the conversion event, a sort of founding myth of the Evangelical religion among the Palikur, always point to an element that, as with dreams, is part of another world.[19] It is the religious ecstasy that transpires in the form of being "touched by the Holy Spirit" in a powerful, intimate encounter.[20] The Palikur ascribe to this Spirit the strength that made people quit drinking alcoholic beverages, stop fighting each other, come together and live in the same common space, and start to believe in the concrete existence of God.[21]

Soon after the event of conversion, the Palikur sought out the Pentecostal Assembly of God church in nearby towns and introduced it to the Palikur villages along the Urukauá River. This Church has introduced to the Palikur a theological emphasis on "reading the Word" and receiving the Holy Spirit; an aesthetic (adopted from Swedish missionaries) of a suit for men and long dresses and uncut hair for women; and a moral code prohibiting drinking, smoking, dancing, and the playing of soccer.

As we shall see, this long history of contact with non-indigenous peoples and the religious landscape of the lower Oiapoque region, with its multiplicity of Christianities, are fundamental to understanding the Crisis phenomenon.

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[19] On Amazonian notions of dreams as messages from the worlds (and inhabitants of those worlds) with which shamans communicate, see, e.g., Chaumeil, *Voir, savoir, pouvoir*; Barcelos Neto, *A arte dos sonhos*; and Bilhaut, *Des nuits et des rêves.*

[20] For a narrative describing this experience, see Capiberibe, *Batismo de Fogo*, 208–209.

[21] The Palikur conceive the Pentecostal religious conversion as the beginning of a life said to be "civilized." Compare similar conceptions among the Piro in Peru and the Paumari in the upper Amazon: see Gow, "Forgetting Conversion"; Bonilla, *Des proies si désirables* and "Skin of History."

The Crisis

In the Houaiss dictionary of the Portuguese language, *crise* has at least a dozen meanings, which can be grouped into two major themes: on the one hand, the term is related to physiology and psychology, describing the decisive moment or turning point of a disease or of an emotional imbalance. On the other hand, this word is connected to the field of social activities, describing acute but economic disturbances or political situations of momentary tension with acute disputes and conflicts. As we shall see, the meanings and consequences attributed to the term "crisis," in the context of the lower Oiapoque River, highlight both physiological-psychic and social aspects.

The Crisis is the emergence of some form of spiritual entity that possesses people, but especially the young. This possession causes the possessed to act violently, putting their own lives and the lives of those around them at risk. This is the recurring situation in the narratives.[22] The phenomenon is described as violent, seen as dangerous and a cause of discomfort (primarily, sadness and fear). It seems to provoke some kind of break with a state of social coexistence through suspicions that cast sociability into doubt. This is seen in the following report:

F. I assigned a group work to the students and noticed that the young people of one of the groups were looking at a girl, as if they were watching her, when she fell, they were ready to hold her. (Galibi-Marworno, Palikur village of Kumenê, 2013)[23]

This "falling" is literally transforming, acting as the spirit that possessed oneself, taking the point of view of the spirit and becoming Another to one's group, altering oneself in the relation, as would happen in a chance encounter with a predator, in the woods. In the following report, this is clear, as the person possessed is said to view their peers

[22] In fieldwork carried out in 2013, I observed some of the events that occurred among the Palikur, and obtained reports about the events that occurred among the Karipuna and Galibi-Marworno.

[23] The interlocutors' anonymity will be maintained, since this topic is delicate and still causes unease in the region. I will provide only generic information about interlocutors, restricting this to an initial letter to distinguish them, their ethnicity, the village and the date on which the narrative was informed.

as demonic or animalistic, an inversion of the perceptions of these peers themselves:

V. […] It's a very great sadness for the families, because the person gets agitated, moving frantically and had to be restrained tightly otherwise… If the person got hold of a knife we could be stabbed. That's because the persons would think, in their vision, that we were attacking, that we were the aggressors. *The possessed person thought that, as we approached, that we were the beast, the devil, everything.* (Karipuna, Karipuna village of Santa Isabel, 2013 [emphasis added])

The danger of the Crisis is also directly associated with contagion, which would occur by the nomination of the "next victim":

N. For example, I was possessed, then I'm here on the ground and suddenly I call your name, then you will be possessed by the devil, too. (Palikur, Palikur village of Kumenê, 2013)

This would explain the spread of the Crisis and the emergence of a real epidemic of possession, a notion that gains strength when the narratives describe the geographical path followed by the Crisis:

F. For a month, last year, I went to teach at the village of Kumarumã [Galibi-Marworno village], but I didn't take my wife or my son with me, because of the Crisis. This thing was very strong there. Then it was the time of Manga [Karipuna village], now it's well spread along the Curipi [river nearby which the Karipuna villages are concentrated]. (Galibi-Marworno, Palikur village of Kumenê, 2013)

V. We realize something isn't cool, because if it were only in Kumarumã… but it's something that's affecting the whole region, because it came from Kumarumã, went to Manga, came down [the river] to Santa Isabel, Espírito Santo. And now with you too, right? [referring to the Palikur man who was listening to the conversation and had just said that the phenomenon had occurred recently in his village]. (Karipuna, Karipuna village of Santa Isabel, 2013)

In 2013, the worst of the Crisis had passed, but people were still working out an explanation for the phenomenon. Although in this conceptualization, inferences also emerged concerning a possible emotional or nervous imbalance, these were always proposed unvigorously, posed more as a doubt than an assertion. The hesitation can be related to an attempt to provide an explanation that could make sense to me (the non-indigenous interlocutor), even if it made little sense to the proposer of the idea, since the indigenous interlocutors are not oblivious to our etiological universe:

N. Recently, a girl was possessed, she ran into the field, then the people ran after her. Then I said, "I won't run after her, because I can't manage to hold a devil, the devil has a lot of strength. […]." *I don't know if it is a disease? I'm thinking so, a mental illness, I don't know?* Now it's hard to find out what it is. (Palikur, Palikur village of Kumenê, 2013 [emphasis added])

My own conduct during these conversations may have induced this type of answer:

Artionka And it's unimaginable that this is in the minds of young people?

V. No, at the beginning we realized it, that the minds were weak. And after that we had no explanation for anything, then we were worried… but I don't think so, *it was not weak mind, because some people even underwent a transformation. Then we thought that it was really a spirit… fierce… that was getting into people and that we had to react, we had to stop this spirit.* (Karipuna, Karipuna village of Santa Isabel, 2013 [emphasis added])

Although there were not many certainties as to how to interpret such dramatic phenomena, among the Palikur I heard, from different interlocutors, something that seemed close to an explanatory conception. According to several adults, the young were putting religious ecstasy, the decisive factor for the Palikur in joining the Pentecostal religion, in a far too central position. The young were approaching a world both desired and feared, and were doing so excessively and with little control.

Everything transpires as if the trance weakened intergenerational relations and, with that, made young people susceptible to spiritual attacks.

Here, it is essential to recall what was said earlier about the importance of "relations" for the notion of a person in Amerindian sociocosmologies: the weakening of the connections with seniors weakens the relations with human relatives and, consequently, opens the body to possession by beings of other species or order.

It is not something new for biblical exegesis of the New Testament, translated into *Parikwaki* by the SIL in 1982, to exert less attraction on the young than does direct contact with the Holy Spirit.[24] Nevertheless, the meaning of religious trance seems to be broadening lately, and, in lieu of exclusive contact with the Spirit of God, it is paving the way for other types of communication.

M. They [young people] do not hear the word of the priest, only that of the Holy Spirit. That's not good, because the Holy Spirit can enter, but also the evil spirit. (Palikur, village of Kumenê, 2013)

In worship sessions, it is clear that young people are turning their backs on "the words" while embracing with furious energy two other aspects of the ritual liturgy—chanting songs and dancing to them. Both are directly related to religious trance:

N. […] Here, in the Church, when the pastor preaches the word of god everyone gradually leaves. They only like to sing, dance, play. To them this is a party. They think "Oh, I'm really in a dance club," but when a pastor rises to preach the word, they lower their heads and gradually go out one by one. When the pastor leaves the microphone, everyone comes back again to dance. I don't like it that way, it's wrong. (Palikur, Palikur village of Kumenê, 2013)

The outbreak of possessions also coincides with the expansion of Pentecostal and Evangelical churches in the indigenous area, which started in the early 2000s. With this expansion, the charismatic *modus*

[24]The evangelical Pentecostal Churches in general have what Otávio Velho calls a "reduced explicit presence of a theology in the stricter sense": the churches are undergoing a sort of "detheologization," in conjunction with an emphasis on "Spirit." The classical Weberian rationality associated with behavioral ethics is replaced by an overvaluation of emotion. See Velho, "Globalização," 144.

operandi was spread to indigenous villages: religious trance and baptism with the Holy Spirit, performed with screams, body tremors, swooning, and glossolalia, has tended to evoke the immediate presence of a suprasensible world.

This suprasensible world is not seen, however, as restricted to a single sphere. This fact appears in the different strategies used to handle the Crisis, which can resort to the public health system, to the various Christian Churches, to indigenous shamanism and even to practices linked to Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Umbanda:

V. […] to control it, in Kumarumã, they sought a *pai de santo* [male priest of the Afro-Brazilian religions].

Artionka Where did they seek this *pai de santo*?!

V. At Macapá [the capital of the state of Amapá-Brazil]. He came, employed sorcery and said: "it will calm down here in this community, but the others will be unprotected." Then it happened at Manga [a Karipuna village], it got into the students inside the school so that it caused a widespread screaming, it was terror. I was very concerned, everybody running in the street, it was a lot of people, many got attacked… only young people. […] the *pai de santo* said: "this thing is not for the *pajé*" [the indigenous shaman]. In our [indigenous] culture, we work with another type of thing, with herbs. "What's happening is something of spirit," said the *pai de santo*. It was impressive when he arrived at Manga, the girl was near death, he stared at her, he said, "get out, spirit! This body doesn't belong to you!" The girl simply stood up, everything had come out. (Karipuna, Karipuna village of Santa Isabel, 2013)

It is clear that the different religious languages—shamanistic, Afro-Brazilian, Christian in several varieties—need not repel one other, but it is important to emphasize that the spiritual beings involved in the narratives are characterized in quite different manners. Although the "spirits" that drive young people crazy are seen as harmful by all parties, on the other hand they are not considered the same way even within Christianity, between Evangelicals and Catholics.

According to the Palikur Evangelicals—who, long ago, relegated the world of shamanistic spirits to a marginal aspect of their sociability—the spirits who prey on young people in the Crisis are essentially "bad"; they

are expressions of the demonic, which, according to the elders, have gained space among the young because the young are straying from "the gospel." In contrast, for Karipuna Catholics—who, as we have observed, maintain shamanistic rituals in parallel to Catholic liturgy—the guilt of being afflicted by this epidemic of spiritual attacks also lies in people's behavior. But here what is seen as bad behavior would be a distance from and disrespect for traditional practices, which causes the spirits to attack out of a feeling of revenge. Nevertheless, according to the Karipuna Catholics, these spirits are not intrinsically evil; they are not devils.

I mention two narratives in which this difference is presented; the first is from an Evangelical Palikur interlocutor; the second from a Karipuna Catholic:

M. […] there, when it attacks someone, girl or boy, they shout, "Look! Satan! Hold me! Help me! Now I'm not going with God." […] This *Crisis* happened … As I was just saying that we're not following the Gospel properly, then this evil spirit comes, attacks the person. (Palikur, Karipuna village of Santa Isabel, 2013)

V. […] the *Pajé* said we were forgetting a lot of our culture, people weren't respecting our ritual anymore, they thought it a joke, this sacred thing. The young man started his farming, there at Kumarumã, where the cemetery was located, where there are funerary urns. They claimed it was a spirit of an old *pajé* that was getting into the people and taking revenge because they had been farming where there is a sacred cemetery, right? An old one. (Karipuna, Karipuna village of Santa Isabel, 2013)

According to the Karipuna Catholics, the Crisis mobilizes a diverse range of beings: some have the form of a very large person, or a giant, others the form of a black and strong man, still others of animals or of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic beings from both indigenous and European origin, such as vampires and werewolves. And when these beings possess people, the possessed start to express the ways and modes of being of the spirits:

V. […] I was very worried when it happened to the boy… I wasn't scared, I was calm, they appeared on him as if they were two fangs, like a vampire, and the boy got very strong! (Karipuna, village of Santa Isabel, 2013)

In the Palikur case by contrast, one finds what the introduction of this book points out as a strategy of Christianity: that is, the evangelical religion reduced a myriad of beings to the unequivocal figure of the devil. Prior to their reduction, such beings were like "small gods" in the sense that they "are often neither angelic nor demonic, heavenly nor infernal but thoroughly terrestrial."[25] They usually inhabit the *Pahakap*, the "other world," a world that exists in parallel and coincides to the world in which humans live, being simultaneously located at heavenly, underground and underwater spheres.

The transformations introduced by Christian religiosity entered this domain, a domain already eminently transformational and constituted by relations, seemingly taking the following assertion by Marilyn Strathern literally:

> The study of social relations pre-empts any illusion of first contact: no one encounters anyone "for the first time," for no one has ever lived in the absence of relationships. Interaction is made possible on the minimalist premise that persons (like concepts) are inevitably lived and perceived as versions of other persons—they are always in that sense already in a relationship.[26]

Therefore, in spite of the differences of interpretation (which are due, as can be observed, to sociocosmological differences), the fact that the Crisis has spread with a similar type of performance and has become a matter of concern for the different populations of the region leads one suspect a common grammar that connects the Crisis phenomena in and between religious (or sociocosmological) discourses. Such a grammar seems to be based on shamanism, which gathers the distinct forms of Christian religiosity and indigenous ritualistic practices through the permeability so characteristic of the different worlds of the Amerindian cosmos.[27] In other words, in the Amerindian worldview, the borders between different dimensions of the cosmos are porous. Shamanism moves across these borders; it also relates these different dimensions and

[25] See Ostling, this volume.

[26] Strathern, "Nice Thing," 164.

[27] It is precisely this connection between worlds (conceived by non-indigenous actors as distinct and separate) that leads shaman Davi Kopenawa to call attention to the eschatological character of the abuses committed by the "whites" against the environment; to destroy the earthly world is to destroy all other worlds. See Kopenawa, *La chute du ciel*.

the human and non-human persons inhabiting them: these relations constantly create and re-create the Amerindian cosmos. The porousness of borders and the propensity to transformation that mark this worldview allow for elements originally external to the indigenous cosmovision (the Christian god and devil, for example) to be incorporated and resignified, and to resignify the cosmology that incorporated them.

Final Remarks

First, an adjustment is necessary to the sense I apply to the word "transformation." It would not be appropriate to speak of the Crisis as if it were an event formed by (and causative of) odd situations, as if the indigenous people of this region had gone "from tradition to Christianity."[28] The history of the indigenous peoples of this region shows that the different Christian religions were constituted in a process comprising multiple layers of "Christianities." "Tradition," here, is therefore already a transformation. This fact problematizes the change/continuity polarity that has characterized the debate on religious conversions of native populations.[29] For the case under analysis, there is continuity in change and vice versa.

In this context of multiple transformations, proselytizing Christianity has tended to emphasize a particular aspect of native socialities: shamanism. Conversion efforts have generally focused on this shamanism (understood by the missionaries as the sphere of religion and "cultural tradition" in indigenous societies) and on "its practical agent," the shaman.[30] This is especially true of the so-called transcultural missions, with their methodology of spreading the Christian message through native languages and cultures and their ideology emphasizing that the Christian God is already present as an autochthonous value in indigenous

[28] I borrow the phrase from John Barker's important critique of the anthropological interpretations of indigenous Christianity that disregard the historical processes experienced by native populations: see Barker, "Secondary Conversion," "We Are Eklesia."

[29] For the latest version of this debate, see several contributions to a 2015 special issue of the *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, especially Mosko, "Unbecoming Individuals"; Robbins, "Dumont's Hierarchical Dynamism"; and Vilaça, "Dividualism and Individualism."

[30] I borrow this expression from de Almeida, "Tradução e mediação," 289.

sociocosmologies.[31] Such transcultural missions are very frequent in the Amazon and active among the peoples of the lower Oiapoque River.

Not incidentally, the missionaries elect, from the start, the shaman as main interlocutor. In Amerindian ethnology, he is already considered a sort of translator for his ability to transit between the different spheres of the Cosmos and return alive to tell what he saw in other dimensions. Although his task is to produce understanding between different worldviews, this understanding is always partial and produced by means of the vague or garbled "suspension of ordinary language" characteristic of shamanistic chants. If to apprehend "other worlds" an expanded perspective such as that of the shaman is necessary, these "other worlds" are not comprehensively apprehensible.[32] The shaman precisely exemplifies the formula *traduttore*, *traditore*.

Transcultural missionaries are fighting in the same semantic field. Thus, their initial attitude of acceptance of indigenous cosmologies, over time, reveals the strategic objective of appropriating these concepts to transform them later—see the Palikur interpretation of the spirits of the Crisis. The result of this is that the translation movement, which occurs in the process of Christianization, also produces a "suspension of ordinary language" that gradually creates a new field of signification, fostered by a partial knowledge about native sociality and cosmology.

Thus, what Christianity produces is a sort of "original translation"—a notion that would seem heretical if we take "translation" as a simple process of transposition of meaning from one language to another, but which makes sense if conceived as a "creative translation," as proposed by Carneiro da Cunha:

> The original synthesis, the syntagmatic system in which there is a need for adherence between sound and sense, in which sound and sense fit each other flawlessly as fruit and peel […], all of it dissolved. The point is to (re)build an original synthesis, a new way of putting in relation levels and codes, to put them in resonance, in correspondence, so this new world gains the desired consistency to become evident […]. *In short, that it acquires a meaning, as meaning is, after all, the perception of relations*, a

[31] See de Almeida, "Tradução e mediação."

[32] Carneiro da Cunha, "Pontos de Vista," 13.

> "network of associations that refer to one another, similar to a dictionary or a relational database."[33]

The "perception of relations" that enables the act of translation (whether shamanistic or missionary), also emerges as a central explanatory element in indigenous narratives regarding the Crisis. The connections that are established (between the young and the spirits) or that fail to be established (between the adults and the young) open up a field of understanding that is able to "make sense"—more than one sense—to the Crisis: for, if according to the Palikur the Crisis is the Devil's work, according to the Karipuna there is no devil involved and the attacks are carried out by shamanic spirits.

There is, despite the differences, a sense that approximates the explanations given by both the Karipuna and Palikur and that, I suggest, is related to the place of production and definition of the person occupied by alterity, an alterity that constitutes Being through and by transformation. As emphasized by the Project Nuti-Pronex, "there is no alterity without alteration. Abstracted from the altering power from which it originates, alterity is frozen in a 'relation' that is merely formal, and often degenerates into a taxonomy of diacritic oppositions between constituted positions."[34] As the Crisis shows, the self is created through transformational relations with the Other, whether that Other is God, the devil, shamanic spirits, or wild beasts of prey: all of them are equally able to "capture the point of view of the Other" and are decisive in the bricolage from which result the multiple Christianities of the lower Oiapoque.

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[33] Carneiro da Cunha, "Pontos de Vista," 14, emphasis added. The internal quotation comes from Crick and Koch, "Why Neuroscience," 33.

[34] Projeto Nuti-Pronex, *Transformações indígenas,* 24.

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PART II

Enlightenment and its Ambiguities

CHAPTER 7

Between Humans and Angels: Scientific Uses for Fairies in Early Modern Scotland

Julian Goodare

> Every Age hath som secret left for it's discoverie, and who knows, but this entercourse betwixt the two kinds of Rational Inhabitants of the sam Earth may be not only beleived shortly, but as freely intertain'd, and as well known, as now the Art of Navigation, Printing, Gunning, Riding on Sadles with Stirrops, and the discoveries of Microscopes, which were sometimes as great a wonder, and as hard to be beleiv'd.
>
> —Robert Kirk, 1692*

Introduction

Most of what we know about pre-modern nature spirits comes from the pens of elite writers who didn't believe in them. This chapter discusses some elite writers who *did* believe in them—or, rather, who attempted to place the study of nature spirits on a scientific basis. The nature

*Hunter ed., *Occult Laboratory*, 100.

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spirits most often recognized in early modern Scotland were fairies and brownies.[1] Most learned authors dismissed them as vulgar superstition, or reinterpreted them as demons. However, a few took a different approach, suggesting that fairies and brownies might constitute a distinct category of intermediate spirits.

This chapter traces the intellectual proposition in early modern Scotland that there existed a distinct class of spirit beings that were intermediate between humans and angels. Reports by the common folk about fairies were argued to provide evidence for the existence of such beings. In tracing this proposition, we shall find that the idea of spirits intermediate between humans and angels could intersect with various other ideas.[2] Several of these ideas were based on binary principles of classification, in which everything was categorically one thing or the other. Such principles could never, in themselves, produce fully intermediate beings. But there were other classificatory principles, notably that of arranging things in hierarchies, that could allow such beings to be envisaged. A brief account may now be given of some related ideas, mostly involving some kind of hierarchy of spirits, that require to be distinguished from the specific idea of beings intermediate between humans and angels.

One such idea was that there might exist neutral angels, in between the good angels and the evil demons. Neutral angels were usually explained as having taken neither side in Satan's rebellion against God.[3] Neutral angels were not intermediate between *humans* and angels, however; even demons were angels. Angels, whether good, evil, or neutral, were all ontologically the same kind of beings.

It could instead be proposed that there existed a hierarchy of angels, all of which could be considered as good. One influential classification of these was the "Celestial Hierarchy," with nine ranks of angels, proposed in the early middle ages by the writer known today as Pseudo-Dionysius. The idea of a hierarchy of angels could be developed in such a way that its lower ranks, extending the hierarchy downward, could be envisaged as not far above humans. A strict binary approach might insist that even the lowest ranks of angels were still angels and not humans, but it

[1] For Scottish nature spirits see Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*; Goodare, "Boundaries."

[2] For an overview of the variety of ideas about spirits, see Cameron, "Angels, Demons, and Everything in Between."

[3] See Coree Newman's chapter, this volume.

might be possible to describe these ranks in such a way that their own distinct characteristics emerged more strikingly than their generic nature as angels. And these distinct characteristics might include some, such as procreation, associated more with humans than with angels.

To some writers, ideas of "spirit" and "matter" needed to be developed further. Few writers' classifications, indeed, were so simple as to regard all that existed as pure spirit and pure matter.[4] "Spirits" themselves could be seen as having bodies of fine matter (such as air), or as living in fine matter (such as ether). Medical writers saw the human constitution itself as including various types of "spirits," usually defined as natural spirits, vital spirits, and animal spirits.[5] Human "spirits" could thus be seen as intermediate between the immaterial soul and the material body.[6]

One characteristically Renaissance idea was that the writings of classical pagan scholars, and even poets, could provide relevant information. Classical authors had described a number of nature spirits, either directly or as the subject of belief by the neighboring peoples they encountered. The beliefs of "Druids," for instance, could be reconstructed from classical sources.

An attempt to explore populated territory between angels and humans might raise the question of whether intermediate spirits were immortal, like angels, or mortal, like humans. This question was sometimes answered in favor of mortality. This might raise further questions about whether they had immortal souls that were separate from their mortal (if airy) bodies. Human souls, unlike most "spirits," were considered to be completely lacking in materiality. This in turn could lead to questions relating to human nature. Thinkers considering the possible existence of unusual spirit beings tended to ask themselves whether these beings had reason, speech, or civilization—attributes possessed by humans but not animals.

Finally, it could be proposed that the ideas of the common folk could provide useful information about spirits. The common folk might not have understood the spirits that they encountered, but their reports

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[4] Smith, "Spirit as Intermediary."

[5] Walker, "Astral Body," 120.

[6] Sugg, "Flame into Being," 143.

might nevertheless provide the basis for an intellectual reconstruction of the spirit world. And, in fact, the writers on intermediate spirits did make this move. This chapter's focus on the intellectual question of "intermediate spirits" thus intersects with folkloric questions about "nature spirits."

All these ideas were likely to diverge from or even conflict with the scholastic Thomist understanding of spirits, not to mention the more recent demonological tradition that had been built on Thomist foundations.[7] But thinkers investigating intermediate spirits soon found themselves considering further questions that orthodox demonologists also had to face. The ultimate demonological question was: How did humans relate to these spirits? This could be broken down into a range of more specific questions. Could humans touch the spirits, or see them, or talk with them? Could they have sex with them? If so, could this produce offspring, and of what nature?

These questions might have been asked by a natural philosopher. But a theologian might pose further questions. Were these spirits good or bad? Or even neutral? And what relationships, if any, was it legitimate for humans to have with them? Orthodox theologians were suspicious of "theurgy"—the idea that angels could be invoked, through ritual action, as mediators with the divine. Since Saint Augustine, angels had been deemed "impassible," not stirred by human action. Any spirit that *was* successfully invoked was likely to be a demon. But while this was the orthodox view, there were also unorthodox views.[8]

This chapter takes Scotland as a case study, but Scottish ideas were not developed autonomously. To some extent I shall be discussing the Scottish *reception* of ideas developed elsewhere. This entails some engagement with those imported ideas themselves. Robert Kirk, the writer whom I shall discuss at most length, was an original thinker who was conscious of a particular Scottish perspective on the subject—indeed a particular Gaelic perspective on it. He was alert to new scientific developments, hoping that his discovery of intermediate spirits would rank with the major discoveries of his time, as the quotation at the head of this chapter shows. However, Kirk's ideas arose as part of a longer and wider intellectual tradition. It is best to begin in the early sixteenth

[7] Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 475–87, 538–39, and *passim*.

[8] Fanger, "Introduction: Theurgy, Magic, and Mysticism," 18–20.

century, when Scottish thinkers can be found engaging with Renaissance ideas on spirits.

Renaissance Ideas, from Alchemy to Necromancy

In 1513, Gavin Douglas offered a Scottish response to the magical beings of classical literature, in his commentary on his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Douglas's prologue to Book 6, in which Aeneas descended to the underworld, offered an anxious but careful Christian explanation of the book's otherworld beings. Readers, wrote Douglas, might think that this book was full of "iapis" (jokes), "leys or ald ydolatryis" (lies or old idolatries), "gaistis and elrich fantasyis" (ghosts and eldritch fantasies), "browneis," and "bogillis" (bogles or bugbears). He explained, however, that the book described life after death as a good pagan saw it, argued that Virgil writes "mony iust clauss conding" (many just and appropriate clauses), pointed out that Augustine had cited him, and drew parallels between Virgil and orthodox Christian belief.[9] This is no place for a full discussion of Douglas's cosmology, but it will be evident that he did not consider "browneis" and "bogillis," as such, to be real. However, Douglas thought that Virgil did have some knowledge of Christian beings:

We trow a God, regnand in personys thre, And yit angellis hevinly spireitis we call; And of the hevinly wightis oft carpis he, Thocht he belevit thai war not angellis all[10]	We believe in a God, reigning in three persons, And yet we call angels heavenly spirits; And he [Virgil] often speaks of the heavenly beings, though he did not believe that they were all angels

Douglas thus took Virgil seriously, and regarded him as having genuine experience of angels, even if he lacked the Christian knowledge to interpret his experience correctly. Douglas's mention of "browneis" shows that he also considered nature spirits to be relevant to a full understanding of Virgil's cosmology in Scottish context.

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[9] Douglas, *Virgil's Aeneid*, iii, 1–5 (quotations at ll. 9–10, 17–18, 59). For similar Italian approaches to Virgil see Kallendorf, "From Virgil to Vida."

[10] Douglas, *Virgil's Aeneid*, iii, 3 (ll. 81–84).

Necromantic ideas involving fairies or fairy-like intermediate spirits were evident in a spectacular political conspiracy in 1568–1569. The leading conspirators were William Stewart of Luthrie and Archibald Napier of Merchiston (father of John Napier, inventor of logarithms, who later acquired a magical reputation of his own). They summoned a spirit, "Obirion," using their own rituals, and consulted a witch, Janet Boyman, for her prophetic abilities.[11] Boyman is interesting for her connection to the shamanistic cult of the "seely wights," unusual nature spirits.[12] As for "Obirion," he sounds like the "Oberon" of a fifteenth-century French romance, translated into English in 1548.[13]

Such necromancy encouraged a belief in a plurality of spirits. The relentlessly orthodox demonologist James VI condemned this, writing in 1597 that necromancers were deceived into believing in a hierarchy of demons. He conceded that demons before their fall had had a "forme of ordour," but it was impossible (and unnecessary for salvation) to know whether they retained this. Overall, demons were simply demons, as were fairies, brownies, and other nature spirits.[14]

Two Scottish writers of the early seventeenth century used classical models to explore more sophisticated classifications of spirits than had been attempted hitherto. William Birnie in 1606 wrote that the "olde Heathen… having divided the world in men good or bad, as we doe: they subdivided both againe in two rankes." The best of the good became gods; the next best "they reserved them to a care of the residue relicts heere, under the name *Lares*. Who in our tong are Brunies." The worst of the bad became "Cacodaemones, or incarnate devilles;" the less bad, "being not *Lares*, but *Larvae* or *Lemures*, that is, bogils or Gaistes… wandring in a vagarant estate about graves and alrish deserts, they were suspended till their pennance was ended from elisean repose."[15] The second writer, David Person, argued in 1635 that the ancient philosophers had had ideas compatible with Christian theology. He maintained a distinction between good and bad spirits, both in the ancient world and in his own time, but perceived hierarchies of each.

[11] Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy*, 57–66.

[12] Goodare, "The Cult of the Seely Wights."

[13] Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies*, 314.

[14] James VI, *Daemonologie*, 14 (Chap. I.6); 51–53 (Chap. III.5).

[15] Birnie, *Blame of Kirk-Buriall*, Chap. 12 (unpaginated).

He quoted Pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchy of angels, and argued that it agreed with Plato's nine "distinct orders of good daemones." Contemporary evidence for a hierarchy of evil spirits came from idolatrous tribes in the "Indies."[16] Thus local folklore about brownies and ghosts aided Birnie's classification, while Person's classification used global rather than Scottish ethnographic evidence; neither, however, engaged deeply with this evidence.

The Reception of Paracelsus

Further currents of thought circulated on the European mainland, and would in due course influence Scottish thinkers. This is no place for a comprehensive survey, but some of the names known to have been discussed in Scotland may be noted. The luminary Girolamo Cardano, who wrote of intermediate spirits and who would later be cited by Scottish authors, visited Scotland in 1552, to attend as a physician to the illness of John Hamilton, archbishop of St. Andrews. He also cast the archbishop's horoscope. His visit was important to the Scots, being discussed for some years afterward.[17] Then there was Cornelius Agrippa, who had posited intermediate spirits in the early sixteenth century. Agrippa's personal reputation as "the most famous Magitian of his time" was known in seventeenth-century Scotland, though this did not necessarily encourage engagement with his ideas.[18] Still, Robert Kirk cited Agrippa, as we shall see.

The most influential voice expressing new ideas about spirits in the sixteenth century was that of Paracelsus.[19] He posited a category of "elemental" beings, intermediate between spirits and humans. "Although they are both spirit and man, yet they are neither one nor the other. They cannot be men, since they are spirit-like in their behaviour. They cannot be spirits, since they eat and drink, have blood and flesh. Therefore, they are a creation of their own, outside the two, but of the kind of both." They existed in four different types, one for each

[16] Person, *Varieties*, 242–44.

[17] Herkless and Hannay, *Archbishops of St Andrews*, v, 63–68.

[18] British Library, Sir James Turner's Memoirs and Essays (c. 1649–1670), Add. MS 12067: essay "Of Magicke," fos. 86v.–89v., at fo. 89r.

[19] Cameron, "Angels, Demons, and Everything in Between," 21.

of the four elements. He usually called them salamanders (living in fire), sylphs (air), nymphs (water), and pygmies (earth). Sylphs were closest to humans because they lived in air, moving through it as humans did; they were usually forest dwellers, as his other name for them, "sylvestres," indicated. They usually lacked souls, being in this respect like animals, or at least like social animals—it was important that they were social beings. Female nymphs could marry men, and if they did so they would be given souls. Paracelsus's theory also encompassed sirens, giants, dwarfs, and will-o'-the-wisps, which were the "monsters" (deformed offspring) of nymphs, sylphs, pygmies, and salamanders respectively.[20]

Paracelsus's elementals, generally understood as spirits, became well known in France and England in the later seventeenth century. In France, the novel *Le Comte de Gabalis* was published anonymously in 1670 by Nicolas-Pierre-Henri de Montfaucon, abbé de Villars. This work, although a satire, was sometimes read as implying that the spirits it described were genuine.[21] In England, several translations of Paracelsus's works appeared in the 1650s. John Webster included a passage on intermediate spirits in his book published in 1677 to dispute the idea of witchcraft. Intermediate spirits formed part of his argument that apparitions did not have to be demons. "It is not certainly known what diversity of Creatures there may be that are *mediae naturae* betwixt Angels and Men, that may sometimes appear, and then vanish." He cited Cardano, and then Paracelsus: "And that there are such mortal Demons, is strongly asserted by Paracelsus, and by him called *Nymphae*, *Sylphi*, *Pygmaei*, and *Salamandrae*, and that they are not of *Adams* Generation, and that they have wonderful power and skill." He added that "these kind of Creatures, which the common people call Fayries" were "doubtless" beings of the same kind.[22]

Several Scottish writers from the 1650s onward began to engage with Paracelsus's medical ideas.[23] Particularly notable was Christopher Irvine, an alchemical writer who in 1656 wrote that "the salt of blood, will by

[20] Paracelsus, "A Book on Nymphs," 228 and *passim*; cf. Webster, "Paracelsus on Demons."

[21] Veenstra, "Paracelsian Spirits," 217–36.

[22] Webster, *Displaying*, 40–41.

[23] Mackaile, *Moffet-Well*, 85; Pitcairne, *Spiritual Sacrifice*, 9; Brown, *Vindicatory Schedule*, 97–98.

the help of the Beasts heat, shew the shape of a man in a glasse: And this I believe was Paracelsus his Homuncio."[24] Paracelsus's elemental spirits also began to be discussed. The covenanting poet William Cleland wrote a wide-ranging satire on the "Highland host," a military force that occupied the southwest of Scotland in 1678. He linked Scottish brownies with Paracelsus's sylphs, as well as with classical fauns and satyrs:

> Some might have judg'd they were the creatures,
> Call'd *Selfies*, whose customes and features,
> *Paracelsus* doeth discry,
> In his Ocult Philosophy,
> Or *Faunes*, or *Brownies*, if ye will,
> Or *Satyres*, come from Atlas Hill.[25]

Cleland's polemical purpose required his readers at least to recognize Paracelsus's name. Cleland studied at the University of St. Andrews in the late 1670s, so this is probably where he encountered Paracelsus. He may or may not have agreed with Paracelsus's ideas, but his Paracelsian allusion makes clear that these ideas were in circulation.

Aerial Spirits and Changelings of Heaven

Scottish debate on intermediate spirits was influenced indirectly by the anonymous English writer, known today as Anti-Scot, who in 1665 added an account of intermediate spirits to the third edition of Reginald Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft*. The original 1584 edition had been skeptical about witchcraft beliefs, but the new material was very different.[26] Anti-Scot included many details of "Astral Spirits," suggesting that "their nature is middle between Heaven and Hell."[27]

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[24] Irvine, *Medicina Magnetica*, 93; cf. 45, 51, 78, 97. Paracelsus had published a tract, *De homunculis* (c. 1529–1532), arguing that human sperm could generate monsters; he was also believed to be the author of a tract, *De natura rerum* (1573), describing the creation of a "homunculus," from human sperm incubated in a glass vessel. See Newman, "The Homunculus and his Forebears."

[25] Cleland, *Collection*, 11.

[26] I am grateful to Professor Michael Graham for a discussion of this edition. It is placed in context by Davies, "Reception," 395–396.

[27] Scot, *Discovery*, "Discourse of Devils and Spirits" (separately paginated), 41 and Chap. 4 *passim*.

Anti-Scot's spirits were then taken up by the poet and playwright John Dryden. In Dryden's play *Tyrannick Love* of 1670, the spirit Damilcar lamented:

> We wander in the fields of air below,
> Changelings and fools of heaven; and thence shut out,
> Wildly we roam in discontent about (Act IV, scene 1).

These were intermediate spirits—beings similar to angels and demons, but neither essentially good, like angels, nor essentially bad, like demons.[28]

These ideas now reached Scotland. The trainee minister Robert Knox wrote in 1677 about the confessions of the witches of Pollok, and mentioned some beings rather like fairies. He clearly thought that they were spirits of some kind, perhaps demons, but perhaps not. Knox approached the affair in a spirit of intellectual enquiry, commenting that "divers into naturall philosophy" should not be "deemed magicianes." He used it to open up what he called a "field of possibilities, where you know there is roome enough to roame in." The witches had been identified by a mute girl, Janet Douglas:

> Possibly, then, Mrs. Dumby [i.e., the mute girl] hath some correspondence with some of Mr. Dryden's changelings of heaven, his aërial spirites, which have taught her all this skill, and which probably, are intimately acquaint with the power of natur, and have easy access to all our litle business here below, and are able to give their favourites clear information thereof. They are they whom the vulgar call white deviles, which possibly have neither so much power nor malice as the black ones have, which served our great grandfathers under the names of Brouny, and Robin Goodfellow, and, to this day, make dayly service to severals in quality of familiars; and if all tales be trew, they have been observed to be effrayed [afraid] at the presence of a black spirit.

Knox continued with the example of a woman who had known a "white" spirit in the shape of a "litle old fellow" named Ethert.[29]

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[28] Novak, "Demonology"; Winkler, "Sexless Spirits?" The term "changelings" here meant fools, not fairy substitutes.

[29] Sharpe, *Historical Account*, 141.

These ideas about intermediate spirits did not just gesture in general terms toward Scottish nature spirits, as earlier writers had tended to do. Knox had thought about how people actually experienced, and interacted with, such spirits.

Robert Kirk: The Scientific Discovery of Astral Spirits

The most detailed Scottish attempt to engage scientifically with popular belief in nature spirits was made by Robert Kirk, minister of the Highland parish of Aberfoyle, in his 1692 treatise *The Secret Common-Wealth*. This work used to be treated simply as a source of "folklore," but since the recent edition of it by Michael Hunter, Kirk's own aims can be recognized more clearly. He was connected with the renowned English scientist Robert Boyle. Kirk was conducting a scientific study, if not exactly of conventional intellectual demonology, certainly of intellectual pneumatology. He was also interested in second sight, an ability to receive prophetic visions. This was usually considered a separate topic from the topic of spirit beings, but Kirk linked the two, and presented his spirits as the source of the visions that second-sighted people received. The present analysis largely sets the issue of second sight on one side in order to concentrate on Kirk's spirits themselves.[30]

Much of Kirk's material on spirits came from his visionary informants: the spirits "are clearly seen by these men of the second sight" (80); "some men of that exalted sight… have told me" (82). He recognized limits to the seers' knowledge: one at least had seen women spirits working with textiles, but whether these were solid materials or "impalpable" ones "it transcended all the senses of the seer to discern" (82). This is as near as we get to the report of a research interview. His informants did not all agree. Having made one point, Kirk added: "But other Men of the second sight being illiterate and unwary in their observationes, vary from these"; there was a "diversity of judgments" (83). Kirk also employed firsthand observation, having himself inspected wounds in cattle said to have been caused by elf-shot (83–84). Some of the visionary experiences may have been his own. He never stated this openly, but he

[30] Hunter ed., *Occult Laboratory*. Further citations from this work are given as page numbers in the text. For the difficulty of identifying "folklore" in Kirk, see Goodare, "Boundaries," 163.

noted that seers were often seventh sons (100)—and he was himself a seventh son.

Kirk also used conventional humanist sources. Most of his citations came in one brief passage in which the non-classical authors mentioned were Raymond de Sebond, Cornelius Agrippa, Girolamo Cardano, Richard Baxter and Henry More (96–98). Kirk also used biblical sources (many at 100–112). It is surprising that he did not cite Paracelsus explicitly, but perhaps Paracelsan ideas were now common currency. Even the Royal Society in London, to which Kirk was connected via Boyle, may have discussed ideas of mortal fauns, dryads, and naiads.[31] Kirk's intellectual approach was in touch with the latest science.

In the first sentence of his first chapter, Kirk set out the basic ontology of his spirits: they were "of a midle nature betwixt man and Angell (as were dæmons thought to be of old)" (79). This was unequivocal as to the spirits' nature: they were between humans and angels. By his analogy with the "dæmons… of old" he probably meant that spirits like his had also been encountered in classical times, when people thought that they were "dæmons."

The spirits had airy bodies:

> light changeable bodies (lik those called Astrall) somewhat of the nature of a condens'd cloud, and best seen in twilight. These bodies be so plyable thorowgh the subtilty of the spirits, that agitate them, that they can make them appeare or disappear at pleasure (79).

Kirk's glossary explained that an "Astral Body" was "An Artificial Body assum'd by any spirit" (112). He presumably thought that clouds were made of air, later mentioning the spirits' "bodies of congealed air" (79).

The spirits' speech presented a problem. Demons, concerned directly with humans, spoke in the local language. But Kirk's spirits had an independent social life. Logically, they should have spoken a language of their own, like the peoples of the New World. However, Kirk's informants had told him of conversations with fairies. So he wrote, guardedly: "They speak but litle, and that by way of whistling, clear, not rough: the verie devils conjured in any Countrey, doe answer in the Language of the place: yet sometimes these Subterraneans speak more distinctly then at

[31] Hunter, *John Aubrey*, 139. I am grateful to Professor Hunter for this reference.

other times" (82). As we shall see, Kirk also had his own theory as to the spirits' purpose toward humanity—a purpose that required them to communicate with us.

Conventional angels did not eat or drink.[32] Kirk's spirits did so, however. Their nutrition was of two different kinds, or perhaps three: "Some have bodies or vehicles so spungious, thin and defecate,[33] that they are fed by only sucking into some fine spirituous liquor that pierce like pure air and oyl: others feed more gross on the foyson or substance of cornes and liquors, or on corn itselfe" (79). These spirits with the finer bodies were thus feeding on air and other vapors. Then the more gross spirits fed on the "foyson"— the essence or nutritive quality—"of cornes and liquors"; or on "corn itselfe." The spirits had a refined but genuine physicality.

The spirits were as intelligent as humans, or more—though equally fallible. They had "Controversies, doubts, disputs, Feuds, and syding of parties, there being som ignoranc in all Creatures, and the vastest created intelligences not compassing all things" (85). Their social life included "Aristocratical Rulers and Laws" (82). They were "distributed in Tribes and Orders" (80). One of these tribes may have been "Elves," defined in Kirk's glossary as "a Tribe of the Fayries, that use not to exceed an ell in stature" (113; an ell was roughly a meter).

In habitat the spirits were basically "Subterraneans"—a word that Kirk often used for them, and that he defined as meaning "those people that lives in the cavities of the Earth" (115). However, they sometimes emerged from these cavities; he wrote that they are "somtimes carried aloft, other whiles grovell in different shapes, and enter in anie Cranie or cleft of the Earth (where air enters) to their ordinary dwellings" (79). Their dwellings in the "midle Caveties of the Earth" (99) placed the spirits' habitat between hell (at the earth's center) and underground creatures such as worms and badgers; Kirk envisaged all regions of the universe, from hell upwards, as inhabited by beings of one kind or another. This was not a hierarchy of status; humans lived on the earth's

[32] Smith, "Spirit as Intermediary," 273, citing John Milton as an exception to the orthodox view.

[33] Kirk explained his word "defecate" as meaning "uncorrupt, pure and clean from dreggs" (113).

surface, while just above them, in the lowest region of the air, lived flies and insects.

The necessity for air to enter the "Caveties" is noteworthy. Kirk recognized the air as the element in which the spirits lived. The fact that he thought it necessary to discuss this indicates that they might, hypothetically, have inhabited some other element. Thus Kirk's spirits were equivalent to Paracelsian sylphs. He made a particularly Paracelsian statement in his so-called London diary, the commonplace book that he kept during a visit to London in 1689–1690: "They are concealed from the most part, becaus in Different elements, as fish to us."[34] If Kirk ever entertained the Paracelsian idea of spirits for all four elements, however, he had dropped it by 1692.

Kirk's spirits were mortal, experiencing birth and death. But for them, birth and death were not as we know it. They "have children, Nurses, marriages, deaths and burials, in appearance even as wee (unless they do so for a mock-show, or to prognosticate som such thing to be among us.)" (80). Their "procreation among themselves… is done at the consent of their wills, as one candle lighteth another" (106). Kirk's longest passage on his spirits' life cycle envisaged something like fairy sperm ("particles of more vivific Spirit"), and sketched their place in the cosmic story:

> And if our Tripping Darlings did not thus procreat, their whole number would be exhausted after a considerable space of time. For tho They are of more refined bodys and intellectuals than wee, and of farr less heavy and corruptive humours (which cause a dissolution:) yet manie of their lives being dissonant to Right Reason and their own Laws, and their Vehicles, not being wholly free of Lust and Passion, especially of the more Spiritual and hauty Sins, they pass (after a long healthy lyfe) into an Orb and Receptacle fitted for their degree, till they come under the General Cognisance of the last day (103).

The spirits' destiny, therefore, was to die and to go to their own place—not, it seems, heaven or hell—until the "last day" when they would be judged like humans. Kirk may have had in mind the Last Judgment as

[34] Edinburgh University Library, Robert Kirk's commonplace book, 1689–1690, Laing MS III 545, fos. 104v.–105r.

it was described in the Church of Scotland's Westminster Confession of Faith:

> God hath appointed a Day, wherein he will judge the World, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom, all Power and Judgment is given of the Father. In which Day, not onely the Apostate Angels shall be judged, but likewise all Persons that have lived upon Earth.[35]

If the Last Judgment was for the "Apostate Angels" as well as humans, it could be assumed also to apply to other beings. However, Kirk's idea that the spirits went to their own place on death—"an Orb and Receptacle fitted for their degree"—would have been hard to reconcile with the Confession. This was clear that the souls of humans went immediately to God upon death, there to be sent either to heaven or hell until the Last Judgment, and that "Beside these two Places, for Souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none."[36] This passage was directed against the Catholic purgatory, but could also have made it difficult to support Kirk's idea of a distinct resting place for his spirits.

As if this was not unorthodox enough, Kirk also sketched what may have been an even more unusual view of the spirits' life cycle:

> They live much longer than wee, yet die at last, or least, vanish from that state: For 'tis one of their Tenets, That nothing perisheth, but (as the Sun and year) everie thing goes in a Circle; Lesser or Greater, and is renewed and refreshed in it's revolutiones, as 'tis another, That Every Body in the Creatione, moves (which is a sort of Life:) and that nothing moves but what has another Animall moving on it, and so on, to the utmost minutest corpuscle that's capable to be a receptacle of Lyfe (82).

The first "tenet," concerning cyclical movement, suggested that the spirits' souls transmigrated in a Pythagorean way—Kirk later mentioned Pythagoras as supporting his theory (97). This was highly unorthodox for humans, but might have been possible for the spirits. The second "tenet" sounds Neoplatonist, and may suggest a blurring of boundaries between life and death.

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[35] *Articles of Christian Religion*, 49 (Chap. 31).

[36] Ibid., 48 (Chap. 30).

Finally, Kirk had ideas about his spirits' place in the cosmic story. They were primeval inhabitants, having formerly cultivated high hillsides before humans spread themselves across the land—"the print of whose furrowes do yet remaine to be seen on the shoulders of very high hills, which was don when the Champain ground was wood & forrest" (79). But they were appearing more openly in Kirk's own day than before—and there was a reason for this:

> The courteous endeavours of our fellow creaturs in this invisible world to convince us (in opposition to Sadducees, Socinians and Atheists) of a Dietie, of Spirits; of a possible and harmless method of correspondence betwixt men and them, even in this Lyfe… A knowledge (belike) reservd for these last Atheistic Ages, Wherin the profanity of mens lives, hath debauchd and Blinded their understandings, as to Moses, Jesus and the prophets; (unless they get convictions from things formerly known) as from the Regions of the Dead (96).

The spirits thus had a purpose *vis-à-vis* humanity—something that conventional angels were not supposed to have except at God's direct command. This purpose related to Kirk's understanding of cosmic history. In the past, knowledge of God had been derived from the Old and New Testaments. Now, however, this was insufficient to prevent many people becoming atheists—atheism being a preoccupation of Kirk's time.[37] Humans were thus being offered this additional form of information about God and spirits, directly from some of the spirits themselves. This was cutting-edge scientific discovery, as Kirk's excited comment, quoted at the head of this chapter, makes clear.

The Fading of the Debate

Kirk died in the same year that he completed his treatise, and it remained unpublished. Copies of the manuscript circulated during the eighteenth century, but Kirk's ideas were never taken up in full (with one exception, as we shall see), and he is mainly important as illustrating the range of seventeenth-century Scottish debate. After his time, the idea of intermediate spirits faded, though it was aired occasionally for another half-century or so.

[37] Graham, *Blasphemies*, 81, 88, 133, 147, and *passim*.

An indication of the stage attained in the debate by 1720 is provided by William Cheyn's treatise against atheism. He cast this as a dialogue between an "Atheist" and a "Believer," enabling him to articulate some interesting views on spirits even while refuting them. Cheyn's argument was effectively a mirror image of Webster's. The "Atheist" claimed that a variety of spirit beings existed, as Webster had done, in order to attack the idea that all spirits were demons—but this claim was then refuted by the "Believer" who reasserted demonological orthodoxy. This orthodoxy was modern in that it had abandoned any interest in the punishment of witches, while retaining a traditional view of demons.[38]

Cheyn's spirit beings were not categorized in Kirk's systematic way. Instead the "Atheist" described miscellaneous apparitions and spirits, some at least of which displayed Cheyn's awareness of recent folkloric writings. There were armies seen in the air; water-wraiths that appeared when someone was about to be drowned; "elf-bulls" that impregnated cows; and, especially, fairies, "sometimes in Company's Danceing most Merrily amongest themselves, others at other times Travelling very gravely and sadly, as if they had been carrying a Beer, or Dead Corps." What these beings had in common was that they were not "evil spirits." Until, that is, the "Believer" proved that they were.[39] Cheyn was up to date in his targets, although he attacked them with traditional weapons.

Finally, a pseudonymous Highland author in 1763, "Theophilus Insulanus," had ideas similar to Kirk's, though he sketched them only briefly. He linked second sight, his main topic, with spirits and with a variety of apparitions. He explicitly endorsed intermediate spirits, indeed a hierarchy of such spirits:

> The astonishing numbers and gradations of corporeal beings, in the animal life, from the least insect to man, the uppermost of terrestrial creatures, and who seems placed in the middle state, leads us (as by a clew) to be persuaded, that the same gradation arises from man, to the highest rank and order of angels, who, though they are immaterial, yet, as cogitative intelligent beings, can communicate in sleep, or awake to the imagination (from their extensive knowledge,) such truths as are hid, and always must escape the knowledge of organized bodies.

[38] Goodare, *European Witch-Hunt*, 339–42.

[39] Cheyn, *Great Danger*, 150–56.

We then glimpse the expanding world of the eighteenth century in the argument that other parts of the universe must have other "inhabitants, endued with souls." And, as with Kirk, the spirits were interested in humanity: the "ghostly visitants from the invisible regions… are employed as so many heralds by the Great Creator."[40] Whether Theophilus was more unorthodox in the 1760s than Kirk had been in the 1690s would be hard to say.

Conclusions

I began by suggesting that orthodox demonological writers didn't believe in fairies, but that writers on intermediate spirits did believe in them. This, of course, is too simple, and we can now see why. Orthodox demonologists were keen to assert the existence of the spirits in which they believed: angels and demons. In the process of doing so, they sought to deny the existence of any other categories of spirits. Reports of fairies were popular misunderstandings of spirits that could only be angels or demons—and, in practice, were invariably assumed to be demons. There was scant reason for angels to appear to peasants at all, and no reason for them to do so in the form of fairies. The Devil, however, was a master of deceit, keen to lead the human race astray. His demons could only too easily deceive ignorant peasants into thinking that they were fairies.

Writers on intermediate spirits were also alert to the possibility of popular misunderstandings, but they sought to use fairy reports more positively. Such reports could be treated as direct empirical evidence for their theories. These writers did not expect the common folk to have a sophisticated intellectual understanding of fairies, but they did not regard a peasant who reported encountering a fairy as simply a victim of demonic deception. From Paracelsus to Kirk, these writers were willing to adopt the common folk's names for the spirits that they reported, and treated their reports as basically true as far as they went.

These writers tended to approach their material differently from demonologists, because they were not guided by the latter's fundamental assumption that demons existed to ensnare and harm the human race.

[40] Macleod ("Theophilus Insulanus"), *Treatises*, 43, 44, 46. The treatise is usually attributed to Donald Macleod, though the author's identity is obscure.

Demonologists argued that the demons' whole purpose was to harm humans, either externally (by damaging their health or material circumstances) or internally (by leading them astray to sin and damnation). Writers on intermediate spirits, by contrast, assumed that the spirits had an independent existence, not being necessarily interested in humans one way or the other. These writers tended to approach the question of intermediate spirits rather in the same way that they might have approached the discovery of an exotic race of humans in some newly explored part of the globe. Early modern thinkers lived in an expanding world in which new discoveries were eagerly anticipated. This encouraged them to try out new approaches to questions about spirits.

Intermediate spirits were probably too unorthodox to form a settled intellectual tradition. Only three Scottish thinkers articulated them fully and unambiguously: Knox in 1677, Kirk in 1692, and Theophilus in 1763. Of these, Kirk was the only one to do so at length, and only Kirk explicitly envisaged *mortal* spirits. Knox was vague about his spirits' ontological status: they seem less exalted than angels, but they may also seem intermediate between *demons* and angels rather than between humans and angels.

In the long run, there was a shift in the intellectual interpretation of popular belief in fairies and brownies. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the orthodox view was that fairies and brownies were really demons. The unorthodox idea of intermediate spirits arose in this context; the compelling importance of demons meant that it was vital to understand "spirits" of all kinds. But in the eighteenth century, a new orthodoxy emerged whereby popular belief in fairies and brownies was no longer demonic. Instead it was vulgar superstition and ignorance—until, with the early Romantic movement, fairies and brownies became "folklore."[41] Neither of these intellectual contexts—fairies and brownies as vulgar ignorance, and fairies and brownies as "folklore"—offered as much scope for scientific inquiry into these spirits. Scientific uses for fairies were thus transitional. The unorthodox authors who wrote of fairies scientifically could do so only once new scientific ideas (in particular those of Paracelsus) had come into circulation; but science was already on the point of abandoning the study of spirits. Still, in the brief phase in which their ideas carried some credibility, the unorthodox authors

[41] Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 193–216.

studied here all testified to human ingenuity in imagining a range of beings that are, simultaneously, both like us and unlike us.

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CHAPTER 8

The *Álfar*, the Clerics and the Enlightenment: Conceptions of the Supernatural in the Age of Reason in Iceland

Terry Gunnell

In earlier articles, I have dealt with the development of the concept of the *álfar* and *huldufólk* in Iceland, noting the possible original focus of the terms in southwestern Sweden in pre-Christian times.[1] I have discussed the original associations of the *álfar* with god-like beings perhaps related to ancestor spirits; the gradual blending of the concept with that

[1]These two expressions are used interchangeably by modern Icelanders and in the Icelandic folk legends collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Álfar* is *not* well translated as "elves" since over time the term denotes various beings that range from the god-like to the nearly human. *Huldufólk* (lit. "hidden people"), with its parallel in the Norwegian *huldre*, appears to be a *noa* term (like "the little people" and "the good people") used to refer indirectly to these beings, without directly naming them. As noted below, the term is not used in early Icelandic literature. See Gunnell, "How Elvish Were the Álfar?"

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of local nature spirits (*landvættir* [lit. land spirits] or *nátturuvættir* [lit. nature spirits]) as people moved away from Sweden and Christianity began to take over); and the equally gradual influence of literary ideas from northwestern Europe (as Icelanders translated French medieval romances).[2] Most recently, I have written about the origins of the modern Icelandic midwinter festivals in which people dress as *álfar*, *huldufólk* and *tröll* (trolls) and dance around bonfires on January 6.[3] In relation to a national folk-belief survey carried out by the University of Iceland in 2006–2007, I examined the way in which people in Iceland still tell legends about these beings.[4] The present chapter will consider the "time between" the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century, and consider those beliefs in the supernatural—especially those relating to the *álfar* and ghosts—which continued to exist even among the ordained and the educated of Iceland during the late Renaissance and, most particularly, the Age of "Enlightenment." The focus will be on the writings of the Icelandic historian Þormóður Torfason (1636–1719), author of *Historia rerum Norvegicarum* and other works, but will also consider several other learned works from the same period that attest to similar beliefs. As will become evident, this material suggests that we should be very careful about leaping to the assumption that "rational" attitudes to the supernatural had become widespread among the learned of the late sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many of whom grew up in candle or fish oil light amid the deeply engrained beliefs of their forefathers. It is clear that during this period neither rationalism nor the church had totally eradicated the earlier beliefs and superstitions. Indeed, both academics and the clergy seem to have retained an enduring interest in the supernatural, and not least the supernatural beings that were believed to inhabit the natural environment of Iceland.

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[2] See further Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, 314–339. Note that most Icelandic names involve a Christian name and then a descriptive patronymic, rather than a surname. For that reason, after their full names have been given, Icelanders in this chapter are referred to by their Christian names in accordance with Icelandic tradition.

[3] Gunnell, "National Folklore, National Drama."

[4] See Ásdís A. Arnalds et al., *Könnun á íslenskri þjóðtrú*; Gunnell, "Modern Legends in Iceland." On modern beliefs about enchanted spots in Iceland, see Gunnell, "The Power in the Place." On beliefs connected to the *álfar* and *huldufólk*, and road building in Iceland, see Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, "The Elves' Point of View."

In his introduction to a collection of letters that passed between the aforementioned Icelandic historian Þormóður Torfason and the Icelandic manuscript collector Árni Magnússon (1663–1730) between 1688 and 1718, the Danish philologist Kristjan Kålund passes a quick and highly critical judgement over Þormóður's academic work. While praising Árni as a "full-blooded representative of blossoming eighteenth-century rationalism and correct bureaucracy, reserved and unconceited, whose material was of a clear critical nature allied to a great scholarly thoroughness," Kålund stamps Þormóður's critical approach as being somewhat minimal.[5] Worse still, writes Kålund, "He shared in the superstitions of his times; omens and dreams had meaning for him, along with using horoscopes to decide his future."[6] Kålund later returns to Torfæus's superstition in more detail, as well as his apparent "difficulty in distinguishing between fact and fiction."[7]

This is no small criticism, and as Jørgensen, Titlestad and others have noted, it is also somewhat unfair if one considers the nature of the times.[8] Criticizing scholars of the past from the position of our own apparently more enlightened times is an easy game. In the following chapter, I would like to undertake a slightly closer examination of the sense of "reality" expressed by other Nordic scholars and authors of the later sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries (particularly those from Iceland) whose work and ideas surrounded Þormóður during his upbringing, and especially their ideas concerning the nature of the supernatural. Exactly how "enlightened" and critical were most of these men with regard to such matters, and how different were their opinions to those that preceded them?

It is logical to begin by viewing several examples of those attitudes Kålund is complaining about which are expressed in Þórmóður's personal letters. Certainly, it is evident that Þórmóður felt few qualms against writing about his supernatural experiences. One notes, for example, a letter to his sister-in-law Abigael Hansdatter about a ghostly experience he had in 1688. Þormóður recounts how:

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[5] See Kålund, "Fortale," xi. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of original sources in Icelandic or the Nordic languages are those of the author.

[6] Ibid., xi.

[7] Ibid., xxvii.

[8] Titlestad, Nes and Jørgensen, "Innledninger," 20.

> … tonight, although I saw nothing, *someone* walked as you might say from the door to my feet and grabbed hold of the top of the bed clothes. I asked whether they wanted to get into bed with me, said they were welcome, and they suddenly moved up the side of the bed; I asked what they wanted, and lit a candle; as soon as that went out again, they lay down on the pillow beside me, and moved themselves up to my face, and I know no better than that I could feel their breath on my mouth. I bade it welcome […] and it went away. I believe it was my sister [in-law]'s shape [that is, the reader of the letter], possibly because you had wanted to talk with me. Just as my shape came into your room that time I was in Samsö.[9]

On another occasion, Þormóður tells how in 1668 (when he was in his thirties), he dreamed he had a conversation with one of his ancestors on his mother's side:

> In 1668 […] I dreamt that I was up north in Kaldaland with a big chieftain, but I don't remember who that was; and then I had an argument with someone else, but I don´t remember that either. Then in came a big man, with a broad face […]. I asked him who he was, he said he was Torfi í Klofa and that it was a habit of his to sit down with people. I went to Torfi, and said I was one of his children, he took me well and told me this and that and that I looked rather old. I then felt he sat down on a bench and me beside him on the outside. I asked him about my fate, he laughed and said, "*Conficieris sale infantis.*" I asked what that was. He laughed and said that was what I should have, meaning that what he had told me was in dark language. I stayed with him for a long time, and ate meat and bread and butter with him.[10]

The third example noted by Kålund is a letter from Þormóður to Árni Magnússon in February 1702, in which Þormóður describes a visit he had from the vice governor general of Norway, Frederik Gabel (1640–1708). Þormóður writes how:

> Vice-Governor-General von Gabel came here on the first Monday in the new year, and left the following Sunday, after breakfast; a pious man, who carried himself well, well read, *magnæ experientiæ*. Now I believe that

[9] Kålund, "Fortale," xxvii.

[10] Ibid., xxvii–xxviii.

> *trollfolk* exist: he has seen, tested, and with various signs proven that this is so.[11]

It is not clear whether the *trollfolk* in question are meant to be trolls, evil spirits, magicians[12] or *álfar*, although one would expect as an Icelander writing to an Icelander, Þormóður would have used the word *álfar* for the latter. Worth noting immediately, however, is *who* Þormóður is placing his trust in; in other words, a well-educated Danish head of state; and secondly the words "seen, tested and with various signs proven." In other words, we are dealing with a writer who is no mere believer, but a form of scientist of his own enlightened times, someone who believes in the need to test and prove, and to argue with logic.

When considering letters like these, and indeed Þormóður's historical works as a whole (which include a chapter on giants[13]), it is important to remember, first of all, that archaeology as a subject hardly existed in this period; there were no museums. Indeed, as Shakespeare's plays show, the past was seen as having been very much like the present. In general, as Goodare's chapter elsewhere in this volume underlines, in the early eighteenth century, the nature of reality was still based on perception; history was based on written records; nature was still potentially magical, and the understanding of *spiritual* reality was still based on the cultural vocabulary and teachings of the elders, be they priests of the Catholic or Lutheran churches or those "wise ones" who had grown up in the local community.

Certainly, as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson writes, the earlier-mentioned Árni Magnússon may well have had a "profound contempt for superstition and made-up stories, for he was by nature the most accurate and clear-headed of men, fully in harmony with his times with their emphasis on reason and level-headedness."[14] However, there is reason to question exactly how much in harmony Árni really was with most educated people living in the Icelandic countryside during his time. In many ways, in the early eighteenth century, Árni was *ahead* of his time, keeping step first

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[11] Arne Magnusson, *Brevveksling*, 368.

[12] The word *trolldom* in Norway referred to magic.

[13] Tormod Torfæus, *Norges historie*, I, 244–251, on the nature of giants and their origins. See further below.

[14] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *The Folk-Stories of Iceland*, 118.

and foremost with the leaders of the enlightenment who were engaged in their own battles with the establishment.[15] Árni was nonetheless quite happy to believe in an invisible God, and trusted the historical reliability of the Icelandic sagas completely.[16] All the evidence suggests that Þormóður was far from atypical of his times.

Indeed, it is worth remembering that Þormóður's aunt's husband, the Rev. Einar Guðmundsson, who had served as a priest in southwest Iceland from 1619, was defrocked in 1635, a year before Þormóður was born, after having accused a father and his son of witchcraft.[17] In 1654, when Þormóður was 18, the magistrate Þorleifur Kortsson had two men burnt for witchcraft in northwest Iceland. Two years later, the Rev. Jón Magnússon had a father and son burned in the same area for giving him what seems to have been a bad case of influenza.[18] Such activities and such beliefs were, of course, not limited to Iceland during this period. At the same time, between 1551 and 1760, 860 people were accused of witchcraft in Norway, and 277 of them executed. Between 120 and 150 people faced similar accusations in Iceland.[19]

It is worth noting though that the aforesaid Einar Guðmundsson, in spite of being a priest and having studied abroad, wrote a short, now lost work on the *álfar*, which Þormóður refers to directly in his Latin work on the ancient saga hero Hrólfr *kraki* (*Historia Hrolfi krakii*) from 1705 (see below).[20] Einar, like other Icelanders in his time, argues that these are physical rather than spiritual beings, created by God; he further claims they have been known to enter into relationships and to have

[15] However, even in Denmark, it might be noted that the Rev. Erik Pontoppidan (1698–1764), who wrote the influential *Everriculum fermenti veteris* (Broom to Sweep out the Old Sourdough) in 1735 as a means of wiping out such superstitions and traditions (see Pontopiddan, *Fejekost*), later wrote an equally influential work on the natural history of Norway in which he argued that sea serpents, mermaids and krakens existed.

[16] The sagas that deal largely with the Settlement period of Iceland between 870 and 1000 were only recorded from the early twelfth century onward. Most sagas thus have their roots in oral memories that were passed on within families for some time.

[17] See Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, "Álfarit séra Einars á Stað," 251.

[18] See Ólína Þorvarðardóttir, *Brennuöld*, 101.

[19] Alver, *Heksetro,* 63, and 156–157; and Ólína Þorvarðsdóttir, *Brennuöld*, 69 and 331.

[20] See also Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Folk-Stories of Iceland*, 92; and quoted in Icelandic translation in Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, "Álfarit séra Einars á Stað."

had children with human beings, for which he gives several examples, including the famous legend of "Katla's dream."[21]

In Iceland, as an academic and cleric, Einar Guðmundsson was far from alone: indeed, the semi-theological discussion of the nature and existence of *álfar*, ghosts, trolls, second sight, magic, and various wondrous creatures, was very popular in Iceland during his lifetime, and far from seen as being "unscientific" or uncritical. Slightly wary discussions of "folklore" were a regular feature of historical, geographical and theological works dealing with the Nordic world throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Bavarian scholar Jacob Zieglar in his *Quae Intus Continentur Syria*, *Palestina*, *Arabia*, *Aegyptus*, *Schondia* [etc.] of 1532 had talked of Iceland being full of ghosts[22]; Olaus Magnus's *Historia de Gentibus Septrionalibus* (1555) contained several chapters on "elf" rocks, "elf" dances, forest spirits (*skogsrå*), farm protectors (*nisse/tomte*), seers, wind-raising Finns, ship-sinking witches, giants and the Devil[23]; and *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae*, a description of Iceland probably written in 1588 by Oddur Einarsson, the Icelandic Bishop of Skálholt between 1589–1630, contained comparatively serious mention of *kobalds* (*cobboldos*), ghosts, water monsters, power poets,[24] trolls (*trollones*), and humans engaging in wrestling contests with supernatural beings.[25]

On the *álfar*, Bishop Oddur writes:

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[21] Later printed in Jón Árnason's collection of Icelandic folktales, "Katla's dream" [Kötludraumur] describes a married woman is drawn into a physical relationship with an *álfur* man in her dreams. See Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 59–63; and VI, 19–28; Jón Árnason, *Icelandic Legends*, I, 52–58; and Einar G. Pétursson, *Eddurit*, I, 100; and II, 89. As in the Icelandic sagas, many Icelanders believed that dreams could provide a portal into another world or at least visions of things that could not be seen in everyday life. Such motifs of relationships between the *huldufólk* and human beings are a common motif in later Icelandic folk legend collections.

[22] Zieglar, *Schondia*, xcii–xciii.

[23] Olaus Magnus, *Historia*, 147–170, and 207–2013 (Book III, 10–22, and Book IV, 1–3).

[24] "Power poets" (*kraftaskáld*) were poets whose poetry was seen as having magical power.

[25] This motif is very popular in later Icelandic legends dealing with contacts with *huldufólk* (as well as outlaws and occasionally ghosts). Early examples in the sagas tend to deal with ghosts: see further Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, "Wrestling with a Ghost."

> Again, there are other beings which live in hills near human beings, friendlier and less harmful [than those who live in the wild], unless they are mistreated in one way or another, and they are worked up to carry out ugly deeds. […] Both of these spirits seem to be equipped with really unbelievably finely made bodies, because they are believed to squeeze into mountains and hills. Neither are visible unless they wish to be seen of their own accord, although certain people by nature and luck have such sharp vision that no nearby spirits can escape being seen by them. Both can engage in innumerable kinds of enchantment and endless tricks to terrify humans in the worst of ways. The latter group are considered to be exactly like their human neighbors in size, clothing and even the food they eat, and they even have the greatest of pleasure in mixing with human beings. There is no lack of examples of this and of scoundrels who are said to have made hidden women pregnant and visited them at certain times or as often as they wish. For their own part, these earth dwellers have lain with our women, often kidnapping innocent boys, girls, and adolescents and youngsters of both sexes. Some have been returned healthy and unhurt after a few days, and sometimes after some weeks, but some have never been seen again, and some found more dead than alive.[26]

The book nonetheless suggests that many of these supernatural occurrences may well be illusions inspired by Satan, rather than based on reality, thereby suggesting a consolidation between local belief and orthodox demonology.[27]

Such allegations against the supernatural beings of Iceland could have consequences for their authors. Oral traditions in Iceland would soon afterward tell of how in 1591, a teacher called Sigurður Stefánsson, son of a bishop, who had written another, now lost work on *álfar*, ghosts (*draugar* and *svipir*), spirits (*vættir*) and other strange beings (*forynjur*) met a strange end. Inebriated and sleepy on his way home, he fell into a river and was drowned. Those in the know apparently blamed the vengeful *álfar* for the occurrence rather than the alcohol.[28] Possibly as a result

[26] Oddur Einarsson, *Íslandslýsing*, 47–48; and *Veröffenlichungen*, 14–15 in particular.

[27] Oddur Einarsson, *Íslandslýsing*, 48–49; and *Veröffenlichungen*, 15. It might be noted that another infamous book from this time, Dithmar Blefken's *Íslandia* (1607), suggests that all Icelanders are prone to superstition, and regularly have demons working in their service: see Blefken, *Íslandia*, 254.

[28] Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga Íslands*, I, 154–155; see also Jón Samsonarson, "Nokkur rit frá 16. og 17. öld," 245–261.

of this, 4 years later we find another bishop, Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar (1571–1627), going out of his way to warn visitors of the potential supernatural dangers one could encounter in Iceland by adding images of sea cows[29] and even the Lagarfljót lake serpent to his map of Iceland.[30]

In 1596, even the Rev. Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648), future author of the famous *Crymogea*, felt the urge to include several accounts of supernatural events in a note on his history of early Danish kings, *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*. Here he tells of *álfar* ("allffuafolch"), how the *álfar* are seen fishing, changelings, men denying their illegitimate children with *álfur* women,[31] and *álfur* clothes drying on rocks, admittedly adding the warning that "this men say and believe, but I cannot believe it, even though there are many witnesses to it."[32]

The jury was clearly still out, and the church remained intrigued. In 1637, just a year after Þormóður Torfason's birth, the Bishop of Skálholt, Gísli Oddsson (1593–1638), wrote a work called *De mirabilius Islandiae*.[33] Here, alongside other wonders of Iceland, readers are informed of sea monsters; of the apparent extinction of the trolls[34]; of sheep being sired by *álfar* rams[35]; and of the possibility that there might

[29] Sea cows, usually encountered in later legends grazing on shorelines, were said to resemble normal cows, except for having a bladder between their nostrils. See, for example, Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 133–135; and III, 204–206; 1; and Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales*, 108–109.

[30] See http://www.summitpost.org/bishop-gudbrandur-orl-ksson-s-map-of-iceland-1590/358804, last viewed 18 August 2017. On the Lagarfljót sea serpent, see Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 637–641; and Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales*, 116–118. See also Gísli Oddsson, *Íslensk annálabrot*, 24 and 39 (entries in Gísli Oddsson's annal for 1606 and 1611).

[31] Several examples of legends of this kind (which are hinted at earlier in *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae*) can be found in later Icelandic folk legends: see, for example, Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 83–84; and Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales*, 54–57.

[32] See Olrik, "Skjoldungasaga," 129–131.

[33] Gísli Oddsson, *Íslenzk annálabrot*, 66–72, 123–127. It might be noted that in 1637, Gísli also put together an annal of wondrous happenings that had taken place in Iceland: see Gísli Oddsson, *Íslenzk annálabrot*, 9–50.

[34] The author admits that he has never seen any *tröll*, but notes the bones of sheep found piled up in caves, and states that he has heard of people finding strange large bodies that are believed to belong to female trolls, all the males now being dead.

[35] Gísli Oddson, *Íslenzk annálabrot*, 96.

actually be two types of *álfar*, so-called *huldufólk*[36] and *ljúflingar* (lit. "sweeties"), beings which he says enter into relationships with humans or are good to them in other ways.[37] Clearly under some influence from *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae* (seen among other things from the reference to *kobalds*), Gísli states that the former are believed to be invisible, and malevolent toward human beings, while the latter are believed to have bred with the ancestors of certain families in Iceland. While slightly dubious, Gísli nonetheless adds several recent accounts of people who are believed to have been kidnapped by these beings or to have spent some time with them.[38] Interestingly enough, Gísli's successor at Skálholt, Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1639–1674), apparently planned a work of his own that was designed to deal with these beings, although this eventually never came to fruition.[39] *Norrigia illustrata* by the Danish writer Jens Lauritzsøn Wolf (1582–1607) from 1651 nonetheless added a new and intriguing dimension to the question of the nature of the *álfar* by suggesting that the strange smells those travelling over Icelandic mountains sometimes detected stemmed from the fact that the Icelandic *álfar* had a problem with body odor.[40] Wolf also mentions an Icelandic farmer he had heard of who used to wear a bell about his neck to protect himself from kidnap by the hidden ones.[41]

In 1660, 9 years after the appearance of Wolf's work, and around 5 years after the earlier noted witch burnings in the West Fjords, the Rev. Jón Daðason (1606–1676) living in western Iceland wrote a book

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[36] Gísli Oddsson is one of the first to suggest that the *álfar* are also referred to as "hidden people." It might be noted that *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae* had earlier suggested the existence of two types of being. See above.

[37] This expression is still understood today. This, to my knowledge, is the first reference to its use in Iceland. See further Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 3, 64, and 93–100 (the eighteenth-century accounts dealing with "Álfa-Árni" in Northern Iceland); and Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales*, 54.

[38] As in the other Nordic countries, nineteenth-century Icelandic folk tradition contained numerous legends telling of both children and adults that were taken by the *huldufólk*: with regard to changelings, see, for example, Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 22–23, 41–44; and III, 73; and Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales*, 39–47.

[39] See Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 105; and Einar G. Pétursson, *Eddurit*, I, 36–39; 338; and 384.

[40] The smells in question were probably the sulphurous exhalations of Iceland's active volcanoes.

[41] Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga*, II, 125.

called *Gandreið* (lit. "Witch-ride"), containing among other things information on folklore and magic;[42] and Gísli Vigfússon, headmaster of the school at the bishopric of Hólar between 1663 and 1667 completed his own unpublished academic work (*De geniis & spectris*) on magic, trolls, ghosts, spirits, *fylgjur* (protecting spirits with which that everyone is born) and various other beings that were either well-meaning or demonic.[43] Gísli provides recent accounts to support his claims, also talks of meaningful dreams, and is one of the first to talk of the persevering Icelandic belief of "nafnavitjun" (lit. naming visits) whereby women dream of somebody they must name their children after.[44] Gísli's material was to furnish the Danish author Peder Hansen Resen (1625–1688) with some supernatural sensationalism for his own book on Iceland and the Icelanders, *Nova description Islandiae*, which later appeared in 1684–1688.[45]

Before Resen's book came out, however, two other works touching on the supernatural world of Iceland had appeared, the first in the shape of *Noctes Setbergenses*, a Latin poem by the Rev. Þorsteinn Björnsson of Setberg (d. 1675), which returns to the question of Icelandic *álfar*. These are said to be:

> similar to men in size and appearance, but their bodies are made of a light, fine-grained matter,[46] for they are neither men nor spirits, but half-way beings. It is said that they die like humans. Those who have seen them say that they have no division between their nostrils. They live in hillocks and rocks.[47]

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[42] As Einar Ólafur Sveinsson notes in *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 92, Jón also brought up the legendary Icelandic priest-magician Eiríkur frá Vógsósum (1637/1638–1716): see further Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, 554–581; and Simpson, *Legends of Icelandic Magicians*, 9–13 and 53–72.

[43] For the original Latin of this part of Resen's account (see below), see Jón Samsonarson, "Nokkur rit frá 16. og 17. öld," 239–244.

[44] See further the figures in the 2006–2007 national surveys of Icelandic folk beliefs in Ásdís A. Arnalds et al., *Könnun á íslenskri þjóðtrú*. See also Dagbjört Guðmundsdóttir, "'Lof mér að vera.'"

[45] See Resen, *Íslandslýsing*, 275–281, most of which is drawn from Gísli's earlier work.

[46] This may be a reference to an idea expressed in the earlier *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae*. See above.

[47] An English translation of the section dealing with the *álfar*, second sight, water horses and hot-spring birds is given in Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 93–95.

Þorsteinn also presents accounts of people receiving help from the *álfar*, and yet another story of them leaving their washing out to dry in the landscape (an account that publically contradicts Wolf's earlier suggestions about their lack of cleanliness). Mention is also made of other beings known in Iceland such as water horses and hot spring birds.

At around the same time, in 1666, Þórður Þorláksson (1637–1697) became the third bishop of Skálholt in a row to take an interest in the discussion of the supernatural. In his thesis *Dissertatio Chorographica-historica de Islandia*,[48] Þórður denies all foreign suggestions that the volcano Hekla is home to a crowd of evil spirits, but like many of his predecessors has little objection to the possible existence of sea monsters and a serpent living in the Lagarfljót lake in the east of Iceland.

Alongside all of the writers mentioned above were key figures like Jón *lærði* ("the learned") Guðmundsson (1574–1658); Jón Eggertsson (1643–1689);[49] and Árni Magnússon's private secretary, Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík (1705–1779). All of these men, like Þormóður, were interested not only in manuscripts, early history, and literature, but also folk beliefs. Jón *lærði*, for example, dealt with second sight and legends of *marbendlar* (mermen), seal wives, and sea cows.[50] Concerning the *álfar*, *huldufólk*, and *ljúflingar*, he touches on the idea that they originated from Adam's semen that fell on the earth prior to the arrival of Eve; and discusses their underground dwelling places, their books, their system of justice and their sarcophogae on hill sides; he also notes their assistance with human farming; and provides a story of a woman who had a child with an *álfur* man. This material appears in various works including *Samantektir um skilning á Eddu* ("A Collection of Material to Help Understanding the Edda"); his poem *Fjandafæla* ("To Keep

[48] See Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga*, II, 94–104.

[49] Jón Eggertsson's main role was to add information to Jón *lærði*'s *Tíðfordríf* (see below), which he seems to have copied. See Bjarni Einarsson, *Munnmælasögur*, xci–xcii, and 23–24; and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 105; 111–116; and 273–274.

[50] See Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 132–134, 632–633; III, 202–203; IV, 10–12; Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*, 106–108, 114–116; and Einar G. Pétursson, *Eddurit*, I, 122–124; II, 37.

Off Demons," c.1601); and *Tíðfordríf* ("Pastime," c. 1644), which was possibly composed for the earlier-noted Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson.[51]

Jón Ólafsson, meanwhile, who was much more open to folk beliefs than his employer Árni Magnússon, assembled an enormous dictionary/encyclopedia of material that has never been published but contains a number of accounts that attest to his belief in the supernatural (including accounts of sea cows, sea monsters, ghost attacks, raising ghosts, magicians, and people welcoming the *álfar* into their homes at New Year [under an entry on "álfur"]).[52]

It might be noted that the ideas noted above were contested by the Rev. Guðmundur Einarsson (1568–1647), who had studied in Copenhagen and governed the school at Hólar. In his unpublished *Hugrás* (1627), Guðmundur criticized the beliefs attested to in Jón *lærði*'s *Fjandafæla*, stating his belief that the *álfar* were actually demons (an idea reflected in the widespread European *exempla* arguing the *álfar*/fairies were actually fallen angels).[53] This idea was in turn

[51] On Jón *lærði* Guðmundsson and *Samantektir*, see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 97–113; Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, xix–xxvi; and Einar G. Pétursson, *Eddurit*, I, 39–152; 334–338 and 352–354. On the material in *Samantektir*, see Einar G. Pétursson, *Eddurit*, II, 37 and 55–56, where Jón *lærði* also suggests that the earth is hollow. The idea of the origin of the *álfar* with Adam (see also Jón Árnason *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 5; and III, 3–5; and Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*, 28) is repeated in *Fjandafæla*: see Einar G. Pétursson, *Eddurit*, I, 334–336. On the material in *Tíðfordríf*, see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 104–108; and Einar G. Pétursson, *Eddurit*, I, 338 and 122–127, which includes references to another work on the *álfar* that Jón *lærði* is supposed to have written and his knowledge of *Kötludraumur* (see note 21 above; see also Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, xxiv). On the account of the woman who had a child with an *álfur* man, and another narrative telling of how hidden beings assisted with farm work, see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 107. See also Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga Íslands*, II, 56, on Jón *lærði*'s apparent skills with regard to the supernatural: he was among other things called in to lay a ghost, and spent several years trying to avoid being burned at the stake because of his interests. See also Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga Íslands*, II, 68, and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 111, on another manuscript by Jón dealing with "hidden places" ("huldupláss").

[52] See Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Icelandic Folk-Stories*, 121–122. Jón also writes here of people "breaking the fire" ("að brjóta að eldi") in the kitchen on the evenings of New Year's Eve for the "álfafólk" that are on the move and might be cold.

[53] See Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, III, 3–4 (Icelandic example); and Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, 206 (Danish example).

immediately questioned by the lawyer Ari Magnússon (1571–1652), who stressed that Guðmundur's ideas did not reflect those of most people.[54]

This, then, was the educated world that Icelanders like Þormóður Torfason grew up within, a world in which the church's academic vision of the unseen was in regular conflict with the rooted perceptions of popular culture, perceptions shaped by old beliefs and new experiences, reinforced by regular winter evening storytelling sessions in Icelandic farmhouses. Here the reading of sermons and biblical texts was regularly accompanied by the telling of folk legends that often blended the two worlds (as in the accounts of Adam's association with the origin of the *huldufólk*). In such a world, being "critical" was a highly relative concept. It might be remembered that while Newton's *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* may have appeared in 1687, it was not until 1735 that the Danish bishop Erik Pontoppidan decided to publish his earlier-noted *Everriculum fermenti veteris*, a work that was designed to eradicate once and for all the old wives' tales, beliefs and traditions that were still rife in the farming society of Denmark.

Bearing all of the above in mind, it is worth taking a brief look at the style and approach of some of the passages in Þormóður's historical work that apparently bear traces of the uncritical superstition and folk belief that Kålund complains about. As will be seen, in many ways these passages are actually very close in tone to the account of Þormóður's meeting with the vice governor general noted at the start. There is good reason to start with the passage that Kålund was most critical of,[55] found in Þormóður's *Historia Hrolfi krakii* (the History of Hrólfr *kraki*) from 1705. Here Þormóður writes:

> It should suffice to say regarding the truth of the saga (Hrólfs saga), it is still full of fantasy, but this is easily recognizable, although *there are some men who believe some of these accounts are true*. The first of these is told of the strange origin of Skuld in ch. 7[56]: *I can in no way believe* that she (Skuld) came into being because of intercourse taking place between King Helgi and an "álfkona." Even though *popular opinion about this will*

[54] See Einar G. Pétursson, *Eddurit*, I, 73–77; and 335–336.

[55] See Kålund, "Fortale," xxvii.

[56] The account in question in *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans*, 25–27, tells how an "álfkona" (*álfur* woman) visits a king one night, and later gives birth to a daughter called Skuld who is returned to the king for upbringing.

> *be ignored* here, I would like to include some notes taken from a small work on the nature of rock-dwellers which was written by Rev. Einar Guðmundsson of Garpsdalur. He was a well-learned man who was already old in the years of my youth. He explains them in this way: "I believe," he says, "and argue that these people were created by God with solid bodies and the senses granted to spirits; they include people of both sexes, they marry and have children, and all human activities occur as with us: there is the ownership of domestic animals and many objects, poverty and riches, tears and laughter, and thus all that belongs to sleeping or wakefulness and other spiritual states that follow perfectly human nature. Finally, they are mortal, and their lives are as short or long as God wills." Then he [Einar] starts discussing how they multiply, and says: "In addition to this is their sexual congress, which is obvious from the fact that they have children; sometimes women of this race have had children with human men, and do all they can to have their children immersed in holy water and christened, but this has often gone wrong."[57]

Þormóður then notes how Einar gives an example of an Icelandic migratory legend (not known in other countries) in which a family is cursed with mental problems for nine generations because of a man who refuses to acknowledge the illegitimate child he has had with an *álfur* girl.[58] The account, like so many legends, is given factual support in the shape of the evidence of recurring illness that has taken place in the family and reference to the physical remains of the cloth the child was wrapped in which could apparently still be seen in the local church.

Þormóður, while interested and open, remains comparatively objective with regard to Einar's account: He writes:

> It must suffice to mention this [account], one of many that he has given on this subject, to show that the story of the origin of Skuld is not totally free from belief or supporters—or, if people trust this, parallels. This is why I am ready to believe that *evil spirits* can easily play on those whom they have entrapped in their nets, and enticed to them under the implication of providing intimate knowledge, precisely through this kind of illusion and enchantment.[59]

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[57] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, "Álfarit sér Einars á Stað," 253–254 (emphasis added).

[58] For other examples of legends of this type see Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 83–84; and Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*, 54–57.

[59] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, "Álfarit sér Einars á Stað," 255–256 (emphasis added).

Þormóður goes on to refer to a range of other international scholars who have dealt with the subject, including the works of Cornelius Agrippa.[60]

Árni Magnússon may have regarded this as "risky talk of *álfar*,"[61] but as has already been noted above, Þormóður's suggestion that the *álfar* might be evil spirits was far from being unique at the time. In many ways, it reflects Oddur Einarsson's approach in *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae* (1588); Gísli Oddsson's idea of two sorts of *álfar* given in *De mirabilius Islandiae* (1637); Gísli Vigfússon's ideas from 1660 about beings that are a blend of humans and spirits; Þorsteinn Björnsson's suggestion in *Noctes Setbergense* (before 1675) about the *álfar* being "neither men nor spirits, but half-way beings" that "live in hillocks and rocks"; and the discussions of Jón *lærði* Guðmundsson and his detractors in the early seventeenth century (see above).

A similar approach appears at the start of the *Historia rerum Norvegicarum* when Þormóður discusses the nature and background of the *gigantes* ("giants"), which he believes to have historical roots in the Canaanites, unlike the old gods which he sees as having been evil spirits or old kings, as the early thirteenth-century Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson had viewed them.[62] Þormóður, ever questioning, sees proof for the earlier existence of giants in huge bones that he had heard had recently been found near Vienna. However, he begins with a discussion of the difference between the old giants and the *tröll* of later folk belief. He writes:

> By the word giants, I do not mean that wild and horrid creature which is written about in stories under the name of a *tröll*, and which is often told about in both folk tales and the eddic poems. To my mind, these are either completely made up, or the illusions of evil spirits. A troll is formed like a human being but has a totally unnatural huge body [….] They fight with bulls which have been chosen as offerings, are blacker than coal, sometimes bald, other times misshapen, with hair that is reminiscent of a thick horse mane all over themselves [….] These accounts are of a dubious kind, if only because the trolls have not multiplied themselves over the course of all the centuries that have passed. If just a couple of them had

[60] Ibid., 253–254.

[61] Arne Magnusson, *Brevveksling*, 239 (letter to Þormóður, dated 3rd September 1698).

[62] Tormod Torfæus, *Norges historie*, I, 243–255; and (on the gods) 278–307.

> survived, they would have destroyed the island long ago, and emptied it of its settlers. And it is not clear how they came here, and not clear how they survived.[63]

Þormóður is also dubious about an account told in certain Icelandic annals dealing with the year 1520 of how the grandfather of a priest named Jón Egilsson described a gigantic woman washed up on the seashore, who was so huge that people only reached up to her knees. Þormóður questions this account because it is not mentioned in the more trustworthy annals. He is similarly dubious of an account in the Icelandic family saga *Grettis saga* of how the hero Grettir apparently fought with a troll woman; of the story of the giant woman Hrímgerðr mentioned in the early Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* (sts 12–30) who turns to stone as the sun rises; and of other accounts in the saga of the Norwegian saint, King Ólafr Haraldsson, *Ólafs saga helga*.[64]

Regarding these troll beings, Þormóður writes:

> To my mind, one can summarise the folk accounts in the following: It is a frightening wild creature of which there are two types. The first avoids the light. When it sees the daylight, it turns to a stone pillar like Lot's wife. People point to monuments of this type in Norway's mountain areas, and because they know no better, the believers spread these stories. The other type tolerates both day and night. Both are by their nature frightening and terrible and stand out from the terrain with their enormous bodies.[65]

He adds that these beings had their own language and magical skills, and could cast illusions, but kept to their word.

Of "real giants," on the other hand, Þormóður writes:

> … it is said that they live in mountains, grottos and holes and wherever nature offers the right circumstances. The traces of this, enormous boulders of various forms resting on a foundation of smaller stones can be seen today everywhere and even in Iceland.[66]

He adds that:

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[63] Ibid., I, 244.

[64] Ibid., I, 244.

[65] Ibid., I, 245.

[66] Ibid., I, 246.

> … they have blended themselves with humans of our kind, and caused hybrids, which are rightly called *halfrísar* [lit. half-giants], *halftröll* [lit. half-trolls] and *þursablendingar* [lit. ogre-hybrids]. These have adopted the human way of being and mildness, their wildness weakening bit by bit and disappearing over time.[67]

Later, Þormóður discusses the origins of the giants that have been reported all over the world, arguing:

> To my mind, they do not stem from demons which have had relations with women of our race, as the philosophers […] argue. I do not believe either that they are the descendants of men who have blended with mares or terribly big animals of another kind […]. I have no belief that such a birth could take place. …[68]

For Þormóður, as noted above, the giants originated with Noah's son Ham, in the form of people who, according to the Bible, were larger than normal human beings.

It may be that such attitudes to folk beliefs may be regarded as "uncritical," and perhaps even dubious from a "modern" standpoint, but as noted at the start, it is questionable whether one should view the scholars of earlier periods from such a viewpoint. For Þormóður, who evidently had his doubts, like most people in Iceland and Norway in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and even the Wittenberg-learned Hamlet in the play of the same name, there were clearly "more things in Heaven and Earth than were dreamt of in" Árni Magnússon's "philosophy."[69] There was much in the environment that people did not understand, and, as noted above, science was still in its infancy. The accounts recounted in this article underline that the rural people of Norway, Denmark and Iceland in Þormóður's time shared a very similar worldview and folklore of ghosts, hidden beings, "elves," water horses, seal people, magicians, lake monsters, and meaningful dreams. Rather than wholly rejecting them completely in favor of a Christian worldview or one based on scientific findings, many of the educated attempted to find ways of rationalizing and blending these

[67] Ibid., I, 247.

[68] Ibid., I, 248.

[69] Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I, v, 166.

approaches (all of which existed side by side in the evening storytelling sessions). As has been shown above, kings, bishops, priests, a vice governor general, playwrights and academics during the period in question were far from totally closed to folkloric perceptions. Indeed, such perceptions had deep, early roots traditions reaching back to pagan times, and, in spite of theological and rational questioning, were still very much in circulation when the various early Nordic folklorists began to collect oral legends in Norway and Iceland a century and a half later at the instigation of Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, whose *Deutsche Sagen* came out in 1816–1818. The enlightened manuscript collector, Árni Magnússon, may well have been a model of the ideal enlightened eighteenth-century man, who had less interest in such superstitious material, only collecting folk tales to do with the medieval Icelandic priest-magician Sæmundur *fróði* ("the wise") because Sæmundur was famous for his potential associations with the Eddic poems.[70] Þormóður Torfason, in contrast, was a man whose worldviews were deeply rooted in the old superstitious seventeenth century. Nonetheless, while his ideas might have been seen by some eighteenth-century scholars as dated, it is clear that, like many others, rather than rejecting the folk beliefs that he grew up with, Þormóður was making attempts to fit these ideas into the religious and learned frameworks he had encountered in school. There is little question that, born 150 years later, Þormóður would have been very much at home with the Grimm brothers and the pioneering folklore collectors that were to follow in Herder's nationalistic wake.[71]

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[70] Interestingly enough, Árni received these stories from yet another bishop, Björn Þorleifsson, of the See of Hólar. See further Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, I, 469–470; Bjarni Einarsson, *Munnmælasögur*, ci, 39, and 45; Simpson, *Legends of Icelandic Magicians*, 19–20; and Gunnell, "The Return of Sæmundur," 90–91.

[71] It is interesting to note that in the mid-nineteenth century, when the Icelandic folktale collector, Jón Árnason, sent out a call for clerics and others to collect folk legends, the scales had turned completely. By this time, the average Icelandic clerics were highly wary about the value of the material. It was essentially those who had been educated in Copenhagen that saw the value of collecting examples of folk belief for posterity.

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CHAPTER 9

The Devil and the Spirit World in Nineteenth-Century Estonia: From Christianization to Folklorization

Ülo Valk

Kurat ("devil") has remained a common swear word in the Estonian language; even today, when the power of the Lutheran church in society has greatly diminished. Once a constant marker of an authoritarian, theologically shaped discourse, the devil is now nothing but an expression in the vernacular language that hardly evokes fears about the old enemy of body and soul. This chapter discusses the discursive processes in nineteenth-century Estonia that ultimately led to the decline of diabolism in folk religion and the rise of rationalist and nationalist discourses.

The nineteenth century brought great changes to traditional rural culture in Estonia. Serfdom was abolished in 1816 in the province of Estland, in the north, and in 1819 in the province of Liefland, in the south; agrarian reforms laid the groundwork for changes in ownership as peasants started to purchase land during the second half of the century. The Enlightenment led to the advancement of education and improvements in the skills of reading and writing among the people.

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Alongside bibles, hymnals, prayer books and catechisms, weekly newspapers, books of popular science, poetry, fiction and folklore started to appear, creating new forms of publication addressed to common readers. The explosive growth of both the handwritten and the printed word expanded and enriched the intellectual space for discussing matters both secular and otherworldly. The peasants had lived for centuries with different kinds of fairy and guardian spirits of the fields and farmhouses. As the discursive and intellectual environment changed, the life of spirits could not remain unaffected, and they received new roles and functions. Demonized by Christianization and displaced by Enlightenment, they now received much more prominent positions in the imaginary realm of folkloristic heathendom as it appeared in the works of scholars and their correspondents throughout the countryside who were recording old Estonian heritage.

In nineteenth-century storytelling the Devil cannot be clearly distinguished from nature spirits as many of their appellations, beliefs and narrative plots overlap. As fallen angels, nature spirits had been integrated into a vernacular demonology that existed in dialogic relationship with clerical doctrines about the powers of evil. Diabolization of the local world of nature spirits lasted for centuries, but the early sources about these beliefs are scarce in comparison to the rich and systematic collections of Estonian folklore starting from the end of nineteenth century. Although it is problematic to reconstruct the history of demonology on the basis of late sources, it seems likely that the Devil had a prototype in pre-Christian mythology—the lord of the underworld and of the dead.[1] The Devil of vernacular Christianity is a complex and ambivalent figure who incorporates a variety of nature and guardian spirits, restless dead, apparitions and other entities that were increasingly diabolized as the Devil took over their former roles and functions in belief narratives and supernatural encounters. This vernacular Devil seems to dominate the nineteenth-century folk religion in Estonia, while in the same period he was pushed and pulled by crosscurrents of Lutheran doctrine, Orthodox conversion, devotional and enthusiastic movements, Enlightened critique and folkloristic celebration.

[1] Valk, "Devil's Identity."

The Devil in Changing Discursive Environments

The Reformation came to Estonia in the 1520s when several Protestant preachers spread the new doctrine. In 1535 a Lutheran catechism was printed in Wittenberg with parallel texts in Low German and Estonian, written by Simon Wanradt and Johann Koell, both pastors in Tallinn. Although the Estonian region was contested between Catholic Poland-Lithuania, Lutheran Sweden and Orthodox Russia through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ultimately becoming part of Russia at the conclusion of the Great Northern War in 1721, nevertheless it remained a Lutheran country with a nobility who spoke Low German and a peasantry whose language was Estonian in its multiple dialects. Whereas the Devil has hundreds of synonyms all over the country, some of which relate him to various nature spirits,[2] the common appellation *kurat* spread everywhere because it was introduced in clerical literature as the standard form.

Martin Luther's Small Catechism appeared in Estonian in 1632 in two basic dialects, and multiple editions appeared regularly over the next centuries. It became one of the primers in spreading Lutheran doctrine among the peasants. In 1739 the full Bible was published in Estonian, although its direct influence on the mentality of the people can hardly be compared with Lutheran hymnals, which were more affordable to the peasants and were regularly used during divine services. Many records in the Estonian Folklore Archives attest that the hymnal had the power to protect against the Devil and all kinds of evil, and that it was used in different kinds of vernacular magic, such as divination. It is difficult to say how much autonomy the Devil enjoyed during the eighteenth century among the variety of spirits and "small gods" who shared power with him in the worldview of Estonian peasants. His position probably depended on the activities and attitudes of the local clergy, mindsets of congregations and vernacular belief systems that existed parallel to the

[2] For example, *metsaline* ["wild one"] can refer to a forest spirit, a wild beast or the Devil; *eksitaja* ["misleader"] can refer to a demonic creature of vague identity who leads people astray and to the Devil; *vanapagan* ["old heathen"] can denote a demonized house spirit, a giant or the Devil; *maa-alused* ["undegrounders"] have been conceptualized both as dwarf-like anthropomorphic spirits and fallen angels, etc.

Lutheran Orthodoxy. Nevertheless it is clear that the Devil gradually replaced several other supernatural entities and became the dominant character in folk narratives, keeping guard over morality and punishing people for different kinds of transgression, from minor offenses to grave crimes. The Pietistic awakening movement of the Herrnhut brethren, which spread among the peasants during the eighteenth century, did not undermine the position of the Devil, instead contributing toward the polarization of the cosmos between heavenly and evil powers.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a wave of folk mysticism in Estonia as several peasant prophets appeared who in their dreams and visions saw heaven and hell and described their experiences at prayer meetings. They became popularly known as heaven-goers [*taevakäijad*]. In 1822 pastor Otto Wilhelm Masing (1763–1832) discussed this movement in several issues of his newspaper *Maarahva nädala-leht* ("The Weekly of the Country People"). As a man of letters who carried the spirit of the Enlightenment, Masing was critical of the ecstatic prayer meetings and the radical views of the preachers. He condemned them ruthlessly, calling the leaders "frauds" and "misleaders of the people" and characterizing the movement as "stupid and indecent rioting" based on "one and the same nonsense" that the folk preachers had heard and learned from each other.[3] Masing summarized their basic teaching as follows: "Who does not listen to our word does not love Christ; but who does not love Christ will be cursed. Hence, they claim: you who would like to resist, the Devil will burn your bones into black coal in hell; or: we curse your souls into an endless sea of burning tar and sulphur."[4]

Masing also gave vivid examples from the prayer meetings that give evidence of the tangible reality of the Devil. One of the preachers was Sõro Jaan, from Vastemõisa, a village in central Estonia, who was visited by crowds of people coming from faraway counties. During one prayer meeting he had taken an axe and started to hack the walls, shouting, "Behold, here is the Devil! Now I have killed him!" As Masing noted, the people who witnessed this scene "were trembling because of fear and terror that the Devil had come among them."[5] In another article, "True

[3] Masing, *Taevakäijatest*, 257.

[4] Ibid., 277.

[5] Ibid., 259–260.

Events," Masing described other cases where peasants troubled by the Devil had sought out his advice as a clergyman.[6] As Masing wrote, he was once visited by a young woman, Kadri, who was desperate and had traveled a long distance to meet him. Kadri's trouble had started when she had become a visitor to a prayer house of the heaven-goers, where she had been convinced that she "had to pray day and night to God in order to get rid of the Devil who is inside us and is born together with every human being." Kadri described her efforts to pray ceaselessly to make the Devil leave her, although her heart was heavy and her mind became more and more confused. She complained to her fellows in the prayer house about her distress, but Kadri was told that she had not been firm in her prayer, and the outcome is as our Savior had expressed: "When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first" (Luke 11: 24–26).[7] These words had afflicted Kadri's heart so much that she could neither sleep nor think of anything else.[8] Masing did not describe how he consoled Kadri or helped her but gave an overall assessment of the case. He said that during his 35-year career as a clergyman he had met other unfortunate people who had thought that they were tortured by the Devil. Among them had been three men and seven women. Masing said that solitary people with "fearful, weak and soft hearts" are more likely to get into this trouble, and the condition is often a ramification of something that they consider as a sin, which cannot be forgiven by God. These people cannot sleep and eat any more, they start to see visions and their bodies and souls are affected by severe illness.[9]

Another case that Masing described involved a widow who started to dream about somebody coming to her bed and whispering into her ear: "Your husband sends greetings to you from the heaven and has asked me to tell you that you should become mine and take me as your man." According to Masing, this was a mere dream, but the woman had

[6] Masing, *Sündinud asjad*, 122–123.

[7] Ibid., 143–144. I have used the NIV translation of the Bible to translate the quoted passage.

[8] Ibid., 144.

[9] Ibid., 123.

misinterpreted it as the appearance of the Devil. After this she heard devils singing beautiful hymns beside her, and at other times tempting her with carnal desires. The woman was the mistress of a farmhouse, but she forgot about her duties. Instead, she started to arrange song and prayer meetings with an old schoolmaster in order to be saved from the Devil. However, it was of no use, and neither did it help when they fired the gun at night in order to scare the evil spirit. Finally, the widow came to talk to a pastor (probably Masing himself) and a good solution was found. The lady was married again and hence forward there was no need for a doctor. She had escaped all the temptations of the Devil—as she had interpreted her experience.[10]

Another case that Masing described had an unhappy ending.[11] Maddi Rein was an aged, honest and intelligent peasant in Saka, a village on the northeastern coast. He was often involved in studying the Bible together with his friend, the manor gardener, whose trouble was that he considered himself wiser than he was and had a firm belief that he could understand all the prophetic passages in the Bible. As a consequence, Rein became confused and started to visit the pastor regularly, looking for relief for his distressed heart. It did not help that the pastor corrected the misinterpretations of the Bible, guided the man to do physical work or read the Gospels instead of the books of the prophets, which one cannot understand without proper education. Confusion grew; the man could not sleep or eat and even stopped talking to his wife, sons and grandchildren. Finally, one night he came out of bed, put on the light and called the whole family to prayer. As they had finished the prayer and songs, Rein said, "Children, my end has come! God has given me into the hands of the tempter [*kiusaja*] and given him power over me. Since first cockcrow in the morning he has been standing in front of me, laughing at me and mocking me. He is not leaving me but shows his tongue when I make the sign of cross." This condition lasted for seven or eight weeks; frequent visits to the pastor were of no use. The poor man went to church every Sunday but then turned back at the door, because he heard that all the walls of the church started to shout: "go away, you filthy one, together with your filthy spirit! You have no place and nothing to do here!" During the last conversation with the pastor Rein complained that

[10] Ibid., 124–125.

[11] Ibid., 126–28, 129–131.

the tempter had started to appear to him, showing him a rope in one hand and knife in the other hand. However, he promised to the pastor to give up these suicidal thoughts with the help of God. Unfortunately, three days later the sad news was brought to the pastor that Rein had killed himself.[12]

These cases show the power of the Devil in the belief world of the peasants in the 1820s. More remarkable within the context of this chapter is how Masing explains these cases: as warning examples not of supernatural power but of a mental illness [*waimo haigus*] caused by some physical trouble or by remorse. Masing emphasizes that such illnesses are severe, the poor sufferers need extreme patience and care and it would be useless to argue with them, telling them that they are wrong. Altogether, as Masing says about these cases, "the Evil spirit has nothing to do here and he has no guilt."[13] At the end of his polemical article Masing repeats his basic points—what people see in such a state of mind is nothing more than an empty delusion [*waimo warjutamine*] or a dream conjured up by a feeble mind. He stresses that the explanation that he offers is valid in other cases as well: "The same is true about seeing or hearing revenants, spirits, apparitions and ghosts that ignorant people speak about."[14] It is remarkable that such rationalist arguments were addressed by a representative of the clergy to the Estonian readership at a time when the Devil still had an outstanding position in clerical teaching and appeared constantly not only in legends of the supernatural but in personal experience as well. In Lutheran demonology the Devil could take many forms, such as the angel of light, restless dead or nature spirits, and this doctrine formed the common ground for blending theological discourse with unorthodox beliefs. Masing was of a different opinion and found the common ground for the Devil and other spiritual entities not in supernatural reality but in mental delusions. This shift helps us to understand the subsequent transfigurations of belief and their interpretations both in vernacular and intellectual discourses.

However, the Devil did not lose his power so easily, as was confirmed by multiple authoritative texts kept in constant circulation. The Lord's

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[12] The strong association between the Devil and suicide through hanging is also expressed in multiple legends collected throughout Estonia: see Valk, *Black Gentleman*, 123–24.

[13] Masing, *Sündinud asjad*, 131.

[14] Ibid., 142.

Prayer, which implores the Heavenly Father to "deliver us from evil,"[15] belonged to the common knowledge of Estonian peasants as the cornerstone of Christian faith. It was recited during Lutheran church services and in prayer houses; it accompanied Christian rituals as well as practices of vernacular magic; and it became the protective formula that helped in critical situations to ward off evil powers. The Devil appears in several passages of Luther's frequently reprinted Small Catechism; for example, in its explanation of the phrase "lead us not into temptation" from the Lord's Prayer: "God, indeed, tempts no one; but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice …"[16] Luther explains redemption through Christ with reference to the Devil: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won [delivered] me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil …"[17] And according to the Catechism, the sacrament of holy baptism "works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this …"[18] We can find in these last two examples the formula of threefold evil—sin, death, and the Devil—that is characteristic of both clerical discourse and Estonian folk beliefs and legends.[19]

There are too many examples of the Devil in clerical texts to be discussed here. However, let us take the last example in the eschatological hymn "On Pain of Hell" [*Põrgu vallust,* hymn no. 213], which was included in Lutheran hymnals until the end of the nineteenth century. This is a visionary song in 18 stanzas, presenting detailed descriptions

[15] Or "from the Evil One": the Estonian term *kuri* usually refers to abstract evil but can also denote a personified Devil.

[16] Eesti Ma-Rahwa Koddo- ja Kirriko Ramat, 14. Translation: http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php.

[17] Ibid., 9–10.

[18] Ibid., 15.

[19] The Devil who appears on the deathbed of a cruel or sinful person is a widely spread narrative motif in the Estonian Folklore Archives. In many stories the Devil is described driving a black coach at night to fetch the soul of an evil landlord or a person who has committed suicide.

of the sufferings in hell.[20] Composed in the second-person plural ("Oh, come, ye people …") and singular ("You will be seized by fear, distress, pain and disgust …"), the hymn thus addresses everybody personally. It says that the sinners in hell are hungry and thirsty but they are offered only fire and tar. They are naked, covered in mud and dirt and seized by flames. Those who have been greedy for honor become the laughingstocks of devils who humiliate them. Those who have been drunkards, brawlers or blasphemers beat and bite each other like dogs. Those who have enjoyed dancing and merry making are in great pain, suffering from heat and cold. Thus, different sins result in different physical punishments in which devils take the lead: "The devils will tear you and throw you from place to place; the fire will burn hard; enraged fiend will pull your sinews, bones and flesh." In the background there is terrible yelling, shouting and tremendous noise, made by the devils. Finally, the song suggests that blessed are those who know this, bear it in mind and mend their ways in time.[21]

This aggressive image of the Devil often appears in Estonian legends, sometimes as late as the mid-twentieth century. He is a watchful moralist, as in the following story:

> One evening father and son were reading the Bible on the islet of Kessulaid. The father was wearing a fur winter cap. Suddenly the door was opened and two blue men entered. The father took off the cap and put it on his son. Immediately the blue men seized the son and carried him out. When they reached the village mill, the son could stretch his legs on the ground and make the sign of cross. When he made the sign of cross, the strange men disappeared as if under the ground. Probably these men were some servants of the evil spirit who got permission to punish the men because they were wearing a cap while reading the Bible.[22]

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[20] *Eesti Ma-Rahwa Koddo- ja Kirriko Ramat*, 265–268.

[21] According to Dr. Kristiina Ross this song appeared for the first time in Estonian in the pietistic hymnal in 1721 and remained in use since then. When the hymnal was re-edited in 1869 the song was not removed but got a different number (490). It was not until 1899 that the song disappeared in the new edition of the hymnal. (I am thankful to Dr. K. Ross for this information.)

[22] Collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives in Tartu, ERA II 227, 524 (19). Recorded in 1939 in Hanila parish, Massu, Mõisaküla by Esta Kirves; narrated by Minni Rotschild, 61 years old. Whereas the colors black, white and gray dominate in the descriptions of the Devil in Estonian folklore, blue is also traditional. The anthropomorphic appearance of the Devil is much more frequent than his zoomorphic or fantastic guise. See Valk, *Black Gentleman*.

The story above was recorded in 1939 in Western Estonia, in one of the parishes that was strongly influenced by the religious awakening movements and conversion to Orthodoxy that spread widely at the end of nineteenth century.[23] The atmosphere of folk piety might explain why reading the Bible with a cap on seemed such a major offence. The story is typical as a warning legend that transmits both religious norms and guidelines about how to protect oneself from the evil powers—by making the sign of the cross. Such a Devil as vigilant protector of Christian values contrasts with his many other appearances in Estonian folklore where he appears less as clerically defined tempter and moralist, instead manifesting features of nature spirits.

Unification of the Spirit World: From Diabolization to Folklorization

Large-scale collection of Estonian folklore started in 1888 when Dr. Jakob Hurt (1839–1907), pastor, leader of the national movement and folklorist, published a public appeal in Estonian newspapers, asking readers to start recording local dialects and folklore.[24] His folkloristic goal was historical—to collect information about ancient Estonian heritage that he hoped to find in oral traditions. Hurt published a thorough questionnaire, including a chapter about old customs and manners and another on old folk belief and superstition. The latter included a list of spirits and mythical beings, such as fairies, thunder, plague, revenants, nightmares, underground beings, Kalevipoeg (hero of the Estonian epic) and others. Most of these beings bear no explicit connection to Christianity and express the interest of Hurt in ancient Estonian mythology, traces of which he hoped to find in folklore. Hurt also mentioned some synonyms of the Devil, such as *Äi*, *Äiätär*, *Juudas* and *Tont*. All of them manifest folkloric guises of the Devil that are somewhat different from the Evil One in clerical discourse. *Äi* is a euphemism of the Devil, referring to his appearance as an old man; *Äiätär* refers to the female guise of the Devil or his mother or daughter who mainly appears in folktales. Both can be used as relatively mild swear words, just like *Juudas*, which is a mild euphemism of the Devil, associated with Judas Iscariot in

[23] Cf Plaat, *Usuliikumised*.

[24] Hurt, "Paar palvid."

vernacular Christianity. *Tont* is the stupid Old Nick of the fairytales, but it can also refer to demonized house spirit. Probably *kurat*—the Devil proper—still represented the authoritative Lutheran doctrine, and it was awkward for Hurt to consider the Old Enemy from the Catechism and hymns as a folkloric character. Hurt had grown up in a pious family; his father had been a reader of the Herrnhut brethren, and he had been a singer in the prayer house choir.[25]

Obviously, the Devil of Christianity from authoritarian discourse was familiar to him and hardly seemed to belong to the world of superstitions, such as legends and beliefs about witchcraft, hidden treasures, nature spirits or assistant demons who carried wealth to their wicked owners. Next to Jakob Hurt other folklore collectors appeared, such as Matthias Johann Eisen (1857–1934), also a Lutheran pastor and man of letters who became a great popularizer of Estonian folklore. In his questionnaire, published in 1896 in a calendar, the Devil and his synonyms are included in the list of "spirits of the olden times": *kurat*, *vanapagan*, *vanapoiss*, *vanakoll*, etc.[26] In 1919 Eisen published his comprehensive book *Estonian Mythology*, giving an overall introduction to the topic. The book included a chapter about the Devil next to discussions about a vast array of nature spirits and other mythical beings, some of whom had first appeared in literary works of nineteenth-century writers and were later folklorized. Thus, the Devil shifted from theological discourse to a very different discursive setting—folklore as it appeared in literary sources and was conceptualized as old heritage, which was typical to the notion of folklore in the late nineteenth century—the age of rising modernity and nation building. Pertti Anttonen has shown that the concepts of tradition, folklore, and modernity appeared together as discursive markers to separate the epistemological realms of old and new, conservative and innovative, rural and urban.[27] Conceptualizing the Devil as a mere character of ancient heritage downplayed his presence in the lives and minds of contemporaries, relegated him to a distant past, and deprived him of power in the secularized world. How did this shift occur? Let us examine the process more closely. Even though the early collectors of folklore showed no interest in Christian topics, the Devil appears as the

[25] Põldmäe, *Noor Jakob Hurt*, 9–13.

[26] Eisen, *Rahvaluule korjamise kohta*, 272.

[27] Anttonen, *Tradition through Modernity*.

dominant character in folk narratives in the collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives. He is omnipresent in different genres—fairytales, legends, proverbs, songs—and his character varies from the clumsy and stupid Old Nick to the aggressive predator-like creature that can attack anybody. In many legends the victims of the Devil die violent deaths, and only some body parts are found the next morning. According to the dominant model of *Interpretatio Christiana* nature spirits and other supernatural powers were seen as manifestations of the Devil. By the nineteenth century this clerical view had spread widely, and there was a growing tendency to associate him with different extraordinary events, accidents and troubles:

> About one verst away from Pühalepa rectory there is a place in the hay-fields of farmlands that is called Kura Kurk.[28] Once Old Nick [*vanapagan*] ate up one man there. Nothing else remained of this man but his left boot. If now somebody happens to step on this place, he or she goes astray.[29]

However, sometimes the experience of getting lost in the wilderness was connected with the forest spirit, whose footprints or path one had crossed. At other times and places the culprit was a vague creature called *eksitaja* ("misleader"). The identity of the spirit could also remain unclear, which itself was an experience connected with demonic powers:

> When a human being gets lost, he or she has stepped on the footprints of an evil spirit. The only way to escape would be to turn one's cap around, or if this won't help, one has to wait until cockcrow. Then the trouble will be over. Once there was a man who was lost quite close to his home. He could not figure out where he was. He went around several times but ended up in the same place and could not find the way out. Finally he even forgot his name and did not know who he was. He turned his cap around but this did not help. Finally he sat down to wait for cockcrow. When the cock crowed his eyes were open as if waking up from a dream. He realized immediately, where he was.[30]

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[28] The words *kura* and *kurat* share the same root, associated with the left side [cf. *kurakäsi*, "left hand"]. The legend thus seems to be a folk etymological explanation of a microtoponym, while also expressing the belief that getting lost is caused by the Devil.

[29] H II 74, 509/10 (7)—recorded in Pühalepa parish by A. Pruuer (1905).

[30] E 22751/2 (6)—recorded in Pärnu-Jaagupi paris, Parasmaa by J. Reitvelt. Informant: Hans Rüisson (1896).

Uncertainty and ambivalence are typical to supernatural encounters at liminal times and in liminal places—such as walking on a road late at night. There is a well-known legend type in Estonian folklore about a wayfarer who wrestles with a mysterious stranger in the moonlight, whose identity varies to a great extent in different recordings. The opponent can be a forest spirit, the Devil, a revenant, ghost or an unidentified creature. As the standard social norm was not to travel in darkness, deviation from it was likely to cause trouble and end up with supernatural encounters—as confirmed by multiple other stories. Certain places had the aura of otherness—such as graveyards, churches, crossroads and sacred sites like groves [*hiis*] where strict behavioral rules and taboos had to be followed. One such liminal space where a magical other world began was the sauna. There are a great number of warning legends about going to a sauna late at night when the place was not safe:[31]

> According to the grandmother of the storyteller this happened not far from Äksi. The aunt of a schoolteacher went to the sauna late on Saturday night and started to wash herself alone. When she put her hands into the water in order to wash she saw that there was pure blood in the tub, which instantly colored her hands red … She was scared and ran out of the sauna. But her hands remained red up to her wrists for the rest of her life.[32]

Whereas the legend above does not mention a supernatural agent, it is usually the Devil who appears in sauna and punishes those who come to wash too late on Saturday evening—although in a few legends the house spirit, rather than the Devil, appears and punishes somebody who had broken the taboo of going to the sauna late at night:

> My mother's sister told me that she heard it from my grandmother. In olden times people went to sauna on Saturday night. A maid was the last one to go to whisk herself alone, late at night. A grey old man had come to help her in washing. He had a pitcher with a metal cover in his hand. He asked, "Would you like me to help you?" The girl had said, "Indeed, I am late. Please be so kind." The old man poured water all over her. In the morning the girl was like a ruddy animal, covered by fur. The old man had

[31] Cf. Ryan, *Bathhouse at Midnight*, 50.

[32] ERA II 12, 354 (18)—recorded by Richard Viidebaum in Simuna parish, Koila. Informant: Emilje Lill, born in 1875 (1929).

> finally said: "On Saturday evening you wash yourself with blood and on Sunday evening with fresh milk (Saturday night is so holy, you should wash yourself on Sunday night)." The old man was a spirit, home spirit [*kodualgjas*]. Otherwise he does not show himself among people.[33]

It seems that generally the former sauna spirit has been replaced with the Devil who controls Christian behavior norms such as celebrating Sunday by avoiding work and cleaning oneself before the holy day starts. In the example above it seems that the role of the Devil as moralist has been attributed to the house spirit. Saunas were usually heated on Saturdays (or in a few places, Fridays) and there was a belief that washing should be finished before sunset, after which the water will turn into blood. Sunday, as is recommended in the legend above, sounds unusual. Vernacular interpretations of established norms tend to vary and beliefs are often expressed in inconsistent forms.

Christianization involves purification of one's immediate environment from the heathen elements of the past and building boundaries between a safe, exorcized "inside" and an outside realm of dangers, impurity, and evil "pagan" powers. Liminal places in the farmhouse, such as the sauna and corners of the garden, as sites where house spirits were formerly worshipped, represented the potential risk of aggression from the otherworld.[34] By the end of nineteenth century the long process of Christianization had affected not only human souls but the home environment as well. Guardian spirits who protected the farm and its inhabitants and had received offerings could not be transferred to a world going through rapid modernization. They had to be left behind and were thus transformed into demonized creatures that caused trouble. Sometimes radical measures such as ritual cleansing and exorcism were taken in order to do away with a past in which house spirits had co-habited in social space with humans. As the implicit agreement of mutual assistance had been broken by the people, the former benevolent or neutral spirits turned mischievous:

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[33] ERA II 38, 280/1 (13)—recorded by Rudolf Põldmäe in Väike-Maarja parish, Porkuni. Informant: Leena Matiisen, 68 years old (1931). Published in Hiiemäe, *Endis-Eesti elu-olu*, 213.

[34] Kaarina Koski has characterized such places as normatively distant, as people were not supposed to go there. They include places of sacred character but also places where frightening things, such as murders, have taken places. See Koski, *Narrative Time-Spaces*, 340.

> Pulgaaru farm is situated near the north western border of Sammaste village. People in this farm had great trouble with Old Nick [*vanapagan*]. The Evil One [*vana kuri*] had chosen this farm as his permanent residence and caused a lot of mischief and chagrin to its people. At night he made noises on shelves and up on poles and disturbed people's sleep. He was not afraid to appear even in the daytime. He cast stones off of the top of the sauna stove, threw the dregs out of the mashing vat, dumped ashes into the well and made other mischief. The master tried to repel Old Nick with the sign of the cross. The Evil One paid no attention to this but fleered at him from the poles. The others instructed him to try his luck with a priest and he brought him from [the town of] Viljandi. The priest brought blessed things and holy water. He started to recite and chant in the hut. When the Evil One climbed on the poles the priest sprinkled him with holy water. Since then Old Nick has disappeared from Pulgaaru.[35]

Nature spirits and guardian spirits of farmhouses were affected by contradictory discursive environments. Christian discourse of demonization was supplemented by the intensified discourse of Enlightenment and disenchantment. Jaan Jung (1835–1900) was a teacher, man of letters and amateur archaeologist who collected data about ancient Estonian culture and history. In 1879 he published a book called *On Old Belief, Customs and Stories of the Estonian People*, offering a survey of his folklore collections.[36] In the introduction, "On the meaning and origin of folk superstition and how to overcome it," he notes that folk superstition has to a great extent become a matter of derision and in some places is preserved like a toy, or like innocent poetry. However, Jung warns that superstition is a dark and serious matter, like a weed, which has to be terminated. According to him, superstition means that people consider it true that demons [*tont*] and spirits [*vaim*] exist in water, earth, hills and forests, and that there is some kind of power above them that affects human life either positively or negatively. In addition, superstition includes different devices and magic, how to protect oneself from these powers, and how to foresee their future actions and attitudes toward human through omens, artful inquiries, casting lots or using cards to tell fortunes.[37]

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[35] ERA II 236, 152/ 3 (11)—recorded in Halliste parish, Kaarli, Sammaste village by Leo Halm, born in 1924 from Mats Ruubel (1939).

[36] Jung, *Eesti rahva vanast usust*.

[37] Ibid., 5.

Jung considers such superstitions to be survivals from the childhood of humankind when there was no science or education—and finds similar examples among peoples of North Asia, Central Africa and India.[38] Superstition can be eradicated through belief in God and the Holy Scripture, the natural sciences and disciplining of the mind.[39] The whole set of folk demonology and related traditions are thus projected onto the periphery of civilization, at the margins of modernity where the darkness still lurks. As Jung concludes his book with a call: "It is the duty of each and every serious friend of the native country to work on the spiritual education of the people—bit by bit—so that darkness and ignorance will disappear and steady light prevail!"[40]

Lumping together the whole legendry and beliefs about demons and spirits as a realm of superstitions was not the only strategy of dealing with them. As we saw, early folklorists reassessed superstitions, although with some hesitations. Together with other enlightened people they saw superstitious belief in spirits as a burden weighing on the mentality of modern society, although they also saw their historical and poetic value. Studying superstition for the sake of exterminating it was supplemented by a different kind of project of perpetuating it as a historical document in the archives. What had been considered as superstition was now interpreted as folk belief—a major field in the academic study of folklore. Folklorization of the Devil and spirits can be understood as turning them into the research object of the new discipline, although it also means that the related traditions were reinterpreted as part of the realm of poetic fantasy. Demonology turned into fiction in entertaining books of old stories. It also turned into national heritage in the volumes of *Monumenta Estoniae Antiquae*—an academic series of folklore established by Jakob Hurt in the late nineteenth century, which continues to this day. Among others in this series a volume has been published with folk narratives about *Vanapagan* ("old heathen")—the awkward giant who appears as the opponent of the mythic hero Kalevipoeg in the Estonian epic.[41] Symbolically, he is the embodiment of all kinds of natural, supernatural and social evil. Kalevipoeg in the epic descends into hell, fights there

[38] Ibid., 6.

[39] Ibid., 10–11.

[40] Ibid., 116.

[41] Laugaste, Eduard; Liiv, Ellen. *Muistendid Vanapaganast.*

with Vanapagan, lord of the nether world, and finally chains him—taking the role of Christ in an epic narrative intended to represent the heritage of pre-Christian Estonia. The compiler of *Kalevipoeg*, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), has depicted in the epic a wide array of demonic creatures with roots in international folklore: beings who have spread with Christianity. The mythology of the epic is a complex amalgamation of motifs from literary and oral traditions as well as Kreutzwald's own creative fantasies.[42] Because of the importance of the epic and folklore books we can also talk about the nationalization of demonology in Estonia. From the role of tempter into sin and moralist, the Devil was assigned the much nobler role of representing ethnic heritage—together with spirits and other supernatural creatures of folklore.

Conclusion: From Marginalization to Survival Through Folklore

This chapter discussed the trajectories of theological and vernacular beliefs within the frameworks of changing discursive settings. The Devil maintained his significant position in Christianity throughout the nineteenth century both in institutionally constructed and folkloric cosmos. He was a powerful outcast, the Other, who was systematically marginalized but tended to be omnipresent, appearing constantly in narratives that were kept in circulation and sometimes turning up in experiences. In the storyworld he can be interpreted as a symbol of evil, but his presence culminated in psychological encounters that cannot be reduced to metaphorical explanations but have to be accepted as real—at least from the perspective of those who had the bad luck of witnessing the spirit world. One was more likely to experience demonic powers when breaking norms or taboos or visiting some liminal places at the wrong time. The Devil could also easily be summoned in the excessively Christian environment of prayer houses and evoked in the practices of folk piety, such as fervent praying, singing or zealous reading of the Bible.

As well as this fearsome Devil of the Lutheran catechism, visionary hymns and prayer meetings, we can talk about different kinds of devil in folkloric discourses. On the one hand we see the termination of good relationships of mutual dependence between humans and the

[42] Annist, *Kreutzwaldi Kalevipoeg*, 755–756.

spirit world, which evokes aggressive reactions from the former guardian spirits and their diabolization. On the other hand we witness the vernacularization of the Lutheran Devil, who appears as the stupid Old Nick or a minor spirit who is localized to a certain place in nature or village setting. Michael Ostling has interpreted a similar kind of process in Poland, occurring as translation and assimilation that mixed the meanings of both "theological" and local demons.[43] However, whereas his much earlier sources mainly represent the clerical and legal discourses, the Estonian sources discussed in the current article express voices from below. These voices have been documented in the vernacular writings of amateur and professional folklorists who co-produced manuscripts in close dialogue with their informants.

The chapter also considered the discourse of Enlightenment, which to some extent contradicted the folkloristic project. Discursive reversal of demonology into the realm of ignorance and superstition in the writings of Otto Wilhelm Masing and other representatives of rational theology appeared as a response to an ecstatic Christianity that the enlightened authors could not tolerate. Born in the frames of Lutheran discourse, disenchantment of the world grew into the scientific project of liberating people from superstitions. According to this view there was no place for the supernatural, and there was no essential difference between the Devil, spirits and ghosts. They were all mere fantasies or delusions produced by the sick or weary mind. The Devil was transferred from the realm of monumental beliefs to the world of folklore. Indeed, this had happened in vernacular traditions as well, but the radical novelty of this theological shift was that the Devil was deprived of his powerful position and ontological reality in clerical settings. He was turned into a mere folkloric character, and folklore was seen as disappearing together with the traditional village society.

The Devil and the spirit world could have easily become extinct, but folklorists in Estonia saved them, giving them a worthy position within the new discourse of ethnic and national heritage. Marginalized within rational theology and finally rejected as superstition, the Christianized and greatly assimilated spirit world became a resource for studying and reconstructing Estonian mythology. This kind of folklorized spirit world has been turned into symbolic capital and has a firm and unchallenged

[43] Ostling, *Between the Devil and the Host*, 227–237.

position in Estonia today as it keeps reappearing in different literary and artistic forms. Nineteenth-century books of fairy tales and legends are reprinted time and again and new ones are composed on the basis of Estonian Folklore Archives. Many artists have illustrated these publications and offered different interpretations of the main events in the epic Kalevipoeg. Some writers, such as the best-selling author Andrus Kivirähk, has set the scenery of some of his books in the semi-literary world of legends and fairy tales.[44] The ballet *Kratt* ("goblin") (1943) by the composer Eduard Tubin (1905–1982) tells a story of a greedy master who makes contract with the Devil and obtains the demonic servant *kratt* who finally kills his owner. The ballet belongs to the classics of Estonian music and has been staged several times, most recently in 2015 by the Estonian National Opera in Tallinn.[45]

Folklore as it was understood in the nineteenth century also set into motion the folkloristic scholarship that has gone through several historical phases. Whereas the folklore studies of the twentieth century were strongly influenced by the national paradigm, the contemporary approaches have gone far beyond it. Hence, the Devil and spirits who were once forced to represent Estonian heritage have today been emancipated from this duty. After going through several historical transfigurations and being shaped by multiple discursive processes, they remain fascinating, ambivalent and controversial, offering countless research questions—probably without final answers.

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[44] Kivirähk, *Man Who Spoke Snakish*.

[45] In addition, the nature spirits of folklore have been revived in the context of New Age and neopagan movements, through many spiritual seekers in Estonia who try to restore the contact with the supernatural world. In such contexts, the Devil today seems to have been discursively detached again from the "indigenous" Estonian heritage as it is conceived in vernacular imaginations. At the same time, the Devil as personified evil has never disappeared from the doctrines of various Christian denominations. He has also been introduced in the context of Satanism as a new religious movement, which has a marginal position in Estonia today.

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CHAPTER 10

Dreaming of Snakes in Contemporary Zambia: Small Gods and the Secular

Johanneke Kroesbergen-Kamps

"I had a bad dream that I was bitten by a snake," wrote a member of the Facebook-group *Reformed Church in Zambia—All Youths Fellowship*, "please pray for me to save me." In Zambia, dreams are traditionally seen as a source of spiritual information.[1] Nowadays, the local symbolism of snakes has changed from ambiguity or even blessing to associations with witchcraft, evil things and the devil. This chapter examines dreams of snakes to explore the Christianization and secularization of Zambian "small gods."

With 72 different ethnic groups, Zambian traditions on snakes are diverse. In many traditions the snake holds a special position, and can be seen as ambiguous, morally neutral or even helpful. For example, for the Chewa, from the Eastern Province in Zambia, the snake—especially

[1] Udelhoven, "Zambian Traditions," 44–66.

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the python—is closely related to the arrival of the rains. Should someone kill such a snake, the deity (*Chiuta*) will not send the rains.[2] In Luapula Province, in the northeast, the deity (*Makumba*) appears in the form of a snake with a white spot on its head. Its appearance is believed to bring good fortune and a rich harvest. According to Bemba traditional beliefs, snakes may carry messages from important ancestors, mainly former chiefs. At various places—for example, the Victoria Falls—a supernatural snake is thought to live in the water and bring blessings as well as punishments. Lastly, throughout Southern Africa *lilomba* is the name for the witch's familiar in the form of a snake. As can be seen from this limited overview, the snake is in many Zambian traditions connected to the divine or supernatural, and is by no means necessarily evil. However, nowadays, the evaluation of snakes is almost purely negative. This makes dreaming about being bitten by a snake very disturbing.

This chapter presents two contemporary ways to deal with images in dreams. The first is exemplified by a neo-Pentecostal pastor who often invites self-proclaimed ex-Satanists to testify in his deliverance services. Religious entities like snakes that previously worked on a local level now play their part on a global stage in the battle between the Christian forces of good and the Satanic forces of evil. Dreaming about being bitten by a snake is widely interpreted as an attack by evil forces or even Satan himself. In this Pentecostal ministry, such testimonies have a clear role: they function as proof that the spiritual world in which the battle between God and Satan takes place is very real. The second example is the Fingers of Thomas, a Catholic group that researches and pastorally engages with cases of alleged Satanism. Their approach is to work with the symbols present in disturbing dreams and experiences, looking at the meaning they have for the person as well as in Zambian traditions. Through conversations and prayer, fearful images are neutralized or at least brought under control of the dreamer. How can these two different approaches be interpreted? In both cases the treatment of the "small gods" is related to a process of disenchantment. Although according to Gifford, "most Africans have an 'enchanted' worldview,"[3] this chapter argues that such a worldview is not self-evident. The Pentecostal pastor feels the need to give proof of the enchanted, spiritual world, while

[2] Van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, 67.

[3] Gifford, *African Christianity*, 328.

for the Fingers of Thomas former religious entities have become disenchanted as individual symbols.

Snakes and Satanism

Both examples are related to the Zambian discourse on Satanism. Zambians are predominantly Christian: 95.5% of Zambians so describe themselves according to the 2010 census.[4] Nevertheless, in contemporary Zambia many Christians feel threatened by Satanism. Satanists are believed to be agents of the devil, working together in a worldwide conspiracy to cause harm and backsliding in faith. In school, in hospitals, on the road, in the market and even in churches, Satanists are believed to cause illness and death, to steal and sell your blood and organs, to cause road accidents and try to get you in their thrall by selling you seemingly innocent products that cause harm or even convert their owners to Satanism. In churches, self-proclaimed ex-Satanists tell about their evil past and subsequent deliverance. The use of the term "Satanism" is relatively new. In Africa, the first testimonies of ex-Satanists appear in the 1980s—Emmanuel Eni's *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* (1987) is an early example from Nigeria.[5] In Zambia, stories about Satanism gained in popularity from the 1990s. In 1997, the press picked up the testimonies of a group of girls from the Copperbelt, in which they confessed that they had been initiated into Satanism before their deliverance at the hands of a Pentecostal pastor.[6] Soon testimonies, rumors, and accusations spread in churches and newspapers. The Zambian panic surrounding Satanism reached its peak around 2007. By this time the phenomenon had become troublesome, with many new cases arising each week. Some schools—especially boarding schools—experienced panics, causing concern among pupils, staff and parents; and hospitals reported that patients were apprehensive of having their blood samples taken.[7] Though the intensity of the phenomenon has abated slightly, pastors known as specialists in this field discover new cases every week. Snakes are mentioned in more than half of the testimonies that I have collected

[4] Central Statistical Office, "Social Characteristics," 19.

[5] Eni, *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness.*

[6] Udelhoven, "Social Side of Possession," 1.

[7] Udelhoven, "Satanism in Zambia."

for my research on the discourse of Satanism in Zambia. Some references to snakes are clearly built on Christian notions—for example, calling the devil "that old serpent," after Revelation 12:9 (KJV). Others seem to have their roots in traditional Zambian views, as becomes clear from the following example. Chimwemwe was a middle-aged mother of five children when she first testified in church about her involvement with Satanism. Looking back, the first sign of evil had manifested when she was 6 years old and defied her mother's commands by jumping into a river that ran through her uncle's lands. This river is a fearful place. Chimwemwe recounted other stories of people who had jumped into the river: some never came back; others appeared after a few months, filled with spiritual knowledge. She says:

> I was not the first to go in that river. Others never came back. Others became half fish, half woman, and were seen breastfeeding children. The mother of my grandmother disappeared for months in the water. She came back with a bag full of medicines and became a witchdoctor. Two white men came—this place was full of precious stones—and they went into the water. The first came out, and all his skin had been peeled off. He was very red. He went in again, and the water became his grave. The second man disappeared in the same way. My uncle, who was managing the farm, one day decided that he wanted to sell the minerals in the ground. But he never did. When working in the field, he stepped on something soft. He stepped on something soft and he realized he was standing on the back of a huge spotted snake. It was not a python, a python is smaller. This snake—he couldn't see where the head was, or where the tail was, it was so big. He had to take a few steps just to get off its back. He ran. When he got home, he had a dream. The same snake appeared and told him: "Don't touch our stones." This place, it was filthy rich with minerals. How wealthy my uncle could have been! But he never touched them, and when people started praying there they just disappeared.

In traditional African cosmologies, the spirit world forms an integral part of reality. Rivers and lakes are inhabited by spirits and serve as points of access for the spirit world in general.[8] In Zambia, the spirit dwelling in Victoria Falls is probably the most well-known example; but lesser water features contain their own spirits. All over Africa, water spirits are

[8] Ellis and Ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*, 52.

depicted as mermaids, half fish and half woman.[9] Probably the most famous marine spirit is Mami Wata. Mami Wata ("mother of water") is a relatively new deity who has attracted many followers in the course of the twentieth century. The Mami Wata cult has followers from Senegal to Tanzania.[10] In their rituals, her followers make altars for Mami Wata and often use mirrors to call on the goddess. It gives them the opportunity to travel spiritually to Mami Wata's realm beneath the sea, where coveted consumer goods like televisions can be found.[11] Although Chimwemwe's narrative is not explicit about the precise workings of the spirit world, the figure of the mermaid is clearly present, and it is likely that the woman who came back as a witchdoctor is believed to have accessed the spiritual world and its knowledge through the river. The snake described by Chimwemwe seems to be another local spirit, though related to earth rather than water. The snake is connected to the precious stones found in the ground, protecting them from being extracted by (white?) businessmen. Chimwemwe's uncle experiences the snake both while working in the fields and in a dream. In Zambia, dreams are interpreted as a medium for communication from God, spirits or ancestors.[12] A dream can give confirmation, the promise of a blessing, or a warning. In the dream described by Chimwemwe, the snake warns her uncle to leave the precious stones alone. This whole sequence in Chimwemwe's testimony is built upon traditional notions of the spirit world. As David Frankfurter argues, in such localized religions the supernatural is closely connected to the landscape: rivers, farmland, precious stones. This supernaturally enhanced landscape brings order to the human experience: "Through an eternally fluctuating context of traditional lore, public discussion, and appeal to local authorities, misfortune and danger become no longer ambiguous and chaotic but located, as a rudimentary system of demons that might be identified, discussed and ritually averted."[13] Connecting specific landmarks to local supernatural forces brings negative experiences under some kind of control—and might also bring positive experiences such as blessings as well. Why were some people swallowed by

[9] Frank, "Permitted and Prohibited Wealth," 331–346.

[10] Drewal, "Interpretation, Invention, and Re-presentation," 101–139.

[11] Meyer, "Commodities and the Power of Prayer," 751–776.

[12] Udelhoven, "Zambian Traditions," 44–66.

[13] Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, 15.

the river? Why did others receive special powers? Why couldn't the white people enrich themselves from the precious stones in the land? The local water spirits and earth spirits help to give meaning to these circumstances.

However, the last sentence of Chimwemwe's narration signifies a break away from these traditional notions. When people started praying on Chimwemwe's uncle's land, the precious stones disappeared. Prayer refers to the coming of Christianity. When Christianity came, local gods and spirits, like Chimwemwe's snake, did not just disappear. Frankfurter argues that local systems of classifying the supernatural—the snake, the water spirit—become incorporated in an ideology that transcends the local.[14] The concepts of the global ideology are used to redefine local notions of the supernatural. Under the globalizing influence of Christianity, especially of the neo-Pentecostal variety, snakes, water spirits and other traditional spiritual entities retained their relevance in African cosmology—albeit transformed into demons and forces of evil.[15]

Most of the references to snakes in testimonies of ex-Satanists can be understood from this perspective, as is illustrated by the next example. Eve is a young woman in her early twenties when she gives her testimony on a popular radio show hosted by a Pentecostal pastor. After Eve felt a lump in her throat and things moving beneath her skin, her mother takes her to a traditional healer. This is the start of Eve's experiences with snakes.

> My mum got scared and she went to a witchdoctor. They said that I needed protection, and she was given medicine that was mixed with a python snake. And from that time, I started seeing some things, like a big thing appearing in front of me. I wasn't sure what it was. Until—I think three months later—I discovered that it was a python. It was always there, anywhere I'd go, it was just in front of me. I wasn't scared. I'd just look at it. Then I'd talk and ask what the snake wanted from me. And all it could say to me was: I'm here to protect you. And if a man proposes to me, mostly if they were Christians, and they wanted to propose to me, first they start by having these dreams about a snake. They would tell me: I

[14] Ibid.

[15] Meyer discusses this process for the case of the Ewe in Ghana in *Translating the Devil*. Robbins, in "Globalization," sees this "ontological preservation" as a general feature of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity.

> dreamt of a snake today, it was trying to bite me. Then I would ask: What did it look like? When they described it, it was the same one—because it wasn't a normal size of snake, it was very big. Most of the times the snake that I used to talk to most would say that I shouldn't be questioning it so much, because the job of the snake was just to protect me. And I learned that everybody who was married to the devil are always given snakes to protect them.

Eve is speaking from a Christian perspective, but it is a Christian perspective grounded in inverted understandings of traditional religion. Like Chimwemwe she refers to the traditional healer not with the vernacular *nganga*, but as witchdoctor—a pejorative term. The healer, working with traditional notions of snakes, gives Eve's mother medicine made from snake skin as an agent of protection. Later, when Eve keeps seeing it, the snake retains its protective characteristics, but there is no question that its nature is anything but evil. Those who are married to the devil receive snakes to protect them, and these snakes threaten, or even harm, Christians who come too close. Snakes have become disconnected from their local systems of meaning and reinterpreted in the global framework of neo-Pentecostal spiritual warfare theology. Neo-Pentecostalism is a transnational movement that exceeds the boundaries of denominations and emphasizes God's direct intervention in matters of healing and prosperity. The other side of the view that God actively and miraculously intervenes in the world and in people's lives is the perception of an almost equally powerful counter-force of darkness. Through spiritual warfare these forces of evil can be fought and expelled. The scale of this theology transcends the local. Spiritual warfare is taking place on a global scale, with ramifications for all corners of the world and signs in worldwide history. In the neo-Pentecostal cosmology of spiritual warfare, world history is seen as an ongoing war between forces of good and evil. Through "spiritual warfare" the forces of evil have to be forced back before the Kingdom of God can materialize in this world.[16] In the globalizing theology of spiritual warfare, the Zambian snake has become part of the legions of evil, and every experience of a snake is connected to the devil. Seeing snakes in dreams or in the physical world has become a signifier for the presence of evil. In contemporary Zambia, this interpretation is commonplace, not restricted to neo-Pentecostal churches.

[16] Hunt, "Managing the Demonic," 215–230.

The Reformed youth quoted at the start of this article is scared because dreaming of a snake means that Satan or Satanists are after you, either to harm you or to initiate you. What to do when one is dreaming of snakes? In the following sections we will discuss two very different ways to handle such frightening images.

Snakes in the Neo-Pentecostal Context: Deliverance and Testimonies

As we have seen, experiences with snakes can be interpreted as spiritual attacks. Often, Christians bring these experiences to the church, hoping for spiritual protection, healing and guidance. Our first case explores how such experiences are handled by the ministry of a neo-Pentecostal pastor. As "men of God," contemporary neo-Pentecostal pastors have the power to protect and deliver their congregants from evil. Pastor Panji Chipeta is a Zambian radio and television pastor and founder of a church, called Kingdom Business Ministries (KBM). Testimonies form an important part of the church services at KBM. Pastor Chipeta regularly refers to testimonies in his sermons, and in the deliverance service on Sunday afternoon there is often a slot where an invited guest gives his or her testimony. Pentecostal pastors, as experts in demonology, play an important role in the interpretation of snakes as agents of evil. In the following example, Pastor Chipeta interviews a certain David for his radio program *Precious Testimonies.* David is a young man in his 20s who confessed that he became a successful businessman through his involvement in Satanism. After his initiation into Satanism, David received a briefcase which he took to a cave near his home village. In the briefcase, he found an egg from which hatched a snake.

David: When I reached [the cave], I opened the briefcase. To my surprise I found a red egg. So when I was concentrating on the egg, I just found that egg did what? Broke. Then there was a very small snake which came out from the egg. It started moving there. It was moving and it was growing bigger, until it covered the entire cave.

Pastor Chipeta: Weren't you scared? I mean, every one of us human beings *when we see a snake we become scared*[17]—I mean am I right?

D: Yes.

PC: There is an enmity between man and snake from the garden of Eden. So when you see a snake, the first reaction is that you shudder and you want to run. Naturally, that's the reaction. So in your case, you didn't get scared.

D: I didn't get scared, and it started talking to me and telling me: "You are now my partner, we'll be working together. I'll be giving you whatever you want, but remember I need to eat as well. So right now what I'm going to do, I'm going to give you money for orders." So it started vomiting money for me now.

PC: You remember that Lucifer in the Old Testament came in the form of a snake?

D: Yes.

PC: Did you know that whoever was in that snake form was Lucifer himself? So you were literally talking to the devil himself, in that village where you went to that snake. It was the devil himself. So when the cave opens and you start talking to the snake, how would you stand? Would you sit by the side of the cave like romantically talking to the snake, or would you be in front of it, straight, or how?

D: I was given the instruction immediately that I reach there I have to bow three times. Then that's when that cave opens. Then that snake will start talking to me. So I put on my red gown, I bowed, [the cave] opened and [the snake] started talking to me. The first time I talked to it is when I saw [the snake], but every time I was going there [afterward] the instruction was that I need to touch my chest, like this, then bow down.

[17]Although the broadcast as a whole was in English, Pastor Chipeta switched to Chinyanja in the italicized phrase (my translation).

PC: So as you bow with your two hands on your chest, which is almost the symbol of holding your heart, it's an allegiance to the snake, to the devil himself, and you seem to say: "My heart is yours, it's no longer mine, my heart is in your hands." As you did that, that is what you were saying literally.

At first sight, David's experience with the snake is very similar to the traditional notion of *lilomba* or *ilomba*, a witch's familiar in the shape of a snake with a human head. This familiar feeds on the blood of its victims and helps the witch to become rich. David's snake does not seem to have a human head. It does, however, vomit money for him, and reminds David that it will want something in return for that. In this sequence, the references to the devil all come from Pastor Chipeta, and not from David himself. The pastor reminds David of the story of the Fall in Genesis, and explains that when he was talking to the snake, he was actually talking to Lucifer—just like Adam and Eve in Eden. According to Pastor Chipeta, David's involvement in Satanism made him lose his fear for snakes. He also interprets the ritual gestures David has to perform to communicate with the snake as pledging allegiance to the devil. David agrees with these interpretations, which seem to originate from the pastor's discernment. While David's account can be interpreted from a traditional Zambian perspective, the conversation between David and Pastor Chipeta places it firmly in the context of spiritual warfare.

According to Pastor Chipeta, demons can appear as snakes. In another testimony, he remarks: "The devil in Genesis came out as a serpent, and that's what deceived Eve: [the devil] impersonating a snake. So snakes even in the Bible were talked about as demons." This connection between snakes and demons means that if a person dreams about a snake attacking him, it can be a sign that they are under attack from evil powers. If a person dreams about talking or playing with snakes, it may mean that this person is, unknowingly, in league with the forces of Satan. In both cases, the neo-Pentecostal way of dealing with the frightening images of demonic snakes is to pray. The evil forces need to be expelled in deliverance. Deliverance can take place in a church service. During the service the pastor makes an "altar call": he invites the members of

the congregation who are suffering from afflictions to the front. The pastor and his assistants go from person to person, praying and laying their hands on them. In these services there is little time for any individual case; and often people are asked to come back later for an individual deliverance session. Many pastors offer individual deliverance at a fixed time during the week. In his description of the practice of deliverance, Stephen Hunt describes a clear succession of phases.[18] First the presence of an evil spirit is established, second is the process of naming the spirit, and third the expulsion of that spirit. The presence of an evil spirit generally becomes clear through the responses of the person the pastor is praying for. If the client falls into a trance and moves or speaks in a strange way, demons are said to manifest. Neo-Pentecostal pastors cast out the demons that cause frightening images of snakes through prayers of deliverance, in which the pastor conquers the forces of evil and is able to free his client. Pastor Chipeta encourages his clients to narrate their experience. Although snakes are enemies, testimonies about snakes and demonic forces have an important function for the pastor. The authority of the pastor is enforced by these testimonies. Testimonies are evidence for the power bestowed on the pastor as man of God: they show that he has the gift to protect from harm and fight evil. Testimonies are also proof for the theology of spiritual warfare in which the pastors operate. In his interviews and sermons, Pastor Chipeta keeps emphasizing the reality of evil forces. In almost every interview, he comes back to this topic; for example, by saying: "Some people think: 'Ah, he is hallucinating, dreaming'—but these things are real, they are happening right now." In the face of churches who deny the existence of evil spirits, Pastor Chipeta aims to show his audience the spiritual truth of these matters.

In conclusion, how do Pentecostal pastors deal with dreams about snakes? First, they interpret them in the context of spiritual warfare theology, and second, they pray to expel the evil forces behind those dreams. Snakes are enemies, but testimonies about snakes are encouraged because they enforce the authority of the pastor and function as evidence for his worldview. As the following section shows, however, deliverance by a "man of God" who encourages the production of testimonies to prove his God-given power is not the only way to deal with images of snakes in dreams.

[18] Hunt, "Managing the Demonic," 218ff.

Snakes and the Fingers of Thomas: Symbols with a Choice of Meanings

In Zambia, Roman Catholicism is the single largest denomination, encompassing about 20% of the population.[19] Some priests and congregations are highly influenced by the Charismatic movement within Catholicism, a wing of the church that deals with snakes in dreams and other frightening experiences in a way similar to the neo-Pentecostal pastor discussed in the previous section. In other parts of the church Christians bring their experiences and hopes for spiritual protection and healing, but the pastors and leaders are struggling to deal with this. In 2007, the newly opened Roman Catholic Faith and Encounter Centre Zambia (FENZA) decided to start an inquiry into the phenomenon of Satanism.[20] A think tank was formed and later complemented with a number of youths from a parish in Lusaka. The resulting group, named the Fingers of Thomas after the biblical story of Doubting Thomas, has been meeting weekly ever since, discussing and following up cases of Satanism and witchcraft. They present workshops about these topics in dioceses across Zambia, and in 2015 Bernhard Udelhoven, the leader of the group, published a study of Satanism, witchcraft and spirit possession in Zambia with recommendations for pastoral care.[21]

The basic tenets of the approach used by the Fingers of Thomas differ substantially from the neo-Pentecostal way of dealing with snakes and other frightening experiences. A first assumption of the Fingers is that one does not have to be a pastor or a "man of God" to be able to help. The aim of the group is to empower those who experience disturbing dreams instead of allocating responsibility in the hands of a specialist. Secondly, the Fingers see spiritual issues, like frightening dreams, as related to problems in other spheres. In his book, Udelhoven makes a distinction between "inner world" and "outer world."[22] The inner world is the world of dreams and visions—a world to which bystanders do not have access to. Udelhoven gives the example of Violet, a girl experiencing spiritual attacks in which she goes into a trance-like state. In that

[19] Central Statistical Office, "Social Characteristics," 19.

[20] Udelhoven, "Fingers of Thomas."

[21] Udelhoven, *Unseen Worlds.*

[22] Ibid., 106–124.

state, she sees herself going to a world located under the ocean, where she interacts with a snake, a lion and a girl. The girl tells her that Violet is married to a son of Lucifer, who is both the snake and the lion. This makes Violet a queen in this underworld and gives her special powers. In Figure 10.1, inner world and outer world are separated:[23]

Inner world	Outer world
Violet goes under the ocean.	Violet is on the floor, being prayed over.
Violet interacts with a lion, a girl and a snake.	Violet is in a trance, speaks words as if to an invisible audience, and vomits what she describes as "slippery things".
Violet is told that she is married to a son of Lucifer.	Violet has split up with her boyfriend whom she still loves. She never spoke about him to her family.
Violet is declared a queen and has a third eye that gives her magical powers over others.	Violet performs poorly at school and alienates friends.
Violet belongs to the underworld.	Violet expresses that she feels not really belonging to her family and unloved by her mother. She is not allowed to visit her father whom she loves.

Fig. 10.1 Inner and outer worlds

A neo-Pentecostal pastor primarily addresses what Udelhoven would call the inner world, expelling the spiritual forces that cause Violet's experiences of belonging to an underworld. The Fingers of Thomas, on the other hand, acknowledge the existence of this inner world but reserve their actions for what is happening in the outer world. In Violet's case, they encouraged her to perform better at school and to prepare for the exams by organizing a tutor who could help her with difficult subjects. They also tried to help her to develop a sense of belonging to God, to her family, to friends and to the Church.[24] A third aspect of the approach of the Fingers of Thomas is that the experiences in the inner world are seen as symbols for problems in the outer world. The meaning of these symbols is not fixed—a snake does not necessarily mean an attack of evil forces. Bernhard Udelhoven writes about Violet's symbols of the lion and the snake:[25]

[23] Table based on ibid., 114f.

[24] Ibid., 114, 116.

[25] Ibid., 115.

> We tried to help her to come to terms with the symbols in a new way. Since they had to do with marriage, I asked Violet at one point what would symbolise for her a good marriage. Oddly, the figure of the lion came back, and she explained: "In my family, I always had to fight for myself. My husband must be a person who will fight for me!" This helped us to remove some of her fears about the spiritual lion she encountered. In another playful association, we compared the lion with God and with Jesus: "God will always fight for you." In this way, we liberated the symbol from a purely satanic world, allowing a more playful engagement that dispelled many of her fears.

In this case, it is the image of the lion rather than the snake that is addressed. Conversations with Violet show that the lion is not only an image connected with the satanic. By making Violet aware that she associates the lion with positive aspects as well, Udelhoven is able to reduce her fear. One might say that the lion lends itself better than the snake for such a positive interpretation, and therefore (in contrast to a Pentecostal minister such as Chipeta) Udelhoven chooses to neglect the snake in her dream. However, in the following example, the Fingers of Thomas do deal with an image of a snake. One of the members of the Fingers is also involved in marriage counseling, and she was made aware of this case, which was then discussed in the weekly meeting of the Fingers:

> This is the case of a husband and wife who have been married for some time. When sleeping on their bed, the wife feels she is pushed to the edge of the bed. At first, the wife thought that she was just drinking too much. Because whenever she had been drinking she thinks that there is something in the middle of the bed, between her and her husband. So she didn't drink for two days, but it was just the same. Recently, when she woke up at night, she saw that it was actually a snake lying between them. The wife was scared and woke her husband up. He said: "Oh, this is my grandmother. Just get back to sleep." Now the wife has run away from her husband and told the marriage counselors that she wants a divorce. It seems that the husband wants his wife to stay. The wife loves her husband, but she doesn't want anything to do with snakes.

For the Fingers of Thomas, seeing a snake does not automatically mean that one is under attack by evil forces that need to be expelled. In the group discussion of this case, it was established that more information was needed. We only know what the wife experienced. What is her

husband's side of the story? How does he remember the night in which he is supposed to have said that the snake is his grandmother? What did he say, and what did he mean? The snake is something that belongs to the inner world. In the outer world, there may be problems in the relationship between husband and wife. These problems can be discussed and addressed. It is suggested that the symbol of the snake may mean that something is coming between the wife and her husband, and that this something may be related to the family of the husband. Talking about the relationship and addressing the problems in the relationship may make the frightening snake go away. In this discussion, the image of the snake may lose its frightening meaning by playfully connecting it to other images, drawing on Zambian traditions in which the snake is not necessarily evil. It may be a bringer of messages or blessings. In a conversation, drawing on these traditions, the Fingers may ask: What could it be that the snake wants to tell you as a couple? This helps to see the snake from a different angle and transform its meaning.

In conclusion, how do the Fingers of Thomas deal with dreams about snakes? Anyone can help those with frightening experiences by listening sympathetically and trying to help with problems that are present in the outer world. The images of snakes in dreams are treated as symbolic representations of these problems. The meaning of these symbols may have their roots in Zambian traditions or in Christian notions. As the cases of the couple and of Violet show, a snake can be disarmed by referring to positive Zambian traditions about snakes; and a lion may lose its dreadfulness if it is connected to biblical images. For the neo-Pentecostal pastor, seeing a snake leads to only one conclusion: there are evil forces at work. The Fingers of Thomas, on the other hand, offer a selection of possible meanings for the image of the snake, whereby the preferred interpretation is established in the interaction between the victim and the Fingers.

Snakes and the Secular

Zambians take their alarming dreams to the church, hoping for healing and protection. The neo-Pentecostal pastor and the Fingers of Thomas handle images of snakes in dreams in very different ways. In this final section of this chapter, I will argue that even though the approaches seem divergent, they have one thing in common. For both the Fingers of Thomas and the neo-Pentecostal pastor dealing with snakes is related

to a wider debate about secularization or disenchantment. Pastor Chipeta provides a platform for testimonies in his church services and radio shows because these narratives illustrate his worldview and his gift for deliverance. "This is real," is a sentence that returns over and over again in Pastor Chipeta's comments on testimonies. What does it mean to explicitly state that something is real? In a classic article on the verb "to believe," Jean Pouillon writes that to state that one believes that God exists "is to open up the possibility of doubt."[26] Similarly, saying "this is real" is only necessary if not everyone believes it to be real. Pastor Chipeta feels the need to say it very often—implying that the camp of disbelievers is strong. In his study on early modern possession, *The Devil Within*, Brian Levack explains the attraction of possession narratives in a similar way: "Reliance on possession and exorcism *as the main proof of demonic reality* persisted through the sixteenth and seventeenth century."[27] In an increasingly skeptical society, exorcisms were performed and narrated in a polemic bid to retain an enchanted worldview. Levack calls the public performance of exorcisms "confessional propaganda," functioning to convert non-believers, to instruct believers and confirm their demonological ideas, and to defend against competing, more secularized religious ideas.[28] Like possession narratives, testimonies serve as evidence for a worldview in which spiritual forces are real and can help, harm or control the physical, and against a more secular, scientific worldview where spiritual causes are rejected. In this way, the need for testimonies inadvertently points toward the fragility of the spiritual worldview, its need for constant maintenance.[29] Testimonies as they are presented by Pastor Chipeta can be seen as polemic instruments in a discussion between worldviews.

The Fingers of Thomas seem much more accommodating to a disenchanted worldview. They see the images of snakes as symbols in a way that is not unlike Western secular dream interpretation (in psychoanalysis

[26] Pouillon, "Remarks," 91.

[27] Levack, *Devil Within*, 71, emphasis added.

[28] Ibid., 81–112.

[29] I have noted the same polemic use of testimonies and other stories among my students. Whenever I introduce in my courses on anthropology or sociology a theory that speaks from a secular point of view—for example explaining witchcraft from its social function—the students try to convince me of a more enchanted worldview by relating stories as evidence for the reality of witchcraft.

or analytical psychotherapy, for example). However, Udelhoven presents the distinction between the inner and outer world as a way to evade the question whether spiritual forces really exist. On the origin of images in dreams, he writes, "An answer to the question whether they originate in God (as Jews and Christians believe in the case of Isaiah's vision) or in something else (inner psychological forces, demons, witchcraft, etc.) can only be given from the perspective of the person's beliefs and worldviews."[30] The Fingers try to keep an open mind: images in dreams may come psychologically from inside a person, or spiritually from outside, or a combination of both. In the end, however, they are part of an inner world that can never be judged by an outsider. Instead, outsiders should try to act on existing problems in the outer world, helping without knowing what is in the inner world, "without pretending to know the evil's metaphysical or ontological character."[31] Where for Pastor Chipeta demonic snakes in dreams are evidence for his enchanted worldview, the Fingers of Thomas take an agnostic stance: they do not want to follow a strictly secular approach but leave the possibility of spiritual forces acting on individuals open. However, this stance is problematic. It is precisely the ability to see images in dreams as symbols, rather than as forces acting out of evil agency, that alleviates the fear they instill. Leaving it open whether these forces do exist seems to be a rhetorical device aimed to deflect criticism, rather than an assumption that truly informs the practices of the Fingers of Thomas.

As has been discussed in this chapter, according to David Frankfurter and others, local gods are often demonized if they come into contact with a globalizing worldview such as Christianity. As the cases in this articles show, Christianity is only part of the story. It is the presence of a secular, disenchanted discourse that makes snakes allies in the defense of pastor Chipeta's theology.[32] A secular worldview gives the Fingers of Thomas the possibility to disarm frightening images in dreams by turning them into symbols. Many Africans may have, according to scholar of African Christianity Paul Gifford, "an 'enchanted' worldview,"[33] but this worldview is by no means self-evident. This article demonstrates

[30] Udelhoven, *Unseen Worlds*, 109.

[31] Ibid., 384.

[32] Although Pastor Chipeta would never phrase it in this way.

[33] Gifford, *African Christianity*, 328.

that, in Zambia, small gods relate not only to the globalizing theology of Christianity but also to the globalizing secular.

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PART III

Remnants, Relocations, and Re-Enchantments

CHAPTER 11

Small Gods, Small Demons: Remnants of an Archaic Fairy Cult in Central and South-Eastern Europe

Éva Pócs

Introduction

In this chapter I raise some key questions encountered during my study of fairy beliefs in Central and Eastern Europe. Certain of these I have already addressed in my earlier work,[1] but several are topical to the present volume, and deserve another look.

The material I have studied is based mostly on contemporary folklore concerning Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Romanian, Albanian, Greek and Hungarian fairies and their associated cults.[2] Key analogies allow one to treat the fairy world of the peoples

[1] See especially Pócs, *Fairies and Witches* and "Tündéres."

[2] See e.g., Hahn, *Albanesische Studien*, 159–62; Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, 13–173; Marinov, *Narodna viara*, 205–15; Marienescu, "Az áldozatok." Şaineanu, "Die Jele"; Pamfile, *Mitologie românească*; Çabej, "Albanische Volkskunde"; Muşlea and Bîrlea, *Tipologia folclorului*, 206–18; Đorđević, "Veštica i vila," 94–117; Blum and Blum, *Health and Healing*, 168–74; Zečević, *Mitska bića*, 31–49; Vrazhinovski, *Narodna demonologiia*.

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of the Balkans and the Hungarian communities as a comprehensive regional unit, focusing on shared and general traits. I have also extended my investigations to the records of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century witchcraft trials from Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary. Limits of space do not allow me to explore fairy beliefs and rituals outside this geographical area, even if the remarkable typological similarities between the Celtic and the Slavic fairy world offer a most tempting research topic. For similar reasons I will concentrate on beliefs and rites and will only refer in a few relevant cases to similarities in motifs of epic songs and fairy tales and their differences specific to genre.

The richest segment of my material comes from the world of Romanian, Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian beliefs. These geographic areas were not affected by the waves of persecutions of witches, even if demonological theological doctrines did find their way into the region. The fairy world has survived almost up to the present day, both as a set of ideas used to justify adversity that befalls humans and as a group of rituals intended to avert such strokes of misfortune, along with a rich body of fairy folklore.

A main objective of this volume is to explore questions of the marginal "small gods" of Christianity; that is, the relation of certain non-Christian spiritual beings to Christianity. This chapter explores the Christianity or otherwise of various members of the world of spirits and deities and of the other-worlds they inhabit. This problem is most easily accessed through questions about communication with the fairy world. Therefore, one main strand of my work is the ritual practice of magicians and healers who communicated with the fairies. These essentially pertain to the communication system between the human and the spirit world, and are characterized by unique formations of fairy communication characteristic of fairies alone, and, in this context, the traits of fairy healers as characteristic double beings.

Fairies and Their Characteristics

Local synonyms to English *fairy* (*vila*, *samovila*, *samodiva*, *iele*, *zâna*, *tündér*, *nereida*, etc.) are all collective terms. If we explore the folklore traditions of the peoples under examination here we find that we cannot speak of a cohesive and clearly outlined fairy figure in any of the cases, but we do come across many types of fairies in each place, some partially resembling each other, some divergent even within the same location,

as well as fairy-like creatures that display only one or two fairy attributes. As belief creatures, fairies show an amalgamation of the most varied mythical and ritual legacies and fragments: from ancient goddesses, fate women, Greek nymphs, Slavic and Albanian nature spirits to storm demons or the souls of those who died prematurely and are now to be found in storm clouds.[3]

This versatility is also the result of a regional cultural context stratified by numerous migration movements, shifts in language use, and complex linguistic and cultural exchanges. Thus we cannot really establish local types that would be characterized, say, by the traits of a particular nature spirit, spirit of the dead, guardian spirit or fate woman. We cannot establish a fairy typology—in other words, it is not possible to chart a taxonomy of the fairy world. Therefore, I do not presume to establish an exact scholarly system of theoretical categories—my goal is the accurate exploration of *emic* categories.[4]

What are the characteristics of this fairy world? Fairies are ambivalent figures, and this essentially determines the unique type of communication that exists between humans and fairies. Ambivalence may manifest in the simultaneous positive and negative traits of fairies, as well as in the parallel existence of notions of "good" and "evil" fairies. On the one hand, they are seen as good, benevolent, goddess-like figures bringing blessing and fertility, often acting as guardian spirits and healers of village communities or individuals, as well as patrons of cultic societies. On the other hand, *bad* fairies are also known to be demons of a ghostly character who appear in storm clouds as wind demons (these are often souls of dead people who lack a clear status: suicides, unbaptized babies, those who died by violence). This demonic character is primarily known from narratives about fairies who punish taboo breakers and make people sick, but the good fairies who bring blessing and fertility are also in close relations with the dead who return to haunt people at certain ritual seasons

[3] See: Brednich, "Die osteuropäischen Volkssagen," 97–117; Pócs, *Fairies and Witches*; Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, 130–73; Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries*; Wenzel, "The Dioscuri."

[4] The discrepancy between etic and emic categories in fairy typologies is explored in several recent works; see e.g., Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*; Goodare, "Scottish Witchcraft" and "Boundaries"; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, Chap. 1; Ostling and Forest, "Goblins."

(e.g., the feasts of the dead of the Eastern church: Easter, Pentecost, and during Rusalia week, which falls in the period between the two).

Everyday Communication Between Humans and Fairies

The most common form of communication with the fairies is through visions, apparitions and dreams. The huge wealth of fairy narratives existing in the Balkans or in Hungary mostly describes vision and dream experiences—direct encounters with the supernatural world of the fairies.

A recurring theme of such narratives involves the appearance of beautiful fairies who dance and make music and the pleasure and delight of those listening. These narratives also reflect the divine/demonic ambivalence of the fairies. The aspect of bringing bliss and fertility is best expressed through the "divine" dance. In one Croatian account, for instance, we read the following:

> When people in the field or the forest would see small, glittering lights they knew that it must be the ring dance of the *vilas.* They were seen as God's blessing round these parts. When people noticed their presence they would just cross themselves, for fairies are divine creatures, and they would quietly move on.[5]

The demonic character of these same fairies also becomes manifest whenever the dance of the fairies makes people ill or when the trance induced by music and dance manifests in compulsive dancing or fits of dancing.

The typical fairy communication known from folklore accounts usually takes place in a characteristic space-time structure that is also a form typical of possession by the dead as it appears in this region.[6] The universe is divided into the world of the living and the world of the dead. Fairies who appear among humans in periods dedicated to the dead take possession of territories that are barred from humans at these times and bound by taboos. The fairies send diseases to punish those who offend against their space and time taboos (i.e., people who go out into the open at night or noon or during the feasts of the dead or approach their springs, paths or dancing spots or trace the steps of their ring dances).

[5] Lang, "Samobor," 147–48.

[6] On the space-time structure typical of Central and Eastern European folklore representations of the possession by the dead see Pócs, "Possession Phenomena," 90–99.

The Greeks, for example, believe it is extremely dangerous to go outdoors at night, particularly on the night of the new moon, because one may easily be "struck by the nereids."[7] "Being struck" is a frequent metaphor for possession in this context, also known from the context of the dead and from the wind demons intermediate between the fairies and the dead.

Breaking the taboos related to music or dance mostly receives the punishment of abduction by the fairies. They "snatch" people who catch sight of them dancing or singing at "their places" (that is, they drive the person into a trance through their music and through inclusion in their own dance, or they come to possess the person), as data from many places testify. They return their victims sick, and cast them on the ground. According to Romanian folklore:

> [T]hey will snatch anyone and lift him up in the air if he's seen them dance or has set foot on the spot where they dance or walk, or anyone who works or sleeps alone in that spot. They will snatch the person and force him to dance with them, then let him down again, and he will have gone mad or be crippled for the rest of his life.[8]

In other cases those kidnapped wake from a trance to find themselves crushed, paralyzed or numb. One illustrative Hungarian account from Gyimes (in Romanian: Ghymeş) describes a lad who came to be possessed by the *szépasszonyok* [beautiful women] in this manner:

> [A] swishing wind came and three women… beautiful as the sunshine, oh, for the world, and they got him to dance and dance and dance and dance, endlessly… So the lad collapsed. He collapsed. He could not speak. He is ill, he is ill, he was just panting, that was all he could do. He was way past his senses by then. His sound mind was all gone from him.[9]

This is the condition called *nympholeptos* described by Plato; it is a form of merging with the deity, which was so characteristic of the cult of Dionysus as it prevailed in Thracia up until late antiquity.[10] Often the

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[7] Blum and Blum, *The Dangerous Hour*, 53.

[8] Muşlea and Bîrlea, *Tipologia folclorului*, 214.

[9] Lunca de Jos, County Harghita, Romania, Salamon, "Gyimesi mondák," 109–10.

[10] Stewart, "Nymphomania," 241; Connor, "Seized by the Nymphs."

people they snatch are taken directly into a bright and glowing fairy heaven[11] where they, too, temporarily turn into fairies. This divine transportation, however, also has its mortal side: the journey to the fairy other-world can also mean irreversible death. According to Croatian and Serbian data, for instance, the phrase "she was taken by the *vilas*" is often used as a euphemistic metaphor for death, and particularly the death of children.

In related narratives, the most fundamental technique of fairy communication appears to be *spirit possession*. Possession can occur as a quasi-death experienced in a state of trance or a temporary form of existence in the other-world of fairies, but it can also be approached from the angle of bodily symptoms. Fairies who invade the body, like all invasive demons, restructure people in both body and mind. A characteristic expression of bodily possession by fairies is the loss of body parts or of the face: they "take" people's arms or legs or distort their face.

The narratives of personal experience reflect characteristics of communication between the two worlds through their accounts of fantasies, dreams and visions. There are no sharp boundaries between reality and dream, experiences of this world and the fairy other-world. Borders are easily crossed, the two parallel worlds penetrating each other. Humans cross them with ease both in their physical and their spiritual reality, while spirits easily become "embodied" by inhabiting a living creature. The boundaries are not sharp between disappearance from this world, temporary stays in the spirit world and subsequent returns to this earthly world. Switches from one level of existence to the next are not indicated by the kind of overt metamorphoses we encounter in epic genres (e.g., fairy tales, epic songs). Instead, they take place invisibly, without clearly outlined boundaries between human existence and fairy existence. The individuals who are seized become invisible or disappear in the bodily sense; alleged onlookers claim that their figure gradually fades and eventually they rise up into the clouds. Being *seized* can be "bodily" or "mental"; it may happen while awake or asleep. Whether the journey takes place in body or in spirit does not seem to be a relevant difference.

[11]Which often includes elements reminiscent of the Orphic heaven of late antiquity and of the heavenly Jerusalem of medieval—Latin and Byzantine—vision literature or of the earthly paradise known from the *Golden Legend* from the eighth century: Lettenbauer, "Russische Visionsliteratur," 401; Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 109–11; Manuel and Manuel, "Sketch for a Natural History," 87–89; Delumeau, *Une histoire du paradis.*

According to the unique logic of these narratives, the two conditions can even be perceived simultaneously by the onlookers. Here we see an example of bodily seizure in a Hungarian narrative from Csíkkarcfalva:

> [S]omething just picked him up… they carried him, put him down somewhere and that is where he finally came round. … And when he came round, he found himself in a large factory area. The old lady told me many times how they looked for his father of a morning and he was nowhere and then all of a sudden there he was, staggering.[12]

Anyone who "goes over" is a creature capable of making that transition, a double being both spirit and human at the same time. Humans who regularly visit the supernatural world of the fairies are referred to in narratives in Hungary or the Balkans as "going about with the fairies" or "turned into fairies" or "s vilovske strane" ("come from fairy land"), as the Croatians call them. Let us quote here an account of semi-fairy people which refers to a Hungarian man from Klézse, who "walked with the *szépek* [the fair ones]":

> I have a brother. When in 1919 we travelled to the Hungarian parts … he was there, too, in Budapest. They were staying there and there was one of them … a lad from over these parts. He was so slight, so tormented. And my brother asked him, "Why are you so slight and wasted?" "I travel home every night," he says. "How can you travel home from Budapest?" "I travel home every night." And he explained that he travelled with the *szépek*. He was one like that, too. He said, "So and so is from your village, from Klézse." And he explained it all, "There are seven people from your village. There are others from our village, there are people from all the villages. They come and go; we dance there on the hill at night, and drink wine in the cellars. …"[13]

The Initiates: Magicians, Healers, Seers

By "fairy magicians" I mean those initiated magicians who maintain a mediating relationship with the fairy other-world. Fifty years ago these magicians were still widely active and still operate today in some

[12] Cârţa, County Harghita, Romania; collection of Éva Pócs.

[13] Cleja, County Bacău, Romania; Bosnyák, *A moldvai magyarok*, 112.

Serbian, Romanian and Bulgarian communities. Such initiates of the fairies were mainly involved in healing (curing people who had broken the fairy taboos of the "fairy disease"), having learned the art from their fairy patrons. Beliefs surrounding living magicians position them amid the archaic cosmos of figures who "go about with the fairies." Their names also suggest a motif of "becoming a fairy"—they are quite simply referred to by the same term as their patron (*vila*, *tündér*, *samodiva*, *bogina*, etc.). Compared to ordinary mortals who sometimes "walk with the fairies," magicians enter the fairy other-world with the explicit intention of becoming initiated.

The rich wealth of narratives that surrounds the figure and activity of magicians consists of folklore motifs of learning and initiation. From time to time the fairies seize them and transport them to the other-world, often starting in early childhood, and there teach them fairy knowledge—mostly the use of medicinal herbs. One common motif is a serious illness that the selected individual needs to undergo, as well as punishment by the fairies of any reluctant candidates. All of this is well known from the narrative repertoire of other magical-religious specialists, too. A unique characteristic of the initiation of fairy magicians is, however, that the fairies snatch them in a state of trance or dream induced by music and so transport them to their own golden, glorious other-world.

How does all of this manifest in the actual living practice of magicians? Some Serbian reports speak of the trance-inducing role of music and dance actually used in "real-life" initiations. For instance, at a certain age a candidate for a fairy magician falls into a trance; that is, goes to the so-called fairy tree of the village in a semi-conscious state and begins to dance there. Or, quite simply, the person will commence an ecstatic dance which, according to one data item, lasted for nine days and nine nights.

The initiates eventually become the professional healers of their community who pursue their activity with the patronage and assistance of the fairies. Some of them re-enter contact with the fairies from time to time. On the basis of field observations, Maria Vivod describes the practice of a Serbian "fairy seeing" healer from Voivodina. She explains that this woman was in constant communication with her fairy helpers who "sent her" the patient's diagnosis and also explained to her how she could help

the patient. She used the term *fairy disease* to refer to mental diseases and states of possession, and would offer healing and fortune telling.[14]

An indispensable part of the healing activity of the fairy magicians of the Balkans was to present sacrifices—a practice prevalent in the Orthodox areas of the Balkans until quite recently. Healing and the offering of sacrifices would both take place in the distinctive space-time structure of the fairy world; in other words at the fairy spots which were, as we have mentioned, taboo at all other times. This could be a meadow, a spring, or an artificially created sacred space (e.g., a circle drawn around the sufferer). Most commonly, however, it was what they called a "fairy tree" (e.g., the hawthorn for the Serbs and a rose tree in Transylvania). Another common fairy spot was any location where the patient had become possessed by the fairies due to some breach of taboo—the point where they had been "struck" by the fairies. The time for healing was usually one of the fairy periods of the calendar year, such as Rusalia (Bulgarian *rusalska sednitsa,* Romanian *rusalia*, Serbian *rusalje*), the week before Pentecost. Alternately, it could take place during one of those "fairy times" that followed in cyclic repetition (1 week, 1 month or 1 year after the appearance of the disease).

The sequence of sacrificial foods and drinks varied from place to place, but milk, honey, wine, bread or cake are part of the sequence in practically all data. The offering of sacrifices is often preceded or followed by a ritual invocation of the fairies in the presence of the sufferer (e.g., Albanian fairy healers dress the patient in white and make them sit in a quiet spot inside a circle that they draw themselves); Bulgarian, Romanian, Serbian, Albanian and Croatian data testify to female magicians praying to the fairies in a whisper or reciting charming spells over them in a chanting voice and in a state of semi-trance, requesting that the fairies withdraw their harm-doing and restore the patient's health in return for the offerings. The patient usually spends the night at the spot or, at other times, the healer will sleep at the location with the patient and an incubation dream takes place during which the patient recovers.[15] The relation of fairy sacrifices to the cult of the dead was noticed quite

[14] Vivod, "A tündérlátó Radmila."

[15] Zečević, *Mitska bića*, 44–45; Blum and Blum, *Dangerous Hour*, 118; Marinov, *Narodna viara*, 215, 362–63, 470–75; Arnaudov, *Kukeri i rusalii*, 208–15; Hahn, *Albanesische Studien*, 159; Şaineanu, "Die Jele," 201, 207; Moldován, *Alsófehér vármegye*, 160; Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, 150, 169–70.

early—Lawson claims that the offerings given to the *nereids* in Greece are actually the same as the Christian offering to the dead, the *pomana*, which is taken to the cemetery as an offering for the salvation of the souls of the dead.[16] Fairy offerings presented by Romanians during Rusalia week are strongly influenced by the fact that this is also the week of sacrificial offerings to the dead. This again strongly underlines the close relationship between the realm of the dead and the fairy world of the Balkans. The relationship which Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek fairy magicians maintain with the fairies can in many cases be seen as verging on communication with the dead. For example, Romanian and Serbian female magicians who have "good fairy" patrons, called *the saints*, fall into a trance and communicate with the dead regularly at the time of the major Christian feasts of the dead; that is, at Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. We also know of magicians who, although fairy magicians by name (*vilarka*, *vilevniak)*, mostly transmit messages of the dead to the living during their spontaneously induced states of trance.

A certain process of "Christianization" may be observed along another line, too—besides fairies and the dead, Christian deities also functioned as communication partners to magicians. Fairies who punish taboo breakers and at the same time accept sacrifices and offer healing were replaced, on many occasions, by God or the Virgin Mary. People would pray to them while presenting their offerings. The role of helping or healing fairies is now sometimes filled in by angels.

As far as our data allow us to judge, the communication technique used in these cases was trance induced by way of concentration and meditation in quiet places at night, by saying prayers to oneself or, occasionally, by the rhythmical recitation of charms. Through trance (either with genuine or dramatically performed), these healers and their patients had visions or at least powerful fantasies about the fairies they had invoked and induced to "appear." As mentioned earlier, oral folklore accounts are full of motifs of healers who were transported by music and dance and underwent initiation in a musical fairy heaven. Images of fairies making music and dancing also appear in the visions of patients or at least in their narratives. There are quite a few reports in which the ill-experienced incubation dreams in "fairy spots" and having visions of fairies making music and dancing: the belief in the remedial power of fairy

[16] Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, 150, 169.

music and fairy dance was prevalent all over the area under examination. This is no surprise, since they need to sleep alone, by the trees or on the clearings of fairies, and "they make sure they don't fall asleep" so that they can hear what the *samodiva* decide regarding their recovery. They also believe that this is the spot where the *samodiva* gather in the night to dance the *hora*.[17]

Fairy Societies

By fairy societies I mean the conglomeration of earthly humans (mostly women, according to our data), who communicate in their dreams with a "heavenly" fairy society, where they learn the art of healing from a fairy, similarly to fairy magicians who pursue their activities individually. One of the most important common traits of these societies seems to have been that members of these societies had *shared dream experiences* about their "journeys" to the fairy other-world. Members of the societies are similar to the individual healers of the Balkans who "go about with the fairies" in that they are spirit-human double beings, having "half turned into fairies." One widely known example of such fairy societies is the *Donas de fuera*, which existed in Sicily and was described by Gustav Henningsen[18]; modern variants of the same are known from Melocco, Sicily, thanks to Charlotte Chapman's description.[19] The element of being transported to the other-world amid music and dance is absent here, but fairy music and dance do still play a part: the sufferers cured by the fairies notice in their dreams or nighttime visions that the fairies play music or dance their ring dance around the sickbed. Using the records of witchcraft trials in Dalmatia, Zoran Čiča has reconstructed a fairy cult probably very similar to that in Sicily. The records he quotes, written down in Dubrovnik in the 1680 s, feature the members of various female societies who appear sometimes as healing *vilenica* ("fairy-related")

[17] Arnaudov, *Kukeri i rusalii*, 211.

[18] Henningsen, "Ladies from Outside."

[19] Chapman, *Milocca*. About the continued practice of the *Donas* in Sicily see also Henningsen: "Witches." We can but make brief mention of the medieval and early modern data identified by historians regarding Diana's society, the Good Ladies, Signore Oriente's society, Lady of the Game, etc., which might be hinting at similar fairy societies in the large Central and Southern European region. See e.g., Bonomo, *Caccia alle streghe*, 15–183.

enemies of witches, and at others as malevolent witches.[20] The fairy magician accused of witchcraft, *Janjina vilenica*, claimed at the trial that she was a member of a company of nine, that a fairy had taught her the use of medicinal herbs and that they were able to identify witches.[21] Čiča's data provide an illustrative example of a fairy magician who had half turned into a witch under the influence of witch persecutions and the religious reform proclaimed at the Council of Trent. It is no accident that these women, owing to the ambivalence of their fairy identity, sometimes admit to witchcraft and at other times claim to be opposed to witchery, committed to healing bewitchment and identifying witches, depending on the momentary direction of the interrogation. This is a well-known attitude with respect to all types of magician in early modern Central Europe.

The records of similar witchcraft trials in Hungary are vague and fragmentary, but what they do certainly reveal is that in the eighteenth-century societies similar to that in Dalmatia probably still existed in some Hungarian communities. Data from Western Hungary (Vas and Sopron Counties) can probably be attributed to the Croatian population who settled there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here again, the testimony concerning fairy societies in the witchcraft trial records emphasize the "non-witch" character of the fairies. One of the accused, a man from Kőszeg (Vas County, 1552) was said to have been a member of St. Elena's Gild. A woman from Csorna (Sopron County, 1745), interrogated about an alleged witch society, stated that the women believed to be witches "consider themselves to come from the followers of St. Elena" and are horrified even by the mention of witches. We know of no gild or monastic order by that name, but it is easy to associate the name of St. Elena/Ilona with one of the divine fairy patrons of the Balkans, Tündér Ilona ("Fairy Helena"). [22]

Witness testimony from the witchcraft trial at Kőszeg describes in great detail a battle of fairies against witches to avert the frosts and secure a good harvest: a revealing example of the juxtaposition of witches and fairies in Hungary.[23] In this context a fertility ring dance was mentioned,

[20] Čiča, *Vilenica i vilenjak*.

[21] Čiča, "Vilenica and vilenjak," 59–60.

[22] See the detailed description: Pócs, "Tündéres."

[23] Bariska, "Egy 16. századi kőszegi boszorkányper," 249–50. For a full text of the document see Tóth, *A magyarországi boszorkányság*; for a more detailed description see Pócs, "Tündéres."

and it seems that we are actually witnessing demonized variants of fertility rites. This incomplete description also reveals that trial documents from Kőszeg have retained vague traces of fairies assisting in the Pentecost battles of magicians and of a cultic body which communicated with the fairies, the remnants of a fairy society and possibly even its ritual practice. The other-worldly spirit battle, as a representation of the opposition between good magicians and witches, is known from many different contexts of witchcraft all over the Western Balkans and Hungary, but this opposition of fairies and witches ending in such a grand-scale battle is only known from the trial records from Western Hungary.[24] The witchcraft trial records in Hungary and Croatia also shows a rather different aspect of their relationship: we find a great quantity of data about fairies who had "turned witch"—that is, of witches with some fairy attributes, or fairies who dance and make music in the dreams and fantasies of sick people, or variations on this theme. Records from throughout the region suggest such tendencies of transformation into a witch were inevitable as the notions of the devil common in anti-witchcraft demonology transformed and influenced the popular world of spirits. The systems used before the witchcraft persecution in these territories for explaining adversities now lost some of their significance, became extinct or lived on by being integrated into notions of witchcraft. [25]

Possession Cults

In the Eastern, Orthodox part of the Balkans, we have no data to show the existence of fairy societies similar to those in Hungary, the Western Balkans, or Sicily. It seems that a similar function was filled here by different cultic bodies: societies of healers of fairy diseases who kept in ritual contact with the fairy world through the practice of various possession cults. Practitioners of such cults would fall into a trance through music and dance; they would also heal by music and dance or through the visions and dreams experienced in the trance induced that way. In other

[24] After the publication of Carlo Ginzburg's book *I Benandanti* on the magicians of Friuli, attention turned toward the "soul-battles" of the magicians of the Western Balkans and Hungary. See, e.g., Klaniczay, "Shamanistic Elements."

[25] See: Pócs, *Fairies and Witches.*

cases they would engage in battle with the spirits or "evil" fairies who bring illness or possess people.

Possession cults or traces of their former existence may be found today among practically all peoples of the Orthodox Eastern Balkans (and indeed of the entire Mediterranean area).[26] Restricting our attention only to those cults related to possession by fairies, we must mention the Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Macedonian healing societies known as *căluşarii*, *rusalia*, *rusalje*, *rosalje*, all of which were still active in the first half of the twentieth century. These cultic societies functioned intermittently, and were closely tied in with the mythical fairy world (occasionally even with the dead). The goal of the ritual practice of the societies was primarily to cure certain diseases caused by possession by fairies (or by the dead).

Members of healing societies assembled on an occasional basis to heal fairy diseases at periods when the hazard of the outbreak of such ailments was highest; that is, during Rusalia week between Easter and Pentecost; in Transylvania and Macedonia this also happened during the period between Christmas and Twelfth Night. It is characteristic in both periods for hosts of both fairies and the dead to appear among the living. The common characteristic of the rites of these societies is that during the ritual the members, or at least some of them, most often the leader or some appointed persons, enter an ecstatic state through music and dance. Possessed by the fairies, they oppose themselves against the demonic forces, or "bad fairies" possessing the patients (who sometimes themselves join in the dance). In other cases they dance around the patient and enter a shared trance to fight together against the possessing evil fairies. The strength they acquire from the possessing good spirit enables them to expel the evil spirit from the sick person. According to Danijel Sinani's description of the *rusalia* in Duboka (Eastern Serbia), there are two types of trance women: the sick, who are possessed by the evil dead, evil spirits and demons; and their healers, possessed by honored ancestors, good spirits or even, in some cases, by the Lord God himself.[27] One of the central parts of the rite is when the *rusalia* or

[26] For the most comprehensive summary of the subject see Antonijević, *Ritualni trans*. See also Arnaudov, *Die bulgarischen Festbräuche*; Majzner, "Dubočke Rusalje"; Arnaudov, *Kukeri i rusalii*; Küppers, "Rosalienfest," 212–24; Zečević, "Neki primeri šamanske prakse"; Eliade, "Fairies and the Căluşari"; Kligman, *Căluş*.

[27] Sinani, *Spirit Possession*.

padalica awaken from their healing trance and mediate the message of the dead to relevant individuals or even to the entire village.

We have both Bulgarian and Romanian data to the effect that during *rusalia* week it is actually the lingering dead who possess the sick. Bulgarian researchers consider contact with the ancestors as guardian spirits of the community (the "good dead") to be the essence of the cult in the Balkans; with the spirit figures of "the good dead" and "the good fairies" merging to a considerable extent.[28] Connections with the dead also mean that these cults, originally related to non-Christian spirit figures, have become integrated with Christianity.[29] The role of the patron of these cultic bodies is now shared out between fairy goddesses and the God of Christianity: the motifs and motivation of the ritual preparations that members of the organizations engage in (prayers, fasts, vows) are all Christian in character. The accusations leveled by the priesthood against *rusalia* rites, insinuating various devilish affairs, were repelled by members of these societies by stressing their Christian sentiments and the Christian character of their rites.[30]

A further motif of Christianization may also be identified here—evil fairies were now being defined as devils (the identity of the possessing agent wavered even within the same cult between bad fairies, the evil dead and the Christian Devil). It is in this context that the practice of such societies for exorcising evil spirits merges in a diffuse manner with some elements of the exorcism practice of the Orthodox Church. A significant role in all of this was played by the unique demonology of the Orthodox Church as it manifested itself from the sixteenth century onward in pamphlets and sermons written by priests: a demonology caught in a tension between the spirit of staying "close to the people" and a belligerent opposition to the devil.[31] In other words, the

[28] Here we should mention the complex and multi-level connections that relate fairy dances to dances of the dead and to medieval Christian church dances, all of which should be interpreted in the context of ecstasy, possession and communication with the other world. See, e.g., Mead, *Sacred Dance*; Backman, *Religious Dances*; Wenzel, "Mediaeval Mystery Cult" and "The Dioscuri"; Shturbanova, "The dance."

[29] On the connections of the rusalia ritual with the dead see, e.g., Arnaudov, *Kukeri i rusalii*, 113–20; Puchner, "Zum Nachleben"; Wenzel, "Dioscuri."

[30] See e.g. in Arnaudov, *Kukeri i rusalii*.

[31] Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*; Angusheva, *Late Medieval*; Todorova-Pirgova, "Witches and Priests."

exploration of these cults, with their rich past, numerous components and extremely complex semantic web, allows us to identify a whole variety of ways in which Christianization took place.

Summary

In the light of my data my view is that contacts between humans and fairies constitute a special form of supernatural communication that belongs to the broad range of the most archaic layer of communication with the dead. Communication between the human world and the other-world takes place between typical double beings: humans who had half turned into spirits and spirits who occasionally take a human shape. Examples of such creatures are the humans or spirits referred to as *mora* in a number of Slavic languages,[32] or the unique double (living and dead) forms of the witches of Eastern Europe. They can at one and the same time exist in a human and its spirit form, as alter ego or free soul; at other times we encounter parallels between living people and their dead relatives and deadly spirits. All of these types of duality also occur with regard to Central and Southeast European fairies. The unique merger and interchangeability of human and spirit figures, of living and dead variants, goes hand in hand with visits to the other-world conceived in terms of temporary or final death.

According to the local understanding and emic categories, communication techniques, "transportation," trance and even out-of-body experiences such as the migration of the soul are all seen as signs of possession by fairies, which corresponds to the emic categories of temporary and/or final death. Communication with fairies is a form of spirit possession in which a special role is attributed to ecstatic states of transportation achieved through music and dance, which may be experienced in a state of trance, as a form of fusion with the deity, when the deity is admitted into the body, as the assaulting spirit invading the body, or as a soul journey to the other-world. Thus, within the interpretative frame of fairy communication, there is room for a varied array of *emic* explanation and categories to function alongside each other. Ecstasy by music and dance

[32] German *Mahr, mara;* English night*mare;* French cauche*mar*; Hungarian *lidérc*. For more on these figures with a rich bibiography see Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*. See also the comprehensive analysis of Claude Lecouteux in his *Fées, Sorcières et Loup-garous*.

certainly plays a central role within this, either in reality within the context of ritual practice, in the virtual world of dreams and visions, or in the textual world that represents dreams and visions.

As regard fairies as marginal "small gods" of Christianity, we can identify various degrees of connection between a non-Christian spirit world and Christianity, and of integration within Christianity. The afterlife character of the fairy world may have been responsible on multiple levels for the integration of that world into Christianity. One consequence is that the Christian calendar plays a regulating role in various related cults and rites. Ever since the Early Middle ages, Christian festivities of the dead and Christian rituals have influenced fairy rites that otherwise display the typical space-time structure of possession by the dead. These were tied in with the Christian calendar and have in that sense assumed a Christian character up to the point where various formations of possession by the dead/fairies/devils and the practice of demon exorcism became merged. Another remarkable feature of Christian integration is that the helping and supporting role of good fairies is often taken over by Christian saints, the Virgin Mary or the angels: in fact the appellation "the saints" is often used as a taboo-evading euphemism for the good fairies. It is worth briefly mentioning here the so-called angel-societies of Greece, Bulgaria and Macedonia, which communicate with the dead and with angels in ways that parallel the communication practice of fairy societies.[33]

The partial or entire Christianization of deities and their opponents, the harmful demons, was probably hastened by the persecution of witches—the accused were constantly placed in the Christian polarized force field of God vs. Devil. One might generalize Zoran Čiča's account of the anti-witchcraft persecutions in Croatia, where the charitable activity of the *vilenica* was demonized by the priesthood.[34] In this kind of setting it easily happens that demonic agents that cause disease, including evil fairies, are represented as devils. The multi-dimensional processes of diabolization are largely the result of the witchcraft persecution that grew intense in the early modern period, and partly to the clerical

[33] See, e.g., Valtchinova, *Balkanski iasnovidki*, Chap. 3.

[34] This fact was emphasized repeatedly in our region in the context of various benevolent magicians accused of witchcraft; see, e.g., Klaniczay, "Hungary" and "Shamanism and Witchcraft."

demonology that induced it. (This is shown by the fact that processes of this kind are largely absent in the geographic area free of witch hunts, although a certain degree of identification in popular parlance between demons and the Christian Devil is also noticeable in Orthodox Eastern Europe.) The encounters of ordinary mortals with the fairy other-world have developed into "demonized," "witchy" variants.

Thus, for example, very often the dreams and visions of earthly mortals can be found in two variants: an "original," fairy-related account and secondary variant where they appear as a gathering of witches.[35] I agree with Gustav Henningsen that dream scenes of the fairy other-world may be interpreted as a kind of "white Sabbath" that in Italy and, in all probability, elsewhere was a precursor to the "black" witches' Sabbath, or that lives alongside it as a more archaic variant.[36]

I have enlisted a number of examples where the two sides of the ambivalent nature of fairies appear as opposing counterparts: in the Christian context good and evil fairies come to be interpreted as the opposition of fairies and devils or of fairies and witches. The opposition of these two sides is also represented on occasion in battle scenes in a dream. In possession cults, the struggle between assaulting spirits and healing spirits can be seen as a battle between God and the Devil. The cults themselves also have some entirely Christianized formations, such as the Bulgarian cult of *nestinarstvo* where St. Constantine and St. Elijah have become solidified as simultaneously possessing and healing deities (thus preserving a non-Christian ambivalence).

Although beliefs and rites related to the fairy world have everywhere become integrated into Christianity, in different areas this took place in different periods, in diverging forms and with a variety of motivations. Clearly we cannot see all of this as the survival of pre-Christian "pagan" systems—instead they are closer to representing a syncretistic version of vernacular Christianity interwoven from a number of different local characteristics. In this way, fairies can in one sense be seen as marginal *small gods* of Christianity, but we are dealing here with versatile formal variants

[35] For more on this, supported by data, see Pócs, *Fairies and Witches* and *Between the Living and the Dead*, 109–13. For Croatian data see, e.g., Krauss, *Slavische Volksforschungen*, 45–55. Čiča, *Vilenica i vilenjak* and "Vilenica and vilenjak."

[36] Hennigsen, "The Ladies from Outside."

of many kinds of small god:—nor should we forget about the marginal *small devil* figures with which they are so closely intertwined.

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CHAPTER 12

Who Owns the World? Recognizing the Repressed Small Gods of Southeast Asia

Lorraine V. Aragon

Throughout the past century Christian highlanders in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, have engaged in a quiet symbolic struggle with missionaries over the nature of their region's "small gods." Western missionaries insisted that the spirit "owners" [*pue'*] and deified ancestor spirits [*anitu*] of their indigenous cosmology be consigned to a category of malicious devils or satans [*setan*]. For many Tobaku people, however, these spirits remained the owners of particular local resources. Some were their historical forbearers. In their capacity as owners and sometimes punishing guardians of land and custom, small gods oversaw communities' moral propriety. Outsiders' initiatives to deny small gods became, in practice, a path to denigrate highlanders' cultural heritage, ethical pathways to adulthood, and systems of explanatory coherence. Theological policing by missionaries posed material and existential threats, endangering familiar guardians of ritual transactions and ethical mores among Christian converts.

This chapter begins with a fundamental question raised by the tension between Protestant clerics' effort to suppress small gods and Indonesian

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converts' continued reliance upon them: Why do so many Southeast Asian people still describe small gods as part of the Christian God's cosmic plan? In other words, what do local small gods do for many communities that bigger, trans-national gods like the Christian God cannot? To address this question, the sections below examine contexts in which a variety of Southeast Asian groups retain an enduring association with small gods, using the small gods' historic position as owners to address present-day problems.

I draw on my fieldwork data of small gods as owners among Tobaku Protestants in Sulawesi to illuminate comparative cases in other regions, as well as recent phenomena such as the revival of tradition in Indonesia. I end with an analysis of copyright law among Desa' weavers in West Kalimantan, where arts and crafts producers view themselves not as authorial owners but rather as authorized vehicles of tradition who turn to small gods such as ancestral spirits, rather than intellectual property law, for their moral legitimization. The recent cases extend and complicate our understanding of how and why small gods endure within Christian communities. They show small gods not as vestigial cultural phantoms, but rather as intellectual resources for contemporary moral engagement and creative local politics.

A host of small beings created big dilemmas for colonial-era Protestant missionaries, who claimed to replace an absence of religion in Indonesia with godly Christianity. Their definitional struggles offer a fruitful entrée to reexamining discourses about syncretism and dichotomies between the natural and supernatural. This reexamination leads us to a larger conversation about ordinary Southeast Asian worldviews and the contemporary socioeconomic contexts in which small gods are found relevant. Key examples include advocacy for ethnic minority rights through appeals to tradition, protection from community land alienation, and indigenous claims about authority over traditional intellectual property and resources through privileged relationships to spirits.

The Value of Small Gods for Small People

Shaw and Stewart have reframed Western portrayals of syncretism as thought-provoking contestations in the politics of purification by agents of Christian orthodoxy.[1] They provide a framework to analyze religious

[1] Shaw and Stewart, "Introduction," 6–8.

boundary defenses and the often tacit local resistance to colonial hegemony. But the contemporary socioeconomic conditions and rationales that bind Christians to their traditional spiritual allies often remain little documented and theorized. Data from my Indonesian fieldwork reveal the high stakes of retaining certain small gods who legitimate particular locals' authority, which in turn prompted missionaries' compromises as well as campaigns to engulf small gods within localized Christian cosmologies. Using historical documents, ethnographic examples from fieldwork in Indonesia (1980s to 2011), and comparative examples from elsewhere in Southeast Asia, I argue that small gods are constructed as owners and guardians of local knowledge and resources, which makes them irrepressible irritants to Christian theological orthodoxy and capitalist modes of resource alienation through private property ownership. Small gods emerge and endure as allies of small people, meaning those living in small-scale or marginalized communities.

As Ostling contends, the contemporary presence of irregular Christian ideas and practices, suggesting the "survival" of indigenous ideas, does not offer a precise view of pre-Christian cosmology and practice.[2] Rather, indigenous variations hint at material and sociological continuities that encourage local inferences from what is inevitably a partially unseen, inconsistent, changing, and uncertain universe. In recent decades, disenchantment efforts by Christian missionaries and indigenous clergy, which aim to liberate uneducated people from their alleged fear of pagan spirits, often seem undermined and counterbalanced by the familiarity, ethical comforts, and autonomy that small gods provide in contemporary social, political and economic contexts.

To comprehend and recognize the continued significance of small gods to many present-day Southeast Asian communities, it is useful, first, to contextualize these spirits within broader local visions of cultural and cosmological coherence; and second, to place local narratives about spirits and their (dis)pleasure with human behavior in relation to present-day threats to community autonomy and political revivals of tradition.[3] Such contextualization renders intelligible the invocation of small gods to defend highlanders' communities from outsiders' efforts to alienate local lands or expertise.

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[2] See Ostling's Introduction, this volume.

[3] Becker and Yengoyan, *Imagination*; Henley and Davidson, "Introduction," 1–5, 38–42.

Among other services, small gods help keep ownership local. An example from my fieldwork that I explore further below revolves around the following question: If local spirits and ancestors are the true owners of the land and the originators of all "traditional knowledge," how can any living member of the community sell that land or knowledge as alienable property to outsiders? By bringing such profound questions to consciousness, small gods present powerful witnesses and supporters of community interests in the face of outsider-driven developments.

Such questions are not simply political or economic, however. What makes them doubly powerful is the way they emerge from the everyday actions and language of rationales that Michael Lambek has termed "ordinary ethics."[4] Specifically, inferences about what deities expect, and who has authority over what behavior, emerge from ordinary local ideas about local social relations, negotiated access to resources, and cosmological knowledge transmission. It was into this deep forest of ideas and relationality that Victorian-era British Salvation Army missionaries unwittingly stepped when they journeyed to the Dutch East Indies island then known as The Celebes, now called Sulawesi.

Sulawesi's Salvation Army Mission and the Attempted Purge of Small Gods

The first British Salvation Army missionaries who arrived in western Central Sulawesi, to proselytize highlanders such as the Tobaku, claimed in mission reports that they were making "religion where there was no religion before."[5] The ministers were motivated to travel halfway around the world in the late 1800s and early 1900s to bring Gospel to people described as primitive headhunters. Although missionary leaders justified proselytization and their need for monetary contributions from European congregations by claiming that the natives had no gods, they in fact expended considerable effort to eradicate natives' veneration of local deities and spirits.

Missionary families made painstaking journeys through the rainforest to deliver sermons, set up mission outposts, translate Bible stories, and

[4] Lambek, "Introduction," 1–4.

[5] Aragon "Reorganizing the Cosmology," 356; Aragon, *Fields of the Lord*, 127.

sponsor village-wide exorcisms and conversions. Becoming the sudden beneficiaries of Dutch colonial attention and European mission resources that funded the first primary schools and health clinics, most highland communities in the area gradually converted to Protestantism between the 1920s and the 1942 Japanese Occupation. By the 1980s, Tobaku people even described themselves as "fanatic Christians" [*Kristen fanatic*]. The claim was heartfelt. It also assured the world of highlanders' zealous commitment to a monotheistic world religion, which was in accord with independent Indonesia's state policies against Communism and for modernity.[6]

Yet the small gods of Central Sulawesi's indigenous cosmology did not just disappear as the early missionaries wished. The Dutch Reformed Protestant missionary Albertus Kruyt worked with a linguist named Nicolaus Adriani, documenting many named indigenous deities and tried to describe local ideas of motile soul elements and animistic forces, which Kruyt termed "personal soulstuff" [*persoonlijke zielestof*].[7] Kruyt and his European colleagues found most local spirits and small gods puzzling and their pantheon inchoate.[8] There were "lords" or "owner" gods called *pue'*, which each seemed to have a sphere of control such as trees (uncut forests), rice (agricultural fields), bodies of water (rivers and lakes), the skies (weather), or even disease (specifically, smallpox). Notice the parallel with European ideas of feudal "lords" overseeing land tenure. Sulawesi highlanders emphasized a genealogical connection, specifying ancestors as owners, rather than a class-based one. The local term for owners [*pue'*] was the same as the kinship term for ascending grandparents and great-grandparents in some regional languages [*pue'*, Da'a Kaili].

Kruyt decided that the Christian God, which he glossed and capitalized as Pue' or "Lord" or "Owner," should be associated with the indigenous Owner of the Skies or Heavens [*pue' langi'*]. Jesus would be called "Pue' Yesus," meaning "Lord (or Owner) Jesus." The other spirits or small gods would be dispensed with by lumping them into the category of evil spirits or Satan [*setan*], an Arabic cognate term that was

[6] Aragon, *Fields*, 27–28.

[7] Kruyt, *Het Animisme*, 1–2, 66–68.

[8] Aragon, *Fields*, 163–175.

already known from trade contacts with Muslim converts who resided in Sulawesi's coastal towns.

In addition to the owner gods, Central Sulawesi highlanders described a category of deified ancestral spirits [*anitu*] and a somewhat amorphous group of trickster spirits, angry souls, and dangerous forest monsters. Foreign missionaries deemed Tobaku people's narratives about encounters with the recently deceased [*kao'*] and with dangerous forest beings (such as the mischievous *tau lero* and the placenta-eating *pontiana'*—the vengeful soul of a woman who died in childbirth) to be delusion at best, superstition at worst. The early European missionaries simply classified all the local spirits and deities, below the introduced slots of God and Jesus, as Satans. They then decreed that these small gods should no longer be addressed or provided food offerings—formerly routine activities. In sermons, the missionaries and local clerics urged indigenous converts to banish Satans from their lives and pray only to the Christian God.

Nevertheless, there remained some thoroughly Christian categories in which most small gods could reside, hide, and endure: devils, ghosts, and hell. The small gods that foreign missionaries called ghosts or evil spirits persisted in local Sulawesi narratives. After funerals that afforded only paltry family contributions, anxious surviving relatives often would hear their deceased loved ones enter the house in the middle of the night to moan or complain with displeasure. The living kin would reply that it was not their fault. It was invariably the fault of this or that other relative, living elsewhere. Relations between living and dead continued.

Similarly, when a villager's dire sickness did not respond to treatment, elders would infer that the patient, or an immediate relative, was guilty of a familiar trespass, such as moving a rice field border marker to her or his advantage.[9] Such acts were known to anger the "owners of the land," spirits who surely had sent the sickness as punishment. In my observation, the well-tutored indigenous minister would emphasize that God was the one who recognized human sins and oversaw all earthly punishments; Salvation Army ministers routinely scolded congregations to stop petitioning the old gods and ghosts.[10] To local people, however, distinctions regarding sources—whether God or the local deities—seemed

[9] Ibid., 223.

[10] Ibid., 236–239.

moot. The logic of punishment for social transgression and the criteria for proper ethical adult behavior were deemed identical.

In my analysis, all Tobaku small gods can be defined systematically by what they do or do not own.[11] The *pue'* gods are owners of earthly resources such as land, trees, and water; the *anitu* ancestor spirits are owners or leaders of living kindreds; and the various malicious spirits that everyone now calls *seta* are dangerous precisely because they own nothing. They thus seek to take resources or even human life in the form of flesh and blood from the living.

But what makes "small gods" still seem logical, desirable, and irrepressible to contemporary Sulawesi highlanders, most of whom are enthusiastic Protestants and do not wish to resist the teachings of either past or present-day Indonesian ministers? I suggest that it was not just the clever reclassification of all their small gods and dangerous forest spirits into a Christian category that has kept them viable under the foreign supervisory radar. Rather, it is their continued conceptual usefulness on many practical fronts, including familiar explanations for accidental misfortunes.

Whereas Protestant clerics often blamed victims of calamity as sinners in the eyes of God, the irrepressible *seta* were deemed by locals to be responsible for many misfortunes among the blameless. Sometimes, it was said, an innocent person was just unlucky and ran into a forest monster by coincidence. In addition, highlanders know well how to approach and petition small gods with brief family-level rituals and food offerings. These acts require no special coordination with church officials who must be paid for their ministrations. In this way, the spirits that support health and well-being remain widely understood as more accessible than the distant Almighty Christian God who, just like a king or president, would hardly seem to know and care about some less-than-wealthy highlanders on the Indonesian periphery. Highlanders feel confident that if the big politicians and Gods did care for and transact with them directly, the costs would be more onerous.

Ultimately, the pioneering European missionaries and their successors failed to banish the spirit owners, deified ancestors, and numerous other place-based spirits or Satans. For many Tobaku people, these beings were known as their powerful helpmates and age-old agents of the universe.

[11] Ibid., 173.

Many Tobaku I met described them to me as an obvious part of the Christian God's cosmic plan, just like the flora and fauna of their mountain forests. Small gods were seen as ancient local beings who aided God by working to support the now-Christian village's well-being and standards of moral propriety. Before going further, then, a broader discussion of Southeast Asian cosmologies is warranted to illustrate three recurring principles that guide all gods, including small ones.

Three Cosmological Connections

Three observations concerning Southeast Asian ideological systems, which to my knowledge have never been linked, illuminate small gods' dynamism while highlighting sparks of tension between local and European Christian cosmologies: Southeast Asian cosmologies operate on a model of center and periphery, a tripartite layering of the cosmos, and a concept of power as homogeneous, pervasive, and fixed in amount. European missionaries' limited success in eliminating small gods is illuminated by the first of these: a widespread Southeast Asian adoption of ideas related to what Stanley Tambiah termed "galactic polities" and Oliver Wolters termed "mandalas" or "court centers."[12] These were early Southeast Asian Hindu-Buddhist political centers, whose diffuse and radiating political power diminished with distance. Most important for the present discussion, the macrocosmic world of nature is seen as parallel with the microcosmic political system, and vice versa. Although most Indonesian highlanders remained distant from Hindu-Buddhist officialdom, many rites use emblematic mandala imagery, such as the differently colored rice offerings that Sulawesi groups set at each cardinal direction of a house or other ritual space. The general worldview that equates cosmic protection and political power is observed across various religions, regions, and scales of Southeast Asian societies, as exemplified by Nicola Tannebaum's research on Shan Buddhists in Thailand.[13]

Despite European missionary efforts to cast local spirits as useless, many Southeast Asians observe that lower-status deities—much like low-level political officials—are the most approachable and successfully petitioned for help. The isomorphism that is recognized between political

[12] Tambiah, "Galactic Polities"; Wolters, *History, Culture*, 32.

[13] Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete*, 1–20.

and divine bureaucracies is a framework through which Southeast Asians maintain that "small people"—rural village people, the urban proletariat, and ethnic minorities—*need* small gods.

This argument is well illustrated by an incident recalled in the memoir of Pascal Khoo Thwe, a Burmese highlander of the Padaung Kayan, a Red Karen subgroup.[14] Thwe relates that although his village, under his grandparents' leadership, converted to Roman Catholicism, everyone continued to pay ritual respects to their butterfly-shaped guardian spirits [*Yaula*]. In the following passage, he describes the local negotiation and perceived relative merits of adhering to both faiths. A key point illustrated by the passage is the way Southeast Asian deity hierarchies are envisioned as functioning like local political bureaucracies. He writes:

> Our *Yaula* [guardian spirit] ceremonies might sometimes be performed to remember our dead, and to cherish the lives of the living. When that happened a thanksgiving Mass would very likely be celebrated as well. The Church did not ban the animist ceremony, but we had to perform it discreetly and with mutual respect. We reconciled the two approaches by believing that while the traditional ceremony worked more quickly, the Christian ritual was an excellent guarantee for the long term.
>
> My grandmother had her own way of reconciling the two faiths. She would kill a chicken, slitting its throat and offering its blood as a libation to the spirits of the farm after each Mass of thanksgiving. The priest told her that it was unnecessary to do that because the Mass had already pleased the highest God. But Grandma had her own reasons: "The gods are like government officials. If you want things done quickly, you have to bribe the small ones."[15]

The quote clearly illustrates two sensible reasons why so many Southeast Asian peoples refuse to extirpate their small gods. First, it can never hurt to appease all possible gods, just in case they have different points of efficacy. Second, just like the big political bosses in the national capital, no distant High God is likely to care about them as much, or be nearly as accessible, as their own deceased kin and place-based spirits. Clearly, the innumerable beings now called Satans are interpreted in different ways

[14] Thwe, *From the Land*. The former nation of Burma is now renamed Myanmar.

[15] Ibid., 63.

by ministers and local Sulawesi highlanders. They persist among congregants because many small gods realize and defend the distributed, often negotiable, authority structures of kinship, reciprocity, and ownership rights that Southeast Asian highlanders understand and adhere to. As Kirsch notes in his assessment of plural belief systems among Zambian Christians, deities may appear to gain or lose power and presence in people's lives over time and are not necessarily equally helpful for every human problem.[16]

A second cosmological connection worth noting is the widespread existence of tripartite cosmologies in Southeast Asia. Cosmic layering of Upper, Middle, and Lower Worlds are reported in numerous Southeast Asian ethnographies, regional tales, and indigenous documents. These include Sulawesi's "La Galigo" epic (where Upper and Lower World deities traverse ladders to the Middle World to mate with human culture heroes); Balinese calendars (which illustrate the astrological influences of Upper and Lower Worlds on Middle-World humans each day, week, and year); and spectacular rites such as the Balinese Eka Dasa Rudra (where once a century, Hindu priests supported by lay people seek to recombine and rebalance the elements of all three worlds through island-wide ritual activities).[17]

The tripartite Southeast Asian cosmos also is spatially visualized and materially indexed in widespread three-level architectural plans.[18] Demons, serpents, and other beasts belong below the house among the bottom pilings or foundation. Deified ancestors and sky gods inhabit the upper, roof zone, the place where house elders store their heirlooms and other treasures. Humans mostly reside in between the upper and lower spirit zones on the middle floor of the house.

Note that the technique by which European Christian missionaries coped with Southeast Asian small gods was to place them geographically into the Christian meta-cosmology of an analogous tripartite universe: heaven, earth, and hell. God, Jesus, and the souls they save occupy heaven, while Satan and the damned occupy hell—a location to which the missionaries also condemned most small gods. According to local Indonesian narratives, though, it seems that important and beneficial

[16] Kirsch, "Restaging the Will," 700.

[17] Lansing, *The Balinese*, 117–121; Abrams, "Three Worlds."

[18] Waterson, *Living House*, 52.

small gods refuse to go there. Highlanders do not think their prominent ancestral spirits deserve to be banished to hell. They are understood instead to inhabit the upper world as servants of God, and both are associated symbolically with the high and semi-sacred roof zones of the house.

The third cosmological connection worth noting begins with Ben Anderson's well-known analysis of Javanese ideas of power. Anderson asserts that, for the Javanese, there is a fixed amount of homogeneous and natural but invisible power in the universe.[19] This model of power opens up our view of small gods' dynamic potential, even as it points to the common misrecognition of Southeast Asians' deities or layered universe as "supernatural." As I argue elsewhere, the natural-supernatural dichotomy that is assumed to be universal by most adherents of Abrahamic religions makes little sense to Indonesians who see cosmic power, as Anderson describes, as uniform in type yet in flux with respect to its distribution at any given time.[20] Indonesian cosmic power, termed *sumangaʼ* or a similar cognate in various Indonesian languages, is similar to the energetic and efficacious power called *mana* in Polynesia.

With Anderson's vision in mind, we can see that Southeast Asian small gods are just as natural as the trees and water that they often are said to own. Similarly, the small gods are just as natural and real as the Christian God and Jesus, beings in whom the missionaries are happy for Indonesian highlanders to believe as real, albeit supernatural. If all deities in highland Southeast Asia usually dwell in unseen and unlikely to be seen (yet natural and real) territories, this is not understood as qualitatively different than other unusual but natural facts; for example, that I visited Sulawesi first from the United States in the 1980s via an airplane. The United States was then a fantastical place that no one in my fieldwork community had ever visited. Yet my narratives, and those of others, made it a natural fact. In short, homogenous and fixed-sum notions of power in Southeast Asia challenge us to place small gods in ongoing reciprocal relationships with political leaders, big monotheistic gods, and ordinary persons who may experience benefits or losses in their daily encounters with deities of all sizes.

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[19] Anderson, "Idea of Power," 22.

[20] Aragon, "Missions and Omissions," 131–133.

In the sections below, I consider recent examples of how small gods continue to benefit Southeast Asian highlanders as they defend their indigenous traditions of regional arts and land use. Contemporary political debates illustrate cases where small gods are invoked to resist the alienation of community lands and traditional cultural expressions through government-sanctioned development projects and intellectual property rights law.

Small Gods as Guardians of Community Land

Although Christian missionaries and many indigenous clergy now view the persistence of small gods as vestigial pagan tendencies or syncretism, the language of "owner gods" can serve to justify local prohibitions against the seizure or individual sale of community lands. One cannot seize or sell parts of the earth that one uses and shares in rotation with other relatives, but technically does not own. In this way, the *pue'* owner gods and the *anitu* or deified ancestors are said to proscribe the sale or alienation of familial or community lands to outsiders, government projects, or other corporate entities.

I encountered narratives of this type during the religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims that troubled Central Sulawesi between 1998 and 2005. When Christians in the Lake Poso region felt under siege by Muslim militias, they told me that the owners of the water [*pue' ue*], which appear to humans in the form of crocodiles, were thrashing in anger over the political capture of indigenous peoples' lands by newly arrived immigrants. This kind of protective discourse by small gods over land was not confined to inter-ethnic conflict situations. On other occasions, such as when developers were putting in tract housing for migrants on what the state considered "unoccupied" lands, or when migrant merchants demanded debt payments in kind through land transfers, local people resisted land alienation through a discourse based on the displeasure of local owner gods or ancestral spirits. By contrast, the Christian God seemed little involved with whether community's forested swidden reserves or shared common foraging and hunting lands remained in local hands.

The economic resistance I describe here correlates with an early twenty-first-century turn to political decentralization in Southeast Asia, which accompanied what is called the revitalization of "tradition" [*adat*] in Indonesia. After the resignation of President Suharto in 1998,

Indonesia began a series of democratic and decentralization reforms to award more local control to peripheral regions. Scholars then reported "adat revivals" in many provinces as local groups began to invoke the authority of indigenous custom to defend their contemporary interests before the state.[21]

Such revivals often demanded increased respect for indigenous cosmological perspectives in comparison to imported monotheistic pronouncements. As few citizens in Indonesia or elsewhere realize, all of the country's national religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and now Confucianism were imported from other world areas and later officially allowed by the Dutch. Under the Suharto regime (1966–1998), discussion of indigenous cosmological ideas was disallowed and persecuted, but public speech opened up considerably after 1998. In 2006, I encountered a surprising conference in South Sulawesi. One panel I attended even privileged the views of ethnic minority religions, including ethnic Bugis's transvestite and transgender priests who bless community rituals by reciting the ancient "La Galigo" epic, which narrates the relationships of Upper, Middle, and Lower World beings.

In sum, although relationships with small gods never were abandoned by most Indonesian Christians (or Buddhists and Muslims, for that matter), the twenty-first century has emboldened them with new purpose as notable protectors of community common lands, advocates for local-scale politics, and, as I will detail below, guardians of traditional knowledge in the face of expanded intellectual property law.

Small Gods as Traditional Knowledge Owners

Textiles are Southeast Asia's most elaborate two-dimensional art forms and bearers of cosmological meanings and symbols that are thousands of years old. The Ibanic people of Borneo (an island now divided among the nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei) attribute much of their indigenous religious knowledge and related weaving skills to communication with spirits that occurs in dreams. Many Ibanic backstrap loom weavers residing in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, are now Roman Catholics. They say they evaluate the handmade textiles they produce

[21] Henley and Davidson, "Introduction."

not just according to size, material costs, labor time, or technical difficulty, but rather to each cloth's "story," which is read according to nested patterns that often convey ancient tales.

Women weavers say that complicated designs and techniques new to their skill set are revealed to them during sleep. Weaving new designs is considered risky because it brings weavers into dangerous contact with the spirit world. Commonplace designs that are copied from ordinary cloth types are considered less dangerous than those that are newly created on the basis of dreams. Yet risks are taken because well-executed, innovative designs are believed to please local deities and attract their beneficence to rituals where they are displayed. Weaving accomplishments gain prestige for individual women artisans.

Novice weavers confine themselves to simple, geometric designs, but may be taught and assisted by elder relatives to tie design sections that may be too potent for them. Complicated patterns with humanlike figures representing ancestors and spirits are attempted only by older, more experienced weavers. Weavers told me that tying dangerous patterns without the proper qualifications and spiritual support results in injury, madness, or death. Even when a woman does receive spiritual license to weave a new or dangerous design, she must then live in an endangered state and uphold personal taboos for the duration of the weaving process. Such weavings formerly required years of work, and the accompanying taboo-filled periods of danger were equally long.

Cases where artists invoke small gods or spirits of the deceased as sources of power and as authorities for new creative works challenge recent Indonesian intellectual property laws that award copyright authority over "anonymous folklore" or "traditional cultural expressions" to the state.[22] In essence, small gods are integral to the way many Southeast Asian weavers rebuff the state's intellectual property claims about personal authorship of works they consider as emanations of their family's or community's traditional knowledge.

In 2006, I traveled to interior West Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo, to meet with weavers from an Ibanic-influenced Dayak subgroup called Desa'. Senior Desa' weavers make ikat cloths similar to the complex figurative *pua'* textiles collected in museums throughout the world.[23] Some

[22] Aragon and Leach, "Arts and Owners"; Aragon, "Law versus Lore," 19.

[23] See, for example, Taylor and Aragon, *Beyond the Java Sea*, 162–166; Plate V. 26, 165.

women also have been encouraged by European NGO leaders to weave designs with new, "modern" motifs. My visit coincided with a weaving cooperative festival in the district capital of Sintang. Trophies were to be awarded for "best in show" weavings, and local Dayak dances provided evening entertainment following a textile seminar.

After the festival, during informal conversations, prominent village weavers told about learning to weave from their ancestors at night in their dreams. One also described the misfortunes that befall women, including her mother, who break ancestral taboos by weaving dangerous designs to which they are not entitled by lineage and ritual attainment. With such narratives, the Kalimantan weavers challenged both Westerners' claims of individual original authorship and commonplace folkloristic assumptions that all traditional peoples own their sacred cultural knowledge collectively.

European scholars and textile enthusiasts, provincial government officials, and Dayak women weavers from roughly sixteen villages were in attendance at the weaving festival's opening seminar. The European visitors and Indonesian government dignitaries praised the excellence of the local Dayak weavers, some of whom they noted were winning national contests. Speakers also promoted weaving as a viable means for little-educated Dayak women to help support their farming families. Large textiles for sale were elegantly displayed on the walls. Each cloth hanging in the exhibit and conference room sported an informative label including the weaver's photograph and information that she provided about the meaning of the cloth's motifs. This promotional device, suggested by European advisors, proclaimed the maker's distinctive personal touch and potentially her creative authorship of individual works that, in principle, could be eligible for copyright. At the same time, some information on the labels drew on shared local terms and interpretations about the cloth's design. Two-foot tall, silver-tone trophies were awarded by a panel of judges to those deemed the most excellent weavers.

One Desa' weaver described how the sequential images in her cloth conveyed the plot of a mythical family's encounter with frog spirits. She said the story idea had come to her in a dream. The weaver's exegesis reiterated textiles' position in Southeast Asia as pictorial literature, a way that narratives have been remembered and conveyed iconically for centuries, perhaps millennia, without the use of writing. Another weaver introduced the local Desa' word for "story," or "song" [*kana*]. She said that "before there were humans, there were already stories" [*sebelum*

ada manusia ada kana], thereby emphasizing the multiple modalities of these arts as well as the small gods–filled cosmos that they portray.

A few older Desa' weavers explained that they would readily teach their tying and dyeing design skills to any younger local women prepared to learn them. Teachers expect acknowledgment by pupils, who are usually younger relatives, and some recompense for their time if the kin relation is more distant. This material exchange tangibly and publicly marks the mentoring assistance and knowledge exchange. Some observers have suggested that this looks like "an indigenous copyright system" marking the authorship of the elder. I would argue otherwise because the compensation, which often is minimal, works differently from a royalty payment or a copyright transfer. It does not transfer ownership of the design or even signal an absolute permission for the pupil's weaving advancement. Only the student's own positive relationship with dream spirits, the keeping of personal taboos, and a future weaving process unmarred by ill omens can do that.

The weavers explained that if a woman begins a cloth and experiences unpleasant dreams or personal misfortune, she will terminate the project and even unravel the textile. The place of the dream spirits—deceased grandmothers and great-grandmothers—is to inspire and validate, in a sense to overshadow, a woman's personal authority to add new designs to her community's repertoire. In this way, women seemingly become unfettered to surpass their mothers' teachings by invoking the authoritative knowledge of their deceased grandmothers. These facts make the weaving achievement a collective one, which is supervised and carried out by certain highly trained and genealogically authorized individuals.

I spoke with two accomplished Desa' village weavers I will call Banyah and Teresa. Whereas outsiders generally focus on the design unit of figurative motifs, these weavers described patterns or "stories" [*cerita*, Indonesian] that they must know "from the feet to the head" [*dari kaki sampai kepala*] of the cloth before they are willing to weave them. The cloth is described anatomically, like a human being. This kind of anthropomorphizing of cloth is customary among weavers in other regions of Indonesia as well. In some areas, women's ability to create cloth is explicitly linked with their ability to create life.[24] This recognition

[24] Hoskins, "Why Do Ladies," 142–145.

highlights women's creative powers in ways that do not threaten the small gods as they might the Abrahamic God's image as the sole and Almighty Creator.

The more senior of the two weavers, Banyah, is recognized within and beyond her village as a master weaver, the only one able to tie and dye cloths that include dangerous patterns such as the "snake king" [*raja ular*] and the crocodile [*buaya*]. Crocodiles and serpents symbolize ancestral spirits and power in many Indonesian regions. What facilitates Banyah's accomplishments is not described simply in terms of her considerable technical skills, but rather of her genealogy. She spoke of being from an "old descent line" [*keturunan tua*], which usually means being descended along elder branches from recognized village founders. It is her pedigree, her post-childbearing age, her personal strength or charisma, and the relationship she has with her dream spirits that licenses her authority over her group's most honored arts practices. Again, it is clear that the authority she has is neither an individual property that she can collect royalties from or transfer, like a copyright, nor a common property accessible to all Desa' people.

In our discussions, Banyah and Teresa avoided naming or giving specifics about either the dangerous motifs or the ancestral spirits assisting their creation. Banyah said, "If I want to try tying that kind of story, it [an existing cloth with that story pattern] must be stored under my pillow, and permitted by what's-its-name" [*anunya*]. As I listened to her circuitous explanation, I began to feel like Harry Potter asking about Lord Voldemort and receiving hushed words about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

In fact, Banyah's words reminded me of an Indonesian form of taboo whereby the collective descendants of particular ancestors, or the living subjects of particular place-based spirits, distinguish and regulate themselves. In highland Central Sulawesi where I lived in the 1980s, people did not dare to name their surviving elderly relatives, even with teknonyms. High-ranking elders received the taboo-naming status of ancestors prior to their deaths. Unlike Lord Voldemort, Sulawesi ancestors and Kalimantan dream spirits promise beneficent and fruitful outcomes after careful solicitations and respectful behaviors. Banyah clarified her method of persuasion and its intended recipients by saying that she feeds her (deceased) elders or "old people" by placing food at the base of her loom before she sleeps.

In Desa' Dayak communities, the stakes in performing these actions properly are high. Teresa said that one time a Catholic Church official I will call Bishop Paulus wanted to commission Teresa to weave a textile with a crocodile motif. This was an advanced design whose story she said she did not fully "understand" [*paham*]. She told the bishop she was not "bold" or "brave" [*berani*] enough to tie, dye, and weave it. The bishop responded disapprovingly, saying, "You're a woman of faith, you can do this." Teresa still refused. As she explained her thoughts at the time, "I like living. I want to live. It is not his life that will be at risk if I do this."

Under further pressure from Bishop Paulus, Teresa's mother agreed to make the crocodile weaving, which he purchased as promised. But Teresa's mother was not rewarded for her compliance and industry. When she returned home from selling the textile, firewood piled high in a truck fell on her. She was badly injured. As Indonesian cosmic justice stories often suggest, ancestral proscriptions cannot be ignored or overruled by non-ancestral authorities, even Catholic bishops, without disastrous consequences.

The Desa' weavers' words clarified that, if anyone owns rights over the crocodile motif, that individual is not living, but rather a "transparent spirit" [*roh halus*, Indonesian] with some descent trail to particular weavers, present and future. Concepts of ancestral spirits remind the living to be aware of their descent, no matter how it is organized. As Maurice Bloch notes, descent is "the opposite of dispersal" because it is aimed at the retention of land, material wealth, and other human resources within the kin group.[25] When ancestors appear through dreams or dramas to inspire the continued use of powerful patterns or "stories," that gambit seems appropriate to the trans-generational continuity of cultural practice and religious experience.

By sharing examples or knowledge of artistic practices, though, neither human resources nor land—the physical basis of traditional livelihood or survival—are alienated. Perhaps this is one reason why the concern to restrict artistic production techniques from foreign outsiders is rarely expressed by producers (as opposed to government officials who fear loss of national revenue). Indonesian artists often say that if outsiders, even foreigners, imitate or reproduce their traditional arts precisely and expertly, well then "bravo." Cross-cultural dispersal is rarely a local

[25] Bloch, *From Blessing*, 85.

concern. Even if foreigners imitate these genres poorly back in their homelands, Indonesian producers generally say that is no serious problem for the originating community. They say that they and their ancestors do not care what happens elsewhere. Why not? I would argue that the true concern motivating their traditional arts is the preservation of local community relationships and rank through hierarchical access to customary arts knowledge and use rights, not the prevention of sharing artworks or techniques outside the community. Master artists express pride in their disciplinary skills, authorized arts knowledge, collective identity, and religious morality, but their focus is just not oriented to monotheistic gods, state bureaucracy, and exclusively owned property—the key idioms recognized by clerics, the state, and national intellectual property law.

Creative Uses for Small Gods in Christian Southeast Asia

My focus has been on the enduring relevance and creative uses of small gods among Southeast Asian Christians, both Protestant and Catholic. For such Christians, continued adherence to small gods entails no challenge to the supremacy of the Christian God or to biblical teachings. Rather, today's descendants of missionized converts usually assume an isomorphism between the moral teachings of their ancestral deities and Christianity. Ultimately, God's mastery of the universe—comprised of the Upper World of Heaven, the Middle World of humans, and the Lower World of Hell—is seen as compatible with local ownership of resources by small gods, including ancestor spirits who serve as vassals to the Christian God.

Although the wide-ranging uses of small gods described here are drawn from Christian contexts, I would be remiss not to mention that similar phenomena are found in the Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist regions of Southeast Asia. In the case of Indonesia, the nation's many decades of Cold War propaganda promoted monotheistic religion as an antidote to Communist ideology and threat. This contributed to the harsh governmental and clerical repression of small gods. We should acknowledge, then, that parallel projects of spiritualization and purification exist beyond Christendom. And even within it, we know that Protestant and Catholic approaches differ, the latter usually being more tolerant of small gods. Overall, though, Southeast Asian Christianity thrives within an endless pursuit of theological purification that hardly makes a dent in the region's still vibrant and valued small gods.

I began this essay by asking why so many otherwise devoutly Christian Southeast Asian peoples continue to interact with, and speak about, the importance of localized small gods. The answers are manifold. Small gods legitimate a vast array of knowledge about local morality and theodicy, knowledge about which Protestant clerics generally remained tone deaf. Small gods also are more cheaply and readily summoned for help than the Christian God whose ministers often require cash payments for ritual services.

Small gods fit within a widely distributed model of a tripartite cosmology found in Southeast Asian mythology, ritual, and architecture, a tripartite cosmology that is structurally parallel to Christianity's heaven, earth, and hell. Small gods are the agents of action within innumerable local stories about ancestors, social reciprocity, and the natural world. They inhabit familiar, nearby places in contrast to the Abrahamic God who seems to emanate from afar. They justify local control over nearby natural resources in the face of global market forces, migrant capitalists, and government seizures of eminent domain. They are ancestral allies in the local politics of indigenous minority causes, what are now called revivals of custom. Small gods command and distribute traditional knowledge and aesthetic skills in ways that allow local arts producers to rebuff national intellectual property laws that shift authority over traditional cultural expressions to the state. What foreign Christian cleric ever suspected that Southeast Asia's minor gods could perform such major work?

I described West Kalimantan weavers' narratives at length because they neatly exemplify the way small gods are integrated into ordinary ethics within and beyond Christian faith and practice. Indonesian weavers must study to achieve, but they also depend upon pedigree, spiritual contacts, and their actions' outcomes to assess the validity of ancestral authorization. Unnamable ancestral spirits appear to own particular stories or weaving images. Similarly, in my 1980s fieldwork in Sulawesi, I heard analogous claims that ancestral spirits were the ones who really own highlanders' farmland plots and other natural resources. In all these cases, access to spirits and resources is understood as most readily and legitimately available through kinship links and the ritual acknowledgment of deceased forebears. Among living humans there exist multiple, but not necessarily evenly distributed, claims to resource access or use rights, all under the aegis of the ancestors or small gods who, amazingly, are considered to be in complete alignment with the Christian God.

Like other arts producers in Indonesia, weavers often speak seamlessly of their personal relations with ancestral spirits, God, or other "unseen" [*halus*] beings whose presence they experience when creating. West

Kalimantan weavers leave food each night at the base of their looms in anticipation of dreams in which their satiated ancestors will convey the secrets of dangerous, complicated motifs. Through their representational and performative capacities, artworks index and transform human and spiritual relationships during performance or transaction. Therefore, it is an analytic distortion, resulting from the application of property regimes to Indonesian regional arts, to propose legalizing creators' claims over "things" (artworks, motifs, styles), when the primary claims artists make are about relationships with the living and the ancestral.

When small gods are the true owners of the forests, these vital resources cannot be alienated through individual sales, nor removed by government or corporate fiat. When small gods, in the form of ancestral spirits, are the true sources of advanced weaving knowledge, no individual weaver can claim exclusive proprietary rights to any particular design element. Considered in light of their century-long mission and governmental repression, Indonesian highlanders' small gods must be understood as integral and necessary pillars of the contemporary Christian cosmological architecture. Rather than peg them into fixed forms and roles, however, we owe the small gods and their human relations sufficient recognition of their fluid and creative agency in contemporary, and future, societal conditions.

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CHAPTER 13

Spirits, Christians and Capitalists in the Rainforests of Papua New Guinea

Michael Wood

This chapter traces a brief history of Kamula ideas about bush spirits as they relate to both Christianity and capitalism.[1] The approach I adopt here owes quite a lot to Max Weber, for whom Christianity—especially in its more Protestant and Evangelical varieties—emerged as a correlate of the modern ideology of individualism, capitalism and the secular.[2] The Christian's vertical relationships with God weakened more horizontal social ties with kin, friends and spirits. This disembedding of persons from other social ties freed them to operate in individualizing institutions such as capitalist markets.

[1] Kamula people, who number over 2000, have their core lands located some 30 kilometres south of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG). The Kamula share many cultural features with groups living around Mt. Bosavi. This is a region of PNG noted for the way spirits and shamans played a key role in daily social life and production. For a useful overview of the ethnography of the Bosavi region see Kelly, *Constructing Inequality*, 27–51.

[2] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*.

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Taking Weber's alignment of the history of Christianity with the history of capitalism as its starting point, this chapter outlines elements of this alignment by reference to Kamula accounts of how certain spirits became entangled with Christianity, European colonialism and the capitalist exploitation of natural resources. These stories indicate that the spirits are not continuous with the ideas and practices that preceded their current relationships with post-colonial religion and economy—Kamula custom is not their only origin and, as a result of these now multiple origins, present relations with the spirits do not simply repeat past forms of interaction with them. Nor, however, are the spirits radically discontinuous with past custom—they are not excluded from any relationship with their past iterations.[3] In the following account the spirits do not necessarily have a stable historical identity nor do their key attributes derive from a singular, unchanging originating ontology. This very instability makes them an excellent index of the Kamula's rapidly changing relations with both the manifest world of natural resources, money and conventional politics and with the unseen, now God-given, components of the world.

Despite these ruptures, the Kamula themselves are very much interested in asserting continuities and affinities between the past and the Christian and capitalist present. Their stories and performances often stress continuities with "ancestral ways of doing things."[4] Kamula approaches to the new often involve incorporating the unusual into forms of continuity, highlighting the repetition of custom and the past. To paraphrase Alison Dundon, Kamula accounts of spirits, capitalism and conversion can involve both disjunctures between "then" and "now" and processes revealing continuities between before and after.[5]

As a result, the histories of spirits that I discuss do not reveal a linear process of secularization. Instead, they involve both limiting and enhancing transformations of the spirits' capacities. Weber's claim that the decline of formal monotheistic religion in Europe involved re-enchantment is relevant here. For Weber re-enchantment involved fragmentation into a plurality of alternative, possibly incommensurable, narratives about the "rebirth" of gods and demons who, even with their old magic

[3] On discourses of continuity and discontinuity, see especially Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 25.

[4] Wood, "Initiating God's Word."

[5] Dundon, "The Gateway to the Fly," 9.

now lost, "strive to gain power over our lives and again … resume their eternal struggle with one another."[6] For the Kamula there has never been a uni-directional process of the decline of spirits, rather different types of spirits are reanimated by either their inclusion in, but also by their exclusion from, the Christian spiritual ensemble.

And nor has this process just involved a Christian revaluation of the spirits. I argue that any history of Christianity among the Kamula necessarily involves highlighting the relationships between Kamula Christians and Kamula capitalists—the rent-seekers and brokers, who, following Kamula usage, I will call Moresby men. The larger part of the chapter involves outlining a history of Kamula spirits as they became Christian or Capitalist (or both). A key moment in such a history was the translated Kamula New Testament published in 2005: a text wherein some Kamula spirits emerged as part of Christian cosmology while others did not. Those that did not enter the Christian pantheon became actors in another kind of history. Outlining this history of non-Christian spirits involves showing how some local spirits have, over the last 80–90 years, engaged with the valuables and different forms of capital that have emerged in the post-colonial era.[7]

My argument owes much to Joel Robbins's account of the Urapmin's talk about spirits, in which the possibilities of post-mining development were as important as Christianity.[8] In the 1990s the Urapmin were interested in the secularization of their landscape through the complete removal of local bush spirits from the environment as they were seen as obstacles to future capitalist development on what would become more purely Urapmin land. Robbins relies on Jane Schneider's argument that pre-capitalist peasants were cautious in their exploitation of both natural and human resources, as they were committed to notions of equivalence through reciprocity with forces and spirits found in nature.[9] Christian reformers challenged this caution, thereby creating a favorable cultural climate for capitalism. She argued that a pre-existing "ethics of animism" needed to be overcome—"capitalists could never have cultivated their self-confident 'spirit of capitalism' had their ethics kept them shackled to

[6] Weber, "The Vocation of Science," 282.

[7] Wood, "Spirits of the Forest"; "Logging, Women and Submarines."

[8] Robbins, "Properties of Nature," 185; "Dispossessing the Spirits"; *Becoming Sinners.*

[9] Schneider, "Spirits and the Spirit of Capitalism."

equitable exchanges with nature, with their forebears, and, by extension, with the fellow members of their communities and nations."[10] However, as I show below, for virtually all Kamula it is still the case, to their frustration, that they are unable to fully detach themselves from issues of equitable transactions and mutual recognition in their relationships both with other Kamula and with the spirits.

A Brief History of Kamula Christianity Primarily Full of Evil Spirits

One indicator of the Kamula's interest in Christian transformation is that the Kamula contacted the mission before the mission officially contacted the Kamula. This contact involved significant numbers of Kamula speakers migrating in the 1950s from their original homelands south of Mt. Bosavi.[11] These migrants moved over 50 km south to villages that were close to the government station of Balimo and became familiar with the colonial government, the local European-run mission known as the Unevangelised Field Mission (UFM) and their new neighbors, the Gogodala.[12]

Kamula lands are primarily located between the villages of Somokopa and Wawoi Falls. Here Kamula and other residents engage in sago processing, hunting, fishing and growing bananas and sweet potato. These forms of food production persist today and are used by those who migrated to villages along the Aramia River where Gogodala and other language groups (such as Dibiyaso and Tulumsa) live close to government and mission services centered in Balimo.

In the late 1980s and early in 1990s some Kamula were thinking that the European missionaries living in the Balimo region were originally from that region. This local origin of the European missionaries was explained by the fact that many Kamula (and Gogodala) never managed to become true Christians before they died. Some of these failed

[10] Ibid., 184.

[11] The Kamula were accompanied by people with Doso origins. Doso is a language with some similarities to Tulumsa. But since at least the 1920s, Doso and Kamula have been inter-marrying allies and co-residents.

[12] For details on the UFM see Weymouth, *Gogodala Society*. On the Gogodala see Dundon, *Sitting in Canoes*, and Wilde, *Men at Work*.

Christians had been ordered back by God to preach as white missionaries in their original homelands around Balimo. Under this interpretation the most Christian of the Europeans were in fact returned dead pre-Christian Kamula (and Gogodala). At this time many Kamula thought it likely that dead Kamula were transformed into Europeans.[13]

In the 1970s the UFM divided into a local church, the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG), and its supporting expatriate mission, the Asia Pacific Christian Mission (APCM).[14] In 1975 the ECPNG established a permanent presence among the northern Kamula living at Wawoi Falls. Contact with the state and some slight integration with global capital had come somewhat earlier: while government patrols through the region around Wawoi Falls had taken place intermittently since the 1930s it was not until the late 1960s that official contact was made by patrol officers from the government station Nomad. Crocodile skin traders visited the region in the 1960s and 1970s, and by 1980 Wawoi Falls had a functioning airstrip built with guidance from the APCM missionary Jack Partridge.

The APCM and ECPNG emphasized radical discontinuity between the past and present as a fundamental feature of their theology. Bambi Schieffelin suggests this emphasis derived from pre-millennialist interpretations of the Bible's overarching narrative of time.[15] In this understanding the unsaved, such as the Kamula, "stand in the way of a particular movement of time or of reaching a goal" such as the return of Christ.[16] There was a need to reorient non-believers and place them in this Scriptural time frame and thereby convert their view of time to a radically different, messianic orientation. This time was explicitly messianic—in the mission's written explanatory commentaries on the Bible it was made clear that all the benefits of redemption will not be received immediately, but "in the fullness of God's time."[17]

This reorientation toward apocalypse was to be achieved by rejecting past customary beliefs and practices. According to Weymouth, a historian

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[13] As a further indication of this sort of equivalence note that a Gogodala word indicating "Australia" can also refer to "Heaven."

[14] Weymouth, "Gogodala Society"; Rule, "Institutional Framework."

[15] Schieffelin, "Marking Time," S5.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid. S5 n. 2; ECPNG, *Commentary on Ephesians*, 27.

of the mission, a total rejection of ceremonial activities and sacred objects was the "mark of a convert" and a "distinctive feature" among Gogodala converts to the UFM and ECPNG.[18] The mission enacted the same ideology in the Bosavi region where "even thoughts about past traditions, whether real or imagined by missionaries, were considered as impediments to conversion and belief."[19] Both the ECPNG and APCM regarded many aspects of custom, especially those practices involving spirits, as profoundly anti-Christian and expressing Satan's and the Devil's power.

For the ECPNG spiritual warfare with the Devil and his evil spirits is a persistent and dominant part of their faith's cosmology. An ECPNG/APCM Bible commentary called for Christians to follow Paul's advice to the Ephesians; to:

> Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (from Ephesians 6: 11–12)[20]

The persisting reality of evil spirits created a need for continuous warfare that:

> goes on all the time and will come to an end only when God gives the word and the King of Kings comes in his mighty power to put an end to the devil and his armies. In the meantime, God's people on earth are engaged in warfare day after day.[21]

This warfare is both part of this world (it involves God's people on earth) and not part of the world. It is not primarily about flesh and blood in this world, although this is implicated; rather, it primarily involves evil spiritual forces in the "heavenly realm" itself. Yet in this text the battle is against the rulers, the authorities and powers that could be secular—"in this dark world"—as well as spiritual. Indeed, in some

[18] Wilde, "Men at Work," 20.

[19] Schieffelin, "Marking Time," S15.

[20] ECPNG, *Commentary on Ephesians*, 135–136.

[21] Ibid., 137.

interpretations, of the relevant passages of the Bible, such authorities, rulers and powers could be either angels or secular rulers of the worldly states.[22]

Kamula thinking on this topic often implies that they envision the "spiritual powers" against which they struggle as a demonic version of the worldly state they currently inhabit. Such understandings not only amplify ECPNG ideas but also reflect ideas from US dispensationalist fundamentalists that detail warfare in the apocalyptic period prior to Christ's return where One World Government will exist and systematically exterminate Christians. Both state power and the productive economy will be in the possession of non-Christians; Christians will have no access to land or food, and will be shot.[23]

These ideas amplify Kamula Christians' concerns that the contemporary PNG economy and state are, or will further become, fundamentally non-Christian and even demonic. The mission has always made a sharp distinction between the church and the secular, excluding pastors from seeking formal political office or from participating in the running of a business. A supplementary contrast is drawn between things of the earth (and humans) and things of heaven (God, Jesus and angels). In the Kamula New Testament "people" was often translated as *ta:lamo so*, literally "ground place people"[24]; whose location was contrasted to heaven represented as *pepeli di mo*, "place above the sky." As Rex Popaiye, who, as a young Kamula man, was very interested in becoming a pastor in the ECPNG, explained to me, heaven was thought about as a place where all people were truly unified:

> When people die everybody changes into having a white skin. Everybody, the spirit, everything is same. One—one beginning, one language, one colour. You know when people die everybody's skin is the same, white skin, yeh white skin.

Like the Bosavi converts discussed by Schieffelin, Kamula Christians understood they had to avoid desiring things of the earth such as money, commodities and magical power.[25] Nonetheless Kamula Christians, while

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[22] Agamben, *The Time That Remains.*

[23] Wood, "Initiating God's Word."

[24] *Ta:lamo* is also translatable as "nations on earth" and "the world."

[25] Schieffelin, "Christianizing Language," S233.

often avoiding traveling to "bad" or "evil" places like Port Moresby or the logging company's local headquarters at Kamusi, enthusiastically receive royalties and engage in the politics of development. In order to control their desires and emotions they try to emphasize humility, gentleness, patience and compassion rather than anger or intense sorrow.[26]

Moresby Men as Sinners

The transformation of the Kamula's world further intensified when logging concessions emerged to the south of Wawoi Falls in the 1980s. One of these—the Wawoi Guavi concession—extended into the Wawoi Falls area in the 1990s; while in the 2000s two significant gas fields (known as Douglas 1 and Pukpuk) were discovered on Doso land, a day's walk from the village of Somokopa. The emergence of the Kamula Doso timber concession, its transformation into illegal special purpose agricultural leases, and its additional, but simultaneous, transformation into an illegal carbon credit scheme created further financial opportunities for Kamula brokers and middlemen.[27]

By the 1990s many Kamula had become recipients of timber royalties and monies channeled through landowner companies. There emerged a group of influential men who were on the executive of these companies or otherwise influential in landowner politics. Neutrally known as company head men, more pejorative descriptors include "thief" and "man who eats money." Company men are those who move beyond the limits of reciprocity and equitable sharing. They are notorious for spending money in Moresby rather than giving it to the rightful owners—the "fathers of the land" or "people of place" [*mo so*] who live in the village. Moresby life involves "living on money" and is often said to involve "bad" or "evil ways of doing of things" [*koko batalimana*]. Moresby men "move around" like prostitutes as they go from developer to developer asking for money.

At issue here is an understanding of secular modernity as alienated from Christian values, privileging the material over the spiritual and allowing virtually unrestrained access to pleasure. Self-critical Moresby men define themselves as sinners who should be bound by Christian laws

[26] ECPNG, *Commentary on Ephesians*, 78–79.

[27] Filer and Wood, "Creation And Dissolution."

and rules. As one Moresby man explained to me, "They give us money and we are lost." These comments also suggest that for many Kamula, while the power of current Kamula Christianity can only be understood when placed in the context of the promises and current practices of secular development, it is these practices and promises that need to be more fully Christianized since secular development involves non-Christian, evil and even demonic, features.

An additional, and significant, problem for Moresby men (and Christians) is that political and moral claims over persons and things can still be made through what can be understood as non-Christian powerful spirits [*bataliye*] and magic [*osolo*]. Kamula cannot stop other Kamula from deploying these non-Christian techniques to enforce various demands for reciprocity and recognition. As one example in 2005, John told me how his younger classificatory brother, Mark, had moved to Port Moresby but and had abandoned his Kamula wife and married other women in Port Moresby. John explained:

> It was Mark's first time in Moresby and he got involved in bad ways. Mark got a wife at Moresby. Did he pay bride wealth? His senior Kamula affines' magic is really powerful. So he got very sick. David [Mark's classificatory brother] had organised a ticket for Mark to come back to his village. But Mark did not want to travel back. His Kamula affines had, with their magic, stopped him from coming back. When David brings Mark's coffin back I and other clansmen will beat up David. This will reciprocate for causing Marks's pain and suffering.

This moral reasoning reiterates the point that Moresby men cannot live their lives independently of the village or from forms of power linked to demands for compassionate caring and forceful reciprocity.

Post-Translation Spirits and Powers

In 1991 Iska and Judy Routamaa, Bible translators from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, arrived at Wawoi Falls to translate the Bible into Kamula. Their ideas were quite different to the orthodoxies of the APCM/ECPNG. Throughout their stay at Wawoi Falls, the Routamaas were generally more encouraging of affirming past practices than were the Gogodala and Kamula pastors who had previously preached in the area. The Routamaas did not seek to initiate a conversion process that

would delete the Kamula's past or their sense of continuity with traditional practices and ceremonies. Reflecting this commitment, the 2005 Kamula New Testament Dedication ceremony involved the Kamula making strong claims about the continued relevance of the radical power of customary ritual to provide some of the framework and content to this Christian celebration.[28]

Crucial to such Kamula concerns over the persistence of customary power in modern contexts are redefinitions of Kamula spirits. I show how these redefinitions have been influenced by both Christianity and the emergence of new forms of capital and wealth in the region. I initially explore such changes as they apply to "evil spirits" [*bataliya*] and then consider changes to two other types of bush spirit. The first involves *banakaka* spirits who have been transformed in the Kamula New Testament into angels. The other type of bush spirit [*dali patalo*] has been redefined by their new links to the wealth-creating properties of capitalist development. Thus the *bataliya* have been demonized, the *banakaka* have been Christianized, and the *dali patalo* have become loggers. These changes in Kamula pantheon of spirits are presented in Figure 13.1.

Lexeme	Kamula pre-mission glosses (before 1980s)	APCM /ECPNG Mission Doctrine (1980s)	SIL / Kamula Bible translation
Bataliya	Evil spirit	Evil spirit	Demon / Evil spirit.
Aiyalma	Prohibited, rule, evil spirit, monstrous entity productive of new wealth	Evil Spirit	Sacred, law, rule, prohibited, evil, monstrous entity productive of new wealth
Banakaka	Spirit for healing, performance and raiding	Evil spirit	Angel
Dali patalo	Spirit useful in hunting	Evil spirit	Not used in Bible. Spirit useful for hunting and now understand by Kamula to be capable of generating new forms of wealth.

Fig. 13.1 Recent changes in definitions of some key Kamula spirits

[28]Wood, "Initiating God's Word."

Bataliya

This term refers to all things bad, wicked, malevolent and evil. *Bataliya* also refers Kamula speakers to an "evil spirit" that cannibalizes the bodies of ordinary humans. This evil spirit can appear as an anthropomorphic entity that can inhabit the heart of a human host where it lives cooking the flesh of its victims. The human host becomes less than human and could in the past be executed. People who are themselves knowledgeable about evil spirits, and who are angry at the intended host, can deliberately encourage a *bataliya* to burrow into a person's heart. This can be done, with aid of spells, by shaving off a bit of the flesh of the heart of the intended host, thereby softening it and making it easier for an evil spirit to be able to occupy the heart. In some accounts large earthworms [*weheli*] do some of this work prior to the *bataliya* taking up residence. These types of transformations of a person into someone with *bataliya* are often linked to situations of strong, typically sexual, desire. If you are overcome with sexual desire and have sex with someone who is not your spouse then a cannibalistic *bataliya* may occupy your heart. For the Kamula the heart is the center of thought and understanding, emotions and feelings, and its physical characteristics are used to evoke moral evaluations as when people are approvingly said to have "hard" or "mature" hearts as opposed to "soft" "immature" ones.

In the 1990s Kamula drew on ECPNG pamphlets that, using both illustrations and text, highlighted how in PNG evil spirits and demons often take the form of animals that would dominate a person and occupy their hearts.[29] These animals included pigs, snakes, cassowaries, frogs, rats, dogs, bandicoots and the Red Bird of Paradise. The presence of these animals in the human heart indicated the arrival of an evil spirit. Once in the human heart it would grow and become very strong and powerful. In one man's account the evil spirit got strength from all these animals who were subject to Satan's influence. The Church's aim was to highlight evil animal spirits and excessive desire—but the difficulty for this critique was that the animals depicted were in some case significant totems and, in the case of the pig and cassowary, the major sources of meat for the Kamula. The church seemed interested in demonizing some of the most desirable things in the world and demanding a renunciation of desire for such things.

[29] Knauft, *Exchanging the Past*.

Perhaps for this reason, by the late 1990s some Kamula men began to think about *bataliya* in very different ways to that set out in ECPNG material. They became interested in determining their own capacity to directly access the power of evil spirits and use such power in dealings with the state. Some argued that men should get military-style training in the ways of these evil spirits so that they could defend the Kamula against the forces of the state—either in its current form or that expected in the demonic One World Government prior to rapture.[30]

Further altering Kamula understanding of the term *bataliya* was the translation of the New Testament, a process that prompted extensive debate about Kamula understandings of witchcraft, evil spirits and Satanic powers. Some of this discussion was facilitated by the SIL translator's commitment to forms of translation that would allow the Kamula to foreground elements of their local world into the Bible translation. The translators often adopted a domestic orientation rather than external, or foreign, approach to translation of the Bible. This domestic approach negotiates equivalence between the foreign and local concepts by creating a translation "in which the language of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors."[31] While recreating the initial reception of the Bible may be an impossible task, the translators' aim is to seriously negotiate distinct cultural worlds so as to create a basis for meaningful understanding of the original text in the local language.[32]

In the Kamula New Testament the stem *batali* helps form words used to refer to "evil spirit," "demon," "wrong," "sin" and "sinner." This term is used to translate sections of the Bible where evil spirits

[30] Wood, "Kamula Accounts of Rambo."

[31] Nida and Taber quoted after Ciampa, "Terms of Translation," 141.

[32] One example of the Kamula translators' approach involves the notoriously difficult-to-translate opening statement of Romans: "From Paul slave of the Messiah Jesus" (Romans 1:1). Rather than finding a means to express "slave" or "servant" this was rendered into Kamula as:

Na:ye	*Polo*	*Yesu*	*Keliso ya:*	*oko oplami.*
I am	Paul	Jesus	Christ's	worker.

This use of proximate terms allows the Kamula to understand Paul's status as approximating something—paid work—that all Kamula have directly or indirectly experienced rather than emphasize the more profoundly alien concept of slavery.

and demons are discussed. For example, the chapter heading to Mark 5 outlines how Jesus heals a man with evil spirits. In the Kamula New Testament this is rendered:

Yesu ta	*bataliya*	*walle*	*oplami*	*kadle*
Jesus	evil spirit	has	man	better

"Jesus cures a man possessed with an evil spirit."[33]

Bataliya is also used to translate "demon," as in:

Alila	*hale*	*Yesu ta*	*yu*	*pa:le*	*oplami*	*dupa*
Day	another	Jesus	language	without	man	heart
dulu	*tle*	*bataliya-ye*	*alikli dla*	*dodolomaiyo*		
in	from	demon	side to	chased		

A possible translation of this sentence is "One day Jesus chased out the Demon from inside the heart of the speechless man" (Luke 11: 14). What interests me is the considerable effort in the Kamula translation to locate this "Demon" or "evil spirit" in the heart of the man who could not speak. For Kamula readers this links the "Demon" to conventional Kamula views about witchcraft and to the ECPNG views on evil spirits discussed earlier. It also aligns Kamula witchcraft with the world of the Devil and his supporting spirits—the Demons.[34] This demonization of the Kamula understanding of witchcraft, enshrined by the use of *bataliya* in the Kamula New Testament, maintains the salience of witchcraft for all Kamula—Christians and non-Christians. And it remains to this day an intractable problem for all Kamula.

Aiyalma

Aiyalma has the sense of prohibition or taboo and as a result can sometimes be used refer to the "evil spirit" [*bataliya*] involved in Kamula

[33] The expression *bataliya walle oplami* would also be understood by many Kamula as a reference to witchcraft or assault sorcery, such that the above could also be back-translated into English as "Jesus cured a victim of witchcraft."

[34] "Demon" can also be translated by the term *batalimale soko*, which can be glossed as "bad spirit" or "unclean spirit." "Evil spirit" and "demon" can also be referred to by the term *sei*, found also in languages to the north such as Aebala and Kaluli.

understandings of witchcraft.[35] Along with notions of "taboo" and "prohibition," *ayalma* can be used to refer something like "sacred," "pure" or "holy." *Aiyalma* also refers to "law," "rule" and "command." It is now commonly used to refer to the laws of the PNG state. For a time the SIL translators were hoping to use the term to refer just to the sacred, but as one of their Kamula assistants told me this would require the Kamula to stop using the term *aiyalma* to refer to the "evil spirits" involved in witchcraft. This linguistic reform did not succeed, and their initial enthusiasm for using *aiyalma* as translating the sacred waned. Finally, even though there is a distinct word, *itiamale*, for "strength" and "power," *aiyalma* is also an objectification of power and a condensation of some of its potentialities—it is neither essentially moral nor immoral, sacred nor profane, but both.[36]

Some sense of *aiyalma*'s changing meaning under post-colonial conditions is evident in the initial naming of steel axes that emerged in the Kamula's country around, if not before, the 1930s. Steel axes were initially called "prohibited axes" [*aiyalma peya*]—in contrast to "stone axes" [*motu peya*]. Around the same time Europeans were also called *aiyalma* people as opposed to the current Kamula term "white skin" [*kapala kamale*]. One reason for calling Europeans *aiyalma* people was that interaction with them was subject to rules of fearful avoidance—if a Kamula saw a European that Kamula was supposed to avoid making physical or eye contact and was not to talk to them. When European patrol officers originally entered Kamula country in the 1950s people would run away into the bush out of fear. But by the 1950s the radical otherness of the European had been, to a degree, domesticated. One type of such partial domestication involved stories about a monster, sometimes referred to as an *aiyalma*, who lived, usually in well-hidden form, in and around a local hill. This *aiyalma* was like a human but covered in steel knives and axes. The monster was said to attack any person intruding on to his territory and could possibly cut them up and kill them. From a Kamula perspective this monster had possession of some of the most desirable valuables of early colonialism. Extreme desire for such things is represented here in the body of monster as a form of

[35] Much of the material in this section and one below titled *Dali patalo* involves material previously published in Wood, "Spirits of the Forest"; "Logging, Women and Submarines."

[36] Kapferer, *Feast of Sorcerers*, 268.

self-alienation and self-loss such that the desired objects become co-extensive with the monster's body. We can understand the figure of this monster as an image of the Kamula's self under the influence of desire for steel goods. This embodied desiring self is transformed into a radical other here referred to as an *aiyalma*.

Moreover, as oil and gas exploration has intensified in the region over the last 20 years, *aiyalma* in the form of dragon-like monsters have come to be talked about as the "origin" of gas and oil. In some accounts the drill cuts into the flesh of the *aiylama* and the blood constitutes the oil that is found. In other accounts drilling forces the *aiyalma* away from the site with the result that nothing is found. This equation of valuable natural resources with powerful entities (dragons) reiterates the idea that the Kamula's control of such resources is only partial and derives from powers that often have a unique capacity to radically fuse their bodies with desirable valuable. This reflects the persistence of the idea that the things of value are ultimately attributes of a person—human or otherwise.

Banakaka

If *aiyalma* has been linked to new valuables derived from radically different bodies and persons that emerge on the frontiers of capitalism and colonialism, other spirits such as those termed *banakaka* have taken on more distinctly Christian roles and attributes. The Christianization of the *banakaka* reflects a refusal by the SIL, and by the Kamula translators Iska and Judy Routamaa, to demonize all the Kamula's pre-Christian spirits. The *banakaka* were undoubtedly quite helpful spirits: in some Kamula accounts, the male performers in mortuary rituals [*kisama*] were effectively replaced by *banakaka* spirits.[37] As one man indicated:

> The real man is not there. His appearance is not there. His skin is not there, [it is] *banakaka*. He finishes painting and then his *banakaka* see him and come with him—the *banakaka*'s likeness. People will ask "who is this man?" You are hidden—the *banakaka* comes up in you. The real man is not there. The *banakaka* gives the song to the *kisama* dancer … If it is just

[37] For additional details see Wood, "Places, Loss and Logging." Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*, and Schieffelin, *Sorrow of the Lonely*, provide accounts of *gisalo*, the Kaluli equivalent of *kisama*.

> a man there would be no crying. With the *banakaka* the *kisama* is good and beautiful.

Similar conjunctions of human and *banakaka* agency occurred in hunting, healing carried out by mediums and when raiding enemies. Overall the *banakaka* were useful allies of the humans; perhaps this helped them become Christian spirits. But the *banakaka* would also steal Kamula children and cause harm and illness to Kamula adults. *Banakaka* women were attractive sexual partners for Kamula men—something that was often deeply resented by their Kamula wives who would secretly feed their husbands particular plants that made them end their sexual relationships with the spirit women.[38]

Currently *banakaka* do not have much of a role in everyday Kamula life as their main functions, in ritual performances, raiding and in healing, are no longer salient features of daily life. This lack of current worldly roles may have reinforced their uplifting into the more spiritual role of New Testament angel. But also instrumental in facilitating such an unambiguously virtuous role were attempts to distinguish two types of *banakaka*—one linked to Christianity and the other type linked to everyday experiences outside the ambit of the Church or its theology. This distinction was achieved by using the term "God's angel"—literally "God his angel man" [*God ya: banakaka oplami*]—in both preaching and in the Bible translation. As Hawo Kulu explained to me, "If we did not put God in front of *banakaka* the whole word would change in meaning. It could mean any other kind of *banakaka* that is sometimes good and sometimes harmful" (pers. comm. August 2015).[39] Most occurrences of *banakaka* in the New Testament are indeed preceded by reference to God, the Lord or the Son of Man, and they are usually in a possessive relation to the *banakaka*. In this way a distinction emerged between the *banakaka* of God and Jesus and those non-Christian *banakaka* who were implicitly devalued if not explicitly demonized. Like many other small gods throughout the world, the *banakaka* have moved from being highly useful agents with a mix of potentially dangerous characteristics to

[38] See Robbins, *Becoming Sinners*, 210, for a discussion of a somewhat similar set of relationships with spirits known as "marsupial women."

[39] Hawo Kulu was for a number of years one of the key research assistants of the SIL Bible translators Iska and Judy Routamaa. He has a deep knowledge of the issues involved in translating the Bible into Kamula.

being unequivocally good in their new role as God's agents. *Banakaka* also still persist, with their more negative potentialities intact, as a separate group of somewhat marginal, but distinctly Godless, spirits.

Dali Patalo

Finally, the Kamula have also been involved in complex, often highly productive, relationships with bush-dwelling spirits known as *dali patalo*.[40] Hawo Kulu argued that since the Bible fails to make any mention of spirits that live in trees there was no need to refer to *dali patalo* in the Kamula version of the New Testament, and nor are *dali patalo* referred to in Church preaching. Hawo suggested this term can be used outside of the Church, but "only when you tell stories to little children" (pers. comm. August 2015).

My brief history of *dali patalo* starts with hunting—here positioned by me as prior to Christianity and capitalism. For many Kamula, good hunters can be created by social relationships with *dali patalo* who through their gifts to Kamula men were (and still are) able to transform an ordinary hunter into an astounding one. In some accounts the unseen *dali patalo* is understood to hunt alongside the Kamula hunter in the unseen side of the world while the Kamula hunter does the same in the seen world of humans.

Much later, with the creation of a new mode of production linked to the production of money via industrial logging, the *dali patalo* re-emerge as mimetic agents who, by the 1990s, could do their own logging in their own unseen world since they had acquired copies (*nasama*) of the equipment used in logging in the world visible to ordinary people. The unseen tree cutting undertaken by *dali patalo* partly defined what Walter Benjamin calls "a weakly utopian space of local control."[41] This control was not exercised by Kamula or other PNG national citizens, but by the *dali patalo* themselves. This was a distinctly political enchantment of the overt spaces of industrial logging controlled by Chinese management.

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[40] Jorgensen, "Whose Nature?" and Lindenbaum, "Fore Narratives" discuss other Melanesian bush spirits in ways that influenced my thinking for this paper.

[41] Benjamin, "Theses."

There were also indications that human and spirit logging were causally interrelated. The *dali patalo* lived in the large canopy-piercing trees that were favored commercial timber species. When a tree hosting bush spirits was cut down by human chainsaw operators the spirits became angry and retaliated by chopping down other trees to fall on the chainsaw operators, injuring or killing them. In some cases trees containing bush spirits were deliberately not cut down out of respect for the bush spirit inhabitants; this was occasionally disruptive of rational industrial logging. But post-logging *dali patalo* were also co-operative with Kamula (who must speak Kamula to the *dali patalo*) and would help them with money so that when you went to the store the money you gave to the storekeeper would actually come back into your pocket.[42]

A new valuable in the form of clean air emerged among the Kamula when for a brief period of time forest carbon credit schemes were being promoted as an investment option in the proposed Kamula Doso timber concession.[43] My discussions about this new form of wealth with Kamula primarily involved analysis of its political context, but one discussion I had with a senior Kamula involved him outlining how unpolluted air was primarily produced by canopy-piercing trees. Most of the trees he named were well known as trees where *dali patalo* resided. While his talk was highly idiosyncratic and there was no direct reference to bush spirits, there was a weak, indirect reference suggesting yet again that the *dali patalo* may have a role in new wealth production. The carbon schemes have collapsed, and as far as I am aware there has not been much further Kamula talk linking bush spirits, clean air and carbon credits.

This brief history not only highlights the *dali patalo*'s role in the production of valued things but also it highlights how these spirits define a common mode of incorporating into the Kamula's world the new, such as unusual capacities and novel valuable things. This is a process that, as we have seen, extends to other spiritual powers such as *aiyalma*. A distinct Kamula cosmology of the production of values is defined and enacted in these similar orientations to how desirable entities and attributes can be incorporated into the Kamula's domain. But these spirits

[42] See Wood, "Logging, Women and Submarines," for another set of narratives that emerged in the 1990s relating to strange people with powers analogous to bush spirits. The stories involved submarines and the then newly emerging drug and gun trade that helped restructure men's understanding of their capacities and powers.

[43] Filer and Wood, "Creation And Dissolution."

allow only limited Kamula access to such desirable things, further deferring full realization of the promise of modernity and development. By mapping elements of the post-colonial political economy into their own productive relationships with others (varieties of bush spirits), Kamula men redefine this new economy partially in terms of their own understandings of productivity and transformative power. The spirits emerge as both facilitator of the Kamula access to such power and as a distinct obstacle to the realization of the Kamula's desires for prosperity and development.

In addition, the wider capitalist order also encompasses the spirit's world. The result is that for many Kamula the spirits become linked to new forms of valuables and potential wealth as defined by forms of capital. Bush spirits continue to define sites of potential economic transformation while also defining the limits to the Kamula's possession and ownership of wealth. Nonetheless, from a Kamula perspective, the spirits have some potential to further successfully align the Kamula's world with capitalist wealth production. In the interim, while the Kamula wait for the possibilities of exclusive ownership of resources and proper development that the spirits might provide, the Kamula's protection of the spirits remains only slightly subversive of state and corporate rationalities. And in other contexts, especially those associated with state-regulated creation of property in timber and other natural resources, bush sprits were understood as extraneous to state and corporate processes of wealth creation and were typically deleted from any consideration or representation in the relevant legal and political processes.[44]

Conclusion

Despite such processes of disenchantment by state-authorized elites, my argument is that the Kamula's previously pagan spirits have been revalued and have taken on new tasks and projects. They have not disappeared. Despite the emergence of new regimes of commodified resource extraction (logging, gas, and carbon credits) there has been no complete demystification or secularization of the Kamula's landscape. Instead, Kamula spirits, as creatively redefined by the Kamula, have entered into productive relationships with different forms of capital and wealth. Other

[44] Ibid.

spirits have become more distinctly Christian as a result of work by Bible translators and Kamula pastors.

This means that the Kamula experience of spirits differs from the dominant European model, where the idea that spirits or "small gods" are in perpetual demise is crucial to modernity's recursive self-construction—a process that was analyzed by Weber as secularization.[45] In contrast to this account of the decline of the spirits, Kamula spirits have thrived in the new conditions, gaining new attributes and new relevance in specific contexts. What has occurred is a revaluation of attributes associated with spirits rather than just their decline as powerful or relevant entities. While some of these new definitions do involve radical shifts in the spirit's properties—as in the transformation of *banakaka* to angels—such Christian redefinition involves more than the creation of discontinuities with the past. Each reference to angels in the New Testament as *banakaka* is also an evocation of the *banakaka*'s pre-Christian meanings and practices. Equally biblical references to *aiyalma* and *bataliya* have the same capacity to re-animate these terms even if they, unlike *banakaka*, are used in the Bible in ways that continue to draw quite directly on these terms' complex and diffuse everyday meanings. Indeed, the survival of the *bataliya* is all but ensured by this Christian incorporation.

The spirits were not just defined by the totalizing discursive framework of a singular form of Christianity. Christianity in the region has never been a singular doctrine—rather, it has multiple origins and has taken a number of forms. I highlighted such differences by contrasting the SIL translators' practices and ideas to those of the APCM and ECPNG. In addition, there were significant differences between the APCM and ECPNG and between the practices of the local Kamula church at Wawoi Falls and the ECPNG church as a national body.

And finally, as indicated above, the definition of Kamula Christianity has been made more complex by forms of capitalist development that promise new kinds of personhood enacted by Moresby men. The possibilities exemplified by this kind of non-Christian person have redefined the power of Kamula Christianity, and to an extent restrict its more totalizing claims. As outlined above, an often sharply dualistic and

[45] See Ostling's Introduction to this volume, and Jenkins, "Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-enchantment."

exclusionary contrast has emerged between the Church and the moral things of heaven and the more secular immoral world of development.

Thus, contemporary Christianity and capitalism have jointly redefined spirits and humans among the Kamula: such redefinition was never just the church's work. Over the last 80 years, if not longer, the Kamula and their spirits have been linked to different valuables and forms of capital linked to natural resource extraction. As the spirits changed with new post-colonial developments and Christianity, so too did the definition of what a Kamula person could become. As outlined here, the definition of Kamula persons and the definition the spirits have continued to mutually inform each other. While both Christianity and capitalism demanded often radical redefinitions of the Kamula and their spirits, they also created spaces where the spirits and the Kamula could re-create and co-renew each other.

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CHAPTER 14

"Reconnecting to Everything": Fairies in Contemporary Paganism

Sabina Magliocco

Field Notes, July 7, 2001.
Reclaiming Witch Camp, Mendocino, California

This afternoon, when I was down in the creek doing our mandatory hour of meditation and writing in my field journal, I experienced something odd and amazing. A flash of turquoise-blue hovered next to my left ear for a second or two; when I turned my head to see it, it flew off backwards very quickly and disappeared. I thought at first it might be a reflection in my glasses, but I heard and felt the murmur of its rapid wingbeat. Was it a dragonfly? There are plenty of them down by the water. … A hummingbird, perhaps? They are usually green, not turquoise. Whatever it was, it came quite close to me and almost touched me, leaving me feeling excited and slightly in awe, as encounters with wildlife often do.

Tonight at dinner I recounted this experience to my table and asked whether anyone had any idea what kind of animal I had seen. Several people said they had experienced something similar, but to my great surprise attributed it not to wildlife, but to fairies. "What part of the creek were you in?" [a woman] asked. When I said I was just beyond the bend after the pool, she said that was a very fae place, and she had experienced fairies there. Another asked me, "Was it blue like the inside of a gas flame?" I explained it was an intense cyan blue. "That's it, that's exactly it," she replied. The consensus at table was that I had encountered a fairy.

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To date, no one has studied fairy legends among inhabitants of the United States, because the consensus was that they didn't exist. In the mid- to late twentieth century, a view prevailed among folklorists and anthropologists that fairy belief was vanishing even in marginal areas of Europe, and that it had never taken hold at all in North America. American folklorists such as Richard Dorson argued that fairies were "rooted in the soil" of the Old World; they were "too closely associated with the culture and geography of the Old Country to migrate."[1] With the exception of the Tooth Fairy, belief in which is limited to very young children, fairies were thought to be confined to literature and Disney films.[2]

Yet at the beginning of the twenty-first century, fairies are alive and well in the globalized North, including the United States. They abound in children's and young adult literature, from J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series to Holly Black's *Spiderwick Chronicles* and its many imitators. They also appear in animated films, such as the 2013 "Epic," based on the children's novel *Leaf Men and the Brave Good Bugs*, by William Joyce. In 2015, The *New York Times* noted the emergence of the glossy new *Faery Magazine*, touting it as a "gossamer pleasure"[3]; home and garden shops sell accoutrements to create miniature fairy landscapes; at least two large music festivals, Faerieworlds and FaerieCon, yearly attract thousands of attendees who dress in fairy costumes throughout the weekend; and participants in the Faerie-Human Relations Congress meet every summer in a primitive campground in upper Washington state to commune with these beings.

Nowhere is interest in fairies more intense than among practitioners of modern Paganisms. This diverse group of religions revive, reclaim, and experiment with elements of pre-Christian practice to create more satisfying relationships with nature, community, and the sacred. Modern Pagans perceive fairies through the eyes of nineteenth-century scholars

[1] Dorson, *American Folklore*, 36.

[2] In 1997, folklorist Peter Narvaez put paid to this opinion with the publication of his edited volume *The Good People*. The legends in these essays, mostly from Canada and Northern Europe, deal with fairy encounters in remote, wild places that lead to tragic consequences, including physical disfigurement, psychological disability, and even death. With the exception of Tad Tuleja's essay on the Tooth Fairy, however, none of these legends are set in the United States.

[3] Fortini, "Faery Fantasy."

who viewed them either as remnants of pre-Christian deities, or as spirits marginalized by the Christian hegemony. They are interested in fairies precisely because of their presumed link to an earlier worldview in which the cosmos was alive with energies, animated by spirit beings—in other words, enchanted and ensouled.

In European folk tradition, fairies were associated with witches and healers; a number of witch trial transcripts feature confessions in which the accused admitted to consorting with the Good People, and they were often identified as the source of gifts such as the healing touch, second sight and the ability to prophecy.[4] Fairies first entered modern Paganism through Gerald B. Gardner's *Witchcraft Today* (1954), a pseudo-ethnography that purported to present England's last living coven of witches as practitioners of an ancient, pre-Christian religion. Gardner drew from the racist, colonialist theories of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholars who attempted to explain fairy belief as folk memories of "primitive" people who had once inhabited Europe before the coming of the allegedly more advanced Indo-Europeans. He thought fairies were a folk memory of the inhabitants of the British Isles who preceded the Iron Age Celts. Hunters and foragers with an intimate knowledge of the land, they were pushed into marginal areas by more powerful agricultural invaders, with whom they maintained an ambivalent relationship, being potentially both good friends and bad enemies. They stole food, played tricks, and occasionally kidnapped babies, leaving one of their own in exchange, but they could also give beautifully crafted, useful gifts. "Witches consorted with them and they often intermarried and became the fairy kin in later legends."[5] Yet whereas "pygmy theories" of fairy origin inherently devalue the Good People, Gardner flips the valence: for him, both witches and fairies are sympathetic, positive characters whose ancient practices connect them to nature and the earth.

This positive connection between modern magical practitioners and fairies persists in Pagan and New Age traditions. Some modern Pagans see themselves as continuing pre-European magical practices; they actively seek relationships with fairies to acquire psychic gifts. A few

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[4] See, among others, Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf*; Ginsburg, *Ecstasies*; Hennigsen, "Ladies from Outside"; Wilby, *Cunning Folk* and *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*.

[5] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 59; 56–62 ff.

even refer to themselves as partly or entirely fairy; as one interviewee explained:

> Those of us who can be tuned into those levels, it's partly because we're fae … descendents. We're a portion fae, and those are the people in the human race who are psychic and who are witches and who are able to do shamanic healing.[6]

An ability to connect with fairies, consort with them, and incorporate them into practice is a mark of distinction for some Pagans; it is part of how they construct differential identities.

A number of traditions, or denominations, of modern Paganism claim to be based on fairy teachings, offering programs specifically designed to put practitioners in touch with the fairy realms to enhance their spiritual development. Among the best known is Victor and Cora Anderson's Feri Tradition, a form of witchcraft allegedly based on the earth-based magical systems of mother-goddess worshipping, small-statured, dark-skinned people throughout the world—like Gardner, Anderson was influenced by the racialized theories of early scholars who interpreted fairies as folk memories of indigenous peoples.[7] Other well-known traditions that claim fairy affiliation include R.J. Stewart's Faery Tradition, largely based on Scottish folklore, and its American offshoot, Orion Foxwood's Faery Teachings, supposedly based on Appalachian folklore; Morgan Daimler's Fairy Witchcraft, based on Irish folklore and literature; and the Radical Fairies, a form of queer spirituality inspired by indigenous traditions that recognize and value non-binary, non-heteronormative constructions of gender. This list is not exhaustive; many other Pagan traditions affiliate with fairies, and a number Pagans not associated with these traditions may also commune with fairies as part of their spiritual practice.[8]

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[6] Interview with Caroline Kenner, August 22, 2015. Throughout the text, quotes from qualitative survey responses will appear without citations; quotes from interview responses will be followed by a footnote citing the interviewee and date of the interview.

[7] Much of Anderson's lore was transmitted to his followers solely through oral tradition, though some teachings are preserved in Anderson and Anderson, *Heart of the Initiate*.

[8] Stewart, *Living World of Faery*; Daimler, *Fairy Witchcraft* and *Fairycraft*; Foxwood, *Faery Teachings*; Thompson et al., *Fire in Moonlight*.

The narratives I explore in this chapter are evidence of the rebirth of fairy lore in late modernity, both in its nations of origin and their former colonies. In the majority of cases, however, they are the result of a conscious and deliberate revival, filtered through literary and ethnographic portrayals of fairies, and romanticized because these narratives reflect a longing for an imagined past. Fairy belief provides us with an ideal test case to examine the process of belief revival. How does a belief complex go from vanishing to flourishing, albeit in a limited community? How does this revived tradition compare with earlier versions? What role do literature, popular culture, ritual, and the imagination play in this process? And what are the reasons for this new interest in fairy narratives and beliefs?

I argue that fairy narratives serve primarily to reenchant the natural world at a time of unprecedented ecological crisis. They animate and personalize it, creating emotional links between practitioners and places, plants, and animals. They are part of a body of imaginative responses to an environment in crisis that ascribe meaning to it, creating a participatory consciousness that may impel people toward more sustainable practices.[9]

Re-enchanting a disenchanted world requires imaginative work. Kataphatic practices—practices that rely on guided visualization, mental imagery and meditation that stimulates the senses—are the means by which Pagans move from disbelief into belief, making fairies and similar spirits real, even if temporarily. These practices, whether occurring in ritual or through more private religious practices, move narrative into experience; they make it possible for many practitioners to experience fairies and other supernatural beings as real. In other words, in the right context and with the right individual, kataphatic practices can lead to embodied experiences of spiritual beings.[10] These experiences are mediated by images of fairies from literature and film that reside in the autonomous imagination, a part of the human imaginal that operates without our conscious control.[11] These images are highly romanticized; like vampires, witches, and zombies, the fairies have been largely stripped of

[9] Taylor, "What If Religions Had Ecologies?" 131; Greenwood, *Anthropology of Magic*, 11 and ff.

[10] Cf. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 161, 168.

[11] Stephen and Herdt, *Religious Imagination*, 99.

their numinous qualities, and appear friendly: at worst mischievous tricksters, at best highly evolved spiritual guides who want to help humanity save the planet from destruction. In fact, were fairies still creatures of terror and awe, the process of belief revival, with its kataphatic practices designed to contact them, could not take place. The very fact that this represents a revived belief system demonstrates that these supernatural beings have on some level been tamed. The fairy revival thus ironically demonstrates its own limitations: Pagans work with fairy energies because the fairies have been stripped of most of their negative powers.

Data and Methods

My analysis is based on a mixed-methods study in which I examined print and online texts, administered a survey to over 500 respondents, and conducted ethnographic interviews in a community in which I have been a participant-observer for over 20 years. My sample consisted of English-speaking adults aged 18 and older predominantly from the United States. Canada, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia and New Zealand are also represented in my sample, albeit to a lesser extent. The survey was distributed through social networks frequented by modern Pagans, and thus represents a respondent-driven sample—in other words, those who responded had an interest in fairies to begin with. The majority of respondents (68%) were female; 26% were male and about 5% identified as transgendered or another gender. The age range was representative of a typical random population sample. The vast majority of respondents identified as being of European descent; this is reflected in the nature of their responses, most of which reproduce European notions about fairies. Not surprisingly, a preponderance of respondents identified as modern Pagans. Because Pagan religions are not exclusive, I also provided other choices, including the related designations of Witch or Wiccan, Heathen, Polytheist Reconstructionist and Druid. 15% of respondents said they were "spiritual but not religious," and a full 19% identified as "Other," although a close examination of these responses illustrate that most fit into one of the existing categories. My interviews represent a sample similar to that of the survey, with a more even gender balance. Interviewees were selected because they are members of the Pagan community with cultural knowledge and personal expertise on fairies.

Seventy-five percent of my sample believed fairies and similar beings could be real. While in European studies, fairy belief has generally been

associated with under-educated populations, the bulk of my respondents had at least completed college, and fully 46% held graduate or professional degrees. Clearly, among this religious subgroup, fairy belief is not the result of lack of education. In fact, 52% of respondents first learned about fairies through reading, and the bulk of their knowledge came from books rather than oral tradition or direct experience. 57% reported an experience with fairies, and another quarter thought they had experienced something that *might* have been a fairy. Given that the majority gained most of their information on fairies through literature, their experiences reflect the content, categories and expectations in their readings. How, then, are practitioners moving from literary notions of fairies to actual experiences? In addition to calling attention to the ways folklore collections and literature can influence tradition, these results reflect the complex relationships between cultural knowledge, experience, and belief.

Defining Fairies

While there is no single common definition of fairies among modern Pagans, Pagan authors agree that fairies belong to an order of beings who coexist with humans, but do not depend upon them. They live in realms parallel to, but separate from, those of human existence, but their realms are intertwined with ours, and influence spheres such as fertility, health, and luck.[12] The denizens of Faery include beings of many different types, with different forms and powers—some attractive in form, others frightening.[13] They clearly differ from both angels and demons, as well as ghosts, although there is some overlap between fairies and the dead.[14] Modern Pagans typically refer to them as fairies (also spelled "faeries"; "Faery" generally refers to their parallel otherworld), "the fae," and "the *sidhe*," using the Gaelic term for both burial mounds and the other-than-human creatures associated with them. According to Pagan author John Matthews, they are beings that occur cross-culturally and occupy a reality parallel to ours, occasionally overlapping with it. They have the ability to shape-shift, forming themselves according to our

[12] Foxwood, *Faery Teachings*, 16.

[13] Ibid., 21.

[14] Daimler, *Pagan Portals* (electronic resource).

stories about them.[15] While this is an emic cosmology broadly accepted in the movement, I propose that it is quite accurate: fairies, however we imagine them, have a knack for conforming to our cultural contours.

This diversity of definition is reflected in the free-write responses to my survey question, "What are fairies?" Answers included such varied examples as:

- Nature spirits
- Other-than-human persons
- Spirits that have never had a physical form
- Manifestations of the elements and nature
- The spiritual reflection of animals/insects
- Creatures from outside our normal reality who sometimes interact with us
- Spiritual layer of the material world, that we humans divide semantically and attribute to the divisions anthropomorphic, theriomorphic or other visual (in most cases) form, that lives life independent of our conscious will
- Beings that exist within and without our plane. …
- Hallucinations and/or externalizations of subjective experience.

These responses also reflect a variety of cosmologies, from what appears to be strict materialism to sophisticated understandings of the organization of the material and spiritual realms. Clearly, there is no uniformity of belief in this community—or indeed, in any human community.

Fairies and the Re-enchantment of Nature

Sociologist Max Weber pioneered the idea that the Enlightenment's privileging of rational thought stripped the world of a sense of wonder and enchantment that had pervaded it in earlier times, leading to a feeling of disconnection and separateness that allowed its exploitation. He called this the "disenchantment of the world."[16] Of course, this notion never completely penetrated Western discourse, especially on the vernacular

[15] Matthews, *The Sidhe* (electronic resource).

[16] Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsatze zur Religionssoziologie*, 564. Cited by Gibson, *Reenchanted World*, 9.

level. Nonetheless, the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first have seen the rise of counterdiscourses of enchantment, some rooted in earlier ideas of an enchanted universe that never completely disappeared.[17] Fairy narratives are among these counterdiscourses. They re-enchant the natural world and strive to create personal connections between narrators, audiences, and a sense of nature as animated and inspirited. This is evident in both vernacular and literary Pagan discourses.

When I asked subjects to categorize fairies among a taxonomy of types of spirits, the most frequently chosen category from among the options I offered was "nature spirits or spirits of place," selected by 85% of my sample. In a related question that asked where fairies are likely to be found, again, the plurality of responses indicated that they are regarded as denizens of nature. The narratives emerging from surveys, interviews, and existing literature tend to confirm this: in the preponderance of narratives, these beings are found outdoors and have a strong relationship to nature and place. When natural places are despoiled, however, the fairies depart.

> There were … nature fairies who lived along a quiet woodland stream with lilies of the valley, wild violets, ferns, jack-in-the-pulpit, and skunk cabbage. My older sister may have told me about them because she visited there too. One year one of the neighborhood boys got a hatchet for a gift and … cut down the trees and damaged the stream. After that, there were no more fairies.

> I was on a moorland at twilight approximately 4 years ago when I had my first and only experience … A dragonfly (or what I now believe to be a fairy) came flying over to me and landed on my shoulder and told me to look at what was around me and to appreciate the beautiful place I was in. It was like the world suddenly became much more beautiful and filled with light and I felt like I was able to see the very air particles filled with sunlight.

> Fairies are a metaphor for the unseen forces of nature. Like gods or goddesses, they are a poetic description, not sentient beings. The use of such terms adds beauty to language and experience, gives a name

[17] Gibson, *Reenchanted World*, 10–11.

> to indescribable feelings of wonder, awe, when confronted with the mysterious—unusual and surprising—workings of nature—…

In many narratives, the fae take on the role of custodians and protectors of nature and natural places, communicating to humans about the needs of the land and its denizens:

> I think they want to protect us sometimes, send us messages. They also want to let us be aware that we're part of nature and that we should protect nature. … They are to protect the land and human beings.[18]

In fairy literature by Pagan authors, the function of fairies as guardians and protectors of nature is much more explicit and developed. Orion Foxwood, in *The Faery Teachings*, argues that humans have separated themselves from the natural world, leaving them feeling disconnected and empty. "Working with the Faery tradition allows the human to reconnect with the land and basic principles of life and to glean visions of the inner pattern and workings of the natural world and where we, as humans, fit in."[19] In *The Sidhe: Wisdom from the Celtic Otherworld*, John Matthews recounts an encounter with a sidhe that takes place inside a fairy mound at an archaeological site. His contact explains that the sidhe have been living alongside humans since ancient times, watching them fight among themselves and destroy the earth. He tells Matthews a new age is about to dawn in which the sidhe will re-emerge, and humans must be prepared for the challenges it will bring. "You must seek to become reconnected to everything," he tells him.

But how are humans to reconnect with a disenchanted universe? Pagan fairy authors provide explicit instructions allegedly given them by their fairy contacts to achieve this enlightened state—a state that allows humans to perceive and interact with fairies, as well as with the inspirited world. These techniques involve practices designed to train the imagination to perceive the world differently, to bring about a more participatory state of consciousness.

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[18] Alfred Surenyan, interview, August 12, 2016.

[19] Foxwood, *Faery Teachings*, 37.

From Disbelief to Belief

Belief is shifting and ephemeral, varying over the lifetime of an individual, as well as within any community. It would be wrong to simply assert that modern Pagans believe in fairies. Belief means holding the possibility that something *could* be real or true.[20] It exists in a permanent subjunctive, referring to things that are by nature doubtful or contested, like much of the material in the wastebasket category of "the supernatural" in Western cultures. Like other forms of expressive culture, belief emerges in a specific context: in a ritual designed to call upon the fairies, by putting out offerings for the fairies, and in narratives (both first-person, or "memorates," and third-person, or "legends"). Narratives and behaviors are the vectors that communicate belief. There is, in addition, a playful element in the discourse of fairy belief: reenchanting the world by *imagining* its fairy denizens suggests a suspension of disbelief and a willingness to entertain the question, "What if?".

David Hufford distinguished between the standard social scientific approach to extraordinary or supernatural experiences, which he calls the "belief-centered hypothesis," and his experience-centered approach.[21] According to the belief-centered hypothesis, people experience fairies because they *believe* in fairies. Culture-based belief precedes the experience; in fact, it *causes* the experience. In contrast, Hufford argues that some supernatural beliefs arise from attempts to explain experiences. When I first began to investigate fairy belief among Pagans, I wanted to apply Hufford's experience-centered approach to the material. Yet while I did find evidence that a certain percentage of respondents had extraordinary experiences with fairies relatively unmediated by external sources,[22] those kinds of tales are the minority in my data set. The preponderance of data tells a different story, leading to questions about the processes through which belief can be revived and translated into experience, making it real to practitioners. Neither the belief-centered

[20] Needham, *Belief, Language, and Experience*; Dégh and Vázsonyi, "*Legend and Belief*," 287–288; Honko, "Memorates and the Study of Folk Belief," 10; Magliocco, "Beyond Belief," 8–10.

[21] Hufford, "Beings Without Bodies," 20–25.

[22] E.g., the "mara" experience or sleep paralysis, in which the oppressing entity is interpreted as a fairy: Hufford, *Terror That Comes in the Night*; see also Dudley and Goodare, "Outside In or Inside Out."

nor the experience-based approach is wholly effective in analyzing how modern Pagans move from a disenchanted world to one in which fairies are not just a possibility, but part of experience. The difficulty in applying the belief-centered hypothesis to modern Pagan fairy belief is that most Pagans did not grow up believing in fairies; they first learned about fairies by reading about them in books. While the majority—51%—report that most of their present-day knowledge of these other-than-human creatures continues to come from literature, a significant percentage—35%—claim that personal experience has played a significant role in their current understanding of fairies. Astoundingly, a large majority—75%—say they think fairies could be real. And a significant layer of the narrative material clearly points to an experiential component to fairy experiences. How are people moving from disbelief to experience and belief? What factors are causing this shift to occur?

Tanya Luhrmann asked a very similar question about Charismatic, Evangelical Christians: How do they create a sense of intimacy with an unseen presence in a religion that encourages adherents to form a personal relationship with Jesus, who is imagined as a friend, comforter, and confidante? Luhrmann discovered that kataphatic prayer, an imagination-based practice in which people visualize themselves participating in the landscape of scriptures, consistently led them to have a sense of Jesus's physical presence and emotional closeness in their lives. These adherents were also more likely to have unusual religious experiences, such as visions and auditory hallucinations.[23]

I argue that certain Pagan practices function in much the same way: they train the imagination to perceive visual and sensory images in ways that sharpen focus, increase the vividness of imaginary perceptions, and can lead to extraordinary experiences. I have argued elsewhere that the practice of magic in the context of Pagan religions trains the imagination and prepares practitioners to experience ecstasy in a ritual context.[24] Not all modern Paganisms involve magical practice, but most make use of visualization, either as part of ritual or in devotional practices directed at specific deities.

In traditional European folklore, fairies as supernatural beings existed entirely apart from organized religion: there were no official religious

[23] Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 243–250.

[24] Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 100–101.

rituals to interact with the fae, except to avoid them. Christian doctrine penalized interaction with such entities, which were interpreted as demonic. There were, however, a number of vernacular magic rituals whose purpose was to propitiate, seek the help of, or otherwise have congress with these beings, and historical documents suggest a number of people participated in them despite church sanctions. Modern Pagan practices are unique in intentionally incorporating relationships with the fae as part of religious practice. Nearly 56% of respondents said that fairies are important in their spiritual traditions, and slightly fewer—46%—work with them regularly as part of a spiritual practice. These range from leaving offerings for them (a practice that derives from folk custom and tradition) to recognizing and calling upon them in ritual space, as one might call upon ancestors and deities, to divinatory rites using decks of cards illustrated with fairies.

The Pagan fairy authors each give their own version of kataphatic practices aimed at helping humans to contact the faery realms, which they teach through workshops, books, websites and recordings. For example, R.J. Stewart's recordings lead listeners on a journey down a path into the side of a fairy mound, where they encounter and interact with a representative of the fae. Foxwood instructs readers to create a portal into the faery realms by imagining an opening in the ground in an attractive outdoor location, such as a back yard or park. They must visit the location regularly, leave offerings at the opening and visualize themselves interacting with it. Over time, it becomes a portal through which faery denizens will make themselves known to practitioners and communicate with them. Likewise, Matthews's *sidhe* interlocutor provides him with a symbol upon which he (and readers) can meditate and from which they can imagine communications from the faery realm emanating. A number of respondents report using these techniques to successfully perceive and communicate with fairies:

> I have had contact with fairy beings in the course of guided visualizations linked to R.J. Stewart's UnderWorld Tradition, Victor and Cora Anderson's Feri Tradition, and on my own initiative. These were acknowledgements of affiliation, connectedness, cousinship, and willingness to support to and fro.[25]

[25] Concerning the traditions referenced here, see Stewart, *Well of Light* and *Living World of Faery* and Anderson and Anderson, *Heart of the Initiate*.

Rituals also provide contexts in which modern Pagans imagine and experience the fae. Pagan rituals can be elaborate artistic productions, often involving costumes, music, drumming, chanting, dancing, guided visualizations, and participation from all who are present. These events transform ordinary backyards into enchanted landscapes with twinkling lights, softly chiming music playing from Bluetooth speakers hidden under draped altars, even reproductions of standing stone circles, creating an atmosphere that stimulates the imagination and encourages (some might say "produces") unusual experiences:

> I practice a faith that is steeped in the Faerie faith. My experiences with faeries [have] been in the context of my religious practice … during ritual at times of the year in which the Fae are most open to communication. My most memorable experience occurred at a mid-Summer ritual. … The Faeries that were present at that time, showed themselves as lightened creatures in the woodland brush around our ritual site. These presences were very close to us.
>
> The last time was at Litha [the summer solstice], when we specifically set out to honour the fairies at our covenstead. I got in touch with two specifically, who told me how they watch over everything in nature and tend to it.

In some cases, imagination alone is enough to bring about a shift in consciousness that leads to this sense of participation. One interviewee clearly describes the role of imagination in his increasing attunement to the fairies:

> When I was a kid, I used to actually pretend a lot of spirits were around … I pretended fairies were there. … Even though I've been already practicing Wicca for quite some time, around … 2000–2001, … I decided that, I'm going to grow my own little herb garden. … And as I was growing it, I started feeling the presence of fairies. And I started talking to them and I really felt like I wasn't pretending at that point. I really felt like I was talking to fairies; I would sit out there, have my morning coffee, and I would have conversations with them. It was just amazing, how it felt different then, it was [like] when I was a child. Upstairs in my bedroom, I was just laying [*sic*] there and I looked up into the field, and I really thought I saw them. … I really saw faces, little tiny faces smiling at me.[26]

[26] Alfred Surenyan, interview, August 12, 2015.

From these examples, we can hypothesize that the work of the imagination that takes place through kataphatic practices such as guided meditations, visualizations and ritual plays a very important role in shifting Pagans' perceptions, causing them to perceive an enchanted world in which experiences involving supernatural beings such as fairies not only occur but are expected. I am not suggesting that respondents are *fantasizing* these experiences. Rather, I argue that making believe, acting "as if," and exercising fantasy in a very particular way, through the regular use of visualizations and imagery, can lead to shifts in consciousness culminating in extraordinary experiences. Here, I see the imagination as particular *way of knowing* that privileges what anthropologists Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and more recently Susan Greenwood, call "participatory consciousness."[27] This form of consciousness operates poetically, emphasizing the interrelatedness of phenomena and the symbolic meaning of experience. It is, if you will, a more magical consciousness from which extraordinary experiences emerge. I would argue that it draws on what anthropologists Gilbert Herdt and Michele Stephen call the "autonomous imagination," a part of the human imagination that operates without conscious control to blend material from the cultural register with memories, sense perceptions, and symbols important to the individual to produce dreams, visions, and artistic inspiration.[28] In the case of the revival of fairy belief, it is important to understand material already in the cultural register and how it may color or condition the extraordinary experiences that emerge in both scripted and unscripted contexts.

The Taming of the Fairies

In European folk tradition, fairies, even when friendly, were always viewed as potentially dangerous. Crossing them could bring bad luck or illness; thus the safest course of action was to avoid them altogether. However, what is striking about all of these accounts is how friendly and eager for contact the fairies are. This did not happen by accident. The fact is that fairies never really disappeared from Western culture. Instead, they became part of a literary and visual tradition that led to

[27] Greenwood, *Anthropology of Magic*, 11 and ff.

[28] Stephen and Herdt, *Religious Imagination*.

revival of interest in fairies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.[29] Representations of fairies in Pagans' extraordinary experiences reflect fairy portrayals in literature, illustrations, and animated films. Paganisms have their own literature about fairies; authors tend to be systematizers, innovators, and interpreters in their own right, developing both practices to connect with these beings and cosmologies to explain their nature. They, in turn, draw from traditional literary and folkloristic texts: the sources they cite include W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, W.E. Evans-Wentz, E. Estyn Evans, Katherine Briggs, and English artist and illustrator Brian Froud, whose "faery" books, films, website, and associated products are an industry in their own right. In the process, like other supernatural creatures such as witches, vampires, werewolves, and zombies, fairies have become "tamed": while we still find them in wild and liminal places, they are no strangers to the urban jungle. More importantly, they have become less frightening, friendlier, and more like us.

One of the best examples of this type of narrative is the following story from Sacramento, California:

> My husband [and] I used to live near a small stream, over which was a 2-lane road. For several months, some cars passing over that stream would break down—an average of once-twice/week. And the distraught drivers would show up at our house asking to use the phone to call a tow truck or friend to pick them up. While they waited, they tended to dump their sad life stories and negativity all over our living room. Cost me a small fortune in smudge. After a few months, I'd had it, and gathered fresh garlic [and] asaphoetida to go exorcise whatever it was that lurked under the bridge. My husband requested that he have an opportunity to go talk to whatever-it-was and explain the situation to it before I hit it with the big guns. He spent some time sitting on the rocks down under the bridge, and told me later that he'd warned the troll to clear out or he'd sic his wife on it. That apparently did the trick, as no cars broke down on the bridge for the duration of our years in that house.

The motif of the troll living under a bridge and threatening anyone who passes comes from the folktale "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," first collected and published in Norway by Asbjørnsen and Moe in 1840. Since

[29] For an account of this process, see Hutton, "Making of Early Modern British Fairy Tradition" and Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden*, 158–283.

then, there have been numerous adaptations of the tale for children, ranging from story books to plays and even playground dioramas.[30] In the first published version of the tale, the troll is a frightening figure; he threatens to eat the billy goats who want to cross the bridge. However, as Lindow argues, each successive version of the story has further romanticized and tamed the monstrous troll, transforming him from a threat into a figure of humor. In this personal narrative, the narrator attributes to the bridge troll the power to make cars break down, sending distressed drivers to her door in search of assistance. However, the mere threat of a witch armed with garlic and asafetida is enough to make him flee in terror. The powerful, potentially cannibalistic supernatural figure of the original folktale is reduced here to a comical character whose real purpose is to highlight the alleged powers of the narrator.

In the next story, the narrator sets out an offering for the *sídhe*, but realizes she has unwittingly offended them:

> I made offerings at Drombeg Stone Circle in Cork, Ireland, on the summer solstice and made a terrible faux pas: I used a stainless steel butter knife to serve the butter to put on the stones. The knife was physically knocked out of my hand twice. I have apologized for this mistake several times at this point, but have been unable to return to the place with more suitable implements than the insulting cold iron.

Here, we see the notion that the fae are repelled by cold iron, which appears in a number of collections of fairy legends, put forth to explain why the narrator twice dropped a butter knife she used in making an offering. However, while in traditional legendry, this blunder might have caused the Fair Folk to blight the narrator in revenge, in this tale, it serves more as a vehicle for the narrator to poke gentle fun of herself. What was she thinking by using a stainless steel butter knife? She followed the text with the word "eyeroll" between asterisks, indicating her emotional affect was more one of impatience with herself than of fear of the *sídhe*.

Even when the fae are troublesome, the kind of tricks they play are, well, playful. The most frequent memorates of this kind involved house spirits such as brownies and hobgoblins who hide things and make machinery malfunction.

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[30] Lindow, *Trolls*, 69, 130–131.

> [W]e had a house Fae (hobgoblin) at our last residence. … He was fond of messing with the electronics to get our attention. One day, about 2 years ago …, the microwave stopped working. This microwave had never had any problems before. By all appearances, it was completely dead. … After trying mundane solutions to this issue—none of which worked—I realized that we hadn't fed the Fae recently. I put out a cup of milk and honey on the counter for him, and he immediately came to "drink" it. When I returned to the microwave about 10 min later, the display was back on and it was working perfectly as if nothing had ever happened to it, and it hasn't had any issues since.

> I experience faery every day. Faery is my spiritual path. I feel like I am part fae. I build houses for them, put out offerings and respect them for the power that they are. I never ask them for things except to please give back whatever it is they took this time. Most recently it was my glasses. I had been reading at the dining room table, I took my glasses off and set them on the table. I walked away for tea and when I came back my glasses were gone. I thought maybe I had mindlessly brought them to the tea kettle, so I looked. No glasses by the tea kettle, or by the cups, or in the cabinet where I keep the tea. I walked about the house saying things like, "Faeries, you are so much more clever than me. Smarter, too. May I please have my glasses back? Pretty please?" They were kind enough to put them back on the table next to my reading.

> A favorite prank was to "take" a newly prepared plate of food or [a] hot drink. Where to I have no Idea, but it would go like this. I would carry my plate of eggs and toast and my tea to the dining room table. I place them on the table, sit down, reach for something, … and my breakfast is suddenly gone. When this first happened I would search everywhere for it. But it would always turn up later, cold, exactly where I had placed it. After a while however, … I would close my eyes, and say "yes, very funny, you are so clever, please give my food back." Sometimes that would work and when I opened my eyes the food would be back. … Other times … they would only return it when I would get angry and start shouting obscenities at them. "Fuck you, you little shits, give me my fucking food or I am going to stomp on the lot of you!!!" That always got the food back, as that particular breed of Fairy wants to play more than upset people.

The final example is particularly striking in its difference from traditional attitudes toward fairies. In older legends, the Good People reward politeness; creatures who are offended by being called anything other than "good neighbors" or "seelie wights" would not stand for being sworn at. Times change, though, and so, apparently, do the fairies. There are very

few stories of malevolent or dangerous fae in my corpus of data. The widespread literature on fairies in which they appear cute, helpful, and at worst mischievous has strongly influenced the ways that Pagans—and in fact all Westerners—now perceive this category of being. It is these mediated sources rather than oral tradition that have the greatest influence on our modern constructions and interpretations of the fae.

When asked to recall a story about fairies, the preponderance of my sample chose one from literature, popular culture, or film; one of the most frequently chosen examples was Tinker Bell from J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, whether in her literary form or in her better-known Disney incarnation. The idea of fairies as small, winged creatures emerges in nineteenth-century literary portrayals aimed at children. These images have been extremely influential, giving rise to everything from Tinker Bell herself to the Cicely Marie Baker portrayals of "flower fairies" from the early twentieth century (reprinted in children's books from the 1970s onward), to illustrator Brian Froud's evocative images of fairies in books, tarot card decks, and dolls. They also surface in alleged photographs of fairies, from the notorious case of the Cottingley fairies, which took in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to more contemporary examples. The influence of these representations on popular tradition is immense, leading to a number of personal narratives in which people report seeing tiny, flying creatures they interpret as fairies:

> A few years ago I was … meditating one night with my back to a tree. I was feeling sad. I felt a playful presence as if someone wanted me to be happy again so I sang a cheerful song. Suddenly there were small shining winged beings dancing before my very eyes. I kept singing and I was filled with an emotional joy I cannot describe.
>
> Though very often, flashes of light much like fireflies but of variant colour [*sic*], are interpreted as being physical manifestations. Such manifestations have occurred since before I can remember. They occur mostly when relaxed, calm and generally but not always, outdoors.

One survey respondent even included a link to a website where he had posted photos of what he thought were fairies appearing as tiny winged beings.

Given the association of fairies with children's literature, it should not surprise us that numerous respondents and interviewees associated fairies

with their childhoods. Fairies often served as playmates and protectors—very different from the good people of legendry, who often stole children, leaving ugly, ravenous changelings in their stead.

> [When I was a little girl], there were the house fairies that slept in an invisible drawer in the wall next to my top-bunk bed. They were "my" fairies because they came out only for me to play on the folds of the blanket at bed time.

> I used to be able to see fairies when I was a child; this ability stopped when I hit puberty. I interacted with them on multiple occasions; we often just played together, and sometimes when I was very depressed (I was trapped in an abusive home) they would try to encourage me to persevere—they would say that I should not kill myself, because things would get better someday. …

By banishing fairies to the nursery, we transformed them from baby snatchers into baby sitters: ideal playmates who care for and comfort lonely children in difficult situations. Given that many adults in my sample grew up on these stories and experienced fairy playmates themselves, is it any wonder, then, that when confronted with dire environmental crises, they long for magical figures who offer wisdom and comfort, as well as a little bit of tough love? The guardians of the land, spirits of trees and plants, who people contemporary fairy legends and literature, are just such figures. They remind us of our responsibilities towards the earth, at the same time letting us know we are not alone in facing them. They re-enchant the landscape by personifying it, filling it with magic beyond that which already exists in the world of animals and plants. What's more, they stand in for us in their role of guardians: if the fae are guarding the planet, then perhaps there's hope for the future, after all.

In this chapter, I have argued that as fairies shifted from ambiguous and potentially terrifying figures of oral tradition to sympathetic literary and film characters largely aimed at children, they lost some of their frightening aspects and became tame, as did other supernatural characters in literature during the twentieth century. This taming of the fae transformed them into romantic figures of nostalgia: both for a pastoral or wooded preindustrial northern European landscape, and for childhood, a time we want to imagine we were protected and guided. In this form, they have been reclaimed by modern Pagans in the early twenty-first century as protectors of the land, nature spirits with whom

they can safely form relationships to enhance their spiritual development and reconnect to everything. Rather than conveying messages about the dangers of liminal places or punishments for violating the community's moral code, they help people with healing and spiritual quests, comfort and befriend children, playfully tease their human neighbors, and offer evidence of the mysterious, ensouled nature of the world, warning us of impending environmental destruction. Pagans use a variety of kataphatic techniques to communicate with the fae, and as a result, many have extraordinary experiences with them. These experiences help revive and sustain their belief in an enchanted world.

The case of the fairies among modern Pagans is useful in helping us understand how other communities conceptualize and interact with the supernatural. The fascination with the supernatural that pervades early twenty-first-century popular culture is largely possible because we live in a disenchanted world in which supernatural figures are officially perceived as fictional—even though a percentage of the population has experiences that support the maintenance of belief. As such, they are "tamed," or at most "feral," to borrow a metaphor from the biological world; they are and are not domesticated. Our visions of them are shaped by literature and popular culture, both of which interpenetrate our autonomous imaginations, shaping our experiences with them. Finally, through specific practices that involve applied uses of the imagination, we can increase the likelihood of experiencing the domesticated supernatural as "real," bringing about a re-enchantment of the world.

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CHAPTER 15

Afterword

Ronald Hutton

It is always an honor and a privilege, as well as a pleasure, to be asked to contribute some reflections on a collection of essays as important as this, which is virtually certain to move its subject forward into a new place. Like the most ambitious of its kind, it has a global reach and spans the two Christian millennia; indeed, it not only comes right up to the present in some contributions, but in that by Sabina Magliocco, nudges forward perceptibly into the future as well. Such a vast catchment area for material normally causes a loss of focus in a collection, which the editor can only remedy—if at all—by dividing the book into different facets. In this case, however, all the contributions really do reflect the same phenomenon: the manner in which Christian societies cope with a continued belief in lesser spirits that have no obvious place in orthodox Christian cosmology other than by being shoehorned into the polarized categories of the angelic and the demonic.

One obvious conclusion to be drawn from the result is that, across the world and across time, such an accommodation has taken different forms, matching the extremely varied function, reputation and importance of the spirits concerned; but Michael Ostling is able to make other and better suggestions from the data he has edited. His collection does indeed

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put its host of fairy-like beings back into history and culture; explore the way in which indigenous local folklores articulate with cosmopolitan Christian demonology; engage with discursive practices of reporting, labeling and contestation; demonstrate that the marginalization of "small gods" is enacted as a mode of imagining Christianity; recognize the paradoxical status of such entities, in that they are at once very long lived, and usually recorded as being on the edge of extinction at any one time; and show that their survival usually takes the form of an ambivalent demonization that uneasily recognizes that they pose no threat to the centrally valued tenets of the new religion. He also proposes an entirely convincing fivefold model of modes of survival of belief in such beings, on a spectrum from outright demonization to re-enchantment. All this I regard as sound, valuable and important. So what else might an interloper such as myself conclude from this collection?

One simple answer is the realization that, worldwide, small gods tend to be for small people, and small things. They are overwhelmingly part of the belief systems of the poorer, or at least more ordinary, members of society, and tend not to feature in those of the rich and powerful, or even, to a great extent, the urbanized, except as objects of study in the culture of other people. They also tend to have little or no relevance to the mainstream concerns of religion: with the fate of the soul, the place of humanity in the cosmos, or issues of obedience to divine law or the keeping of the general balance of nature. They are mixed up instead with the accidents and joys of daily life, which can be momentous enough for individuals—if, for example, a goblin blights your household, a puck leads you into a hole in which you break your leg, or a fairy purloins your baby—but not for society as a whole. Even more than saints, they are often accessible, and humble, enough to make productive relationships with them practicable for ordinary folk, or at least to make the aversion of hostile relationships relatively easy. All this provides another major reason for their near ubiquity and stubborn tendency to persist. They are local, accessible and relatively tractable, as far as generally disempowered humans are concerned.

The whole point about a collection as good as this one, however, is that it should enable a commentator to see a bit further into the subject, because it now supplies a place of vantage from which the terrain can be surveyed better than before; and that I shall now attempt. A starting point is provided by the dictum, prominent in Michael Ostling's introduction, that on the Christianization of a society "small gods" survive

while major deities disappear. This is apparently true across most of the globe, and in the extensive Baltic and Slavonic regions of Europe, and at the level of ordinary people in the remaining portions of that continent: in other words, in precisely those areas of concern with which this book is preoccupied, which entirely justifies Michael's use of it. It is also, however, spectacularly wrong with respect to elite culture across most of Europe, and this is the result of a historical accident: that in the period before Christianization, a knowledge of the art and literature of pagan Greece and Rome had become one of the main qualifications for acceptance into the elite of the Roman Empire. As a result, when Christianity arrived, respect for classical pagan culture was too deeply embedded to be discarded and remained a feature of European civilization in all ages until the present. The major Graeco-Roman deities may have been neutered by being deprived of their cults and temples and turned into allegorical, literary and artistic figures, but they remained major players in the European cultural imagination. Moreover, this process had a knock-on effect in parts of northern Europe such as Ireland and Iceland, where the classical example caused leading native pagan deities to be preserved as prominent figures in medieval literature. At the elite level, therefore, the opposite effect to that studied in this book occurred: the "small gods" (such as Lares and Penates) disappeared, while the larger, thanks to their impressive literary and artistic footprint, endured.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider what this meant in terms of Christianization. Two notable artists at either end of the early modern period of European history, Sandro Botticelli and Diego Velazquez, are both famed for painting pictures of the pagan Roman goddess Venus. So, are these works, to use the ringing phrase with which Michael ends his introduction, "Christian creations with which to think the limits of Christianity"? In one sense the reply must be a clear affirmative, for both artists were devout and orthodox Christians, of the Roman Catholic denomination, and operated within a society (and served clients) that shared that faith. On the other hand, they were emphatically not drawing on Christian tradition to create their pictures, but on both a set of associations linked to a pagan goddess and a pagan iconography that had been developed to portray her. Moreover, they were doing this in order to achieve a particular effect—to make a lifelike image of a gorgeous naked woman, and induce feelings not only of admiration but also potentially of desire and erotic arousal—for which Christian tradition not only provided no historic resources but also which it had often striven directly to

discourage. To describe these works as "pagan survivals" certainly seems inappropriate, confusing and obscuring too much of what is going on in them; but to put them indiscriminately and without any sense of difficulty into the general carton of Christian culture is to miss much of the point of them as well.

My issue here is that I sense that much of the same effect may attach to "small gods" as well, though it is harder to identify and document because we know less about how they were regarded in pagan times to compare with their status in the Christian period. It does seem, reading through the case studies in this collection, as well as taking into account the broader literature on fairy-like beings, that those beings survived in Christian culture because they usefully plugged gaps in Christianity, and did so the better in that they were ultimately products of an older and pre-Christian world. This is, of course, why—as Sabina Magliocco illustrates—modern Pagans often find them amenable figures with which to think—because they seem to represent, and to a great extent probably do represent, aspects of the ancient world that Christianity never quite managed either to obliterate or to digest. In many respects, modern Paganism consists of a checklist of such phenomena: ideas and images taken over by Christian societies from paganism but not entirely assimilated by the new faith, and so the more easily filtered out of it and recombined to develop a modern Pagan identity.

As Sabina has also pointed out, however, the fairies of modern Pagans are not those of the ancient world but very much those that feature in modern literary works. Here Michael's punchline that small gods are Christian creations has a particular force, because this collection opens a door to enable scholars to think harder about the way in which Christian societies have not merely preserved concepts of essentially non-Christian beings but actually developed them. I would draw attention to what I believe to be three examples of this effect, drawn from my own archipelago of the British Isles. The first concerns the medieval British fairies.[1] The Anglo-Saxons clearly believed in beings they called elves, and credited them with the ability to blight humans with ill health and fortune, but to whom they perhaps also attributed physical beauty and a willingness to aid favored humans. During the high Middle Ages this tradition was preserved, and around it a looser sense of similar beings of different

[1] For which see my "The Making of the Early Modern British Fairy Tradition."

kinds, similar to humans but not human and inhabiting the terrestrial world or a parallel one. The distinctive development of the later medieval period was that the English, Welsh and Lowland Scots (though not the Gaelic peoples) came to believe in an organized kingdom of such beings, with a king and queen, the latter often being more prominent. This new concept was linked to a change of terminology, by which the beings concerned became generally known as "fairies." The term was borrowed from high medieval romantic literature, along with the idea of the fairy kingdom, and seems to have permeated from elite culture through the whole of society by the fifteenth century. It remained a part of general culture throughout most of Britain through the early modern period. The early modern fairy tradition was therefore at once directly rooted in ancient Pagan beliefs and a late medieval creation.

Something similar, though at an earlier period, seems to have happened with another famous medieval tradition to which reference is made in the present book: that of humans, mainly women, who claimed to ride or fly at night in a retinue of usually female spirits, often led by a superhuman female with a name like Diana, Herodias, Holda or Percht.[2] At first sight this looks like a classic Pagan survival, but closer inspection reveals problems with such an easy (and hitherto generally drawn) conclusion. For one thing there is no known ancient Pagan deity who was associated with night journeys joined by living humans; not Hecate, or Diana, or Epona or the Matres or Matronae, all of whom have been suggested as superficially attractive candidates for the origin point of the medieval leader of the night journeys. For another, these night travels do not feature in any of the earlier medieval clerical denunciations of popular beliefs and customs, but appear in the ninth-century Rhineland, at least three centuries after the conversion of that region to Christianity. Moreover, it then had a distinctively medieval trajectory of wax and wane, being apparently confined to the Rhineland until the twelfth century, from which it spread to cover most of Western Europe during the high Middle Ages. After that it contracted, and split into three distinctive regional traditions that endured until modern times: a German one in which the night rides have a leader and humans do not join them; an Alpine one in which the rides have no leader and humans join them; and an Italian one in which they have a leader and humans join them.

[2] For what follows, see the fifth chapter of my forthcoming book, *The Witch*.

Whatever its source, therefore, this was a flourishing and widespread medieval popular belief system, which engulfed a large area of Europe without any discernible elite input at all or any contact with orthodox Christian thought.

My last example is peculiar to the Gaelic areas of the British Isles, Ireland, Man, the Hebrides and parts of the Scottish Highlands, and focuses on the figure of the Cailleach. She is a major character across this cultural region, as a mighty and venerable superhuman female closely associated with striking features of the land: in this respect, apparently a classic Earth goddess. She features as such, however, only in its modern folklore.[3] There is a female character in a medieval text who occupies the same physical location as one of the later stories of the Cailleach, Bui of Beare, but she has otherwise nothing in common with her and there is no other reason to associate the two of them. This matters because Ireland has one of the richest vernacular medieval literatures in the world, which makes copious mention of superhuman beings, some of whom are clearly former Pagan deities. Indeed, it has a whole subdivision, the metrical and prose Dindshenchas, which are texts devoted to explaining placenames, especially those attached to prominent natural features of the sort subsequently associated with the Cailleach; but she is not there. Irish medieval stories abound with powerful and aggressive superhuman females whom one would suppose even less palatable to orthodox medieval Christian taste than the Cailleach, such as the Morrigan, Babh and Nemain, so her absence cannot plausibly be accounted for in terms of repugnance on the part of the authors. The economical explanation for the anomaly is that she evolved as a major folkloric figure subsequent to the medieval period, among commoners and by word of mouth.

Michael Ostling's tag of "Christian creations" may therefore be seen to have even greater force in these cases, which the quality of this collection enables us now to see with greater clarity than before. They seem to indicate that Christian Europeans were not merely capable of retaining and developing belief in non-human beings rooted in a pre-Christian past and with no obvious relevance to a Christian cosmos, but of imagining—or discovering—new kinds of being of a similar sort. It

[3] For the folklore, see *inter alia*, MacKenzie, *Scottish Folklore*; and Ó Crualaoich, *Book of the Cailleach*.

may be questioned, indeed, whether the leader of the nocturnal bands, the Cailleach and even the fairy queen could really be described as "small gods": they seem rather *large*. It may be of significance in addition that all three seem to relate to an attraction to the divine, or semi-divine, feminine. I do, however, have a persisting unease about the religious labeling that can be attached to them.

Over a quarter of a century ago, I adopted the expression "Pagan survivals" to describe elements of ancient Pagan culture that had persisted in later Christian societies.[4] In doing so, I was drawing a distinction between such survivals, of which there seemed to be many, and "surviving Paganism"; that is the continued self-conscious practice of the older religions, of which there seemed to be none. This point was worth making because even in the 1980s, there was a persisting belief, based on outdated academic texts, that Paganism had survived as a living force among the common people in much of medieval Europe: it was widespread in other scholarly disciplines than history, let alone among the general public. My formula and approach was adopted by other authors in the 1990s.[5] During that decade, however, a reaction set in against it among historians who preferred to stress the comprehensive Christianization of medieval European societies and to relegate elements that had hitherto been identified as of pagan origin to categories of religiously neutral folklore or of lay Christianity. Some emphasized that the undoubted tendency of some Christians at the time to condemn such beliefs and practices as pagan was a hallmark of a highly atypical, reforming, intolerant and evangelical strain of churchman.[6]

Michael's system of classification, in this volume, may be said to take its place in this, apparently now dominant, set of scholarly attitudes. Revisiting the issue myself, I am inclined to meet it halfway. I am starting to agree that to speak of aspects of medieval culture as "Pagan" might indeed be misleading and inadequate. Moreover, it would be especially inappropriate to characterize figures such as the lady of the night rides, the fairy queen or the Cailleach as "Pagan survivals" when they seem like medieval or post-medieval creations. However, I have equal difficulty in

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[4] In my *Pagan Religions*, 284–330.

[5] Notably in the collection edited by Ludo Milis, *Pagan Middle Ages*.

[6] E.g., Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 283; Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 140; Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, 76–106; Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, 176–77; Marrone, *A History of Science*, 35.

describing them simply and straightforwardly as "Christian" because of their total lack of reference to any aspect of Christianity, including theology, cosmology, scripture and liturgy; all of them would indeed fit far more comfortably into a Pagan world-picture. This problem links up with that outlined earlier, in treating the Venuses of Botticelli and Velazquez as "Christian creations." It may be that the old polarized labels are becoming inadequate to describe a medieval and early modern religious and quasi-religious world that is coming to seem even more complex, exciting and interesting than it had seemed to be before. That such a perception is possible, however, is due in part to the gifts of this splendid collection, upon which Michael and his contributors are warmly to be congratulated.

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