CHAPTER 11

Small Gods, Small Demons: Remnants of an Archaic Fairy Cult in Central and South-Eastern Europe

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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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M. Ostling (ed.), *Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits*,
Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58520-2_11

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).

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[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 Băcau, 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,

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[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

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[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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