

Literature

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TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND NARRATIVES OF A CONTEMPORARY IRISH TRADITION BEARER

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Belief in the supernatural has been an integral part of the world view of the Irish people over many centuries. Irish literature from the early Christian period offers testimony to the existence of such belief in ancient times¹ and thus also to its antiquity since much of its content clearly predates the Christian era in Ireland. Irish and Anglo-Irish literature² also bears witness to the continuation of such belief in Ireland down the centuries and into modern times. But it is modern folk belief and the large body of oral tradition collected over the last hundred years³ in Ireland which documents in the most comprehensive and intimate way the persistence of belief in the supernatural, as well as the very richness and the variety of its expression and its continuing importance in the lives of the people who share its precepts. The widespread distribution of the belief in the supernatural in Ireland in modern times⁴ is a clear indication that belief in the supernatural has been a common property of the Irish people over the many centuries. Even today such belief has retained its position as an active element in the thoughts and habits of some people, in the *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking) and *Galltacht* (English-speaking) areas of Ireland, and among active

as well as passive bearers of tradition.

Since the Irish imagination has had for centuries full play in conjuring up a supernatural world close to the human world including a wide variety of supernatural beings whose activities often brought them into contact with human beings, it is not surprising that the mythological tradition in Ireland is wonderfully rich and varied. Although categorisation of this abundant material is not without difficulties and uncertainties, nevertheless, thanks to it, has been possible to establish categories of supernatural beings and phenomena which have a basis in the folk philosophy in Ireland,⁵ as well as patterns of belief and also supernatural tale and legend types. Firm belief in the supernatural due to its enduring personal and social relevance has clearly been a key factor in its persistence down the centuries; nevertheless in Ireland, as no doubt elsewhere, individual attitudes to the various reflexes of the mythological tradition undoubtedly differed and changed over time and in space. Here we will consider the responses of one individual – a modern Irish tradition bearer – to traditional beliefs about the supernatural. The tradition orientation and narrative tendencies of the tradition bearer in question have already been dealt with in some detail in previous articles,⁶ therefore I will confine myself to a summary of her background.

Mrs. McGlynn, a housewife and mother in her early fifties, was born into a working class family in a small town in the midlands of Ireland – an area, like many another in the province of Leinster, which could not be intensively covered by the Irish Folklore Commission's collecting activities because of its limited financial resources.⁷ Apart from a few years spent away from the town in her early childhood she has lived all her life there. She is thus a product of an English-language environment and cultural milieu and is, therefore, an exponent of folk traditions learned and transmitted through the medium of the English language in Ireland. But, as we shall see, her traditions, though possessing strong local colouring, are part of the common stock of mythological traditions known throughout Ireland and even further afield.

This tradition bearer's attitudes to folklore, her choice of repertoire themes and her interpretations of traditional motifs have largely been influenced and determined by the tradition area in which she spent her formative years and also by the experience of her later married life. Prior to her marriage in 1961 at the age of twenty-two years, she has live virtually all the time in the family home in the town with her maternal grandmother. From her, as well as from her parents, and neighbours who regularly visited the house at night, she learned much supernatural lore.

In the storytelling environment of her new home after marriage she added considerably to her repertoire of supernatural lore and became an active bearer

of tradition. From her mother- and father-in-law, as well as from the men who regularly gathered in the house at night, she learned much supernatural lore concentrated in the landscape, particularly in relation to ghosts and the fairy world.

In a tradition environment conducive to storytelling and in which supernatural lore had a prominent place, it is not so surprising that the mythological tradition should become a repertoire dominant for Jenny. In the years after her marriage when – despite her youth – she gradually became an active bearer of tradition and performed for discerning adult audiences who gathered in the house at night, she was considered an expert performer of her preferred genre – ghost lore.

Although most of that lore was garnered from the collective local repertoire, personal experiences of her own, especially in relation to the banshee and other omens of death, have also contributed to her store of mythological lore. These omens, together with her beliefs and legends about the return of the dead, the devil, the fairy world, and other supernatural phenomena, will be dealt with in this essay.

Death Omens

There is a wide variety of death omens of Irish tradition and although no formal classification of them has yet been made they appear to fall fairly naturally into certain categories according to formal type and content and the nature of the sign considered significant. There are, for example, ominous dreams, visions and smells, observations of supernatural beings or objects, deceased people, one's own fetch, birds etc., or a combination of any of these⁸. A common death omen is the fetch or wraith and in the following narrative Jenny recalls her mother's personal experience of that particular death signal:

Well, my mother was washing one day at the back window of the cottage at home and a distant cousin of hers used to stop [i.e. stay] with her and she saw him coming up the garden and she was waiting for him to come in and he didn't come. So she went out to see where he was and there was no sign of him anywhere. And, she thought, maybe then she was only imagining it and that night when she went to get his bed ready for him word came that he had been found dead where he'd gone off for a walk across the roads. He was found dead: he died, and he came back to her to let her know that he was going. She believes that.⁹

Her own earliest recollection of experiencing a death premonition was at the decease of a neighbour. She and her mother-in-law heard the sounds of the 'phantom death-coach' as they say by the kitchen fire late one night. She heard

it again subsequently at the death of her cousin in England. She describes that occurrence of the omen as follows:

I was up sitting one night reading and Gus [i.e. her brother-in-law] was in bed and there was this sudden gush of wind – it burst in the door – but I jumped up as fast as I could and put the bolt on so that it wouldn't knock anything over, and the next thing, I could hear the clip-clop of the horses. The hair started to stand up on the back of my neck – I was in an awful state with fear. Gus woke up – he heard the noise too. And he came out. And he got weak because he'd heard it before. And he said, 'that's the Dead Coach and we're going to hear news of somebody dying now.' And I think it was a fortnight after a cousin of mine died in England... Tom Conroy...¹⁰

She also believes that she received a foreboding of the death of her mother-in-law with whom she had a close personal relationship, and from whom she learned much supernatural tradition. Her personal narrative describes the significant event which occurred as she lay in her hospital bed:

When my mother-in-law died I was in hospital. It was April, the 1st of April, and I was in hospital on the birth of the last child, and got word earlier in the day that she wasn't too well. I wasn't told that she was bad, or she was dying, but that she wasn't too well. And I was after getting sleeping tablets from the nurse. About half past eleven or a quarter to twelve, an awful blast of wind came and it opened up the windows – you know the windows in the hospital that open down, the small little windows, they open down? It fell in, and the curtain went right up to the roof and the next morning I got the nurse to phone up the hospital, you know – 'I'd like to find out how the mother-in-law was', and she had died at the time that the blast of wind came to me... Probably it was because I was thinking of her, but I thought I saw her at the foot of me bed after the blast of wind. I had to call the nurses and everything. I really was upset over it and ... she had died that exact time that I thought she was there with the blast of wind. It definitely happened to me.¹¹

Some of her most dramatic personal experience narratives spring from her continuing deep and firm belief in the banshee, an Irish female supernatural death-messenger popularly believed to forebode death in certain Irish families. She ranks as one of the best exponents of this widespread belief and claims to have both heard and seen the banshee, prior to a number of deaths in her own, as well as in neighbouring families. Her belief statements, memorates and legends centering on the banshee have been referred to *in extenso* elsewhere; here we will give only her description of the cry of the supernatural death-messen-

ger – a motif of fundamental importance in the complex of beliefs about the banshee. Elaborating on her description of the cry as ‘a terrible weird wall’ and her reaction to it, she says:

Oh, the dogs kick up an awful racket and if there are any dogs on the street when she is around, they are around her, and they are barking, and she’s wailing.. People would say it is a dog howling, but there’s a big difference in the sound. You can actually make out the sound of it. It’s like a desperate human cry, as if someone was in terrible stress, and ... screaming for ... someone to come to them. And that’s the sound it has...¹²

Well, when I heard it first, I had very cold sensation all over me, it was like there was death near me; now I can’t describe exactly how I felt but it’s a terrible sensation. You’d feel cold all over and you’d get a chill going through you when you’d hear the ... the roar first. You’d imagine then there was somebody going to call for help any minute. You’d be just waiting for that cry for help with the roar...¹³

The Returning Dead

Our storyteller is a firm believer in the Catholic doctrine of the after-life. Yet she also subscribes to the widespread a-Christian notions about the dead in Irish Tradition including the belief that the dead can – and do – return. She states: *I do believe the dead can come back, without a doubt... I do believe in ghosts... ghosts are the dead; some are good and some are evil...*¹⁴ Even though she rationalises the return of the dead in some of her ‘purgatorial narratives’, in terms of punishment for contravention of the will of God, and also points to an enigmatic biblical passage which refers to the resurrection and appearance of the dead after the death and resurrection of Christ, as an overall validation for her belief in ghosts and spirits, nevertheless her belief is essentially based mainly on received secular folk traditions.

The belief statements and narratives in which she expresses her belief in the returning dead recount many personal experiences of family members. Given her professed (and locally acknowledged) propensity to experience and identify the supernatural – as discussed in the previous section – it may be considered surprising that her belief in the returning dead is not based also on personal experiences of her own. Some reasons why this is not so may be put forward here. Sightings as well as physical encounters between the living and the dead are significant elements in traditions about the return of the dead in Irish tradition.¹⁵ However, her special power in relation to the supernatural – according to her own estimation, and something which also her narratives re-

flect – is her ability to perceive and interpret supernatural sounds rather than to see or otherwise physically interact with supernatural beings or forces. She states: *Some people are born to hear and see; other people can't hear or see anything... I've heard things – I've never actually seen anything, but I've heard...*¹⁶ Thus in view of her auditive capabilities in relation to the supernatural, it is understandable that she might lack personal experience narratives about the returning dead which involve visualisation of, or encounters with, such supernatural beings.

Another reason – though less important than the previous one – why Jenny lacks personal experience narratives about the returning dead relates to the fusing of beliefs about the fairies and the dead in Irish tradition. For a tradition bearer like Jenny who tends to evaluate critically all aspects of experiences described as supernatural before subscribing to them, supernatural events may well remain at the *numen*¹⁷ stage for a long period of time. This is clearly illustrated in the following personal narrative; several decades after the event which she considers supernormal she is still reluctant to ascribe her experience to the returning dead – despite the interpretation to that effect by her mother-in-law whom she respected as a bearer and sharer of supernatural traditions:

*...And another night before my mother-in-law went to bed, I was sitting reading, and she said, 'do you want to go to bed now, Jenny, before midnight and leave the kitchen to the dead? They do ramble,' she said. So I got carried away reading ... and the time went by and Tom called me and he said: 'It's time you were in bed now,' I stood up to go across to the room and I was just at the room door when the frying pan hit me on the back of the legs. My mother-in-law had left it up against the hob for convenience for the morning. And it hit me on the back of the legs going out the back room... And there was nobody, but no-one in the kitchen, only me at the time. So I had been disturbing somebody that wanted to sit down.*¹⁸

We have already stated that our tradition bearer's beliefs concerning the dead are based on received folk tradition as well as on the teaching of the Catholic Church. She thus shares many of the ancient and persistent notions about the dead which are characteristic of Irish folk tradition. One of these concerns the ubiquity of the dead. Although particular locations on both the domestic and the wild landscape such as hills, rocks, ringforts, cemeteries, islands etc., were, and perhaps still are, considered the specific abodes or kingdoms of the dead, nevertheless, another parallel notion is that the otherworld of the dead is coextensive with the human world. Consequently, the dead may be everywhere and anywhere, in particular places or wandering about on the landscape. A favoured location was near the family home; thus it was neces-

sary according to tradition to shout a warning (*seachain*: ‘beware!’) when throwing out water at night, or as she says, such water should be ‘poured away’ on the ground. The vicinity of the house may also be the particularised abode – perhaps a purgatorial one – of the dead. The following is Jenny’s version of a legend told elsewhere in Ireland, which illustrates this point:

Well, an uncle of mine used to come up to play cards in Mammy’s and bring a few of his companions. It’s a long time ago – it was during the last war. And every night when he’d be coming in one of the men would say, ‘I wonder who that man is at the gate?’ I always say ‘good night’ to him and he never answers. So me uncle got fed up of them saying it and he said he’d have a man there one of these nights. And it was a moonlight night and he went out and he stood at the gate exactly where Paddy had said the man was standing. And Paddy came up anyway and he was coming through the gate and he says, ‘good evening to you both’... Me uncle had to be brought in unconscious! He got weak with the fright of Paddy saying ‘good evening to ye both’. There seemingly was somebody [else] at the gate and that’s up the Manor. The gate is still there.¹⁹

It is also widely believed that the dead might return to life haunts. Stories are told of dead people seen after death in places where they had worked or spent their lives – like the landowner in the following legend who continued to guard his property after death:

Well, he was very fond of his land ... and he was so possessive of it that no-one could even walk on it. One of the boys said that when he was gone they would do this that, or the other. And he said ‘dead or alive I’ll be on the land’. And he has been seen by many people since he died and he’s about forty years dead now.²⁰

It is perhaps an almost universal belief that the grey and dark hours – twilight and night-time – are the preserve of otherworld beings. These were the manifestation times *par préférence* for ghosts and spirits. Any infringement of that right by humans was believed to be resented, and the indignation of the supranormal beings was often conveyed directly by them to the offending humans by means of the familiar admonitory formula: ‘the day is for the living and the night is for the dead’.²¹ Thus human in the open at night, particularly towards the midnight hour, ran the risk of encountering the dead – sometimes, it must be said, to the advantage of the latter, as we shall see presently. The following narrative which purports to describe the personal experience of the tradition bearers’ father-in-law, incorporates these beliefs and ideas:

... my father-in-law, the Lord have mercy on him, he was very young and they had no fire. And him and his neighbour, they used to

go into the farmer's field. And there was this particular brang (branch) leaning right over a laneway and the father-in-law was afraid to cut it down because it would be too obvious that it was after being taken. But the other man, he was so desperate for a fire, he said he'd get it. So he was up on the brang – and the father-in-law was across the field – and he was up on the brang leaning over the road and a man came along and he says, 'the night is for the dead and day is for the living, go home!' Now, of course, the man got a bit frightened; he did go home and the father-in-law and him went the next night again and he said they were going to try and take that bough no matter who was there. The father-in-law said he'd wait with him. The man was up on the tree – 'here's your man again', he says and the father-in-law only heard the voice saying 'the night is for the dead. And don't have me to tell you for the third time, or you'll be out every night'.

Adding that they were afraid to go back the third night, she continued: *Those were the words that were used; for there is such a thing as people wandering the streets at night, perhaps for penance or something like that.*²²

The penitential dead as a category of the returning dead figure largely in Irish folk belief. These restless earthbound dead may be subject to specific periods, as well as types of punishment and, as the innocent dead, may be released by human intervention. The release is effected by human assistance given on their request to the dead. The human help sought by the dead varies; in our tradition bearer's narratives what is required by them are prayers and assistance to complete or carry out a task for which payment had been received prior to death. In fact a cycle of legends has grown up around the idea that the 'innocent' dead need human assistance to bring about a final release from their earthbound purgatory. A number of these legends have in common a dialogue between the living and the returned dead, almost a *sine qua non* of the legend type. The human person makes contact with, or indeed forces the dead person to speak, by using the traditionally prescribed formula consisting of a pious invocation in the form of a question: *In ainm Dé cad atá ag cur isteach ort?* ('In the name of God what is troubling you?') The dead person can then communicate his circumstances and need to the human, and on being assisted, vanishes.

One of our tradition bearer's narratives conforms almost completely to this pattern. Relating it as a personal experience of her grandfather's she says:

He used to work on the bog late at night saving the bit of turf for the winter. And every night for a week there was a man walking behind the back of the car. He wouldn't speak to him. My grandfather was a very friendly type of a person, he spoke to everyone. And he

was getting nervous of the man walking behind him, so after a week he stopped the car and said: 'In the name of God, man, if you're alive speak to me, but if you are dead, will you go to Heaven!' And then a voice came – but it wasn't the man's voice because he said he didn't see the man's mouth moving – and said, 'I've been waiting for someone to tell me where to go' and then he vanished. Shortly after that my grandfather died.²³

The belief that a person who died without having fulfilled his earthly obligations would return is firmly rooted in the collective tradition. Still earth-bound because of human affairs he is destined to be restless until he himself fulfils his obligations with human assistance or until they are performed for him by a human person. The following two narratives involving Catholic priests illustrate this belief. In the first, the cause of the priest's restlessness is a unfinished grotto to the Virgin Mary for which he had collected money prior to his death:

I heard tell of a priest coming back; he was to have a grotto built and had collected money for it. And he was supposed to have come back to see that it was done. And they had a special Mass and procession and all at the opening of it. And the priest hasn't been heard tell of since. He was supposed to have come back, to have definitely come back to get the grotto built and it has been done.²⁴

The second narrative is a variant of a legend, well-known in Ireland, of the dead priest who returns to celebrate a Mass he had promised someone before he died. He cannot celebrate the Mass, however, without the assistance of a human to serve the Mass and thereby witness the fulfilment of the priest's pre-death promise.

In the more usual versions of this legend a woman is inadvertently locked into the church at night, and on being awakened by the sudden illumination of the church at the midnight hour, sees a priest fully vested for Mass, coming from the sacristy into the altar. He faces into the body of the Church and asks 'is there anyone there who will serve my Mass?' The woman becomes frightened, leaves the church in the morning and reports the experience to the parish priest. He accompanies her to the church on the following night and when the dead priest re-appears, and asks – often three times – for a server the parish priest replies that he will serve the Mass. At the end of the Mass he asks the dead priest why he has returned and he replies that he could not enter heaven until he had fulfilled his obligation to say a Mass for which he had been paid. He then vanishes. The following is our tradition bearer's version:

That happened here in Mountmellick, in the old graveyard up in Chapel Street. The men used to sit out, years ago, on the bridge play-

ing cards and having sing-songs and things like that. And my father-in-law was one of the men that was up at the bridge one night and they could hear a chant. And the louder the chant got, the more nervous they got. And they went away terrified. The next morning the father-in-law and a neighbour went down to the priest and told the priest what happened... 'Why didn't you go and serve the Mass?' he said, 'you are putting an awful lot of trouble on me now.' And they had to go back up the following night for to say the Mass with the priest...'²⁵

The Dead return To Give Help

As well as accounts of the dead who return to seek help of one kind or another from the living, there are also many stories told of dead persons appearing to give help or advice or indeed a warning to the living. Our tradition bearer has a few narratives of this nature. One tells of the friendly return of a dead mother to care for her children, a legend rarely noted from Irish oral tradition to date.

Yes. I heard tell of a story about four children – they were between the ages of a month and five years old. And the father had to work to keep going, to keep the house going and keep the children fed. And he couldn't get over how the children were able to manage, have the house clean and the fire lit and a meal ready for him every evening. So, he asked the eldest girl one night, how did she do it? They were sitting in the dark with the fire lighting and the meal cooked. And they said that they didn't do it, that Mammy had been there with them; she had been with them for two or three years before he realised that she had been there. She definitely was there helping them, because they were too small to be left on their own.'²⁶

Another legend reiterates the importance generally attached by people to the reception of the Last Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Penance, before death, by expressing the common belief that even the dead may return to procure the services of a priest for a dying human relative. Our tradition bearer's narrative tells how a dead mother brought the priest to her dying son in prison. After the priest had collected the Blessed Sacrament from the church

... he went down with the woman and she went ahead of him. When they came up near the gates, she opened the gates for the priest to get in and brought him to the cell. And after hearing the prisoner's confession and giving him the last rites he asked who was the young woman that was after bringing the priest to him. He described the woman to the man and he says 'That was my mother; she died 20

years ago.' So the mother had come to save her son, to give him the chance of the last rites.²⁷

Since people tended to delay the administration of the Last Sacraments until the person was already *in extremis*, the fear that he would actually die without receiving them was ever present. A variety of legends in Irish tradition – many portraying the Devil as the central evil character and enemy of the dying – reflect this anxiety and will be dealt with later.

That the dead man may come back to give advice or perhaps a warning to relatives to change their ways, is the theme of the following legend:

I remember a man telling me a story about some person that wasn't leading a good life. They had lost a daughter And they were all very cruel people, everything for themselves. Even if they had to beg, borrow or steal it, they'd take it and they had plenty. And they were very hard people. And one of the daughters died and the father continued with his evil way. And she came back and left the imprint of her hand at the foot of his bed in case he might think it was a dream. She came back and told him to change his way, that once in her life she had given charity and that piece of charity was coming between her and the deepest flame in hell.²⁸

The Malevolent Dead

Evil spirits figure prominently in the Irish supernatural beliefs. The causes of their evil disposition were not always known but they were regarded as suffering everlasting punishment for some heinous crime – hence their malice towards humans who encountered them late at night. Some of them are closely identified with particular places in the landscape from which they have derived their names. They could appear in male or female form or as various animals or birds. They could be restrained or banished by a variety of means but the priest's power was considered especially efficacious against them. It was believed that he could banish them to some narrow confine, or condemn them to a never-ending task such as placing a *gad um ghainimh*, ('a rope around sand'). The following two legends involving encounters with evil spirits in zoomorphic forms illustrate many of these motifs. In the first one the evil spirit appears in the form of a turkey. Irish folklore reveals ambivalent attitudes as an important domestic fowl was accompanied by an initial apprehension and a certain underlying fear of it. These reactions may have arisen because of its foreign origin, its dark colour, its appearance and because of aspects of its behaviour, during the initial period of familiarisation with it as a farmyard fowl. In folk belief it was sometimes regarded as a protection against supernatural beings, particularly against the devil and evil spirits; conversely it was also thought to

have a demonic nature and could be, or could become, possessed by an evil spirit.²⁹ The following legend illustrates this latter belief:

A big turkey was supposed to have been an evil spirit. Seemingly the person that was in the house wasn't a very good living person and died without repenting and came back and took possession of the turkey. Every time they tried to catch the turkey to kill it, it vanished. They couldn't find it anywhere. It used to get up on the rafters – you remember the old houses, they had rafters – he used get on it at night and keep them awake all night long. And they had to get a priest down and the priest said that it was an evil spirit had possessed the bird. 'There was no real bird there at all', he said, 'it was an evil spirit.'

Well, he banished it to a shed and locked up the shed and there was no more about it.³⁰

In the second, the evil spirit has the shape of a black dog. The dog is considered man's faithful companion. He is also frequently credited with the ability to perceive supranormal presences and forces and of warning and protecting his master from them. But in popular belief, the dog has also a demonic nature. This is often expressed in stories of fiendish dogs with fiery eyes, mostly black in colour and often of enormous size, which are thought to frequent particular locations in the landscape. Such dogs are often considered to be evil spirits, and like all such spirits everywhere, they should be avoided and left undisturbed.³¹ The following is our tradition bearer's legend of such a black dog:

Well, in Manor Lane, at the turn of the lane there's two iron gates, one straight opposite the other, right on the turn. And each night around midnight, this black dog or a form of a dog, jumps over the gate with two big balls of fire for eyes. And one particular night a neighbour of mine who was very drunk coming home made a kick at the dog and he ended up with a pair of black eyes and a couple of broken ribs. So it's supposed to have been just a passway for some spirit or other that had the shape of the dog and because he was interfered on [sic] he struck back. It is supposed to be very dangerous to interfere with anything that isn't able to be accounted for – in the line of spirits - you know?³²

The Devil

In popular belief the devil too is sometimes thought to appear as a black dog.³³ Cat shape is also attributed to him in Irish tradition.³⁴ A strange black cat in particular was viewed with apprehension. The cat has long been considered

a sinister animal. In Greek and Roman traditions it was perceived as the concomitant of supernatural evil. In the Christian tradition its predominant association was with wickedness, darkness and the occult. To medieval preachers the cat was a symbol of Satan³⁵ and this image has persisted in folk belief.

The power of the priest to banish evil spirits has already been mentioned. In Irish legend the priest is also depicted as the powerful and successful adversary of the devil. The following legend is representative of narratives detailing the banishment of a cat-devil by a priest in Irish tradition:

... it was about the old woman, her husband died and this cat strayed in – an old black cat strayed in and she used to feed it. Priests used to go around those times visiting the houses and he came in one evening and she was making tea or something and the cat came in and she left the tea down; instead of continuing to feed the priest she left the tea down and went on to feed the cat. And she came back anyway and the priest and her had their tea. He asked her how long was the cat there, and she said like, that he's only come in since the husband died, and kept her company. And the priest said, 'get rid of it'. And she says, 'ah, what harm is it doing, sure what harm can it do there'. And the priest said, 'it's not a cat'. 'What else is it?' she says, 'it's there now and it'll stay there'. The priest says, 'I wouldn't advise you, I'll show you,' he says, 'what it is'. So he put on his stole, started to pray and the next thing the cat began to get real big, man-sized, shaped into a man and went through the door and vanished. And there wasn't another word about the cat after. It terrified the woman; she was terrified of black cats after that.³⁶

The devil was also believed to appear in human shape. According to our tradition bearer *the devil can have any form, – cats, dogs, man, animals of any kind, even birds. He can take any form.*³⁷

One of the many notions about the devil in folk belief generally is that he is a gambler,³⁸ and card-playing is thus depicted as the devil's pastime.³⁹ In a legend which has grown up around this belief the devil is recognised by his cloven hoof. In Christiansen's list of Norwegian migratory legends this legend (no. 3015) is entitled 'The Card-players and the Devil'.⁴⁰ In the following version of the legend from our tradition bearer's repertoire the card-playing scene is set in Maynooth College, the major Catholic seminary in Ireland, and it is incorporated in an aetiological legend explaining a cloven-hoof impression said to have been visible on a floor in the seminary:

I've heard tell of the cloven foot. There is a story about it in Maynooth College. It seems as though the students were studying and it was their last studying before they became the priests. And

instead of studying they were playing cards. And a strange student came on the scene to play cards with them. And, of course, as always happens with these stories, the Ace of Spades fell and one of the boys stooped down for to pick up the card and saw the cloven foot. And two of them committed suicide and one of them lived long enough for to tell the story. And there is supposed to be something about the footmark being still there in the College. I've seen a mark that looks like that of a cow's foot. I've seen it in the College. Me brother-in-law brought me up to it one time and showed it to me and he laughed when I said, 'how did the cow's footmark get into the tile?' It was supposed to have been the devil himself coming to tease the boys before they became priests, you know?⁴¹

Attempts by the devil to delay a priest on a sick call is a common theme in Irish devil-lore and has given rise to a number of legends. The delaying tactics credited to the devil are many and varied and among them may be enumerated such tricks as, causing a thick fog to surround the priest, appearing in the shape of a black dog and physically attacking him, placing imaginary physical obstacles in the priest's path or, as in the following legends, creating the illusion of gold coins on the road, or singing sweetly, in order to delay the priest.

In the first legend which comments on this theme the priest who is wearing his stole recognises the devil's evil snare and keeps going on his journey of mercy and arrives in time to administer the Last Sacraments to the dying person:

Well, he's supposed to be on the road here, down here – a country road. And he won't let people pass by. There was a woman dying one night and a man came in for the priest. And at that time the priest used to go on horses. And they went up this laneway. It was the shortest way to the woman's home and it was a moonlit night and there was two crowns shining on the ground. Now, the priest, of course, had his stole on him especially when he was going to visit the sick. And he says to the man 'keep the horse going', he says, 'and don't stop, you can get your crowns coming back'. So the man was very reluctant, of course, when he saw the two crowns there lying on the ground and he very badly off; he needed money. But he went on anyway, he done the priest's bidding and when they were coming back the priest stopped the horse himself and told him to go down and get the crowns. And it was two horseshoe nails that had taken the shape. And he said 'It was the devil was there trying to stop him from getting on time to save the woman's soul'.⁴²

The second legend-type, however, illustrates how the priest is often be-

guiled by the singing (sometimes said to have been performed by two black dogs)⁴³ to the extent that he listens until the song⁴⁴ is finished and thus arrives to find that the person is already dead. The implication of the legend is, of course, that the devil may have won the person's soul.

... A story goes that one night – it was the time that the priests used to go on horseback to attend the dying – and this priest was sent for in the night. And on his way he could hear a beautiful sweet-singing voice out in the fields. So he stopped his horse for to listen and he waited for the song to be finished and by the time he got to the patient that he was sent for to give the last rites to, they were dead. He was too late.⁴⁵

The Fairy Faith

As well as having a continuing belief in death-omens, the returning dead and the devil, our tradition bearer also believes in certain aspects of the Fairy Faith. Reidar Th. Christiansen has defined the Fairy Faith as 'the complex of beliefs connected with the existence on earth of another race side by side with man but normally invisible to him...'⁴⁶ Belief in the existence of that second race once held in most countries, is perhaps as old as man himself. Such belief was very strong in former times in Ireland and still today it remains part of the unofficial world-view – of some people at least. Some sample collections of Irish fairy lore have been published⁴⁷ and from these it is evident that the fairy lore component of our tradition bearer's repertoire, although possessing strong local colouring (something which is to be expected in traditions dealing with nature-beings⁴⁸ such as the fairies) is nevertheless part of the fairy faith in Ireland. The thematic content of her fairy lore including the belief legends summarised here, and her responses to the various reflexes of the fairy faith, have been presented and analysed in some detail elsewhere. In the context of this wider discussion of the folk belief content of the tradition bearer's repertoire, it is thus necessary only to present a summary of our previous examinations and conclusions here.

The main themes comprising the storyteller's fairy-lore are: locations of the fairy world, fairy origin and hope of salvation, social organisation and way of life of the fairy world, fairy physique and dress, and interaction between the fairy world and the human world. Our analysis shows that in terms of belief, her attitudes to these various themes range from firm belief in the existence of the fairy world, and an equally firm conviction that it is unwise to interfere with it in any way, through uncertainty and fluctuation of belief about the origin of the fairy-race and details of daily life in the fairy world, until finally a state of total disbelief is reached on her part in relation to traditional ideas about ab-

duction of humans – children and adults – by the fairies.

In general terms it is probably true to say that in Ireland the fairy faith remains strongest in situations in which it is tied to a landscape feature – as our storyteller's repertoire illustrates. For her firm belief in the existence of the fairy world is linked to a dominant local landscape monument, an earthen mound in the vicinity of her home. This place she considers 'sacred' or set apart, and her repertoire includes legends of revenge arising from interference with it.

Her attitude to the traditional explanation of the origin of the fairy race in Irish tradition, that is, that they are the bad angels cast out of heaven by God and the Archangel Michael, during the war in heaven, is more ambivalent, however. Although she knows and has told me this traditional account of the origin of the fairies many times, she is not sure about it – she feels rather that the fairies are in some way connected with the dead and that they may in fact be the ancient dead who live on in the mounds and hills.

Linked to the question of the origin of the fairies is their final fate on the Day of Judgement. In Irish tradition their fate is inextricably linked to their origin – as the fallen angels there is no hope of salvation for them. Although the storyteller is ambivalent about their origin, she knows, nevertheless, and also tells, a variant of a legend common in Ireland which is based on the belief that fairies are the fallen angels, and which confirms the hopelessness of the fairy peoples continuing expectations of re-admittance to heaven on the Last Day. Her narrative may be summarised as follows: A priest encounters a fairy man on a lonely road. He asks if he will go to heaven on the Day of Judgement. The priest tells him to cut his finger and when no blood comes the priest says that he will not be saved since he has not enough blood in his body to write his name.

The theme of abduction of humans into the fairy world has several reflexes in Irish tradition. Our storyteller mentions two – the abduction of young children into the otherworld and the attempted abduction of brides. Both themes have found expression in legends. The Changeling Legend, an international migratory legend (no. 5085)⁴⁹ is well attested in Ireland and has grown out of the belief that the fairies could abduct human beings (and animals) and leave some sickly substitute (known in Gaelic as an *iarlais*) or changeling behind. Our tradition bearer's version can be summarised as follows: the child was continually crying and not thriving. Music was heard from her room. Relatives decided that it was a changeling because of its physical characteristics and strange behaviour. Having asked the mother to leave the house, the father heated a fire-iron until red hot and threatened to assault the child with the hot iron as well as uttering many curses. The 'child' then disappeared, emitting a terrible scream, and the little girl was returned.

Our storyteller does not believe this story. Her view is that the condition of children which gave rise to the notion that they were changelings could be explained in the normal way. She feels that these children may have had an incorrect diet, for example. Thus when the child got the right food it 'returned' to normal again.

The storyteller's pragmatic attitude to the changeling belief is also evident from her explanation of the factors which she considers gave rise to the belief that fairies attempt to abduct brides. Jenny's version of a legend arising from this belief can be summarised as follows: The fairies were trying to abduct a bride and they had a human helping them to get into the house where the wedding feast was being held. The fairies were perched on the rafters and while the bride was dancing one of them moved and scattered dust. The bride sneezed once, twice and at the third sneeze the human helper said 'God Bless' – at which the fairies were compelled to vanish.

Our tradition bearer's reaction to this legend was that it was only 'an old wives tale' and feels that the belief in the abduction of brides could have been used to explain altered behaviour of women after marriage who had difficulty coping with their new situation in life.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of the folk belief content of the repertoire of a modern Irish female tradition bearer shows that belief in the supernatural remains an important aspect of her present-day world view. Having been raised in a home and local environment conducive to fostering firm belief in the supernatural, it is understandable that supernatural lore became a repertoire dominant for her. However, she has not reacted uncritically to the home and community repertoire in relation to the supernatural – some themes in the collective local store of mythological traditions she has accepted fully, while she has rejected or remains ambivalent about other aspects of it; for example, she believes firmly in death omens, the return of the dead and in the Devil. Her attitudes to the fairy faith, however, varies from firm belief in the existence of the fairy world, tempered by doubt as to the origin and final fate of the fairy race and their social organisation, to total disbelief about the abduction of humans into the fairy world. Although possessing strong local colouring the storyteller's folk beliefs and legends are appropriate to the collective supernatural tradition in Ireland – in Gaelic speaking as well as in anglicised Ireland – and are part also of a wider European belief tradition.

Our storyteller is an intelligent and discerning woman for whom belief in aspects of the supernatural is a fact of life, something which must be taken into consideration in assessing the continuation of folk beliefs into modern times

and their impact on modern-day thought.

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²Cronin J. *The Anglo-Irish Novel*. Belfast, 1980. Nineteenth and early twentieth century collections of folklore in English and fictional works incorporating folklore as mentioned in: R. M. Dorson: ‘Foreword’, in Sean O’Sullivan: *Folktales of Ireland*. London, 1966, pp. V-XXXII. Folklore motifs and themes in the work of one well-known Anglo-Irish writer, W. B. Yeats, are analysed in, Thunete M. H. *Yeats and Irish Folklore*. London, 1980, New Jersey, 1981.

³cf. Dorson, op. cit., and Almqvist B. *Irish Folklore Commission - Achievement and Legacy*. Béaloideas 45-47, 1977-9, 6-26.

⁴The manuscript material in the archive of the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin is clear evidence of this as some published collections of fairy lore from different areas, e.g. S. Ó hEochaidh, *Màire Ní Néill, Séamas Ó Catháin Sí-Scéalta ó Thír Chonaill*. Dublin, 1977; S. Ó Duilearga *Leabhar Sheáin Uí Chonaill*. Dublin, 1977, pp. 291-322, 434-440, 484-488. (Engl. Summary); S. Ó Catháin *Scéalta Chois Cladaigh. Stories of Sea and Shore*. Dublin, 1983.

⁵See in this connection S. Ó Súilleabháin. *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*. Dublin, 1942, Detroit, 1970, esp. pp. 440-519.

⁶Lysaght, P. A Tradition Bearer in Contemporary Ireland. In: Rörich, L., Wienken-Piepo, S. (eds.). *Storytelling in Contemporary Societies*. Tübingen, 1990, pp. 199-214; Lysaght P. Fairy Lore from the Midlands of Ireland. In: Narvaez, P. (ed.). *The Fairy Faith: New Fairy Lore Essays*.

⁷See Note 3, Ahlqvist.

⁸See Note 5, Ó Súilleabháin, p. 216, and the catalogue in the archive of the Department of Irish Folklore for a survey of the variety of death omens in Ireland. About the special relationship between the beliefs and death omens, see also Almqvist, B. The Death Forebodings of Saint Óláfr, King of Norway and Rögnvaldr, Earl of Orkney. *Béaloideas*, 1974-1976, Nos 42-44, and especially pp. 23-38. Some of the death omens are discussed in Lysaght, P. *The Banshee. The Irish Supernatural Death-Messenger*. Dublin, 1986.

⁹Lysaght, P. June 1, 1976 quotation from a recording.

¹⁰ibid.

¹¹See Note 9.

¹²See Note 12, Lysaght, P. 1986.

¹³Lysaght, P. Recording 1, 1976.

¹⁴Lysaght P. Quotation from Recording 20, August 18, 1989.

¹⁵See various subdivisions of Ó Súilleabháin 1970, pp. 244-250. ‘The Return of

the Dead.’

¹⁶Lysaght P. quotation, tape No. 1, 1976.

¹⁷Honko L. Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs. In: *Journal of the Folklore Institute*. 1964, No. 1, pp. 16-17.

¹⁸Lysaght P. Tape No. 20, quotation, September 18, 1989.

¹⁹Lysaght P. Tape No. 1, quotation. 1976.

²⁰Lysaght. P. Tape No. 7, quotation. 1981.

²¹In Gaelic, *Is libhse an lá, is linne an oíche*; in German, *Der Tag ist dein, die Nacht ist mein*. See, Hoffman-Krayer, H. and Bächtold-Stäubli, H. *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*. VI. Berlin, Leipzig 1934-1935. p. 776.

²²Lysaght P. Tape No. 7, 1981.

²³Lysaght P. Tape No. 8, July 1981.

²⁴Lysaght P. Tape No. 6, 1981.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶See Note 24 and Christiansen, R. Th. *The Migratory Legends*. Helsinki, 1958, No. 4030 ‘The Dead Mother Visiting Her Children.’

²⁷See Note 26.

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³⁴See Note 33.

³⁵Rowland, B. *Animals with Human Faces. A Guide to Animal Symbolism*. London 1974, pp. 51-52.

³⁶Lysaght P. Quotation, tape No. 7, 1981.

³⁷Lysaght P. Quotation, tape No. 6, 1981.

³⁸See Note 31, Thompson, Motif N. 4; Tubach, 745, 2238.

³⁹See Note 31, Thompson, Motif G 303.6.1.5. The devil appearing to the card-players.

⁴⁰See Note 26, Christiansen, pp. 24-28.

⁴¹Lysaght P. Quotation, tape No. 1, June 1976. About this legend in the Irish tradition, see É Ní Anluain. *An Cearrbhach agus an Diabhail*: ML 3015 in Éirinn (The Gambler and the Devil: ML 3015 in Ireland). Student essay in the Department of Irish Folklore.

⁴²Lysaght P. Quotation, tape No. 1, 1976.

⁴³See Note 31.

⁴⁴In South Wexford there is a song used in this context: *Arise Bonnie Lassy, We'll Bundle and Go* (IFC 107:387), but there is a more widespread one in Gaelic: *Caillín deas crúite na mbó* ('The Beautiful Milk-maid'). In places it is known as a 'cursed song' that was forbidden to sing.

⁴⁵Lysaght P. Quotation, tape No. 7, 1981.

⁴⁶*Béaloideas*, 1971-1973, No. 39-41, p. 95.

⁴⁷See Note 4.

⁴⁸See, von Sydow, C. W. Övernaturliga vasen. *Nordisk Kultur XIX. Folketro*. 1935, pp. 91-159; see also, Hultkrantz, Å. *The Supernatural Owners of Nature*. 1961.

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PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN REALIA IN THE CULTURE OF THE PRE-KAMA REGION INHABITANTS IN THE II CENTURY AD.

Leonid Makarov. Izhevsk, Udmurtia

The problem of mutual influence of pagan and Christian religions is of major importance in the sphere of ideology of the peoples of the medieval East Europe. The adoption of Christianity by the ruling circles of the Kiev Russia has been viewed as a historical process. However, the pagan beliefs, having millenia-old traditions in the consciousness of the people, could disappear only gradually and, thus, the 11th-13th centuries are considered to be the period of double beliefs and that of the struggle of the Orthodox Church with the relics of the pagan traditions. The involvement of some other alien ethnic inclusions into the process of formation of the ancient Russian nationality further contributed to the obscuration of Christian dogmas. It is especially true of the region between the Volga and the Oka rivers and the Novgorod territories – the regions serving as the starting points for the Russian colonisation of the areas between the Kama and the Vyatka rivers.

We know from the chronicles that the Finno-Ugrian population of the Dvina and Pechora rivers have been tributaries of the Novgorod principality, and the area between the Kama and the Vyatka paid taxes to the princes of Kiev.¹