# ASPECTS OF SUPERNATURAL BELIEF, MEMORATE AND LEGEND IN A CONTEMPORARY URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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April 1985

## ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to move away from the antiquarian bias of previous work on the folklore of the supernatural in order to shed light on present day attitudes and concepts. In the past, folklorists have done very little to collect their own culture, or even to recognise its forms. This has been particularly true of British work on ghost traditions - the tendency of all but a very few scholars has been to retire to the library and compile collections of legends. The present study eschews this approach in favour of fieldwork.

There are three main aspects of the work. The early chapters provide a resume of texts on the supernatural, from 1572 to the present day, seeking (i) to construct a cultural history of the concept of the ghost, and (ii) to evaluate the usefulness of these texts to the folklorist or historian of ideas. The central part of the thesis concentrates on presenting a picture of contemporary supernatural beliefs, drawing on data collected in informal interviews with 120 mainly elderly people resident in Gatley, a suburb of Manchester. Two central concepts are analysed - that is, ideas about ghosts, and about knowledge of the future. A third chapter describes miscellaneous beliefs (telepathy, UFOs, 'Luck', and mediumistic powers). In the later chapters attention is drawn to the manner of the storytelling through which these beliefs are expressed. The structure of memorate is discussed with particular reference to the Labovian model of personal experience stories. Finally the performative style of the storyteller is analysed in detail to show the basic linguistic resources a storyteller may call upon when structuring private experience into public narrative.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for their help in producing this work. First, and most obviously, there are my parents, who allowed me to make their workplace my research base. Next there are all those people in Gatley who thought that they were simply going to get their corns removed and instead were asked impertinent questions by their chiropodist's daughter. Thirdly, of course, I owe much to Professor John Widdowson, my supervisor, mentor and thorn-in-the-flesh. To all these my gratitude and affection.

Lastly, but by no means least, I would like to thank my excellent typist, Mrs. Eileen Grimes, without whom all my work would have been in vain, and my husband, Andrew, who has had a lot to put up with these last five years.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

## 1. Introduction

This study represents the coming together of two dominant intellectual interests: narrative and supernatural belief. Their coming together was accidental but productive. In the summer of 1980 I had completed a dissertation on occupational stories and was looking round for another branch of narrative to investigate - a narrative genre as alive and enduring as stories about work and working life have always been. During this time, in a single week, I was told three tales of the supernatural, one a traditional legend, one an urban legend and one a memorate. Here, obviously, was a fruitful field for further exploration.

Stories of the supernatural are common to all cultures, can be found in ancient and modern texts and are still in oral circulation,being told at both formal and informal storytelling sessions and, as I discovered, in casual conversation too. Belief in occult forces is both endemic and ancient, one of the most enduring matters of interest. As Le Loyer wrote in the sixteenth century, it

> ... is the topic that people most readily discuss and on which they linger the longest because of the abundance of the examples, the subject being fine and pleasing and the discussion the least tedious that can be found. 1

It has also been one of the most commonly studied of all folklore genres. Historical texts abound, reaching from the exempla of the middle ages to the popular ghost gazeteers, investigative writings and folkloristic texts of the present day. The saturation coverage of the topic is both its merit and its shortcoming as a subject for research.

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1 Quoted by John Dover Wilson in his editorial introduction to the 1929 edition of Lewes Lavater's Of Ghostes and Spirites walking by Nyghte [Oxford 1929], p.x.

Its advantage as a research topic obviously lies in the multiplicity of historical writing that can give background and cultural depth to the study. The pitfall is that this very coverage makes it appear that nothing more can be said on the subject: it allows scholars to think that there is nothing new to learn, that all necessary information can be found in libraries and there is no point in independent fieldwork. The task, therefore, as I saw it in 1980, was to look at these interrelated areas.

1) First, to "read, learn and inwardly digest" the historical writings, for it is on this foundation that academics (social historians and folklorists alike) have built up their conception of the strength and nature of popular belief in the supernatural.

2) To conduct fieldwork into the subject among a selection of ordinary people. The vast majority of present day work in the supernatural being based on written not oral reports, it seemed both useful and relevant to try another approach.

3) To conduct that fieldwork in such a manner that I could collect a corpus of stories to study. It would be interesting to see what genre of stories predominated, what topics they covered, and how they were told - the rhetoric of belief being as fascinating a topic as belief itself.

These tasks underlie the subject matter and organisation of the present work. It begins by reviewing the literature; moves on to discussing the beliefs of a particular social reference group through their narratives and conversation; and ends with an examination of their storytelling style.

## 2. The Literature of the Supernatural

2.1 It would indeed be an enormous task to present a comprehensive review of the literature of the supernatural - a lifetime's work. Any review within the compass of a study such as the present one must necessarily be selective. Any selection, unfortunately, must to some degree be arbitrary. It may be that a text seen by one researcher as central to the subject, by another is considered marginal. Though such disagreements are bound to arise, they are less serious if each understands the grounds on which the other makes his or her selection. In order that any arbitrariness will be understood, if not avoided, the following paragraphs set out the criteria by which the literature to be included in this review has been selected.

In the first place, the texts have been chosen and arranged according to a taxonomy which aims to highlight major trends in the literature. Secondly, texts have been chosen in so far as they help to reconstruct a history of concepts of the supernatural and show changes in the stereotypes of occult forces. Finally, the review chiefly concerns itself with texts which deal with the return of the dead. The first and second criteria are more or less self-evident; the third perhaps needs to be justified.

In part the exclusion of other types of supernatural belief and the concentration on just one form - ghost belief - is a matter of convenience. Where there is such a mass of data on a variety of interrelated topics, it is often simplest and most revealing to find one's way through the maze holding on to a single thread. That the chosen thread should be belief in ghosts is not arbitrary. The literature itself gives primacy to ghost belief: it is the most vigorous area of supernatural lore and provides the most plenteous and consistent data throughout each period.

It is from religious writing and records of popular magic and superstition that most historical information about supernatural beliefs can be drawn. Each of these systems incorporates (or has at some time incorporated) a belief in the continued existence of the souls of the dead and the possibility of their return to this world. Throughout the literature, both sacred and secular, the existence of ghosts - empirically vouched for by the evidence of reliable witnesses - is the cornerstone of argument. Because the existence of ghosts has always been thought to be intrinsically verifiable, it has consistently been used as authentication for supernatural systems. For example, the system of religion is strong in rational and contingent evidence but empirically weak. The ghost has therefore been vital to its authentication for, being the sole observable entity, it bears the burden of empirical proof for the higher order Beings: on the other hand, popular magical practices such as clairvoyance are vouched for by experience and empiricism but weak on logic. For them, the spirits of the dead provide the causal link between ritual and effect and thus bear the burden of rational proof. Thus it is that in both secular and sacred writings, whenever the supernatural is mentioned, it is implicitly assumed that the discussion will at some time or other deal with the subject of ghosts. In accordance with this built-in bias in the historical literature, this review will consider chiefly those texts which throw light on the development of the concept of the ghost.

2.2 That in dealing with ghost beliefs, we are dealing with immensely widespread and ancient traditions may, of course, be taken for granted. We may read of ghosts in both Old[2] and New[3] Testaments, find ghost stories in

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2 J.R. Porter, "Ghosts in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East", in Hilda R. Ellis Davidson and W.M.S. Russell (eds.), The Folklore of Ghosts (Bury St. Edmunds, 1981), pp.215-238.

3 See especially Luke 24, 37: "But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." Note too that in order to reassure his disciples Jesus says (Luke 24, 39), "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

the classics[4] and the Icelandic Sagas,[5] as well as among communities in modern London.[6] Anthropologists have pointed out[7] and continue to point out[8] the intimate connection between tribal religion and belief in spirits, and folklorists have documented similar connections in Western thought.[9] Poltergeist reports come from sixth century Italy as well as twentieth century New York.[10] Belief in supernatural beings and effects is plainly universal, even fundamental - a strenuous attempt to give order and meaning to the chaotic and often cruel circumstances of human life. As such, it is essentially a religious impulse. Sociologists of religion are plainly correct when they see such belief systems as a "base of religiousness"[11]

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4 W.M.S. Russell, "Greek and Roman Ghosts", in Davidson and Russell, pp. 193-214.

5 H.R. Ellis Davidson, "The Restless Dead: An Icelandic Ghost Story", in Davidson and Russell, pp. 155-176; Alan Boucher, Ghost, Witchcraft and the Other World: Icelandic Folktales 1 (Reykjavík, 1977).

6 Venetia Newall, "West Indian Ghosts", in Davidson and Russell, pp. 73-94.

7 See especially: Edward B. Tylor, Primitive Culture: Researches into the development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom (London, 1873); Sir James George Frazer, The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion: Lectures delivered on the William Wyse Foundation (London, 1934); Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays [London, 1974]; Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande (Oxford, 1937).

8 See, for example, Kenneth I. Taylor, "Body and Spirit among the Sanumá (Yanoama) of North Brazil", in David L. Browman and Ronald A. Schwarz (eds.), Spirits, Shamans and Stars (The Hague, 1979), pp.201-221.

9 See, for example, Lauri Honko, Geisterglaube in Ingermanland , Folklore Fellows Communication, 185 (Helsinki, 1962).

10 See Gauld and Cornell's 500 poltergeist cases subjected to cluster analysis by computer. Alan Gauld and A.D. Cornell, Poltergeists (London, 1979), pp.366-398. See also George Lyman Kittredge, Witchcraft in Old and New England (New York, 1929), pp.214-217, for an equally wide-ranging survey of poltergeist manifestations.

11 Robert Towler, Homo Religiosus: Sociological Problems in the Study of Religion (London, 1974), p.156.

and refer to them as "common religion"[12] or "subterranean theologies".[13]

In the history of conventional religion (Christianity as represented by the official churches) in Europe, the ties between orthodox doctrine and "subterranean theologies" have been closer than is always recognised or thought desirable by the church itself.[14] In the first place, early Christianity had to take account not only of Graeco-Roman culture but also of its mother-religion. In particular it took over key supernatural concepts from Judaism - its doctrine of an afterlife and its angelology and demonology. In the second place, as early Christianity confronted and reacted to pagan faiths in its spread from its mediterranean origins, many aspects of those faiths, particularly their numinous and supernatural traditions, became assimilated into it. Medievalist R.C. Finucane rather appropriately speaks of the early church as being "haunted"[15] by its past.

From the time of Augustine on, Christian thinkers continually debated the nature of an afterlife and the relationship between the dead and the living. Apparitions of martyrs, saints and the holy dead were common, their function being to enforce proper religious and social behaviour in the living.[16] In addition spirits and apparitions were the mechanism for the miracles so necessary in the propaganda war with rival faiths. Later in Christian history the mapping out of the doctrine of purgatory was accompanied by illustrative ghost stories: during the later middle ages

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12 Towler, p. 148; and see also the title given to religious research carried out by the Department of Sociology at the University of Leeds: that is, "Conventional religion and common religion in Leeds" (my emphasis).

13 David Martin, A Sociology of English Religion (London, 1967), p. 74.

14 The following remarks are based on: R.C. Finucane, Appearances of the Dead: A Cultural History (London, 1982), pp. 29-89; and Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (Letchworth, 1971).

15 Finucane, p. 32.

16 See also Richard Bowyer, "The Role of the Ghost Story in Medieval Christianity", in Davidson and Russell, p. 186 and pp. 189-190.

one of the most common purposes of ghosts was to demonstrate the reality of purgatory and the value of prayers and sacrifices for the dead.[17]

By the end of the medieval period, souls of the dead were an "integral part of an immense and ordered spiritual world"[18] which also included elemental and demonological beings - fairies, elves, witches, poltergeists - as well as God and his angels. No one aspect of, or entity in, this supernatural hierarchy could easily be separated from any other. The system stood or fell as a whole. Isaac Barrow, the teacher of Newton, suggested, for example, that all the following supernatural entities and effects might be adduced as proof of the existence of God:

> Apparitions from another world ...; spirits haunting persons and places ...; visions made unto persons of special eminency and influence...; presignification of future events by dreams ...; the power of enchantments...; all sorts of intercourse and confederacy ... with bad spirits ....[19]

Many other practices and beliefs might well have been added to this list. Both Thomas[20] and Kittredge[21] note the contingent relationship between on the one hand official religious practice, and on the other popular magic and white witchcraft - cures, astrology, the recovery of lost property, charms, love spells and so on being effected by a mixture of sacred and profane incantations and rituals. Popular belief and practice could therefore be considered as the baseline of the pyramid on which the official supernatural hierarchy was built. The ghost in particular, as spirit of the dead, was an essential intermediary between the sacred and mundane layers of this pyramid - the vehicle of miracles, the propagandist of

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17 Thomas, p.602.

18 Bowyer, p.177.

19 Isaac Barrow, <u>Theological Works</u> [Oxford, 1830], vol. V, pp.380-482.

20 Thomas, pp.1-51.

21 Kittredge, pp.37-42.

religious laws, 'spectral evidence' against witches, and empirical evidence for the existence of God.

2.3 As far as a review of the literature of the supernatural is concerned it seems best to begin with the Post-Reformation period; the earliest text reviewed in this study is of 1572. The choice of this date is partly a matter of convenience, partly of logic. Before this period, so far as I am aware, there are few books (especially few vernacular texts) apart from exempla which are specifically devoted to the supernatural. Around 1570, however, the debates of the second phase of the Reformation bring the subject to the forefront of discussion. In contrast with the preceding centuries, there is a wealth of literature specifically devoted to the topic of the supernatural. Hence it is convenient to start at this date rather than earlier. There is logic too in choosing the late sixteenth century in that it marks the beginning of what is usually considered the 'modern' period of English history. The changes wrought by Renaissance and Reformation so substantially altered people's outlook on the world that an attempt to push the historical survey of supernatural belief any further back in time than this would probably reveal little about the foundations of present day beliefs.

At the beginning of this modern period when learning revived, thinkers turned their minds to the esoteric, among other things. The crisis of religion accompanying the greater degree of enlightenment opened up a flood of interest in the supernatural. As Andrew Lang points out, if a crisis in religion produces greater belief, then unusual events are welcomed as "miracles divine or diabolical": if the crisis produces religious scepticism then "where no Gods are, spectres walk."[22] The literature of

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22 Andrew Lang, Cock Lane and Common Sense (London, 1894), p.25.

this period repeating, as it does, stories to be found in the classics and the works of the Greek philosophers and the neo-platonists and calling upon contemporary accounts, provides a sound introduction to the supernatural and is still quoted today. The literature of the immediate post-Reformation period needs to be treated in some detail in any review of the literature of the supernatural.

During this time men of letters adopted the old peasant belief in ghosts and made it do duty in religious or political arguments. On the continent speculation about ghosts became chiefly a weapon in the Catholic/Protestant argument over the existence of purgatory, while in Britain the same materials were used in the witch controversy of the sixteenth century and the Hobbesian debates of the seventeenth. Translations of important French texts appear round the turn of the sixteenth/seventeenth century. These continental texts by Catholic and Calvinistic divines, the native texts by supporters and critics of the witch persecutions and those interested in defending religion against materialistic 'Atheism', together make an homogeneous literature in which a limited corpus of narrative is interpreted and reinterpreted in defence of opposing causes. This period, from about 1572 to 1710, may be referred to for our present purposes as the 'early period' of the literature of ghosts and the supernatural.

During this period the main thrust of the work[23] is investigative: that is, the writers were concerned about whether the beliefs they recorded were true beliefs, based on good religious principle, sound reasoning and empirical fact. On the continent Catholic writers such as Le Loyer[24] and Taillepied[25] used ghosts as evidence of the existence of purgatory, and

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23 Apart, obviously, from the works of Kirk and Aubrey. See below pp. 64-69.

24 Pierre Le Loyer, A Treatise of Spectres (London, 1605).

25 Father Noel Taillepied, A Treatise of Ghosts [London, 1705]. First published Paris, 1588.

Calvinists such as Lavater[26] attempted to discredit the evidence for ghosts in order to undermine Catholic doctrine. In Britain and America what might be called the 'psychical research' of the period, carried out in the latter half of the seventeenth century by Glanvil,[27] Sinclair[28] and Bovet[29] in Britain, and the Mathers in the USA,[30] was in defence of religion and the received practice of persecuting witches. Later work at the turn of the century by Baxter[31] and Beaumont[32] tended to keep intact the aims and methods laid down by their predecessors but to treat the subject matter in more antiquarian manner.

The homogeneity of this literature comes principally from the writers' sharing a single world view. Despite considerable individual variation, all subscribe to the idea that:

> Overlapping with the ordinary physical world was
> a sphere inhabited by strange ... creatures ...
> A world full of 'power' both good and evil. [33]

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26 Lavater (1572).

27 Joseph Glanvil, Saddueismus Triumphatus (London, 1682).

28 George Sinclair, Satan's Invisible World Discovered [Gainsville, Florida, 1969]. First published 1685.

29 Richard Bovet, Pandaemonium: Or The Devil's Cloister [Aldington, 1951]. First published 1684.

30 Increase Mather, An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences, wherein an account is given of many remarkable events which have happened in this last age, especially in New England (Boston, 1684); Cotton Mather, Wonders of the Invisible World (Boston, 1693) and Magnalia Christi Americana: or the Ecclesiastical History of New England from its first planning in the year 1620 unto the year 1698 (London, 1702).

31 Richard Baxter, The Certainty of the World of Spirits fully evinced: to which is added "The Wonders of the Invisible World" by Cotton Mather [London, 1840]. First published 1691.

32 John Beaumont, An Historical, Physiological and Theological Treatise of Spirits, Apparitions, Witchcrafts, and other Magical practices (London, 1705).

33 Alan MacFarlane, "Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex", in Mary Douglas (ed.), Witchcraft: Accusations and Confessions (London, 1970), p.96.

This orderly magical world crumbled only slowly and reluctantly and was not replaced until philosophers could offer an equally orderly mechanical world.[34] Two aspects of this supernatural system - witchcraft and ghosts - come to particular prominence in the literature of the 'early' period. The two concepts become increasingly close, until by the end of the seventeenth century it is virtually impossible to separate the discussion of one from consideration of the other. First, the religious arguments of the post-Reformation, by redefining the ancient concept of the ghost, bring it into the realm of the diabolical. Secondly, the terror of witches, which reaches its peak at this time, proliferates theories of the supernatural which further link witch and ghost. Thirdly, when the arrival of Cartesian and Hobbesian philosophies bred (or were feared to breed) atheism and materialism, both ghosts and witches were used as evidence for the existence of the supernatural and hence for God himself.

The intellectual atmosphere in which these texts were written is peculiarly of its time. They were written in the context of acrimonious religious debate, a confusing expansion of the diabolical aspects of the supernatural world, and, in the last decades of the period, a fierce propaganda war against the rationalism and the secularisation of the state that characterised the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe.[35] This particular synthesis is distinct and non-recurring, and serves to mark the literature of 1572-1710 as quite distinct from that of later periods.

2.4 The remaining years of the first half of the eighteenth century saw the last debates about the possibility of witchcraft and the last texts

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34 See Easlea's able documentation of the scientific revolution of 1450 to 1750. Brian Easlea, Witchhunting, Magic and the New Philosophy (Brighton, 1980).

35 R.H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism [Harmondsworth, 1938] pp. 21-23.

on the supernatural in the old mould. It is difficult to say whether the advance of an 'age of enlightenment' and its attendant rationalistic spirit finally forced the defeat of the witchmongers, whether on the other hand the discrediting of witchcraft paved the way for enlightenment and rationalism, or whether the collapse of belief in (or at least prosecutions for) witchcraft was a side effect of the rise of the modern capitalist state. Easlea argues that the latter was the more significant factor,[36] Thomas suggests that Newtonian physics and Cartesian philosophy combined with changes in social welfare provision to banish the concept of witchcraft from England,[37] and Kors and Peters plainly link the decline of witchcraft with the rise of rationalism and a decrease in supernatural beliefs as a whole:

> From this combination of decreasing anxiety about the structure of the world men inhabit and increasing ability to understand that world in earthly terms, witchcraft, as a Western belief was ultimately to flounder. [38]

Their selection of documents shows this as a movement accelerating from 1690 onwards. A belief in ghosts seems to have decreased correspondingly, not only because the new scientific spirit was antithetical to occult systems, but also because the ghost, having been for the preceding centuries so firmly linked to belief in witches, was discredited along with witchcraft. It could be that the final repeal of the last of the Witchcraft Acts in 1736 convinced people that, if witches could no longer exist, then neither could ghosts.

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36 Easlea (1980).

37 Keith Thomas, "Anthropology and the Study of English Witchcraft", in Douglas, pp. 47-80.

38 Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700: A Documentary History (London, 1973), p.313.

Certainly the period 1710 to 1800 saw a rapid decline in serious interest in the supernatural among men of letters. Two early texts - Francis Hutchinson's An Historical Essay concerning Witchcraft[39] and Jacques de Daillon's Daimonologia[40] - though they go over familiar ground, do so in a completely different spirit - one of stringent sceptical enquiry. After 1723, apart from the rather anachronistic Phantom World of Augustin Calmet[41] (which, anyway, was not translated into English until 1850), there is a dearth of intellectual interest in the subject until the nineteenth century, when the speculative medical, philosophical and psychological texts of the early decades prefigured a new interest in psychic powers, which culminated in the rise of spiritualism in the 1840s.

During the eighteenth century, then, interest in ghosts was largely relinquished by the intellectual classes who had taken it up in the sixteenth and returned to the ordinary people from whom it had been borrowed. Stories about supernatural happenings cease to appear in theological and philosophical treatises after about 1730, but flourish in magazines, broadsides, pamphlets and the work of popularisers and literary hacks. The only occult topic to receive much attention in the serious writing of the middle and late eighteenth century is 'animal magnetism' (that is,

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39 Francis Hutchinson (Bishop of Down and Connor), An Historical Essay concerning witchcraft with observations tending to confute the vulgar errors about that point. And also two sermons: one in proof of the Christian Religion: the other concerning good and evil angels (London, 1718).

40 Jacques de Daillon (Comte du Lude), Daimonologia, or A Treatise of Spirits wherein several places of scripture are expounded, against the vulgar errors concerning witchcraft, apparitions, etc. To which is added an appendix containing some reflections on Mr. Boulton's answer to Doctor Hutchinson's Historical Essay; entitled The Possibility and Reality of Magick, Sorcery and Witchcraft Demonstrated (London, 1723).

41 Augustin Calmet, Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des démons, et des esprits. Et sur les revenans et vampires (Paris, 1746). Translated as The Phantom World: or the Philosophy of Spirits, apparitions etc. (London, 1850).

hypnotism) which was regarded as supernatural rather than natural until well into the early years of the present century.

The years from 1710 until the rise of spiritualism in the 1840s also saw the publication of important books of popular antiquities: Bourne's Antiquitates Vulgares (1725);[42] Brand's updated and expanded version of Bourne, Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain (1777)[43] (plus, of course, Ellis's updated version of Brand, 1810); Grose's, Provincial Glossary[44] (1787); and Hone's Year Book[45] (1832). All these treat supernatural topics alongside other popular beliefs and customs.

Unlike the years 1572-1710, the following hundred and thirty years reveal no homogeneous pattern as far as the literature of the supernatural is concerned. Rather they are fallow years in which attitudes changed largely without literary documentation. One can think of this as a watershed in ideas about the supernatural (in the review of the literature, the years 1710-1840 will therefore be termed 'the watershed period').

2.5 After 1840 there is a second eruption of interest in the supernatural which represents the coming together of two disparate interests - the antiquarian and the spiritualist. The significant dates for each of

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42 Henry Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares; or the Antiquities of the Common People [New York, 1977]. First published, Newcastle, 1725.

43 John Brand, Observations on Popular Antiquities: including the whole of Mr. Bourne's Antiquitates Vulgares, with Addenda to every chapter of that work: As also an Appendix containing such Articles as have been omitted by that Author (Newcastle, 1777).

44 Francis Grose, A Provincial Glossary with a collection of Local Proverbs and Superstitions (London, 1787).

45 William Hone, The Year Book or daily recreation and information concerning remarkable men and manners, times and seasons, solemnities and merrymakings, antiquities and novelties, on the plan of the Everyday Book and Tablebook etc. (London, 1832).

these movements are close together. W.J. Thoms wrote his now famous letter to The Athenaeum in 1846 and the Folklore Society was formed in 1879. Meanwhile, in the U.S.A. the seances of the Fox sisters in 1848 had initiated the spiritualist cult, and in Britain the Society for Psychical Research issued its first Proceedings in 1882. From 1840 to the present day again represents, as far as the literature of the supernatural is concerned, a fairly homogeneous period. Again a limited amount of information in terms of theories and narratives is used and reused. We may think of this, perhaps, as the 'modern period' of the literature of ghosts.

The inauguration of the Society for Psychical Research finally completed the secularisation of the supernatural. The ghost, which had been espoused by the church for so long, had already during the watershed period been first neglected by religious theorists, then deplored, then ignored. When belief in the ghost revived among intelligent people of mystical temperament, it was not harnessed to the Christian religion. Those who took up the old beliefs did so within the compass of alternative systems - theosophy and spiritualism. Investigative writing, which in the sixteenth century had been the province of clergymen, became in the nineteenth first the concern of medical men, then of academics.

Differently directed, academic interest in the superstitions of the past resulted in increased interest in popular antiquities. In the regional folklore studies which followed the inauguration of the Folklore Society, legends of the supernatural often take pride of place. There is in this literature a considerable degree of homogeneity of opinion concerning the supernatural beliefs of country people and the 'superstitious' customs of the past.

Popular texts have also flourished, drawing equally from contemporary folklore works, from the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research,

and from older legends to be found in the polemical and antiquarian texts of the 'early' period, and popular writing of the 'watershed' years.

The spirit of all this work is easily separable from work of earlier periods. Though within it there are two quite distinct threads - the investigative approach and the folkloristic - popular interest in the subject has served to blur the differences and make the literature appear cohesive and homogeneous.

In the review of the literature of the supernatural, therefore, texts will be treated in three broad historical sections. Chapter 3 will look at 'early' texts; that is, texts written between 1572 and 1710. Chapter 4 will examine 'watershed' texts (1710-1840). Chapter 5 will discuss 'modern' texts (1840 to the present day). This sort of categorisation of texts by the historical period is, of course, to some degree arbitrary, and the dates are approximate only, but the categories do reveal real and significant stages in the history of the literature of the supernatural.

2.6 Within these periods certain styles and functions also tend to distinguish some texts from others. This may be illustrated most simply by listing three questions commonly put to the teller of a supernatural story or experience:

A) "How did you come to hear this?"

B) "Is it true?"

C) "Why are you telling me this?"

According to the answers which a writer would give to each of these questions, we can work out a simple taxonomy. The questions refer to the <u>channel</u> of communication (question A), the <u>truth</u> of the communication

(question B) and the value put on the communication (question C). A given book will tend to focus on one of these areas of concern - either channel or truth or value. These distinctions of emphasis can help to group literature into dominant types.

One type of literature is concerned almost exclusively with the truth of the communication. It considers channel only when it is useful in authenticating the communication. The value of the communication is as evidence. A second type is principally concerned with channel, considering matters of truth only as aspects of this larger concern. The value of the communication is as information. A third considers neither truth nor channel seriously though it may refer to both as a rhetorical device. The value of the communication is as entertainment.

The first type can be characterised as 'investigative', the second as 'folkloristic', the third as 'popular'. The table below shows this schematically:

| Type | Truth | Channel | Value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Investigative | + | - | evidence |
| Folkloristic | - | + | information |
| Popular | - | - | entertainment |

This is the second criterion on which a taxonomy may be based.

2.7 The interaction of chronological and classificatory factors in the literature of the supernatural shows types and trends in the literature from 1570 to the present as follows:

| Period | Type |
| --- | --- |
| Early (1570 - 1710) | Investigative Folkloristic |
| Watershed (1710 - 1840) | Investigative Popular Folkloristic |
| Modern (1840 - ) | Investigative Popular Folkloristic |

Again it must be stressed that a taxonomy such as this is an aid to analysis, not an analysis itself. It is necessarily crude but it enables the material to be presented in an orderly fashion. In chapters 3-5 of this study, the literature will be surveyed under these headings as indicative of both type and period.

## 3. Library work versus fieldwork

3.1 In no other branch of folklore can the problem of methodology and definition be brought more sharply to the fore than in the study of the supernatural. "What is folklore?" and "How do we study it?" are the most important questions that have to be faced in this sort of research. As the questions are interrelated it is possible to deal with the first and let the second follow from it.

3.2 In respect of supernatural beliefs, the question "What is folklore?" is customarily answered by distinguishing between experience of the supernatural and traditions of the supernatural. This position has recently been most cogently expressed by two distinguished British folklorists, Carmen Blacker and Jacqueline Simpson. Carmen Blacker writes:

> We shall not be concerned with first hand testimonies of apparitions such as might interest the student of psychical research, but rather with ... the 'tradition' of ghosts, what is made of the shocking and often horrifying experience of perceiving an apparition of the dead, the stereotypes into which, as though by some magnetic force, the mind tends to elaborate these bare perceptions. [46]

and Jacqueline Simpson says:

> An account of a 'psychic experience' if given at firsthand by the person concerned, with full belief and the aim of accuracy, cannot of course be called a folktale ... on the other hand, a personal account might sometimes become the starting point for a local legend. [47]

There is much to say in favour of such positions. They rely on tested and tried distinctions: that between the enduring and the ephemeral, between the communal and the personal, the cultural and the idiosyncratic. Folklore as a discipline concerns itself with the enduring, the communal and the cultural: the personal is only of interest when and where it is moulded by wider, more permanent forces. On the subject of the supernatural these distinctions have implicitly come to mean that legend (rather than personal testimony) is the proper province for study.

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46 Carmen Blacker, "The Angry Ghost in Japan", in Davidson and Russell, p. 95.

47 Jacqueline Simpson, The Folklore of Sussex (London, 1973), p. 44.

3.3 Thus when dealing with supernatural lore, most folklorists (certainly most British folklorists) opt for the historical and textual approach - for library work rather than fieldwork. However, it is time to question the dominance of this approach to studies of the supernatural.

One might begin first by asking why it is that personal experience has been so long neglected by those researching the supernatural. The first reason for this neglect is simply that it is unfair and indelicate to pry into, and perhaps trample over, deeply held personal beliefs. Jacqueline Simpson puts this well:

> When I was gathering material for my Folklore of Sussex in 1971 several people volunteered reminiscences like those you describe (and also ones about eerie feelings, haunted places etc.). But I decided not to use any of them in the book since I knew it would distress my informants to find deeply felt experiences presented as 'folklore' on a par with legends about fairies, dragons or giants. [48]

Timidity may be a second reason for neglecting personal experience. Supernatural belief systems have always been one of the central concerns of folklorists but since 1882 there has been competition in the field. The basic interest of the Society for Psychical Research also lies in exploring the same set of ancient and tenaciously held beliefs. The incompatibility of the aims, purposes, methods and motivation of the Society for Psychical Research with the purposes and motivation of folklorists has led to a wary timidity among the latter. Above all their aim has been to dissociate themselves from the studies of the psychical researchers. This gut feeling manifests itself in a retreat into 'safe' material - that is, material safely in the past. Again, the Society for Psychical Research relies chiefly on personal experience accounts: the Folklore Society therefore prefers legend. So the circle is complete - the proper concern of folklorists is old legends (as we always knew it was, anyway!).

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48 Personal communication.

The third reason for the neglect of personal experience is theoretical. Unlike legends, it is argued, memorate is untraditional.[49] It is purely personal, it has not been passed on by word of mouth down through the generations, it is ephemeral, it lacks continuity, structure and poetic character. Through a memorate one has the idiosyncratic view not the cultural view. So it is that in the study of supernatural belief, delicacy, wariness and theory have combined to encourage the scholar to use legendary material.

3.4 Legendary material has another advantage. It can quite easily be collected from a variety of written sources; it is not necessary to go out in the field to do the research. This may be convenient, but it is very dangerous. It leads the folklorist back to antiquarianism - a return to the "peasant custom and savage myth"[50] approach that has been abandoned in every other branch of folkloristics. It is a retreat into the textualist approach at its narrowest, which excludes consideration of both context and performance, and it is a retreat from discussion of the nature and relevance of the two central definitive tenets of folklore: that is, of tradition and transmission. We cannot afford to retreat on so many fronts. Whatever the difficulties it must be time to leave the library for the real world. As Richard Dorson noted:

> We have done very little to collect our own culture, or even to recognize its forms. [51]

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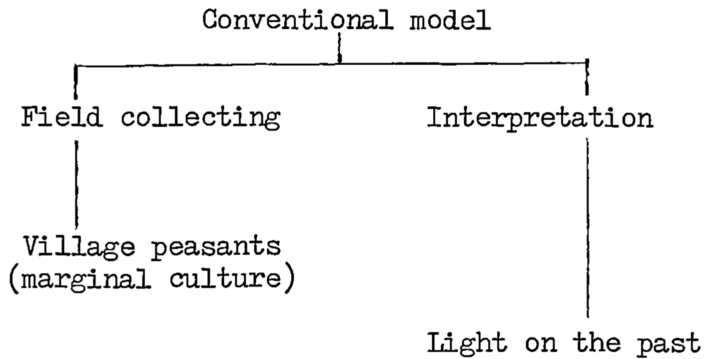
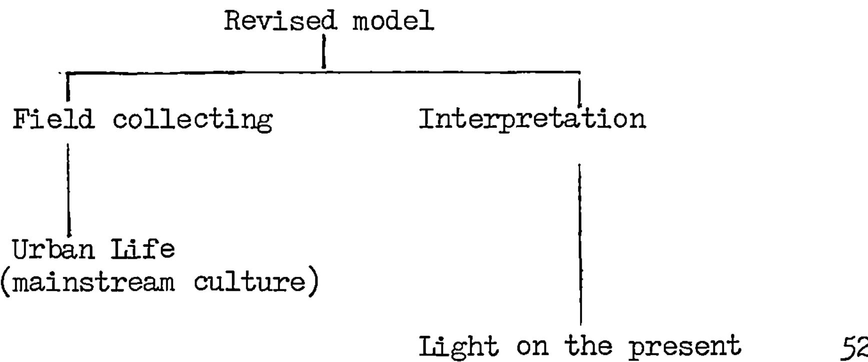
49 The memorate's lack of traditionalness in comparison with legend is implicit in Von Sydow's first description of the genre. Carl Von Sydow, Selected Papers on Folklore (Copenhagen, 1948), pp.60-88. See also Dégh and Vázsonyi's discussion in Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "The Memorate and Proto-Memorate", Journal of American Folklore, 87 (1974), 225-239.

50 Richard M. Dorson, Peasant Custom and Savage Myth (London, 1968).

51 Richard M. Dorson, Land of the Millrats (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 2.

His "revised model" of folkloristics is an apt reminder of what the task is:



[52]

In the field of supernatural lore, more than in any other field, it is time we shed "light on the present".

## 4. The relevance of memorates in folklore study

4.1 Once a researcher goes into the field collecting supernatural beliefs (s)he is likely to find that the majority of material (s)he collects is personal - personal opinion and personal stories in the form of memorate. Is this folklore? Sometimes it seems there are as many

52 Dorson (1981), p. 2.

definitions as definers of the term 'folklore'[53] but ultimately any definition in some form or other juggles with two concepts - tradition and transmission. The application of these two definitional basics causes particular problems in the study of supernatural beliefs. This, therefore, is a good place to start when considering folklore, personal experience and the relationship of each to the other. That belief in ghosts is 'traditional' (in the sense of being an old and continuing belief) is obvious on the face of it, but only as long as we do not define the word 'ghost' or seek to describe one. As soon as we do either of these things the sense of continuity is disturbed.

The fact of ghosts is traditional, the nature of ghosts is not. This sharply brings into focus the basic difficulty of the concept of tradition: what is traditional about tradition? Is it believing in ghosts that is traditional; or believing in a particular kind of ghost? Is it storytelling that is traditional, or the story that is told? The process or the item? Out of the answers given to these questions are formed the two major camps of folkloristics: textualists on one side; contextualists on the other. The majority of British work on the supernatural is strongly textualist. It aims to discover continuity of belief by recovering old legend texts from modern communities. There is an alternative - that is, to see the process as more important than the particular item it engenders, and to look for the continuities of thought that underlie both ancient and modern accounts of supernatural experiences or which structure experience in any community. If we are to study process then it is essential to listen to personal experience accounts, for

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53 See the twenty-one definitions of 'folklore' in Maria Leach (ed.), Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology & Legend (New York, 1949).

through them we are best able to see "the productivity of the rules of the genre".[54]

4.2 The second criterion - that of oral transmission, is particularly hard to apply in the case of ghostlore. More perhaps than any other genre of tradition ghostlore is influenced by the written word. The relationship between the 'folk' and the 'literary' is particularly close, each influencing the other in a long and mutually agreeable association. The elements of contemporary belief derived from literature are impossible to separate from those derived from oral sources. The oral recycling of literary stories is one of the chief features of the transmission of ideas about the supernatural, and in turn literature, film and television, when they turn to the mysteries of the occult, rely enormously on traditional oral material. To one principally interested in the processes by which experience is transmitted into culture, it matters comparatively little that historically some ghostlore is derived from written sources. For those who study texts it is important that the text should be the genuine product of a specifically oral tradition - otherwise why study that ghost story rather than The Turn of the Screw or an episode from the film Poltergeist?

For the textualist the irony is that in the study of ghost stories one cannot study texts and insist on impeccable orality. The only impeccably oral stories are the more ephemeral memorates. Our favourite old legends have come down to us through a tradition as influenced by the written as by the spoken word. Certainly the most famous stories and

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54 Dell Hymes, "The 'wife' who 'goes out' like a man: Reinterpretation of a Clackamas Chinook Myth", in Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngas Maranda (eds.), The Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 52.

those most often quoted by folklorists as well as social historians, though they may have had an oral origin, have since spent so much of their time in print that it is hard to say whether they are either oral or believed. These oft-quoted narratives, derivedfrom the classics, from the sixteenth and seventeenth century texts, from the pages of the Athenaeum and the regional folklore collections of the nineteenth century, have become more like literary stories than living legends. Their connection with actual belief, doubtful in some cases even to start with, would now be virtually impossible to establish. We cannot shed light on the present by using old materials no longer in oral transmission. If a story is not in vigorous oral transmission either diachronically from generation to generation, or synchronically among peers, how can the scholar assess whether the belief it embodies still flourishes in a given community? How can (s)he know that it is folklore? It is just a story. If you want a story that is more than "just a story", a story that shows a tradition in action, then one must turn to the memorate.

4.3 If people tell what their beliefs are and give narratives as part of their answers to questions of belief, those narratives can legitimately be taken as guides to or aspects of their beliefs, for they were given in that context and they illustrate that belief at work. People shape, interpret, or express their beliefs in culturally patterned ways and their personal narratives reflect that patterning. The memorate thus shows old processes in new items. This makes it for me the most exciting aspect of folklore, exhibiting as it does both tradition and transmission at work.

By listening to, collecting and studying memorates, far from falling into the trap of becoming psychical researcher rather than folklorist, one

can study tradition at work shaping discrepant experiences and giving meaning to meaningless perceptions. It is sensible then in a study such as this to make no distinction between 'the experience of the supernatural' and the 'tradition of the supernatural'. Memorates will have to be considered on a par with legends - just as 'traditional' but exhibiting tradition in an alternative way. The criterion of both should be how far each type of story seems to show what contemporary supernatural tradition is and how it works in ordinary people's lives.

## 5. Oral styles of folk narrators

5.1 Since the publication of Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale[55] in English in 1958, western scholars have by and large turned away from the earlier historical approach to folk narrative and focused their attention on the act of narrating itself. This interest in the process of storytelling has taken two forms: the structuralist and the contextualist/performative. Both of these approaches have much to offer, especially to the analyst of folk narrative.

5.2 Among the former group, the work of Lévi Strauss,[56] Brémond,[57] and Barthes,[58] in the forefront of anthropological theory, offer constant

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55 Vladimir Propp, The Morphology of the Folktale [Austin/London, 1968].

56 See especially Claude Lévi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning (London, 1978).

57 See especially Claude Brémond, "Morphology of the French Folktale: The Ethical Model", in Heda Jason and Dimitri Segal (eds.), Patterns in Oral Literature (The Hague, 1977), pp. 49-76.

58 See especially Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative", New Literary History, 6 (1974-5), 237-272.

insights into the nature and function of myth and folktale. In structural folkloristics, such eminent theorists as Heda Jason,[59] Pierre and Elli Köngäs Maranda[60] and Alan Dundes[61] are perennially useful reference points for the detailed study of narrative form and structure. It is to the linguists, however, that the analyst of informal oral narrative most constantly turns when looking for narrative pattern. Above all, perhaps, the greatest debt is owed to the work of Labov and Waletsky,[62] which is the starting point of all the analysis undertaken in this study. Though there are many and serious ways in which ultimately the Labovian model is unsatisfactory and simplistic, nevertheless it gives to the analyst what was lacking before: that is, a basic vocabulary for talking about structure and performance. However much the model has to be adapted, it is flexible enough to serve as a constant point of reference. Among other scholars whose insights are particularly valuable to folklorists are Longacre[63] and Grimes[64] whose immeasurably creative, comprehensive and detailed work enlarges our understanding of the processes of narrating and the forms of narrative itself.

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59 See especially Heda Jason, "Content Analysis of Oral Literature", in Jason & Segal, pp. 261-298.

60 See especially Maranda and Maranda (1971) and Elli-Kaija Köngäs and Pierre Maranda , "Structural Models in Folklore", Midwest Folklore, 12 (1962), 133-189.

61 See especially Alan Dundes, The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales , Folklore Fellows Communications, 195 (Helsinki, 1964).

62 William Labov and Joshua Waletsky, "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience", in June Helm (ed.), Essays on the Visual and Verbal Arts (Seattle, 1967), pp. 12-44.

63 See especially R.E. Longacre, An Anatomy of Speech Notions (Lisse, 1976).

64 See especially J.E. Grimes, Thread of Discourse (The Hague, 1975).

Other workers in the field of narrative have taken a narrower focus to great effect. To Livia Polyani's work, for example, we are indebted for insight into the fluid and negotiable aspect of storytelling;[65] to Nessa Wolfson for a detailed and enlightening study of tense use;[66] to Janet Langlois for showing the rhythmic counterpoint of legend structure.[67] Outside folklore and linguistics, the work of Harvey Sacks in children's stories shows the underlying assumptions, conventions and formulae which allow hearers to understand that a story is being told.[68] It is through patient and imaginative work like this that we are beginning to understand our own narrative culture.

5.3 Equally the work of the scholars who pioneered contextualist and performative approaches to folklore is enormously relevant to the study of both traditional and informal oral narrative. The holistic approach to narrative as shown particularly in the work of Sherzer[69] and

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65 Livia Polyani, "So What's the Point?", Semiotica, 25 (1979), 207-241.

66 Nessa Wolfson, "A Feature of Performed Narrative: The Conversational Historic Present", Language in Society, 7 (1978), 215-237.

67 Janet Langlois, "Belle Gunness, the Lady Bluebeard: Community Legend as Metaphor", Journal of the Folklore Institute, 15, no. 2 (May to August, 1978), 147-160.

68 Harvey Sacks, "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children", in J.J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (eds.), Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication (New York, 1972), pp. 325-345.

69 See for example, Joel Sherzer, "Strategies in Text and Context: Cuna Kaa Kwento", Journal of American Folklore, 92 (1979), 146-163.

Hymes[70] constantly reminds the analyst that a text is not an isolated phenomenon but exists in a complete cultural environment. Similarly the studies of scholars like Abrahams,[71] Ben Amos[72] and Georges[73] stress that any given text is a performance of that text and cannot be treated in isolation from that context. These useful correctives to too much text orientation send the researcher back to the original material to seek a more delicate and discerning analysis, and, by doing so, remedy misapprehensions in the understanding of the event, and crudities and over-simplification in transcription and presentation. Any analysis of structure and style in this study will therefore attempt to maintain a balance between textual and performative approaches.

5.4 Another guiding light in folk narrative studies is Richard Dorson's work on the oral style of American folk narrators.[74] Dorson's storytellers were artists in their own field, skilled raconteurs in demand in their own community as entertainers. Yet everybody, or almost everybody, tells stories and most of us have no particular expertise or reputation as storytellers. As far as I am aware no-one has yet studied the storytelling of naive narrators in depth. Here, however, is a

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70 See, for example, Dell Hymes, "The Grounding of Performance and Text in a Narrative View of Life", Alcheringa 4, no. 1 (1978), 137-140, and Dell Hymes, "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life", in Gumperz and Hymes, pp. 35-71.

71 See, for example, Roger D. Abrahams, "Toward an Enactment-centred Theory of Folklore", in William Bascom (ed.), Frontiers of Folklore (Boulder, 1977), pp. 79-120.

72 See, for example, Dan Ben Amos, "Towards a Definition of Folklore in Context", Journal of American Folklore, 84 (1971), 3-15.

73 See especially Robert A. Georges, "Towards an Understanding of Storytelling Events", Journal of American Folklore, 82 (1969), 313-328; and Robert A. Georges, "From Folktale Research to the Study of Narrating", in Juha Pentikainen and Tuula Juurikka (eds.), Folk Narrative Research (Helsinki, 1976), pp. 159-168.

74 Richard M. Dorson, "Oral Styles of American Folk Narrators", in Richard M. Dorson, Folklore: Selected Essays (London/Bloomington, 1972), pp. 99-146.

fascinating field of research - the discovery of those techniques and conventions upon which even the least able narrator relies in our culture. Humankind is a speaking, narrating creature: by seeking to understand how we speak and 'tell', we seek to understand ourselves just that little bit better.

5.5 The present work then will attempt an examination of story, language and belief. The aim is to approach each through the other and to synthesise the three in order the better to understand the processes of presenting ourselves, our thoughts and our experiences to the world.

After the presentation of the methodological approach, the work will be divided into three main sections. Chapters 3 to 5 will examine the literature of the ghost in each of the historical periods outlined above in order to discuss (a) how far that literature is a reliable guide to the folklore of the time, and (b) what the stereotype of the ghost may have been for that period. Chapters 6-9 will present the supernatural beliefs and stories of a single community and assess (a) how each type of story is presented, (b) how far the stories may reflect belief, and (c) what the nature and function of those beliefs may be. Chapters 10 and 11 will examine a corpus of memorates and seek to discover the structures and performative conventions on which the narrators rely.

5.6 Any work on the supernatural, where the information is culled from living people, must be presented with a plea from the writer. Much of the material on which the present work is based is frighteningly personal. Those who told me their thoughts and their experiences deserve to be treated well; they have been more open than one would have thought possible. Many of the stories told here are tragic and nearly all involve

loss and suffering. The informants have all my gratitude and affection. May they also have the reader's - for

> Where'er we tread 'tis haunted, holy ground.[75]

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75 Byron, The Bride of Abydos, 11, lxxxviii.

# CHAPTER 2

## Methodology

The discussion of the methodology is presented in five sections:

Section 1: Fieldwork

Section 2: Interim Evaluation of the fieldwork

Section 3: The data and the selection of a reference group

Section 4: Early analysis

Section 5: Final evaluation and summary

## 1. Fieldwork

1.1 Since very little British recent folkloristic research into supernatural belief has been based on fieldwork, there is little guidance on how to set up an elicitation methodology for a study such as the present one; yet it is obviously essential to get away from a library-based investigation and out into the community. Only through fieldwork can "light be shed on the present".

Outside the discipline of folklore, however, some methodological models are available. At various times, members of the Society for Psychical Research have conducted wide-ranging surveys simply by making public appeals for information. This method was tried with some success by Gurney, Myers and Podmore in 1886,[1] and Sidgewick, Johnson et al. in 1894.[2] Writers with an eye on the popular and commercial market (for

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1 E. Gurney, F.W.H. Myers and F. Podmore, Phantasms of the Living (London, 1880).

2 Mrs. Sidgewick and Miss Alice Johnson, "Report of the Census of Hallucinations", Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 10 (1894).

example Ingram in 1884,[3] and Byrne in 1969[4]) have adopted the same appeal technique using the pages of the Athenaeum (in the case of Ingram) and the local newspaper (in the case of Byrne). Newspapers themselves have on occasion compiled considerable amounts of data on the supernatural simply by asking for information and publishing the accounts they select. The Daily News survey of 1926[5] was particularly successful in this respect; Sir Ernest Bennett compiled a very useful collection of legends and personal experience stories by the use of radio broadcasts;[6] and the sociologist Geoffrey Gorer has published important work, the data for which were collected through a questionnaire published by and circulated through a Sunday paper.[7] All this work has produced considerable bodies of useful information.

Elsewhere psychologists, sociologists and educationalists have used student volunteers and administered written questionnaires to them to test their attitudes and beliefs over a range of popular superstition, including the supernatural.[8]

These were the sorts of methodologies which were initially considered. They have the advantage of being (a) received practice, (b) capable of

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3 John H. Ingram, The Haunted Houses and Family Traditions of Great Britain (London, 1884).

4 Patrick Byrne, Irish Ghost Stories (Cork, 1969); and The Second Book of Irish Ghost Stories (Cork, 1971).

5 S. Louis Giraud, True Ghost Stories told by readers of the Daily News (London, 1927).

6 Sir Ernest Bennett, Apparitions and Haunted Houses (London, 1939).

7 Geoffrey Gorer, Exploring English Character (London, 1955).

8 H. K. Nixon, "Popular answers to some psychological questions", American Journal of Psychology, 36 (1925), 418-423; Eugene E. Levitt, "Superstitions Twenty-five years ago and today", American Journal of Psychology, 65 (1952), 443-449; Lynn L. Ralya, "Some surprising Beliefs concerning Human Nature among Pre-medical Psychology Students", British Journal of Educational Psychology, 15 (1945), 70-75; F. W. Warburton, "Beliefs concerning Human Nature among Students in a University Department of Education", British Journal of Educational Psychology, 26 (1956), 156-162.

widespread application, (c) successful in accumulating large amounts of data, and (d) surveying a good cross-section of the community. All are based on two practices: the use of volunteers contacted through some sort of appeal; and the administration of a written questionnaire. My early endeavours therefore sought to adapt this approach to folkloristic study, for it seemed to be a technique capable of yielding a wide range of material and to have few practical difficulties. I thought that it might be possible to conduct such an inquiry through the popular tabloid The Daily Star for it customarily carries a number of reports of psychic experiences and actively invites reader participation in many of its projects. I also had an acquaintance on the editorial staff who I thought might be amused to help me.

1.2 Before this project got under way, however, serious theoretical and practical objections began to appear. In order to initiate responses it would be necessary to submit an article to engage public interest: to appeal to a paper like the Daily Star, the article would have to be aimed at the popular level and contain mainly narrative examples. Consequently the replies might be strongly biased towards narratives of the type originally included in the article. In addition, the respondents would be entirely self-selected and the study would be wholly text-based. All hope of studying a representative group of people or of being able to set narratives in their context would have to be abandoned.

Some of these theoretical problems might be overcome by following up written replies by face-to-face interviews. However, if that were to be the aim then the appeal for informants could not be made through a national newspaper. Too much time would be wasted by travel and organisational problems.

1.3 To overcome at least the latter set of problems, I decided to approach local rather than national papers. I telephoned the features editor, explained my purpose and offered to write a small article to accompany a request for informants. The article contained one local ghost legend, the phantom hitchhiker urban legend, and a personal experience story told to me by a fellow student. These seemed fairly representative of the range of stories thought to circulate in modern urban communities. As a result I was invited to Radio Manchester to participate in a programme where the interviewer asked for information about ghosts and invited me to tell a current ghost story and appeal for informants. This interview, plus the first four pieces in local newspapers, produced a grand total of three responses. With that average I might perhaps get eighteen informants by covering every suburban paper in the whole of the conurbation, so when my attention was drawn to an article about a local ghost in a Sheffield free paper I thought no harm would come of writing a letter to the editor and asking for informants in the Sheffield area too. I received only three replies. I could see that even if I covered every newspaper in the north of England it was likely that I would get very few useful results.

Unfortunately these early experiences with the press had not been happy ones, for the journalists were steadily altering the content of the articles and interviews. The pattern was that they seized on the familiar urban legend, asked for more, then edited out the other material, so that the article as published contained only urban legend not the broad band of tales of the unexpected which I was seeking. Obviously there was no control over what the press finally printed, and, without control, their publicity was no use. In brief, this technique did not have much to recommend it; in practice, it was neither easy nor productive.

1.4 Moreover, the method was revealing itself as a trap. Though a corpus of narrative elicited under such conditions would obviously be

preferable to one gathered from documentary sources, it still would not be possible to assess its relevance in terms of any relationship to actual belief. Consistently the folkloristic literature has assumed that narratives, especially legends, reveal belief in a simple one-to-one relationship, and the study of ghost stories thus does duty for the study of ghost beliefs. But this assumption has not been tested and need not be true. By asking solely for narrative responses, I too was in danger of making this mistake.

The relevant questions to pose as far as ghost stories are concerned are first whether they are used in the expression of belief, and secondly, if they are so used, then how and to what effect. A fieldwork methodology, therefore, rather than requesting narratives should specifically refrain from doing so. It should present the research to the informants as about beliefs not stories and allow, or at least not discourage, an independent assessment of the strength and nature of belief in the occult. Thus any narrative corpus which results from the fieldwork can be set in the context of belief and at the same time corroborated by reference to that context.

The aims of the fieldwork were therefore updated and expanded to include, as well as the collection (if possible) of a corpus of supernatural stories, the acquisition of an overall, working knowledge of the informants' belief systems and the means to assess how far those systems were expressed or justified by means of narrative.

1.5 I was encouraged to think that such ambitious aims could be achieved because, though formal requests were having very little effect, during this time I was unofficially collecting a wide range of spontaneous opinion and narrative from friends and acquaintances. Whenever the subject of my research was mentioned, people promptly and unselfconsciously started talking and telling personal experience stories. Also, on the occasions when I spoke to reporters when trying to arrange for an article to appear

in one of the papers, I encountered ready interest and information about where local ghosts could be found. Gerald Maine of BBC Radio Blackburn, for example, supplied copies of interviews from his programme "The Ghost Hunt" and was keen to discuss his reactions to what he had seen and heard while making the series.

It was obvious from all this that there is an interest in the macabre and supernatural which relies on an underlying stratum of received traditional belief and which can be readily tapped. The story of strange events was indeed the robust branch of narrative which I had been seeking, and discussion of the occult a perennially interesting topic.

1.6 The answer to the methodological problems was obviously to abandon appeals to the public through newspapers and radio and to adopt a more personal approach through face-to-face interviews. As I wanted to avoid direct elicitation of narratives, the interview would have to be constructed and presented as a survey of attitudes and beliefs. If it was organised round a structured schedule of oral questions and answers, it would be possible to cover a good many aspects of supernatural belief and to create a situation which might spontaneously elicit narratives in context. It would have to be free-ranging and relaxed, as nearly a purely social encounter as possible, because its subject matter would be 'delicate', and in order not to obstruct the free flow of discussion which might give rise to storytelling. As far as the interview schedule was concerned, this meant that I would have to have in mind a series of possible questions but be prepared to abandon the planned line of approach if it was unproductive or if the respondents' own interests lay in a different direction. It also ruled out any notebook-and-pencil or written questionnaire approach and necessitated the use of free conversation, tape-recorded and later transcribed.

As far as the venue was concerned, several possibilities presented themselves. Ideally the interview should take place in the sort of environment where stories and rumours naturally circulate and where the topic would not be too out of place. On the one hand, staffrooms and canteens seemed promising venues, for such places naturally provide homogeneous groupings and spontaneous talk;[9] but here it would be virtually impossible to control the interview. On the other hand, hairdressing salons seemed good ground, for confidences are frequently exchanged in this environment; but there the social environment might not always be quite right.

Eventually I hit on the idea of asking my father (a chiropodist) to let me interview his patients. This had several advantages. First, it gave good control of the interview and a relaxed atmosphere, because I could be regarded, as it were, as an extension of my father rather than as a stranger. Secondly, his patients were a fairly homogeneous group of mainly retired people. Thirdly, my father had been at his present surgery for fourteen years and was to retire in six months time, so that even if my presence were resented by his patients (which I doubted), it could not adversely affect his practice. Fourthly, in the chiropodist's surgery, as at hairdressers' salons, conversation is by convention necessary and I knew that my father was accustomed to talk on a variety of subjects well beyond mere chat; he was used to receiving confidences, discussing politics, religion and philosophy, giving practical advice and hearing domestic and marital troubles. Fifthly, I knew that my father had discussed the supernatural with his patients from time to time. For example, he had recently

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9 See for example the excellent work which has been conducted on workplace interaction. A particularly good example is Don Handelman, "Expressive Interaction and Social Structure: Play and an emergent game-form in an Israeli Social Setting", in Adam Kendon, Richard M. Harris and Mary Ritchie Key (eds.), The Organization of Behaviour in Face-to-face Communication (The Hague, 1975), pp. 389-414.

told me that two of his patients had told him, while these things were still on their minds, stories of alarming experiences which they had interpreted as supernatural.

His status as a sort of agony aunt or confessor was the result of several factors. Most obviously, he is kind and readily sympathetic and has known his patients for many years. A chiropody visit normally lasts twenty minutes and is a regular monthly or two-monthly occurrence. Patients attend a chiropodist's clinic over a period of years rather than weeks, for most foot ailments are the result of long-term, continuing misuse rather than of a disease or infection which can be dealt with in a short course of treatment. Secondly, by its nature, chiropodial care is personal and somewhat intimate. Thirdly, most patients are elderly; and lastly my father is in the same age group as the majority of his patients and is based at home in a Manchester suburb. Many of his patients go to the same shops, church and doctor as he and my mother (who works as his secretary/ receptionist), so they are a part of a social network based on the neighbourhood. It seemed to me that his surgery could well be the sort of environment in which supernatural happenings might be talked of without undue falsity.

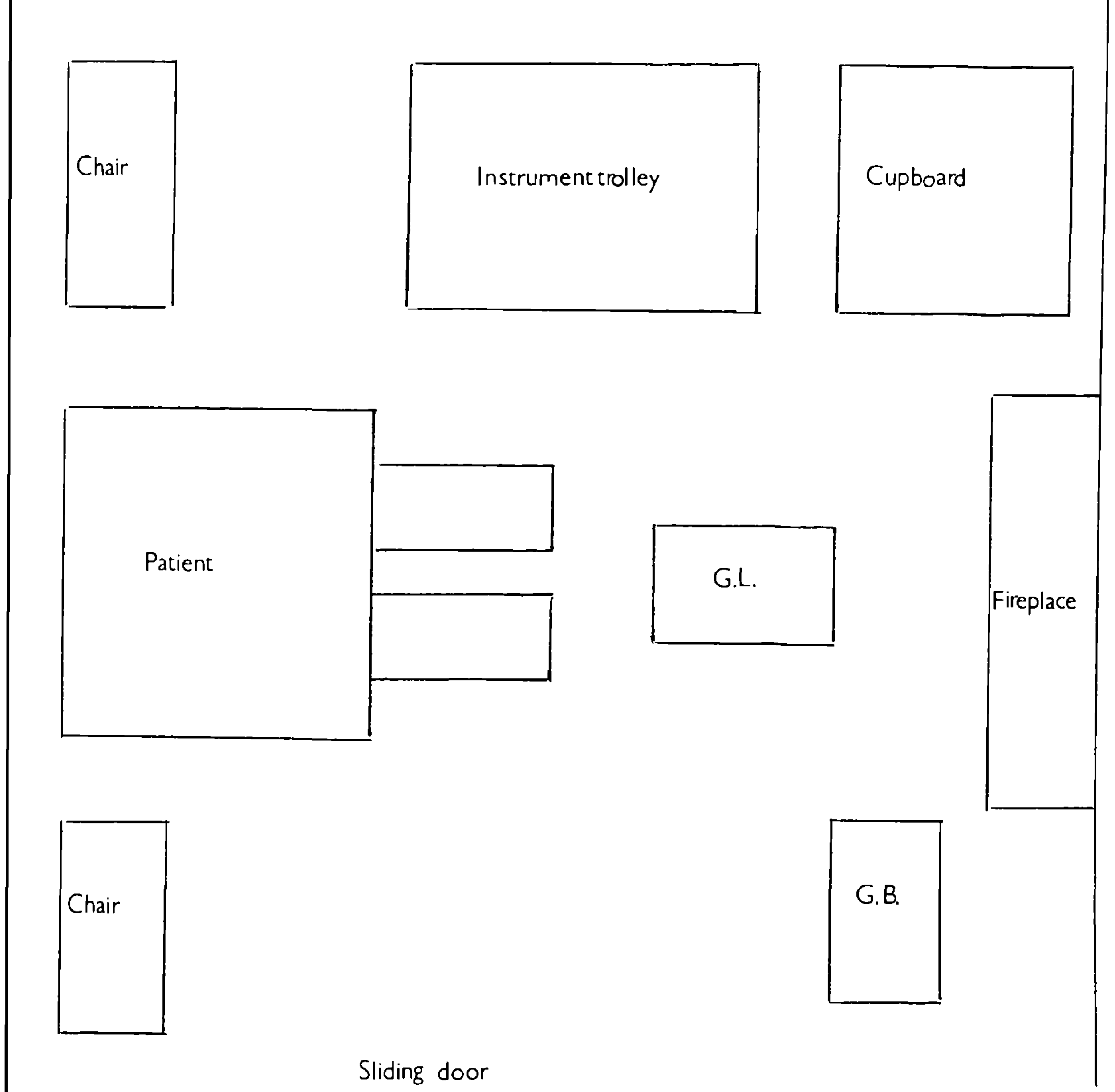
1.7 The surgery is situated in Gatley, a pleasant pre-war suburb which lies approximately ten miles south of Manchester city centre on the boundary of Lancashire and Cheshire formed by the River Mersey. Before the conurbation grew, Gatley had been a separate village, one of the many in the Mersey valley. Like other settlements, it retains its 'village' - a central area of shops and services adjacent to the old green. The surgery is held in the converted rear portion of the family home, fairly near the village. The local family practitioner's surgery is fifty yards away in the same area. Both doctor and chiropodist serve the people of the area

in which they themselves live and are part of the network of local services and social relationships.

1.8 I arranged with my father to co-opt him into my research by allowing me to interview his patients two days a week until he retired or I had seen them all, whichever happened first. So we had a three-way system:- an informant; a participant-observer; and a researcher whose status was ambiguous - part social (as my father's daughter), part eavesdropper to the main business, and part interviewer. The ambiguity of my position was deliberately chosen and cultivated, as increasing the naturalness and flexibility of the situation.

It was not difficult to arrange the surgery so that I did not interfere with the work, and yet was not too far from the person who was to be interviewed. I sat behind and to the left of my father (G.L.) about four or five feet away from his patient, with a tape-recorder under the chair. Initially I used as small and inconspicuous a machine as possible, thinking to minimise the artificiality of the situation. However this machine picked up far too much extraneous noise - nail clippers, drills and even nail files made a surprising amount of noise, and the clatter of the ratchets on the footrests drowned out every other sound every time they were used. In practice, as permission had to be asked to record the interview, it hardly mattered whether the machinery was conspicuous or not. Consequently, I changed to a larger, more professional machine with a strongly directional microphone which I held in my hand resting on my crossed knee. I found that this coped better with potential recording difficulties and was no more intrusive than the small machine had been.

Figure 1: PLAN OF SURGERY AND SEATING ARRANGEMENTS



During the time I worked there, I probably saw six or seven out of every ten patients who came to the surgery. I was not allowed to interview those who were recently bereaved, those who were touchy or fearful by nature, suffering from any sort of psychological distress, were late, whom my father did not like, were in a hurry, new patients, or had malformed feet. This successfully randomised the sample, for there was no way of knowing which patients might come into these categories.

1.9 I arranged with G.L. that he would introduce me to each of his patients and ask permission for me to interview them, but that I myself should tell them about the research. Each person was told that I was doing a survey into attitudes towards "what you might call the uncanny or otherworldly aspects of life". This led to a series of oral questions ranging from astrology to the return of the dead, in answer to which the informants were encouraged to talk freely and naturally. The question and answer framework had to be kept very flexible and open, for the purpose was to invite chat and if possible to create a suitable context for narrative. I agreed with G.L. that he should not try to direct patients into specific lines of inquiry, and should not interrupt if they were in full flow however irrelevent he thought their talk was. He got into the habit of joining in with query, story or personal opinion when, and only when, conversation flagged, or if he felt that my questioning was getting nowhere yet his greater knowledge of the patient suggested that another approach might be more profitable. Thus it worked out fairly soon into an equal partnership. Most people were interested and co-operative, only a minority were wary, and many commented that they had enjoyed their visit.

The opening formula, the format of the interview and the questions asked were all worked out by trial and error. As far as the opening formula is concerned, initially I had said I was interested in "the supernatural",

but this produced negative reactions ranging from denial to hostility and even fear. Next, the formula was amended to "popular beliefs like you read about in the papers", but this seemed to confuse informants and leave them unprepared for what was to be asked. After the first four days, I settled down to the formula used for the rest of the fieldwork.

A similar flexibility of approach governed the wording of the questions. Again, it was through trial and error that the eventual terminology evolved. For example, in the first days of the research the informants were asked whether they believed in "ghosts", and they all said they did not. When, however, I began to listen to and imitate their own usage the results were more positive. "Does your mother ever come to you?" produced many positive replies, and later when amended to, "You know how you hear people say that their mother comes to them sometimes when they're in trouble - their mother's often been dead - oh, years. What do you make of that?", the rate of affirmatives improved again. This formula seemed to reassure the informants that they were not alone in their experiences and gave the illusion that they were commenting on another person's belief rather than revealing their own. This wording was the one used in all but a minority of interviews.

Originally, it had been the intention to encourage talk about the returning dead only, but in practice it was found convenient to widen the scope of the questions to accommodate less alarming and delicate matters. This decision initially arose out of a fellow-student's[11] remark that she thought the ghost story proper was a middle-class phenomenon and that working-class people tended to have premonitions and warnings rather than to see ghosts. This interesting idea was obviously worth testing. It then only wanted the addition of a question about telepathy for the interview

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11 My thanks to Danuta Davies for this observation.

to cover the four preoccupations of mainstream psychical research - apparitions, precognition, supernatural warnings, and telepathy - so this last topic too was added. However, the resulting list of questions was intimidatingly personal and needed some gentler, less controversial additions to make it usable as a basis for conversation, so questions about fortune telling and astrology (both horoscopes and birthsigns) were included. This meant that the delicate subjects could be offset by - indeed preceded by - the casual, commonplace and inoffensive. Hence, a format evolved in which the early questions concerned forms of divination, later ones asked about premonitions and warnings, and lastly the difficult question of the spirits of the dead was approached. This took the form of asking about revenants, poltergeists and the afterlife. Finally, the last questions reduced tension by asking about telepathy and life on other planets - subjects people seem particularly disposed to chat about. The former, in particular, was useful as it often led into talk about family and friends, and so let the interview situation fade out rather than abruptly terminate.

1.10 The interview technique that thus evolved soon settled down into a useful and practical pattern. Unfortunately, it did not continue for as long as I had first planned. The original expectation had been to work at the surgery from January to June 1981 and interview between two and three hundred people. However, after we had been working together for just over three months, G.L. was suddenly taken ill, his heart condition (always serious) was worsened by his illness and he was ordered to retire at once. Work thus stopped abruptly on the 8th April 1981 and was not resumed. By this time, I had interviewed 124 people (ninety-four women over sixty years old, seventeen younger women and thirteen men of pensionable age).

The interviewing was, of course, rather less extensive than I had planned. It was especially disappointing that the sample of people interviewed was so unrepresentative as to age and sex. I had hoped that, even if the bias towards elderly women might not be corrected in later work, another two or three months of interviews might at least give larger numbers of men and younger women among the eventual total. On the other hand, to analyse the tape recorded conversation of 124 people was already a considerable task, and I felt that it might be as well to call a halt at this juncture.

1.11 While I was yet in a quandary, one of my brothers (M.L.) suggested an answer to the dilemma. M.L., a lecturer at a school of chiropody, at that time supplemented his income by conducting a short evening session each week at our father's surgery. He thought that I might like to continue the work with him as collaborator - at least for the six sessions remaining until G.L.'s surgery furniture was sold and the house reconverted to a purely private dwelling. We thought that the fieldwork conditions would be sufficiently similar, but that an interesting comparison might be made between G.L.'s erstwhile patients and M.L.'s, who were younger working people. When I was considering this proposal, the best plan seemed to be to interview women only and hope to build up a good sample of the younger group to act as contrast to the older women who had previously been the main informants. The research would thus have a natural coherence as a study of the belief systems of women.

I started work with M.L. in the first week of May. The only significant difference in the interview context lay in the personality of M.L. and his relationship with his patients. Whereas G.L. was affable and familiar and, in a sense, unprofessional, M.L. projected a rather different image. He had known his patients for a much shorter time, and maintained

more professional distance. He is more concerned than G.L. with status, role and theory, and adopts a special 'medical man' intonation when talking to his patients (a sort of brisk sing-song). He does not invite, though he nevertheless receives, confidences. He is young, smart and handsome, which might deter older people from confiding in him or chatting informally. In order to counteract the greater formality that this created, the introductory formula was changed a little. I explained that I had conducted a survey into "the uncanny and mysterious side of life" with the older generation and now wished to see if younger, working women "had the same ideas". This cast the whole interview in the light of comment rather than self-revelation. Fortunately, M.L. is like G.L. in, as he says, "believing all of it" and in being ready to tell experiences of his own. Together, these things reduced the potentiality for greater formality in these interviews.

Though in principle there was no reason not to continue to work with M.L. there was however a practical reason which terminated the arrangement after three weeks. My decision to interview only M.L.'s women patients had unfortunately been a miscalculation, as it turned out, for most of M.L.'s patients were men! During three weeks, therefore, I had only been able to interview eight women (two over sixty and six under sixty years old). In terms of value for time this was clearly wasteful, so I resolved to stop. During January to May 1981, therefore, I interviewed 132 people:- ninety-six women of over sixty; twenty-three women younger than sixty years of age; and thirteen retired men.

## 2. Interim Evaluation of Methodology

2.1 The fieldwork procedure had been evolved with three purposes in mind: to acquire a working knowledge of the types of supernatural belief that members of a particular community might hold; to test whether, in discussing or expressing belief, speakers use narrative (and, if so, which genre they prefer); thirdly, to acquire (if possible) a corpus of contemporary stories of the supernatural. With hindsight it now appears that each of these aims to some degree was capable of defeating the others. For example, the most satisfactory way of acquiring a reasonably reliable insight into the spread of supernatural beliefs would have been to ask every respondent questions on every topic and thus be able to make statistical comparisons. On the other hand, the most satisfactory way of acquiring a story corpus would have been to follow the original course and to invite narrative directly. However, each of these two approaches was ruled out by the decision to test whether speakers do actually use narrative when asked to discuss questions of belief. Speakers were therefore allowed to talk freely on any topic they pleased as long as it interested them and were not encouraged either to tell stories or to complete the schedule. On the one hand that meant taking the risk that there would be no narrative response whatsoever, and on the other hand risking not being able to complete all the questions with each informant. As it happened, the first danger never arose and narrative constituted a significant portion of conversation-time for most respondents. The second problem however was significant - it was indeed impossible to obtain a hundred percent response on any of the questions. The number of women interviewed in the study group (see below, pp. 49-52 ) was eighty-seven. The number of responses on each question was as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| horoscopes | 81 |
| birthsigns | 60 |
| fortune telling | 53 |
| premonitions | 69 |
| omens | 60 |
| revenants | 67 |
| poltergeists | 47 |
| telepathy | 47 |
| UFOs/life on other planets | 50 |
| life after death | 31 |

This means that statistically significant measures of frequency were difficult to achieve.

2.2 In spite of drawbacks, however, the technique was still successful in giving a general picture of current beliefs. An interview such as this has two advantages which a questionnaire or fixed format interview cannot have. In the first place, it allows people to talk about only what interests them, therefore the researcher is in a better position to assess what is culturally significant. Secondly, just as it gives the informant a necessary freedom, so it gives the interviewer a similar flexibility. In a fixed questionnaire interview, the researcher is liable to get a false predominance of negative answers, for whereas (s)he is hard put to it to keep the responsive informant in check and actually encourage him or her to finish the questionnaire, the unresponsive and negative informant finishes very quickly. If there is no need to complete a set number of questions, then the question schedules which are incomplete because the responsive informant talks at length on the topics which interest her will be offset by those which are incomplete because the researcher has given up, discouraged by a set of totally negative answers. Thus in many ways the free interview, though it cannot have statistical validity, yet probably gives a more representative picture.

Of all the research aims, however, the methodology was best suited to discovering whether narrative is a feature of the expression of belief. Even at an early stage it became obvious that narrative is a vital component

of the expression and discussion of matters of opinion. Ironically, too, the methodology proved successful as a means of eliciting narrative - though this was the research aim put most in jeopardy by the interview technique. The narrative content of the interviews was high, especially bearing in mind that nobody was asked to tell a story, and there was a large degree of homogeneity in these stories (a very substantial proportion of this total being memorates, more than a hundred of which recounted supernatural experiences). A methodology which elicits over a hundred examples of a single genre without once directly asking anyone to tell a story must have something to recommend it.

## 3. The Data and the Selection of a Reference Group

3.1 Though the fieldwork had been abruptly terminated before I had interviewed as many people as I should have liked to, nevertheless I had acquired a total of thirty-six hours of recorded material. This took the form of direct answers to questions, stories, reminiscences, discussions and theorising. It seemed adequate as a data-base - in some ways, more than adequate if the data was to be subjected to detailed analysis. It was possible, in fact, to be selective. With such a large amount of data to be analysed, it seemed best to limit the scope of the analysis to a certain extent:

1. it was possible as well as advisable to set aside some early unsatisfactory interviews and recordings;
2. it was possible to limit the study of the incidence and nature of supernatural beliefs to those of a single homogeneous grouping within the larger group of the informants;

3. it was possible to limit the study of narrative per se to a single genre.

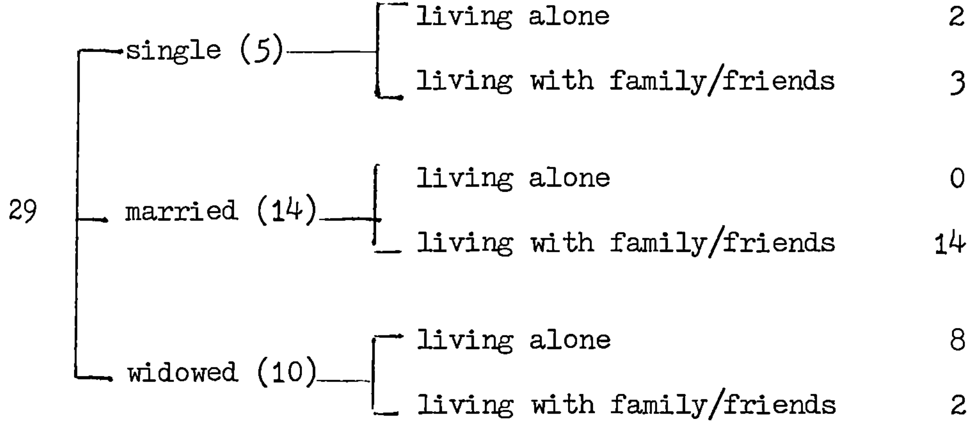
3.2 The early interviews posed special problems. I was particularly aware that during this period the interview technique and questions were still evolving and that mistakes, both technical and psychological, had been made. The technical mistakes had resulted at times in the tapes being difficult to understand and the transcriptions were therefore in places incomplete. As it was necessary to analyse the manner as well as the matter of the responses, this was a deficiency which could not be ignored. The psychological mistake lay in the type of approach to the informant. I suspected that many of the early responses did not reflect true opinions but were the results of an approach found by later experience to be inappropriate. The early interviews thus created a significantly different atmosphere and used questions which were not only expressed differently but sometimes were different in content too. These problems particularly affected nine interviews conducted in the first two days of fieldwork. As there were so many other informants whose responses could be analysed, it seemed possible as well as advisable to set these nine defective interviews on one side, and concentrate attention on the 123 satisfactory ones.

3.3 As far as the selection of a study group from among the informants was concerned, it seemed best to keep to the plan of making the research a study of women's beliefs and to concentrate attention on older women only, as they were a substantial majority of the informants.

G.L. was able to provide a breakdown of the age and domestic circumstances of eighty-one of the eighty-seven older women, so that at least some social considerations could be taken into account in analysis and discussion. Table 1 gives this breakdown:

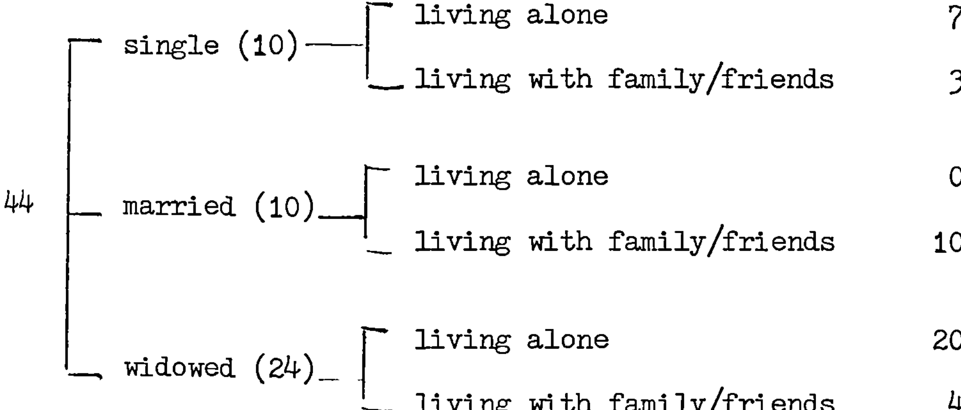
TABLE 1: Age and Domestic Circumstances of 81 Women in the Study Group of 87 Elderly Women

AGE: 60 - 70 (29 women)



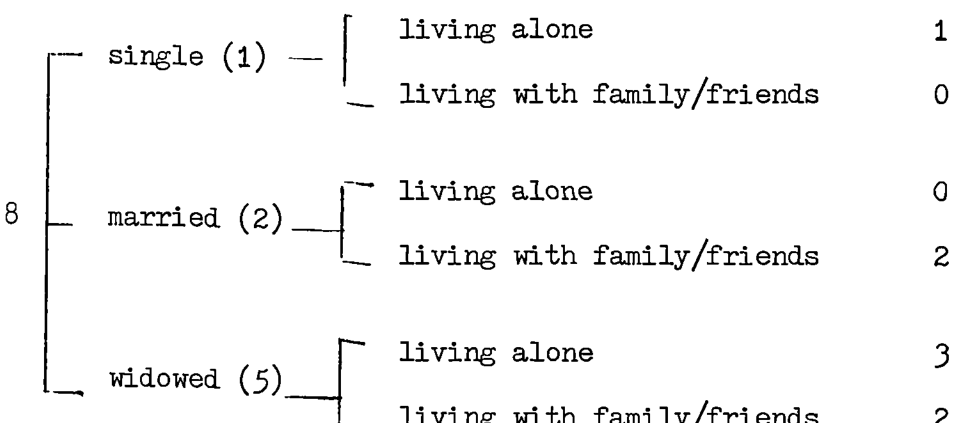
| Total | Marital status | Living arrangement | Number |
|---|---|---|---|
| 29 | single (5) | living alone | 2 |
| | | living with family/friends | 3 |
| | married (14) | living alone | 0 |
| | | living with family/friends | 14 |
| | widowed (10) | living alone | 8 |
| | | living with family/friends | 2 |

AGE: 70 - 80 (44 women)



| Total | Marital status | Living arrangement | Number |
|---|---|---|---|
| 44 | single (10) | living alone | 7 |
| | | living with family/friends | 3 |
| | married (10) | living alone | 0 |
| | | living with family/friends | 10 |
| | widowed (24) | living alone | 20 |
| | | living with family/friends | 4 |

AGE: 80 - 90 (8 women)



| Total | Marital status | Living arrangement | Number |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | single (1) | living alone | 1 |
| | | living with family/friends | 0 |
| | married (2) | living alone | 0 |
| | | living with family/friends | 2 |
| | widowed (5) | living alone | 3 |
| | | living with family/friends | 2 |

The men and younger women were regarded as contrast groups and their beliefs analysed only as comparison to the views of the larger reference group.

It remained for one final adjustment to be considered. Among the twenty-three younger women were three considerably more youthful than the average. Most of the "younger women" were young only in comparison with the study group - their average age was fifty or fifty-five - and (with the exception of these three) no one was younger than forty. The three exceptions were only eighteen to twenty-five years old and so in terms of experience were of a distinctly different generation. It seemed wisest, therefore, not to consider these as part of the contrasting group of women, yet they were hardly numerous enough to constitute another distinct sub-group. With some regret therefore I decided not to use material obtained in these interviews (except where it was of exceptional interest, see below pp. 553-4 ). The final number of interviews transcribed and analysed was therefore reduced from 123 to 120.

3.4 The 120 interviews finally selected for analysis afford 153 narratives, of which 121 were memorates and thirty-two were legends and personal experience stories told at second hand.[12] 111 of the memorates recorded experiences of a supernatural or quasi-supernatural nature. These 111 were taken as the corpus of narrative for later analysis. The majority were told by women of the main sample, a minority contributed by members of the smaller contrasting groups as follows:

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12 Cf. Chapter 6, Section 5.2.2.

TABLE 2: Narratives and Narrators of Supernatural Experiences

| Narrators | No. of Narratives |
|---|---|
| women of the study group | 92 |
| women of contrast group | 10 |
| men | 9 |
| TOTAL | 111 |

It may be seen that the study of the memorate corpus is essentially a study of women's storytelling styles within the genre, for once again the contribution made by women outweighs that of men. If there were sex or age differences in storytelling performance they were not revealed, the memorates presenting a unified and cohesive pattern in the analysis.

3.5 Summary

The following study is based as follows:

The total data base = 120 interviews recorded between January and May 1981

The reference group = 87 women over sixty years old

The contrast groups = 20 women 40 - 60 years old
13 elderly men

The narrative corpus = 111 memorates told within the context of the 120 interviews both by women of the main study group and by the contrast groups.

## 4. Analysis of degree of belief

4.1 The fieldwork produced ample data for the discussion of the three areas of concern central to the research, that is:

(a) the incidence of belief in the supernatural among the women of the reference group and the co-occurrence of narrative;

(b) the nature of their supernatural concepts and categories;

(c) the structure and style of memorate.

These topics will be considered in turn in succeeding chapters of this work, after the review of the literature.

The first of these chapters (chapter 6) is intended as an introduction to the succeeding three (chapters 7, 8 and 9). It (1) presents the results of the survey of belief among the study group, and (2) discusses the relationship(s) of narrative and belief as shown in the fieldwork. Section 4.2 below describes the analysis on which calculation of the incidence of belief in supernatural traditions among the study group (and contrasting groups) was based.

4.2 This analysis sought to quantify (at least roughly) the degree of belief expressed by each informant in her answers to specific questions on astrology (horoscopes and birth signs), divination, premonitions, omens, the return of the dead, poltergeists, life-after-death, telepathy and UFOs. This was a task of some difficulty. Problems arose because:

(a) the informant told a story instead of giving a direct answer. In some cases this was because the question reminded her of a story she had heard or liked to tell and sometimes the story was told because it seemed to her to embody her attitude. It was often impossible to tell which category a given narrative fell into;

(b) the informant contradicted herself, was evasive or overhelpful;

(c) the informant replied irrelevantly, but considered her answer quite adequate;

(d) the informant did not recognise the same categories as the interviewer so that, for instance, she told a story about a revenant when asked about omens or said that she believed in telepathy when asked about precognition. These muddles of terminology could seldom be resolved in the interview because of the fear of embarrassing or humiliating the informants, many of whom were very diffident and self-denigrating;

(e) the informant's personality or upbringing influenced the type of reply she considered polite. For example, one lady seemed to think it courteous to discount nothing anyone else had ever thought.

(f) the informant's words were belied by intonation or nonverbal signs - which of these should the researcher trust?

(g) the informant, asked a question about a topic to which she had given little prior consideration, produced a random answer or a purely conventional one (again, it was not always possible to tell when this was happening).

With practice, however, some clear linguistic clues could be recognised. A convinced belief was often embodied by expressions such as: "I _firmly_ believe"; "I _do_ believe in _that_"; "Yes, oh, yes"; "Without question"; "I've proof of that". The true believer often replied very promptly (even precipitately) or said "yes" in a firmly reflective tone of voice or replied, "I'm inclined to believe that" and promptly began an explanation or narrative.

A lesser degree of belief was indicated by such expressions as, "Not _really_, but..."; "Possibly there is something _in_ that"; "I _think_ there _could_ be"; "I don't say I _believe_ it, _but_". All these cases of partial belief were marked by the use of strong and often unusually placed stresses.

"Yes", said in a falling-rising tone, was also indicative of qualified assent. Apart from the obvious "I don't know", unsureness or lack of commitment was shown by, "I don't take any notice of that sort of thing", "I get a bit mixed up about that", and by extreme hesitation when unaccompanied by embarrassment.

A degree of scepticism was most typically marked by, "I don't think so, really...." An interesting comparison here is with, "Not really, but..." which invariably indicated partial belief rather than partial doubt. The significant factor is the placing of the pause. When expressing scepticism, the pause occurs before "really"; when expressing some belief it occurs after. The qualifying "but" was also absent when expressing doubt.

Absolute disbelief was expressed by an emphatic, "No!", by laughter or smiles, by vigorous headshakes, facial grimaces, and expressions such as, "I don't believe in that!" and "I just don't see!"

These typical responses suggested a simple five-point scale from convinced belief to convinced disbelief as tabulated below (see p. 57).[13]

In assessing the degree of belief accorded each topic by each informant too little belief was attributed rather than too much certainty, so that if any error exists it is in the direction of underestimating, rather than overestimating, the prevalence of supernatural beliefs.

No notes were made during the interview because the atmosphere had to be as informal as possible and total attention had to be given to conversation, but each week after recording I played the tapes back and made out an index card for each informant. The cards listed the topics discussed in the interview and the degree of belief the informant seemed to accord to each, and noted any matters of particular interest (the presence of narrative, the occurrence of rhetorical formulae, and so on), as follows (see Figure 3, p.58).

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13 Dégh and Vázsonyi have also wrestled with this problem. Their discussion has interesting parallels. See Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "Legend and Belief", Genre, 4, No. 3 (1971), 294-295.

FIGURE 2: To Show Five Point Scale of Belief

| Degree of Belief | Symbol* | Expression |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Convinced belief | ✓ | "I firmly believe"<br>"I do believe in that!"<br>"Yes, oh yes"<br>"Without question"<br>"I've proof of that"<br>prompt or precipitate reply<br>prompt initiation of narrative |
| 2. Some belief | ✓? | "Not really, but"<br>"Possibly there is something in that"<br>"I think there could be"<br>"I don't say I believe it, but"<br>falling-rising tone |
| 3. Unsure/uncommitted | ? | "I don't know"<br>"I don't take any notice of that kind of thing"<br>"I get a bit mixed up about that"<br>unstressed intonation<br>hesitation unaccompanied by embarrassment |
| 4. Some scepticism | x? | "I don't think so, really"<br>(compare "Not really, but": when expressing scepticism pause occurs before "really")<br>absence of qualifying "but" |
| 5. Convinced disbelief | x | "No"<br>"I don't believe in that!"<br>"I just don't see!"<br>laughter<br>grimaces<br>headshakes<br>absence of stress on verbs expressing knowledge/belief/understanding:<br>stress placed on word for object of knowledge instead |

* See Figure 3, immediately below

FIGURE 3: Informant's Index Card

| | | Agnes[14] |
|---|---|---|
| horoscopes | ✓? | "I believe it if it's right" |
| birth signs | x | |
| fortune-telling | x | "for fun" (memorate x 2) |
| premonitions | ✓ | examples in narrative form + memorate x 2 |
| omens | ? | memorate |
| revenants | ✓ | ("meet again" x ?) |
| poltergeists | ✓ | spirit of house examples in narrative form, 3rd person story |
| telepathy | ✓ | examples in narrative form + memorate |
| UFOs | ? | "I'd like to see one. I never have" |
| Other | | Urban legend. See over |

A month after the fieldwork was complete, the tapes were played back a second time for transcription purposes. Informants' answers to direct questions, any passages of conversation which indicated attitudes, and narrative sections were all transcribed. At the same time the index cards were checked for accuracy and updated where necessary. When all the transcriptions were finished and checked, they were re-read and compared with the notes on the index cards. Where there was any disagreement between the index card entry and the assessment made from the transcription the tape was played back again and a judgement made on the basis of that. So

14 Code names are used throughout.

at least two checks were made on the accuracy of any ascription of belief, and sometimes three. Even so, it must be stressed that placing informants' answers along the five point scale was a difficult task. The results, however, are as reliable as it is possible to make them. If anything, the prevalence of belief has been underestimated.[15]

The results of this survey of the incidence of belief in the supernatural among the women of the study group is reported in Chapter 6.

## 5. Final evaluation of the methodology and summary

5.1 With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see that the research project was both difficult and ambitious. It was difficult in that the subject matter was delicate and at every step it was possible to offend or alarm respondents or to misrepresent their opinions. Only after the work had begun did it become apparent just how sensitive an area supernatural beliefs can be and how many pitfalls lie in wait for the unwary. It is obviously not the sort of project to enter into lightly: one can see only too clearly why many researchers have preferred a more distant, less personal approach to the documentation of belief in occult forces.

The project was ambitious almost by accident. It had originally been intended as an impersonal, wide-ranging survey yet when it had to be scaled down many of the original aims were left intact. Characteristics of the survey approach were thus incorporated with characteristics of the face-to-

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15 David Hufford has an apt comment on the difficulty of this sort of task: "Determining and describing the strength of an informant's belief concerning what is often a sensitive subject is a problem of major proportions." David J. Hufford, "Ambiguity and the Rhetoric of Belief", Keystone Folklore, 21, no. 1 (1976), 11.

face small scale interview. Other aims developed out of the methodological difficulties themselves. The result was that the research had a multiplicity of purposes: to document belief (the small scale interview approach); to study one characteristic - narrative - through many examples (the survey approach); and to examine the relationship between narrative and belief (a consequence of the original methodological difficulties). Perhaps the methodology, and the research, should have concentrated on just one of these aspects: to some extent the aims, though not themselves inconsistent, are best served by methodologies which are. It was perhaps unduly ambitious to attempt to design a methodology which would serve all three aims at once. Nevertheless, I cannot regret the way the work developed, and feel that for some purposes it was an ideal way of obtaining data.

In the first place, the methodology succeeded in eliciting a wealth of information of an original kind. The value of the work was that it was personal where other work was impersonal, discovered living traditions where other work re-examined ancient ones, and looked at urban folklore where many had confined themselves to rural lore. Simply judged by the quantity of useful data, too, the methodology was a success. It not only provided a very adequate general picture of supernatural belief in a particular community, it also gave rise to over two hundred narratives, more than a hundred of which were of a single genre that has long awaited proper analysis. Whatever the design-faults of the methodology, whatever the conceptual confusions, that still is a sound achievement which justifies the approach.

On reflection it seems that the particular value of the methodology lay in its exploitation of a pre-existing social situation. G.L.'s surgery was a place at which the supernatural and other delicate and impersonal topics had been from time to time discussed. The people I spoke to had had conversations like those I was encouraging many times before in that place

and with at least one of the same people. The interview took place in the presence of a familiar and trusted person with whom the respondents were used to communicating on a personal level and in a location already associated with storytelling and philosophical discussion. The addition of a third person altered nothing in this basic situation.

It did however 'point' the occasion in two significant ways. Firstly, it increased the sense of social occasion, and secondly it focused the discussion and storytelling. Though my father had heard many of the women's narratives before, there were very many more which were completely new to him and, though he was aware of their personal philosophies, he commented that he had seldom heard these philosophies so expansively and cogently explained. The presence of a third person seems in this way to have heightened rather than destroyed the social context out of which memorate and discussion usually flowed. An already conducive context for talk about the supernatural was improved by being turned into a research interview - improved, that is, from the point of view of the respondents themselves. There can be few other researchers who have been so placed as to be able to capitalise in this way on a pre-existing natural context. It is to this good fortune, I believe, that I owe anything that is useful in the following work. There was less need for respondents to be defensive or purely conventional in their replies, and I had time to learn from them how such delicate matters could be best approached and how they were customarily spoken of in that community.

I feel that there are not many research situations in which such frank replies could have been obtained to questions as sensitive. Thanks to the co-operation of my family, the present study comes nearer to discerning the truth than the subject usually permits.

5.2 The presentation of the research falls into four main sections. Each aims to be complete in itself but all contribute in equal measure to the whole.

| | |
|---|---|
| Chapters 3 - 5 | review the literature of the ghost in English 1570-1984. |
| Chapter 6 | tries to quantify as far as possible the incidence of belief in the supernatural among a group of retired suburban women, and to assess how far and in what circumstances any statement of belief is accompanied by narrative. |
| Chapters 7 - 9 | analyse the reference group's beliefs in a number of traditional concepts. |
| Chapter 7 | considers beliefs about the return of the dead, poltergeists and life after death; |
| Chapter 8 | considers beliefs about foreknowledge; |
| Chapter 9 | considers beliefs of a quasi-supernatural nature - that is, UFOs and telepathy |
| Chapters 10 and 11 | examine the corpus of memorates offered by all three groups of informants (men and younger women as well as those in the study group) |
| Chapter 10 | discusses matters of definition and structure |
| Chapter 11 | discusses performative patterns. |

# CHAPTER 3

## The Literature 1570-1710

## 1. Introduction

The years 1570-1710, for convenience called the 'early' period,[1] gave rise to some of the most interesting texts on ghosts, poltergeists and hauntings. The majority of the literature 1570-1710 is 'investigative' in the sense of being concerned to establish whether or not the dead can continue their existence in or influence on this world. Three early texts, however, are folkloristic or at least antiquarian in purpose.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. Section 2 will consider the writings of Kirk and Aubrey. Section 3 will consider:

(a) the disputes of the post-reformation years, in particular changes in the definition of ghosts and the importance of this movement in the witch controversy;

(b) the writings of the late seventeenth century which appeared in the context of the increasing secularisation of the state and the onslaught of Hobbes and Descartes on educated European philosophical thought;

(c) the work of Baxter and Beaumont at the turn of the century which fuse antiquarian and investigative aims.

The final section, Section 4, summarises and evaluates the literature of the early period and suggests conclusions which may be drawn about the concept of the ghost in the years 1570-1710.

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1 See Chapter 1, p. 9 above.

## 2. Folkloristic Literature

### 2.1 Kirk and Aubrey

It is appropriate to begin this review by considering those early texts which are the best guides to the folklore of the ghost in the period 1570-1710. Three works which could be broadly classed as folkloristic (Kirk's Secret Commonwealth of 1691,[2] Aubrey's Miscellanies of 1696,[3] and his Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme of 1686-7[4]) are of particular interest to the documentation of supernatural traditions. Though neither Kirk's nor Aubrey's work would be classed as truly folkloristic by the more stringent standards of today, they show that greater concern with channel and that lesser concern with truth that distinguishes folklore study from mere investigation. It is difficult, at this so distant point in time, to be sure what value either put on his own work - perhaps Aubrey tended toward the popular, Kirk towards the investigative type of literature - but both appear principally to appreciate the information they published for its own sake. For these reasons, texts by Kirk and Aubrey have been classified as folkloristic rather than considered as anomalies in the investigative majority.

The intellectual tenor of the age was 'investigative' in the sense that philosophers and divines were concerned to establish the truth of supernatural phenomena as evidence first for the existence of purgatory, and later for the existence of God. An interest in ghosts, then, was principally harnessed to theological politics. Aubrey and Kirk are both outsiders in this intellectual milieu, individualists who were unselfconsciously interested in the supernatural for its own sake. Writing of

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2 Robert Kirk, The Secret Commonwealth and A Short Treatise of charms and spels [Cambridge, 1976]. First published 1691.

3 John Aubrey, Miscellanies (London, 1696).

4 John Aubrey, Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme [London, 1881]. First published 1686-7.

Aubrey nearly two hundred years after the publication of Miscellanies, J. Wentworth Day calls him, "that pleasant and credulous gossip".[5] It is this spirit that makes him both out of step with his generation and a valuable source for supernatural beliefs.

Aubrey is, of course, today recognised as the leading antiquarian of his age, among other things, for example, conducting research into Stonehenge for Charles II. Kirk is appreciated by modern folklorists as "a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles"[6] and as an early enthusiast for occult lore.

2.2 Kirk's Secret Commonwealth is a curious book devoted to discussing the existence of "Subterranean Inhabitants" of the earth, half bodied, half disembodied, creatures living in a parallel society and contingently influencing human lives. Though Kirk's work is chiefly of interest to students of fairy-lore, it is valuable too for the student of ghosts and clairvoyance. It is certainly one of the most complete accounts of the phenomenon of second sight in Scotland, and it discusses poltergeists in an idiosyncratic but revealing way. Because Kirk writes down indiscriminately all that comes his way, and does not select his material to harness it to a specific purpose, the student can construct a picture of supernatural belief in the early period. Furthermore, Kirk makes it plain that he is speaking of an established tradition of the supernatural - "a matter of an old imprescriptible Tradition"[7] - not merely a contemporary fashion in ideas. His account reveals an age in which supernatural creatures of all kinds were thought to live and move among men and women, and the power of seeing them was given to some. He believed poltergeists to be invisible

5 J. Wentworth Day, Here are Ghosts and Witches (London, 1954), p.80.

6 William Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, Act IV, Sc. 2.

7 Kirk, p.93.

spirits that threw things but inflicted no real harm and had no discernible purpose. On the other hand, ghosts were visible and recognisable apparitions of the dead restlessly seeking to reveal murder, injury, or the secret location of treasure, and they could be laid by helping them complete their earthly business.

Kirk's work is valuable to the student of the history of folklore because it helps form an idea of the ground-base of beliefs in the period. When so much contemporary writing was geared to specific purposes, and examples were selected to reveal that purpose, the historian of ideas needs to be able to point to at least one collection of folklore and narratives which is unselective in order to make judgements about the concepts of the age. Kirk can serve this purpose very usefully. In addition he has another important value. His work is rambling, disorganised, conversational and reflective in manner, and this gives us, better than a tidy collection of narratives can do, an insight into attitudes towards the subject matter.

2.3 Altogether a larger and more expansive book than Kirk's, Aubrey's work shares the same virtue of being an unselective collection of lore and legends. Aubrey's relaxed conversational tone indicates that his narratives were taken down somewhat in the manner in which they were told and were relatively unaltered from their original oral versions. The features are those of oral rather than literary style. They are inconsequential, having no moral added or significance pointed up; they are full of the typical authenticating devices of oral narrators - often irrelevant details of place, person and circumstance; they lack expanded dialogue and plot-mechanics; and they are spare, anecdotal stories on the borderline between narrative and conversation. In fact, they are more typical of a story-swapping gathering than of literary work. Hence their value as indicators of an oral tradition. Miscellanies covers a wide range of supernatural

topics: portents; omens; precognitive dreams; apparitions; spectral voices; impulses; knockings; blows invisible; prophecies; marvels; magic; transportation in the air; visions in a Beryl, or glass; converse with angels and spirits; corpse candles and second sight. Chapter 6, which deals with apparitions, contains thirty-six narratives from various sources through which we get a very clear idea of how seventeenth century ghosts were expected to behave.

The most typical ghostly activities appear to be warning and prophesying. Other activities are the prevention of injustices such as the disinheriting of children; the giving of medicinal recipes for the relief of sickness; revenge for broken promises; showing affection for the living; revealing hiding places of wills and assuring the living of the reality of damnation. In addition a ghost may be a 'Fetch' sent to a living person to bring him or her to death. Alternatively it may appear at the moment of death or be the wraith of a living but sorely troubled person. On the other hand, many apparitions appear to be purposeless, like the most famous in the collection:

> Anno 1670, not far from Cyrencester, was an Apparition. Being demanded whether a good spirit or a bad? returned no answer, but disappeared with a curious perfume and a most melodious twang.[8]

Ghosts may knock down sceptics to prove their existence, or, like the ghost of Luther in another favourite narrative, arrange that the percipient should spend ten years in jail in order to have time to translate the ghost's life work into English.[9] Aubrey also is the first to refer to the poltergeist at Woodstock which frightened away Cromwell's Commissioners.

Discursive, credulous and relaxed, Aubrey is certainly the most readable of the early texts, and, lacking prejudice and intolerance (an

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8 Aubrey (1696), p. 67.

9 Aubrey (1696), pp. 78-82.

unusual feat for the seventeenth century), is the pleasantest of the writers on the supernatural. His Miscellanies is recognised still as a major contribution to the study of folklore and popular tradition.

The earlier Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme (1686-7) is a more learned work which traces relics of classical and biblical beliefs in the folklore of his own period. Though the book is not specifically concerned with the supernatural, the reader may glean from it various fascinating snippets of information such as that a spayed bitch keeps haunting at bay,[10] that there are *a good many haunted houses though not so many as reported*,[11] and the wise reflection (suggested by the dearth of ghosts during the civil war) that,

> Warres doe not only extinguish Religion and Lawes: but Superstition: and no suffimen is a greater fugator of Phantosmes than Gunpowder. 12

Aubrey presents a wider view of the folklore of ghosts than Kirk does, and introduces the student to classes of apparition that are absent in the investigative literature of the period but which make a strong reappearance in the modern period - that is, the purposeless ghost and the wraith of the living. His work is of great interest for folklorists for he anticipates a type of popular antiquarian writing that otherwise makes no appearance until the following century with the work of Brand and Grose.

A knowledge of Kirk and Aubrey is especially essential to the historian of the folklore of the ghost, for unless (s)he is well grounded in these texts, (s)he cannot be trusted to make judgements about the reliability of

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10 Aubrey (1686-7), p. 104.

11 Aubrey (1686-7), p. 26.

12 Aubrey (1686-7), p. 53.

the other major texts of the period, which are all investigative in purpose, harnessed to theological theories and therefore potentially misleading.

## 3. Investigative Literature

### 3.1 Post-Reformation Controversies

3.1.1 A review of the investigative literature of the period 1570-1710 must obviously begin with a brief survey of that bitter argument between Catholic and Calvinist which took place in the second phase of the Reformation - that is, the debate about the existence of purgatory - for it was in pursuit of this disagreement that a controversy arose over ghosts. Catholic divines needed the traditional concept of the ghost because the existence of disembodied spirits of the dead was vital evidence of the existence of purgatory. The reasoning was that if the soul of the departed went straight to heaven or straight to hell, as protestant doctrine taught, then ghosts could not exist. The blessed would not want to leave heaven; the damned would not be allowed to leave hell. That ghosts were heard and seen by reputable people was therefore crucial in the argument against protestant doctrine. Not only did tradition and empiricism both vouch for the ghost but it had been consistently important in religious thought heretofore as the entity in the supernatural hierarchy of ghost, devil, angel, Satan, God, most easily attested by everyday experience.

The protestant divines were put in an awkward position. Argument demanded that they should reject the notion of the supernatural, but logic and empiricism both demanded that it should be kept. To defeat the Catholic

argument about purgatory it was necessary for them to discredit all known examples of ghostly visitations, yet this could not simply be done. Not only was popular oral tradition in favour of the ghost, there were examples of ghostly apparitions in the bible, most notably the appearance of Samuel to King Saul through the mediumship of the Witch of Endor. All this evidence had either to be rejected or reinterpreted. For logical reasons it was not easy to reject it. As a member of the hierarchy of supernatural creatures mentioned in the bible and by the Christian fathers, the ghost was vouched for on the highest authority. If the bible and the fathers could not be taken as authoritative on this matter, they could not be relied on in others. There was no logical place at which to put scepticism aside, and the whole edifice of religion was therefore threatened. The hatred of protestant divines for the sceptical Sadducee was a measure of the insecurity of their own position.

The answer to the dilemma was first to discredit as much of the evidence as possible and then to redefine the remainder. This process of redefinition was quite simple, intellectually satisfying, and incapable of being refuted on empirical grounds. If the ghost could not be a departed soul, and yet if it obviously existed, then it had to be another type of supernatural creature masquerading as the spirit of the dead. It could be an angel sent from God to warn or comfort, or it could be a devil sent from Satan to alarm, confuse, deceive or entrap. The second of these possibilities was more likely because God was Truth and would not lightly deceive the faithful. Furthermore there was a precedent for such beliefs. Early Christian legends of the saints and fathers frequently told of devils assuming forms other than their own;[13] in addition there is evidence that, in the clerical mind at least, there had always been a connection between

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13 See H. C. Lea, Materials Towards a History of Witchcraft (New York, 1957), p. 65.

the two: the ceremony for the exorcism of devils, for example, is very similar to that for exorcising ghosts.[14]

### 3.1.2 Lavater

The protestant approach to the supernatural can be seen clearly in the earliest text under consideration here, Lewes Lavater's, Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyghte of 1572.[15] The first part of the book is given to undermining the empirical evidence for the existence of ghosts; the second to re-interpreting the biblical and other documentary evidence. Seeing spirits is explained in a variety of ways - melancholy, dull senses, fear, trickery, the plots of catholics, and so on. Bold and ruthlessly logical, Lavater even takes the difficult problem of the ghost of the prophet Samuel in his stride, saying:

> If the witch had called for Samuell whilest he liued, doubtles he would not haue approached hir. And how then can we beleeue that he came to hir after his death? 16

In Book 1, chapters 11-19, Lavater discusses the core of veridical folklore he cannot dispose of by logic, admitting that "daily experience techeth us that spirites doe appear to men",[17] but insisting that such experiences are not what people believe them to be:

> I pray you, what are they? To conclude in a few words: If it be not a vayne persuasion proceeding through weaknesse of the senses, through feare, or suchlike cause, or if it be not the decyte of men, or some naturall thing, it is either a good or evill Angell, or some other forewarning sent by God. 18

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14 Lea, p. 149.

15 Lavater [1929].

16 Lavater, p. 219.

17 Lavater, initial list of contents, no pagination.

18 Lavater, p. 160.

The shift in the classification of the ghost spread confusion because not only did it undermine established belief systems, but it also left people unable to interpret their experiences. Their life and salvation depended on guessing correctly whether the ghostly visitations to which they were accustomed were from angels or devils, but there was no way of telling them apart.

### 3.1.3 Taillepied

The common people were not the only ones to be confused, the clergy appear no better informed. Throughout the period the matter is still in dispute, and no settled pattern of belief emerges. There are protestant philosophers and divines who believe in ghosts as spirits of the dead, and there are catholic scholars who utilise the notion that ghosts are or can be devils in disguise.[19] The debates of the Post-Reformation period in fact upset traditional patterns of thought without replacing them with anything as intelligible.

The unsettled and unsettling nature of the theory of ghosts can be seen in the work of Father Noel Taillepied. A Treatise of Ghosts[20] begins confidently enough. The first ninety pages run through such traditional concepts as ghosts which demand revenge, burial or absolution; mysterious footsteps; omens of death; spirits of houses and mines; second sight; phantom funerals and mysterious warnings. Obviously here he is dealing with a folklore so secure in the public mind that no theory can disrupt it. The same list of phenomena is to be found in Lavater's work and constitutes the

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19 In Religion and the Decline of Magic Thomas notes that belief in ghosts in the seventeenth century "was to be found among almost all religious groups and at virtually every social level", and that even the intrinsically catholic doctrine of purgatory lingered on "in nominally protestant circles". Thomas (1971), p. 593 and p. 601.

20 Taillepied [1702].

core of experience he cannot argue away.[21] Similar descriptions of ghostly phenomena are to be found in Kirk and Aubrey. Reginald Scot also adumbrates a similar list of commonly held supernatural beliefs in order to scorn the gullibility of his age,[22] and the writer of Book 2, the strange appendix to The Discoverie of Witchcraft, paints a very similar picture of spiritual mysteries.[23]

Scot's sneers make it plain that all this is a matter of established folkloric tradition:

> And as among faint-hearted people; namely women, children and sick-folk they usually swarmed: so among strong bodies and good stomachs they never used to appear. [24]

The words "usually" and "used" indicate an accepted lore, and the ascription of those beliefs to "women, children and sick-folk" is a slur that folklorists have learned to recognise as a reliable guide to the presence of tradition.

In the first ninety pages, then, of A Treatise of Ghosts Taillepied feels that he is on sure ground. However, he begins to flounder when he has to deal with poltergeists and similar unpleasant phenomena that call for interpretation according to recent theory. It is interesting to note the influence of calvinist thought even on an orthodox catholic such as Father Taillepied. There is a clear confusion in the later part of the book between ghost and devil, and this is exacerbated by having, for theological reasons, to insist that God is responsible for all occurrences. So we read

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21 Lavater, pp. 49-97.

22 Reginald Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft: Proving the Common Opinions of Witches contracting with Divels, Spirits, or Familiars, their power to kill, torment and consume the bodies of Men, Women and Children, or other creatures by disease or otherwise: their flying through the Air etc To be but Erronious conceptions and novelties, second edition (London, 1651), pp. 25-26.

23 Scot, Book 2, pp. 39-49.

24 Scot, Book 1, p. 16.

that God "permits" that certain places and people "should be plagued and haunted by evil Spirits", but that "Disembodied Spirits, however, more often manifest themselves in their proper mortal likeness".[25] Poltergeists are discussed in the chapter dealing with "Demons" yet referred to as "Spirits" and their power of malice and injury seen as derived from God:

> It is well known that spirits often contrive to render a man's nights sick and helpless with their malice [ .......... ] perilously molesting men and women, even sometimes, if God permits, endangering life and limb. [26]

The confusion obviously arises out of trying to graft new theories on to old traditions, and also because the divines can offer no useful criteria for distinguishing between ghosts, devils and angels. Taillepied spends two chapters on this problem but can only lamely suggest that the percipient should be guided by the appearance and discourse of the apparition, then promptly contradicts himself by saying that the Devil can assume the shapes of the departed.[27]

### 3.1.4 Ghost and witch

This translation of ghosts into the servants of a greater power, usually the power of evil, added its quota to the proliferation and terror of devils that created the psychological conditions for the witch persecutions. Whereas before there had been the forces of good and evil and, below them most influencing daily life, amoral elemental creatures and morally neutral ghosts, after the arguments of the Reformation these lower order entities became assimilated into the higher orders. The balance of fear in the supernatural world was thus drastically revised, the forces of evil and danger now outnumbering those of good by about three to one. In addition, the supernatural entity for which there was now the best empirical

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25 Taillepied, pp. 99-100.

26 Taillepied, p. 106.

27 Taillepied, p. 130.

evidence was no longer a harmless ghost but (possibly) an evil spirit out to entrap the unwary. Again, where before the ghosts had behaved according to a strict code of haunting - seeking revenge, preventing injustice, revealing sin and secrets - the devils were subject to no such well-understood conventions. Charles Lamb puts this well when he writes:

> ... since the invisible world was supposed to be open, and the lawless agency of bad spirits assumed, what measures of probability, of decency, or fitness or proportion - of that which distinguishes the likely from the palpably absurd - could they have to guide them in the rejection or admission of any particular testimony? 28 [my emphasis]

The potential for terror is clear enough, but what perhaps made it worse was that the transmogrification of ghost into devil was never fully completed, never became entirely assimilated into the folkloric tradition. This left a situation in which fear was exacerbated by confusion. Not being able to punish the supernatural entities who had thus betrayed them to Evil, it is not really surprising that the populace were ready to persecute the mortal creatures they imagined had likewise betrayed them.

As the period progresses, the literature shows that ghost and witch became not merely allied beliefs but parts of a single system. One was seldom mentioned without the other, as in this passage from Religio Medici:

> It is a riddle to me ... how so many learned heads should so far forget their Metaphysicke, and destroy the ladder and scale of creatures, as to question the existence of Spirits. For my part, I have ever believed, and now do know, that there are witches; they that doubt of these, doe not only denie them, but Spirits: and are obliquely and upon consequence a sort not of Infidels, but Atheists. Those that to confute their incredulity desire to see apparitions, shall questionless never behold any, nor have the power to be so much as Witches; the Devil hath them already in a heresie as capital as Witchcraft; and to appear to them were but to convert them. 29

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28 Charles Lamb, Essays of Elia, quoted in Gustav Jahoda, The Psychology of Superstition (London, 1969), p. 87.

29 Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici and other works [Oxford, 1964], p. 29.

In this passage the fit between ghosts and witches is so neat as to constitute virtual synonymity. After introducing the topic of spirits, Browne moves on in the next sentence and without apparent change of topic to witches and in the following one to apparitions, explaining that sceptics wishing to see apparitions cannot even be witches, for the Devil will not waste his time appearing to them. In this ambiguous statement the confusion between ghost and witch is complete.

In a supernatural system such as Browne depicts, apparitions are essential evidence for the existence of witches, witches for devils, devils for Satan and Satan for God, because all are part of the supernatural hierarchy which tops the Great Chain of Being. The system as a whole stands or falls on the strength of its parts. It was simply not possible in theory or in practice to separate out one supernatural entity for belief or disbelief. In many cases the effects of a supernatural visitation were the same whatever the class of visitor. Witches, imps and ghosts were all responsible for twitching bedclothes off the insomniac, buffeting the sceptical, and causing madness. Both imps and witches could turn the heads of cattle awry. Witches could cause poltergeist-like effects, and so could household spirits, and devils unaided by witches. Poltergeists, though often accompanied by spectres and attributed variously to possession, demons or spirits, were a frequent accompaniment of witchcraft. Ghost beliefs became thus closely linked with witchcraft:

> ... a person who was troubled by a poltergeist or spectre might well blame a malevolent neighbour for the intrusion. [30]

Not only that, but the appearance of the spectre of the "malevolent neighbour" was often evidence enough for an indictment on a charge of witchcraft. "Spectral evidence", doubts about which were among the chief reasons

30 Thomas (1971), p. 594.

for the recantation of the Salem jurors, had previously been widely accepted both in old and New England.[31]

The close relationship of ghost and witch in philosophical and theological writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is inevitable in this context. In particular, works in defence of witches stand or fall by how much of the total supernatural system the writers feel they can afford to repudiate. If too little, like Weyer and Montaigne on the continent and Gifford and Webster in England, then the writer's position is obviously inconsistent. Why deny one part and affirm another part of a unified organic whole? The only possible way the witches could be effectively defended was to undermine the whole edifice - witch, devil, familiar, house-sprite, ghost and all - proving not that witchcraft did not happen, but that it could not happen. To defend the witches a writer had to attack the whole concept of the supernatural; it was not enough merely to attempt to prove there were no such things as witches, for the evidence for witches was overwhelming. He had, rather, to take a thoroughgoing rationalistic stance and argue that whatever the evidence, it still was just not possible, and therefore everybody, including the witches themselves, had to be mistaken. Only a mind of entrenched scepticism could even approach the problem. A mind that could dismiss the weight of evidence for the existence of witches would have no trouble doubting the evidence for ghosts or any other uncanny phenomenon. Scot and Bekker, the most courageous of the defenders of witches, therefore attacked, as far as they dared, the supernatural system as a whole. Scot left corners of it untouched; Bekker, none. Scot escaped with contumely; Bekker was deprived of his living and excluded from communion.

In turn, those who believed in witches simply insisted on the unity and common sense of the received philosophy, avouched for by religion and

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31 Kittredge, pp. 221-225 and pp. 363-366.

the empirical evidence supplied in the visions and apparitions commonly known to be part of the experience of sober and honest people. Thus it is that a large part of the evidence about ghost belief in the early modern period is to be found in the treatises on witchcraft. How long this close connection was to hold together in conservative minds is evidenced by the fact that, as late as 1768, John Wesley could write:

> It is true likewise that the English in general, and indeed most of the men of learning in Europe, have given up all accounts of witches and apparitions, as mere old wives fables. I am sorry for it; and I willingly take this opportunity of entering my solemn protest against this violent compliment which so many that believe in the Bible pay to those who do not believe [...]. They well know (whether Christians know it or not), that the giving up of witchcraft is, in effect, giving up the Bible. 32

## 3.2 Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair

3.2.1 If consideration of the long and close association of ghost and witch may prove useful to historians of witchcraft, it has even more to offer - in a cautionary way - to historians of the folklore of ghosts. Principally it would suggest some wariness about the main source books for ghostlore of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many of these are also source books for witch belief, and we must ask ourselves in what context these texts came to be compiled. In particular, closer attention should be given to the work of Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair in the late seventeenth century.

Glanvil's Sadducismus Triumphatus of 1682, Bovet's Pandaemonium of 1684, and Sinclair's Satan's Invisible World Discovered of 1685 are the most influential compilations of supernatural legends of their day. They

32 The Wesley Journal, May 25, 1768, quoted in Christina Hole, A Mirror of Witchcraft (London, 1957), pp. 32-33.

are also, with Aubrey's Miscellanies, the texts most often quoted by historians and folklorists, more or less exclusively relied on as guides to seventeenth century ghostlore. How far their reliability matches their popularity, however, merits some consideration. It has to be asked whether these works are collections of folklore or polemics.

In aim they are definitely polemical: their purpose is explicitly to give both logical and empirical proof of the existence of witches to an increasingly sceptical world. Writing at a time when the 1604 Witchcraft Act was seldom invoked and belief in witches was lessening its hold on the minds at least of the educated elite, Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair were fighting a rearguard action against the materialism of philosophers like Hobbes, using the old weapon of fear of witchcraft. That Glanvil, at least, feared that the battle was already lost can be seen from his title. In an earlier treatise he had written:

> ... those that deny the being of Witches, do it not out of ignorance of those Heads of Argument of which they have probably heard a thousand times; But from an apprehension that such a belief is absurd, and the thing impossible. And upon these presumptions they condemn all demonstrations of this nature, and are hardened against conviction. 33

Accounts of apparitions and other ghostly phenomena are not the central concern of the books: they are included solely as strong empirical evidence for the existence of witchcraft and, through witchcraft, of God. In a letter to Glanvil, Dr. Henry More summed up the position well:

> I look upon it as a special Piece of Providence that there are ever and anon such fresh examples of Apparitions and Witchcrafts as may rub up and awaken their benumbed and lethargic Mindes into a suspicion at least, if not an assurance that there are other intelligent Beings besides those that are clad in heavy Earth or Clay: In this, I say, methinks the Divine Providence does plainly outwit the Powers of the Dark Kingdom, in permitting wicked men and women

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33 Joseph Glanvil, "Against Modern Sadducism", in Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion (London, 1676), p. 3.

> and vagrant spirits of that Kingdom to make Leagues or Covenants one with another, the Confesions of Witches against their own Lives being so palpable an Evidence, (beside the miraculous feats they play) that there are bad Spirits, which will necessarily open a Door to the belief that there are good ones, and lastly that there is a God. [34]

Their interest in ghosts, then, was 'investigative' in the sense that they were concerned primarily about the truth of the beliefs and experiences they recorded, and the value of these as evidence for a particular point of view; their motive was religious zeal and the maintenance of the cultural status quo.

### 3.2.2 Glanvil

Glanvil's arrangement for Sadducismus Triumphatus set the pattern for the two subsequent texts, and influenced the methodology of every writer of the period. The first part of the book is an abstract treatise on the subject of the supernatural. The second part is a collection of twenty-eight narratives ("Relations") and six "Additional Relations". It is this second part that has been of most interest to folklorists because it is ostensibly a collection of contemporary legends. This part of the book is based on an active search for suitable evidence in the form of strong narratives vouched for by people of known rank and probity. It is to an extent a corporate endeavour by the whole of Glanvil's social group, each enquiring for stories among his/her own circle of acquaintances and correspondents. Their methods can be seen in the following "Advertisement" appended to Relation 19:

> ... this account was sent from a Dutch Merchant procured by a Friend for Dr. R. Cudworth, and contains the main particulars that occur in the Dutch Narrative, which Monsieur Van Helmont brought over with him to my Lady Conway at Ragley ... As also Philippus Limbergius in a letter to Dr. H. More. [35]

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34 Glanvil (1682), p. 16.

35 Glanvil (1682), pp. 208-210.

Novelty, authenticity and impact are what is required. Glanvil and Bovet reason first, but, if this fails, are prepared to appeal to the human weakness for a good story. Sinclair, the most popular of the three, dispenses almost altogether with abstract theorising, arguing that:

> The philosophical arguments ... though very cogent, yet many of them are so profound and speculative, that they require a greater sagacity, than many learned men ... will allow. Neither can the common and vulgar sort of Readers reach the understanding of such Reasonings. Therefore, I judge they are best convinced by proofs which come nearest to Sense, such as the following Relations are. [36]

The collections of all three writers are a heterogeneous mixture of stories of poltergeists, witchcraft, apparitions, miraculous cures, omens, warnings, deathbed experiences and demonology. Of the three, Glanvil is the most scrupulous. All his narratives are followed by an authenticating "Advertisement" which catalogues the sources from which he obtained them. In the narratives themselves he is emphatic that he can rely on the sense and good faith of the percipients. The most famous story in his collection - Relation 1, The Demon of Tedworth[37]- was actually investigated in the modern style, Glanvil staying in the haunted house and interviewing the family and staff.

Bovet follows Glanvil's practice to an extent. Nine out of fifteen narratives have an "Advertisement", though in Bovet's hands this tends to be given over to a discussion of the merits of the case rather than to an authentication of the narrative. Sinclair, the most natural storyteller of the three, is content to let the story speak for itself, giving neither source nor authentication.

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36 Sinclair, p. xv.

37 Glanvil (1682), pp. 71-94.

Of Glanvil's Relations all but five of the twenty tales of ghosts and poltergeists appear to be rumour or legend current at the time. Eight of these make frequent reappearances, not only in the literature of the early period but more or less continuously until the present day. In complex and tortuous tales, ghosts are seen as poltergeists (Relations 1, 20, 23, 24, Additional Relations 1, 3 and 5), as righting wrongs (Relations 9 and 16), seeking confession (Relation 9), assuring the percipient of the existence of God and issuing warnings about the hereafter (Relations 10 and 11), gossiping about family affairs (Relation 12), appearing at the moment of death (Relation 13), revealing murder (Relation 14), ensuring children's inheritance (Relations 15 and 26), buffeting the sceptical (Relation 17), testing the faith of the living (Relation 18), achieving miraculous cures (Relations 18 and 19) and threatening the living (Additional Relation 4).

The most famous of his Relations perhaps needs special notice. Relation 1, the story of the Demon of Tedworth, aroused immense interest, being an exciting and notorious case of witchcraft. A certain Mr. Mompesson, a magistrate, confiscated the drum of an itinerant drummer and thereafter was plagued by sounds of drumming throughout the house. The drummer, though jailed in Gloucester for theft, seemed to have knowledge of what was happening at the Mompesson house in Wiltshire, and was said to have remarked, "I have plagued him and he shall never be quiet till he hath made me satisfaction for taking away my drum." On this evidence he was tried for witchcraft, convicted and transported. The manifestations thereupon ceased. By some means or another, the drummer escaped from the convict ship and returned. The troubles at Mr. Mompesson's house began again immediately. Glanvil investigated this case himself and his narrative is an account of his own experiences in the house. Long, rambling, and nowadays to most people (one would imagine) incredible, at the time the

story made considerable impact and was the cornerstone of arguments in favour of belief in the supernatural. It has been extensively used since that time as a classic example of a poltergeist.

There could be no more fitting summary of an account of the work of Joseph Glanvil than to quote his own words about this case, for they typify the methods and attitudes of writers on supernatural topics in the late seventeenth century:

> Mr. Mompesson is a Gentleman, of whose truth in this account I have not the least suspicion, he being neither vain nor credulous, but a discreet, sagacious and manly person. Now the credit of matters of Fact depends much upon the relators who, if they cannot be deceived themselves, nor supposed anyways interested to impose upon others, ought to be credited. For upon these circumstances, all human Faith is grounded, and matter of Fact is not capable of any proof besides, but that of immediate sensible [i.e. sensory] evidence. [38]

This is the approach to the supernatural that set the pattern for the next two hundred and fifty years.

### 3.2.3 Bovet

The second member of the group who provides evidence of ghostlore in the late seventeenth century is Richard Bovet who published Pandaemonium: or the Devil's Cloister two years after Glanvil's work, in 1684. His aim of offering a collection of entirely new narratives produces a very heterogeneous and at times even more than usually fantastic collection of narratives. Of these, four are stories of witchcraft, one is an account of a poltergeist, another of raising the Devil, one is about a family death-omen, two concern fairies and one is about a midsummer divination ritual and its outcome. The remaining five are ghost stories. They include a personal experience story in which Bovet gives an account of seeing

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38 Glanvil (1682), p. 89.

five "very fine and lovely women"[39] draped in white veils process in single file to his bed, and an equally preposterous tale of a manservant who was "stripped of all his clothes after he was in bed"[40] by apparitions of:

> ... very beautiful young Women, whose presence lightened the place, as if it had been day, though there was no candle near it. [41]

As the Advertisement says, this must be:

> ... perhaps one of the most stupendious [sic] accounts of this nature that have been heard of. [42]

Relation 4 is the long, rambling and often ludicrous account of The Demon of Spraighton,[43] a story of poltergeist phenomena accompanied by two ghosts that was used, almost verbatim, by Aubrey twelve years later, but seems then to have dropped from sight. Perhaps it was too unlikely even for his credulous age? Its main interest for the modern folklorist is that it includes a motif which, with modifications, probably grows up to become the core of the phantom hitchhiker legends: that is, the female ghost who rides behind a young man and then disappears, sometimes after endangering his life.[44] Other phantoms recorded here are that of a bear in a circle of "duskish light",[45] and a phantom funeral that impedes the progress of a pedestrian who was "in no wise in drink; nor was he at all of a timorous nature".[46]

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39 Bovet, p. 122.

40 Bovet, p. 132.

41 Bovet, p. 133.

42 Bovet, p. 133.

43 Bovet, pp. 107-113.

44 Bovet, pp. 108-109. See Gillian Bennett, "The Phantom Hitchhiker: Neither modern, urban or legend?" in Paul Smith (ed.), Perspectives on Contemporary legend: Proceedings of the Conference on Contemporary legend held in Sheffield, July 1982 (Sheffield, CECTAL, 1984), p.59.

45 Bovet, pp. 120-121.

46 Bovet, p. 138.

### 3.2.4 Sinclair

Sinclair's Satan's Invisible World Discovered of 1685 was produced as a rival volume to Glanvil's. Sinclair hoped that his book's more sprightly narrative style and lower price would sell more copies - a neat combination of serious and commercial aims. There are fifteen narratives about ghosts, six of which are, in the manner of the age, borrowed without reference from Glanvil. Another is an elaborated version of a story which he first published in his Hydrostaticks of 1672,[47] (The Demon of Glenluce poltergeist story).[48] Another - the famous story of the ghost of Anne Walker on which a murder trial was based - comes from Webster.[49] The others concern "an apparition to King James the fourth and his courtiers",[50] an "apothecaries Servant that returned to the Shop after he had been dead",[51] "a great Doctor of Divinity, that raise out of the Bier and spoke to all that were present",[52] and "an apparition seen at Gladsmuir"[53] - a truly remarkable story of a murderer who will not die though executed several times over - and two stories of poltergeists.[54]

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47 George Sinclair, The Hydrostaticks (Edinburgh, 1672).

48 Sinclair (1685), pp. 75-92.

49 Sinclair (1685), pp. 19-22. Cf. John Webster, The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft (London, 1667), pp. 295-296. N.B. Webster calls the girl Anne WATERS.

50 Sinclair (1685), pp. 102-108.

51 Sinclair (1685), pp. 156-8.

52 Sinclair (1685), pp. 187-90.

53 Sinclair (1685), pp. 190-2.

54 Sinclair (1685), pp. 155-154 and pp. 200-202.

### 3.2.5 Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair as guides to seventeenth century ghost traditions

Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair are the most influential collectors of their day. Furthermore they are, with Aubrey, the authors most often quoted and most relied on as guides to the supernatural beliefs of the seventeenth century. Three of Glanvil's stories and one of Sinclair's continue to be quoted to the present day.

Glanvil's story of the Villiers ghost can be found in Aubrey's Miscellanies,[55] Beaumont's Treatise of Spirits (1705),[56] John Ingrams' influential Haunted Houses and Family Traditions of Great Britain (1884),[57] Andrew Lang's equally well-known Dreams and Ghosts (1897),[58] Eric Maple's The Realm of Ghosts (1964),[59] and one of the best popular works of the present day, Peter Haining's Ghosts: The Illustrated History (1974).[60]

The story of The Demon of Tedworth has been even more popular: re-told by Baxter (1691),[61] by Robert Dale Owen in Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World (1861),[62] by Ingram[63] and Sacheverell Sitwell (1940).[64] It appears in both Christina Hole's books of 1940, English Folklore[65] and

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55 Aubrey (1696), pp. 64-65.

56 Beaumont, pp. 256-258.

57 Ingram, pp. 277-285.

58 Andrew Lang, Dreams and Ghosts (London, 1897), pp. 118-127.

59 Eric Maple, The Realm of Ghosts (London, 1964), pp. 74-75.

60 Peter Haining, Ghosts: The Illustrated History (London, 1974), p.40.

61 Baxter, pp. 57-58.

62 Robert Dale Owen, Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World (London, 1861), pp. 151-159.

63 Ingram, pp. 242-251.

64 Sacheverell Sitwell, Poltergeists (London, 1940), pp.214-229.

65 Christina Hole, English Folklore (London, 1940), p. 154.

that source book for writers on the supernatural, Haunted England,[66] and in the work of the populariser of psychical research, Harry Price.[67]

Glanvil's account of the ghost of Major Sydenham has been retold by Sinclair,[68] Brand,[69] Grose,[70] Dr. Lee in his popular The Other World (1875),[71] Ingram,[72] Hole,[73] and Maple.[74]

Sinclair's story of Anne Walker has been retold by Chambers,[75] Lee,[76] Ingram,[77] Lang,[78] and Hole.[79]

Only two of Aubrey's narratives get such coverage: that is, the stories of the wraith of John Donne's wife and Lady Diana Rich's fetch. Of the ghost stories of the period to 1710, only Baxter's account of the

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66 Christina Hole, Haunted England (London, 1940 (1940 b)), pp.169-171.

67 Harry Price, Poltergeist over England: Three Centuries of Mischievous Ghosts (London, 1945), pp. 43-62.

68 Sinclair (1685), pp. 40-45.

69 Brand, p. 71.

70 Grose, p. 10.

71 Frederick George Lee D.D., The Other World: or Glimpses of the Supernatural (London, 1875), Book 2, pp. 22-25.

72 Ingram, pp. 95-98.

73 Hole (1940 b), p. 32.

74 Maple (1964), pp. 95-97.

75 Robert Chambers (ed.), The Book of Days (London/Edinburgh, 1869), p. 387.

76 Lee, Book 2, pp. 3-7.

77 Ingram, pp. 158-160.

78 Lang (1894), pp. 261-262.

79 Hole (1940 b), pp. 29-30.

wraith of Mary Goffe[80] has been more influential, being quoted in every text under review except Lee (1875). In the literature after 1710, only ten stories are such perennial favourites and only four have been retold more often (The Hinton Ampner poltergeist; the Wesley poltergeist; the Brown Lady of Rainham; and the Lyttleton ghost).[81] It is therefore necessary to try to assess how far Glanvil's, Bovet's and Sinclair's narratives genuinely reflect the folklore of the ghost for their time.

In the first place, their interest in ghosts is investigative, motivated by religious purpose, and their material therefore was no doubt selected to serve that purpose. If it is representative of popular beliefs then it is accidentally so, for that is not its aim. Secondly, they are collections for which certain sorts of material were actively sought. Glanvil's group would neither be offered nor accept material which did not fit in with their preconceptions. Thirdly the stories were collected from self-selected informants, and fourthly these informants were limited to educated, upper-class people known to the collectors,and their ideas may have been in no way representative of the views of the people at large. The sampling and methodology would not meet any serious folklorist's standards today. Hence it could be argued with some justice that the information which Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair provide cannot be used as if it were a reliable guide to what the populace as a whole believed, but should be seen at best as representative only of the ideas of their social and educational peers.

Moreover, the detail of the stories makes it clear that many of them come from literary sources, through tenuous transmission chains or from

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80 See below, section 3.3.1.

81 See below, Chapter 5.

folktales. To regard them then as contemporary legend is dubious practice. If a representative story collection is examined, these characteristics become clear.

Of the three writers, Glanvil is the most honest and scrupulous: for all of his narratives he gives details of how he came by them and seems to add but little fanciful elaboration to the main outline. If any of the story-collections are faithful to contemporary folklore then Glanvil's is. Even Glanvil's corpus, however, will not stand up to scrutiny as a collection of contemporary legends.

First of all, it is plain from the Advertisements that some of the Relations come from printed sources. Relation 19,[82] for example, would seem probably to have had a source in a Dutch broadside, and the first three Additional Relations come from previously published books. Two of these three narratives were probably already non-current at the time of writing. The Woodstock story (Additional Relation 1) can be dated to 1649, so it must have been about forty years old. There is no independent evidence that it was still current or believed in 1682. The Demon of Glenluce Story was first published in 1671 and, even if Sinclair can be trusted not to have invented it, it must have been at least twenty years old by the second time of telling. Again, it is possible that this story had already dropped out of contemporary folklore. Two further narratives, Relations 18 and 27, have more motifs from folktale than legend, come from Ireland, and are probably on both counts not representative of British ghostlore. Finally, the last three stories in the corpus have no authentication and hence no judgement can be made about the sources from which they come.

Of the twenty-six narratives dealing with aspects of the supernatural other than witchcraft, at least a third therefore are probably not

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82 See above, p. 80.

representative of contemporary folklore at all. Furthermore, Glanvil's Relations show evidence of having all been re-written for publication. The writing is polished and contains detail of dialogue, setting and motivation that betrays a literary style. Every one of the Relations, then, to a greater or lesser extent is a literary, not a folk, product.

Lastly the story of The Demon of Tedworth, which is usually counted as a reliable indication of contemporary ghost belief and consistently quoted as it stands as a classic example of poltergeist manifestation,[83] should be treated with some suspicion as an example of contemporary ghost story. Though one cannot dispute its origin in fact (that is, something must have happened in the house which was sufficiently strange to give rise to such public excitement), one must dispute the details. The motifs get more improbable as the narrative progresses. It starts with sounds of drumming in the roof, moves through the full range of the usual manifestations, and progresses to a horse being found with its hoof stuck fast in its mouth and a moving log in the fireplace which, when shot at, fled and left bloodstains on the stairs. In fact, it gives every indication of being a literary story patched together from every available bit of gossip and hearsay however improbable. It is impossible now to decide how far a narrative such as this was believed, either in part or whole, by any section of the populace.

The crucial matters of whether the stories were both believed and orally transmitted by Glanvil's contemporaries are acutely called into question by the manner of their collection and presentation. Unless we can be reasonably sure that these stories were in general circulation there is no way of knowing whether they may be safely used as indices of contemporary supernatural belief: their connection with a genuine folklore is therefore essentially not established.

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83 Cf. Price (1945), pp. 43-44, and Sitwell, p. 91.

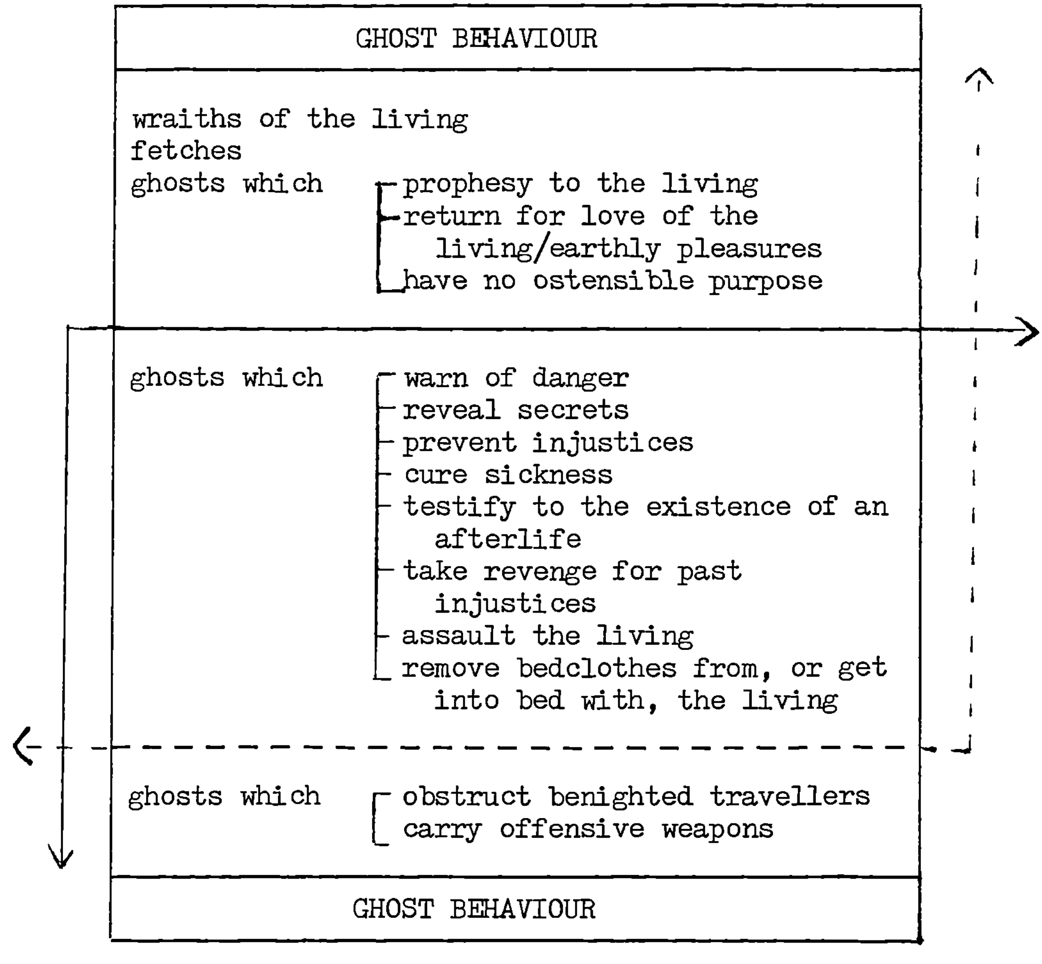
On the other hand, in defence of these writers it must be said that in order to be convincing, the evidence they presented for the existence of supernatural powers could not have diverged too far from commonly accepted opinion otherwise it would have been useless from a polemical point of view. Again, though the Relations may not show the full range of seventeenth century supernatural beliefs and may possibly describe some beliefs which Glanvil's contemporaries may not have universally held, yet on the whole the tenor of contemporary ideas must have been reasonably accurately portrayed. At least where the information to be gleaned from Glanvil, Sinclair and Bovet corresponds with that in the books of antiquarian contemporaries it can probably be trusted as a reasonable picture of the ghostlore of some sections of the community in the seventeenth century.

What all five writers present in common is a picture of an age in which a full range of supernatural entities and effects was a pervading influence in people's daily lives. In all five writers the core features of ghostly behaviour are: the giving of warnings; the prevention of injustice; the righting of wrongs; revelation of murder, treasure or other secrets; and the effecting of cures by the giving of medicinal recipes. In Britain at least the ghost does not appear to have undergone a final transition into a devil except in the case of poltergeists which in investigative writings are consistently referred to as "The Demon of X" or ascribed to witchcraft. With this exception the beliefs are very similar to those found in the ancient philosophers, the classics and the neo-platonists, and discover a supernatural tradition unchanged for centuries.

Some types of ghost behaviour are present in Kirk and Aubrey but absent from the work of Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair: that is, prophesying, fetching and returning from a strong desire for earthly things. The

purposeless ghost and the wraith of the living are also absent. On the other hand, certain threatening behaviours make their appearance in the investigative but not in the folkloristic texts: that is, obstruction and threatening with weapons. The table below summarises these similarities and differences schematically.

TABLE 1: comparing and contrasting ghost behaviour as seen in five texts, 1570-1710




Kirk and Aubrey - - - - - - -

Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair ———————

On the whole, the ghost of the folkloristically oriented writers is rather pleasanter than the ghost of the investigative authors. Though the shift is small, one can detect in the latter the influence of the re-classification of the ghost. However, the shift demonstrated in their work is small enough to suggest that the transmogrification of ghost into devil was, in Britain at least, a matter more of theological theory than popular practice. It is difficult, though, to assess how far the fear and confusion sown by the clergy's theoretical approach affected the way the laity felt about ghosts. It may be that even where ghostly behaviour appears to remain the same, the emotion it evoked in the percipient had changed. This is where a genuinely folkloristic study would have been particularly useful. Without one, the student should be wary of using narratives from Glanvil, Sinclair and Bovet as illustrations of a continuing tradition of ghosts.

In conclusion, therefore, Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair should be used by folklorists with considerable caution. They are adequate for indicating trends in the content of supernatural belief in the early period, especially as corroboration for more reliable writers such as Aubrey. Where they differ from these other sources it would be wisest to reject the information they offer. Though they can provide an outline of aspects of supernatural belief, they do not show how those beliefs formed a system and were acted upon or reacted to. Folklorists should not quote their narratives as sole evidence for any particular type of belief, nor use any detail from them for such a purpose. Where other stories of the same period and type can be demonstrated to exist, then the addition of Glanvil's, Bovet's and Sinclair's well-turned narratives could add interest to the account.

Unfortunately, however, it has been the practice to quote them verbatim and treat them as reliable sources for early beliefs.[84] As far as one

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84 Cf. Finucane, pp. 117-152.

can tell, none of the safeguards and provisos listed above have influenced later writers who have used information from these texts. This is doubly a pity when there is a comparable, though not so well-known text in the investigative manner, namely Richard Baxter's The Certainty of the World of Spirits (1691), which is a more reliable guide to the folklore of ghosts in the seventeenth century.

## 3.3 Baxter and Beaumont

### 3.3.1 Baxter

In Baxter's work the student can detect a movement towards antiquarian interests. He is less intense, less concerned with persuading public opinion than his predecessors, and his concern is largely to prove the matter to his own satisfaction, as the Preface makes clear. Like his better-known forerunners, he believes that empirical demonstration persuades best. He therefore follows their example and compiles a collection of memorates, legends, dîtes, rumours and confessions. Of special interest for the folklorist are letters from Welsh correspondents (John Lewis JP of Glaskerigg, and John Davies of Generglyn) on the local folklore of death.

In spite of its faults, The Certainty of the World of Spirits is one of the most useful books on supernatural folklore of the late seventeenth century for, being unselective, it contains references to what is probably the full range of beliefs, and, as containing a high proportion of memorate, personal experience story, current legend and anecdote, it reveals, where previous work fails to do, the attitude of ordinary people to those beliefs.

The topics covered in the book are: ghostly apparitions; mysterious noises; suicidal states and other dangers caused by the Devil; raising the Devil; possession; witches; good Angels; precognition; providences; and poltergeists. His Welsh correspondents refer to corpse-candles, apparitions

of the dead, knockers in mines, and the Tan-we, or Tan-wed (phantom fire), and make it plain that these are part of an established folklore.[85]

Of the total of over forty[86] narratives (excluding the Welsh letters), half are memorates, personal experiences, or local legends and anecdotes. This high proportion of topical material is the best guide we have as to how the supernatural functioned in the lives of Baxter's contemporaries. Two features are of special interest.

First of all, the supernatural was obviously seen as a system of control over human lives. Contact with it always had results - death, despair, madness, fear, removal of doubt, reformation, confession, preservation by miracle. Poltergeists knocked in order to expose witches[87] or to reprimand drunken backsliders;[88] those preserved by miracle grew up to be "a blessing to the church"[89] and so on. The whole system is purposeful.

Secondly, supernatural phenomena were matters of considerable public curiosity. A haunted house was just as great an attraction then as now, it seems. Narrative 8[90] tells how while he was ill at Lady Cook's house in Derbyshire, the house-party had an outing to investigate a haunted house where stones were thrown and strange whistling heard. Again, "Mr. Charles Hatt's letter"[91] concerning a haunted house in Worcestershire notes that

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85 For example on the subject of corpse candles John Lewis writes: "I never scarce heard of any sort, young or old, but this was seen before death" (p.88), and John Davies writes that they "... are common in the three counties ... and, as I hear, in some other parts of Wales" (p. 92).

86 The organisation of the book, and definitional problems, make it difficult to be more specific about numbers.

87 Baxter, Narrative X, pp. 60-63.

88 Baxter, Narrative XIV, pp. 64-5.

89 Baxter, pp. 106-107.

90 Baxter, pp. 58-9.

91 Baxter, pp. 72-3.

"by this time many of the townspeople came in and were at duty"[92]- a phrase which links this haunting to those at Cock Lane in 1742[93] and at Runcorn in 1957,[94] where similar crowds of spectators and investigators accumulated.

Baxter's two best researched stories are classics of ghostlore. The story of Mrs. Bowen of Llanellin,[95] whose dead and decomposing husband tries to get into bed with her and, when rejected, cries reproachfully, "What! Not the husband of thy bosom?", is given in two variants and vouched for with some earnestness. The second is the ghost story most often repeated in subsequent literature,[96] and was something of a scoop for Baxter. The narrative of Mary Goffe, the dying woman whose wraith visits her faraway children while she is unconscious, is treated at some length, and Baxter goes to some trouble to get corroborative accounts from all the witnesses, thereby becoming the first person to adopt the strategy of serious psychical research.

The Certainty of the World of Spirits, with perhaps Increase Mather's Illustrious Providences,[97] Cotton Mather's extended and edited version of his father's work, Magnalia Christi Americana,[98] and Robert Wodrow's Analecta (1701-31)[99]- all strictly speaking outside the confines of the

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92 Baxter, p. 73.

93 Cf. Lang (1894), pp. 161-179.

94 Cf. Eric J. Dingwall and Trevor H. Hall, Four Modern Ghosts (London, 1958), pp. 68-85.

95 Baxter, pp. 44-54.

96 Baxter, pp. 96-100.

97 Increase Mather (1684).

98 Cotton Mather (1702).

99 "M.L." (i.e. Matthew Leishman) (ed.), Robert Wodrow's Analecta, or Materials for a history of Remarkable Providences; mostly relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians [Edinburgh, 1842].

supernatural type discussed in this review - was one of the last great books of its kind. Among more recent texts only Mrs. Catherine Crowe's Night Side of Nature (1848),[100] and Dr. Frederick George Lee's The Other World (1875)[101] and Glimpses in the Twilight (1885)[102] have anything like its comprehensiveness, verve and panache.

3.3.2 Beaumont

The last text to be reviewed in this chapter is John Beaumont's A Treatise of Spirits (1705). Making up in eccentricity and erudition for any verve or panache it might lack, Beaumont's work is a scholarly overview of ancient and modern lore. In this justly termed "treatise" can be seen the first stirrings of a new spirit which begat the 'watershed' period[103] of the literature of the ghost, so different in style and intention from that surveyed so far. A born scholar, as the Dedication of the book shows, Beaumont is the first of the writers of the period 1570-1710 who is scrupulous about references and sources. The dedication deserves to be quoted as revealing the odd combination of qualities in the author's make-up.

> If I have more enlarged myself upon it, it is, that some extraordinary visitations having happened to me, in which I have had converse with those GENII I treat of have made so strong an impression on my mind, that I could not well withhold myself, from perusing the Best Authors I could meet with, relating to it, in order to draw an abstract of what I found most material in them, and to publish it together with my own Experience and Thoughts in that kind. [104]

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100 Mrs. Catherine Crowe, The Night Side of Nature: or Ghosts and Ghost-seers (London, 1848).

101 Lee (1875).

102 Frederick George Lee DD, Glimpses in the Twilight, being various notes, records, and examples of the Supernatural (London/Edinburgh, 1885).

103 See above, Chapter 1, Section 2.4.

104 Beaumont, Dedication, no pagination.

Beaumont then goes on to examine an impressive array of literature both classical and contemporary, and to intersperse this literary and philosophical material with narratives from the "Best Authors" and his own extraordinary experiences. Logically and comprehensively organised, the book deals first with the ancient tradition, then passes to empirical evidence, then to the arguments of abstract reason, and finally devotes a whole chapter to a refutation of Bekker. Beaumont is particularly valuable as a source because he gives, with Kirk, one of the best accounts of second sight, has the fullest record of cases of precognitive dreams, and is the first to deal with some form of telepathic clairvoyance. Other subjects covered in his methodical and scholarly style are omens, the "light" and "dark" spiritual worlds, and the operation of "Genii": that is, personal spirits. Significantly enough, only one chapter deals with witches and apparitions, which had been the central concern of previous authors. Beaumont thus fills in the gaps in the picture of supernatural beliefs in the early period.

His account of second sight is based on his own experience, and, like Kirk, he puts the phenomenon down to the existence of "Genii" or familiar spirits who inform the person they attend of events beyond his or her own perception. Horses, children and cows are particularly prone to it, he says, quoting Martin Martin; other people are "spectre-sighted", that is, they have the facility for seeing ghosts. There is obviously an entrenched belief too in precognition at the turn of the seventeenth century, for Beaumont writes:

> To say absolutely, that all dreams, without distinction are vain Visions and Sports of Nature ... and to banish all Divination from the Life of Man ... is contrary to Experience, and the common Consent and Agreement of Mankind. 105

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105 Beaumont, p. 220.

Quoting instances from the classics, Cotton Mather, Aubrey, Alexander ab Alexander, Cardan, St. Augustine, the life of Sir Henry Wootton, Bekker, Lilly, Clarendon, Binet, the personal experience of the Bishop of Gloucester and of "an ancient Gentleman now living in London",[106] he goes on to collect a convincingly large amount of circumstantial, experiential evidence for this traditional belief. This chapter also contains his discussion of telepathic clairvoyance which quotes Bekker extensively, whose theory that this effect is achieved by bodily "emanations" attracted to each other by love is not very dissimilar from modern ideas.[107]

The influence of the witch controversy with its multiplication of devils is more evident in Beaumont than in other writers considered here. The spiritual world is divided into the "light" and "dark" worlds. Quoting Pordage's Necromancy (1665), he describes contrasting visions of these worlds. Of the light world he writes:

> There appeared to their inward Sight, multitudes almost innumerable of pure Angelic Spirits, in Figurative Bodies which were clear as the Morning Star; and transparent as Crystal, sparkling like diamonds, and sending forth Beams like the Sun, powerfully refreshing their Souls, and enlivening their bodies.[108]

The dark world, naturally, contains all that is black, hideous and fearful, including an early example of a spectral coach-and-four.[109] The concept of the Genii or familiar spirits must also have owed something to witch beliefs, perhaps combining with the older folklore of fairies, elementals and domestic spirits, as his description of the two who attended on him shows.

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106 Beaumont, p. 250.

107 Beaumont, pp. 251-256.

108 Beaumont, p. 208.

109 Beaumont, p. 206.

They:

> ... appear'd both in Women's Habit, they being of a Brown Complexion, and about Three Foot in Stature: they both had black, loose Network Gowns, tyed with a black Sash about their Middles, and within the Network appear'd a Gown of a Golden Colour ... at their first coming they did not appear to me, but only called to me at my Chamber Windows, Rung Bells, Sung to me, and played Music etc. [110]

It might be tempting to the sceptical modern reader to dismiss Beaumont as a mad scholar. That option does not appear to be open to us, for who would put his madness so publicly on view? Rather, perhaps, he is the best evidence we have of what to us seems a madly credulous age.

There can be no better evidence for the existence of living tradition than proof of historical continuity in the form of tales and legends, combined with examples of present belief in the form of memorates, dîtes, and personal experience stories in the same mould. In Beaumont we find all these. His eccentric personal experiences follow the pattern set by tradition and public opinion and thus are evidence of the continuity of traditional lore.

## 3.4 Summary of Section 3

The trend in the investigative literature of the period 1570-1710, then, begins to be clear. The period starts with a flux of books, largely theoretical and abstract, in which the folkloristic concept of the ghost is taken up by leading men of ideas and examined for its usefulness in contemporary religious disputes.

These texts, mainly the product of catholic versus calvinist theological argument, are useful to the folklorist in that they reveal that foundation of supernatural folklore which is so entrenched as to be considered irrefutable. These are the texts, too, which spearheaded changes

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110 Beaumont, pp. 91-92.

of attitude towards, and definition of, the supernatural. The definitional changes of ghost (and elemental) into devil contributed their measure to that most disgraceful episode of European/American history - the witch persecutions. Simultaneously the attitudinal changes which resulted both from the original transmutation of ghost into servant of a higher, moral power and the immensely increased level of fear which the witch-stereotype created appear not only to have led to short-term confusion but may have created a long-term fear of the supernatural. Aubrey and Kirk, for example, betray little fear of ghosts and other phenomena, and in so far as their work is folkloristic, they probably reflect the traditional attitude. Later texts do not show the same mixture of acceptance, credulity and freedom from fear.

Whereas the earliest texts are largely abstract and theoretical, the work of the seventeenth century relies more heavily on empirical demonstration. These collections of rumour, legend and literary stories are probably best treated as curiosities rather than collections of genuine folklore, not necessarily because they are not reliable, but because there is no evidence that they *are*. The later texts of the period (Baxter and Beaumont) show a gradually accelerating deviation from the pattern set by Glanvil. Baxter's methodology is more antiquarian and Beaumont's more that of the historian of ideas. These are trends which pave the way for the rejection of the old-fashioned investigative mould in the next period to be considered - the 'watershed' of 1710-1840.

# 4. Summary of texts from 1570-1710

## 4.1 Introduction

Section 4 aims to show for easy reference in the form of tables and brief discussions:

(1) the principal forms of supernaturalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as indicated by texts of the period;

(2) the principal types of literature in the period;

(3) which aspects of belief can be found in which type of book;

(4) which aspects of belief appear to be universal and therefore likely to represent a core of folk belief in the period;

(5) trends in the development of supernatural belief-systems from 1570 to 1710.

4.2

Table 2: ghostly phenomena mentioned in reviewed texts 1570-1710

- Life-like apparitions
  - Purposeful ghosts
    - action >
      - prophesying/warning
      - secret-revealing >
        - wills etc.
        - murders
        - treasure
      - paying debts/rectifying wrongs
      - preventing injustice
      - revenging crimes
      - confessing/clearing name
      - seeking burial/absolution
      - effecting cures
      - reporting on the after-life
      - returning for love of life/goods/wife etc.
      - assault
        - with weapons
        - with blows
        - obstruction
        - pulling bedclothes off } the living
        - getting into bed with } the living
  - Purposeless ghosts
  - Wraiths of the >
    - newly dead
    - dying
    - living
  - Fetches and Doppelgangers
- Non-human phenomena
  - knockers in mines
  - animal or fiery forms
  - mysterious noises
  - poltergeists

4.3

Table 3: The main types of literature 1570-1710

Types ranked in descending order of reliability as guides to sixteenth and seventeenth century folklore or ghosts:

| Type | | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Folkloristic texts | | Kirk, Secret Commonwealth |
| | | Aubrey, Miscellanies |
| 2. Investigative texts which portray ghostly folklore of the age and seek to redefine/ repudiate it in part or whole | (a) believers | Taillepied, A Treatise of Spirits |
| | (b) sceptics | Lavater, Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght |
| | | Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft |
| 3. Investigative texts in which traditional and personal examples are mixed with selected contemporary examples - all subject to interpretation by the writers | | Baxter, The Certainty of the World of Spirits |
| | | Beaumont, A Historical Treatise of Spirits |
| 4. Investigative texts in which examples are selected from contemporary legend and rumour to prove an a priori thesis | | Glanvil, Saddumcismus Triumphatus |
| | | Bovet, Pandaemonium |
| | | Sinclair, Satan's Invisible World Discovered |

4.4

Table 4: To show which aspects of belief are to be found in which text

| Phenomenon / Type* | 1 | 2 (a) | 2 (b) | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Life-like apparitions** | | | | | |
| Purposeful Ghosts: | | | | | |
| warning/prophesying | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| revealing wills/settlements | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| revealing murder | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| revealing money | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| paying debts/righting wrongs | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| preventing injustice | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| revenging | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| confessing crime/clearing name | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| seeking burial/absolution | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| effecting cures | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| reporting on the afterlife | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| returning for love of life/family | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| assaulting with weapons | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| assaulting with blows | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| assaulting with obstruction | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| assaulting with in bed | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Purposeless ghosts | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wraiths of the newly dead | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Wraiths of the dying | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Wraiths of the living | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Fetches and doppelgangers | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Non-human phenomena** | | | | | |
| knockers | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| animal/fiery forms | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| mysterious noises | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| poltergeists | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

* For types 1-4 see above Section 4.3.

** Note: 1 = present 0 = absent

4.5

Table 5: Patterns of belief as shown in Section 4.4

(a) Universal Beliefs

1. ghosts who seek [ payment of debts / righting of wrongs / prevention of injustice ]
2. wraiths of the newly dead
3. ghosts who [ pull bedclothes off / get into bed with ] the living
4. ghosts who assault the living with blows
5. poltergeists

(b) Beliefs referred to in Kirk and Aubrey only

1. ghosts who return for love of [ life / family ]
2. purposeless ghosts
3. wraiths of the living

(c) Beliefs referred to in Kirk, Aubrey, and folkloristic sections of Lavater, Scot, Taillepied

1. ghosts who reveal [ murder / secret hiding places [ wills / treasure ] ]
2. ghosts who issue prophecies
3. fetches/doppelgangers

(d) Beliefs referred to in every source except Glanvil, Sinclair and Bovet

1. knockers
2. mysterious noises

(e) Beliefs referred to in Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair only

1. ghosts who assault with weapons
2. ghosts who obstruct travellers

(f) Miscellaneous anomalies

1. animal and fiery forms

(These are mentioned in Taillepied, Lavater, Scot, Baxter and Beaumont, but are absent from Kirk, Aubrey, Glanvil, Bovet and Sinclair.)

## 4.6 Discussion

Matters on which all writers agree whatever their particular frame of reference obviously are a part of a universal popular tradition: it would seem, then, that the set of beliefs listed under (a) in section 4.5 above were firmly entrenched in the cultural traditions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the other hand, phenomena which are mentioned only in the least folkloristic sources should be regarded as idiosyncratic rather than general opinion: the concept of ghosts who threaten the percipient with weapons should therefore probably not be considered a traditional one (list (e)).

Between the two extremes are a set of phenomena that need a little more consideration. List (b) is of particular interest. In many ways these are ideas of the ghost that seem most akin to modern concepts, and their appearance in these texts suggests that modern ideas about ghosts are neither idiosyncratic nor in decline as some researchers have recently suggested,[111] but part of a continuing and developing tradition. That such beliefs were neglected by the investigative writers of the time in no way suggests that they were not popular beliefs. Rather it suggests that they were part of a genuine folklore which was ignored by religiously motivated writers because it served to illustrate no religious doctrine. Ghosts who return for love of life are not helpful in proving the existence of a better life elsewhere; wraiths of the living cannot be used to prove the continued existence of the dead and devalue the proof of that existence offered by other wraiths and ghosts. Similarly, a purposeless ghost by its nature cannot be used to prove any theory at all. These classes of ghost therefore would naturally be left out of any account which sought to use the supernatural in religious argument. On the matter of the purposeless ghost that usually very reliable writer, Andrew Lang, therefore seems

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111 Cf. Finucane, p. 281; Thomas, p. 605; and Robert Blauner, "Death and Social Structure", Psychiatry, 29 (1966), 382.

for once to be mistaken. In his historical survey, Cock Lane and Common Sense, he writes:

> ... the modern ghost is a purposeless creature. He appears no one knows why; he has no message to deliver; no secret crime to reveal, no appointment to keep, no treasure to disclose, no commissions to be executed, and, as an almost invariable rule, he does not speak even if you speak to him ... But the ghost of the seventeenth century was positively garrulous. [112]

Their garrulity, one would rather argue, is the result of the narrator's inner need for them to have an obvious and stated purpose.

Related to this point is another interesting anomaly. Some sorts of ghosts, those seeking payment of debts and so on (see list (a)), are recognised in all the literature, whereas other types of purposeful behaviour are not. A clue to this anomaly might be provided by a remark made by Lavater:

> On those apparitions of spirits, as on a sure foundation [the catholic] purgatory is chiefly builded. For by the talke hadde with them [i.e. ghosts] Popishe writers taught that men atteined unto Saluation by theire owne and other men's merits. [113]

Lavater is probably right in suggesting that some features of traditional ghost behaviour had their foundation in the doctrine of 'Justification by Deeds': in Britain after the Reformation and the substitution of the doctrine of 'Justification by Faith' the concept of the ghost who cannot rest because some good deed is outstanding would necessarily gradually be eroded. Those aspects first eroded are the more worldly, less moral ones like revealing secrets and guarding treasure. As time progresses the erosion of this aspect of the behaviour of ghosts is completed. As far as I am aware, ghosts who seek payment of debts and so on no longer make any appearance in memorate and living legends today.

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112 Lang (1894), p. 95.

113 Lavater, p. 110.

It is probably safe to guess that the remaining features of lists (c) and (d) above could be folkloristic too. Again, these are attested by the majority of writers and in addition are just the sort of 'superstition' that writers motivated by strong religious purpose would omit.

The anomaly listed under (f) in section 4.5 above is difficult to account for, there being no discernible pattern in its distribution. All one can judge by is that this particular phenomenon can be found in the literature of the supernatural in every succeeding age including the present and it also appears in the earliest text reviewed here (Lavater). It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that this also was very probably an item of folklore during the period 1570 to 1710.

## 4.7 Conclusion

It seems that the most universal feature of ghostlore during the period 1570-1710 is the concept of the life-like purposeful ghost. Its behaviour in some cases is aggressive: at night it twitches bedclothes off or attempts to get back into the warmth and security of a bed, its own or another person's; during the day it often strikes or bumps into living people as they walk about in the street. This last behaviour comes close to that of the non-human poltergeist (another universal belief of the age) which displays a wide range of macabre, malicious and offensive behaviours either alone or in conjunction with an apparition. A poltergeist might be the sort of relatively harmless spirit envisaged by Kirk, which merely throws stones without inflicting personal damage, or it might be the devilish entity portrayed by Taillepied, which seriously endangers both life and limb.

The most purposeful behaviour of all is that of ghosts who return for moral reasons, to interfere in the affairs of their survivors. Debts, injustices and crimes can never be left unresolved: the ghost must come back to settle the account and to ensure that its last or best intentions are

carried out. Clearly here the ghost is a sanction for social order and private morality, just as in times past it had been a sanction for religious order and pious observances. Ghosts with less socially desirable aims were probably also an entrenched part of sixteenth and seventeenth century beliefs, though it is possible that the more materialistic and hedonistic behaviours attributed to ghosts in the past are already beginning to fade from the stereotype during the period.

Alternatively, ghosts may be passive and relatively purposeless - for example, it is thought common to see the apparition of one newly dead, who might or might not communicate with those it has left behind. Throughout the age, elements of the ghost concept which might account for and interpret discrepant perceptions very probably are a part of a universal belief-set. Thus purposeless (and often silent) bedside apparitions, wraiths of the living, mysterious noises, including those made by knockers, and animal and fiery forms appear in the majority of the texts of 1570-1710. The relatedness of these sorts of phenomena to unusual states of consciousness needs no stressing, nor the usefulness of ghost concepts in making sense of the unaccountable and alarming experiences which humankind from time to time encounters.

It is difficult to make a final assessment of how far the religious disputes of the age made an impact on the folklore of ghosts among ordinary people. Certainly, though the ghost was officially banned in protestant theology, it nevertheless continued to lead an active life in the thoughts of laymen.

# CHAPTER 4

## The Literature 1710-1840

## 1. Introduction

The years 1710 to 1840 present a much less coherent picture of ghost belief than the preceding hundred and forty years - a picture that is further complicated by a plethora of popular writing on supernatural topics.

The present chapter aims to present an overview of the literature - popular, investigative and folkloristic — to assess how far these texts give a reliable picture of the supernatural folklore of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to attempt to paint at least a provisional picture of the popular concept of the ghost during this time.

It begins by considering the investigative literature up to the emergence of the Society for Psychical Research in the 1840s. Section 3 then examines the popular literature of the age, and in particular the work of Daniel Defoe. The fourth section assesses the value and significance of Bourne, Brand and Grose as guides to the folklore of ghosts. The final section attempts to summarise what aspects of traditional stereotypes were changing, and what appear to have remained constant in an age which was, as far as supernatural concepts were concerned, a 'watershed' period.

## 2. Investigative Literature 1710-1840

2.1 As far as serious investigative literature goes, the watershed period falls into two very distinct parts: the writings of 1710 to 1740 and the writings of 1800 to 1840, with a gap in serious-minded interest in the topic between about 1740 and 1800. In the books of the first half of

the eighteenth century one can detect the last stirrings of the preoccupations of the early period. When interest revives in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is through the work of philosophically-minded medical men and has an entirely different complexion, one of dispassionate scientific curiosity.

## 2.2 Writers of the early eighteenth century

The writings of 1710 to 1840 are both similar and dissimilar to the last texts of the early period. They are similar in that they are harnessed to theological purposes; written for the most part by clergymen or those interested in religious matters; and concerned with the occult primarily because they are concerned with witchcraft. Though the Witchcraft Act of 1604 had rarely been invoked since the turn of the century, the last execution being in 1684, it remained on the Statute Book till 1736.[1] The last trial for witchcraft in England was that of Jane Wenham in 1712.[2] However, in spirit and method the texts of the early eighteenth century are entirely different from their forerunners. After 1700 there were few writers who would take the possibility of witchcraft seriously, there are no collections of occult narratives, the method of argument is by pure reason, and writers refuse to be sidetracked into discussing all aspects of the supernatural but confine themselves to refuting the possibility of magic, sorcery and witchcraft.

The two most typical texts of this period are Francis Hutchinson's An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft (1718)[3] and Jacques De Daillon's Daimonologia (1723).[4] In both books the main text deals exclusively with

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1 Rossell Hope Robbins, The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology (New York, 1959), p. 551.

2 Robbins, pp. 536-537.

3 Hutchinson (1718).

4 De Daillon (1723).

witchcraft, the matter of ghosts being confined, in the case of Hutchinson, to a sermon appended to the Essay, and, in the case of De Daillon, to an appendix dealing with two famous biblical cases - the raising of Samuel by the Witch of Endor and the driving of evil spirits into the Gadarene swine. Both are a joy to read: Hutchinson and De Daillon write with dignified passion, logic and a vivid, direct style.

De Daillon must be the country's first logical positivist, for he proceeds by examining the meaning of key terms and the history of their usage. Finally he reduces the concept of witchcraft to its lowest common denominator and dismisses the whole edifice as "silly stories of old women and children".[5] Hutchinson's attack concentrates on the notions of probability and natural justice.

The treatment of ghosts is as sceptical. The sermon, "concerning Good and Evil Angels" appended to the main text of Hutchinson's Essay is intriguing.[6] In its treatment of ghosts as both evil spirits and imaginary it stands firmly between the theological doctrines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the medical theories of apparitions to be developed in the early nineteenth. His argument against the fear of ghosts rests first on moral grounds, secondly on practical ones. On religious grounds he argues:

> As we worship not Good Angels, so neither let us be in over great Dread or Terror for fear of bad ones. 7

Fear of ghosts and evil spirits detracts from the true fear of God and smacks of the dualist Manichean heresy:

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5 De Daillon, p. 138.

6 Hutchinson, pp. 332-4.

7 Hutchinson, p. 332.

> 'Sanctify the Lord God in your Hearts, and let Him be your Fear, and let Him be your Dread.' Live virtuously and take care to fear him, and then fear nothing else beyond Reason, either Men or Devils. [8]

The second, practical, line of his argument runs concurrently with this. He argues that ghosts are "Heathenish Stories that the Holy Scriptures never taught"[9] and "imaginary creatures of their own making".[10] Fear of ghosts is self-induced, liable to make one unnecessarily miserable and a prisoner of one's own mind:

> The tales they have heard have made their minds like rooms painted with devils. [11]

Though this second line of reasoning is somewhat inconsistent with the first (the one assuming the reality of apparitions, the other denying it), together they make a most persuasive attack on "Frights and Terror".[12]

De Daillon's treatment of ghosts is less general.[13] He concentrates upon the two biblical narratives that consistently proved to be the stumbling-block of Sadducistic thought: that is, the raising of the ghost of Samuel through the mediumship of the Witch of Endor and Christ's removing a legion of devils into the Gadarene swine. His position on both is that the narratives have been misunderstood and pressed into the service of a set of beliefs they really do not illustrate at all. His treatment of the raising of Samuel is a classic of reasoning. He convincingly demonstrates

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8 Hutchinson, p. 334.

9 Hutchinson, p. 334.

10 Hutchinson, p. 332.

11 Hutchinson, p. 333.

12 Hutchinson, p. 334.

13 De Daillon, pp. 121-8.

not only that it must have been a trick, but also examines the method by which the trick could have been perpetrated. By examining the biblical account in rigorous detail he concludes that the Witch of Endor was a competent ventriloquist who was able to impose upon Saul because Saul was anxious to be imposed upon. De Daillon's analysis of Saul's psychological state is particularly impressive, prefiguring later psychological theories of autohypnotic states.

Both Hutchinson and De Daillon evidence the new intellectual freedom of the age, a freedom that could work in two directions - first disposing of fear of the supernatural and then (after a period of dormancy and dissociation) taking up the subject again as suitable for scientific enquiry.

## 2.3 Writers of the early nineteenth century

The texts of the second generation of writers (from 1800) are of quite different kind to the work of men such as Hutchinson and De Daillon. The battle over the question of the existence of supernatural forces - witchcraft and ghosts - had at least in public been won by the rationalists, and the chief interest of speculative men was in explaining why something so fantastical should keep on recurring as an aspect of human experience.

During the middle and late years of the eighteenth century there had been virtually no serious public discussion of the supernatural. While belief in ghosts may well have been, as Thomas suggests,

> ... a reality in the eighteenth century for many educated men, however much the rationalists laughed at them, [14]

there is yet a dearth of investigative writing on the subject for at least six decades. It has been suggested that public expression of belief or

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[14] Thomas (1971), p. 591.

interest in the supernatural declined before a general feeling that such beliefs were in some way absurd,[15] or because they lost their social relevance.[16] Certainly this may well have been true in public: in private there is yet evidence that both educated and uneducated people retained a large proportion of the traditional beliefs.

The final passage of Ferriar's Theory of Apparitions[17] aptly illustrates the continuing interest among the uneducated classes, the public attitude towards the supernatural, and the spirit of disinterested enquiry which motivated the investigative writers of the early nineteenth century:

> I conceive that the unaffected accounts of spectral visions should engage the attention of the philosopher, as well as of the physician. Instead of regarding these stories with the horror of the vulgar, or the disdain of the sceptic, we should examine them accurately, and should ascertain their exact relationship to the state of the brain and the external senses.
>
> The terror of nocturnal illusions would thus be dissipated, to the infinite relief of many wretched creatures; and the appearance of a ghost would be regarded in its true light, as a symptom of bodily distemper, and of little more consequence than the head-ach [sic] and shivering attending a common catarrh.
>
> There is reason to believe, that many persons suffer silently, from these imaginary visitations, who are deterred from divulging their distress, by the ridicule, with which complaints of this nature are commonly treated. When the proper distinction is established, admitting the reality of the impression, but explaining its production in the mind alone, all difficulties of this kind may be removed, and the apprehensions of the visionary may be readily quieted. [18]

It is particularly noticeable how different Ferriar's attitudes are from those of his predecessors, and from those who came later. There is no correlation, for example, between these early nineteenth century texts

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15 Lang (1894), p. 23.

16 Thomas (1971), p. 606.

17 John Ferriar MD, An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions (London, 1813).

18 Ferriar, pp. 138-139.

and the investigative texts of the post 1840 period when Spiritualism became a force. The texts of Ferriar and those he influenced are best seen as a postponed flowering of eighteenth century rationalism, rather than as forerunners of Victorian occultism.

In many ways, Ferriar's is a strange book to have been so influential. Its tone is somewhat impudent, unserious and anecdotal. His remarks about Beaumont give something of the flavour of his style and approach:

> Had this man, instead of irritating his mental disease by the study of the Platonic philosophers, placed himself under the care of an intelligent physician, he would have regained his tranquillity and the world would have lost a most extraordinary set of confessions.[19]

After relating a series of more than usually fantastic experiences drawn from a wide variety of literary sources, he goes on to explain that all proceed from a morbid disposition of the brain resulting from mysticism, superstition, sensuality and depression.

In spite of its levity, An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions was sufficiently in tune with its age to set a fashion for medico-philosophical treatises on ghosts. One of the most ambitious of these is Samuel Hibbert-Ware's Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions (1825)[20] which frankly owes its debt to Ferriar and to the papers appearing in medical journals under the pens of "medico pathological" physicians such as Alderston, Crichton, Hartley and Brown.[21] Hibbert-Ware's work is unfortunately tedious to the modern reader. Pretentious and complex, it persistently fails to come to the point; instead, it hints at a theory then promptly wanders off into anecdote. As far as it can be understood, the

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19 Ferriar, p. 68.

20 Samuel Hibbert-Ware, Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions (Edinburgh, 1825).

21 Hibbert-Ware, p. 57.

theory relies on a Humeian dichotomy between "impressions" (i.e., sense-data) and "ideas" (stored memories of and abstracts of sense-data). Apparitions are caused as "an undue degree of vividness in the recollected images of the mind"[22](i.e., in the "ideas"), a condition which can be caused by either physical or psychological factors, but particularly by an over-active circulatory system or a surplus of blood. Under these conditions the processes which turn impressions into ideas are reversed, and the ideas are revivified to become "sensations", presenting themselves as newly-perceived sense-data. This is highly ingenious, though showily and confusingly presented in a series of tabular diagrams and padded out with a good deal of fashionable and now outdated physiological theory. Book three[23] is one of the more interesting parts of the work, arguing fairly cogently that the traditional superstitions among which a patient has been brought up will determine the form any apparition/hallucination will take.

In both Ferriar's and Hibbert-Ware's books, the author's introductory remarks are as telling as the main texts. These prefaces give some indication of contemporary context in terms of attitudes towards the supernatural. Ferriar's work is quite plainly written in the context of the popularity of the Gothic novel,[24] and Hibbert-Ware, too, notes that "there is a general interest excited on the subject" and "a desire for information".[25] Ferriar also makes it plain that alongside the literary fashion for synthetic thrills, there was a genuine fear of the supernatural.[26] In general the

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22 Hibbert-Ware, p. 70.

23 Hibbert-Ware, pp. 125-240.

24 Ferriar, pp. vi-vii.

25 Hibbert-Ware, p. viii.

26 Ferriar writes of "those unfortunate persons, who feel a real dread of apparitions", p. viii.

treatises of the early nineteenth century have a threefold aim: to dispel these fears where they exist; to fulfil the public's need for information on a subject neglected for decades; and to include the phenomenon of apparitions in a unified theory of the human mind.

The best-known and most successful work to accomplish the last of these aims was John Abercrombie's An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth (1841).[27] This popular work had run to fifteen editions by 1854. Firmly rooted in the tradition of the English Empiricists, Abercrombie's work aims for something like their comprehensiveness. Part I deals with "The nature and extent of our knowledge of mind"; Part 2 with "The origin of our knowledge of facts"; and Part 3 with "The intellectual operations". The following parts are concerned with applying philosophical rule to medical practice and the maintenance of a healthy mind.

It is Part 3, Section iv.2 ("Of the use of Reason in correcting the impressions of the mind in regard to external things")[28] that has been found useful by folklorists interested in the supernatural, for this section deals in turn with four cases in which the senses are capable of deceiving the reason: dreaming, somnambulism, insanity and spectral illusions. In particular, Abercrombie's section on dreaming[29] has been rifled to provide illustration of prophetic dreams. Every single one of his narratives has been used at least once by subsequent writers, entirely regardless of the theoretical framework in which they are placed. All but two of his examples - which are treated as inexplicable coincidences - are interpreted

27 John Abercrombie, An Enquiry concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth, eleventh edition (London, 1841).

28 Abercrombie, pp. 272-396.

29 Abercrombie, pp. 272-307.

by Abercrombie as instances where a submerged memory is brought to the conscious mind through the medium of a dream, or where a strong mental impression is made on two individuals who coincidentally revive those impressions as dreams at about the same time. In no case at all does Abercrombie regard these dreams as prophetic or as psychic events. They are regarded as entirely natural, and explainable by rational processes. Yet they reappear persistently in subsequent literature as examples of supernatural phenomena.

Abercrombie's section on "Spectral Illusions"[30] is less well-known, probably because it cannot be so easily quoted out of context. Illustrative accounts occupy the main body of the section, as in his account of dreaming, but this time they are ordered strictly according to the causal agencies he thinks are at work - that is:

(a) voluntary hallucinations;

(b) lucid dreams;

(c) "intense mental conceptions so strongly impressed upon the mind as, for the moment, to be believed to have a real existence";[31]

(d) disease (and drugs);

(e) misperception.

The illustrations to this section are drawn from his own and colleagues' casebooks and from journals such as the Edinburgh Medical Journal and the Edinburgh Journal of Science.

Abercrombie's confident overview of the human mind has a stylishness which is entirely of its age and its popularity and influence are easily understandable. The best-known of the books of this period and type, it has suffered since by being misused as a source for supernatural wonders which Abercrombie himself could never have accepted as likely.

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30 Abercrombie, pp. 376-396.

31 Abercrombie, p. 5.

## 2.4 Concluding remarks

The investigative literature of the period 1710-1840 has a limited but vital interest for the historian of ideas. In these texts we see the folklore of the age through the eyes of educated men. The view is necessarily limited, perhaps even distorted, but nevertheless it has much to show us. One of the interesting aspects of this writing is to see that, whereas in the two previous centuries the beliefs of intellectuals and uneducated people had coincided, during the watershed period they became increasingly distant. Though traditional beliefs in ghosts and other supernatural phenomena were still obviously retained by the populace as a whole, educated people (at least in public) repudiated them. Belief in ghosts became somehow vulgar and disreputable. Intelligent opinion was strongly against the reality of such primitive fears and the ghost was taboo in polite society for the best part of a century.

The exact nature of the beliefs of the people cannot easily be reconstructed from the writings of the intellectuals, but appear to have included vague terrors of churchyards, darkness and old houses - in fact, a rather similar set of circumstances that arouse fear in people today.

# 3. Popular Literature 1710-1840

3.1 If openly expressed theological and intellectual interest in the supernatural waned during the watershed period, popular interest certainly did not. There is indeed a multiplicity of popular texts in the form of pamphlets, short books and booklets, articles in literary and other journals, and popular literature. This section will consider representative texts from each of these types.

3.2 Pamphlets and booklets

Eighteenth Century British Books[32] lists over fifty texts of an unashamedly popular nature produced from 1710 to 1800 and relating to such supernatural topics as prophecy, apparitions and witchcraft. The following three titles are representative of the average entry:

1. "Admiral Vernon's Ghost: being a full account as how a warlike apparition appeared to the author and discoursed to him concerning the present state of affairs."

2. "Views from the world of spirits: or interesting anecdotes of the Dead: containing narratives of the appearance of many departed spirits."

3. "A faithful narrative of the appearance of Counsellor Morgan's ghost. With a genuine copy of the speech he made without his head."

These little documents vary between four and forty pages, one of the longer being Dean and Munday's 1800 booklet, New Life after Death or the Secrets of the Grave laid open. Being a selection of authentic and miraculous appearances of spectres and apparitions to several persons yet living.

Daniel Defoe's account of the apparition of Mrs. Veal,[33] first published in 1706, ran to over twenty-five editions, did not finally go out of print until 1965, and was in continuous production till 1883. Almost as popular, Mary Beer's "prophetical warnings" were published in several editions between 1709 and 1711, and Robert Nixon's "Cheshire Prophesies" ran to twenty-one editions before 1745 and continued in print until 1878. The Cock Lane poltergeist created a flurry of activity in the popular press, including an anonymous study by Oliver Goldsmith.[34] Goldsmith was careful not to append his name to this piece of popular occultism. This

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32 G. Averley, A. Flowers, F.J.G. Robinson, E.A. Thompson, R.V. and P.J. Wallis (eds.), Eighteenth Century British Books: A Subject Catalogue, extracted from the British Museum in General Catalogue of Printed Books (Newcastle, 1979).

33 Daniel Defoe, A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal, the next day after her death: to one Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury. The 8th of Sept. 1705 (London, 1706).

34 Oliver Goldsmith (attributed), The Mystery Revealed: containing a series of transactions and authentic testimonials respecting the supposed Cock Lane Ghost (London, 1742).

indeed seems to be the common practice: throughout the period a large proportion of popular texts are written anonymously or under a pseudonym. Andrew Lang explains the lack of outspoken public interest in the topic in the years 1720 to 1840 thus:

> ... belief in all such matters, from fairies to the miracles in the gospels, declines as rationalism or enlightenment advances. Yet it is not ... before reason that they vanish, not before learned argument and examination, but just before a kind of sentiment, or instinct, or feeling, that events contradictory of normal experience seem ridiculous and incredible. [35]

The amount of cheap popular literature circulating in the period indicates that such topics only seem ridiculous and incredible to the more educated men who wrote it, not to the common sort of people who consumed it in such quantities.

## 3.3 Defoe

For the rather better educated, there was an equally steady diet of occult literature freely available. Whereas the cheaper popular literature tended to stress the authenticity and fidelity of the accounts, the books describe themselves as "histories", "dialogues" or "systems", so casting a veneer of science and sophistication over their subject matter. Nevertheless, the writings of men such as Daniel Defoe do no more than exploit the popular taste for wonders. Defoe, in particular, produced a quantity of titles on supernatural topics, including The Second-Sighted Highlander (1714);[36] The Political History of the Devil (1726);[37] A System

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35 Lang (1894), p. 23. I myself would fix the dates as 1723 to 1800. Possibly Lang missed texts here reviewed as "investigative", or did not consider them as representative of a general interest in the supernatural.

36 Daniel Defoe, The Second Sighted Highlander: Being four visions of the eclypse and something of what might follow (London, 1714).

37 Daniel Defoe, The Political History of the Devil ancient and modern [Durham, 1822]. First published 1726.

of Magick (1727);[38] and, as Andrew Moreton, The Secrets of the Invisible World Disclosed (1729),[39] all of which were popular and sold well. The Political History of the Devil ran to eighteen editions between 1726 and 1843; The Secrets of the Invisible World Disclosed to four editions in eleven years.

This latter is perhaps the most useful of the popular texts to the historian of folklore ideas. In the first place, Defoe was far too shrewd a journalist to move far from consensus opinion on any matter, so that we may trust that the supernatural beliefs portrayed in his work are commonplace. Secondly, his good ear for idiom and neat turns of phrase lead to his quoting contemporary phraseology for occult phenomena.

The student can therefore glean the information that apparitions were commonly thought to be of three kinds - angels, devils and "the departed souls of men"[40] - and that they might appear voluntarily or be conjured up by magicians or necromancers. For anyone interested in the history of ideas this is quite valuable information, for it shows that, after the debates of the Reformation had finally settled down, the new beliefs revealed themselves as grafted on to existing traditions rather than as replacing them. This indicates the resilience and adaptability of folklore. Furthermore, Defoe's preface implies that opinion was at the time still shifting - and shifting back to what it was before ghost was equated with devil:

> ... almost all real apparitions are of friendly and assisting Angels and come of a kind and beneficent... Errand [41]

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38 Daniel Defoe, A System of Magick: or a History of the Black Art. Being an historical account of man's most early dealings with Devils (London, 1727).

39 Andrew Moreton (alias of Daniel Defoe), The Secrets of the Invisible World Disclosed (London, 1729).

40 Defoe (1729), p. 16.

41 Defoe (1729), p. (a2).

he writes, the word "real" here indicating the logical loophole through which the ghost can be re-redefined. Surely, too, he must be reflecting common opinion when he writes:

> ... the mistake lies chiefly here, that we either will allow no apparition at all, or will have every apparition to be of the Devil; as if none of the Inhabitants of the World above, were able to show themselves here, or had any Business among us....[42]

Later chapters of the present work will show how common are these sentiments, and the way they are expressed, among the conventionally religious even today. The tone and temper of the book make it plain that it is not a questioning work, but a descriptive one dealing with commonly held views. As he says, his business is "adjusting the fact".[43]

Secondly there are genuinely folkloristic observations here and there. For example, in talking of apparitions, he notes that:

> This is what our People vulgarly call Walking; and when any such thing appears, they know not what otherwise to call it, they say Something Walks: and: if it be the appearance of any known Person lately dead, they say Such-a-one Walks.[44]

Defoe's even more successful The Political History of the Devil is a popular history of the biblical Devil and all his works. The second part deals with witchcraft, necromancy, magic and divination. With no claims to any sort of scholarship, Defoe merely panders to the popular desire to be excited and horrified.

Books such as Defoe's suggest that such matters are safely in the past for the reader of the early eighteenth century, and that what were for a previous generation real dangers are now no more than topics for vicarious thrills. One feature of interest in this respect is Hutchinson's remark that the books of Baxter, Glanvil, Bovet, Aubrey, the Mathers and

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42 Defoe (1729), p. (a2).

43 Defoe (1729), p. 6.

44 Defoe (1729), p. 16.

Beaumont

> ... are in Tradesman's Shops and Farmers Houses, and are read with great eagerness and are continuously levening the Minds of the Youth, who delight in such subjects.[45]

It seems that treatises which once were written with serious purpose for a serious-minded readership, in a later century became fireside entertainment for the masses. What influence these had in keeping alive the old stereotypes of ghost and witch is difficult now to say with any certainty, but they do blend in well with eighteenth century popular literature.

Here and elsewhere the popular literature betrays an age which, under a veneer of sophistication, is still preoccupied with the miraculous and agog for wonders.

## 3.4 Journals

The Watershed period was also, of course, the heyday of the periodical. The great popular magazines of the period all reflect public interest in the supernatural. Foremost among them was The Gentleman's Magazine (1713-1907), which carried a very substantial amount of antiquarian material, including ghostlore. Gomme collected the folkloristic articles appearing between 1731 and 1868 and published them as English Traditions and Foreign Customs[46] in 1885. Gomme's section on the occult[47] covers such familiar topics as precognitive dreams, current ghost legend, and wraiths of the living and newly dead. More interestingly, entries show a growing interest in exorcism (a preoccupation of populo-folkloristic texts

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45 Hutchinson, dedication, no pagination.

46 Sir George Lawrence Gomme, English Traditions and Foreign Customs: A Classified Collection of the Chief Contents of the Gentleman's Magazine from 1731-1868 (London, 1885).

47 Gomme, pp. 177-210.

of the modern period) and the earliest versions of three popular tales of haunting: that is, The Dog of Mause (1731 issue); the Barminster Ghost (1774 issue but dated to 1728); and the Lyttleton Ghost (1816 issue).

The influential Athenaeum (1828-1921) took a discreet interest in folkloristic topics, customs and beliefs, legends, and occasionally occult lore. Until Thoms' letter of 1846 there are few, if any, articles devoted to popular antiquities but entries regularly appear in correspondence and the "Miscellany" column. Folkloristic books were frequently reviewed; the "On Our Library Shelf" column invariably included one text on antiquarian or occult topics; and "The Library of Romance" column, as its title suggests, carried much occult material in the tradition of the Gothic novel.

Accounts of supernatural happenings can be found in even less likely environments: for example John Wesley published extracts from his diary covering the period of the haunting of Epworth Rectory in his own Arminian Magazine in 1784. Literary periodicals, such as Blackwoods (1824-1900) and Fraser's Magazine (1830-1882) took a keen interest in both antiquarian and occult subjects. The "Ettrick Shepherd", poet and countryman James Hogg, wrote on folkloristic topics for both Blackwoods and Fraser's until his death. Other articles on folklore and the occult in Blackwoods include Robert MacNish's contribution of a quartet of occult fantasies under the pseudonym of "A modern Pythagorean"; John Stirling's "Legendary Lore" series which ran from October 1837 to January 1840; and John Roby's "The Witch of Roseberry Topping" of December 1835. Occasional pieces include: "The Murder Hole: an ancient legend", by Catherine Sinclair (February 1829); "The Iron Shroud", by John Galt (1830); "The Devil's Doings: or warm work in Wirtenberg" by George Moir (October 1836); "Animal Magnetism in London", "Two hours of Mystery" and "The Devil's frills" all by James White; and "The Murderer's Last Night" by Thomas Doubleday (June 1829).

Equally prolific, in its first five years of publication (1830-1835) Fraser's Magazine published ten pieces on the occult and related topics,[48] as well as initiating a series "Tales of Mystery" and publishing the first thirteen of Hogg's articles.

All these pieces seem representative not only of the volume of interest in the supernatural during the late watershed period, but also of the type of interest. Such popular writing was obviously influenced by late Romantic aesthetic attitudes, by early Victorian feeling for sentimental thrills and the still-continuing influence of the Gothic novel.

## 4. Folkloristic Literature 1710-1848

4.1 As noted above[49] the watershed period saw the publication of some of the most influential of antiquarian texts: Bourne's Antiquitates Vulgares (1725); Brand's Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain (1777), which edited and updated Bourne; Ellis's edited and updated versions of Brand (1810 and 1813); Grose's Provincial Glossary (1787); and Hone's Year Book (1832). However it is with some misgivings that this work is discussed under the heading of "Folkloristic Literature". Strictly speaking all except Bourne's work are, as Brand's title states, books of popular antiquities: that is, they look back from the perspective of

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48 See the following issues:

Fraser's Magazine, volume 1 (July, 1830), 673-684
" " volume 1 (July, 1830), 33-41
" " volume 3 (February, 1831), 39-49
" " volume 6 (December, 1832), 728-746
" " volume 10 (July 1834), 51-62.

Fraser's also ran a three-part series by Edward Irving on "spiritual gifts" between January and April 1832 and a two-part series (unattributed) on magic, January to March, 1833.

49 Chapter 1, section 2.4.

intelligent outsiders to the lives of country people of a bygone age and record the customs and superstitions they find. They rely chiefly upon written sources for information and illustration, not seeking to understand the contexts in which the customs and beliefs they recorded functioned. Implicit in their attitudes is an assumption that folklore is not of their own class or period.

However the study of folklore had not yet begun, and it is pointless to criticise these writers for failing to meet standards which have been imposed since their time; in spite of all, their work is plainly the forebear of the social science of modern folkloristics. Lacking, therefore, a more fitting category and wishing to distinguish these texts from the popular and investigative writing of the age, it is most convenient to treat them as 'folkloristic'. With the exception of Bourne, all are products of the latter years of the period, a corollary of that late flowering of intelligent interest in popular superstition that in a differently oriented mind gave rise to the investigative literature of the second phase.[50]

## 4.2 Bourne

Bourne's work is rather different in kind from the majority of texts. As far as its treatment of the supernatural is concerned, it is an endearing mixture of the investigative and the naively accepting. Its naivety comes from the fact that Bourne is clearly writing from within the tradition that he is describing. While affecting to see supernatural fear as self-created delusion, he argues himself into accepting the majority of the beliefs he discountenances. Chapters 6, 7 and 10 deal specifically with ghostlore, chapter 9 with omens, and chapter 11 with rites of exorcism.

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50 See above, section 2.3.

In each of chapters 6, 7 and 10 he discusses traditional supernatural beliefs; Chapter 6 debates whether night-time is specifically the time for walking spirits of the dead and whether they return to their graves at cockcrow; Chapter 7 deals with churchyards as the principal location of ghosts; and chapter 10 discusses a miscellany of popular beliefs about the Devil, fairies, hobgoblins, the walking places of spirits, and haunted houses. In all, there is an implicit faith in most of what he discusses, though he is prone to dismiss "spirits in the shape of Cows, Dogs and Horses" as:

> ... grounded on no other Bottom than the Fears and Fancies and weak Brains of Men, [51]

and to redefine the supernatural in terms of good and evil angels. Overall the impression of the state of supernatural belief to be obtained from Bourne corresponds very closely to that obtained from Hutchinson's sermon "Concerning Good and Evil Angels".[52]

Brand's later edition of Bourne (1777) preserves these chapters in entirety and adds little extra except quotations from Chaucer, Gay and Shakespeare and a number of dismissive sneers. This might indicate either that ghost beliefs changed between 1725 and 1777 or that Augustan fear of vulgarity influenced Brand's comments. The latter interpretation would go to show that the beliefs enumerated in Bourne were still commonly held at least by the uneducated classes.

Both these earlier texts are now rather difficult to obtain. The chief sources for the ghost beliefs of the watershed period are Grose, Ellis's editions of Brand, and Hone. These remain not only the most easily consulted but the most influential of watershed folkloristic texts.

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51 Bourne, p. 77.

52 Hutchinson (1718).

## 4.3 Hone

Hone's book is perhaps the least significant, partly because of its organisation as a calendar compendium, which makes it difficult to consult as a guide to any particular belief. Of course, it was not designed to be used in this way but as a magazine to provide entertaining reading throughout the months of the year. However, by sifting through the volume, one can find entries on such topics as "lating the witches",[53] corpse candles,[54] knockers in mines,[55] cunning men,[56] witches and charms[57] and many different types of divinatory rituals and omens.[58] All this indicates that peripheral occult beliefs flourished and remained fairly constant over long periods of time.

## 4.4 Grose

Grose's Provincial Glossary[59] (1787) remains the single most influential folkloristic text of the eighteenth century, but whether it deserves its reputation is another matter. Even the title gives away the antiquarian bias. Grose's interest is clearly in the peasantry, and ghost belief is seen as a provincial aberration on a par with the use of dialect words. His collection of "popular superstitions" which is appended to the Glossary is instructive as showing a full range of familiar beliefs and

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53 Hone, pp. 638-640.

54 Hone, p. 640.

55 Hone, p. 676.

56 Hone, p. 213.

57 Hone, p. 189.

58 Hone, pp. 759-760, 702-703, 664, and passim.

59 Grose (1787).

practices:

> Ghosts - Witches, sorcerers and witchcraft - Fairies - Corpse-candles - Second sight - Omens - Things lucky and unlucky - Spells, Charms and other fanciful devices for preventing and curing disorders - Superstitious Methods for obtaining Knowledge of future events - Sympathy [telepathy] and Miscellaneous Superstitions.[60]

The very familiarity of the list, however, might make one pause, for it strongly suggests that information on these matters has been culled from earlier written sources rather than collected as a living system from the people themselves.

His discussion of ghosts is famous, and it is indeed a witty and sharp-edged summary of conventional stereotypes:

> A ghost is supposed to be the spirit of a person deceased who is either under command to return for some special errand such as the discovery of a murderer, or to procure restitution in land, or money unjustly held from an orphan or widow, or having committed some injustice while living, cannot rest until that is redressed, sometimes, the occasion of spirits revisiting this world is to inform their heirs in what secret place or private drawer in an old trunk they have hidden the title deeds of the estate, or buried their money or plate. Some ghosts of murdered persons whose bodies have been secretly buried cannot be at ease until their bones have been taken up and deposited in consecrated ground [...]
>
> The coming of a spirit is announced, some time before its appearance, by a variety of loud and dreadful noises.... At length the door flies open, and the spectre stalks up to the bed's foot, and opening the curtains, looks steadfastly at the person in bed by whom it is seen.... It is here necessary to observe, that it has universally been found by experience, as well as affirmed by diverse apparitions themselves, that a Ghost has not the power to speak until it has first been spoken to; so that, notwithstanding the urgency of the business on which it might come, everything must stand still till the person visited can find sufficient courage to speak to it, which sometimes does not take place for many years [...] Ghosts have undoubtedly forms and customs peculiar to themselves.[61]

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60 Grose, p. 5.

61 Grose, pp. 5-11.

In addition, the introductory chapter deals with the phenomenon of haunting as representative of the superstitions which nurses, maids and "antiquated maiden aunts and cousins" told to children and which "embittered the lives of a great number of persons of all ages".[62] The content of this passage, however, is curiously different, as the detailed quotation shows:

> The room in which the head of a family had died was for a long time untenanted, particularly if they had died without a will, or were supposed to have entertained any particular religious opinions. But if any discontented maiden, or love-crossed bachelor, happened to dispatch themselves in their garters, the room where the deed was perpetrated became for ever after uninhabitable, and not infrequently nailed up. If a drunken farmer, returning from market, fell from Old Dobbin, and broke his neck ... that spot was ever after haunted and impassable. In short, there was scarcely a bye-lane or cross-way but had its ghost, who appeared in the shape of a headless cow or horse, or clothed all in white glared with its saucer eyes over some gate or stile. Ghosts of superior rank .. rode in coaches drawn by six headless horses, and driven by headless coachmen and postillions. Almost every ancient manor house was haunted by one or other of its former masters or mistresses ... and as for churchyards the number of ghosts that walked there, according to the village computation, almost equalled the living parishioners.[63]

It is worthwhile to quote Grose's discussion of ghosts at such length for various reasons. There is a difference in the types of haunting described in the section on ghosts and in the introduction. The section in the introduction is written in the past tense and refers explicitly to a village context: the section of "Ghosts and Apparitions", on the other hand, is in the present tense and refers to a less explicit context. In the introduction the hauntings are purposeless unless the fear they inspire is their purpose, the apparitions are of indeterminate shape and fearful aspect, and the populace is powerless to remove them from their midst.

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62 Grose, p. 5.

63 Grose, pp. 2-3.

In contrast, in the section on ghosts and hauntings in the main text, the apparitions are motivated by set purposes relating to their past lives or to the present state of those they visit, they bear a recognisable human shape, and can be sent back to the grave by being spoken to and obeyed. It is hard to reconcile the two descriptions, and one can only conclude that they were drawn from two distinct sources. Of these two sources, which is likely to be the more accurate representation of late eighteenth century belief?

It is instructive to notice that the section on ghosts and apparitions in the main body of the book is liberally sprinkled with references to Glanvil. Glanvil's relations 10, 16, 17, 25 and 27 are all quoted and the discussion begins and ends with references to Saddicismus Triumphatus. If one reads first Glanvil's Relations then Grose's entry on ghosts, Grose begins to sound like a witty paraphrase of Glanvil. The passage quoted above is analysed to show the close correspondence between the two.

Figure 1. Grose and Glanvil compared

| | Passage from Grose | Episode occurring in Glanvil Relation no. |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | "some special errand such as the discovery of a murder.... | 14 |
| 2. | or to procure restitution in land.... | 15, 16, 26 |
| 3. | or money unjustly held from widow or orphan.... | 9, 26 |
| 4. | or having committed some injustice cannot rest till that is redressed.... | 9 |
| 5. | to inform his heirs in what secret place ... they have hidden the title deeds or buried their money or plate.... | 27 |
| 6. | cannot be at rest until ... deposited in consecrated ground.... | / |
| 7. | The coming of a spirit is announced etc.... | 10, 11 |
| 8. | A ghost has not the power to speak till it has first been spoken to" | 27 |

The only item without a parallel in Glanvil is number six, but another familiar literary source for this item is not hard to discover. One of the ghost stories from the classics most often quoted by writers of the early period is Pliny's tale of the ghost that haunted the house of Athenodorus, and clanked its chains until the phlegmatic philosopher took some notice of it, followed it to the garden, discovered and buried its bones. If Grose read the investigative texts of the previous century, as he obviously did, he could not have missed Pliny's story. As this close correspondence continues throughout, it is not unfair to suppose that Grose took his section on ghosts and apparitions from Glanvil, adding the occasional piece of information gleaned from other literary sources.

In contrast, the ghostly phenomena mentioned in the introduction are not typical of Glanvil, and the sort of haunting which they describe cannot be found in Sadducismus Triumphatus at all. Their nearest relative can be found in Bourne and in Hutchinson's sermon where he chides people for their irrational fears of churchyards and desolate houses. Hutchinson writes:

> Churchyards and desolate Houses they fancy are much haunted with ghosts and evil Angels. [64]

and Bourne says:

> The most ignorant People are afraid of going through a Churchyard at Night Time. If they are obliged, upon some hasty and urgent Affair, they fear and tremble, till they are beyond its Bounds, but they generally avoid it, and go further about. [65]

The same sort of fear is echoed in Grose's comment:

> And, as for the churchyards, the number of ghosts that walked there, according to the village computation, almost equalled the living parishioners. [66]

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64 Hutchinson, p. 332.

65 Bourne, p. 59.

66 Grose, p. 3.

This is not to suggest that either Hutchinson or Bourne was Grose's source here, for Grose's passage is full of detail that does not appear in the earlier texts. It is more likely that all three reflect independently a genuine rural folklore of ghosts and that Grose is referring to well-known and accepted opinion - the lore and legends of village life which one would guess were handed on to him by the nurses, maids and maiden aunts whose conventional wisdom he so deplores.

It would seem then that the two passages in Grose represent distinct traditions of the supernatural: the passage in the introduction being the rural or 'folk' tradition; the passage in the chapter of ghosts and apparitions being the literary tradition (perhaps a purely literary tradition). If either passage is to be considered a reliable witness to contemporary folklore then it must be the passage in the introduction, not the well-known, oft-quoted section specifically on ghosts and apparitions. However, it is consistently the passage based on Glanvil that is used and quoted by later scholars.

## 4.5 Ellis's Brand

It is the passage based on Glanvil that is taken almost verbatim to constitute the chapter on apparitions in Ellis's influential editions of Brand, entirely replacing Bourne's chapters on churchyard and cockcrow ghosts. Nine pages of the 1810 edition of Brand are given to the topic, of which seven are direct quotations from or close paraphrases of Grose. The chapter begins (at p.625) with the quotation from Grose analysed above and shown to be a résumé of Glanvil. It continues to p.628 following Grose closely using the same illustrations and the same quotation from Hamlet. On pages 628-629 Ellis includes additional literary references then resumes his quotation from Grose, finally summarising the last three pages of Grose's chapter in totality. There is not one bit of Grose's chapter

that is not used, the passages corresponding closely even in length and order. Ellis's treatment of the subject only leaves Grose for the set of references mentioned above and for the final page which quotes Gay and also adds a mention of the original Bourne.

What purports to be the ghostlore of the early nineteenth century therefore is no more than a summary of a summary of an unreliable seventeenth century text. What is particularly regrettable is that those elements in the ghost stereotype which are most emphasised in Ellis's editions of Brand are just those which a closer examination of the texts suggests were already crumbling away in the second half of the eighteenth century: that is, the more purposeful and religiously motivated types of ghost behaviour. When one considers that Ellis's editions of Brand are the most frequently quoted sources for folklorists researching into the lore of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and that the books occupy a place of honour in folkloristics second only to Aubrey's _Miscellanies_, the implications are alarming. A reference in Brand to any custom or belief has been customarily accepted as evidence for the existence of that belief in the period 1777 to 1848 but as far as the folklore of ghosts is concerned such trust is obviously misplaced.

It follows that the most influential antiquarian works of the watershed period, if taken at face value, are misleading. However solid and informative Ellis's Brand may be on other matters, it presents a false view of supernatural beliefs. Grose reveals some significant insights but not to the casual reader: only by a close comparison of Grose with his source and with his own comments in other places can the student piece together the probable state of the folklore of ghosts during the period 1710-1846.

## 4.6 The value of the folkloristic literature of the watershed period

What use can the so-called folkloristic texts of the period be to the historian of ideas?

Fortunately the picture is not quite as black as it looks, and a careful analysis does reveal some significant information. Ironically the writer who is capable of most misleading - Grose - has valuable insights to offer as long as he is not taken at face value. The most unfortunate feature of the Provincial Glossary, as we have seen, is its heavy reliance on Glanvil, yet even here something may be salvaged, for though Grose is dependent on Glanvil yet his quotation from him is selective. Seven types of apparition mentioned in Sadducismus Triumphatus are absent from Grose's account: that is, ghosts who return to warn or prophesy, to revenge a crime, to confess or clear their name or to effect cures, ghosts who threaten with weapons, get into bed with the living or pull bedclothes off them, and poltergeists. It seems likely that Grose might have left out references to these types of ghost behaviour because they were out of tune with contemporary ideas. Grose's omissions may thus show possible changes in the ghost stereotype during the hundred years between 1682 and 1787. In particular, Grose's selection from Glanvil seems to show a further erosion of the concept of the purposeful ghost. Although following Glanvil closely, Grose includes only seven types of purposeful ghost whereas Glanvil has ten.

The beginnings of an erosion of the concept of the purposeful ghost may be detected, in fact, in the writings of the previous century. Whereas before the Reformation:

> ... the main purpose of ghosts had been exemplary: they upheld the church's moral teaching, returned from Purgatory because of some unrequited crime; could not rest until it had been confessed and absolved by the priest, [67]

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67 Thomas (1971), p. 602.

a change in the type and amount of this purposeful behaviour was initiated, as we have seen, by doctrinal changes at the time of the Reformation. As the ghost's religious relevance and functions declined, so did the purposefulness of its behaviour. By the late years of the seventeenth century Glanvil was already fighting a rearguard action to preserve belief in supernatural forces. Even in his time, though ghosts were active, purposeful and loquacious, nevertheless the range of their demands and activities was more limited than in previous ages and had taken on a more secular tone.

This movement away from purposefulness as a part of the ghost stereotype can be seen in all the literature from 1570 to 1710. If the writings of this earlier period are examined one can discover a set of beliefs which were common to all writers of the period and thus could be thought of as constituting a core of received folklore. These are: ghosts who right wrongs, who pay debts, prevent injustice, assault the living with blows, get into bed with them or pull bedclothes off; wraiths of the newly dead; and poltergeists.[68] A list such as this shows that of seven received ideas about how ghosts behave, only three show positive and beneficent behaviour. Another three show ghosts in particularly meaningless and alarming forms.

Outside this core of accepted ideas, notions about how purposeful ghosts are supposed to behave fluctuate a good deal from writer to writer and there seems no steady consensus. In particular there is very little agreement about the more useful and benevolent forms of ghost behaviour, for example effecting cures, seeking absolution, reporting on the afterlife, returning for love of the family left behind, and so on. It seems, therefore, that these were aspects of the ghost stereotype most in danger of eroding away. Conversely, the investigative writing of the seventeenth century shows an expansion in unpleasant forms of supernatural manifestations -

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68 See above chapter 3, section 4.5, list (a).

witchcraft, devilism, poltergeists, and ghosts who obstruct the living or threaten them with weapons. It could well be that, during that time, terror of ghosts was exacerbated. The redefinition of ghost as devil increased belief in the malignant supernatural and the banning of rites of exorcism left people with no means of dealing with the evil in its own terms. Altogether, the doctrinal changes of the post-Reformation period seem to have eroded the concept of the good purposeful ghost and paved the way for nameless terrors. So it is that Ferriar may speak of the "horror" with which the "vulgar" regard the supernatural[69] and Hutchinson and Bourne may chide simple people for their fear of dark houses and churchyards.[70]

It seems, then, that Grose's selection from Glanvil shows a further decrease in belief in purposeful ghosts - the erosion from the stereotype of four relatively harmless behaviours (prophesying, revenging, seeking absolution and effecting cures). These, it may be noted, are behaviours about which there was no steady consensus in the previous century.

At the other end of the scale, Grose also omits some of the more offensive types of ghosts. One of these, the armed ghost, is mentioned only in Glanvil, Sinclair and Bovet, and thus may not have been a part of the stereotype anyway. The other two, poltergeists and ghosts who get into bed, seem to be basic in the folklore of the previous age. Perhaps the ghost who gets into bed with the living drops from the stereotype at this time, or is subsumed into the larger group of ghosts who pull bedclothes off. The omission of poltergeists, however, must surely be idiosyncratic? It is difficult to detect any overall pattern in these omissions: probably it was a matter of personal distaste for extreme manifestations.

What is left of Glanvil's ghost stories when picked over by Grose is a supernatural world devoid of its extremes of benevolence and terror, but

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69 Ferriar, p. 138.

70 Hutchinson, p. 322; Bourne, p. 59.

a world distinctly less meaningful and organised than in previous centuries. Thus the part of Provincial Glossary that is reliant on Glanvil begins to seem on reflection less distinctly different from the account given in the introduction, which is drawn from intuition and memory. Together these accounts strongly suggest the erosion of the concept of a purposeful supernatural world, and its gradual replacement with a domain of meaningless and nameless terrors.

Together the writings of Grose, Bourne and Hone create a picture of supernatural belief consistent with that to be picked up from Hutchinson. This world appears to be haunted by a variety of terrors principal among which are the ghosts of the restless dead - especially those of suicides, fanatics and those who died intestate. These ghosts are considered to 'walk' in set places, for instance the room where they died, old houses, lanes, crossroads and particularly the churchyards where they are buried. Night and loneliness are to be feared as their walking time and cockcrow will send them back to their graves. In addition to these ghosts, which are all in recognisably human form, the benighted traveller may be unfortunate enough to encounter ghosts in animal shapes, headless ghosts, or coaches with headless horsemen.

Thus it appears that on the whole the ghost, though less elaborate a concept than in previous ages, had become more frightening by the early years of the nineteenth century. The only anomaly in this picture is the apparent growth of the concept of the kindly ghost. Defoe, for example, mentions "friendly and assisting Angels" which appear for "kind and beneficent purposes",[71] as well as apparitions sent by the Devil. Anachronistic as this belief seems, Defoe is usually in tune with popular ideas. The friendly domestic phantom certainly comes to later prominence in the late

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71 Defoe (1729), p. (a2).

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[72] and would appear to be a vital part of present day stereotypes too.[73] It is hard to come to any firm conclusions about the relevance of this anomaly: perhaps it merely shows that ghost belief was in a state of flux and subject to no overall structuring philosophical convention as it had been in previous ages.

## 5. Summary and discussion

Unfortunately, as this chapter has illustrated, there is very little direct and reliable evidence about the state of supernatural belief in the watershed period. Investigative literature is, in keeping with the intellectual fashions of the age, extremely sceptical about the possibility of apparitions and inclined to dismiss the subject as the type of vulgar superstition of which intelligent men were so in dread. Only late in the period is there any attempt to take the subject seriously, and then it is to try to account for the source of the 'delusion' rather than to describe what the 'delusions' were. As the writings of the period come from men of the class who affect to scorn supernatural beliefs, one can only speculate by reading between the lines of investigative literature what those beliefs were. Popular literature is a little more helpful though not much more so. Although in the potboilers and pamphlets one can find exact descriptions of phantoms, one cannot tell whether the people who read this literature actually believed what they read, or treated it merely as entertaining fiction.

The antiquarian books of the period are even more disappointing. The original modest and folkloristic Bourne is successively updated by writers

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72 See below, chapter 5, section 5.

73 See below, chapter 7, section 3.2.

increasingly distanced from folk traditions. The single most influential text, Grose's Provincial Glossary, is heavily plagiaristic and reflects primarily a literary tradition based, for the most part, on the writings of the previous century. In turn, Ellis's important editions of Brand are reliant on Grose for descriptions of ghostlore. What evidence there is for the beliefs of the eighteenth century has therefore to be gleaned where one can.

There are, however, some conclusions which can be safely drawn. One can assume a continuing, eager interest in supernatural topics among many sections of the population. There was a multiplicity of cheap popular literature on the subject throughout the period, and stories and articles about ghosts made their way into the most respected journals of the day. The investigative texts of the previous century were hoarded and re-read, and dîtes and legends of ghosts and spirits must have been in wide enough circulation to worry the clergy and the medical establishment. Though in educated circles it was fashionable to disdain such beliefs there is evidence to suggest that even among the educated the concept of supernatural forces continued to influence thinking at least in private. The intellectuals' fear of vulgarity, their sneers and their disdain, however, in turn strongly suggest that belief in ghosts flourished most vociferously among the less wealthy and educated. Those of the educated élite who did recognise such beliefs saw them as damaging. Hutchinson, for example, thought that fear of the supernatural was a prison of the mind,[74] Ferriar describes believers as "wretched creatures",[75] and Grose says that fear of the supernatural "embittered the lives of a great many people of all ages".[76]

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74 Hutchinson, p. 333.

75 Ferriar, p. 139.

76 Grose, p. 5.

On the whole, however, it seems that, under a thin veneer of sophistication, people of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries kept a large part of the traditional belief in the restless dead entirely intact, although it is also possible that the more meaningless and alarming aspects of the ghost stereotype were enlarging at the expense of the more purposeful and benevolent aspects. It appears, for example, from a detailed comparison of Grose with his sources, that the concept of the ghost was becoming less elaborate but possibly more frightening. Thus the erosion of some of the more aimiable and moral aspects of the ghost's behaviour both fuelled and was accompanied by an increase in vague terrors suffered in secret.

During this period aspects of the stereotype which are dominant in the ghost legends of today also seem steadily to have been accruing. In particular the picture of the motiveless night terror has much in common with some modern concepts, especially those held and transmitted by children or used by adults to control or scare them.[77] Thus ghosts are thought to lurk in churchyards, old mansions, or at the sites of crime and suffering, and to walk at night in lonely places. They are often headless or assume grotesque shapes or luminous fluidity to terrify the percipient. These aspects of ghost behaviour were for the most part already present in the stereotype in previous centuries, but the multiplicity of ghosts with benevolent purposes, and the church's encouragement of belief in such spectres, did much to soften the stereotype and assuage fear. As the more moral aspects of supernatural traditions were eroded and the church no longer condoned belief in ghosts, on the one hand the more meaningless and alarming aspects of the ghost stereotype assumed greater importance, and on the other

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77 See J.D.A.Widdowson, If You Don't Be Good: Verbal Social Control in Newfoundland (St.John's,1977).

the benevolent ghost lost much of its public influence and began to assume the domestic role to which it was increasingly confined in later centuries.

Thus the watershed period may be seen as a time when some of the older supernatural concepts, which had been kept intact since the middle ages, finally began to break down. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this change lay in the decline of the concept of the orderly magical world in which both natural and supernatural creatures had their due function and rank. In the mechanical world view which emerged during the eighteenth century and was at its height in the nineteenth, a higher-order purposeful supernatural system had no place. In that age, therefore, ghosts and other supernatural phenomena could only be meaningless and disharmonious intrusionsinto an orderly, rational, 'real' world, or a purely private and personal experience. These are the trends which will be examined in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER 5

## The Literature 1840 to the present day

## 1. Introduction

This chapter considers the literature that arose from (or followed after) the inauguration of two societies with a special interest in what had previously been thought of as irrational superstitions. The Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1848 specifically for the investigation of supernatural phenomena: the Folk Lore Society, founded in 1879, initiated regional collections of traditional lore, the heartland of which in most cases was legend , tale and belief about the supernatural.

To some extent all this wealth of material should be treated with a little caution by the modern folklorist or cultural historian. The books and papers issued by the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) *in particular* need to be approached warily. The aims, motivation and methods of the SPR all make their publications unreliable as folklore sources: essentially their techniques and attitudes are anti-folkloristic, for it is just the traditional elaborations and interpretations that psychical researchers have encouraged informants to strip from their accounts.

The historian of ideas should also approach the nineteenth century regional folklore collections with a similar caution, though for rather different reasons. Very often the amateur folklorists and antiquarians who carried out this work approached the task with the idea that they were recording a dying culture, regarding their work (as folklorists have so often regarded it) as a rescue operation. Ironically therefore the nineteenth century folklore collections may present a world-view which had already been substantially revised by the time the collections were made. In the light of their orientation to the "peasant custom and savage myth"[1] approach to tradition, it is particularly unfortunate that this work was

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1 Dorson (1968).

never updated. Just as the comprehensiveness and stylishness of Glanvil's, Bovet's and Sinclair's collections in the seventeenth century led to eighteenth century writers drawing substantially on them at the risk of misrepresenting the folklore of their own age, so the prestige of the nineteenth century collectanea has tended to lead subsequent folklorists to similar reliance with similar results. By constantly referring to the works of a previous age, scholars' notions of the supernatural were - and still are - in danger of becoming subject to a time warp. Thus work which was already (by the 1880s) principally geared to the recording of dying beliefs is still often regarded as a useful source for traditional belief even in the late twentieth century. The end result is that our ideas of the supernatural folklore of our own community at best may be very significantly influenced by beliefs long since abandoned, and at worst may well be a hundred years out of date.

In each of their different ways, therefore, the investigative and the folkloristic literature of the years from 1840 presents special problems to anyone who would construct a history of the idea of the ghost. After about 1900 the task becomes particularly difficult because of the publication of an enormous body of popular writing on every aspect of the occult. The net result is a confusion of the serious and the commercial, the honest and the frankly bad work. Though the years from 1840 have produced some of the very best work on the cultural history of ideas about the supernatural (that of Lang, Tylor, Frazer and Thomas, to mention only the better known),[2] they have also produced some of the most misleading and cynical writing, ghost-hunting guides, gazeteers and commercially motivated 'investigations'.

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2 See chapter 1, footnotes 7, 14 and 22.

The clear distinction between investigative, popular and folkloristic texts breaks down in the modern period under two influences: first the pressure of commercial publishing; and secondly the merging of investigative and folkloristic interests in the work of cultural historians. On the one hand serious folklorists may choose to present their work in popular format; on the other hand historians may take a cultural stance and present their work as the investigation of a tradition. Overall, two larger approaches to the subject begin to emerge: on the one hand collections of stories; on the other descriptive studies of beliefs and belief-systems. The main difficulties here are: (a) that these broad approaches cut across other divisions so that every collection of stories tends to look like every other collection whatever the particular orientation of the writer; and (b) the writers of the analytical type of text have to rely on collections of stories, at least for their illustrative material and sometimes for their source material too. Unfortunately the aims and methods of collection compilers vary enormously from the aims of analysts. Depending on the context in which they were collected, the stories people tell and the beliefs they cherish may well be quite distinct, but the distinctions are not (and perhaps cannot be) maintained in writing on the subject.

Hence in the years 1840 to the present day five major areas of potential misinformation have to be kept in mind:

(a) How far investigative writings of the Society for Psychical Research are useful to folklorists;

(b) How far nineteenth and early twentieth century folklore collections are still relevant today;

(c) How far popular writing on the supernatural affects standards of serious folkloristic work;

(d) How widespread the practice of drawing on material from previous story compilations is, and how far that invalidates subsequent collections;

(e) To what extent are descriptive studies of belief vitiated by drawing illustrative material from older collections of stories or depending on them as primary data sources.

It should also be noted that, in the discussions below, the three categories of text - investigative, popular and folkloristic - are even more impressionistic than in previous chapters. Commercial interests tend to fudge distinctions: it is difficult if not impossible for either investigators or folklorists completely to disregard considerations of popular appeal. In spite of the problems in operating the categories, however, they have been kept for the sake of continuity. Two points however need to be made:

(a) the categories - investigative, popular and folkloristic literature - were and are intended merely as devices whereby large numbers of texts can be handled in an orderly fashion. They are not in themselves analyses, merely aids to analysis.

(b) in the discussions below, texts are assigned to categories principally by virtue of the status, reputation or intention of the author. Thus the undeniably popular work of Harry Price is discussed in the section about investigative literature because he claimed to be and was treated as a serious psychical researcher: similarly, because Christina Hole is a respected folklorist, her Haunted England - surely produced with commercial intent? - is dealt with in the section on folkloristic literature.

The shortcomings of such a classification system are admitted. There must however be some scheme of presentation, however arbitrary, which allows for a mass of heterogeneous material to be handled with some degree of orderliness. The categories are merely such a scheme devised with such an aim in mind.

## 2. Investigative literature

2.1 The modern period includes some of the least as well as some of the most reliable examples of the investigative type of text. At its best, modern investigative work approaches psychic phenomena with no pre-conceptions about their reality or non-reality: such an attitude is not evident in any literature before 1840 and heralds a new scientific attitude to investigation. On the other hand, modern investigative work does not always maintain this high standard. Many texts are as disingenuous as the most fanciful products of the seventeenth century but, lacking their compilers' willingness to collect evidence at first hand where possible, are even less impartially investigative. Where the popular taste for wonders is exploited for commercial advantage under the cloak of dispassionate investigation, modern work has less to offer the folklorist than the texts of any other type or period.

The following pages present a brief examination of representative modern texts in the investigative manner and attempt to evaluate their usefulness to the folklorist or cultural historian. But first, three texts in the old mould must be described. With Aubrey, Glanvil and Grose these works are among those most frequently referred to in collections of folklore today.

### 2.2 The writings of Dale Owen and Lee

Though Robert Dale Owen's Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World[3] has been influential in folklore circles, it should not really be regarded as a folkloristic work at all. It is rather a sort of armchair psychical research essentially in the manner of the investigative texts of the later years of the watershed period (Ferriar, Hibbert Ware,

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3 Dale Owen (1861).

Abercrombie). In his presentation of data, Dale Owen is careful to pare away the "large apochryphal mass" in favour of:

> The comparatively few sources ... which come down to us in authentic form, vouched for by respectable contemporary authority, sustained by specifications of time and place and person, backed sometimes by judicial oaths. [4]

Unfortunately these sources are neither novel nor contemporaneous and therefore give little information about the attitudes of Dale Owen's own age. His evidence consists for the most part of a handful of famous stories collected from texts of the previous centuries. Typical quotations are of the poltergeist cases at Tedworth and Epworth, the wraith of John Donne's wife, and the more recent case of the Fox sisters' seances in the U.S.A.

F.G. Lee's The Other World of 1875[5] and Glimpses in the Twilight of 1885[6] return to the investigative mould of an even earlier generation of writers. These collections are very similar to Glanvil's late seventeenth century 'Relations' and written with the same polemical purpose in mind:

> In the present age of unbelief and scepticism when universal traditions regarding things spiritual are being flung aside as useless, and when so many persons profess to reject the doctrine of the immortality of the soul as well as that of the resurrection of the body, it may not be out of place to gather together and set forth various records of remarkable facts and well authenticated traditions in support of the supernatural. [7]

Earlier in the introduction he had written:

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4 Dale Owen, p. 49.

5 Lee (1875).

6 Lee (1885).

7 Lee (1885), p. 35.

> ... a Christianity which does not permanently rest on the Supernatural is no Christianity at all [8]

making it quite plain that the book is written from a Christian point of view, in defence of Christian teaching, and about beliefs which are already being "flung aside".

Like investigative texts nearly two hundred years previously, Lee covers the full range of supernatural phenomena from witchcraft to remarkable dreams, but it is difficult to judge how much of this heterogeneous material:

> ... gathered from various sources ... the large majority of them ... now published for the first time [9]

genuinely reflects the beliefs of people not committed to an old-fashioned Christian view of the supernatural. The "well authenticated traditions", for example, collected in the two volumes, are no more than tales out of Aubrey and Glanvil, the Bible and the Christian Fathers, and family legends such as that of the Tyrone ghost; and the "various records of remarkable facts" contain quite a significant proportion of current rumour circulating in journals like The Athenaeum. Other references are to the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (whose poltergeist cases are treated as examples of witchcraft), and to eighteenth century texts.

The earlier of these two works was severely criticised in a review in Notes and Queries for its failure to be either factually scrupulous or honest about its sources. Lee offended the critic by claiming that his documentation of the famous Lyttleton ghost was the first of its kind, whereas Notes and Queries had already covered the story (with full authentication) the previous autumn. The reviewer's reflections are worth

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8 Lee (1885), p. 8.

9 Lee (1885), introduction, unpaginated.

quoting,for, not only do they shed light on contemporary opinion of a text which was to become a source-book of supernatural traditions for succeeding generations of writers, but also because with some justice they may be applied to much of this subsequent work too:

> No doubt there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. In connexion with the supernatural, however, the subject is often treated as if it were not only dreamt of, but one familiar to us all, and one the treatment of which required no especial care nor any stringent accuracy. But the supernatural demands the most careful correctness, not only as to facts, but as to how the document came into the hands of the narrator. Any ghost story put forward on anonymous testimony should be treated at once as untrustworthy till its alleged truthfulness of detail can be confirmed. [10]

Under the circumstances it would seem wisest not to rely too heavily on either Lee or Dale Owen as sources for supernatural folklore of the late nineteenth century. Neither is, nor attempts to be, representative of the beliefs of his age: each does no more than keep old legends and rumours in circulation and spread the knowledge of them to a wider audience. In a sense therefore their unique contribution is to the literary rather than to the folk tradition of the supernatural.

## 2.3 Parapsychology and psychical research

Most, though not all, investigative literature since 1840 has been written by members of the SPR. Originally established, as its name suggests, to investigate psychic phenomena, it quickly became the victim of its own ambitious programme. Its first major project, Gurney, Myers and Podmore's Phantasms of the Living,[11] is a massive piece of work on a nationwide scale. Still a major source for accounts of supernatural or at least inexplicable happenings, it is an honest attempt to collect

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10 Notes and Queries, Fifth Series, vol. 3 (January-June 1875), p. 319.

11 Gurney, Myers and Podmore (1880).

together a body of previously unrecorded information. Eight years later this was followed up by the equally ambitious Census of Hallucinations[12] now very seriously criticised for its failure to authenticate its findings or produce contemporary documents supporting the corpus of 2,272 positive replies (later, significantly, corrected to 1,684). It took the society some years to recover from the internal scandals and controversies surrounding this project.

During the early years of the present century the SPR seems to have been 'captured' by theosophists and other occultists. The writings of such men as Sir William Barrett, Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle[13] are neither 'investigative' nor 'research' in any meaningful sense. They rather demonstrate a desire to believe the phenomena being investigated, and an eager enthusiasm which treats any degree of scepticism as heresy. It is not until about seventy years after the first founding of the SPR that work in the spirit of dispassionate intellectual enquiry appears. This represents an entirely new approach to the investigation of the supernatural: for the first time the work is investigative in the sense of attempting to discover the truth of the matter rather than seeking proof of an a priori position. Typical work of this later period is that of D.C. Broad,[14] G.W. Lambert,[15] Carrington and Fodor,[16] and Dingwall and

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12 Sidgewick and Johnson (1894).

13 See for example, Sir William Fletcher Barrett, Death-bed Visions (London, 1926), and On the Threshold of a New World of Thought: An examination of the phenomena of spiritualism (London, 1908); Sir Oliver Lodge, Raymond: Or Life and Death, with examples of the evidence for the survival of memory and affection after death (London, 1916).

14 D.C. Broad, Lectures on Psychical Research (London, 1962).

15 For example, G.W. Lambert, "The Geography of London Ghosts", Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, 40, 706 (December, 1960), 397-409; G.W. Lambert, "The Geophysical Theory of Poltergeists", Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, 41, 709 (September, 1961), 148-153; G.W. Lambert, "Pattern Finding in Psychical Research", Psychic News, 1227 (December 10th, 1955), 1 and 2.

16 Hereward Carrington and Nandor Fodor, The Story of Poltergeist down the Centuries (London, 1953).

Hall.[17] Broad's Lectures on Psychical Research, perhaps the most sober and persuasive introduction to a difficult subject, takes a series of topics and subjects them to academic speculation; G.W. Lambert's work accounts for poltergeists in terms of seismic disturbances and other geophysical phenomena; and Dingwall and Hall specialise in subjecting well-known ghost stories to demanding research criteria. Specially to be recommended are their The Haunting of Borley Rectory[18] and Four Modern Ghosts[19] which investigates four hauntings (three of which are famous in the literature of the ghost) by thorough documentary and field research.

For all their virtues, however, these texts are little direct use to folklorists, for they conscientiously strip away all traditional explanations of the discrepant experiences they examine. All one can learn from them is that, unlike investigators, ordinary people generally account for strange perceptions and untoward occurrences by calling on the ancient concepts of haunting and poltergeists.

## 2.4 The spirit of commerce: the writings of Harry Price

Harry Price in his lifetime made a name for himself as a psychical researcher and produced many volumes on the supernatural for

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17 See, for example, Dingwall and Hall, (1958) ; Eric J. Dingwall, Kathleen M. Goldney and Trevor H. Hall, "The Haunting of Borley Rectory: a critical survey of the evidence", Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 51, part 186 (January, 1956); Trevor H. Hall, "The Cock Lane Ghost: a Historical Note", International Journal of Parapsychology, 4:1 (Winter, 1962), 71-87; Trevor H. Hall, New Light on Old Ghosts (London, 1965); Trevor H. Hall, "The Wesley Poltergeist: A Reappraisal", International Journal of Parapsychology, 2:2 (Spring, 1960), 62-78.

18 Dingwall, Goldney and Hall (1956).

19 Dingwall and Hall (1958).

which he claimed serious consideration.[20] These volumes, of which Fifty Years of Psychical Research[21] and Poltergeist over England[22] are typical, pretend to dispassionate investigation and scientific thoroughness and, as such, need to be examined with some care.

Poltergeist over England consists of four early chapters of general information followed by a collection of the best-known poltergeist cases, including those of Epworth, Tedworth, Hinton Ampner, Cock Lane and Bealing. Many of these accounts are paraphrased from source, some quoted directly, the rest plagiarised from other writers. All four early chapters and the treatment of the Drummer of Tedworth story appear to be taken from Lang (1894), though none of this is acknowledged (the only reference to Lang is a mention in the introduction). Two quotations (one from Price, one from Lang) will illustrate the close correspondence between the two:

Lang: In the month of February, 1665, there was assembled at Ragley Castle as curious a party as ever met in an English country house [ ... ] Thus at Ragley there was convened the nucleus of an unofficial but active Society for Psychical Research, as that study existed in the seventeenth century. 23

Price: There must have been many societies formed for the study of the occult ... and one of the most important ... was the sort of Society for Psychical Research that met at Ragley, Warwickshire, in the early months of 1665. 24

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20 Notably Harry Price, The End of Borley Rectory (London, 1946); Harry Price, Fifty Years of Psychical Research (London, 1939); Harry Price, The Most Haunted House in England: Ten Years Investigation of Borley Rectory (London, 1940); and Price (1945).

21 Price (1939).

22 Price (1945).

23 Lang (1894), pp. 84-6.

24 Price (1945), p. 43.

Fifty Years of Psychical Research[25] is written in much the same style. Purporting to record the activities of the Society for Psychical Research from its first Proceedings in 1882, it is a collection of confusingly presented anecdotes. The central episode - the 'Rosalie' manifestation - has been scrutinised by Dingwall and Hall, who conclude that Price invented it in order to make an exciting chapter capable of holding the ramshackle structure of the book together.[26] Price's other well-known works, The Most Haunted House in England: Ten Years Investigation of Borley Rectory[27] and The End of Borley Rectory,[28] were to make Borley Rectory as famous as Cock Lane or Tedworth, and were influential in persuading many sober-minded people to a belief in ghosts. The worth of these books has been subjected to very thorough analysis by Dingwall, Goldney and Hall.[29] Their lengthy evaluation concludes unequivocally that Price not only misrepresented the evidence but invented it, or caused it to be invented, for reasons of personal publicity. Even the title is a cheat, it seems, for it conceals an eight year gap in which he took no interest whatsoever in Borley. Dingwall, Goldney and Hall sum up Price's character graphically:

> It is possible to regard Price as a brilliant, if cynical, journalist who used material gathered in the laboratory or in the field in such a way that its publicity value was highest. [30]

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25 Price (1939).

26 Dingwall and Hall, pp. 46-67.

27 Price (1940).

28 Price (1946).

29 Dingwall, Goldney and Hall (1956).

30 Dingwall, Goldney and Hall, p. 175.

It is a pity therefore that his books are still often considered as seriously investigative: they can hold no interest for folklorists either - neither reflecting a tradition of ghosts nor an investigation of such traditions.

## 2.5 Investigative work of interest to folklorists

At the more serious end of the spectrum of popular investigative texts are the works of Lethbridge, Sitwell, Bennett, and Green and McCreery.

Lethbridge's work[31] has an engaging personal quality which rescues it from banality. He is an honest and serious investigator with an unpretending enthusiasm for occult lore. The books are based on his personal theories and experiences and, as they invariably reflect the intellectual fashions of the day, they incidentally provide an accurate gloss on many aspects of mid-twentieth century occult folklore. Green and McCreery's Apparitions[32] presents cases of apparitions from informants and from the files of the SPR ordered according to type, content, or the context of the hallucinatory experience, without any spiritualistic superstructure or preconceptions. The aim of the book is to investigate the circumstances of seeing apparitions rather than the reality of the apparitions themselves. Implicit throughout is the assumption that such experiences are genuine but subjective. Its interest for folklorists is that it is a collection of first-person accounts which seem to be very typical of present-day experiences and expectations.

Also of contingent use to anyone interested in the history of folkloristic ideas, the works of Bennett and Sitwell deserve mention. Though

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31 T.C. Lethbridge, ESP: Beyond Time and Distance (London, 1965); T.C. Lethbridge, Ghost and Ghoul (London, 1961).

32 Celia Green and Charles McCreery, Apparitions (London, 1975).

neither is either investigative or folkloristic and both are written with the market for psychic wonders in mind, they are not exploitative of that taste nor hysterical in their support of the reality and significance of the phenomena they describe. Sitwell's Poltergeists[33] attempts the difficult task of synthesising a history of poltergeists with a theory of their causation. He is the only writer in the investigative mould, so far as I am aware, to trace a tradition of poltergeist haunting, suggesting that later manifestations may have been influenced by knowledge of previous ones.[34] Bennett's Apparitions and Haunted Homes[35] undertakes to present representative cases in the records of the SPR, augmented by fifty of the best-evidenced personal experience stories obtained in response to a plea for informants broadcast in 1934. The book is set out as 104 "cases", the source of each one being carefully noted. Where information was obtained through correspondence, the story seems to be quoted in the writer's own words. Each case is left to stand or fall on its own merits; the only interpretation is contained in the summary and conclusions at the end. It is interesting to the folklorist primarily because of the corpus of fifty personal experience narratives. Although there is no guarantee that they remain untouched by the author, and though in this form they lack contextual detail, they are still useful as a comparative source for the study of the modern supernatural personal experience story.

Among investigative texts these four are probably the only ones which have much of value to offer to folklorists interested in ghost traditions This is perhaps a surprising statement in view of the fact that investigative work of the period includes texts such as Dale Owens Footfalls and

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33 Sitwell (1940).

34 Sitwell, p. 63.

35 Sir Ernest Bennett (1939).

Lee's Glimpses in the Twilight, as well as the enormously popular and apparently serious work of Harry Price. For their different reasons, as we have seen, all this material needs to be approached with cautious reservations. Owen and Lee because, despite their influence on folklorists, they are essentially polemical texts in the old investigative manner; Price because commercial interests are paramount in his work. Lethbridge, Green and McCreery, Sitwell, and Bennett, however, produce work which, while investigative in purpose, seems to reflect current folklore or at least to be capable of serving as comparison with stories of supernatural encounters collected by using folkloristic techniques.

Conventional psychical research also has its dangers for the folklorist: these will be considered in the concluding section immediately below.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The investigative work of the modern period has been almost exclusively carried out by members of various societies for psychical research. In so far as the national body, the SPR, is typical, it is worth examining its aims and methods, and on the basis of this examination, assessing how far investigative work is of value to folklorists today.

As far as ghosts and apparitions (the main concern of the present work, as of most folkloristic accounts) are concerned, the SPR sees its brief as the examination of the objectivity of the phenomena. It is only interested in well-documented personal experience independently authenticated. All culturally-determined aspects of the testimonials are as far as possible stripped away to leave a bare experience. Thus accounts of apparitions from the pages of the society's Proceedings or Journal are extremely basic: the portrait of the ghost to be derived from these

articles is essentially one of a passive and usually silent manifestation. Because these accounts are readily available and well-documented they are often taken as fair representations of the current state of supernatural traditions (though, of course, this is not at all what they are intended to show). Thus it has come today to be assumed that the principal types of ghost in modern traditions are those which psychical researchers have drawn attention to - passive and purposeless apparitions, poltergeists, wraiths, and spirits of the dead conjured by mediums. All these are of course familiar ghost-types and there is no reason to think that they are not believed in today. However, they still represent only a selection from the range of possible supernatural types. If folklorists and historians rely too exclusively upon the work of psychical researchers and do not initiate their own independent fieldwork, they are likely to receive a very partial impression of the vivacity and diversity of present day ghost beliefs. In so far as modern investigative work has presented an authoritative but partial and biased view of the ghost, it has actually done folklorists a disservice.

It is because writers on supernatural beliefs have relied so heavily on modern investigative work that they have concluded:

> ... the social function of the belief in ghosts is obviously much diminished and so is its extent [36]

and

> The relative absence of ghosts in modern society, ... reflects the disengaged social situation of the majority of the deceased. In a society where the young and middle aged have largely liberated themselves from the authority of and emotional dependence on old people by the time of the latter's death, there is little social-psychological need for a vivid community of the dead. [37]

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36 Thomas (1971), p. 605.

37 Blauner, p. 382.

These conclusions, however, are entirely the result of relying on material from which traditional elaborations have been rigorously excluded and which the collectors have insisted is not only subjectively 'true' but independently verifiable.

It remains to be seen whether popular literature is any less misleading, or whether folkloristic work in the modern period can flesh out the very scanty skeleton of ghost belief as revealed by the psychical researchers and those who have relied on their material in presenting a picture of the modern ghost.

## 3. Popular Literature

### 3.1 Nineteenth century popular literature

During the early modern period popular interest in the supernatural continued to be expressed chiefly through the reprinting of books of the watershed period, and through the literary journals. The Athenaeum took a keen interest in folklore and the supernatural, as of course did Notes and Queries very shortly after its inauguration in 1849.[38] Blackwoods, The Strand Magazine, The Cornhill Magazine and The Contemporary Review printed between them a considerable amount of supernatural legend and fantasy often of a sensational nature, as well as articles by leading folklorists such as Andrew Lang (who also wrote for The Nineteenth Century).[39]

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38 Correspondence about folklore was initiated in the issue of February 2nd, 1850.

39 See for example, Andrew Lang, "Ghosts up to date", Blackwoods, 155 (January, 1894), 47-58; "Ghosts before the law", Blackwoods, 155 (February, 1894), 210-222; "Comparative Psychical Research", The Contemporary Review, 64 (September, 1893), 372-387; "The Wesley Ghost", The Contemporary Review, 68 (August, 1895), 288-298; "The Black Dogs and the Thumbless Hand", The Cornhill Magazine, 74 (December, 1896), 763-768; "Ghosts and Right Reason", The Cornhill Magazine, 75 (May, 1897), 629-641; "Comparative study of ghost stories", The Nineteenth Century, 17 (April, 1885), 623-632; "Ghost Stories and Beast Stories", The Nineteenth Century, 37 (February, 1895), 258-270.

In addition the early years of the modern period of ghost literature saw the publication of Catherine Crowe's The Night Side of Nature,[40] a collection of stories and reflections to which many subsequent writers on the supernatural have been very much indebted for material. Rambling, discursive, credulous and romantic, Mrs. Crowe brings together a massive collection of narratives and a body of theoretical speculation on the supernatural. She is usually considered to be the first British writer to use the term 'poltergeist',[41] and her chapter on that phenomenon (unfortunately in the second volume which is difficult to obtain) is a classic of its kind. The first volume (Chapters I to X) deals with dreaming (including precognitive and telepathic dreams), warnings, wraiths, doppelgangers, apparitions, and the after-life. Though there is no system, order or science in any of this, it has one advantage which many texts do not. Traditional legends from literary sources are placed beside contemporary stories, family legends and memorates which the indefatigable author has picked up or sought out, and this even if randomly presented often gives an idea of a continuing tradition in the subjects she deals with. Her occasional reflections on her data also indicate areas where a vital popular tradition exists. For example, in speaking of prophetic dreams she writes:

> Instances of this sort are numerous; but it would be tedious to narrate them, especially as there is little room for variety in the details. I shall therefore content myself with giving one or two specimens of each class, confining my examples to such as have been communicated to myself ... The frequency of such phenomena maybe [sic] imagined, when I mention that the instances I shall give, with few exceptions, have been collected with little trouble, and without seeking beyond my own small circle of acquaintance.[42]

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40 Crowe (1848).

41 Price (1945), p. 2.

42 Crowe, p. 59.

Again, about apparitions, she says:

> The number of stories on record ... is I fancy little suspected by people in general; and still less is it imagined that similar occurrences are yet frequently taking place ... I scarcely met anyone, man or woman, who if I can induce them to believe that I will not publish their names, and am not going to laugh at them, is not prepared to tell me of some occurrence of the sort, as having happened to themselves, their family or their friends. [43]

The resulting discussion is not primarily based on personal experience but relies equally on stories culled from literary sources. In these narratives ghosts can be seen in very traditional roles - paying debts, revealing murder and otherwise returning because they died with something on their minds. The commonest theme, however, is the return of parents to offer love and comfort, a type of ghost which is not at all prominent in the ghost stories of previous centuries but which is to feature very strongly in the folklore of later times.[44]

Her treatment of wraiths and doppelgangers seems to rely for the most part on personal experience accounts, though she also quotes familiar legends such as the ones about John Donne's wife, Catherine the Great, Lord Lyttleton and Lord Tyrone. These sections also contain substantial numbers of stories about phantasms of the living, out-of-the-body experiences and death-bed scenes. This may suggest, if Crowe can be trusted to reflect trends in popular opinion, that interest in ghosts may have been declining before a fascination with more indefinite psychic experiences.

The other important texts of the period were Ingram's first and second series of Haunted Homes. These were vast clearing houses of legends and, as such, immensely influential. Ingram was the first to collect

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43 Crowe, p. 187.

44 See below, section 5, and chapter 7, section 5.

together a large number of accounts of hauntings from a variety of sources, mainly literary, and arrange them in alphabetical order of placename for easy reference, in order

> ... to serve as a guide to the geography of ghost-land - a handbook to the Haunted Houses of Great Britain.[45]

As such, Haunted Homes is, and claims to be, no more than a popular book: neither aims nor methods, presentation nor emphasis is folkloristic. His borrowings are haphazard and unchecked and he is never concerned about the 'channel'[46] of any story, nor about whether it can provide accurate information about the state of current ghost belief. They are simply offered as collections of stories.

It is worth stressing this fact because Ingram's collections have been used time and again by both popular and folkloristic writers as sources for ghost traditions. How far they can legitimately be used in this way is, to say the least, debatable. In the first place, a substantial majority of the stories are undocumented in the sense that no references are given for them. Of the remainder, thirty-two come directly from literary sources or from popular or investigative writing of previous centuries and seventeen are contemporary gossip and rumours. Only sixteen of his quoted references are to antiquarian or folkloristic works. Unfortunately there is very little other popular work of the late nineteenth century which can be used to check the representativeness of Ingram's collection. Most articles appearing in journals and periodicals are themselves unauthenticated stories written in a heavily stylised literary manner, and it is impossible now to be sure how far they were purely imaginative creations and how far they were reworkings of contemporary legends. It is the more disappointing in this context to find that that very useful source for folklore, Notes and Queries, is remarkably reticent

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45 Ingram, first series, p. iii.

46 See above, chapter 1, section 2.6.

in its early years concerning stories and traditions specifically about ghosts. Though traditions of the occult are in general well represented, popular interest seems to focus most strongly not upon ghostlore but upon divination rituals, omens of death, miscellaneous customs and beliefs about dying, and upon witchcraft.

It is worthwhile to examine both Ingram and Crowe in detail, paying attention to their methods of compilation and the sources from which they gathered their material, for both have had considerable impact on subsequent work. Above all these two texts have provided a reservoir of story-material which has been used and re-used by both popular writers and folklorists to illustrate ghost traditions past and present.

That neither should be treated as an entirely reliable source for the documentation of nineteenth century ghost traditions is perhaps obvious. Mrs. Crowe's work is the more interesting and relevant because she is apparently the more enthusiastic and less discriminating of the two writers. Hence, though her collection contains a great many stale and over-used literary legends, thanks to her lack of system or organisation these are at all times juxtaposed with memorates, dîtes and rumours which she has gathered from friends and acquaintances. Each type of narrative validates the other, the personal experience stories serving to indicate that the beliefs encapsulated in the old narratives still find an echo in contemporary attitudes, the legends indicating that the memorates are not entirely idiosyncratic. Even so, it must be emphasised that, taken out of context, it is impossible to estimate which of her stories are either traditional or believed, and this makes Crowe's collection an unsuitable source for borrowings.

Ingram should be viewed with even greater wariness. His collections are, and are intended to be, no more than gazeteers of ghosts. They do not at any time claim to represent ghost beliefs: they merely collect together summaries and retellings of ghost stories. There is no independent

evidence that these stories reflect contemporary folklore. This point needs to be stressed because, despite their overtly commercial, popular nature, Ingram's collections have been consistently utilised to provide story illustrations for work on the folklore of ghosts.[47] Few texts have had such popularity.[48] Crowe and Ingram continue to be quoted to the present day - an indication of the influence that collections of stories exercise by virtue of their being a ready source of interesting illustrative material. Such borrowings taken out of context from popular sources have thus surely contributed their measure to our misunderstanding not only of past traditions but also of our present day folklore of ghosts.

A later section of this chapter is specifically devoted to discussing the dangers faced by folklorists who use compilations of stories as a method of presenting supernatural traditions.[49] In the interim, this section goes on to consider compilations offered for the commercial market from 1900 to 1930, and from 1930 to the present day.

## 3.2 Twentieth century popular writing

### 3.2.1 1900 - 1930

In the prewar period 1900 to 1914, three popular books were published which deserve mention, though unfortunately primarily for their failure to make the most of their folkloristic base. The earliest of these, Baring Gould's A Book of Ghosts,[50] though written by an eminent collector of folklore, is no more than a literary compilation in the

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47 See below, section 4.3.2.

48 Except perhaps Jack Hallam's and Christina Hole's collections (see sections 3.2.2 and 4.3.2), and Lee's (see above, section 2.2).

49 See below, section 4.3.

50 Rev. Sabine Baring Gould, A Book of Ghosts (London, 1904).

heavily sentimental style of Victorian periodicals, and E.G. Swain's The Stoneground Ghost Tales[51] uses folkloristic materials, but reproduces them in popular form principally for the commercial market. These texts contribute very little to an understanding of traditions of the supernatural in the early twentieth century.

Mary Lewes's Stranger than Fiction,[52] however, though intrinsically a popular collection, has much to offer. Her intention is clearly folkloristic:

> Though fast disappearing, some of the old tales and beliefs are not entirely lost in the more remote localities; and it was with the idea of preserving a few of them from oblivion that this book was begun.... [53]

Her treatment of some aspects of Welsh supernatural folklore is good, for example her chapter on corpse candles, tan wed and toili,[54] and her transcription of the collection of Lledrod Davies who died in 1890.[55] Unfortunately, in the manner of the period, nothing is quoted verbatim. Everything is 'improved' by over-writing:

> I have sometimes slightly paraphrased the original text, here and there rather weighted by repetition, a trait which, however quaint and characteristic in the vernacular, is apt to sound tedious in our more precise and reserved English language. [56]

In spite of its characteristic faults, Stranger than Fiction is well worth reading: it is folkloristic in aim if not in method; it is a

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51 E.G. Swain, The Stoneground Ghost Tales, compiled from the Recollections of the Reverend Roland Batchell, vicar of the Parish (Cambridge, 1912).

52 Mary Lewes, Stranger than Fiction (London, 1911).

53 Lewes, p. 8.

54 Lewes, pp. 106-158.

55 Lewes, pp. 127-177.

56 Lewes, p. 127.

collection of stories which, though contextless and referenceless, at least gives the impression of having been told to or heard by the author herself; and it includes some original material relating to Welsh supernatural beliefs.

Between 1914 and 1920 there seem to have been few publications on the subject of the supernatural, then a mild revival of interest allowed works such as Blakeborough's The Hand of Glory (1924),[57] and the Daily News survey of 1926.

Like Swain's The Stoneground Ghost Tales, Blakeborough's book might have been, but fails to be, folkloristic. The text consists of edited and rewritten selections from Blakeborough senior's collection of oral narratives. Unfortunately no references are given to informants, dates or places of collection or other minimal contextual detail, and the author has sought earnestly for the atypical tales from among the collection. This bias, of course, has turned a potentially folkloristic work into a merely popular one.

The Daily News survey was undertaken in 1926 and the results collected in four volumes the following year. Of these the first is still available in the library of the Folklore Society.[58] The introduction to this volume indicates that the enquiry was sparked off by the reported appearance of the Brown Lady of Rainham, notes that though ghost stories are ubiquitous in all ages and classes, "The really horrible stories of ghosts"[59] have disappeared, and makes it plain that the survey sought contemporary

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57 J. Fairfax Blakeborough, The Hand of Glory, and Further Grandfather's Tales and Legends of Highwaymen and Others, collected by the late R. Blakeborough (London, 1924).

58 Giraud (1927).

59 Giraud, p. iv.

first person experience stories not traditional legends. The interest of the survey is that it is one of the very few conducted in the period, and that the response to the enquiries was good enough to fill four volumes. Though not conducted in rigorous field conditions, it is still one of the best guides we have to supernatural beliefs of the early twentieth century. What is particularly interesting about this survey is that when asked for personal experiences (as respondents in this case were) the replies yet contain a high proportion of traditional material. Respondents claim personal experience of legendary ghosts (that is, ghosts which feature in traditional legends), tell personal experience stories composed exclusively of traditional motifs and retell traditional legends as if recent (or personal) experience. This is exactly what one would expect to happen if the informants are giving the responses appropriate to their cultural traditions. The book therefore contains for anyone prepared to analyse the stories carefully, an indication of some aspects of the folklore of ghosts current at the time.

It is of particular value to notice that even in 1926 certain of the older aspects of the ghost stereotype were retained in memory or perhaps even still transmitted. In the 117 narratives published in True Ghost Stories ghosts are seen as bringing messages and warnings to the living, seeking revenge, hoarding treasure and returning for love of earthly things. All these are of course old aspects of the English tradition of ghosts. In addition the stories tell of ghosts as wraiths seen at the moment of death and as fetches. Poltergeists, and ghosts who assault the living by blows also appear in these accounts, as do mysterious lights and voices, phantom footsteps and knockings. Considering that the readers of the Daily News were asked for true stories of their own experiences this is a remarkable list, for these are all aspects of ghost behaviour

that appear as core beliefs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[60] and for the most part in the eighteenth too. The survey thus shows this core of tradition persisting well into the twentieth century.

The accounts from True Ghost Stories also show ghosts taking forms and indulging in behaviour that have fewer direct parallels in pre-nineteenth century literature but which have been widespread in folkloristic and popular literature since that date. Chief among these are the white, grey and brown 'ladies', snoring ghosts, ghosts who re-enact their deaths and ghosts who guide lost travellers and in other ways help the living, particularly the ghost in search of help for a dying man.

As far as the context of seeing an apparition is concerned, the stories show ghosts in situations which have remained constant for all the period under review. Here, as ever, they are intrinsically associated with darkness or half-light, travellers, lanes, bedrooms, stairs, doors, gates, pictures, photographs, lamps and mirrors. The Daily News survey is thus very valuable in showing both the unchanged and the changing aspects of traditions of the ghost. Though its aims and methods were not folkloristic, the breadth and scale of the coverage does show what aspects of the supernatural were steady enough at least to make credible stories and perhaps to be believed.

### 3.2.2 Popular work from 1930 to the present day

#### 3.2.2.1 Gazeteers and ghost-hunting guides

If careful analysis is capable of salvaging much useful information from the popular writing of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the same unfortunately cannot be said of the bulk of subsequent

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60 See above chapter 3, section 4.5.

work. The general impression is of shoddy workmanship and cynicism towards traditional concepts.

Most of this work takes the form of gazeteers, ghost-hunting guides, story-compilations and the occasional popular history. These books are readily available in bookshops and libraries and - outside folkloristic literature - are the only indication of the nature of present-day ghost traditions that we have to guide us. The chief compilers of the gazeteers and ghost-hunting guides are Hallam, Green and Underwood;[61] typical story collections have been compiled by McGregor,[62] Byrne[63] and O'Donnell;[64] of popular histories Haining's Ghosts: The Illustrated History[65] is one of the more reliable, and Maple's The Realm of Ghosts[66] one of the more misleading.

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61 Of the many volumes written by these three writers, the following selection has been consulted: Jack Hallam, The Ghosts' Who's Who (Newton Abbot, 1971); Jack Hallam, Haunted Inns of Britain (London, 1972); Andrew Green, Ghosts of the South East (London, 1976); Andrew Green, Our Haunted Kingdom (Glasgow, 1974); Andrew Green, Phantom Ladies (Folkestone, 1977); Peter Underwood, A Gazeteer of British Ghosts (London, 1971); Peter Underwood, Ghosts of Wales (Swansea, 1978); Peter Underwood, Haunted London (London, 1973); Peter Underwood, Into the Occult (London, 1972).

62 Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, The Ghost Book: Strange Hauntings in Britain (London, 1955); Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, Phantom Footsteps: A Second Ghost Book (London, 1959).

63 Byrne (1969); Byrne (1971).

64 Of Elliott O'Donnell's many volumes those consulted were: Elliott O'Donnell, Dangerous Ghosts (London, 1954); Elliott O'Donnell, Ghostly Phenomena (London, no date); Elliott O'Donnell, The Screaming Skulls and other Ghost stories: the collected true tales of Elliott O'Donnell, ghost hunter for more than half a century (London, 1964). Also consulted, Roy Christian, Ghosts and Legends (Newton Abbott, 1972).

65 Haining (1974).

66 Maple (1964).

Most of these works consist of heterogeneous material culled from unspecified sources. The authors are plainly uninterested in whether their stories have ever been believed or not, so it is impossible for the reader to judge whether any particular ghostly manifestation is, or has been, a feature of traditional lore. A typical entry of this nature is the following from MacGregor:

> Reports of such dogs having been seen in Westmoreland are by no means uncommon. Some of these dogs are said to be headless, as in the case of that haunting Eggholme, not far from Kendal. Headless also is the terror that at midnight walks the watershed of the Belah, and is sometimes seen on the hillside between Beetham village and the market town of Milnthorpe. The latter creature is thought to be the same as that seen at intervals in the Stainmore parish of Westmoreland ... At Endmoor it has been seen running alongside a wall. [67]

In very few cases is any reference to a source mentioned, though occasionally for the sake of a spurious authenticity a writer may throw in a reference to a well-known name and a supposition about what he "might have" thought:

> Doubtless it is the room where according to Andrew Lang ... strange knockings are heard, [68]

writes MacGregor about a house so far as one can tell never mentioned by Lang at all, and in confirmation of a story which Lang dismisses as "good but an invention".[69] In other places writers are capable of quoting well-known stories, easily looked up in the original source, without any reference to that source at all. Similarly where the writers' information is inadequate, they are seldom deterred from giving it anyway. Roy Christian's entry on Mary Queen of Scots' haunting of Lyme Hall in Cheshire is typical in this respect:

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67 MacGregor (1955), p. 64.

68 MacGregor (1955), p. 36.

69 Lang (1897), p. 193. The story is André Maurois' La Maison

> Even there, though the room she occupied is the haunted one, it is probably not her ghost that appears in it. [70]

Altogether these failures mean that the reader never knows what reliance, if any, may be placed on any piece of information in these texts.

Ghost-hunting guides are more variable in their quality. One of the better, Underwood's Ghostsof Wales,[71] claims to be representative rather than comprehensive and the claim seems justified. He covers the country fairly well, and in the process tells twenty-nine traditional tales, twenty-three personal experience stories, gives eleven quotations from local newspapers, one from the guide to a stately home, and eighteen from other writers, which seems a fair range of narrative types. Many of these are quite well told narratives and only a few are the fragments of dîtes and legend that often serve for ghostlore in guides of this type. However Andrew Green's Our Haunted Kingdom[72] is perhaps more typical. Obviously Green has conducted no systematic research, merely compiled a collection of information sent to him. In 222 of his 348 cases he appears to have made no check on this information. Of the 126 cases which have been "personally investigated by the author or the witnesses involved interviewed",[73] seventy-eight are conveniently haunted pubs or inns, only nineteen are north of a line drawn between the Severn and the Wash, and these nineteen are in recognized beauty spots or tourist areas. One hundred out of his total of 348 cases are in the Home Counties, only ninety north of the Severn/Wash line (including, that is, all of Wales, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Ireland), which suggests that he did his research from an armchair in Surrey or when on holiday in one of the more attractive

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70 Christian, p. 96.

71 Underwood (1978).

72 Green (1974).

73 Green (1974), p. 17.

parts of the country. Some of his anecdotes make one believe that he was having his leg pulled, as this one from Exeter does:

> Several times students of the university reported seeing an apparition of "a tall man in a long white coat" in one of the corridors. Although his identity remains a mystery, he was seen again in 1969 and 1970 and could possibly be one of the decorators who helped complete the building a few years ago. It is known that one of the team of workers was a man devoted to his craft and had often expressed his great enthusiasm for the work involved. [74]

This latter quotation gives an idea of the style thought appropriate for modern popular work. Invariably overwritten by the authors, the mass of unsifted narrative is pressed into saleable form and emerges bedecked with banality, inconsequentiality and whimsicality. This, for example, is the introduction to Underwood's Ghosts of Wales:

> The ghosts of Wales, like the people of Wales and the scenery of Wales, are varied and different and utterly delightful. [75]

Popular gazeteers and story compilations such as these are obviously of little or no use to folklorists and cultural historians. Without minimal standards of research or presentation, the information (such as it is) is valueless. Where dîte, legend (often in fragmentary form), folk-tale and extracts from guidebooks are thus yoked together without adequate reference to the source of the information there is no way of telling if any of the material is in transmission as stories or believed as true experience. This point has to be stressed, perhaps at too great length, because popular work has in fact had a considerable influence on publications which purport to be folklore. In some folklore studies[76] popular story compilations and gazeteers have been rifled to provide illustrative material and sometimes even basic data for chapters on supernatural lore.

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74 Green (1974), pp. 60-61.

75 Underwood (1978), p. 11.

76 See sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 below.

This is a direct result of (a) relying on compilations rather than discussion as a method of presenting supernatural traditions; (b) of recycling stories from previous collections indiscriminately; and (c) of failing to carry out field-based research.

### 3.2.2.2 Halifax, Day and Jones

Fortunately not all popular work is so overtly and cynically commercial as the average gazeteer or ghost hunting guide. We have already seen that good popular collections of supernatural narratives and lore can be useful in indicating trends in ghost beliefs for a given age. It has already been noted what a valuable text Giraud's True Ghost Stories can be to the analyst, because it is a vast collection of unselected stories volunteered by people who obviously thought them both true and relevant. Alternatively, a personal collection of narratives like Mary Lewes's can be useful because it shows what type of stories were told to a particular individual over the course of several years. Though there is little or no way of knowing whether the stories were believed to be true by either teller or hearer they must at least at some time have been spontaneously told. This is valuable information, and makes such texts considerably more useful than collections of stories derived solely from previously published work.

In the years since 1930 two such important personal collections have been published - Lord Halifax's Ghost Book[77] and J. Wentworth Day's Here are Ghosts and Witches.[78] In addition, the American folklorist L.C. Jones has brought together the beliefs and stories of his students in Things that go Bump in the Night,[79] a book designed principally for the popular

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77 Charles Linley Wood (Viscount Halifax), Lord Halifax's Ghost Book (London, 1936).

78 Day (1959).

79 L.C. Jones, Things that go Bump in the Night (New York, 1959).

market. Sensitively used, these texts are some of the most useful guides to the folklore of ghosts in the twentieth century.

J. Wentworth Day's Here are Ghosts and Witches is not in the slightest scholarly, but neither is it the usual compilation of materials borrowed out of context. He claims for the items in his collection first that they were nearly all heard at first hand or were the result of enquiries through newspapers and therefore represent for the most part personal experience believed to be true, and secondly that "most of them bear the unmistakable stamp of authenticity".[80] His principal informants seem to be men of his own acquaintance - elderly, upperclass, retired military men and journalists - who have given him stories remembered from their youth; the narratives thus probably reflect at least some of the ghostlore of the turn of the century. As a credulous jumble of supernatural beliefs culled from various sources, Here are Ghosts and Witches has the potential to represent fairly well a cross-section of twentieth century popular beliefs.

L.C. Jones's general reader text, Things that go Bump in the Night, remains one of the most readable popular books on the folklore of ghosts. Largely based on fieldwork among his own students, it describes and classifies modern American ghosts and ghost-behaviours, and contains one of the earliest studies of urban ghost legends of the Phantom Hitchhiker type. Lord Halifax's Ghost Book is a lifetime personal collection of stories told to Lord Halifax, retold regularly as family entertainment, and published after his death by his son. Though published in 1936, internal evidence shows that some of the seventy stories and anecdotes are anything up to 150 years older than that. Drawn equally from personal experience stories, family and other legends at second or third hand or more (and including

80 Day, p. 2.

one invented by Lord Halifax, two from documents and three from journals), the book retails four old legends (the haunting of Glamis, the Tyrone Ghost, the ghost in the library at Mannington Hall and the poltergeist at Hinton Ampner), and two stories subsequently to be very popular (the 'strangling ghost' at Thurstaston Old Hall, and the Fawn Lady of Burton Agnes). It is probably the most useful of the popular story-collections, and throws light on the ghostly folklore of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in that, at the least, it indicates the range and type of belief found credible in that period.

Together, then, these texts may well indicate the sorts of stories which were circulating in Britain about the turn of the century and in mid-century America. Always remembering the proviso that it yet remains to be established what connection, if any, there is between narrative and belief, this is useful information to have and fills a gap in the history of the ghost at least in its literary form.

## 3.3 Summary

In summary, though most modern popular work obviously had best be avoided by the student of folklore, the period affords some popular work of considerable interest - Lewes (1912), Giraud (1927), Halifax (1936), Day (1954), and Jones (1959). A reading of these five texts permits some tentative conclusions to be drawn about the nature of ghosts and ghost-stories in popular traditions in the period 1910 to 1960. These are:

1. Ghost stories circulate principally as memorate or as second- or third-hand narratives.

2. Though collections contain legends, they are less numerous than memorates or often presented as memorates.

3. Old and established legends are preferred to newer traditions, thus there is a premium on the transmission of a number of very familiar stories.

4. An analysis of the contents of the narratives in these texts and their distribution can be suggestive of the development of the concept of the ghost in the early twentieth century:

A. In stories from these five sources the following types of manifestation are universal:

(a) ghosts who re-enact their own deaths

(b) wraiths of the dying or newly dead

(c) phantom voices

(d) phantom footsteps

(e) phantom ladies

(f) animal ghosts

(g) mysterious noises

(h) ghosts in the form of light.

B. Other features of the ghost stereotype are common to four sources:

(i) poltergeists (all sources except Lewes)

(j) ghosts who return to help comfort or support the living (all sources except Day).

C. Other features appear in three out of five texts:

(k) ghosts who twitch bedclothes off (Halifax actually has a story about a ghost who gets into bed - perhaps the older, stronger variant of this tradition) (Jones, Giraud and Halifax)

(l) various grotesqueries - severed hands, headless ghosts, mutilated ghosts, ineradicable bloodstains, and so on — (Day, Halifax and Jones)

(m) ghosts who return for love of earthly people or things (Jones, Giraud and Lewes).

D. Several features of ghost behaviour or type are common to two texts:

(n) ghostly guardians (Halifax and Lewes)

(o) phantom hitchhikers (Halifax and Lewes)

(p) treasure-revealing ghosts (Halifax and Day)

(q) murder-revealing ghosts (Halifax and Day)

(r) ghosts who assault the living (Giraud and Halifax)

Though no firm conclusions can, of course, be drawn from these lists, the following hypotheses are worth investigating:

Features of ghost behaviour which appear in at least four out of five texts may be a stable part of twentieth century ghost-stereotypes. Lists (A) and (B) above contain both ancient and novel features. Wraiths, phantom footsteps and voices, animal ghosts, mysterious noises, ghosts in the form of light and poltergeists are familiar from the literature of previous centuries. Their appearance in twentieth century popular texts suggests that they are still a vivid part of the imagery of the ghost or at least an aspect of the older stereotype which is not completely discredited in modern thought. The novel elements - that is 'ladies', ghosts who re-enact their own deaths and ghosts who return to comfort or support the living - may indicate recent developments in the idea of the ghost. There is some indication in particular that the latter ghost type may have been for some time growing steadily in influence in the popular stereotype: ghosts who return to comfort and support survivors may be the "assisting angels" mentioned by Daniel Defoe who "come of a kind and beneficent Errand."[81] Ghosts who re-enact their own deaths may be the descendants of murder-revealing ghosts, which in this century are steadily losing their appeal. Phantom ladies are perhaps the modern expression of the purposeless ghost: Aubrey, for instance, has several examples of passive and

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81 Defoe (1729), p. (a2). Cf. above, chapter 4, section 3.3.

aimless apparitions, though he never, of course, refers to them as 'white' or 'grey' 'ladies'.[82]

At the other end of the spectrum (list D) there are some rather more idiosyncratic ghost-types: that is, ghosts who assault the living or reveal treasure or murder. These are ancient ideas which can be found in sixteenth and seventeenth century books. It would seem likely that their appearance in modern texts is due to the tenacity of literary legend. There are also types of ghost which are mentioned for the first time in the literature: that is, phantom hitchhikers and ghostly guardians. If a reference can be found to these types in the folkloristic literature of the age too, we may assume that these are the latest additions to the inventory of ghosts.

Popular literature such as this may thus provide useful hypotheses about the folklore of ghosts. Unless, however, there is some supporting evidence from folkloristic work they must remain no more than guesses. Therefore, it is to work by folklorists, or under the direction or influence of the Folklore Society, that we must next turn, to see how far their work substantiates these hypotheses and/or provides new and better insights into the folklore of the ghost in our own century.

## 4. Folkloristic Literature 1846 to the Present Day

4.1 It is one of the ironies of folklore studies that while belief in the supernatural may claim a central position in both human psychology and human culture, the topic is relatively sparsely, indeed carelessly,

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82 Cf. Aubrey (1696), pp. 59-64 for three such aimless ghosts. Aubrey terms one an 'angel', another a 'satyr', and a third simply an 'apparition'.

covered by antiquarian and folkloristic writers. The anonymous reviewer of Lee's The Other World was only too accurate when he wrote:

> ... the subject is often treated as if it were ... familiar to us all, and one the treatment of which required no especial care nor any stringent accuracy.[83]

Unfortunately the modern period is no different from previous ages in this respect. In Britain very little original folkloristic work has been conducted into occult beliefs, especially in the last fifty years. In the U.S.A., with which the present review is not principally concerned,[84] matters are a little better, but even there the best work tends to appear in specialist publications rather than in widely available books.

In general, folkloristic work on the supernatural tends, as all work of this period, to divide into two overall types: on the one hand, compilations of narratives; on the other, descriptive essays. Though perhaps the most useful approach to ghostlore, the latter, especially in Britain, is the minority form. Each of these larger classes of texts will be considered separately below, section 4.2 dealing with descriptive texts and section 4.3 analysing story-compilations.

## 4.2 Descriptive texts 1846 to the present day

It is surprisingly difficult to compile a list of books which are both descriptive and folkloristically oriented. Such a list is unfortunately a very short one if only the work of professional folklorists is considered. Outside the realm of folkloristic studies narrowly defined, of course, there are very valuable studies of supernatural beliefs as aspects of culture in other times and societies. Frazer's,[85] Tylor's[86]

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83 See above footnote 10.

84 Unfortunately space allows only the briefest reference to American work. See below pp.185-189 and p. 200.

85 Frazer (1934).

86 Tylor (1873).

and Malinowski's[87] contribution to our understanding of the cultural functions of belief in occult forces cannot be underestimated, nor Jahoda's[88] contribution to our understanding of their psychological foundations. Outstanding work has also been contributed by Keith Thomas who considers ghost belief in his history of religion and magic.[89]

Of British folklorists only Andrew Lang has a breadth of vision equal to that of the best anthropological or historical writers. Of all authors - investigative, popular or folkloristic - Lang is probably the best informed, having a grasp of the history and literature of the ghost that few people can rival. Among his many publications on supernatural topics, Cock Lane and Common Sense[90] and Dreams and Ghosts[91] are probably the best known. The former is witty, intelligent and erudite, and, in showing belief in spectres as a developing tradition, it is intrinsically folkloristic. In arguing with cogency and erudition that the evidence for ghosts is as good as the evidence for anything else, it is also in the best tradition of investigative work. Dreams and Ghosts which followed in 1897 is rather more popular in that the same mixture of folklore and investigation is leavened with illustrative narrative. Unusually for this period, these are all carefully accredited, and interpreted in terms of an unfolding tradition. Eleven of his narratives have the special interest of having been told to Lang as personal experiences, so that legends, reports from the Society for Psychical Research, and personal experience stories are

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87 Bronislaw Malinowski, "Baloma: Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands", in Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion and other Essays [London, 1974], pp. 149-254.

88 Jahoda (1969).

89 Thomas (1971).

90 Lang (1894).

91 Lang (1897).

shown to be part of a single pattern. Lang's particular synthesis of narrative, interpretation through tradition, and analytical investigation was unfortunately not copied by later writers who on the whole simply fell back into the old practice of compiling more or less reliable collections of narrative.

Two recent British texts which deserve praise for refusing to fall into this unproductive pattern are Theo Brown's The Fate of the Dead[92] and Davidson and Russell's The Folklore of Ghosts[93] which is a collection of papers from the 1980 conference on ghostlore organised by the Folklore Society. Even these works, however, have their limitations. Theo Brown's study of the effect of the Reformation on West Country ghostlore is interesting but it adds nothing new to our knowledge of the old ghost beliefs and, by its nature, can shed no light on contemporary ones. Similarly, among the papers in The Folklore of Ghosts there are few which are addressed to the examination of contemporary lore. Apart from the papers by Venetia Newall[94] and Linda May Ballard[95] (on the lore of West Indian and Ulster communities respectively), none of the contributions is based on fieldwork. Most contributors prefer to go over familiar ground using written sources for data, deliberately eschewing any consideration of contemporary beliefs on the grounds that this is outside the concept of tradition. Carmen Blacker epitomises this attitude when she writes:

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92 Theo Brown, The Fate of the Dead: A Study in Folk Eschatology in the West Country after the Reformation (Bury St. Edmunds, 1979).

93 Davidson and Russell (1981).

94 Newall (1981).

95 Linda May Ballard, "Before death and Beyond - A Preliminary survey of death and ghost traditions with particular reference to Ulster", in Davidson and Russell, pp. 13-42.

> We shall not be concerned with first-hand testimonies of apparitions but rather with the 'tradition' of ghosts. 96

The Folklore of Ghosts therefore contains a majority of library-based, historically-oriented papers.

However, it does attempt to break with the standard pattern of writings on supernatural themes which isolates on the one hand explanatory, investigative literature, and on the other literature which, whatever its guise, is principally a collection of stories for the most part devoid of commentary. Very little work on the folklore of ghosts has attempted to interpret experience of the supernatural in terms of a tradition of occult belief, and this, of course, is what The Folklore of Ghosts does try to do. What light it can throw on twentieth century ghost belief, however, is distinctly limited by the nature of its attitudes to tradition itself.

In the USA, as in Britain, in-depth study of supernatural traditions has been somewhat limited, with only a handful of scholars working in the field. The foremost of these, Wayland Hand, was undoubtedly right when he entitled his contribution to Folklore Today, "Folk Belief and Superstition: A Crucial Field of Folklore long Neglected".[97]

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96 Blacker, p. 95. Cf. A.R. Wright on the Daily News survey in his presidential address of 1927: "I set aside a considerable collection of ghost stories made by The Daily News in November last, because they are mostly alleged individual experiences ... and not the traditional or other stories of the countryside that interest us." A.R. Wright, "The Folklore of the Past and Present", Folk Lore, vol. 38 (1927), p. 28.

97 Wayland D. Hand, "Folk Belief and Superstition: A Crucial Field of Folklore long Neglected", in Linda Dégh, Henry Glassie and Felix J. Oinas (eds.), Folklore Today: A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington, 1976), pp. 209-219.

Apart from Hand himself,[98] there are indeed few who have collected, analysed and sought to understand folk belief, and in particular supernatural beliefs. Louis Jones's work in the 1940s is clearly an exception,[99] and so is the work of such scholars as Donald Ward,[100] David Hufford,[101] Larry Danielson,[102] William Montell and Barbara Allen.[103] The contribution of such scholars is enormous. Alternatively, when particular legends and traditions have received attention from a number of different researchers over the years, the resulting work is most insightful.

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98 For example: Wayland D. Hand, Anna Cassetta and Sondra B. Thiederman (eds.), Popular Beliefs and Superstitions: A Compendium of American Folklore compiled by Newbell Niles Puckett (Boston, Mass., 1981); Wayland D. Hand, Boundaries and Portals in Folk Belief and Custom, The Katharine Briggs Lecture No. 2, delivered 2 November 1982 to the Folklore Society at University College, London (London, 1982); Wayland D. Hand, "Will-o'-the-Wisps, Jack-o'-Lanterns and their Congeners: A consideration of the Fiery and Luminous Creatures of Lower Mythology", Fabula, 18 (1977), 226-233.

99 Louis C. Jones, "The Ghosts of New York: An analytical study", Journal of American Folklore (October-December, 1944), 237-254; Louis C. Jones, "Hitchhiking Ghosts in New York", California Folklore Quarterly, 3 (1944), 284-292; Louis C. Jones, "The Ghost and I", New York Folklore Quarterly, 10 (1954), 123-126. Jones (1959).

100 Donald Ward, "American and European Narratives as Socio-Psychological Indicators", in Juha Pentikainen and Tuula Juurikka (eds.), Folk Narrative Research (Helsinki, 1976), 348-353; Donald Ward, "The Little Man who wasn't there: Encounters with the Supranormal", Fabula, 18 (1977), 212-225.

101 David J. Hufford, "Humanoids and Anomalous Lights: Taxonomic and Epistemological Problems", Fabula, 18 (1977), 234-241; David J. Hufford, "Traditions of Disbelief", New York Folklore, 8, nos. 3-4 (Winter, 1982), 47-55; and see note 119 below.

102 Larry Danielson, "Towards the Analysis of Vernacular Texts: The Supernatural Narrative in oral and popular print sources", Journal of the Folklore Institute, 16, no. 3 (September-December, 1979), 130-154.

103 William Lynwood Montell and Barbara Allen, "A Biographical Approach to the Study of Memorates (Personal Experience Narratives)", International Folklore Review, 2 (1982), 85-104.

The approach is perhaps seen at its most fruitful in the study of the phantom hitchhiker legend - one of the best understood and most accessible of modern ghost traditions. Interest in the story began with Beardsley and Hankey's seminal papers of 1942 and 1943.[104] L.C. Jones's dissenting study followed in 1944[105] and he devotes a section of Things that go Bump in the Night[106] to the same legend. Between 1969 and the present day several useful papers have contributed to our understanding of the story: Katherine Luomala's study of the Hawaiian versions;[107] Philip Brandt George's work on the Cline Avenue Ghost;[108] William Wilson's study of the legend among the Mormons;[109] Lydia Fish's "Jesus on the Thru' way",[110] and Roger Mitchell's study of the legend on Guam.[111] Shorter references and orally collected versions continue to make appearances in

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104 R. K. Beardsley and Rosalie Hankey, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker", California Folklore Quarterly, 1 (1942), 303-335; and R.K. Beardsley and Rosalie Hankey, "The History of the Vanishing Hitchhiker", California Folklore Quarterly, 2 (1943), 13-25.

105 Jones (1944).

106 Jones (1959), pp. 161-184.

107 Katherine Luomala, "Disintegration and Regeneration: The Hawaiian Phantom Hitchhiker", Fabula, 13 (1972), 20-59.

108 Philip Brandt George, "The Ghost of Cline Avenue", Indiana Folklore, 5, no. 1 (1972), 56-91.

109 William A. Wilson, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker among the Mormons", Indiana Folklore, 3 (1975), 80-97.

110 Lydia M. Fish, "Jesus on the Thru' way: The Vanishing Hitchhiker strikes again", Indiana Folklore, 9, no. 1 (1976), 5-13.

111 Roger Mitchell, "Ancestral Spirits and Hitchhiking Ghosts: Syncretism on Guam", Modern Journal of Language and Folklore, 2 (1976), 45-55.

journals (see Cunningham,[112] Larson,[113] Skinner[114] and Hurley),[115] in longer works of supernatural stories,[116] and in studies of urban legend.[117] Examinations of related legends further extend our knowledge of hitch-hiking ghosts.[118] By such means the nature, function and distribution of supernatural traditions become increasingly clearer.

Similarly, traditions of the 'Old Hag' have become better understood because of continuing coverage. In particular David Hufford breaks startling new ground in his examination of the objectivity of these experiences. In three pioneering papers[119] (and a later book) he argues that experience predates tradition rather than, as is commonly assumed, the existence of a tradition's leading to and determining the content of supernatural experiences. More recently the Old Hag tradition has been given attention by Joe Ross.[120]

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112 Keith Cunningham, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker in Arizona - almost", Southwest Folklore, 3 (1979), 46-50.

113 Mildred R. Larson, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker again", New York Folklore Quarterly, 9 (1953), 51-52.

114 Margo Skinner, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker Again", Western Folklore, 12 (1953), 136-137.

115 Gerard T. Hurley, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker Again", Western Folklore, 11 (1952), 46.

116 See, for example, William Lynwood Montell, Ghosts Along the Cumberland: Deathlore in the Kentucky Foothills (Knoxville, 1975), pp. 118-129; Ruth Ann Musick, Coffin Hollow and other ghost tales (Lexington, 1977), pp. 44-45; p. 76; pp. 137-158.

117 Jan Harold Brunvand, The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and their Meanings (New York/London, 1981), pp. 1-46.

118 See especially William Edgerton, "The Ghost in search for a Dying Man", Journal of the Folklore Institute, 5 (1968), 31-41; Jan Harold Brunvand, "Modern Myths of Mormondom; or Supernaturalism is alive and well in Salt Lake City", in Wayland Hand (ed.), American Folk Legend (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1971), pp. 185-202.

119 David J. Hufford, "Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Folklore", Southern Folklore Quarterly, 38 (1974), 187-198; Hufford (1976); David J. Hufford, "A New Approach to the Old Hag", in Wayland D. Hand (ed.), American Folk Medicine (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1976), pp. 73-85; David J. Hufford, The Terror that Comes in the Night (Philadelphia, 1982).

120 Joe Ross, "Hags out of their skin", Journal of American Folklore, 93, no. 368 (April-June, 1980), 183-186.

Where particular legends or traditional beliefs have in this way been studied over several years by a number of scholars in regional and national journals, the results have been enlightening. This clearly indicates that serious in-depth study of particular motifs or genres associated with supernatural beliefs can be a fruitful approach to a difficult area of tradition. In fact, only through scholarly and soberminded analysis can the prestige of the study of supernatural traditions be improved so that folklorists can eventually break out of the vicious circle in which delicacy towards informants prevents them using anything but old data when discussing the subject, and yet the use of old tales and legends creates just that prejudice about supernatural lore which embarrasses potential informants and makes the delicacy necessary. Continuing the present practice of compiling collections of narratives (mainly legend) can in no way improve the status of the study nor contribute to our understanding of the beliefs themselves. An examination of such compilations makes this (unfortunately) only too clear.

## 4.3 Compilations of ghost stories 1848 to the present day

### 4.3.1 1860-1914 Regional Collections

The greater proportion of modern work has been in the form of compilations of dîte, legend and tale. The pattern is set by early studies of the folklore of the regions of Great Britain. These regional collections,[121]

121 In the preparation of this section the following collections have been consulted: The Reverend Sabine Baring Gould, Cornish Characters and Strange Events, 2 vols. (London, 1905); The Reverend Sabine Baring Gould, Devonshire Characters and Strange Events (London, 1908); R. Blakeborough, Wit, Character, Folklore and Customs of the North Riding of Yorkshire (London, 1898); Charlotte Sophia Burne, Shropshire Folk-lore: a Sheaf of Gleanings from the collection of Georgina F. Jackson (London, 1883); Charles Hardwick, Traditions, Superstitions and Folklore (chiefly Lancashire & the North of England) (Manchester, 1872);John Harland & T.T. Wilkinson, Lancashire Folklore (Manchester, 1882); William Henderson, Folklore of the Northern Counties [Wakefield, 1973]; Robert Hunt, Popular Romances of the West of England: or the drolls, traditions and superstitions of Old Cornwall (London, 1865); Ella Mary Leather, The Folklore of Herefordshire (Hereford/London, 1912); John Nicholson, The Folklore of East Yorkshire [Wakefield, 1973]; J. Roby, Traditions of Lancashire, sixth edition (Manchester, 1900).

written for the most part between 1860 and the first world war, have been immensely prestigious and are without doubt monuments to enthusiasm and perseverance. Though they have since been attacked for being "armchair scholarship", Georgina Smith has persuasively argued that:

> ... this constant reiteration and annotation among published sources had a number of beneficial effects for the study of folklore [122]

in terms of helping to define the discipline and establish paradigms for its study. This is no doubt true, but nevertheless as sources from which to study the history of folkloric concepts, especially the folklore of the ghost, they should be approached with a certain amount of caution.

One should in particular be slightly suspicious of them as guides to the folklore of the last years of the nineteenth century. The compilers of these collections, influenced by romanticism, historicism and nationalism,[123] went in active search of 'quaint' rural lore. In the first place one cannot be certain whether the beliefs and stories recorded in the collections were communal rather than idiosyncratic, proven by time or ephemeral: in the second place there is no telling how representative the collections were of the folklore of groups other than the country poor.

On the first point, it should be noted that there is evidence that traditions were changing even as they were being recorded. There is a telling anecdote in the introduction to Hunt's Popular Romances of the West of England, where he writes that his first collection was a juvenile one, and that:

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122 Georgina Smith, "Literary Sources and Folklore Studies in the Nineteenth Century: A Re-assessment of Armchair Scholarship", Lore and Language, 2 No. 9 (July, 1978), 26-43.

123 Smith, ibid.

> I have within the last year, endeavoured to recover those stories, but in vain. The living people appear to have forgotten them; those traditions are, it is to be feared, gone for ever.[124]

Later in a footnote, he comments that:

> Mrs. Bray collected her Traditions, Legends and Superstitions of Devonshire in 1835 and they were published in 1838. This work proves to me that even at that time the old world stories were perishing ... Many wild tales I heard in 1829 appear to have been lost in 1835.[125]

One cannot think that the West of England is peculiar in its predisposition to change; the alteration and development is what one would expect in a living organism such as oral tradition. The regional literature of the nineteenth century thus perhaps merely artificially catches and suspends one moment in the flux of tradition.

In the second place, the regional collections are oriented towards rural beliefs. Hence the lore found there focuses on what appear to be expressions of country fears of lonely places and hence on boggarts, bogeys and other elementals. In only five pages, for example, Harland and Wilkinson list no fewer than ten boggarts and in the same space also record beliefs in such entities as black dogs, Grindylow, Jenny Green Teeth, and Peg o' Lantern.[126] How far this lore would be accepted by urban communities it is impossible to say.

However, once written down in large and prestigious compendia, such lore becomes the official tradition to which other writers turn in their search for the region's folklore. Hence the black dogs, boggarts, white and grey ladies, cauld lads and headless cows and coaches that appear in nineteenth century collectanea have become the recognised folklore of ghosts. In order briefly to illustrate this effect, one can take three

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124 Hunt, p. viii.

125 Hunt, p. xxi.

126 Harland and Wilkinson, pp. 50-55.

ghost legends from influential nineteenth century collections and trace their reappearance in a selection of texts to the present day.

Robert Hunt gives an account of the ghost of Dorothy Dingley:

> ... an account of an Apparition attested by the Reverend William Ruddell, Minister at Launceston in Cornwall, 1665. [127]

This story is taken up by Baring Gould in Cornish Characters;[128] Christina Hole in both English Folklore[129] and Haunted England,[130] and by Tony Deane and Tony Shaw in their Folklore of Cornwall [131] (In these latter texts, incidentally, the ghost is called Dorothy Dinglet ). Henderson's legend about Silky, the rustling ghost of Black Heddon[132], is retold by Ingram,[133] Thiselton Dyer[134] and Hole.[135] An equally famous story about the "Cauld Lad of Hilton Castle", which may be found in Harland and Wilkinson's Lancashire Folklore[136], is later mentioned by Ingram,[137] Thiselton Dyer[138]

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127 Hunt, p. 295.

128 Baring Gould (1905), pp. 72-85.

129 Hole (1940a), p. 162.

130 Hole (1940b), pp. 35-37.

131 Tony Deane and Tony Shaw, The Folklore of Cornwall (London, 1975), pp. 101-113.

132 Henderson, pp. 230-232.

133 Ingram, Second Series, pp. 33-37.

134 T.F. Thiselton Dyer, The Ghost World (London, 1898), p. 398.

135 Hole (1940a), p. 155.

136 Harland and Wilkinson, p. 229.

137 Ingram, pp. 122-125.

138 Thiselton Dyer, p. 313.

and Hole.[139] A list such as this could go on indefinitely. It is particularly significant that stories from regional collections find their way into huge clearing-houses of legends like Ingram's and Hole's, for once mentioned there, they are sure to be retold in many later texts.

Thiselton Dyer's The Ghost World, which also played a large part in the dissemination of these stories, is just such another huge compilation of information: it differs from Ingram's and Hole's only in that its sources are primarily anthropological and folkloristic. Referring to Tylor's Primitive Culture extensively and taking material from Henderson, Burne, Harland and Wilkinson, Wirt Sykes's British Goblins[140] and Notes and Queries, as well as Ingram and Crowe and a multiplicity of other writers, Thiselton Dyer compiles what amounts to a 'dictionary' of legendary supernatural characters. His very comprehensive list of ghosts includes Benjie Gear, Silky of Black Heddon, The Cauld Lad of Hilton Castle, the Clegg Hall Boggart, the White Doe of Rylstone, the Drummer of Cortachy Castle, and the ghostly re-enactments of the battles of Edgehill and Marston Moor - a set of legends in constant circulation since. Once a legend gets into a collection such as this it is guaranteed immortality. Whether it is 'folklore' is an entirely different matter.

The essential trouble with the compilation approach to the presentation of ghostlore is this extensive, and usually contextless and referenceless, borrowing from previous collections. This is, of course, just the difficulty that all compilations of ghost narratives risk. A book of stories has to have a certain minimum length, so it is tempting to pad it out with familiar narratives from a received corpus. Furthermore, the stories in such a collection necessarily must have impact and excitement.

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139 Hole (1940b), p. 7.

140 Wirt Sykes, British Goblins [Wakefield, 1973]

Unfortunately the aim of exciting and thrilling readers is often, if not always, incompatible with that of painting a true picture of the beliefs of a community. The real criterion for a story's inclusion in compilations too often has been aesthetic rather than folkloristic. That again is a risk a compilation intrinsically runs however honest its intentions.

### 4.3.2 Christina Hole's Haunted England

In earlier sections of this chapter we have seen how enormously influential large compilations of dîtes, tales and legends may be - and how often they can be misleading. In particular, attention has been drawn to popular collections such as Ingram's, to the limitations of the regional folklore collections, and to the influence of compendia such as Thiselton Dyer's The Ghost World. It is to such works that students and researchers often turn for data, so it is especially important that they are reasonably accurate reflections of traditional concepts. The position that Ingram's and Thiselton Dyer's collections held for writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is for writers of the present generation occupied by Christina Hole's Haunted England, a compilation of 178 narratives of the supernatural. It is the most recent collection of this kind to be written by a folklorist and, as such, has some prestige. Davidson's reference to it in her preface to The Folklore of Ghosts is typical of the way it is customarily regarded:

> The best publications of this kind like Christina Hole's Haunted England, provide a valuable basis for serious study: the more objective the account and the more carefully mapped the background, the more reason we have to be grateful to the researcher.[141]

It is worth looking at Haunted England in some depth, first as representative of collections of ghost stories, and secondly because of Hole's influence on subsequent chroniclers of supernatural traditions.

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141 Davidson and Russell, p. vii.

Most of all it is relevant to check on the sources from which Hole obtained her stories, for collections are only as good as the material they depend upon. The bibliography lists thirty-seven books: apart from regional folklore collections of the late nineteenth century (Hunt, Hardwick, Henderson, Burne and Baring Gould), only two folkloristic sources are listed[142] (three, if you count Hole's earlier Traditions and Customs of Cheshire).[143] The other twenty-nine sources break down as follows: seven investigative texts, twenty popular books, and two unclassifiable.[144] In addition Hole has drawn from Notes and Queries, county records, the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, The Gentleman's Magazine, Folklore, The Cheshire Sheaf and papers from the Hampshire Field Club. Altogether this makes a very catholic set of sources, ranging not only from the seriously investigative to the blatantly popular, but also from seventeenth century sources to contemporary ones. On this evidence alone it is questionable how far the collection is representative of the traditions of 1940.

If close examination is given to the stories and their sources even more grounds for unease appear. Of 178 narratives, Hole gives references for only fifty-six. By working through her bibliography, however, it is possible to find the probable sources for some of the others. Fifty of her stories can be found in Ingram's Haunted Houses and Family Traditions of Great Britain,[145] (though Ingram is given as a source only once), eight can

142 That is, Aubrey and Chambers.

143 Christina Hole, Traditions and Customs of Cheshire (London, 1937).

144 I have been unable to find these texts (W. Johnson's Folk Memory and Middleton's Legends of Longdendale), so cannot estimate how far these are popular and how far folkloristic works.

145 Ingram (1884).

be found in Lee[146] (though Lee is quoted only twice), and seven may perhaps come from Shropshire Folklore[147] (though Burne is acknowledged only twice). There is strong reason, therefore, to think that out of 178 stories, sixty-five come from these three sources. Other stories for which there is no acknowledgement are to be found in and may come from Camden,[148] Bennett,[149] Aubrey,[150] Halifax[151] and Henderson[152] (ten narratives in all).

The most worrying aspect of this investigation into Hole's sources is the discovery of her reliance on previous popular and investigative compilations, especially Ingram's Haunted Homes, a book designed as no more than "A handbook to the Haunted Houses of Great Britain".[153] Nearly a third of Hole's stories can be found in Ingram: in contemporary terms it is the equivalent of a folklorist relying on Underwood's A Gazeteer of British Ghosts. Another debt is owed by Hole to polemical investigative writers such as Dale Owen and Lee. Whatever its influence, therefore, Haunted England is hardly a compendium of contemporary folklore: it is really no more than a collection of old stories out of books. Its only value lies in the number and variety of sources consulted, making it a sort of encyclopedia of ghostly phenomena mentioned since the sixteenth century. Ironically, this is also its danger for others: it is all too easy for subsequent writers (a) to feel that the topic of the supernatural

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146 Lee (1875) and Lee (1885).

147 Burne (1883).

148 William Camden, Britain: or a chorographical description of the flourishing Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland (London, 1610).

149 Sir Ernest Bennett (1939).

150 Aubrey (1696).

151 Halifax (1936).

152 Henderson [1973].

153 Ingram, first series, p. iii.

has already been exhaustively covered, and (b) to use Haunted England as a source book for their own compilations. So the vicious circle continues to revolve, each writer relying on those who went before and failing to check their sources or to initiate independent work either in the library or in the field.

### 4.3.3 The Folklore of the British Isles series

The unfortunate effects of constant copying is to be seen most forcefully in the chapters on the supernatural in the newly published regional folklore series. To date[154] fifteen volumes of this series have been issued. When dealing with the folklore of ghosts, only three[155] of these volumes do not present their material as collections of previous writers' stories woven together with a little linking material. The table below lists twelve titles and for each title first shows the number of stories told, summarised or paraphrased, and secondly lists the number of this total which are taken from previous work rather than from contemporary oral sources.

One simple illustration of the drawbacks of this reliance on previous collections and written sources is Jacqueline Simpson's entry on 'The Gatley Shouter', an amusing and well-told story of a ghost and its exorcism.[156] From this account one would imagine that Gatley was an isolated marshland Cheshire village: in fact it is the suburb of Manchester where the present research was carried out. Surely it is wrong to represent local ghostlore by a story so old that nothing remains in common between the community that told it and the community that lives in the area now, except for the name of the place?

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154 July, 1984.

155 That is: Anne Ross, The Folklore of the Scottish Highlands (London, 1976); Margaret Killip, The Folklore of the Isle of Man (London, 1975); Sean O'Suilléabháin, The Folklore of Ireland (London, 1974).

156 Jacqueline Simpson, The Folklore of the Welsh Borders (London, 1976), pp. 91-92.

Table 1: Sources of narratives about ghosts and hauntings in the 'Folklore of the British Isles' series

| The folklore of: | Number of narratives on supernatural topics | Number of narratives from written sources (as acknowledged in footnotes) |
|---|---|---|
| Cornwall[157] | 23 | 17 |
| Cotswolds[158] | 19 | 8 |
| Devon[159] | 39 | 39 |
| Hampshire and Isle of Wight[160] | 40 | 38 |
| Hertfordshire[161] | 25 | 22 |
| The Lake District[162] | 5 | 4 |
| Orkney and Shetland[163] | 14 | 4 |
| Staffordshire[164] | 30 | 29 |
| Sussex[165] | 19 | 13 |
| Warwickshire[166] | 28 | 28 |
| The Welsh Borders[167] | 52 | 52 |
| Wiltshire[168] | 72 | 72 |

157 Deane and Shaw.

158 Katharine Briggs, The Folklore of the Cotswolds (London, 1974).

159 Ralph Whitlock, The Folklore of Devon (London, 1977).

160 Wendy Boase, The Folklore of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (London, 1976).

161 Doris Jones Baker, The Folklore of Hertfordshire (London, 1977).

162 Marjorie Rowling, The Folklore of the Lake District (London, 1976).

163 Ernest W. Marwick, The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland (London, 1975).

164 Jon Raven, The Folklore of Staffordshire (London, 1978).

165 Simpson (1973).

166 Roy Palmer, The Folklore of Warwickshire (London, 1976).

167 Simpson (1976).

168 Ralph Whitlock, The Folklore of Wiltshire (London, 1976).

Furthermore, when the written sources from which The Folklore of the British Isles series is derived are examined, it is found that by far the most popular source book is Hole's Haunted England. Local histories and guidebooks are the next most common sources of information, then Hallam's Haunted Inns,[169] and lastly the appropriate nineteenth century regional collection. Two of the sources most frequently relied on therefore are no more than popular collections of heterogeneous story-material. One of these was certainly never intended to be a collection of folklore, the other might have been so intended but fails to achieve that status. A further common source, regional collections, were compiled under the influence of a backward looking romanticism more than half a century ago, and another common source - guide books and local histories - are a species of literature that tends to regard ghost stories as unserious, merely entertaining interludes. There is no way that material of this nature can be considered either current or folklore. Nearly eighty years ago the folklorist S. O. Addy complained:

> Although in these days the word folk-lore had become part of the common speech, and the subject is in some degree familiar to everybody, little original research is done. Even the Folk-lore Society, instead of collecting fresh material - and there is plenty to be had - has been printing under the name of County Folk-lore, a farrago of material from local histories and guide-books, of which not one item in twenty was worth reproducing.[170]

It seems a pity that the same criticism is apposite today.

If a book is to be a guide to modern folklore, surely the lore should be current at the time of writing, in oral transmission, and believed to be informative and relevant by those who transmit it? However, the authors of the current folklore series have unfortunately disregarded such considerations. Because (a) they have relied on previous story compilations

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169 Hallam (1972).

170 S.O. Addy, "Derbyshire Folk-Lore", in Rev. J. Charles Cox (ed.), Memorials of Old Derbyshire (London/Derby, 1907), p. 346.

for material; (b) equated the study of lore with the description of legends; and (c) implicitly defined the terms 'folk' and 'tradition' as 'peasant' and 'old survival' respectively, they have consequently gone in search of country ghost stories of the old sort and produced a wonderful collection of legendary fragments about black dogs, white ladies, boggarts and wraiths without a shred of evidence to show that these are currently believed in or even transmitted simply as stories.

### 4.4 The weakness of the compilation approach to the study of ghost traditions

The risk of a compilation of stories becoming this sort of heterogeneous and misleading mass of uninformative data is inherent, especially where narratives are drawn from previous collections rather than taken from oral testimony in the field. The borrowing is invariably unselective, each item being first treated as equal in value to any other, and secondly being quoted without those details of date, region or type of source which might have made the information meaningful. This is the consequence of an unwillingness to do more than collate legends from previous work and a lack of awareness of the possibly conflicting aims of previous collectors, which may invalidate them as useful sources. Such compilations are worthless in assessing the strength and nature of contemporary ghost belief.

On the other hand, where researchers have collected stories in the field some very valuable insights have been contributed. As far as I am aware, there are no such modern British collections, but at least two excellent books of this kind have come from the USA - Ray B. Browne's _A Night with the Hants_[171] and William Lynwood Montell's _Ghosts Along the Cumberland_.[172] These do show that, when based on proper field-recording,

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171 Ray B. Browne, _A Night with the Hants: and other Alabama Folk Experiences_ (Bowling Green, 1976).

172 Montell (1975).

useful information can be given in the form of compilations.[173] However, even here there are some limitations. Collectors cannot, for example, present more than the minimum of contextual information, neither can they throw much light on the psychology of ghost belief. In the area of supernatural traditions these questions are just as relevant as the nature of the traditions themselves.

There is, furthermore, an implicit assumption behind all collections of ghost stories that needs to be questioned: that is, that by collecting stories we are describing beliefs. In some way, it is always assumed, the stories directly reflect the lore. That is an assumption that has not been tested and need not be true.

It is especially likely to be untrue if the stories are legends. Even by definition, a legend does not necessarily illustrate belief; it need not be believed to be true, but simply told as true. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated, principally by the practical difficulties of operating the definition, that the ascription of truth/belief is probably no more than a rhetorical slot in the performative structure of the genre. Collections of legends for which there is no proof that they have been told in recent years cannot be used as direct evidence for any existing belief. They can be evidence for a tradition only where their historical continuity with contemporary belief is demonstrated by noting beside them similar memorates and personal experience stories collected orally in the field.

The second difficulty with using collections of stories (mainly legends) is that, thanks to the continuous borrowing from previous collections, there grows up a received corpus of narratives which forms the backbone of every subsequent compilation. Because these have grown so familiar,

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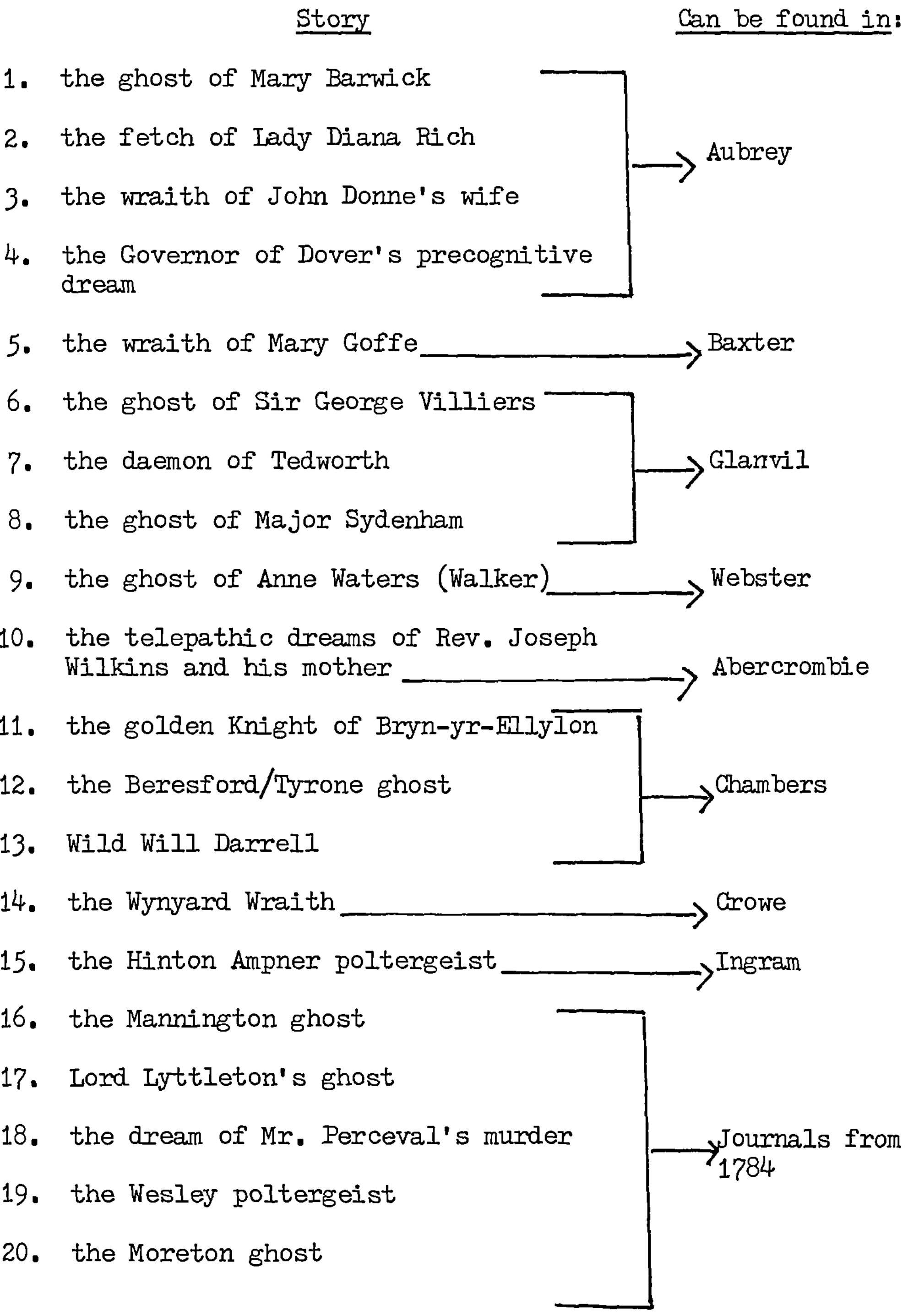
173 This review has not been able to consider compilations of belief not presented in the form of narrative, such as the classic collections of Brown, Hand, Hyatt, and Newman Ivey White (ed.), The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore (Durham, N. Carolina, 1964).

they are rarely challenged and are therefore taken to present a true picture of British ghostlore. The central core of this body of old narrative is twenty familiar tales, starting with eight from the earliest sources, then gradually gaining accretions from Abercombie, nineteenth century texts, and various journals from the latter half of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. These twenty stories are:



| | Story | Can be found in: |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | the ghost of Mary Barwick | Aubrey |
| 2. | the fetch of Lady Diana Rich | Aubrey |
| 3. | the wraith of John Donne's wife | Aubrey |
| 4. | the Governor of Dover's precognitive dream | Aubrey |
| 5. | the wraith of Mary Goffe | Baxter |
| 6. | the ghost of Sir George Villiers | Glanvil |
| 7. | the daemon of Tedworth | Glanvil |
| 8. | the ghost of Major Sydenham | Glanvil |
| 9. | the ghost of Anne Waters (Walker) | Webster |
| 10. | the telepathic dreams of Rev. Joseph Wilkins and his mother | Abercrombie |
| 11. | the golden Knight of Bryn-yr-Ellylon | Chambers |
| 12. | the Beresford/Tyrone ghost | Chambers |
| 13. | Wild Will Darrell | Chambers |
| 14. | the Wynyard Wraith | Crowe |
| 15. | the Hinton Ampner poltergeist | Ingram |
| 16. | the Mannington ghost | Journals from 1784 |
| 17. | Lord Lyttleton's ghost | Journals from 1784 |
| 18. | the dream of Mr. Perceval's murder | Journals from 1784 |
| 19. | the Wesley poltergeist | Journals from 1784 |
| 20. | the Moreton ghost | Journals from 1784 |

What these twenty famous narratives have in common is not that each is typical of the beliefs of its own or later ages, but that each combines at least two out of three of the following components: a cast of famous people; contemporary documentation; a suspenseful story-line. That is, these are good stories. It is neither necessary nor possible to argue from this that they are good illustrations of the folklore of ghosts. They have come to acquire that status simply by being repeated in preference to the banal and seemingly pointless personal experiences that often constitute the genuine expressions of a supernatural belief system.

The other strand which runs through all compilations from 1900 onwards comes from the regional folklore collections of the nineteenth century. So great has been the prestige of this early folkloristic work and so large and informative are their compilations that the beliefs recorded there have come to be regarded as the 'real' or 'traditional' folklore of ghosts for those areas. Certainly no book since has been completed without at least one reference to or illustration from one of these texts. Even if this work initially was conducted by means of scrupulous fieldwork (which is doubtful) and referred to traditions then living (again doubtful), it can in no way be regarded as always and necessarily representative of present day oral traditions. A reference to these texts is therefore now as much a literary reference as the quotation of one of the twenty famous narratives from older texts.

Basically, then, the received consensus about the folklore of ghosts follows two bookish traditions: one the core of old legends; the other the work of the nineteenth century collectors.

5. <u>The Concept of the Ghost from 1840</u>

It is interesting in this context to attempt to bring the history of ghost traditions as much up to date as possible.

It has been suggested that the post-Reformation years saw two essential changes in the ghost stereotype which substantially altered people's conception of the supernatural world. The first of these was the secularisation of the occult and the second the erosion of the concept of a purposeful supernatural system. During the last years of the sixteenth century the idea of ghosts motivated by religious concerns gradually lost its hold on the popular imagination, to be replaced during the seventeenth century with ghosts for which social concerns were paramount. At the same time certain purely materialistic purposeful behaviours (like guarding treasure) may have also dropped gradually from the stereotype. The end result was a decrease in the number and variety of purposeful life-like ghosts. Simultaneously various apparently purposeless and offensive types of ghost became more prominent, owing perhaps largely to the growing importance of related beliefs in witchcraft and possession.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries these changes seemed to continue. The number of purposeful, life-like ghosts seems to have been further restricted, whereas there appears to be a corresponding expansion of the malevolent or motiveless types of apparition. Two aspects of these changes deserve special mention. First, it seems that the idea of the dead being restless because they have to fulfil some errand is gradually replaced by the idea of <u>mere</u> restlessness. Secondly, concomitant with this movement is a gradual change from the idea of <u>people</u> being haunted to <u>places</u> being haunted.

The regional folklore collections of the late nineteenth century seem to substantiate these hypotheses. Writing between 1860 and the first world war, the majority of these researchers were actively in search of old and dying traditions. The lore they recorded may therefore be taken as best

representing aspects of rural beliefs of the middle or early years of the nineteenth century. Their work tends to show a multiplicity of the less purposeful and more terrifying types of apparition strongly associated with specific localities, plus a proliferation of elemental types such as boggarts and bogeys, formerly more typical of fairylore than ghostlore. In addition there are a vast number of animal ghosts, grotesqueries of various sorts, and the sort of aimless haunting ghost typified by white and grey ladies. This work tends to take account of country lore only, and to refer back to earlier belief traditions, and thus can supply only limited information about the development of ghost belief after 1840. The recent county folklore series, rather than initiating new fieldwork, has tended to rely heavily on earlier work. However, without up-to-date fieldwork it is impossible to tell whether the aspects of ghostlore highlighted by the nineteenth century collectanea have remained vital parts of folk traditions. Our information therefore effectively stops in the middle years of the last century.

Outside folkloristic literature there are some popular texts which, as we have seen, may well be able to tell researchers much about ghost beliefs in the first half of the present century. If this work is a reliable guide to the supernatural folklore of the age, it would appear that the concept of the life-like purposeful ghost has been further eroded and its function changed largely to the personal and domestic. The most common categories of purposeful ghosts would appear to be those that re-enact their own deaths, those that return for love of life and earthly things, and those that intervene for good in the domestic concerns of the living. The largest single group of apparitions, however, would appear to be both purposeless and neutral, wraiths of the newly dead in particular being a traditional ghost type brought to even greater prominence in present day beliefs. Apart from these life-like forms, there would seem to be

substantial numbers of non-human ghost types - animal, fiery or grotesque apparitions, spectres of 'ladies' or other mist-like forms, poltergeists and various bedtime disturbances including the traditional ghost fond of twitching bedclothes off the sleeper.

However, there are two drawbacks in using this literature to construct a history of the idea of the ghost. First, it cannot take us any nearer to the present than about 1950 and probably is more representative of traditions of the turn of the century; secondly, there is no folkloristic work to act as a check on its accuracy. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that since 1840 *more questions remain unanswered than have been* answered. There has been no recent study based on fieldwork among members of the majority culture in Britain to enable us to complete a history of ghost beliefs with any degree of reliability. Some of the questions which most need to be answered are still outstanding. Has the concept of the purposeful ghost now been completely eroded or has it changed direction slightly to assume a family or domestic role (as some popular literature might suggest)? How far is the concept of haunting now applied solely to specific locations? What aspects of the stereotype of a haunted house have remained constant? Of what does the experience of seeing a ghost consist in our culture? Is belief in the supernatural integrated into an overall philosophical system? and so on.

Ironically it is possible to answer some of these questions for earlier centuries but impossible to answer them for our own on the existing work into ghost traditions. The cause of this state of affairs is twofold: the failure to do fieldwork, and the reliance on the bookish "Two Traditions" approach.

With notably few exceptions,[174] modern British work has followed the bookish traditions, neither seeking new information in the field, nor querying the received conventions. Indeed, it has been so consistently the practice to adopt this approach that any modern collection which deviates from the pattern would probably be regarded as "not folklore". Amongst the volumes of folkloristic writings on the supernatural in the modern period, there are thus very few which genuinely reflect the folklore of the age. Students, scholars and general readers alike have been gulled into believing that the subject has been well-researched and supernatural traditions known, but all we have known has been the folklorists' own group-folklore of what constitutes the folklore of ghosts. How far that folklorists' folklore corresponds to the folk's folklore has yet to be established.

In conclusion, British folkloristic work on the supernatural since 1840 is of little value in determining modern folklore of ghosts. Its theoretical and methodological approaches are not beyond criticism and its assumptions about the content of our ghostlore are based on the literary "Two Traditions" approach, a reliance on legend as indicator of belief, and an almost total lack of fieldwork. It seems time both to put the theoretical assumptions to the test and to collect new and relevant data in the field.

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174 Sidney Oldall Addy, Folktales & Superstitions [Wakefield, 1973]. First published 1895; Katharine Briggs (ed.), Somerset Folklore (London, 1965); Ethel Rudkin, Lincolnshire Folklore [Wakefield, 1976]. First published 1936.

# CHAPTER 6

## Introduction to the Data:
## Patterns of belief and their narrative expression

## 1. The scope of belief in the supernatural among the women of the study group

Previous chapters have sought to show how ghost beliefs have changed and adapted to the dominant religious philosophy or social need of the age, and how far the literature of the period has reflected the lore. In particular, chapter 5 sought to demonstrate the perils of concentrating on legends and assuming that they are representative of supernatural lore for any community or time. In the almost total absence of field-based work on the supernatural, it is difficult to assess what the present state of belief in the occult among modern Britons actually is. Intuition suggests that belief is in general as strong as ever it was, but the exact nature of the supernatural beliefs held by mature members of society is difficult to guess. Sylvia Grider's work in the USA suggests that by the age of seven or eight most children have acquired knowledge of the full range of supernatural creatures and that the stereotypes are thus fixed mentally at a very early age.[1] In urban Western communities it is generally assumed that one will grow out of such childish 'superstitions'. What, however, will happen to the residual belief in the supernatural, how far will it diminish with increased age, and what forms will it take in later life? There is at present no serious folkloristic study to tell us. Neither is there sufficient information to be able to trace with any accuracy the development of the concept of the ghost from about the mid-nineteenth century. It is conventional to suggest,[2] in fact, that supernatural belief is on the decline. These conclusions, however, are based on documentary evidence gleaned for the most part from the pages of the Proceedings of the SPR. A very different picture might well have emerged if oral and folk materials had been consulted.

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1 Sylvia Grider, personal communication .

2 See Thomas (1971), pp. 602-606; and Finucane, pp. 217-224.

The present research seeks on a small scale to discover what supernatural traditions are believed today by a representative group of ordinary people. In addition it attempts to throw some light on the various relationships between belief and narrative and to study narrative form and content in these contexts. The results of the fieldwork and analysis will be presented below and in the remaining chapters.

First some general conclusions about the types of supernatural belief popular among the urban women who formed the study group for this work will be presented (and comparisons will be made where relevant with the more limited information available about the beliefs of men of comparable age, and of slightly younger women). It must, however, be remembered that the fieldwork was not designed as a formal survey of belief. Questions about supernatural traditions were used to elicit narrative and to set that narrative in context: as a survey of belief, the results are partial and at times somewhat impressionistic. The discussion which follows, therefore, is intended to supply a descriptive background for the more detailed analysis of following chapters: it should not be taken as statistically significant outside this context.

The second topic touched on in this chapter is the vexed question of how far narrative is a reliable index of belief and how in a given context narrative may be used in the discussion of matters of belief.

## 2. Background to the study: supernatural beliefs among members of the study group

2.1 Chapter 2 described how 132 informants were asked questions concerning ten topics of a supernatural or quasi-supernatural nature, how a homogeneous sample group of 87 retired women (60-90 years of age) was

selected, and how answers to the questions were scored along a five point scale from committed belief to convinced disbelief. It must again be stressed that questions asked in the interview were used to elicit conversation and narrative, not to construct a scientific picture of the state of supernatural belief. It is fair to say, however, that the interview technique afforded a better than average opportunity of assessing the degree of individual belief in any topic.

## 2.2 Typology

When the fieldwork was initially planned and the list of questions for discussion was drawn up, I relied on a set of ready-made popular and folkloristic categories. These fell into three overall types: beliefs about the presignification of future events (omens, premonitions, astrology, fortune telling); beliefs about spirits of the dead (life after death, revenants, poltergeists); and a miscellaneous grouping of popular traditions, beliefs and practices (UFOs and telepathy). Though in talk and discussion these categories were perfectly adequate for stimulating discussion and storytelling, later analysis revealed that the classification and terminology used in the community were rather different. The first thing to be learnt from a study such as this is that the fit between the conventional categories of academic folklorists (and of parapsychologists, psychologists and sociologists too) and a folk taxonomy is not good.

The most significant divergences between conventional categories and the women's own typology appear when beliefs about spirits of the dead and about the presignification of future events are discussed. Obviously some difficulties must arise simply because a single experience may be counted as belonging to two classes; for example an apparition may be both ghost and omen. Though such considerations make statistical mapping

tricky, they do not undercut the conventional categories. Elsewhere, however, confusion can arise. In discussing the presignification of future events, for example, the women of the study group do not draw the same distinctions between 'divination', 'premonitions' and 'omens' as a folklorist would: and in discussing the spirits of the dead, not only do they reject the term 'ghost' outright, and use the word 'poltergeist' in an idiosyncratic way, but the category of revenant in which they have most faith is one relatively unknown in the literature of the supernatural.

When considering premonitions and omens, the definitions in mind when the question-list was first drawn up were:

'Premonition' - a physical or mental state which signals danger, or direct knowledge intuitively transmitted.

'Omens' - abstract, arbitrary signs which, by custom, are associated with specific future events, particularly death.

The women's conversation soon revealed that these definitions - though they would probably be accepted by the majority of folklorists - were not always or clearly maintained by the informants themselves. For example, accounts of perceiving signs were not only given in response to questions about omens. Six women described such signs in their discussion of 'premonitions' (these included visionary dreams, disembodied voices, mysterious noises, déjà vu experiences), and another described such a sign as being given to her when she was reading the cards for a relative. She says:

> All I could see and all I could smell - All I could smell was flowers and all I could see was a coffin sitting there in the hall on a bier.

Conversely, the clearest account of a 'premonition' in the sense of a precognitive intuition occurred in answer to a question about omens.

Thus the terms 'omen' and 'premonition' seem on the whole to be used interchangeably. Where the two are differentiated, it is not on criteria a folklorist might use: what seems to happen is that if the event foreshadowed is a death, especially sudden death, then the sign or signal will be described as an 'omen'; if the event foreshadowed is death in the fulness of time, or a less serious fate such as accident, sickness or marriage, then the forewarning will be described as a 'premonition'. In brief: whereas a folklorist's definition of these classes will distinguish between them by virtue of the nature of the sign or signal, the popular definition distinguishes differences by virtue of the outcome, where it distinguishes at all.

Similarly, on the question of the spirits of the dead, significant and very interesting definitional and classificatory points became apparent during the course of the interviews. Originally the aim of the survey had been to discuss ghost belief. However, using the word 'ghost' seemed to frighten people and produced only negative replies. Either the term is non-functional in the community or its connotations are too alarming. By following the linguistic clues provided by informants, however, some progress can be made. The first clue was provided by one of the younger women, Molly, who in reply to a question about ghosts first hesitated, then redefined the question in terms of "spirits" and went on, "We lived once in a house that was spirited".[3] The second linguistic clue came from one of the oldest informants, Carrie, who followed a denial of belief in ghosts by the remark:

> It's funny, but whenever someone in our family is going to be ill or anything, my mother comes to me.[4]

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3 See below, chapter 7, p. 274 for a transcription of Molly's story.

4 For Carrie's story, see below, chapter 10, p. 470

Here, it seems, are two native categories: supernatural occupants of houses, and the family dead who "come to" the living. These are not, of course, the same as the conventional or academic categories. For example, in their authoritative text, Poltergeists, Gauld and Cornell spend some time presenting the results of a cluster analysis of 500 cases of poltergeist manifestations in an attempt to define the basic characteristics of the phenomenon. Their final cluster groups show patterns, on the one hand, of 'poltergeists' (short-lived, person-centred phenomena in which objects are displaced, thrown or carried through the air), and on the other of what they call 'hauntings' (long-lasting, primarily nocturnal, house-centred phenomena in which raps, imitative noises and voices are heard, phantasms and lights are seen, and doors open of their own accord).[5]

Apart from stressing house-centredness, the latter set of criteria would describe quite accurately the folklorist's conception of a 'ghost' (and most scholars would be happy with the distinction Gauld and Cornell draw between 'poltergeists' and 'ghosts' too). The taxonomy the Gatley women use, however, conflates these two categories and, instead of setting them in opposition to each other, sets them in opposition to a type of apparition - the apparition of a known and loved person. On the one hand, therefore, there are frightening supernatural occurrences or occupants of houses, and on the other, reassuring visitations from people who were loved in life and continue to be loved in death. Whatever the differences between academic and folk taxonomies, however, they do not obscure the general picture of belief in supernatural concepts among the study group.

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5 Alan Gauld and A.D. Cornell, Poltergeists (London, 1979), pp. 224-240.

## 2.3 Belief patterns

This picture is in many ways surprising. In the first place the women were less, rather than more, inclined to believe in 'safe' traditions such as astrology. In spite of the immense popular attention given to horoscopes and signs of the zodiac, and in spite of their apparently innocuous nature, only two percent of the women firmly believed that there was any truth in daily horoscopes and only fifteen percent thought that character might be determined by planetary influences. On the other hand there was a surprisingly high degree of belief in more controversial, less publicised traditions such as second sight. When discussing premonitions and omens, for example, nearly a third of the women spontaneously expressed a belief in second sight, using the concept as a received fact capable of explaining other phenomena. The possibility of quite ordinary people having foresight into or forewarnings of the future was discounted by very few respondents (only thirty-one percent were sceptical about omens and only eleven percent doubtful about premonitions). Most of the women claimed to have had such forewarnings on at least one occasion and many said they were themselves "a little bit psychic". Belief in psychic powers was in general high; sixty-seven percent of the women, for example, believed in telepathy and claimed some limited power of telepathic communication with husbands or daughters. Nobody at all was prepared to deny categorically that such things might happen.

Another surprising aspect of the women's ideology was the prevalence of belief in traditional signs of death or danger. Where they were reported such warnings took the familiar forms of mysterious tappings, breakages, the scent of flowers, dreams, visions, apparitions, phantom footsteps and sightings of the 'Angel of Death'. A significant number of women (twenty-three) reported having seen an apparition, and as many as

forty-four percent had a convinced belief that the dead could "come to" their living relatives. Similarly, many women (fourteen percent) firmly believed that a house could be haunted, and only twenty-six percent were sceptical or disbelieving in the face of reports of poltergeists. It is particularly interesting to note that eleven percent referred in this context to the "feel" of a house, to its having a (un)pleasant atmosphere left from previous occupants, or to its being a "happy" or "unhappy" house. It is perhaps not fanciful to suppose that this is a last remnant of traditions of household spirits, for these references to "unhappy" or "happy" houses were given in the context of discussions of poltergeists and spirits.

The table below charts these findings schematically. The ten topics for discussion are listed horizontally, the degree of belief vertically. Chapter 2, Section 4.2 explained how the degree of belief an informant accorded to a topic was placed on a five point scale from utter scepticism to firm belief. At one extreme of this continuum, respondents express convinced belief through phrases such as "I firmly believe that". Slightly less conviction (termed below "some belief") is expressed in a variety of ways:- "Not really, but", "Possibly there's something _in_ that", "I _think_ there _could_ be", and so on. The middle point of the scale is reserved for the genuinely doubtful who reply with a crisp, "I don't _know_", or a more hesitant, "I get a bit mixed up about that". Finally there are two categories of scepticism. "Some scepticism" is indicated by phrases such as "I don't _think_ so, _really_", whereas "convinced disbelief" is shown by hearty laughter and energetic disclaimers, like "I don't believe in _that_!" The incidence of belief is calculated as a percentage of the total number of replies on each subject.

TABLE 1: To show relative frequency of occurrence of five degrees of belief, with relationship to ten topics, expressed as a percentage

No. of replies:

| Topic | No. of replies | Percentages (top to bottom of column) |
|---|---|---|
| horoscopes | 87 | 24, 40, 06, 25, 02 |
| life on other planets/UFOs | 50 | 40, 20, 14, 22, 02 |
| fortunetelling | 53 | 64, 11, 09, 15 |
| birth signs | 60 | 23, 33, 08, 18, 15 |
| poltergeists | 47 | 14, 12, 19, 27, 11, 14 |
| omens | 60 | 23, 08, 13, 30, 25 |
| premonitions | 69 | 07, 04, 10, 34, 43 |
| revenants | 67 | 14, 10, 13, 16, 44 |
| telepathy | 47 | 10, 08, 12, 14, 53 |
| "meet again" after death | 31 | 16, 12, 12, 58 |

Key: convinced belief | some belief | unsure/ don't know | some scepticism | convinced disbelief

In interpreting the tables, it must be remembered that:

1. The classes and terminology used are those originally conceived at the beginning of the fieldwork and do not correspond in all respects to native categories;

2. In particular the classes of omen and premonition are not always distinct in the women's taxonomy. In preparing the table I have therefore kept to the informant's own terminology and not attempted to assign beliefs to categories on the basis of my own definitions. If a respondent said she believed in "premonitions", though she then described what I would call an omen, she was still assessed as believing in premonitions;

3. The women use the term 'poltergeist' as synonymous with 'evil spirit': they may also use the word 'ghost' or refer to 'things in houses'. The term in general refers to evil supernatural beings or occurrences in houses. (The figure of eleven percent in the lower quarter of the table quantifies those who have a related belief in 'happy' or 'unhappy' houses);

4. The term 'revenants' applies only to those comforting apparitions of dead relatives which the women spoke of. There may be other categories of revenants in the women's belief system, but, as they were never spontaneously mentioned, this line of questioning was never pursued. The terms 'poltergeist' and 'revenant' as used here are therefore mutually exclusive: they represent opposed poles of supernatural experience, the malevolent and the benevolent.

## 2.4 Comparisions with previous studies

The most interesting aspects of these findings are revealed when they are compared with the findings of impersonal surveys. Such studies, large-scale as well as small-scale, have been undertaken since

at least 1886. In that year Gurney et al.[6] published the results of their massive survey, Phantasms of the Living, based on 17,000 replies to a written questionnaire. Nothing on a similar scale was attempted, so far as I am aware,[7] until Gorer included questions on ghosts, palmreading and horoscopes in the nationwide questionnaire on which Exploring English Character (1955)[8] is based, and the Leeds Religious Survey of 1982-3 asked respondents about life after death, ghosts, telepathy, clairvoyance, fortune-telling and horoscopes in its survey of common and conventional religious belief in Leeds.[9] Small-scale surveys into 'superstition' among students have been conducted by Nixon (1925),[10] Ralya (1945),[11] Levitt (1952)[12] and Warburton (1956).[13] These studies examined beliefs in astrology and fortune telling.

Four out of six of these studies are in general agreement about the levels of belief in astrology and palmreading, and their findings accord well with the figures obtained in the present work. For astrology, for example, Gorer found twenty percent belief; the Leeds religious survey fourteen percent; Nixon twenty-nine percent; Ralya eighteen.[14] Among the

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6 Gurney, Myers and Podmore (1880).

7 Except the discredited "Census of Hallucinations", Sidgewick, Johnson, et al.

8 Gorer (1955).

9 Towler et al.

10 Nixon (1925).

11. Ralya (1945).

12 Levitt (1952).

13 Warburton (1956).

14 Jahoda also refers to a German study (Schmidtchen, 1957) which gives a figure of 29% belief in astrology, Jahoda, p. 31. However, two of the six studies (that is, Levitt's and Warburton's) show much lower levels of belief. (Levitt shows 7% belief in astrology and 5% belief in fortune telling; Warburton 6% belief in each.) Differences may be due to methodology or sampling.

women of the study group, figures are twenty-seven percent belief in horoscopes and thirty-three percent in birth signs (that is, taking percentages for 'firm belief' and 'some belief' together). On fortune-telling Gorer records thirty percent belief; thirty-five percent of the Leeds respondents believed they had had fortunes correctly told; Nixon found twenty-five percent belief; and Ralya twenty percent. Among the present study group the numbers of convinced and partial believers together were estimated as twenty-four percent of the total respondents. The table below summarises these figures for easy comparison:

TABLE 2: Comparison of percentage belief in astrology and fortune telling in 5 studies

| | Study: | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Topic | Gorer | Leeds 1982-3 | Nixon | Ralya | Gatley 1981 |
| Astrology → horoscopes | 20 | 14 | 29 | - | 27 |
| Astrology → birth signs | - | - | | 18 | 33 |
| Fortune telling | 30 | 35 | 25 | 20 | 24 |

Comparative figures are not available for belief in life after death, UFOs, telepathy and premonitions except from the Leeds survey which reports forty percent belief in life after death, sixty-one percent belief in telepathy and fifty-four percent belief in clairvoyance. All these figures are rather below those obtained in Gatley.

TABLE 3: Comparison of percentage belief in life-after-death, telepathy and clairvoyance in Leeds study and present work

| | Study: | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Topic | Leeds | Gatley | Topic |
| life after death | 40 | 70 | life after death |
| telepathy | 61 | 67 | telepathy |
| clairvoyance | 54 | 55 | omens |
| | | 77 | premonitions |

## 2.5 Interpretation

### 2.5.1 Methodology

The higher incidence of belief found among the Gatley women may be attributed in part or whole to three factors:

1. The members of the study group were nearly all churchgoers. Incidence of belief in life after death would naturally be higher among such a group than in the community as a whole.
2. The study group were elderly women whereas the Leeds survey attempted to interview a cross-section of the population. It is possible that belief in mysterious psychic forces is higher among the elderly or among women.
3. The information for the present work was gained in face-to-face, informal, oral interviews. It is possible that the greater formality of the Leeds interviews had an inhibiting effect on affirmations of belief.

Though doubtless the first two factors are influential, the third nevertheless appears to be the most significant. This is particularly apparent when figures for ghost belief are compared.

TABLE 4: Comparison of percentage belief in ghosts in four studies

| Study | % belief in 'ghosts' |
|---|---|
| Gurney et al. | 10 |
| Gorer | 17 |
| Leeds 1982-3 | 36 |
| Gatley 1981 | 41 'poltergeists'<br>70 'revenants' * |

* NOTE - These percentages conflate 'convinced belief' and 'some belief'.

This table makes it quite plain that the more distant and impersonal the study, the lower the percentage of respondents who admit to believing that spirits of the dead may remain active in their former domain. Gurney, Myers and Podmore's survey was both huge and impersonal: the data were written replies to a written question. Gorer's work was also nationwide and based on a written questionnaire. The Leeds study used a questionnaire administered by fieldworkers. Once a face-to-face, oral element is introduced into a survey (however formal the resulting interview) the percentage of those admitting to beliefs in ghosts immediately goes up - compare, for example, the ten and seventeen percent belief recorded by Gurney et al. and Gorer respectively, and the thirty-six percent belief recorded in Leeds. In the Gatley fieldwork the proportion of affirmative responses is still higher, forty-one percent of respondents showing some measure of belief in 'poltergeists', seventy percent in 'revenants'.

In part, too, the higher percentage of belief recorded must be due to the method of scoring belief. For computerised statistical work such as that in Leeds, respondents must be pressed to answer clearly "yes" or

"no": categories of partial belief or disbelief are not allowed. Yet most people prefer to be left to phrase answers with a little face-saving ambiguity. Pressing a respondent who answers "Not really but" to say whether this means "yes" or "no" will usually result in a "no", though this may be far from the truth. In larger part, however, differences in the findings of this and other work must be due to the terminology and categories used in the eliciting question-schedule. Both Gorer and Towler et al. asked respondents whether they believed in 'ghosts'. The field-work in Gatley clearly showed that for the average person this particular term is heavily saturated with negative connotations - ghosts are evil and belief in them superstitious. Fieldwork in a formal survey using pre-planned questions could neither learn that this was so nor substitute a more 'user-friendly' word.

Asking people whether they believe in 'ghosts' can give no true indication of whether they believe that the dead may return to this world. This is particularly apparent if one compares the incidence of belief in 'poltergeists' recorded among the Gatley women and the incidence of belief in 'revenants'. The word 'poltergeist' is synonymous both with 'evil spirit' and with 'ghost' in their terminology. Only forty-one percent[15] of informants believed, or would admit to believing, in such malevolent phenomena, but they did believe in and were happy to talk about encounters with the beneficent dead, apparently classing these as natural, not supernatural, occurrences - certainly not as encounters with 'ghosts': ghosts and the benevolent dead are for them mutually exclusive concepts.

The main lesson to be learnt is that in the study of matters of belief, the more delicate the subject matter, the more essential it is to

15 This is quite close to the Leeds figure of 36%.

conduct fieldwork on a friendly face-to-face basis. Not only does such a context seem more natural to informants and lessens the need for purely conventional replies whilst giving the confidence necessary for frank and truthful answers, it allows the researcher to adapt his/her own terminology and taxonomy to fit that of the community whose beliefs are being investigated. Without this monitoring and adjustment the researcher on the one hand receives a falsely high incidence of negative replies to his/her pre-planned questions and on the other hand never discovers which types of belief are transmitted and functional. It is possible that the incidence of belief in the return of the dead is even higher than the present work shows. Though the atmosphere in which the interviews were conducted was as relaxed as possible, it was still subject to various contextual limitations. First and most obviously, though I was vouched for by a trusted (and present) third party, I was not myself personally known to the respondents. Neither was I of the same generation and could not be expected to have had the same sort of experience of bereavement. There were also constraints of time and situation. These contextual artificialities together might have lowered the incidence of expressed belief.

### 2.5.2 Age and sex factors

Of course, it is still possible that beliefs in psychic powers and the ability of the dead to return to this life are age and sex related. Though the numbers of men and younger women interviewed in Gatley are too small to provide adequate control groups, they may yet be useful in suggesting possible patterns which might be discovered in a more representative sample. The incidence of belief among the study group was therefore compared with the incidence of belief in the small contrasting groups.

A comparison of belief between younger and older women in particular proves interesting. Though younger women tend to believe in a wider range of phenomena than older women, they tend to express their belief less positively and there are differences of emphasis too. Among the younger women, as among older ones, there is a high level of belief in premonitions. Unlike the older women, however, the younger age-group place some faith in mechanical, non-intuitive methods of discovering the future. Their beliefs in fortune-telling for example is .19 higher than older women's. What is particularly surprising about this is that they place most trust not in the popular and widespread practices of astrology but in old-fashioned methods of determining the future such as palmistry and teacup reading. The ideas rejected most often by younger women, yet accepted for the most part by older women, were omens and an afterlife in which we will "meet again". It seems that most younger women would agree with the lady who said that she did not "go in for signs and wonders".

A very different pattern emerges when the beliefs of retired women are compared with the beliefs of retired men. With three exceptions, the men are noticeably unwilling to accept any of the lore as reliable, the contrast between men's and women's attitudes being most marked on the subject of the return of the family dead (among men this belief occurs with a frequency of only .10; among their wives with a frequency of .60). Of the three exceptions, the high incidence among men of belief in an afterlife where we will meet again, probably reflects their conventional piety; belief in omens and premonitions is, however, also high - belief in premonitions is almost as common among men as among women, and belief in omens even more common.

It appears, then, that the incidence of belief in traditional supernatural concepts may be, to a degree, age and sex related. What emerges

from a comparision of men's and younger women's beliefs is that there is:

1. <u>A central belief common to all</u>.

   Precognition, in the form of the ubiquitous premonition, is recognised as highly probable by both age groups of women and by older men.

2. <u>A belief common to older people</u>.

   Omens of death in their traditional form of tappings, the scent of flowers, apparitions and breakages seem generally accepted as fact by both men and women of pensionable age. Perhaps the belief in an after life in which we will meet again should be included here too. In order to be sure, however, that this is a widespread belief I should have been happier if the sample had not been so fortuitously slanted in favour of the conventionally religious.

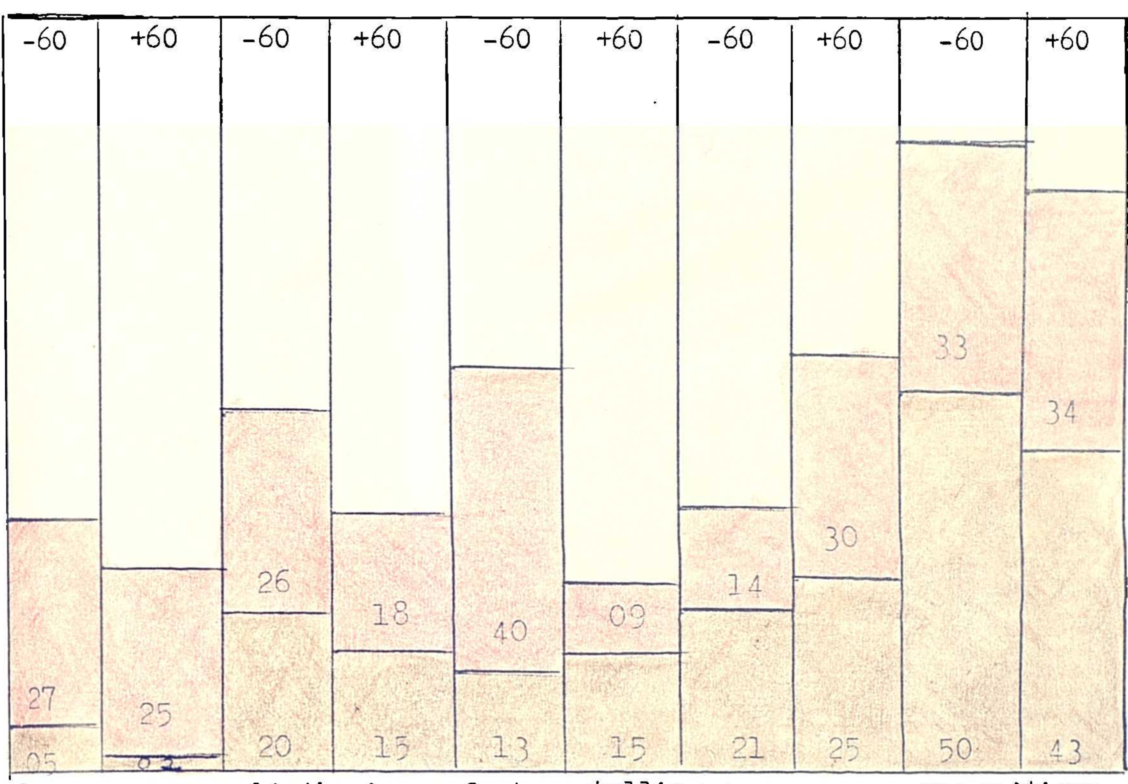
3. <u>Beliefs common to women</u>.

   A significant proportion of all women had a measure of belief in the return of the family dead, in poltergeists or other types of spirit, and in telepathy.

These patterns may very well be worth testing in a large-scale survey, for they suggest intriguing questions about social conditioning, age and (perhaps) education.

The differences in belief between younger and older, men and women are summarised in the following tables.

TABLE 5: Women over 60 years and women 40-60 years, compared for degrees of belief

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31
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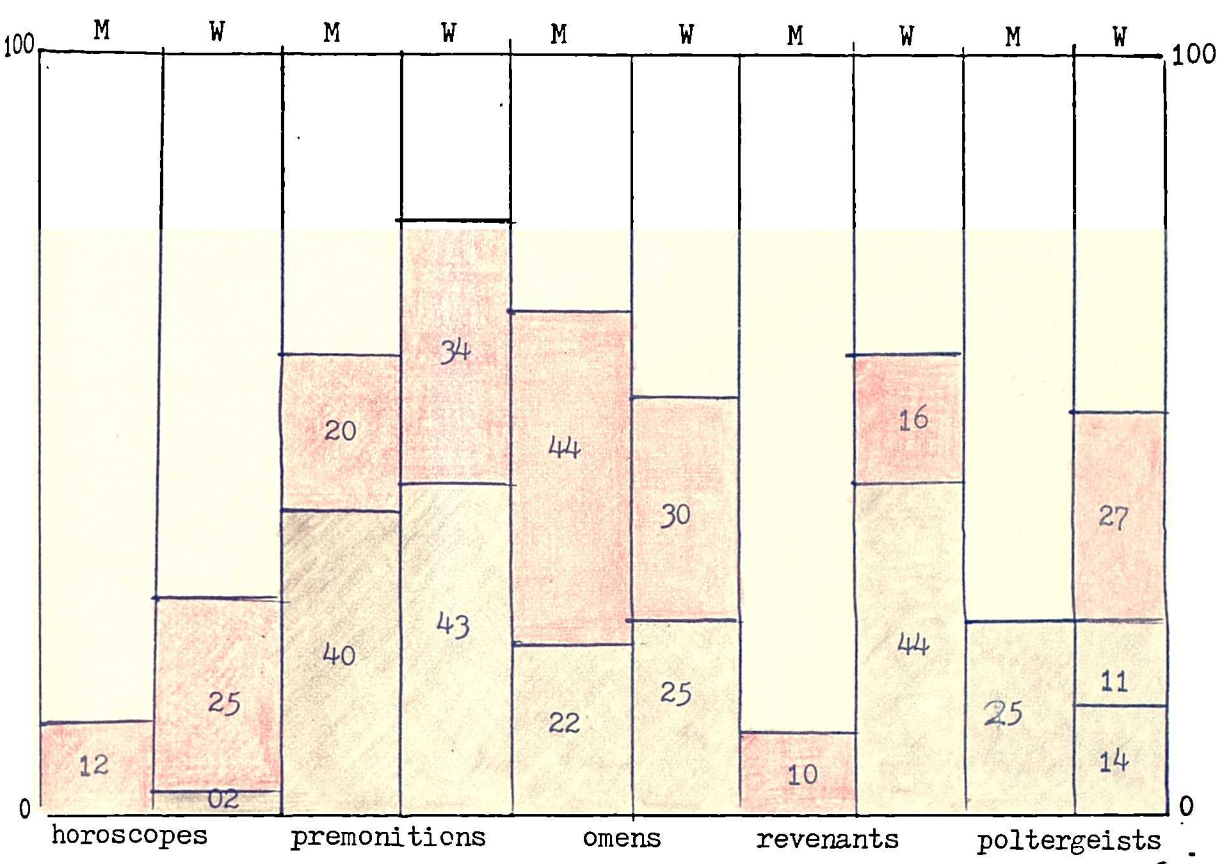
58

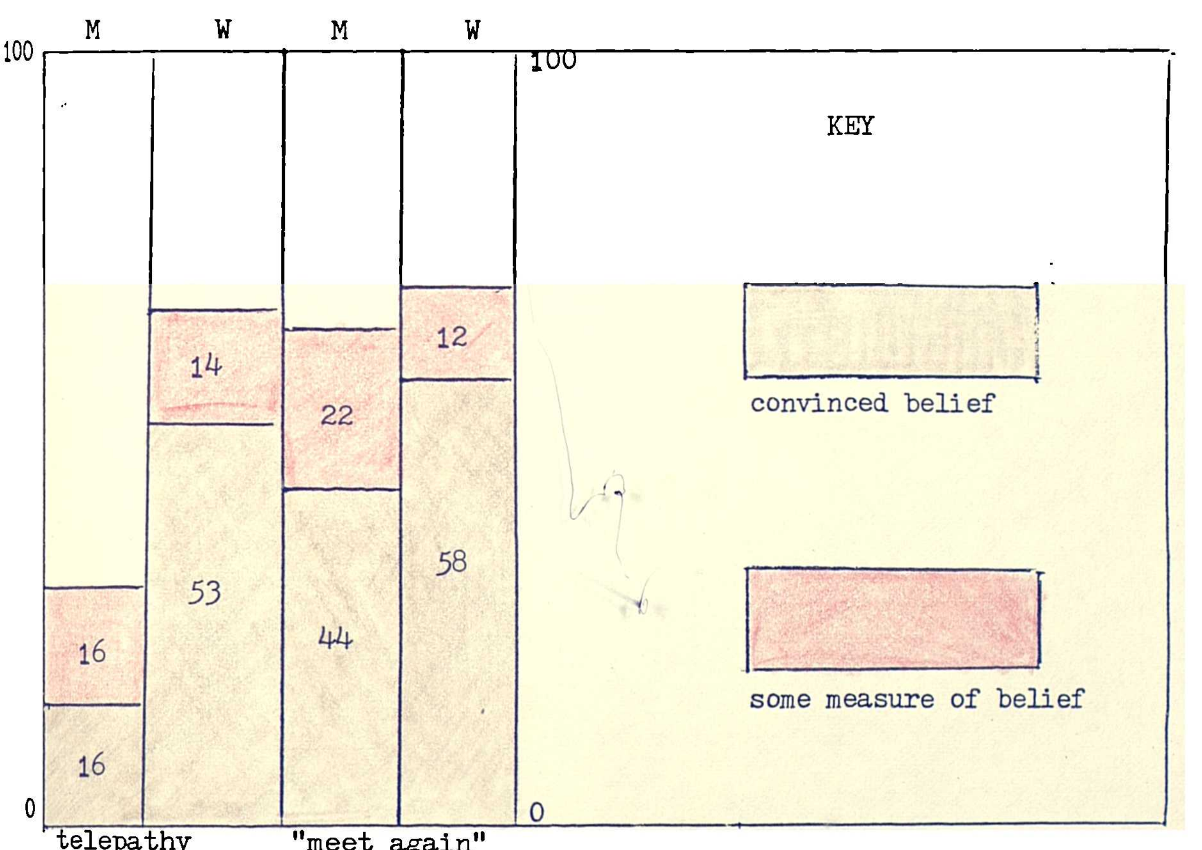
revenants poltergeists UFOs (life on other planets) telepathy "meet again"

Key:

convinced belief some measure of belief

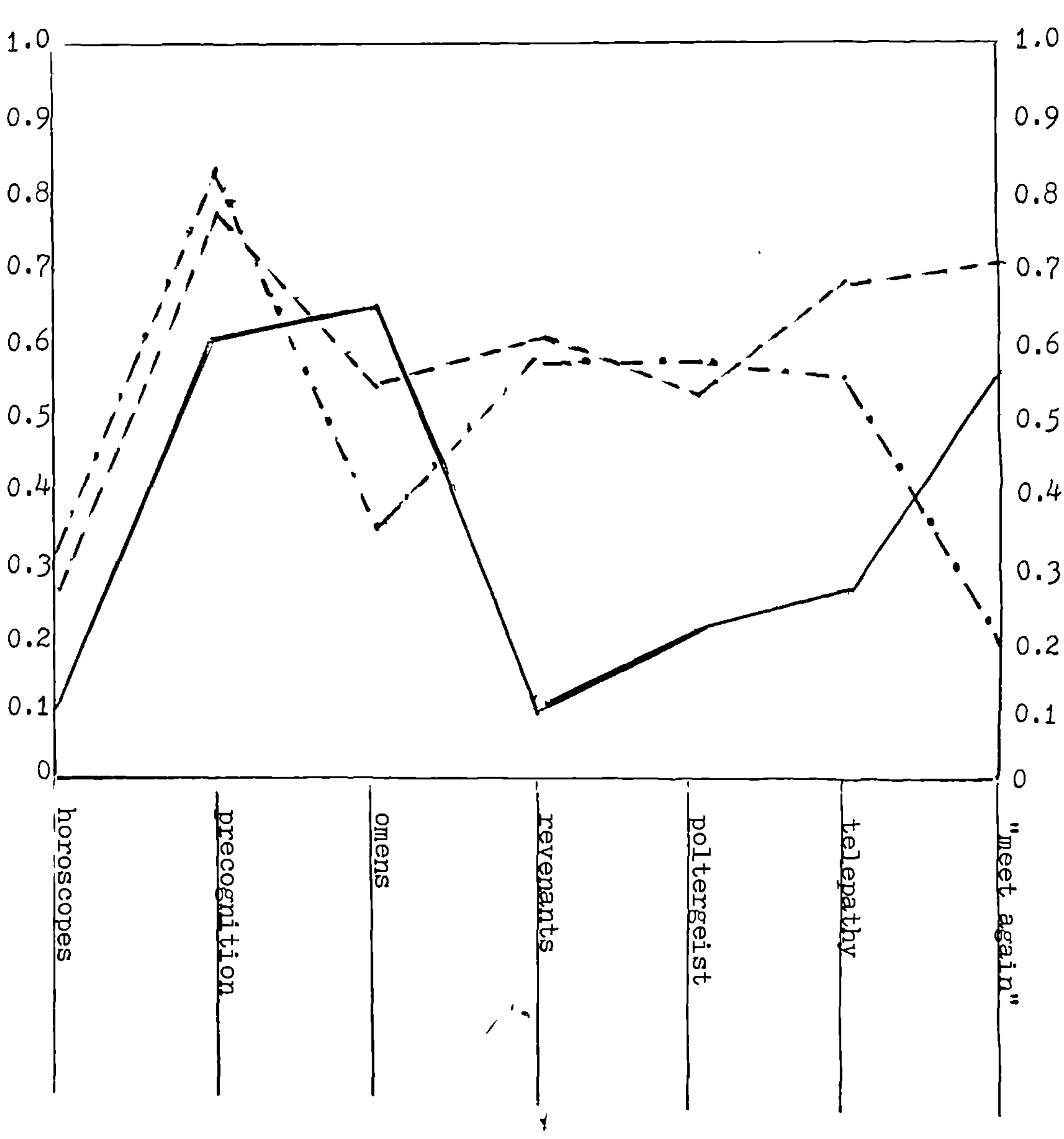
TABLE 6: Women of 60 years and men of 65 years and over, compared for degrees of belief accorded each of 7 topics*




NOTE: there were so few responses by men to questions about birthsigns, UFOs and fortunetelling, as to make meaningful figures impossible.

TABLE 7: to compare frequency of belief among men of 65 years and over, women of 60 years and over, and women of 40-60 years, over 7 topics



2.6 Summary

The conclusions one is compelled to draw are similar to those drawn by Jahoda in his study of superstition. He writes:

> There is clearly a substantial minority of the general population in England ... (and probably in other European countries as well) who hold decidedly superstitious beliefs. Moreover, detailed breakdowns according to social background of the informants indicate that such beliefs are by no means confined to the poor and ignorant.
>
> [ ... ]
>
> If one takes into account the fact that people are apt to be somewhat shamefaced about superstition and liable to deny holding any such beliefs when faced with a strange interviewer, the evidence becomes even more impressive. Superstition is still very much with us, and it is even possible that some forms of it may be on the increase. Therefore it is well worth trying to understand the nature of this complex phenomenon, which is a general human one not confined to distant peoples. 16

Exchange the word 'superstition' in these lines for a more general term implying fewer value-judgements and one would have an apt resumé of the raison d'être for studies such as the present.

## 3. Metaphysical, moral and social factors in belief

3.1 Jahoda is undeniably right when he says that "the complex phenomenon" of belief is "well worth trying to understand", and it would be unsatisfactory not to make at least some broad interpretive comments about the women's philosophy and attitude to life. In general their beliefs on the specific questions asked in the interview must be put in the context

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16 Jahoda, pp. 25-26.

of any information which can be gleaned about their metaphysical, moral and social values.

### 3.2 Metaphysical factors

As the specific questions about supernatural traditions were asked in the context of an informal, often rambling, conversation, it was possible to glean substantial amounts of information about the attitudes and orientations of the women. In particular, it was interesting to find that among the study group of women the acceptance or non-acceptance of the idea of 'revenants' is critical in determining whether an individual will have a high or low level of belief overall. Women who believe in revenants usually answer at least five other questions affirmatively, whereas those who reject belief in revenants also reject at least five other concepts. The beliefs of women who are genuinely in doubt about revenants are unpredictable on other topics too. Hence, crudely speaking, the women fall into three overall types:

(a) 'believers' - those who believe in revenants and at least five other concepts (43 women)

(b) 'sceptics' - those who disbelieve in revenants and reject at least five other concepts (27 women)

(c) 'neutrals' - don't knows and mixed types (17 women)

Within the larger of these overall groups, divisions of attitude and philosophy can be detected. 'Believers' have a mystical, 'sceptics' a mechanical, view of the world. For 'believers' the world is a semi-magical place, as their favourite expressive formulae show:

> "The world's a great study and a great puzzle "
>
> "There are more things in Heaven and Earth - "
>
> "The world's so wonderful, isn't it? And we just don't know what there is "

> "There is far more than we are ready to know yet."
>
> "It's such a beautiful, wonderful universe, anything is possible."

Those who formulate this world view in terms of God seem to see the world's strangeness and infinite possibilities in terms of unrevealed order. Though the world is incapable of being understood and is perpetually surprising, it is nevertheless an integrated and purposeful one and guidance, help and divine providence mitigate the worst excesses of ignorance and chance. Though all the women in this group profess adherence to the tenets of the Church of England or other mainstream religious groups, elements from other religions and sects form a stable part of their faith. The belief in reincarnation is particularly dominant, notably in its Buddhistic form of infinite progression towards perfection. Again, the doctrine of personal revelation and divine intervention borrowed from evangelical and fundamentalist sects is a frequent aspect of their thinking. For these women, it would seem, academic distinctions between the natural and the supernatural, the normal and the paranormal are virtually meaningless. All believe in an after-life in which we "will meet again", and this view informs a world-view in which "the dead never leave" them, and the boundary between the mundane and the spiritual world is a flexible one.

Alternatively women may have a great sense of the world's mystery and not formulate their philosophy in theistic terms. Rather than seeing a world in which "God moves in a mysterious way", they see a world of psychic wonders. These different emphases/interpretations are particularly apparent when attitudes to life after death and the return of the dead are discussed. Theistic women exhibit convinced belief in both matters: women who see the world as mysterious, yet do not seem to need the concept of a Prime Mover to make it intelligible (or do not need the concept of order at all?), tend to express only qualified belief in revenants and life after death. On the other hand they are convinced about the possibility

of premonitions and other forms of forewarning, second sight, telepathy, and - inconsistently - the validity of mediumship and what, in an earlier age, Cotton Mather called "spectre sightedness".[17] Many of these women claimed to be "a little bit psychic" and several said that they had been offered the chance to train as mediums (a chance all had declined). Invariably these were women of great intellectual curiosity, open-minded and discursive. The dominant impression one receives about women of this sort is that their psychic-ness is a substitute for religion and considered to be something of a social accolade.

For both theistic and psychic women their mysticism allows a relaxed acceptance of life's oddities, the onslaught of fate and the chaos of the material world. 'Sceptics', on the other hand, have a mechanical world view which does not admit disorder. It stamps order on chaos either by ignoring it (the materialistic attitude) or by denying it (the determinist attitude).

The women's determinism makes the world mechanical by presupposing an immutable divine plan. Life is a machine which has been set in motion, and, once running, cannot be stopped. There is no result to be gained nor purpose served by astrology or by fortunetelling. Though the future is ordained, it <u>is</u> the future and therefore cannot be apprehended in the present, hence there can be no possibility of omens or precognition. No jot of one's fate can be altered: warnings, prophecies or helpful revenants are therefore irrelevant, and therefore nonexistent. This gloomy Knoxian doctrine is widely held not only by the sole Scottish Presbyterian in the study group but also by members of the Church of England and by those who do not actively profess any religion - another example of an imported

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17 See Beaumont on Mather. Beaumont, pp. 129-142.

doctrine which yet constitutes an important ingredient of popular religious belief. This attitude is summed up neatly in Evelyn's words:

> My father used to say that from the moment you're born to the moment you die, your life is mapped out for you. He says nothing will alter it.

'Deterministic' women in the study group are resolute, stoical and unflinchingly negative in their attitude to the supernatural: on the other hand, 'materialistic' women refuse to be drawn into thinking about it at all. They say they do not "go in for it", they do not "bother with it", they do not "believe in delving". Their approach to life, they say, is to "take one day at a time", to "meet troubles when they come" and so on. This group of women is little inclined to talk in abstract terms at all. However, phrases such as those quoted and self-descriptions such as, "I'm a day-to-day person" and "I'm not fanciful, I'm more practical" are used to suggest the philosophy. Grimes notes that:

> ... the handling of the structure of explanation actually sheds light on the depth and sensitivity of the speaker's estimate of who the hearer is. 18

In this way, he notes, explanations tend to contain as little information and to have as uncomplex a structure as the speaker thinks (s)he can get away with. The belief system may be rich and complicated and the number of logical steps in it may be considerable if they were traced out fully, but unless a speaker foresees some misunderstanding (s)he can be counted on only "to hit the high spots" of the argument. A speaker will count on the hearer to have most of the elements and relations of the argument already present in his/her head, "so that touching a few points is sufficient to activate the whole logical structure".[19] Therefore although brief phrases are all the explanation this group of women typically give, to a

18 Grimes, p. 57.

19 Grimes, p. 58.

sharer of the same cultural assumptions the outlines of the philosophy are apparent: their attitude is one of 'naive realism' (to adopt the terminology of metaphysics), in which discrepant experiences are denied or corrected by the application of simple rules of commonsense, so that the world can be made a fairly reliable "machine for living in".[20]

Belief in the topics covered by the interviews - astrology, fortune-telling, premonitions, omens, revenants, poltergeists, telepathy and UFOs - therefore is seen to flourish best within (or be a symptom of) a broadly-speaking mystical world view, a philosophy in which Chance and Disorder are recognised but considered unthreatening because they are part of a hidden benevolent pattern. This perhaps accounts for the prevalence of helpful revenants in their philosophy (see ch. 7 below), the absence of clues to belief in more conventional ghosts, and the comparatively low incidence of belief in poltergeists.

## 3.3 Moral Factors

A second factor which helps towards an understanding of the distribution of belief among the study group might be broadly termed 'moral'. The degree of belief likely to be accorded to any traditional supernatural concept appears to depend on:

(a) how far its basis is intuition;

(b) how far it is other-person orientated;

(c) how far it reflects a 'safe' world.

It would appear that among the Gatley women a belief is accepted more readily if it depends upon the utilising of qualities such as insight, imagination and intuition; if it enhances or extends interpersonal relationships; and if it gives reassurance of the goodness of God and Man. Among the Gatley women belief was highest in phenomena that were intuitive,

20 The phrase is, of course, Le Corbusier's architectural maxim.

interpersonal and safe; lowest in dangerous physical phenomena that had no apparent relevance to the individual in her relationships with others.

(a) the first axis

The perception of revenants, as the study group defines them, is primarily intuitive rather than physical and so are experiences of receiving or interpreting premonitions and omens of the future. So also are telepathic powers. In contrast to these subjective experiences, they feel that poltergeists and UFOs are objectively verifiable happenings; similarly the practices of fortunetelling and astrology rely on skill in interpreting objective physical signs.

(b) the second axis

Telepathy and revenants are interpersonal concepts and a life after death is conceived of in terms of meeting loved ones again. Alternatively it may be the object of the experience which is interpersonal. Premonitions and omens, for example, concern the fate of another person, not one's own (in contrast to the predictions of fortunetelling and astrology which feature one's own, private future).

(c) the third axis

The visitations of revenants reflect the goodness of God; poltergeists are the manifestations of evil spirits. The idea of life on other planets threatens the perceived world order; the concept of life after death consolidates it. As far as premonitions and omens are differentiated, they are differentiated according to the dangerousness of their outcome - it is 'safer' to have a premonition than an omen in the sense that it has less serious consequences. One can chart the concepts along the intuitive, the interpersonal and the safety axes as follows:

Figure 1

| Intuitive/subjective | Objective/physical |
| --- | --- |
| revenants<br>telepathy<br>premonitions/omens<br>after-life | poltergeists<br>astrology<br>UFOs |

Figure 2

| Interpersonal | Private/individual |
| --- | --- |
| revenants<br>telepathy<br>premonitions/omens<br>after-life | poltergeists<br>astrology<br>fortunetelling<br>UFOs |

Figure 3

| Safety | Danger |
| --- | --- |
| revenants<br>telepathy<br>premonitions<br>after-life | poltergeists<br><br>omens<br>UFOs |

The degree of belief accorded to any of these concepts can be predicted by its position on the axes. Sixty percent or more of the study group believed in revenants, telepathy, premonitions and life after death, all of which are intuitive, interpersonal concepts that encourage a feeling that the world is safe and good. At the other end of the scale less than

a quarter of the women believed in UFOs, a notion which both threatens the idea that the world is knowable and safe and also records objective happenings of (usually) a purely private nature. Between these two extremes lie beliefs in fortunetelling, astrology (horoscopes and birthsigns), poltergeists and omens. Private, non-intuitive practices like those of astrology and fortunetelling are accorded belief by less than a third of the study group: it is interesting to note in this context that many women found these practices threatening in that they involve "delving" for hidden knowledge.[21] Slightly more women (about half those asked) were more prepared to believe in poltergeists - on the 'wrong' end of the axis on all counts but at least unsought encounters with the supernatural. Rather more still (fifty-five percent) were prepared to accept omens - dangerous in consequence, but at least other-person centred, unsought and intuitive experiences. These ratios and correspondences are shown in Table 8 below:

Table 8

| Concept | % belief in study group | intuitive? | inter-personal? | safe? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| premonitions | 77 | yes | yes | yes |
| 'meet again' | 70 | yes | yes | yes |
| telepathy | 67 | yes | yes | yes |
| revenants | 60 | yes | yes | yes |
| omens | 55 | yes | yes | no |
| haunting | 52 | no | no | no |
| birthsigns | 33 | no | no | no |
| horoscopes | 27 | no | no | no |
| divination | 24 | no | no | no |
| UFOs | 24 | no | no | no |

21 For this term, see below, chapter 8, pp.360-4 and chapter 9,

It would seem, then, that the acceptability of a given concept depends to a large extent on its morality in the women's eyes. That morality is dependent on their perception of women's 'proper' role and persona (as caring, unselfish, intuitive and unaggressive in the pursuit of knowledge), and in their need to see the world as the sphere for the operation of God's goodness and human kindness. If a concept challenges these views, it is unlikely to be accepted.

## 3.4 Social factors

Many social factors in the lives of elderly women might be considered potentially capable of predisposing them to a belief in traditional supernatural concepts. Age and sex apart, the circumstances in their lives which might be particularly relevant are, of course, widowhood, social isolation, and the loss of family ties. Such conditions might be specially important in leading elderly women towards belief in the return of the family dead, for instance. As interpersonal relationships are plainly a significant factor in the women's philosophies and moral values, it might be supposed that belief in revenants would flourish most vividly in the minds of widows and those living alone - that lacking the love and companionship of the living, they should turn to the dead for comfort.

Attractive and plausible though these suggestions are, they are not borne out at all in the fieldwork and analysis. When a woman's readiness to believe in revenants is set beside social factors such as age, marital status and domestic situation, no clear pattern emerges. Readiness to believe in revenants does not increase with age and it is not more observable in widows and those living alone. The table below shows the incidence of belief in revenants first according to age, then according to marital status, and thirdly according to domestic situation (that is, whether respondents live alone or not).

TABLE 9: To show correlations of belief in revenants with 3 social factors - age, marital status and domestic situation

A. Age

| Incidence of belief | Age group |
|---|---|
| 83% | 80-90 years |
| 54% | 70-80 years |
| 65% | 60-70 years |

B. Marital status

| Incidence of belief | Marital status |
|---|---|
| 68% | married |
| 41% | single |
| 64% | widowed |

C. Domestic situation

| Incidence of belief | Domestic situation |
|---|---|
| 68% | living with family/ friends |
| 54% | living alone |

Though there does not therefore appear to be any simple correlation between social circumstances and belief in revenants, there is one very significant aspect of social and family life which does seem very strongly to predispose women towards belief in the return of the family dead. This is simply that when ties of family and kinship have constituted or continue to constitute a significant element of a woman's life, then she will tend to believe in 'revenants'. One simple way of showing this is by selecting a representative group of women to whom kinship and family are obviously important and comparing the incidence of revenant belief among them with the incidence of belief in a contrasting group of women with apparently little family feeling.

When listening to the tapes it is quite easy to distinguish the 'family' woman, for her talk is liberally sprinkled with references to aunts and uncles, sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, parents and grandparents. It is not simply that narratives accompanying references to belief in revenants,and stories of premonitions and omens feature these relatives, it is that the whole interview is interspersed with family references. On the other hand, as a complete contrast to the 'family woman', there is the woman whose conversation, though maybe thoughtful, entertaining and fluent, contains few or no references to other people, neither to friends nor family. Though these relationships may exist, they do not colour her thinking, memory and discourse as they do for the 'family woman'. In order to facilitate analysis, the definition of a 'family woman' (or 'family talker') was set as "one who mentions at least two relatives other than a husband in answer to questions other than about the return of the dead"; and the definition of 'non-family talkers' was set as "one who does not mention any relative - even a husband - during the course of the interview". However these formal definitions very seldom need to be

invoked because the distinction between the two groups is readily discernible. Of the eighty-seven women in the study group, forty-two are 'family talkers', twenty-nine 'non-family talkers' (the remaining sixteen falling into an intermediate grouping just as likely to talk of friends and acquaintances as about members of the family). When these groups are compared for the incidence of belief in revenants the results are very significant.

The analysis of the answers given by each of these groups shows that eighty-three percent of the family talkers believe in revenants, the strongest correlation between revenant belief and any other factor or combination of factors. Only twenty-eight percent of non-family talkers believe whereas sixty percent of them are sceptical - a neat reversal of the belief pattern shown by the sample overall (sixty percent frequency of belief: twenty-four percent frequency of disbelief, see table 10 below, p. 242). Surely the significance of this must be that the family talkers are those bound by ties and affections to their kinfolk, and that the need for others predisposes a woman to believe in the continued presence or influence of lost members of the family?

In order to check whether it might be a general sociability rather than specifically family affections that predisposes a woman towards belief in revenants, two checks were made. First of all, five women who talked a lot about friends though not about family were added to the sample of family talkers to make a group of 'social talkers', and the frequency of revenant belief calculated for this new grouping. Secondly, twelve women who, while not chatting about either friends or family, were voluble and discursive, were added to make an even larger group of 'talkers', and again the figures for revenant belief assessed. Both new groupings returned lower figures for belief in revenants than the original group of family talkers (that is: .78 for social talkers; .66 for talkers). It

appears, therefore, that the single most significant correlative of a belief in the return of the dead is devotion to family and family life.

Table 10: to show incidence of revenant belief among 'family women'

| Incidence of belief | Social type |
|---|---|
| 83% | family talkers |
| 78% | social talkers |
| 66% | talkers |
| 28% | non-family talkers |

Simply, there is strong evidence that people who put a high value on personal relationships - particularly the ties of kinship - tend to believe in the return of the dead. The fact that belief in revenants is also stronger than average among talkative and sociable women suggests that this is a tradition actively transmitted orally through social channels.

4. Summary - patterns of belief in the supernatural

The results of calculating the incidence of belief in horoscopes, birthsigns, fortunetelling, premonitions, omens, revenants, poltergeists, UFOs, telepathy and life after death among the members of the study group are most revealing, and in some cases unexpected.

(a) It is very valuable to have discovered that folk taxonomy is not at all points identical with academic categories. In one area in particular questions of taxonomy and terminology are essential to accurate

surveying. Folklorists, psychologists and sociologists alike blandly refer to manifestations of the spirits of the dead as 'ghosts'. It is very probable that a dislike, indeed a fear, of this term is as common in the community at large as it is among the women studied in Gatley. Its connotations for them are wholly evil and fearsome and many people seem reluctant to believe in motiveless evil, still less to talk about it. Yet they do believe in a form of apparition. Those apparitions are of known people on benevolent missions, and they are not regarded as manifestations of the supernatural.

In the matter of premonitions and omens too, folk taxonomy appears to diverge from academic classifications. Rather than distinguishing the two according to the nature of the forewarning, as a folklorist would do, the Gatley women often make no distinction, or when they do, distinguish by virtue of the outcome of the experience. An omen is of (sudden) death: a premonition has less frightful consequences.

(b) In general the patterns of belief revealed in the present work accord very well with the findings of previous, more statistically significant, large-scale surveys. Where findings differ, it is in recording significantly higher incidences of belief in the return of the dead. These high figures probably come nearer to showing the true state of belief in that:

(i) they result from a more relaxed, face-to-face interview in which views may be exchanged as well as requested;

(ii) informants were not pressed to commit themselves to bare "yes"/"no" answers with neither qualification nor face-saving ambiguity;

(iii) incidences of partial belief could be recorded as well as incidences of uncompromising and unashamed conviction;

(iv) questions were asked using the respondents' own terminology and categories;

(v) the interview conditions (see chapter 2) were conducive to trust and confidence.

(c) On the whole,the level of acceptance for traditional supernatural concepts was high among those interviewed. Beliefs in esoteric psychic powers in particular is widespread, being prevalent among older women and finding echoes in the thinking of both men and younger women.

(d) Some beliefs and practices seem to be, to a degree, sex and age related. The older generation share a belief in omens and premonitions; women share belief in premonitions, telepathy and the return of the benevolent dead. Younger women have greater belief in fortunetelling than older ones; men have no faith in it at all.

(e) Belief in the supernatural seems to be conditioned substantially by metaphysical, moral and social values, for example:

(i) a metaphysical philosophy which is tolerant of chaos and fate, a mystical attitude to life which sees the world as wonderful and exciting and as governed by unseen forces which organise apparently haphazard phenomena according to an unseen scheme of things, predispose a person towards belief;

(ii) those beliefs are more readily accepted which accord with moral values and a vision of the creation as good and safe. Hence alarming and disturbing manifestations of supernatural power (such as poltergeists) are less likely to be believed than benevolent manifestations (such as

revenants). Concepts which rely on intuition and have interpersonal relevance are also likely to be accepted, whereas mechanical practices with private relevance are likely to be rejected. Thus the women are more likely to believe in premonitions and telepathy than horoscopes and fortunetelling. This would seem to reflect their sexual socialisation into caring roles and intuitive thinking;

(iii) in particular, belief in the return of the family dead is substantially conditioned by interpersonal and family relationships. Women who are enmeshed in kinship networks, whatever their age, domestic situation or marital status, are likely to believe in revenants: that is, the power of dead loved ones to return to the survivor. Belief in the dead is strongly linked with love of the living.

Belief in psychic phenomena reflects personal philosophy, emotional orientation, socialisation and social relationships, and moral and religious values. It appears to be formed, consolidated and transmitted orally through social networks, and to have great functional value in the women's lives.

## 5. Belief and narrative

### 5.1 Narrative and discourse

As beliefs are formed in the context of social relationships, in other words in the oral and interpersonal sphere, it is important to consider the role of discourse and narrative. A moment's reflection shows that a substantial part of ordinary conversation is taken up with story-telling. An earlier study demonstrated that as much as half the discourse of a social group took the form of the exchange of personal experiences, jokes and anecdotes.[22] On the evidence of the present fieldwork, narrative is just as much a part of serious conversation as of casual social chat. Narrative, then, plainly has some function to play in the formation, or at least the expression, of belief. Indeed, it is commonly assumed that belief is directly reflected in narratives, so that, for example, a ghost story expresses not only a belief in ghosts but the nature of that belief. This is, of course, the assumption that lies behind the presentation of collections of ghost legends as the folklore of the supernatural. How far that sort of one-to-one relationship really holds good has not so far been tested.

The present work is perhaps unusual in being able to gather together a corpus of narratives that have been volunteered specifically in the context of discussions of belief. It is possible therefore to assess the degree to which narrative occurs in this context and how it is used, and, by testing the contents of the stories against the picture of supernatural belief discernible in non-narrative discussion, draw a reasonably reliable portrait of the traditions of the study group. Before moving on to discuss this aspect of narrative analysis, however, some preliminary definitions must be presented.

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22 Gillian Bennett, "Storytelling in an Urban Folk Group", unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1980.

## 5.2 Working definitions of narrative and narrative genres

### 5.2.1 Working definition of narrative

As practised hearers and tellers of stories, most people have little trouble in recognising the narrative genre and would be capable of giving very adequate general descriptions of what a story is. When it comes to setting a formal definition of stories told in conversation and discussion, however, the matter is more problematic than it seems at first sight. There are very well-known definitions of major narrative genres (folktale, legend, anecdote and joke) but very few universally accepted definitions of the more informal genres of personal experience story and memorate. All the narrative material afforded in data of the present kind is of this latter type. Obviously, personal experience story and memorate are narrative types that record real, remembered experience and this makes formal boundaries between narrative and non-narrative conversation particularly difficult to set in this particular case. The reason for this is that in answering questions or contributing to discussion, the women tend to support any expression of opinion with appeals to experience. At what point an appeal to personal experience takes a form which is obviously a narrative of personal experience is very difficult to decide. Yet in order to establish a corpus of narrative for study such a decision must be made, and made with the minimum of arbitrariness.

Part of the difficulty is that to a certain extent all or most references to experience have some narrative quality about them. A statement such as "I've often had a feeling about something and then it happens" is temporally sequenced like a narrative,[23] and it is

> ... the linguistic encoding of past experience in order to say something about, or by means of, the events described.[24]

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23 Cf. Labov and Waletsky, p. 20.

24 Polyani, p. 207.

Commonsense and experience as hearers and tellers of stories would suggest to most people, however, that such an utterance is not narrative as we normally think of it. Some vital ingredient is missing. Yet Polyani's definition is just as obviously true in a general sense. What it lacks, perhaps, is merely enough specificity about the form this "linguistic encoding" will take. A definition of narrative should in particular be more explicit about the way pastness is encoded. During the course of questions and discussions in the present work, on over three hundred occasions the women elaborated their answers by appealing to their own or another person's experience. These three hundred or so replies show steady differences in the way the pastness of these experiences is translated into grammar and lexis. In some, for example, "I've often thought about something and then it happens", the sense of pastness is only partial and incomplete. The speaker uses a mixture of present perfect and universal present tenses and is vague about the past occasions when the event occurred. In other replies pastness will be represented less ambiguously. The speaker will use the simple past tense and lexical markers such as "once" or "on one occasion". Alternatively, time and pastness may be quite specifically marked by accurate dating or by the detailed recollection of exact occasions.

> When I was married, and we'd been married Lord knows how long. The war interrupted so of course we never had any children until 1947. Now, in that summer of 1947.... (Rose)

> Dad had been dead by now three years probably and Billy was working at the time at the Hall Farm, Coreley, and he was going to Tenbury market one terrible frosty day. It was a dark morning.... (Agnes)

Utterances in which time and pastness are not coded in a specific way would be interpreted by an experienced teller or hearer of stories as <u>references to</u> experiences rather than <u>accounts of</u> experiences and, as such, well outside what would normally be considered narrative. At its minimum, a narrative is some sort of account of experience: the more

specific that account, the more like a story it is. The very minimum of specificity must be as to the past time in which the experience occurred. So "I've often had a feeling about something and then it happens" is not a narrative, although, of course, it could be used to introduce one. On the other hand, Rose's and Agnes's utterances quoted above are plainly the introductory remarks for a narrative speech act. Between these extremes lie utterances such as these:

> There's only one occasion -. I had two brothers killed in the war, and I woke up once - and I was wide awake! - and I could see my brother disappearing into the distance, and he seemed to disappear into the wall, and yet I was on the edge of the bed wide awake. (Valerie)

> I once had an aunt and - um - she died. Just before she died, she says, 'Yes, I'm coming, I'm coming,' so she'd <u>seen</u> somebody. It was my mother's sister. (Norma)

The second of these examples falls exactly on the borderline between a reference to an experience and an account of one, having the very minimum of coding for pastness (the simple past tense and the lexical marker <u>once</u>). The first example is just a little more specific - simple past tense, two markers of pastness (<u>one occasion</u> and <u>once</u>) and enough contextual information to allow a hearer to date the experience and set the temporal scene (references to "the war", and to waking up, with its implication of night time). This is clearly an account of an experience, though of course a minimal one, rather than a mere reference to it. It is just barely on the narrative side of the borderline between the narrative and the non-narrative encoding of past experience.

Norma's utterance, however, poses more problems. Though clearly more specific as to time and occasion than statements like "I've often had a feeling about something and then it happens", it displays the speaker's unwillingness to elaborate: it is more like a summary of a narrative than the narrative itself. Though clearly there is a story to tell about this occasion, the narrator does not quite tell it. The utterance remains

firmly on the boundary between narrative and non-narrative - a 'neo-narrative' rather than a proper story.

An examination of the specificity of time references is useful as a definitional tool, allowing judgements to be made about the status of a wide range of experiential utterances. At one end of the continuum there are mere references to experiences, at the other detailed accounts, and, between the extremes, utterances which vary in the specificity of their encoding of pastness. In the centre of the continuum are 'neo-narratives' which code pastness by the use of the simple past tense and at least one lexical marker such as <u>once</u> or <u>on one occasion</u>. On the narrative side of this divide, utterances are more precisely coded using such devices as:

(a) simple past (or historic present) tense;

(b) lexical markers (<u>once</u>, <u>on one occasion</u>);

(c) references to dates, times of day;

(d) contextual scene-setting.

On the non-narrative side of the divide, utterances will be much more generalised. They will be marked by the:

(a) absence of contextual information;

(b) absence of dating and scene-setting;

(c) absence of lexical markers of occasion;

(d) use of universal present and present perfect tenses.

These are possible criteria for judging the narrative status of experiential utterances.

The definition of narrative which will be used throughout this work is therefore:

> "An account of a past experience which:
>
> (a) is given in order to say something about, or by means of, the events described, and which
>
> (b) encodes for pastness by the use of:
>
> (i) simple past tense (or simple past alternating with the historic present tense);

and

(ii) lexical markers of time and occasion;

and either or both

(iii) specific mention of dates and times of day/ year;

(iv) contextual information about the specific past occasion."

5.2.2 Working definitions of memorate and other genres

Within the corpus of narrative so defined there are recognisable sub-divisions, notably memorates, family legends and stories told at second hand. Here, too, some attempt at definitional clarification is necessary.

Family legends are quite straightforwardly recognisable. Their status is marked in the opening sentences by clauses such as "My mother used to tell the tale". The phraseology incorporates the words used to and always to indicate some historicity in the transmission of the story and references to other people who were the original transmitters.

Distinctions are less clear between 'memorate' and 'personal experience stories told at second hand'. Von Sydow's original definition of memorate as a "purely personal" narrative[25] presents difficulties in actual application. In the first place it is very doubtful whether any story told in public can be purely personal, in the sense of idiosyncratically personal: narratives are necessarily culturally shaped and adapted to or by the hearer in the telling. Another common difficulty experienced in applying the definition is that a story may recount events which happened in the presence of the narrator but not to the narrator, or may be introduced by the narrator in the capacity of the confidante of the person to whom they happened, usually in the form of "I remember so-and-so telling me that she...." Are these stories "purely personal" or not?

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25 Von Sydow, pp. 60-88.

Similarly the phrase 'personal experience stories told at second hand' is a little contradictory, for if a story is told at second hand is it really personal experience? Or is such a story a fabulate? Or even a legend? The jungle of genre definition is nowhere more difficult to hack through.

In these circumstances, perhaps no definition is more arbitrary than another, so to avoid confusion a fairly narrow interpretation of the term 'memorate' has been adopted. It will be used here and subsequently to refer only to stories told in the first person about events that either happened to the narrator or were witnessed by him/her. In contrast to memorate, and in order to maximise the distinction between memorate and other forms of narrative in the corpus, stories in which the narrator recounts the experiences of another person will be grouped together. Thus family legends will be classed with personal stories told at second hand. This grouping is not as arbitrary as it seems at first sight, for there is no telling how long the transmission chains are in either case. The opening "My mother used to tell the tale", though it suggests historicity and frequent retelling, may in fact introduce a story that was told by the mother only to the narrator. On the other hand a story that recounts events as told to a narrator by the person to whom they happened may have been told very many times by either or both people. There is nothing in the narration or its opening formula in either case to indicate with any certainty how often the story has been told. Of course memorates too may have longer chains of transmission than their surface features show,[26] but in the context of a lack of certainty about transmission, all one can safely do is to take the surface features at face value, and make a distinction between memorate and the various second-hand narrations on the

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26 See Dégh and Vázsonyi (1974), pp. 225-239.

lines of their use of the first or third person voice, and the identity of the ostensible actor/eyewitness.

In this work, therefore, a distinction will be made between memorates (first person stories which give an account of an event which happened to the narrator or were witnessed by her/him) and what for want of a ready-made term will be referred to here as 'personal legends' (third person stories which recount events about which the narrator gained information indirectly through another person who may or may not her/himself have been actor or eyewitness on that occasion).

## 5.3 Memorate and its context

### 5.3.1 Explanatory glosses

That narrative has an important role to play in the expression of belief must be obvious from the fact that the present data affords no fewer than 153 stories. Yet during the fieldwork, on no occasion was a story ever requested: the discussion simply centred on the question of whether respondents believed in certain popular supernatural traditions. Plainly, when asked to express an opinion about controversial matters, the Gatley women usually feel constrained also to explain why they think as they do, and these explanations/justifications/proofs often take narrative form.

It is rare for the women to express opinions without adding such explanatory or justificatory glosses. Of the total 551 answers to questions over all the subjects in all the interviews, only 135 were unelaborated "yes"/"no"/"don't know" statements: in the other 416 cases the women made at least a minimal effort to show that they (a) held the opinion for some good reason and/or (b) understood the question and were cognisant of the ideas it raised.

At the very least such glosses might be brief statements such as "Yes, I've heard of that"; at the most elaborate they might be abstract disquisitions on the meaning of life. Such explanations and justifications come in two differing overall forms. A minority of women tend to use appeals to reason or principle (for example "God wouldn't allow it"); a majority prefer appeals to experience ("Well, I've experienced it"). These outnumber appeals to principle by four to one. Even women whose preferred discourse-mode is abstract rather than empirical tend to add experiential glosses (a) to affirmative answers, and (b) to discussions of the most delicate or "deep"[27] subjects. Hence of the total number of answers glossed with appeals to experience (309), sixty-nine percent are expressions of some measure of belief in the topic under discussion, and only sixteen percent are expressions of disbelief. On the other hand, of the total number of answers glossed with appeals to reason or principle (75), only nineteen percent accompany expressions of belief, whereas sixty-eight percent accompany expressions of scepticism. If the Gatley women believe something to be true, therefore, especially if it is a difficult or "deep" question, then they are likely to explain or justify their opinion by giving evidence from their own or another person's experience.

### 5.3.2 Memorate as 'evidence'

It is in this context that narrative and its function in the expression of belief should be viewed. By the difficulty of fixing a boundary between narrative and experiential statements in general it has been shown that narrative in this context is often one sort of appeal to experience, functioning to give shape to opinion, to show that the speaker

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27 Their term for metaphysical.

is cognisant of the ideas under discussion, or to justify or explain a point of view. Ninety out of the total 153 narratives follow directly on the expression of belief and are plainly designed as responses to questions. Narrative then may be a way of directly discussing belief. Overwhelmingly in these circumstances the same bias towards empiricism that leads women to justify their viewpoint by appealing to experience, leads them to consider the retelling of their own experience as the most relevant contribution they can make to any discussion.

In this context, memorate therefore is the preferred genre of narrative, 'personal legends' come a poor second, and traditional supernatural legends do not feature at all. Of the ninety narratives, seventy-seven are memorates and thirteen 'personal legends' as defined above. In particular this throws considerable doubt on the validity of using collections of traditional legends as a substitute for genuine fieldwork into supernatural belief in any age or community. In keeping with the value the Gatley women place on first person observation and experience, it is memorates that are the dominant type of narrative used in discussions of belief.

Time and again the women's comments and conversation make it clear that for them good evidence of the truth of any concept is primarily empirical and oral. Thus personal experience is the best evidence, then in descending order of merit:- the eyewitness accounts of peers; the reports of 'sensible' people; media reports; written accounts in books; reasoned argument. Empirical evidence for the existence of revenants, the validity of premonitions and so on, circulating among the women in the form of orally transmitted reports of personal experience would seem, then, to form the foundation of the supernatural belief system of the Gatley women.

The study of memorate, therefore, should be considered an integral part of the study of belief. Memorate often constitutes the 'evidence' that transmitters of traditional supernatural belief provide for the validity of the system. It is the narrative genre most often offered in the context of discussion to give shape, body and personal relevance to abstract concepts - one of the many kinds of appeals to personal experience that underpin the formation and exchange of complex or controversial ideas. In this context memorates, far from being 'purely personal' or idiosyncratic, are very much a reflection of culture. They show what ordinary people make of traditional concepts, how they are used in a particular context, which elements of the stereotype are still transmitted and functional, and so on. They express "traditional attitudes"[28] and embody "covert belief".[29]

### 5.3.3 Other aspects of narrative

What, however, of the sixty-three narratives (forty-three memorates plus twenty 'personal legends') which were not contributed as direct responses to questions about aspects of belief? What are the purposes and functions of these stories? Are they reliable guides to belief in the community too? Should they be analysed for content on an equal footing with those which were plainly designed to offer illustration of belief? Their status is a little more ambiguous than that of the majority contributed in answer to questions. Some of them were told as the second or third in a series of stories on a single topic; some were told at the end of the interview when the main discussion was at an end; some were

28 Sandra K.D. Stahl, "The Personal Narrative as Folklore", Journal of the Folklore Institute, 14, nos. 1-2 (1977), 20.

29 Lauri Honko, "Memorates and the Study of Folk Belief", Journal of the Folklore Institute, 1 (1964), 9.

told in the 'wrong' context (for example, a speaker might suddenly revert to an earlier topic of discussion and start reminiscing); yet others concerned visits to mediums, a topic which was not covered in the question schedule.

Such stories seem primarily to be told for the pleasures of narrating and reliving the past. Fifteen of these stories (six 'personal legends' and nine memorates) were about miscellaneous subjects unconnected with the supernatural: they concerned events in the far past, topical local news stories and humorous incidents in marital and family life. The ratio of memorate to 'personal legend' is different in this group of stories too, perhaps reflecting less exacting standards of verifiability. Whereas the ratio of memorate to 'personal legend' in direct answers to questions is about six to one, these less context-specific narratives show a ratio of memorate to 'personal legend' of just over two to one. The looser the connection with direct and unambiguous statements of belief, therefore, the less a narrative is likely to be necessarily 'true' (in the sense of empirically verifiable) in the eyes of the narrator. The implication here is that if a narrative is told <u>entirely</u> outside the context of discussions of belief (for example, on request to a visiting folklorist), then there is no guarantee that the beliefs it embodies will actually be believed by the narrator who tells it. Such stories are just as likely to be told for artistic or social reasons as with the intellectual purpose of making opinions known or a belief explicit. Narrative can only be a reliable index of belief if it is obtained in the context of question and discussions about belief: the further removed from such a context, the less reliable it is likely to be.

<u>Within this context</u> narrative appears to be used primarily as explanatory illustration and authentication of belief: <u>freed from that context</u>, artistic and social functions may be more important than intellectual ones.

## 5.4 Narrative and context

The collection of narrative in the context of a general discussion is therefore doubly valuable. In the first place it elicits a large number of stories apparently specifically designed to explicate matters of belief. In the second place, the surrounding non-narrative discourse (in the form both of unstructured appeals to experience, and appeals to principle and commonsense) provides an essential background against which the 'free' narratives not specifically attached to expressions of belief may be checked for content and reliability.

Narrative has a complex of artistic, social and authenticating functions. A researcher seeking to establish a link between a belief system and a set of narratives cannot be sure, without both textual and contextual information, which part of the complex is active for any given narrative at any given time. A conversational narrative, in addition to illustrating belief concepts, may show what subjects are considered narratable in any group, what subjects are considered appropriately answered in empirical rather than abstract terms, or what memorable experiences the narrator has had. The telling of a narrative also involves a process of selection. If a respondent has a story that validates or explains her belief, she will seek to tell it, but stories are selected highlights of experience. In the data there are many opinions which do not have stories attached, and some stories without opinions attached. Any simple assumption that stories reflect belief in a direct way is misleading.

If narrative is any index of belief, it can only be so when collected in the context of a discussion of belief. To assume that a narrative will automatically and directly provide clues to current folklore is naive. More perhaps than in other areas, it is necessary to know the conversational context in depth before any judgements about it can be made.