Pagan Traces in Medieval and Early Modern European Witch-beliefs

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore how pre-Christian beliefs, cults and popular traditions may have indirectly survived in early modern and medieval European witch-beliefs. It will be attempted to show how witch-beliefs and medieval/early modern popular imagination may have reflected (through the filter of Christian demonology *and* by unwittingly drawing upon folklore and mythology), extinguished pre-Christian cults and beliefs. Whether and to what extent such cults may have actually survived in Christianised Europe, however, is completely beyond my scope. This research is solely concerned with the origins of popular belief and imagination. Since valuable comparative studies of the subject are still relatively rare, it seems that lack of cross-disciplinary communication may have led scholars to neglect the examination of those aspects of evidence which do not appear to be directly linked with the witch-hunt but might nonetheless be relevant to the still ungrasped aspects of it. This has resulted in the fact that many areas connected with the origins of witches' confessions and witch-beliefs have remained unexplored. Here the attempt is made to show how witch-beliefs appear to have been fed from local variations of folklore and folk beliefs largely derived by the mixture of the two major influences over the European cultural heritage, the Celtic and the Classical, the latter echoing the Indian. This is achieved through viable comparisons between Southern European (mainly Roman and Greek) and Eastern (mainly Indian) religions and mythologies, in turn echoed in medieval/early modern European beliefs. Such comparisons also contribute in showing how much the strong symbolism present in witch-beliefs appears to overlap with symbol-related aspects of sapiential traditions such as Alchemy as well as of Shivaite and Dionysian cults.

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Preface

Aim

The aim of this research is to explore Pagan traces in early modern and medieval European witch-beliefs. Although only a minor aspect within the complex social/economical/political phenomenon of the witch-craze, it may be crucial to the understanding of a still ungrasped and elusive facet of it, which may integrate and shed new light on previous studies.

The dispersed pre-Christian fragments scattered throughout the centuries of persecution may be reunited again to reopen questions around Pagan continuities through folk-belief, folklore and popular imagination, if not through secret societies, as suggested by Murray, who failed to discern the "incrustations" resulted from "the interventions of judges, inquisitors and demonologists".[1] The attempt will be made to discern how witch-beliefs may have reflected (blended with demonological "intrusions") folklore and myth, in turn possibly reflecting extinguished pre-Christian cults and beliefs. Whether and to what extent such cults may have survived in Christianised Europe, however, is beyond my scope. Whilst circumscribed explanations are unhelpful, we favour studies describing witchcraft as a social phenomenon with the function of relieving village and personal tensions between neighbours,[2] or explaining it through scapegoating theories[3] and as a way to interiorise social taboo.[4]

In acknowledgment of the width and depth of the phenomenon, it would be useful to clarify what this dissertation does not attempt, however such issues might occasionally be touched. Firstly, it does not claim "witches" perpetuated pre-Christian cults in secret covens. Secondly, it does not attempt to find causes for the persecution. Thirdly, it does not directly attempt to address gender issues, unless

[1] Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 9.
[2] see Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Stuart and Tudor England.* (London: Routledge, 1991), xvi, 11, 16, 104, 107-109, 112-113, 147, 161, 163, 174, 196, 231-237, 244; Keith Thomas *Religion and Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England.* (London: Penguin Paperback, 1971), 534, 548, 608, 624, 636, 673; James Sharpe *The horrible and true story of Anne Gunter.* (New York: Routledge, 2000), xi-xiii, 17-20, 37-39, 51-52, 54-55, 65, 87; Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 21-22, 66, 69, 116, 142, 163, 195, 206, 219-221, 252, 333.
[3] see Lyndal Roper, *Witch-craze, horror and fantasy in Baroque Germany*. (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 125-181.
[4] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 217.

strictly linked with the pre-Christian elements which are being reviewed. Likewise, it should be acknowledged that there are numerous pathways which may link witch-beliefs to pre-Christian times, which will not be analysed. These may include but are not limited to:

- The power attributed to witches and to pre-Christian Goddesses and priestesses, to influence or direct natural forces.
- "Magic" to heal and to harm (e.g. the use of wax images used in witchcraft as well as in ancient cultures such as the Egyptians[5]).
- Pre-Christian concepts of possession from evil spirits, divine ecstasy/vision[6] and witchcraft concepts of possession, "inspiration" from the familiar[7], vision[8] and ecstasy.[9]
- Hermetism.[10]
- Clowns and Fools, and the rites of inversion.[11]
- Early modern prophets and visionaries.[12]
- The knowledge of herbs in association with Goddesses, witches[13] and Fairyland.[14]
- The use of words and formulas.[15]

Due to limited space the focus will be mainly on three strictly inter-related aspects: the Familiar, shape-shifting and flying. These appear to provide substantial links between "witches" and female followers of ancient Pagan cults who may be behind

[5] Valerie Flint, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe vol. 2: Ancient Greece and Rome*. (London: The Althlone Press, 1999), 63-67.
[6] cf. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanesimo e tecniche arcaiche dell'estasi*. (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1974), 93, 215-254; Dante Alighieri, "Inferno", in *La Divina Commedia*, *vol.1*. London: 1778, 40-251, accessed June 15, 2011, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW3315303959&source=gale&userGroupName=uniyork&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE;
see Dante Alighieri, "Paradiso", in *La Divina Commedia*, *vol 2* ed. Matteo Romani. Reggio: G. Davolio e Figlio, 1859; cf. Luigi Valli, *Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei "fedeli d'Amore"* (Genova: Dioscuri, 1988), Gershom Scholem, Herny Corbin, Mircea Eliade, Steven M. Wassertrom, *Religion after Religion.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 17, 33, 89; 161; Walter Otto, *Le Muse e l'origine divina della parola e del Canto*. (Roma: Fazi Editori, 2005), 19, 35-45, 54-63.
[7] see Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits, Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic*, (Brighton-Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 6-7, 46-53, 59-74, 77-81, 139-145.
[8] Emma Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie: Magic, Witchcraft and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland*. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 250-251, 256-268.
[9] see ibid, 255-291, 301-308, 382-389, 391-393.
[10] see Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[11] see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9-30, 69-80.
[12] Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits,* 199-218.
[13] Luisa Murano, *La Signora del Gioco*. (Milano: La Tartaruga Edizioni, 2006), 160, 204.
[14] see Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, 87.
[15] Aubrey John, *Three Proses Work*. Buchanan-Brown, John, ed. (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1972), 260; Keith Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 32, 47, 57, 62, 65, 78-83, 212-215, 220-225, 393, 551, 588, 613.

the origination of witches' "myths", a point that may indirectly shed some light on current gender questions.[16]

Intellectual Approach

Some fifty years ago Eliade, in *Myths, dreams and mysteries*, discussed how "Western Culture [would] be in danger of decline into a sterilising provincialism if it despise[d] or neglect[ed] the dialogue with the other cultures"; how "one day the West w[ould have to] know and to understand the existential situations and the cultural universes of the non-Western peoples"; and how the West would "come to value them as integral with the history of the human spirit and w[ould] no longer regard them as immature episodes or as aberrations from an exemplary History of man".[17] Such risk of falling into "a sterilising provincialism" may persist if the Western scholar continues to treat European autochthon past cultures[18] with an implicit attitude of superiority, or if —worse— ignores them. As for cross-cultural comparisons, if doubts about the "applicability of Macfarlane's use of evidence from cultures far removed chronologically and geographically" to Tudor and Stuart Essex[19] must be granted, it should be noted how it may, however, be *necessary* to seek the origins of European folklore in pre-historical cults well **beyond** the boundaries of modern Europe. If it may be true that "non-Western social anthropology provides keys that do not fit continental locks",[20] considering and comparing European and extra European folklore, mythology and relatable archaeological evidence may clarify certain European witch-beliefs.

Furthermore, analysing witch material from the perspective of the accused has been seen as problematic. Witches' confessions have been regarded as "fantasies" and "impossibilities" that may not be used to understand what actually occurred,[21] and as "mountain peasant born of popular credulity and female hysteria".[22] Yet, the contemporary authorities' apparently more organised and coherent[23] beliefs (which *are* used to understand the witch-craze) did not lack "imagination" either. As it has

[16] cf. Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 106-134; Valerie Flint et al., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe vol. 2: Ancient Greece and Rome*, 63-67; Barbara Ehrenreich, Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses: A History of Women Healers*. (New York: Feminist Press, 2010); Marianne Hester, *Lewd women and wicked witches: a study of the dynamics of male Domination*. (London: Routledge, 1992).
[17] Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*. (London: Harvill Press, 1960), 8-9.
[18] I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 19, 36-39.
[19] James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 11.
[20] E.William Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: the Borderlands During the Reformation.* (Cornel University Press, 1976), 11.
[21] Norman Cohn, *Europe Inner Demons*. (London: Sussex University Press, 1975), 110, 115.
[22] H.R. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch Craze of the 16th and 17th Century*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 10.
[23] Ibid, 9.

poetically been remarked, "the question 'do you believe in fairies?' would have baffled people in pre industrial societies, because such beliefs were normal in all layers of the population".[24] With regard to Murray's widely acknowledged flaws,[25] to manipulate confessions to "prove" the existence of an organised pagan religion is obviously unhelpful. Yet comparison of witches' "visions" to those of fanatics of any religion[26] may be helpful. If Murray's highly generalising views of witches as followers of an "Old Religion" remain unacceptable, it is true that the visions of a Christian were not regarded as evil delusions at the time, and today, are still commonly treated with respect both within intellectual debates and by modern psychology, which cannot officially regard Christian visionaries as mentally ill. However, the same respect is rare with regard to witches' alleged visions, where the terminology recurring "again and again… in some of the most authoritative studies, reflect[s] a preliminary choice of ideological character".[27]

The possibility that the stories emerged from witches' confessions might derive from folklore echoing in turn older shamanistic practices (expressing a reality's perception not yet understood by the empiricism dominating Western belief-systems), should be further explored. History is about the defeated as well as the winning cultures,[28] and not merely in what is comfortably acceptable. Agnosticism seems more suitable than atheism as a research approach, particularly because the fragile empirical scientific system which the Western sense of reality is constructed upon is ever shifting and leading to ever new discoveries. Some branches of experimental science attempt and at times "cautiously grant scientific explanation for psychic phenomena".[29] If scientists can consider analysing such phenomena, the question maybe raised as to why historians should not. A fascination with the "supernatural" permeates at some level even the most rational minds for the "supernatural" itself (what is "inexplicable") permeates both life and death. Most notably nature itself, remains an unanswered question which science could never completely "explain away". It is

[24] Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2004), 1.
[25] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 198; Norman Cohn, *Europe Inner Demons*, 99-126; Jacqueline Simpson, "Margaret Murray: Who Believed Her and Why?" *Folklore 105* (1994) Jstor.org, http://www.jstor.org/pss/1260633; Hardy Halliday, 1992; Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 19-20; Cecil L'Estrange Ewen, *Some Witchcraft Criticism*. (London: self published, 1938); Rose, Elliot *A Razor for a Goat: A Discussion of Certain Problems in Witchcraft and Diabolism*. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1962). Cecil L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, (London: Heat Cranton Limited,1933), 25; 59-60.
[26] Margaret Alice Murray, *Witch Cult in Western Europe.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 9. cf. Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 250-251, 256-268.
[27] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 11.
[28] see James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England, Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 15.
[29] I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A study of Shamanism and spirit Possession*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 16.

undeniable that nature appears to possess an intrinsic force which overall seems greatly superior to any scientific capacity to subjugate it, decipher it, contain it, explain and exploit it. Since this ungraspable quality of nature is part of reality — hence of History— it may be absurd that historians should so often endeavour to neglect or even ridicule those aspects of History which may have become entangled at some level with such an ungraspable quality of reality, as in the case of mass' confessions of "impossibilities". Indeed, "witchcraft's apparent lack of reality is a non-issue".[30] What matters is understanding the cultural realities that such accounts disguise, rather than polemicising about their "impossibility".

It is still true that the accused's voices "have been silent for too long",[31] and since "a frustrating aspect of the trial is the frequently abrupt termination of the transcript, presumably at the behest of the judges…only interested in the recording…of certain type of evidence",[32] it may be necessary for contemporary academics to start reconstructing the fragments we have. Deciphering the "impossibilities" present in confessions in light not only of the cultural reality at the time, but also of their relationship with fragments of ancient heritages from which such images (passing through centuries of subsequent distortions) potentially originated. Of course, "the use of witch-trial evidence to classify beliefs or practices in folkloric culture via indirect, casual, often interspersed by hiatuses and silences is difficult",[33] yet "the fact a source is not objective does not mean it's useless".[34]

Again, in response to Cohn's objection to using confessions,[35] it may be noted that if confessions are the only direct evidence remaining of the perspective of the accuseds, the question should be posed whether it is any longer acceptable (in a rational, unbiased approach) to simply ignore evidence reflecting such perspectives differing from ours with their difference as motivation. Furthermore, from the evidence analysed, it appears that many of the accused did not actually believe their "confessions". They simply elaborated stories drawing from popular folklore to cease pressure[36] as in instances where the accused plainly declared s/he would say

[30] Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 6.
[31] Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 4.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 213.
[34] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), xvii.
[35] Cohn, *Europe Inner Demons*, 114.
[36] Which may be psychological, financial (when fees related with capture and imprisonment had to be paid), or physical.

anything required by the authorities,[37] or in numerous cases when confessions were retracted.[38] In regard to symbolism, to be found in "impossible" accounts, Murray did actually acknowledge it to an extent, stating her interpretations of some such descriptions: like flying on a broomstick out of the roof, i.e. the fertility connotations of the broom, the "taboos of certain primitive culture around the door", and the "mound-dwellings" of such societies.[39] It seems more caution is necessary before altogether dismissing the answers previously given, however imperfect, keeping in mind that, as Briggs assures us, we are all bound to make mistakes, and that no-one is "safe" from misinterpreting sources, since the material available is indeed so "pliable" it could serve to prove all sorts of views.[40]

Comparative Approaches

According to Eliade, the witchcraft phenomenon cannot be properly explained "as a creation of religious and political persecution" and cannot be fully understood without the help of disciplines such as folklore, ethnology, sociology, psychology and the history of religions.[41] Surely, the task of identifying the combined origins of witch-beliefs is problematic and risky in the sense that "pioneers" in this field can only proceed by advancing theories on speculative grounds. This is obviously the main limit of any research like this. Yet, if such limit can be accepted as intrinsic to any such researches, the results of these may in the future be used more safely in comparative studies. One must follow an intuitive trail of similarities and associations through centuries and different areas of human existence, namely history, literature, mythology and folklore, music, poetry and visual art, religious and popular traditions. If intuitive comparative approaches may present problems in academic research, when the similarities are numerous enough and documented they assume the form of evidence and can no longer be dismissed.

Lack of communication between different fields of expertise, (and therefore the examination of *all* the evidence we *do have* from *all* angles, rather from circumscribed angles only) has left many unexplored areas. A primary source is not only what was written and archived by the leading classes, it is anything documenting past human

[37] cf. Robert Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 32; Luisa Murano, *La Signora del Gioco*, 53-131, 142-165.
[38] Alonso de Salazar, *The Salazar Documents: Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías and Others on the Basque Witch Persecution.*, ed. Gustav Henningsen, (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 326.
[39] Murray, *Witch Cult*, 16.
[40] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 8.
[41] Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Bengt Anakrloo and Gustav Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft, Centres and Peripheries.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 191.

experience reaching the present unfiltered. Macfarlane notoriously challenged unilateral approaches through the employment of social anthropology and others have attempted to employ other fields of knowledge. Thomas and Larner employed sociology, and psychology to an extent, particularly in the latter case. Henderson and Cowan have used folklore, Ginzburg folklore, myth and the study of ancient religions, whereas Wilby's studies possibly encompass all the above. Still, comparative approaches remain risky. The main problem consists in the complexity of the debates inherent to each field of research necessary to comparative studies. However, if the more important of these debates are acknowledged without being entered in ways that become entangling (departing too greatly from the overall subject of a research), comparative approaches may be safer. Yet imperfections inherent to necessary generalisations must be granted.

India and Europe

This dissertation explores how witch-beliefs appear to have been fed from local variations of folklore and folk beliefs largely derived by the mixture of the two major influences over the European cultural heritage, the Celtic and the Classical, the latter reflecting the Indian. Through viable comparisons between Southern European (mainly Roman and Greek) and Eastern (mainly Indian, as a bridge between Europe and the Far East) religions and mythologies echoed in medieval/early modern European beliefs, the reasons for discussing India will hopefully become clear. Such comparisons may show how much symbolism within European witchcraft beliefs seem to be ultimately rooted in India, particularly in Shivaism, which overlaps with Dionysian cults, which in turn have influenced classical myth and through it, much of European folklore. This kind of cross-cultural comparison seem essential when reviewing the origins of religions and consequent myths, folktales and beliefs, as to restrict a study to the investigation of only one specific area simply prevents the discovery of the primary origin of a symbol, hence its primeval significance. Symbols, in fact, through tales and legends of Gods and Goddesses, "travel", shift and get adapted/distorted through time and space much faster than it is easy to recognise and chronologically document. Yet these symbols survive, through endless distortions, for thousands of years.

Amongst the academics whose studies have provided great support to this research in terms of cross-cultural and comparative approaches are Carlo Ginzburg, Marija

Gimbutas and Alan Daniélou. Ginzburg made an admirable attempt to identify shamanic traits of ecstatic cults behind certain witchcraft beliefs and to retrace possible roots in the Celtic European, Eurasiatic and Mediterranean symbolic heritage embedded in folklore, folk-belief, mythology and religion. Establishing a connection between witches' Sabbath and legendary "Fairyland", he showed how beyond what more recently contributed to "the crystallization of the Sabbath stereotype in the Eastern Alps, between the Dauphiné, Suisse Romande, Lombardy and Piedmont", there is "one far more ancient [element]: the sedimentation of Celtic culture", in regard to the archaeological remains at La Téne, near Lake Neuchâtel, which gave "the oldest nucleus of Celtic civilization its name".[42] He claimed that the "literary and inquisitorial re-elaborations of the ancient Celtic myth of the journey into the world of the dead were diffused at different times and in different ways from the same area and from similar folkloric materials."[43] He explored leading figures of supposed female ecstatic cults in Italy: *Richella* and *Madonna Oriente*. Most importantly, in terms of cross-cultural comparisons relevant to this research, he attempted to explain through intuitive "trail" the anomalous presence of the "Women from Outside in Sicily".[44] He made close comparisons between Celtic matrons and "the mothers transplanted from Crete to Sicily"; between "the Cretan myths and cultures linked to nurturing goddesses of ursine appearance" and the cults of Artemis Kalliste in Arcadia and Artmeis Brauronia in Athens, where a Goddess with a nurturing function is associated with the bear, and finally with "Artio represented as bear and as matron".[45] These anomalies within Sicilian evidence allowed him to bring to light the existence of an older stratum of "commingled Celtic, Greek, possibly Mediterranean elements",[46] emerging from the confessions of the witches.

With regard to the numerous links made throughout this thesis between Shiva, Dionysus, and Hermes, but also Osiris, which lead to subsequent comparisons with medieval Alchemy (and Hermetism), the initial "inspiration" were the studies of the twentieth-century French historian and Indologist Alan Daniélou. Daniélou claimed that the Proto-Australoids represent the oldest race in India and show affinities with the Neanderthal man, the other two main races being the Aryans and the

[42] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 109.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Stating that if evidence is "improperly presented does not mean it is useless": ibid, 129.
[45] Ibid, 129.
[46] Ibid.

Dravidians. The latter, of unknown origin, are said to have appeared in India in the Neolithic Age, their religion being Shivaism. The influence of their language and culture, still present in Southern India, is believed to have travelled to the Mediterranean before the Aryan invasions (ca. 1700 to 1300 BC).[47] Linguistic traces of its influences (in the "Georgian, Basque, Peuhl, Guanche and the dialects of Baluchistan"[48]) still survived in peripheral zones which are said to have acted as intermediary for the diffusion of primeval Shivaism.[49] Furthermore, the Pelasgians, Etruscans and Eteocretans are claimed to share the same linguistic traits/roots.[50] It is further claimed that during the New Stone Age, Indian civilization used wood, and it hardly left a trace behind, hence why it is problematic to formally establish earlier Shivaistic activities since the first genuine Shivaistic remains are found at Catal Hoyuk in Anatolia, dating from about 6000 B.C.[51] It is from around 6000 B.C that Shivaism is believed to have travelled towards Europe, South Asia and Africa, with all its related symbols (phallus, horned God, bull, ram, snake, Lady of the Mountains, the young God wearing a horned mask, the bull with human head or vice versa, the man with bull's head), leaving traces at "all stages of Ancient Europe, from Proto-Sesklo and Starcevo (sixth millennium) to Dimini and the Vinca period".[52]

Crete in particular emerges in Daniélou's studies as the intermediary between Eastern and Greek, hence Western civilisation, since religious Minoan elements undoubtedly mirrored Shivaistic ones. Clear examples are the Goddess of the Mountain, the bull and the Minotaur, the snakes, the young resurrecting God and the he-goat. Also, the ecstatic dances of the Koribantes, are clearly identifiable with the Ganas, mischievous followers of Shiva but also (like many ancient divinities) characterised both by kindness and vengeance.[53] The Minoan paintings are noted for recalling the paradise of the Lord of the Animals, Shiva-Pashupati, probably called *Zan* by the Cretans, "hellenized into Zagreus and later identified with Zeus".[54] The myths of the young god and the Cretan goddess can be compared to those of Shiva and Parvati, of Ishtar and Tammuz, Isis and Osiris, and Venus and Adonis.[55]

[47] Alain Daniélou, *Gods of love and Ecstasy: the traditions of Shiva and Dionysus*, (Rochester: Inner Traditions Ltd., 1992), 20.
[48] Ibid, 20.
[49] Ibid, 20.
[50] Ibid, 20.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Valcamonica Symposium, *Les Religions de la Prehistoire,* 135, cited in ibid, 33.
[53] Daniélou, *Gods of love and Ecstasy*, 36.
[54] Ibid, 36.
[55] Ibid.

Rhea of the Mountain is also identified with Parvati of the mountain and we are reminded that the names of Diktynna (from Mount Dikte) and Artemis are also related to the concept of Goddess of the mountain.[56] It was during the second Minoan period, influenced by the Homeric Achaeans, claimed Daniélou, that the Cretan God Zagreus, also called the "Cretan Zeus" (*Kertagenes*) became "Dionysus, of Nysa". Its rites were, however, preserved under different names, as the sixth century B.C. Orphic cults changed name whilst maintaining the same characteristics. Major Italian mid-twentieth century philosopher and esoterist Evola too, confirmed the idea that the practices of ancient left-hand Tantrism showed that Dionysus was already associated with Shiva by the ancients.[57] In the fourth century B.C., Megasthenes identified Dionysus with Shiva.[58]

> When the soldiers of Alexander rushed to the Shivaite sactuary of Nysa (near modern Peshwar, in the north of present-day Pakistan) to embrace their brothers in Dionysus, it did not enter their minds that this may have been another divinity, or a different cult.[59]

Further elements that become noticeable in terms of cross-cultural comparisons are in Daniélou's discussion of Shivaistic symbols.[60] These are intuitively associated with equivalent elements present in Irish myth: the sword echoing the Celtic Sword of Nuadu; the shaft reminding us of the Celtic Spear of Lugh[61] and the Chalice of Immortality[62] mirroring the Cauldron of the Celts and, most importantly, the alchemic vase[63] connected with Hermes,[64] and a central symbol of shape-shifting.[65] This Chalice is called Kudru, mother of the snakes,[66] and is significant if we remember that in Tantrism the energies of the Kundalini (Sanskrit word for "serpent") are represented by symbolic snakes coiled at the base of the spine, associable with Hermes' caduceus.[67] This again is significant. In known Cretan statuettes,[68] the Potnia is represented with snakes that from the base of the spine climb to the top of her head (corresponding to the seventh chakra in Hindu

[56] Ibid, 36.
[57] Julius Evola, *Le Yoga Tantrique: sa métaphysique, ses pratiques*. (Paris: Fayard, 1971), 15.
[58] Daniélou, *Gods of love and Ecstasy*, 39.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Alain Daniélou, *Miti e Dèi dell'India, I mille volti del pantheon induista*. (Novara: Bur, 2008), 187. Also, cf. appendix, note 1.
[61] Daniélou, *Miti e Dèi dell'India*, 253-4. cf. Miranda Green, *Celtic Myths*, (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 15.
[62] Ibid,189.
[63] see p.p. 47-59.
[64] Whom Daniélou connects to Shiva and Dionysus, see p. 13.
[65] see chap. 2.
[66] Daniélou, *Miti e Dèi dell'India*, 189.
[67] cf. Daniélou, *Gods of Love and Ecstasies*, 41.
[68] see appendix, note 2.

tradition, the supposed exit for "soul-flight"). On her head a bird, which has been seen to represent flight, hence possibly betraying the existence of an ecstatic cult connected with the Potnia. Furthermore, the snakes are also represented in alchemy, climbing Hermes' caduceus, which at the top too has wings, probably symbolising ecstatic flight following the ascent of the snakes.[69]

Daniélou described Shiva as the terrible beneficial God of sleep,[70] an ambivalence that is reminiscent of the alchemic medicine/poison associated with Hermes/Mercury.[71] Hermes is also God of sleep, God of travel, psychopomp, "go-betweener" (it is Hermes who took Persephone back to Demeter from Hades' kingdom), herald between humans and Gods, possibly represented in human experience by liminal states such as sleep. Reminding us of Shiva's mischievous Ganas (echoed by Dionysus' Satyrs), Greek-Roman Hermes/Mercury is also the shape-shifter, God of trickery and thieves, connected to mischief as well as to the rainbow,[72] bridge between earth and sky, symbol of the inter-changeability of colours, volatility, elusiveness and versatility. A term, the latter, still translated in modern Italian with *mercurialità*. Shiva is covered in ash,[73] has a necklace of pearls (a feminine attribute reminiscent of the alchemic hermaphrodite[74]) and snakes.[75] The main image associated with Shiva is the *linga*[76] (one of the main qualities of the ithyphallic Dionysus) and Hermes is also associated with the phallus and the snakes. The linga can also be seen as a parallel of Hermes' rod, later identifiable to the rod of the Devil, mentioned in witch trials.[77]

Gimbutas and "Her" Goddess

Amongst the scholars who tried to prove the existence of societies centred around a great Goddess' worship, (as illustrated in *The Triumph of the Moon* with regards to the great "matriarchy debate" [78]), the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas is perhaps the only academic to support 'Goddess' theories, who came out "upright" from Hutton's helpful analysis of the rise and fall of such theories. In spite of highlighting her flaws,

[69] see p.p. 15, 88-92, 96.
[70] Daniélou, *Miti e Dèi dell'India*, 223-229.
[71] see p. 87.
[72] Norman Oliver Brown, *Hermes the thief: the evolution of a Myth*. (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), 51.
[73] Ibid.
[74] see p. 89, note 102.
[75] Ibid, 250.
[76] Daniélou, *Miti e Dèi dell'India*, 248.
[77] cf. p. 82, note 59 and p. 96, note 148.
[78] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26-309.

particularly of her later publications,[79] Hutton described her as "the only front-rank professional archaeologist in recent years to give full support to the idea that prehistoric European cultures were woman centred in both society and religion".[80] His criticism can be summed up in the following:

> [Gimbutas] violated one of her own tenets, namely, that analyses of Neolithic culture should rest upon the close and detailed knowledge of a particular region, rather than a superficial overview of the whole continent. For most of her career she held to it admirably, basing her arguments upon the archaeology of Greece and the Balkans in which she was herself an expert; even though her characterization of this corner of the land-mass as "Old Europe" did indicate a tendency to see it as a typical of the whole. This last tendency was enhanced in *The Language of the Goddess*, where she was still relying on the Greek and Balkan material but now declared that 'its systematic association indicate the extension of the same cohesive and persistent ideological system'. In the *Civilization of the Goddess* she finally abandoned caution and incorporated material from all over this region. Having no expertise in that of the British Isles at all, she took it from whichever sources seemed most fitted to her purpose, including the books of Michael Dames, whose grasp of archaeology was so weak that he treated the Wessex long barrows and superhenges as belonging to the same phase of prehistory instead of being monuments from different millennia and cultural packages.[81]

After which, Hutton concludes "that her ideas are best evaluated in the area of Europe upon which she was a leading expert, and not one in which she never even grasped the basic chronology of cultures".[82] In consideration of such warning, it should be noted that *The Language of the Goddess* and *The Living Goddesses* here have been employed not so much in view of her overall arguments but with regard to details of specific observations upon archaeological data that coincide with my speculations and analysis of witch-belief's related symbolism.

[79] Ibid, 356-359.
[80] Ibid, 356.
[81] Ibid, 359
[82] Ibid.

What has also been criticised about Gimbutas, but may be a strength as well as a weakness, is her interpretative approach. Gimbutas examined archaeological data trying to interpret it and discover religious or cult-related meanings, rather than merely describing it. By doing so she challenged the then current belief that the meaning of such data may never be uncovered. Her at times doubtful conclusions were bound to be disputed, namely by scholars such as David Anthony,[83] Douglas Bailey or the Haalands,[84] but even by feminists such as Lynn Meskell[85] and archaeologists Ruth Tringham and Margaret Conkey,[86] and many other academics which for reasons of space and relevancy cannot be discussed here. Generally what created most concern amongst academics was her inclination to leap to conclusions. However, in spite of the critiques (yet generally respectful of her preparation and contributions) attracted by Professor Gimbutas her "archeo-mythologic" approach, combining comparative mythology, archaeology and folklore, has been at times illuminating. In any case, what seems more immediately relevant to this research are her explorations of a gynocentric Minoan Crete and Aegean Islands, her discussion of pottery and decorative patterns, and her analysis of the birth and life-giver, the snake-bird Goddess, the Goddess of death and regeneration, which I will associate with the figure of the Strix or night witch.

A Note on Conventions

Language

Any word defining a pre-Christian (semi-)divinity (or supernatural entity discussed as such e.g. "Fairies", "Imps" or "Familiars") and any substantive or adjective defining

[83] In regard to her theories in support of a matriarchal society previous to the Kurgan incursion; see Peter Steinfels, "Idyllic Theory Of Goddesses Creates Storm". NY Times, February 13, 1990, accessed March 11, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/1990/02/13/science/idyllic-theory-of-goddesses-creates-storm.htm

[84] Who for instance challenge the idea that predominance of female figurines reflects the existence of a matriarchal society where women have a dominant position. G. Haaland and R. Haaland "Levels of meaning in symbolic objects", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal 6*: 295–300. In Douglass Bailey, *Prehistoric Figurines: Representation and Corporeality in the Neolithic*. (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2000). Accessed 25 January 2012. http://www.scribd.com/doc/27321621/Prehistoric-Figurines. See also: G. Haaland "Fur", in R.W.V.Weeks (ed) *Muslim Peoples. A world Ethnographic Survey* (New Haven: Greenwood Press, 1984), 264-9; —— "Øl og morsmelk. Symbol, moral og valg i Fur-Samfunnet", *Norsk AntropologiskTidsskrift 1*(1990), 3–16; G. Haaland, and R. Haaland, "Who speaks the Goddess's language? Imagination and method in archaeological research", *Norwegian Archaeological Review 28* (1995): 105-21.

[85] Who in "Goddesses, Gimbutas and New Age", argues "that when Gimbutas writes that the Palaeolithic and Neolithic feminine figures suggest a gynecocentric and not an androcentric culture, this is proof of irresponsible and non-scientific behaviour"; Lynn Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas and the New Age", *Antiquity* (1995): 74-86, in *Journal of Prehistoric Religion, vol.10* (1996): 70.

[86] Who, for example, criticised Gimbutas' focus on symbolism and "Gimbutas' scenario of egalitarian, peaceful coexistence". Ruth Tringham and Margaret Conkey, "Rethinking Figurines: A Critical View from Archaeology of Gimbutas, the 'Goddess' and Popular Culture.", in *Ancient Goddesses,* ed. L. Goodison and C. Morris, (London: British Museum Press: 1998), 22-45.

pre-Christian religions or followers of the latter (e.g. "Shivaism", "Pagans" etc.) will be capitalised. The purpose of this is to equalise, from a linguistic hence intellectual viewpoint, the Christian God to the Divinities of "defeated" pre-Abramitic cultures.

Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that terms such as "Pagan", "Celt" and "Totem" are generalised. This research is not aimed at exploring in any depth differentiations and nuances between various pre-Christian cultures; although it may occasionally stumble into such differentiations. Likewise, it carefully avoids the wide debates about "Celtic" identity.[87] The term "Pagan" will generally be used to refer to any pre-Christian religious system. The term "Celt" will be used generally in reference both to continental and British "Celts", however semantically problematic, especially in regard to the British Isles. The term "totem", as one recently adopted in Western vocabulary, will also generally be used in its broad meaning and not particularly to its aboriginal Northern American provenance. Finally, the word "witch", as Sharpe[88] noted, "is not unproblematic". This term will be employed indistinctively, for practicality, to indicate any of the persons accused of/tried for witchcraft and does not imply acceptance of the reality of witchcraft.

Referencing Style

For referencing, I have used the Chicago Style illustrated in the University of York referencing guidelines booklet for the Department of History. With regard to useful primary-source references found in doubtful secondary sources, the original has always been checked

[87] Simon James, *The Atlantic Celts, Ancient People or Modern Invention?* (London: British Museum Press, 1999), 9-25; Miranda Green, *The Celtic World*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 3-21, 515-737; John Collis, *The Celts, Origins, Myths and Inventions*. (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2003), 27-45, 93-133, 195-205.
[88] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*,13.

CHAPTER ONE

FAMILIAR SPIRITS

(…)De sa fourrure blonde et brune
Sort un parfum si doux,
qu'un soirJ'en fus embaumé,
pour l'avoirCaressée une fois, rien qu'une.
C'est l'esprit familier du lieu;
Il juge, il préside, il inspire
Toutes choses dans son empire;
peut-être est-il fée, est-il dieu?
Quand mes yeux, vers ce chat que j'aime
Tirés comme par un aimant,
Se retournent docilement
Et que je regarde en moi-même,
Je vois avec étonnement
Le feu de ses prunelles pâles,
Clairs fanaux, vivantes opales
Qui me contemplent fixement.[1]

Political and Social Climate

> Where dyvers and sundrie persones unlawfully have devised and practised Invocacons and conjuracons of Sprites … whiche thinges cannot be used and exercised but to the great offence of Godes lawe, hurt and damage of the Kinges Subjectes, and losse of the sowles of suche Offenders, to the greate dishonor of God, Infamy and disquyetnes of the Realme: FOR REFORMACON wherof be it enacted by the Kyng oure Soveraigne Lorde with thassent of the Lordes spuall and temporall and the Comons in this present Parliament assembled and by auctoritie of the same, that … then all and every suche Offence and Offences, frome the saide first day of May next comyng shalbe demyde accepted and adjuged Felonye; And that all and every persone and persones offendyng as is abovesaide their Councellors Abettors and Procurors and every of them from the saide first day of Maye shall be demyde accepted and adjuged a Felon and Felones; And thoffender and offenders contrarie to this Acte. Being therof lawfullie convicte before suche as shall have power and auctoritie to here and determyn felonyes, shall have and suffre such paynes of deathe losse and forfaytures of their lands tentes goodes and Catalles as in cases of felonie by the course of the Comon lawes of this Realme, And also shall lose p'vilege of Clergie and Sayntuarie.[2]

Henry VIII's Witchcraft Act of 1542 was the first to denounce the conjuration of spirits as felony and to condemn those who transgressed it to the death penalty and

[1] Charles Baudelaire, "Le Chat", *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, trans. Richard Howard. (Jaffrey: David R. Godine Publisher Inc., 1983), 217-218.
[2] 33 Hen VIII c. 8; see C. L'Estrange Ewen, ed., *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials, The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of 1373 Assizes held for the Home Circuit A.D. 1559-1736.* (London: Kegan & Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1929), 13-14.

to forfeit any goods possessed at the time of conviction. Although this act may partially be attributed to the religious tensions of the time, religious matters may appear to be secondary in the historical context of England, which seems to have come to hunt witches in ways and times only partially coincidental with continental Europe. The continent was more ostensibly obsessed with religious concerns, especially in the case of France and Germany. Although Christian demonology was in itself a powerful tool to eradicate any "leftover" of Paganism, the fact that this act openly condemns the invocation of spirits (together with its "reinforced" version in the 1563 Act[3]) may perhaps constitute an attempt to reinforce the action of demonology to eradicate any pre-Christian trace and superstition at folk-tradition/folk-belief/everyday-practice level which got caught in Christian ideas of Satanism. [4] The question of whether such attempts should be considered political or religious may be answered by the fact that these acts came not from the Church of England but in the name of the King, who recently had claimed supremacy over the English Church. Hence, although "any attempt at a clear division between political and religious, or for that matter, between religious, social and economic issues would be anachronistic"[5] such eradication may appear to be dictated more strongly by political motivations than genuinely religious ones as a way for the King to assert his newly gained power over the Church.[6] The 1534 Act of Supremacy,[7] through which the King declared himself to be the head of the English Church, independent from Rome, was only a few years before the start of a succession of witchcraft acts that signified a major shift, in theory at least, in terms of the English authorities' stance towards witchcraft. In practice, it was unnecessary to enforce them as strictly as their wording claimed.

It is true that the 1604 Act ("an Act against Conjuration, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits"[8]), one year after King James' coronation, addressed Familiar spirits more directly (particularly —and typically— with reference to "entertaine, employ, feede or rewarde"[9]) again, as it will be argued, a strongly pre-

[3] Witchcraft Act, 1563, 5 Eliz., c.16.
[4] As in the sermons attributed to the Bishop Caesarious of Arles (542 AD). Rudolph Arbesmann, O.S.A., "The 'Cervuli' and 'anniculae' in Caesarius of Arles". *Traditio, vol. 35* (University of Fordham, 1979). Accessed 25 January 2012.http://www.jstor.org/pss/27831061; see also note 28 and 29, p. 24.
[5] Whitney Richard David Jones, *The Tree of Commonwealth (1450-1793).* (Madison, Teaneck and London: Associated University Presses), 2000, 173.
[6] Also, the personal motivations of the King for incurring in the Pope's excommunication must not be forgotten.
[7] Act of Supremacy, 1534, 26 Henry VIII, c. l.
[8] Witchcraft Act, 1604, Jas. I, c. 12.
[9] Ibid.

Christian (thus *anti-Christian* in the eyes of Christianity) aspect:

> If any person or persons … shall use practise or exercsise any Invocation or Conjuration of any evill and spirit, or shall consult covenant with entertaine, employ, feede or rewarde any evill and wicked Spirit to or for any intent or purpose … shall suffer pains of deathe as a Felon or Felons, and shall loose the priviledge and benefit of Cleargie and Sanctuarie. AND FURTHER, to the intent that all manner of practise use or exercise of declaring by Witchcrafte, Inchantment Charme or Sorcerie should be from henceforth utterlie avoyded abolished and taken away.[10]

Yet the fact that this act was only rarely enforced (except for Hopkins' numerous cases) seems to show that according to the English what was truly regarded —on a psychological/publicly shared "common-sense-level" as opposed to the juridical— as a crime punishable by death was murder by witchcraft rather than covenant with the Devil. This shows a much lesser divergence than expected between "learned" classes who condemned "good" witches as worse than "bad" ones[11] and popular classes who still had confidence in "cunning folk". If the acts of Elizabeth and James placed witches under the jurisdiction of Common Law, moving them from the ecclesiastical courts to the secular,[12] it meant that the witch became an enemy not only of "God", but, more importantly, *of the State*, because Church and State were now *united under* royal power. Being a witch —for having made covenant with the Devil[13]— was illegal for the State only because the Church, which was now controlled by the King, condemned it. Therefore, to take charge of the witch-hunt[14] may simply have been another way to assert royal powers over religious ones thereby showing that the Monarch could take care of such matters more effectively than the Church had before, persecuting anyone who in any way attempted or contemplated moving away from the *State's* religion. The direct attack against the conjuration of Familiar may thus be explained as a way to eradicate any rejection of English Protestantism *because* of the political importance the Church had assumed to the Crown. The political manoeuvres supposedly behind such acts may also explain their short time span. In fact, if it was only two centuries later with the Witchcraft Act of 1736[15] that witchcraft ceased being unlawful (and the *pretence of* witchcraft

[10] Ibid.
[11] see p. 23 and note 18, p. 23.
[12] Although the Church was to continue contributing to the same eradication through the heavy demonological works of Anglican clergymen and sermons and by trying through its courts minor acts of sorcery.
[13] This had long been a continental preoccupation because of the still dominant influence of the Vatican.
[14] And in spite of (or perhaps because of) the formation of a "Godly" Commonwealth. After all, the formation of a "confessional state" in itself could be seen as political manipulation to ensure Royal supremacy over ecclesiastic powers.
[15] Witchcraft Act, 1736, 9 Geo., 2 c. 5.

punishable instead), by the mid-seventeenth century the witch-hunt was already in decline, and in Essex there had been no executions between 1626 and 1645,[16] when Hopkins became active. This view may also account for the otherwise odd[17] intellectual weight given in England to apostasy (as opposed to actual *maleficium*): namely the idea present in British upper classes (as well as in Continental European ones where, however, it was justified by the Catholic influence of Rome) that "good witches" should be considered equally bad if not worse than "bad witches".[18] This is something which may be seen as further proof of the attempt to eradicate any pre-Christian attachment for political (disguised as religious) reasons. Likewise (even though the timing remains slightly odd[19]) such a view may also partially explain why witch-finders with a manifest obsession against making "covenant" with the Devil, such as Hopkins and Stearne (who challenged the English law with their methods[20]) were —albeit briefly— allowed to operate. Moreover, another interesting act about "ungodly" behaviours becoming an open enemy of the State, is the Buggery Act. This act was introduced in 1533[21] (repealed in 1553, reinstated in 1563, and repealed again in 1828[22]) only one year after the submission of the clergy to the King and the same year in which the Pope excommunicated the King for marrying Anne Boleyn. The Buggery Act condemned sodomy (interesting when considering issues regarding Devil's kisses/marks versus Dionysiac/Shivaistic rites[23]) but also, much more curiously, zoophilia. This may show that the Buggery Act was not simply a statute aimed mainly against male homosexuality —which, if not expressly a "Pagan" feature, was surely less attacked in pre-Christian times.[24] The aggression against zoophilia may reveal instead the belief that sex with an animal polluted it and made its meat and milk harmful, constituting therefore a serious economic

[16] Keith Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England.* (London: Penguin Paperback, 1971), 537.
[17] In view of the1604 Act being rarely enforced.
[18] For they were believed to corrupt the soul (seen as worse than corrupting the body) through diverting people from Christianity by seeking healing or answers through non-Christian methods. cf. William Perkins, *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward. (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1969), 598; Henry Holland "chap. 3", in Henry Holland, *A treatise against witchcraft: or A dialogue, wherein the greatest doubts concerning that sinne, are briefly answered.* (Cambridge: Printed by Iohn Legatt, printer to the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, 1590), G I., accessed May 12, 2011, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?action=ByID&source=pgimages.cfg&ID=99839892&VID=4352&PAGENO=25&SUBSCRIBER_TCP=Y&FILE=../session/1310576591_12049&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&HIGHLIGHT_KEYWORD=default
[19] Such oddness in timing may also, however, be clarified in terms of MacFarlane's views (that do not contradict those exposed here) which, on the other hand, relegated Hopkins' role in the witch-hunt of the 1640s to a secondary position, thereby explaining this late explosion of witchcraft hostility in view of political, social and religious tensions mainly due to the Civil War: Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Stuart and Tudor England.* (London: Routledge, 1991), 142.
[20] Ibid, 543; Malcom Gaskill, *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy*. (London: John Murray, 2005), 47.
[21] Buggery Act, 1533, 25 Henry VIII, c.6.
[22] Douglas Farrow, *Nation of Bastards: Essays on the End of Marriage*. (Toronto: Bastian Publishing Services Ltd., 2007), 33.
[23] see p.p. 90, 98 and note 112, p. 90.
[24] In the First century B.C., Diodorus Siculus, who wrote about the Celts of Gaul and Britain, recounted that: "the men are much keener on their own sex; they lie around on animal skins and enjoy themselves, with a lover on each side… Furthermore, this is not … regarded in any way disgraceful." Cited in Gerhard Herm, *The Celts*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1977), 58.

threat.[25] On the other hand zoophilia has been known to have been performed in various forms of pre-Christian spirituality across Europe for ritual purposes,[26] in periods where the boundaries between human and animal/divine (animal seen as divine) were more fluid. The fact that an originally "Pagan" (once ritualistic) practice survived in Europe as a non-ritualistic, no longer specifically "Pagan" and mundane form of sexual relief, may be compared to the transformation of former Pagan cults into very much mundane festivals survived to these days.[27] Furthermore the fact that zoophilia persisted in England as well as continental Europe, as shown by this act, may perhaps reopen hypothesis inspired by the accounts of Gerarld of Wales, now no longer in use amongst academics, which recount the forms of ritualistic zoophilia in Britain.[28] The vicinity between human and animal evoked by these surviving forms of zoophilia somehow reminds in a distorted form of the vicinity between man and animal evoked in originally Pagan "totemistic" practices of dressing in animal skins, as described by a passage of the sermons attributed to the French Bishop Caesarious of Arles (542 AD) (wrongly cited by Murray in the attempt to prove the continuity of Paganism in Christianised Europe[29]). "Si quis Kalendis Januarii aut in vecola aut in cervolo vadit, tribus anis peniteat; quia hoc daemonium est" (meaning: "If anyone goes on the Kalends of January in a cart or as a stag, he will do penance three years, because this is demonic").[30] This, in turn, may demonstrate that when converting the religion of a country it may take centuries for people to let go of popular traditions or habits connected with the previous belief-system, particularly in those aspects responsible for achieving psychological or physical release. As claimed by Russel, in matter of "pagan survivals, nothing was more appealing to popular

[25] see Laura Stokes, *Demons of Urban Reform: Early European Witch Trials and Criminal Justice, 1430-1530*. (Basingstokes: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 169. cf. also ibid, 1-3, 20, 77, 157-160,162, 168, 170,179.

[26] As widely discussed by Uberto Pestalozza *Religione Mediterranea*. (Milano: Bocca, 1951. Professor Pestalozza (1872-1966) was an Italian Catholic and celebrated classicist; he was also the first historian of world religions to hold a chair in this subject in Italy in 1935. His valuable studies upon middle-eastern and Mediterranean Goddesses have inspired since.

[27] see Russel's comments above (and note 31, p. 25).

[28] Giraldus Cambrensis, *The history and topography of Ireland (Topographia Hiberniae)*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982), 110; Miranda J. Green, *Exploring the World of the Druids*.(London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 131.

[29] She attributed to the Penitential of early English law issued by Theodore of Tarsus, the Archibishop of Canterbury about the seventh Century, without realising that this was not in the original text "an unknown cleric working somewhere in what is now France or Germany who made his own additions" to the original two centuries later. Ronlad Hutton, *Stations of the Sun: A History o fthe Ritual Year*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 89. cf. Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 21, 60, 233.

[30] Rudolph Arbesmann, O.S.A., "The 'Cervuli' and 'anniculae' in Caesarius of Arles". Traditio, Vol. 35 (University of Fordham,1979). Accessed 25 January 2012.http://www.jstor.org/pss/27831061. To note is that it is also said further on "If anyone on the Kalends of January shall go about **according to the custom of the pagans** with a stag or cart…". Giovanni Chiantore, ed., *Studi Medievali*, Il Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto Medievo. (Torino: Chiantore, 1986), 668. See note 4, p 21. This date would suggest a link with the Saturnalia, in honour of Cronus/Saturnus, father of Zeus/Jupiter, major Roman divinity, which according to Orphic tradition was father of Zagreus [Barry Powell, "Chapter 11: Myths of Death". Classical Myth. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 2008)], "the hunter of live-animal" (see p.p.14-15 and 88) the goat-God, which was Dionysus in the earlier forms. The Saturnalia were celebrated originally on the 17th December but then extended to the end of December and they were also connected with disguise (namely the inversion of social roles). Although it may seem a stretch to connect this early January British costume of dressing up as animals to the Saturnalia, we must remember that the Carnival, both contemporary and in its earlier forms (e.g. the Medieval Feasts of Fools) are also a derivation of the Saturnalia and have been celebrated up to February.

imagination that than the ancient festivals, and nothing lasted longer".[31]

With regards to animal disguises and pre-Christian religious cults possibly survived in the form of folk-traditions, it may be helpful at this point to note Gimbutas' comments on Neolithic figurines with animal-shaped heads. "Snake, bird-, pig- and bear-headed figurines have all been discovered. All of those manifestation, whether masked or not, represent the intimate vicinity amongst humankind, nature and the divine during the Neolithic". Animal masks said to represent "the 'goddess' sacred animals …when worn by a human figure …embody a fusion of animal and human forces",[32] which was very much the original purpose of the aforementioned zoophilia. This apparent continental "folk-costume" to dress up as herd animals, could thus be the remnant, on a mundane level, of older religious cults related to herd animals and horned deities. Gods such as Dionysus and Cernunnus, easily transformed into the horned "Devil" as soon as their worship became illegal. In conclusion of this preliminary discussion it may be said that besides the political/religious and social causes behind the "explosion" of witch-persecution, what is of primary importance in the context of this study, is any surviving trace of pre-Christian belief or tradition which may link to (hence disclose the meaning of) witch-related beliefs.

Intuitive Differentiations

When reading witch-trial material on Familiar spirits we encounter descriptions that show slight or sometimes significant differences that however intuitively apparent are not easily or immediately pinned down theoretically. The cases of John Walsh, Elizabeth Southerns, Anne Whittle and Bridget Goldsbrough could be used as examples. John Walsh, who was examined in August 1566 before Thomas Williams, Commissary to the Bishop of Exeter… said that his "Familiar should do any thing at his commaundement"[33] and that it:

[31] Jeffrey B. Russel, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. (Ithaca: Cornel University Press, 1984), 50.

[32] Marija Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, ed. Miriam Robbins Dexeter. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 11.

[33] Anon, *The examination of John Walsh before Maister Thomas Williams, commissary to the Reuerend father in God William Bishop of Excester, vpon certayne interrogatories touchyng wytchcrafte and sorcerye, in the presence of diuers ge[n]tlemen and others. The .xxiii. of August. 1566.* (London: printed by John Awdely, 1566), BII, accessed April 29, 2011 http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99837900&FILE=../session/1298904511_28806&SEARCHSCREEN=param(SEARCHSCREEN)&VID=2247&PAGENO=6&ZOOM=FIT&VIEWPORT=&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=param(DISPLAY)&HIGHLIGHT_KEYWORD=undefined

> would somtyme come vnto hym lyke a gray blackish Culuer, and somtime lyke a brended Dog, and somtimes lyke a man in all proportions…[with] clouen feete.… And whe~ he would call him for a horse stollen, or for any other matter wherein he would vse him: hee sayth hee must geue hym some lyuing thing, as a Chicken, a Cat, or a Dog. And further he sayth he must geue hym twoo lyuing thynges once a yeare. And at the first time when he had the Spirite, hys sayd maister did cause him to deliuer him one drop of his blud, whych bloud the Sprite did take away vpon hys paw.[34]

In April 1612, Elizabeth Southerns, alias *Demdike*, said:

> That about twentie yeares past, as she was comming homeward from begging, there met her this Examinate neere vnto a Stonepit in *Gouldshey,* in the sayd Forrest of *Pendle,* a Spirit or Deuill in the shape of a Boy, the one halfe of his Coate blacke, and the other browne, who bade this Examinate stay, saying to her, that if she would giue him her Soule, she should haue any thing that she would request. Wherevpon this Examinat demaunded his name? and the Spirit answered, his name was *Tibb*: and so this Examinate in hope of such gaine as was promised by the sayd Deuill or *Tibb,* was contented to giue her Soule to the said Spirit: And for the space of fiue of sixe yeares next after, the sayd Spirit or Deuill appeared at sundry times vnto her this Examinate about *Day-light* Gate, alwayes bidding her stay, and asking her this Examinate what she would haue or doe? To whom this Examinate replyed, Nay nothing: for she this Examinate said, she wanted nothing yet. And so about the end of the said sixe yeares, vpon a Sabboth day in the morning, this Examinate hauing a litle Child vpon her knee, and she being in a slumber, the sayd Spirit appeared vnto her in the likenes of a browne Dogg, forcing himselfe to her knee, to get blood vnder her left Arme: and she being without any apparrell sauing her Smocke, the said Deuill did get blood vnder her left arme.[35]

Whereas Anne Whittle, alias *Chattox,* in the same month of the same year declared:

> that about foureteene yeares past she entered, through the wicked perswasions and counsell of *Elizabeth Southerns,* alias *Demdike*, and was seduced to condescent & agree to become subiect vnto that diuelish abhominable profession of Witchcraft: Soone after which, the Deuill appeared vnto her in the liknes of a Man, about midnight, at the house of the sayd *Demdike*: and therevpon the sayd *Demdike* and shee, went foorth of the said house vnto him; wherevpon the said wicked Spirit mooued this Examinate, that she would become his Subiect, and giue her Soule vnto him: the which at first, she refused to assent vnto; but after, by the great perswasions made by the sayd *Demdike,* shee yeelded to be at his commaundement and appoyntment: wherevpon the sayd wicked Spirit then sayd vnto her, that hee must haue one part of her body for him to sucke

[34] Ibid.
[35] Thomas Potts, *The vvonderfull discouerie of witches in the countie of Lancaster.* (London: printed by W. Stansby for Iohn Barnes, 1613), B2v-B3, accessed May 12, 2011, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D00000998502000000&WARN=N&SIZE=247&FILE=../session/1307811984_7310&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR&ECCO=Y

> vpon; the which shee denyed then to graunt vnto him; and withall asked him, what part of her body hee would haue for that vse; who said, hee would haue a place of her right side neere to her ribbes, for him to sucke vpon: whereunto shee assented. And she further sayth, that at the same time, there was a thing in the likenes of a spotted Bitch, that came with the sayd Spirit vnto the sayd *Demdike,* which then did speake vnto her in this Examinates hearing, and sayd, that she should haue Gould, Siluer, and worldly Wealth, at her will. And at the same time she saith, there was victuals, *viz.* Flesh, Butter, Cheese, Bread, and Drinke, and bidde them eate enough. And after their eating, the Deuill called *Fancie,* and the other Spirit calling himselfe *Tibbe,* carried the remnant away: And she sayeth, that although they did eate, they were neuer the fuller, nor better for the same; and that at their said Banquet, the said Spirits gaue them light to see what they did, although they neyther had fire nor Candle light; and that they were both shee Spirites, and Diuels.[36]

The above examples, with slight differences from case to case, differ only slightly more significantly from cases in which the Devil/spirit Familiar show itself solely in animal form, as in the case of Joan Upney of Dagenham in 1589:

> In Primis, this saide examinate saith and confesseth, that about sixe yeeres last past, betweene the feastes of all Saintes, and the birth of our Lord God, the devil appeared unto her in the Almes house aforesaide: about the of ten of the Clock in the night time, being in the shape and proportion of a donnish colloured Ferrit, having fiery eyes, and the saide Examinate being alone in her Chamber, and sitting upon a low stoole, preparing herself to bedward: the Ferrit standing with his hinder legs upon the ground, and his fore legs settled upon her lappe, and settling his fiery eyes upon her eyes, spake and pronounced unto her these words following, nameleye: Joan Prentice give me thy soule, to whome this Examinate being greatly amazed, answered and said: In the name of god what art thou The Ferrit answered, I am satan, feare me not my coming unto thee is to doo thee no hurt but to obtaine thy soule, which I must and wil have before I departe from thee to whome the saide examinate answered and said, that he demanded that of her which is none of hers to give, saying: that her soule appertained onely unto Jesus Christ, by whose precious blood shedding, it was bought and purchased. To whome the saide Ferret replyed and saide, I must then have some of thy blood which she willingly graunting, offered him the forefinger of her left hand, the which the Ferrit tooke into his mouth, and setting his former feete upon that hand, suckt blood thereout, in som much that her finger did smart exceedingye: and the saide examinate demaunding again of the Ferrit what his name was: It answered Bidd. And then presently the said Ferrit vanished out of her sight sodainly.[37]

[36] Ibid, B4-B4v.

[37] Anon, "The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches. Arreigned and by Justice condemned and executed of three notorious Witches. Arreigned and by Justice condemned and executed at Chelmes-forde, in the Countye of Essex, the 5. Day of Julye, last past. 1589. With the manner of their divelish and keeping of their spirits, whose fourmes are herein truelye proportioned"(1589), in Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches, Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing.* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 135.

Yet all the above evidence differs more significantly from accounts of animals in which witches are said to transform into, and are hence *identifiable with* the witch *herself* like a kind of animal "alter ego". Such animal "alter ego" may possibly be regarded as a Familiar spirit because such animals into which the witch transforms, perform magic on behalf of the witch. It was *through* this kind of Familiar that, in people's imagination, the witch could be hurt; by hurting the Familiar in fact, the witch herself would be hurt. An example of this kind of Familiar could be a late accusation (1736) against Bridget Goldsbrough of Baildon, allegedly seen by Sarah Brook, turning herself into two grey cats and going into John Heartly's house.[38] According to James Brook, Bridget "sat upon the coals" whilst Margaret Goldsbrough (another witch) "stood in her shape and offered to put a bridle upon him and a girdle around his body".[39]

In John Walsh's instance, we have a Familiar that can have both human and animal form, and has been given to him by his supposed master of witchcraft, Robert Dreiton.[40] Like in the case of Anne Whittle and Elizabeth Southern, the Devil and the Familiar are here superimbosable; they appear to the witch in human (in the first case) or mainly animal form (in the second and third). In the case of Joan Upney, the Devil-Familiar is described to manifest itself solely as an animal. In all these three cases, the Familiar will fulfil the witch's wishes through magic, in exchange of some for her blood, milk or food. However, it should be considered that in early modern and medieval times any spirit outside of the Christian faith was affiliated to the "Devil"; it is also possible that there might be no substantial differences at all between the above four cases. In the fifth case examined, however, regarding the belief that a witch could turn herself into the animal Familiar associated with her, the argument that this is something rather different conceptually will be presented.

This chapter will thus attempt to make sense of such possible conceptual differentiations organising them theoretically according to their narrative patterns, using folklore, legend, ancient belief-systems, cults and lost or surviving popular traditions to explain such differentiations observable in early modern beliefs related to Familiar spirits.

[38] West Riding Record Office, Wakefield, Quarter Session Rolls, QS1/76/2File 3.
[39] Ibid. (see appendix, note 4).
[40] see p. 25-26.

Definitions

The Romans and Greeks believed that behind the "person" (term used in ancient Greece and Italy to indicate stage characters, supposedly derived from Latin *personare*, "to resonate through" indicating the mask worn on stage by actors through which his real voice resonated[41]) existed a spirit which often could take the shape of an animal called *Genius* or *Daimon*. Such entities were, at times, considered ancestors and protectors, not only of the individuals but also of families, tribes or clans. Such belief finds echoes in ancient China, but is also found amongst the Mongolians, the Lapps, and many others.

The popular Latin expression *Nomina sunt omina* ("Names are presages") may have derived from the aforementioned belief; this expression gives the idea that within the name is enclosed a fate, a presage, a direction, or, in the case of *Nomina sunt Numina* ("Names are Spirits"), an energy, a deity, a spirit. From this belief, surnames and names after animals and plants, or names related to aspects of nature could also be derived. Furthermore, such belief is very likely to have been widespread in antiquity well beyond Italy. It is indicated by folktales (e.g. the relatively recent "Rumpelstiltskin"[42]) common in different parts of the world expressing the idea that discovering someone's true name[43] can dispossess them of every power (as if their very essence had been uncovered, thus exposed), which is gained by whom has come in possession of the name in question. Likewise, *not* being given a name (e.g. in the case of Arianrhod and her son Leu[44]) can prevent a child from becoming an adult, hence of growing to his/her full potential, depriving him/her somehow of an identity/essence. This may also be why the Yoginis, Indian priestesses who practised Kaula tantric rituals, were believed to each inhabit a tree or a plant that was never to be cut, or able to be transformed into animals,[45] and why their names, as everything about them, was wrapped in a veil of secrecy. In fact as Professor Vidya Dehejia, Cambridge PhD Graduate (1967) of Southern Asian Art and author of *Yogini Cults and Temples*, noted, people still held them in great awe. When mentioning them people almost whispered, and believed that to walk too close to their temple

[41] Ottorino Pianigiani, *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana*. (La Spezia: Fratelli Melita Editori, 1991), 1007.
[42] Jachob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. (Croydon: Popular Penguin Classics, 1996), 140-144.
[43] Philip Martin, *The Writer's Guide to Fantasy Literature: From Dragon's Lair to Hero's Quest*. (Waukesha: Kalmbach Publishing Co., 2002), 13.
[44] Sioned Davies, trans., "Fourth Branch", in *The Mabinogion*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55-56.
[45] Vidya Deheja, *Yogini Cults and Temples, A Tantric Tradition.* (New Delhi: Ed. National Museum, 1986), 36.

(Hirapur) could potentially attract their terrible curse, which actually meant that the existence of the temple itself only became public knowledge in 1953.[46] This mirrors the belief in Greece that the Driads (from Greek *dendros*, "tree") inhabited trees, or amongst the Celts that various Spirits inhabited different parts of the wilderness.[47]

"A demon in animal form", as defined by Perkins,[48] the Familiar is also known as "imp", "devil" or "spirit",[49] and was a major feature of early modern British witchcraft-related imagination. It may be described as the magical companion of the witch, an aiding spirit, usually in the form of a domestic or small animal that guided and/or helped witches to perform tasks of supernatural nature. Such spirit was visible to the witch[50] as a "clearly defined, three-dimensional human or animal form, vivid with colour and animated with movement and sound", as opposed to the stereotypical ghost image, "smoky" and "undefined".[51] Hence, Wilby noted, historians who have confused Familiars with descriptions of "real flesh-and-blood beings" may be forgiven.[52] In *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, whilst accepting the two may at times overlap, Wilby persistently attempts at conceptualising the distinction of "good" from "bad" witches, thus making a conceptual discernment between benevolent or malevolent Familiars depending on whether they served a good or a bad witch, since the Familiar's duty was to assist the witch.[53] Though this moral distinction between good and bad witch was common amongst the people and in trial records, while the related terminology itself of "white" and "black" magic is old, Wilby's *further* conceptualisation of such distinction in current terms, according to current parameters, appears almost forceful and too modern. Demonologists tried to abolish this distinction, as discussed below. Conversely, common people were probably, more than anything else, caught in between the confusion of new ideas of "right" and "wrong". They were simultaneously trying their best to survive poverty, famine, unknown disease, fear of the supernatural (spirits and witches as well as "the wrath of God") and of the authorities, whilst also living in an inhospitable climate and —least but not last amongst all concerns— the risk of being accused and/or imprisoned. If they went to "cunning folk" to receive advice, they were also ready to

[46] Ibid, ix, 95.
[47] Miranda J. Green, *Exploring the World of Druids*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 24.
[48] Perkins, *The Work of William Perkins*, 44-7.
[49] Montague Summers, *Witchcraft and Black Magic*. (Minneola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), 50.
[50] Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits, Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic*, (Brighton-Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 61.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid, 74-76.

accuse that same person of malevolent magic if the need (or fear) arose. Therefore, the boundary between "good" and "bad" witch in popular belief was fluid and subject to constant shifts and suspicions. Accordingly, in pre-Christian perspectives of "right" and "wrong", the distinction between good and bad witch seems a non-issue.

> The Sicilians did not hold a similar dualistic belief… the *donas de fueras* complex was ambivalent: Fairies and witches could exercise both good and ill although the harms they caused was seldom so bad that it could not be repaired by an expiatory ritual,[54]

Henningsen noted, in regard to the Sicilian Fairy trials, "because Sicily had retained an oddly archaic witch-belief which did not undergo the same subsequent demonialization by demonologists."[55] Such an archaic belief system echoed that of the ancient primeval Goddesses holders of both good and evil, as will be argued.[56] Henningsen noted, in regard to the Sicilian Fairy trials, "because Sicily had retained an oddly archaic witch-belief which did not undergo the same subsequent demonialization by demonologists."[57] Such an archaic belief system echoed that of the ancient primeval Goddesses holders of both good and evil, as will be argued.[58]

The next mental association is between concepts of Familiar and shamanistic "totemism". However disputable, (and subject to similar tortuous routes such as those encountered by Ginzburg in discussing possible links between witchcraft and Siberian shamanism[59]) in proving solid historical links between it and British Familiar concepts, some interesting similarities may nonetheless be briefly discussed. Riffard defined the Familiar spirit as "doppelganger, personal demon… totem… spirit companion… the double, the alter-ego of an individual" which "does not look like the individual concerned. Even though it may have an independent life of its own it remains closely linked to the individual… The Familiar spirit can be an animal".[60] This idea is interesting in terms of explaining, for instance, details of a confession related to Jane Wenham, clearly identifiable in her Familiar that she appeared to her victim in the shape of a cat ("on Wednesday, the 12th of March, she

[54] Bengt Anakrloo and Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft, Centres and Peripheries.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 206.
[55] Ibid.
[56] see p.p. 54, 58, 60.
[57] Ibid.
[58] see p.p. 54, 58, 60.
[59] see Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).
[60] Pierre Riffard, *Dictionnaire de l'ésotérisme.* (Paris: Payot, 1983), 132.

[Anne Thorn] saw Jane Wenham again several times in the Afternoon, and at Night… The next Day she saw her again in the Shape of a Cat" [61]). The judge asked Anne Thorn how she knew the "Cat to be Mother Wenham?" She answered, "she knew it to be her, because the Face of the Cat was like hers, and she (the Cat) spoke to her, and told her she would torment her".[62] Likewise, the same idea can be employed to interpret evidence in regard to Ellaine Smithe of Maldon, who was hurt through hurting her Familiar. After refusing alms to Ellaine's son, Ihon Estwood:

> was taken with very greate paine in his bodie, and the same night followyng, as he satte by the fire with one of his neighbours, to their thinkyng thei did see a Ratte runne vp the Chimney, and presently it did fall doune again in the likenesse of a Tode, and takyng it vp with the tongges, thei thruste it into the fire, and so helde it in Forcesibly, it made the fire burne as blewe as Azure, and the fire was almoste out, and at the burnyng thereof the saied Ellen Smithe was in greate paine and out of quiete.[63]

This passage is reminiscent, amongst many others, of the Irish folktales of the Selkies, who shed their seal-skins and thereupon transformed themselves into beautiful women to dance in the moonlight. By stealing their seal-skins (symbolising their ability to became seals, thus to take the physical shape corresponding to their true essence) anyone, however, may gain total control over them, and prevent them from re-transforming into seals until the seal-skin is returned to them.

Following the above line of thought, we have come to associate the early modern concept of the Familiar to that of totem in totem-related beliefs in pre-Christian cultures. Thus, before passing to more specific cultural examples, it may be useful to give a brief and general definition of the concept of "totemism" which, to use the (in this instance still valid and helpful in its simplicity) words of the otherwise outdated[64] pioneer of cultural anthropology Sir James Frazer, would be: "an intimate relationship which is supposed to exist between a group of kindred people on the one

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[61] Anon, "A full and Impartial Account of the Discovery of Sorcery and Witchcraft Practis'd by Jane Wenham of Walkerne in Hertforshire, upon the Bodies of Anne Thorn, Anne Street, &c. The Proceedings against Her from Her being first Apprehended, till She was Committed to Gaol by Sir Henri Chaunci. Also her TRYAL AT THE Assies at Hertford before Mr Justce POWELL where she was found guilty of Felony and Witchcraft, and receiv'd Sentence of Death for the same, March 4-1711-12", (London, 1712), in James Sharpe and Peter Elmer ed., *English Witchcraft, 1560-1736, vol. 5. The later English trial pamphlets*. (London; Brookfied, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), 134.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Anon, *A detection of damnable driftes, practized by three vvitches arraigned at Chelmifforde in Essex, at the laste assises there holden, whiche were executed in Aprill. 1579 Set forthe to discouer the ambushementes of Sathan, whereby he would surprise vs lulled in securitie, and hardened with contempte of Gods vengeance threatened for our offences*. (London: J. Kingston, 1579), A.c., accessed April 29, 2011, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D0000099854184000 0&WARN=N&SIZE=19&FILE=../session/1310492778_7266&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR&ECCO=Y

[64] see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 37, 113-116, 129.

side and a species of natural or artificial objects on the other side".[65] However, he added, "the species of things which constitutes a totem is far oftener natural than artificial, and …the great majority are either animals or plants".[66] To this idea of the collective totem as "soul" or "spirit" of a tribe, clan or group of people may be added an individual concept of totem. In fact, as Émile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology, put it:

> no religious societies exist in which, next to the Gods whose worship is imposed to all members, there aren't also other Gods that each individual creates for personal use. Next to the collective totem there exists always a private totem… which becomes object of an authentic cult.[67]

This "inner animal spirit" is what gives the shaman his/her supernatural powers just like the animal Familiar does for the witch in early modern belief. Henry Michael[68] through the analysis of the Evenki shamans showed "how previously independent totemic cults were destroyed in their local setting and reduced to the role of spirit-helpers of the shaman" and how "individual totems were elevated to become the chief shamanistic spirits,"[69] which may indirectly suggest the idea that witches' helping spirits, the Familiars, might have also derived from autochthon totemic cults, an hypothesis which may require further enquiry. However, in the meantime, it is interesting to note that in witch-trials and pamphlets we often hear of witches having more than one helping Familiar spirit, for instance in the case of Ursula Kemp:

> The saide Thomas Rabbet saith, that his said mother Ursly Kempe alias Grey hath foure severall spirites, the one called Tyffin, the other Tittey, the third Pygine, & the fourth Jacke: & being asked of what colours they were, saith that Tyttey is like a little grey Cat, Tyffin is like a white lambe, Pygine is black like a Toad, and Jacke is black like a Cat.[70]

"External" and "Internal" Familiars

What has been described above, fundamentally as the inner spirit of the witch in the shape of an animal which (in some cases) the witch can turn herself into will be here

[65] Sir James George Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, *vol. 4*. (London: MacMillan, 1910) 3-4.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Self-translated citation from: Émile Durkheim, *Per una definizione dei fenomeni religiosi*. (Roma: Armando Editore, 2006), 72.
[68] A recently deceased American Anthropologist and Professor of Geography who specialised in the studies of Siberians, Eskimos and other Artic people.
[69] Henry N. Michael, *Studies in Siberian Shamanism.* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1963), 184.
[70] W. W., fl. 1577-1582, "A true and just recorde, of the information, examination and confession of all the witches, taken at S. Ofes in the countie of Essex whereof some were executed, and other some entreated according to the determination of lawe. Wherein all men may see what a pestilent people witches are, and how vnworthy to lyue in a Christian Commonwealth.", in Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 84.

conveniently termed as "internal Familiar". To better distinguish the "internal Familiar" from the personal but external aiding spirit (or "Devil"), whether human or animal, the latter will be termed instead as "external Familiar".

In clarifying such self-coined yet not self-fabricated differentiations further, tribal comparisons will be made. When discussing the Nanai of Siberia, Eliade noted "the Goldi clearly distinguish between the tutelary spirit (*ayami*), which chooses the shaman, and the helping spirits (*syven*), which are subordinate to it and are granted to the shaman by the *ayami* itself".[71] The parallel seems perfect. The *ayami* could be considered as the equivalent of Tom Reid for Bessie Dunlop,[72] whereas the *syven* may be compared to "internal" Familiar spirits such as the cat for Bridget Goldsbrough, or even Tyffin and Tittey for Ursula Kemp, who could represent the *outer* animal manifestation or *projection* of her **inner** "totem", and divergent by comparison to the *ayami*, equipped with a more defined anthropomorphic identity and not subordinate to the shaman, like the *syven*.[73] However, to avoid confusion between the "internal Familiar" as the animal which the witch can turn into and the pet-like "internal Familiar" which the witches usually keep in a basket and feed blood, cheese, bread and milk, we shall term the latter as "*projected* internal Familiar".

It could be thus assumed that if the *ayami* may be compared to the "Devil" (which appears to the witch both in animal or human form), the *syven* is usually the pet-like spirit the English witch keeps in a basket, or the animal the witch turns into or rides upon when going to the Sabbath[74] and is nearly always animal (or semi-animal[75]). If this is the divine "totem" of the witch, "transforming into" it means being pervaded by it, and her/his human side being transfigured into the divine. In the following account an *ayami* talked to a (Siberian) Shaman and said: "I shall give you assistant spirits. You are to heal with their aid".[76] The shaman went on to say:

> Sometimes she [the *ayami*] comes under the aspect of an old woman, and sometimes under that of a wolf, so she is terrible to look at. Sometimes she comes as a winged tiger (…) She has given me three assistants-the *jarga* (the panther), the *doonto* (the bear) and the *amba* (the tiger). They come to me in my dreams, and appear whenever I summon them while shamaning. If one

[71] Mircea Eliade, *From primitives to Zen: a thematic sourcebook of the history of Religions*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 437.
[72] see p. 37-38, and notes 89 and 93, p. 37-38.
[73] Eliade, *From primitives to Zen*, 437.
[74] see p. p. 28, 53, 80, 82.
[75] see p.p. 25-26 and 28.
[76] Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 72.

> of them refuses to come, the *ayami* makes them obey, but, they say, there are some who do not obey even the *ayami*. When I am shamaning, the *ayami* and the assistant spirits are possessing me; whether big or small, they penetrate me, as smoke or vapour would. When the *ayami* is within me, it is she who speaks through my mouth, and she does everything herself up.[77]

When analysing several pre-Christian accounts from different ancient periods and geographical areas, there is no neat difference between the divine outside and the divine inside[78], and whilst both the *ayami* and *syvens* possess the shaman (supposedly one from the inside and the other from the outside), the *syven* may have been described as subordinate to the shaman because they are subject to his/her egotistic/personal will. If we are to accept the speculative parallels between *syven* and "internal/projected internal Familiar", or "totem", then the *syven* is subordinate to the shaman like the "internal/projected internal Familiar" is to the witch. The logic here is that however superior to her as it constitutes her inner source of supernatural power, it is the palpable outer human "ego" who materially makes decisions and interacts with the world, not her essence (the "internal/projected internal Familiar"). In fact both internal/projected internal or "external Familiars" can make suggestions or even give orders, but ultimately it is up to the witch to decide whether to obey, regardless of any possible consequences. An example may be when Elizabeth Southerns refused to follow Tibb's suggestion to go and help Anne Whittle and Anne Refern to make clay pictures of Christopher, Robert and Marie Nutter. "The said Spirit seeming to be angrie … pushed this Examinate into the ditch, and so shed the Milke which this Examinate had in a Can or Kit".[79]

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[77] Ibid.

[78] see for instance the Greek-Roman concept of inspiration, and the Muse as divine inspirer of all arts. cf. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most and Salvatore Settis, *The Classical Tradition*. (Harvard: Harvard College, 2010), 604. Also, the English linguist and Professor of Modern English Language, Ronald Carter, noted that "the notion of inspiration (with its derivation of "breathing in"), suggesting the influence of natural but unaccountable outside forces can be traced back to the time of Plato and has been dominant in much Western thinking about the subject": *Language and Creativity: the Art of Common*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2004), 25-29. However, the verb "to inspire" itself has an apparently contradictory etymology. It comes from Latin *inspirare*, made of the particle *in*, meaning "in", "inside" or "upon" and *spirare*, "to blow", "to take breath". The original meaning would be "to blow upon", "to instil a thought in the soul, an affection, a plan"; "to give advice"; "to gift with divinatory art", "to gift with genius"…but also to draw air in the lungs": Piangiani, *Vocabolario Etimologico*, 723. This seems to suggest both the idea of inspiration as a gift from outside, as well as perhaps a meditative concept of "breathing in" and finding source of creativity **within**. This, in turn, suggests an idea of predisposition and of "Muse" within, a concept which would make sense if we remember that according to the Greeks there were nine Muses for the different arts, thus suggesting the concept of the Muse taking different shapes to inspire different typologies of individuals inclined to different arts. This could be confirmed by a second century B.C. composition in what is said to be probably a Ionian dialect: "Sing to me, dear Muse, lead me *into my* song. Let a breeze from your sacred grove whirl about my mind": cited in John Gray Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 254. The Muse here leads the poet ***into his*** song, suggesting that the song is already **within himself** and the Muse has the role of leading the poet *into himself*, to the song *already* "hidden" there, perhaps through a process of sympathic evocation. This Greek concept of inspiration where outer and inner divine principles, "inside" and "outside", appear to blend, is better expressed by the Indian concept of "Samadhi", widely explored by Swami Rama (Master of Sankya Yoga of the Himalayan tradition and founder of the Himalayan Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy with branches across the USA, Europe and India) in *Samadhi: The Highest State of Wisdom: Yoga the Sacred Science*. (Uttaranchal, India: Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust, 2002), 1-10, 15-18, 115-124, 179-187, 219-228.

[79] Potts, *The vvonderfull discouerie of witches in the countie of Lancaster*, E2v-E2.

The "External Familiar" and the Devil

Personal "external Familiars" seem to overlap often in witch-trial accounts with the "Devil" appearing in the shape of a man, an animal or a boy. This overlap is probably partially due to the known fact that the generalising term of "Devil" was employed in medieval/early modern Europe by religious authorities and subsequently by lay authorities and ordinary people, to define any supernatural entity, spirit or deity outside the Christian faith. Yet, a further reason for such an overlap may be that the Devil appears to the witch in a shape of another, possibly to suit her inner preference/nature, as in the case of Jane Wenham who "fancied" the Devil to appear in the shape of a cat.[80] If we accept this totemistic interpretation of Familiar spirits and non-neatly dualistic conceptions of "internal" and "external", such an example may confirm a shamanistic concept (of a supernatural entity that appears in the shape of/in a shape compatible with the shaman's totem/s or inclination) thereby underpinning, perhaps by way of folkloric transmission, this otherwise odd early modern belief concerning a Devil that appears to witches in different shapes according to their preference. It may be useful at this regard to return to Eliade's previous account of the *ayami* appearing to the shaman:

> Once I was asleep on my sick-bed, when a spirit approached me. It was a very beautiful woman. Her figure was very slight, she was no more than half an arshin (71 cm.) tall. Her face and attire were quite as those of one of our Gold women (…) She said: 'I am the *ayami* of your ancestors, the Shamans. I taught them shamaning. Now I am going to teach you (…) I love you, I have no husband now, you will be my husband and I shall be a wife unto you'.[81]

This is interestingly reminiscent of those magical women who assisted mortal men in old folktales. In the *Mabinogi*, Rhiannon of the birds assisted Pwyll, the King of Dyved,[82] thereby saving his kingdom, his life and providing him with advice before finally marrying him, and losing (unlike the *ayami* of the above account, however) part of her powers and her immortality. Likewise, Macha, married to the King of Ulaid, died to save her husband's life having to demonstrate —however heavily pregnant— that she could run faster than a horse as her husband claimed.[83] Loves of

[80] Anon, *A Full and Impartial Account of the Trial and Proceedings against Jane Wenham for Witchcraft, &c.*, in Sharpe and Elmer ed., *English Witchcraft, 1560-1736, vol. 5*., 131.
[81] Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, 72.
[82] Davies, trans., "The First Branch", in *The Mabinogion*, 11-22.
[83] Jeffrey Gantz, ed. and trans., "The Labour Pains of the Ulaid & the Twins of Macha", in *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*. (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 127.

similar magical women for mortal men occur in Greek myths also, for instance in the tale of Theseus and Ariadne: Ariadne saved his life but in different versions of the legend nonetheless died or was betrayed by him.[84]

A parallel of the above may be found in later history up to the witch-trial period. One example could be the thirteenth century legend of Thomas Rhymer and the "Queen of Elfame".[85] The Queen warned Thomas that if she offered herself to him as he desired, she would become ugly and grey, and her prediction did in fact come true as the legend goes. Thomas Rhymer chased her on his horse, but she was always ahead of him and remained so until he courteously asked her to stop.[86] Here a female figure from an idyllic magical dimension (that is not ruled by force, thus — it can be supposed— not necessarily patriarchal), clearly seems to be clarifying to the mortal man (of the patriarchal world ruled by force) who approaches Fairyland that women there are not won through force nor are they weaker than men. This mirrors very closely, again, the tale of Pwyll chasing Rhiannon who was always ahead of him[87] when he chased her through her territories and who stopped only when he kindly asked her to, but was eventually humiliated and betrayed when marrying him.[88] When we reach the early modern period however, the Queen of Faerie did not lose her powers by becoming the mistress and guide of men (e.g. Andro Man[89] and Tom Reid[90]), and spirit helpers in human form did not lose any power either when helping female witches.[91] Therefore, the parallel with the *ayami* seems again to be suited. Likewise the Devil or a male aiding spirit of the witch does not lose its magic by assisting the witch: for example as in the aforementioned Chattox and Demdyke,[92] Agnes Sampson;[93] Alison Pairson, Isoble Gowdie and Isobel Haldane,[94] or Bessie Dunlop:

> Elizabeth or Bessie Dunlop… accused of the using of Sorcery, Witchcraft and Incantation with Invocation of spirits of the devil, continuing in

[84] Angela Cerinotti, *Atlante dei miti dell'antica Grecia e di Roma antica*. (Firenze: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 2003), 233-234.
[85] Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History: A History from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century.* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001) 6, 9, 36, 75-76, 142-144.
[86] Ibid, 142-144.
[87] Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion,* 9-10.
[88] Ibid, 17.
[89] Ibid, 56-58.
[90] Tom Reid was the alleged spirit helper of Bessie Dunlop, and was said to have been a real man and to have died at Pinkie in 1547, who gained his powers from the Queen of Faerie, who was also the one to ask him to help Bessie, according to Bessie; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief,* 60.
[91] E.g. Tom Reid for Bessie, ibid.
[92] see p.p. 26-28, 35, 39, 41.
[93] Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, 84.
[94] Ibid, 87-88.

> Familiarity with them at all such times as she thought expedient dealing with charms and abusing the people with [the] devilish craft of sorcery forsaid by the means after specified. [She] used these [magical practices for] diverse years bypast, specially at the times and in [the manner] following:
>
> 1. IN the first, That forasmuch as the said Elizabeth being asked by what art and knowledge she could tell diverse persons of things they tynt [?lost] or were stolen away, or help sick persons she answered and declared that she herself had no kind of art nor science for to do, but diverse times, when any such persons came at her [?] to she would ask one Tom Reid, who died at Pinkie, as he himself affirmed, who would tell her whenever she asked.
> 2. ITEM, She being asked what kind of man this Tom Reid was, declared he was an honest well [quite/very] elderly man, grey bearded, and had a grey coat with Lombard sleeves of the old fashion, a pair of grey breeches and white stockings gartered above the knee, a black bonnet on his head, cloise behind and plain before, with silken laces drawn through the lippis [edges] thereof and a white wand in his hand.
> 3. ITEM, Being asked how and in what manner of place the said Tom Reid came to her [she] answered that it was as she was going between her own house and the yard of Monkcastle, driving her cattle to the pasture and making heavy fair dule [sorrow] with herself, gretand [weeping] very fast for her cow that was dead, her husband and child that were lying sick in the land ill [famine or epidemic] and she newly risen out of child-bed. The foresaid Tom met her by the way, hailed her and said 'Good day, Bessie'. And she said 'God speed you, goodman'. 'Sancta Marie' said he 'Bessie, why make you such great dule and fair greting for any worldly thing?'. She answered 'Alas! Have I not great cause to make great dule, for our gear is trakit[dwindled away] and my husband is on the point of death and a babe of my own will not live and myself at a weak point. Have I not good cause then to have a fair [?faint] hart?'. But Tom said 'Bessie, you have angered God and asked something you should not have done, and therefore I counsel you to mend to him, for I tell you your baby shalld die, and the sick cow, before you come home; your two sheep will die too, but your husband shall mend and be as hail and fair as ever he was.' And then I was something happier for he told me that my Goodman would mend. Then Tom Reid went away from me in through the yard of Monkcastle, and I thought he went in at a narrow hole of the dyke nor ony [that no] earthly man could have gone through and fwa [?so then] I was something afraid', This was the first time that Tom and Bessie met.[95]

"Projected Internal Familiar"

At times the line (defined by the above parameters) between "internal", "projected internal" and "external" Familiar, remains blurred, as in John Walsh's case,[96] where the boundary between internal and external is less clear. Also, the animal appearance is often shared both by the "external Familiar" and by the "projected

[95] Robert Pitcairn, *Ancient criminal trials in Scotland 1488-1624*. (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1833), cited in Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, ix-x. The original sixteenth-century Scottish has been modernised by Wilby, and the square brackets employed by the author which have been copied when thought necessary, are also Wilby's.
[96] see p.p. 26 and 28

internal Familiar". It seems that a characteristic possibly differentiating these two different categories of Familiars is if the naming occurs. It emerges in fact from recurrent confessions that the naming of the spirit was believed as part of the process of achieving "full witch status". Whilst in the case of "external Familiars" or "Devils" appearing to the witch in human or animal shape, the said spirits here already had a name. For instance, in the case of Elizabeth Southern: "Wherevpon this Examinat demaunded his name? and the Spirit answered, his name was Tibb";[97] or in the case of Anne Whittle: "…and the Deuill then further commaunded this Examinate, to call him by the name of *Fancie*.[98] However, we do find slightly different accounts mentioning the act of the naming of the Familiar, which suggests a more intimate relationship of "ownership" of the Familiar. Such accounts incidentally coincide with what has been here described as "internal/projected internal Familiar", therefore, showing further parallelisms with tribal rituals concerning the naming of the totem. From this it could be inferred that when we witness the witch's naming of her own personal spirit, we are witnessing an account of "projected internal Familiar". One example could be found in James Device's confession claiming that the first reason of the Pendle Witches' meeting at Malkin Tower was "the naming of the Spirit which *Alizon Deuice,* now prisoner at Lancaster, had".[99] However, they "did not name him, because she was not there".[100] Similarly, we witness the naming of the Familiars in the previously mentioned case of Joan Cunny of Stysted (Essex, 1589); however, here it appears the Familiars were naming themselves rather than the witch naming them, as she:

> saith and confesseth, (…) that she learned this her knowledge in the same, of one mother Humfrye of Maplested, who told her that she must kneele down upon her knees, and make a Circle on the ground, and pray unto Sathan the cheefe of the Devills, the forme of which praier that she then taught her, this examinate hath now forgotten, and that then the Spirits would come unto her (…) so yt she would promise to give them her soule for their travaile, for otherwise: they would doo nothing for her. Where-upon she did promise thime her soule, and then they concluded with her so to do for her, what she would require, and gave themselves severall names, that is to say, the one Jack, and ye other Jyll by the which names she did always after call them. And then taking them up, she carried them home in her lap and put them in a Box and gave them white bread and milke.[101]

[97] Potts, *Wonderful Discoveries of witches in the countie of Lancaster*, B2v.
[98] Ibid, D3v.
[99] Ibid, G4.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Anon, "*The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches*", in Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 131-132.

In other descriptions that would fit into the idea of "projected internal Familiar" we do not, however, have clear indication of the naming of the spirit, as in the example of Ursula Kemp's spirits,[102] or in the case of Joan Upney of Dagenham who:

> saith, that one Fustian Kirtle, otherwise called White-cote, a witch of Barking, came to her house about seaven or eight yeeres agoe and gave her a thing like a Moule, and tolde her if she ought any body any ill will, if she did bid it, it would goe clap them. She saith that Moule taryed not above a yeere with her, but it consumed away, and then she gave her another Moule and a Toad, which she kept a great while, and was never without some Toades since till her last going away. [103]

Similar are also the cases of Cysley Sellys[104] as well as that of the shared Imps of Ales Manfield and Margaret Gravel,[105] or of Ales Hunt[106], where even though the accounts would suggest we are reading descriptions of "projected internal Familiars" there is no indication of the naming of such spirits. For example in the latter case, Febey Hunt, Ales' eight-year-old step daughter, merely confessed that:

> she hath seen her mother to have two little thinges like horses, the one white, the other blacke: and that they stoode in her chamber by her bed side, and saith, that shee hath seene her mother to feede them with milke out of blacke trening dishe, and this examinat being carried after this confession by the Constables to her fathers house, shee shewed them the place were they stood and the borde that covered them: And this examinate chose out the dishe, out of which they were fedde, from amogst many other dishes. She this examinat did also confesse that her mother had charged her not to tell anything, what inate saith that her mother did send them to Hayward of Frowicke, but to what end shee can not tell, & shee being asked howe she knew the same, saieth, that shee hard ther mother bid them to go.[107]

A Common Feature

In descriptions of both "projected internal" and "external" Familiars we find a common feature consisting of a peculiar intimacy between witch and Familiar spirit, namely the belief that the Familiar would suck the witch's blood in some hidden part of her body. For instance, Alizon Deuice declared that "her Graund-mother …did sundry times in going or walking togeather as they went begging, perswade and

[102] see p.p. 33, 34, 53, and W. W., "A true and just recorde, of the information, examination and confession of all the witches, taken at S. Ofes in the countie of Essex whereof some were executed, and other some entreated according to the determination of lawe. Wherein all men may see what a pestilent people witches are, and how vnworthy to lyue in a Christian Commonwealth.", (London, 1582), in Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 83-87.
[103] Anon, "The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches", in Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 134.
[104] W.W., *A true and just recorde, in* Gibson, *Early Modern Witches,* 100-102.
[105] Ibid, 104-105, 107.
[106] Ibid, 81-82.
[107] Ibid.

aduise this Examinate to let a Deuill or Familiar appeare vnto her; and that shee this Examinate, would let him sucke at some part of her, and shee might haue, and doe what shee would".[108] Likewise, Anne Whittle claimed, as we have seen, that when meeting her Familiar *Fancie* "hee would haue a place of her right side neere to her ribbes, for him to sucke vpon".[109] Thomas Rabbet claimed to have, at times, seen his mother Ursula Kemp give her Familiars "beere to drinke and of a white Lofe or Cake to eate, and … that in the night time the said spirites will come to his mother, and sucke blood of her upon her armes, and other places of her body."[110] Furthermore, Elizabeth Bennett claimed "that above tow yeeres past there came unto her two spirits, one called Suckin, being blacke like a Dogge, the other called Lierd being red like Lion, Suckin", one "a hee, and the other a shee", and that once as she returned from the mill "the spirite called Suckin came unto her and did take her by the coate, and helde her that shee could not goe forwarde not remove by the space of two houres".[111] Finally, we find examples of Familiars who, as claimed by witch Elizabeth Clarke, were not "fussy about whom they suckled".[112] These were two she got from her mother and the other pair she had on loan from Anne West;[113] or like Joan Upney's toad, whom she claimed to have left "under the groundsil at Harrolds house" one day and that "it pinched his [John Harrolds'?] wife and sucked her til she dyed."[114]

Such activity was believed to leave a mark, although —as noted by Bessie Clarke after exhibiting before Hopkins and Stearne her five Familiars and assuring that anyone with a mark like hers is undoubtedly a witch— the absence of the mark is no proof of innocence.[115] In *The Discovery of Witches*, Hopkins offered various ways to distinguish between the natural body marks and witch's mark. A witch's mark is to be found at "bottome of the back-bone".[116] Furthermore, such marks "are most commonly insensible, and feele neither pin, needle, aule, &c., thrust through them."[117] Finally, it is necessary to watch over the accused witch for:

[108] Potts, *The vvonderfull discouerie of witches in the countie of Lancaster,* C
[109] Ibid, B4-B4v.
[110] W. W., *A true and just recorde,* in Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 84.
[111] Ibid, 90-91.
[112] Gaskil, *Witchfinders*, 52.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Anon, "The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches", in Gibson, *Early Modern Witches,* 134.
[115] Gaskil, *Witchfinders*, 52.
[116] In regard to possible reasons of why the mark was believed to be located in such areas of the body see p.p. 90, 98 and note 112 p. 90.
[117] Matthew Hopkins, *The discovery of vvitches: in answer to severall queries, lately delivered to the judges of the assize for the county of Norfolk.* (London: Matthew Hopkins, 1647), 4. This notion was present on the continent too: in seventeenth-century Italy we find accounts of how lay courts looked for the "insensitive" Devil's mark (the Devil's here rather than the Familiar's) with long

> 24 houres with a diligent eye, that none of her Spirits come in any visible shape to suck her; the women have seen the next day after her Teats extended out to their former filling length, full of corruption ready to burst, and leaving her alone then one quarter of an houre, and let the women go up againe, and shee will have them drawn by her Imps close againe: *Probatum est*.[118]

Yet amongst the several descriptions of surrealistic intimacies, we do not often find explicit references to the possible reality of such marks and in the Lancashire case of 1634 for instance, when the King had the witches examined by his private physician William Harvey, the marks were considered to be natural features of the body and the case was dismissed.[119] It could be thus presumed that such belief is more likely —like the rest of witchcraft beliefs— to have its roots in folklore and legend rather than having any connection whatsoever with reality, and it should therefore be read as one of the many distorted symbols part of some older belief-system yet to be uncovered. At this regard an interesting parallelism is between the witch's "teat" or mark and the "caul" of the Beaneandante.[120] The Familiar sucked the witch's blood in some intimate part of her body thereby creating a subtle intimate link between human and spirit world allowing her/him to perform magic, like the caul of the Benandante connected physical to spiritual dimension and enabled ecstatic flight. In both cases we have a link based on the idea of feeding. It matters little whether the feeding is described as physical, consisting of blood, bread, cheese, beer or milk (in the witches' instance) or if the feeding is impalpable (in the case of the Benandanti), consisting essentially of the Benandante's vital energy (of which milk and blood are most particularly —and symbolically— recipients on a physical level) and was symbolised as explained in *The Night Battles,*[121] by an invisible "umbilical cord".

In chapter two we shall return to this latter symbol, resembling by analogy the feeding from mother to foetus when discussing cauldrons and the witches' "Son of Art", possibly comparable to the supposed inner result of alchemic symbolic pregnancy[122] or "son of the philosophers" or "of the Wise".[123] This might be

needles: self translated from Luisa Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco, La caccia alle streghe interpretata dalle sue Vittime*. (Milano: La Tartaruga Edizioni, 2006), 11.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Gaskill, *Witchfinders*, 46.

[120] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft & Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Paperbacks Edition, 1992), 15, 61.

[121] Ibid.

[122] see Michael Maier, "Emblema I" [representing a pregnant man], in *Atalanta Fugiens* (1617). (Roma: Ed. Mediterranee, 1984), 30.

compared to the developed adept's "alter ego", or "double", to return to Riffard's definition. Perhaps not coincidentally Bessie Clarke too called her Familiars "her children" when asked why she is not afraid of them.[124]

Shifting Perceptions of Animals and Nature

"Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."[125] This passage from Genesis clearly expresses a very settled androcentric vision of the world. Man is at the centre, animals and nature are there to be subdued, and the woman is there to serve him, born from his rib, not even from God's rib, as opposed to the rather opposite natural ways in which the female gives birth through her vagina. As illustrated by Thomas in *Man and the Natural World*, in early modern England this model was still strongly enrooted in human attitudes towards animals and nature. This was, however, beginning to shift.[126] Man began, for instance, to give names to pets[127] or express empathy towards animals, which exemplified in the new practice of removing the animal's head when served at the table.[128]

Yet before the Old Testament, the Jewish perception of a nature that *is* only to serve mankind spread across Europe (and European colonies). It may be generally claimed as widely accepted (altogether avoiding the debate which lasted more than a century, outlined by Hutton in *The Triumph of the Moon* in regard to whether or not there is a Great Goddess who was worshiped throughout pre-Christian Europe) that in pre-Christian animistic conceptions across the world, nature was often seen as a kind of divine parent (Mother or Father, according to the different religions) feeding and nurturing humans *as well* as other animals. Yet the existence of nature and animals was never described as having no other purpose than feeding and pleasing humans. On the contrary, the human dimension was often seen as a limit which could be

[123] see Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 33-34, 37, 75, 137, 244.
[124] Gaskil, *Witchfinders*, 52.
[125] Gerhard Von Rad, ed., "verses 1:26" in *Genesis: A Commentary.* (Philadelphia: SCM Press Ltd, 1972), 46-47.
[126] Keith Thomas, *Man and the natural world: changing attitudes in England 1500-1800*. (London: Allen Lane, 1983), 92-191.
[127] Which on the other hand, being something new and alien, could have encouraged an actual phobia thus demonisation of the home-pet which could have led to the obsession for witches' Familiar and to the revival and distortion of much older related folklore.
[128] "If I see a chicken's neck pulled off or a pig sticked, I cannot choose but grieve; and I cannot well endure a silly dew bedabbled hare to groan when she is seized by the hound" was Montaigne's remark in late sixteenth century; Ibid, 173.

overcome only through some kind of deprivation or physically challenging initiation. This has been documented by studies such as Eliade's *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Neil Price's *The Archaeology of Shamanism* or Marco Massignan's *La danza del sole. La cerimonia sacra degli indiani delle grandi pianure*. The Celts believed that the wilderness was sacred as rivers, hills, mountains, lakes and forests etc and were inhabited by deities and divine spirits.[129] Such conceptions of sacredness could also be said to echo Scottish accounts that often narrate witches' encounters with the Fairy dimension inside hillsides.[130] The well-known general notion that all across the pre-Christian world offers were made to the Gods before and after hunting derived from the belief that each aspect of nature was presided over by some divine entity which required an offering in exchange for what was being taken. "There existed a special and complicated relationship between the Celts and the creatures they hunted, a relationship that involved reverence and acknowledgement of theft from the natural world, which required appropriate propitiatory ritual".[131] According to Green, this ambivalence is sometimes represented in Celtic visual art, like the sculpture of hunter-God with his stag from Le Donon, (Vosges) "where the god shows tenderness towards his prey".[132] She also noted how "the behaviour of certain beasts gave rise to religious symbolism: the earthbound nature of snakes led to perceptions of links between these creatures and the Underworld; the ability of birds to fly was seen in terms of an allegory of the human spirit freed at death".[133] This may also be the case of the already mentioned Potnia figurines from Crete[134] or as in the case of the image of the Eagle that flies above, turning her eyes to the sun, found in Basilio Valentino, Azoth.[135] In literary retellings of the hunt, animals were also represented as a go-between to the otherworld (a role which also may be assumed by witches familiars[136]), as in the case of Finn, seduced into a supernatural dimension by magical animals,[137] or Pwyll chasing an otherworldly white stag into the Anwann.[138]

Many ancient cultures from across the globe left evidence of a perception of nature as sacred. In regard to the Celts Green noted: "an important element in sacred myth

[129] Green, *Exploring the World of Druids*, 24.
[130] Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 9-10, 14, 45-46.
[131] Miranda J. Green, *Celtic Myths.* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 56.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] see p.p. 15-16.
[135] Basilio Valentino, Azoth. (Roma: Ed. Mediterranee, 1988), 67.
[136] see chap. 1 and p.p. 79-83.
[137] Green, *Celtic Myths*, 56.
[138] Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion*, 3-4.

was the absence of rigid boundaries between animal and human form",[139] as proved by the popularity of semi-zoomorphic divinities. Animals were often perceived as sacred, and in regard to linguistic evidence of totemism in Europe, it should be noted that the Latin word for "soul" is *anima*, whilst *animal* is "animal". The Latin word *anima* is the feminine form of *animus*, "spirit", which has joint etymological roots with the Greek word *ànemos*, "wind"[140]. This link between wind and spirit (in Latin again *spirto*, "blow", "breath of air"[141]) is interesting in relation to the discussed etymology of the verb "to inspire",[142] particularly in the already mentioned meanings of "gifting with advice, genius or divinatory art", which returns to the concept of Familiar as internal or external guiding soul ("anima") or animal spirit. It is also interesting that from the Latin *spirto* ("spirit") also derives the modern Italian word "spiritoso" ("humorous"[143]); a term which also means "volatile". This was employed in alchemy possibly with reference to ecstatic flight, to which the First Discourse in *Altanta Fugiens* in regard to Hermes' winds[144] may refer to, as shall be discussed in chapter three, an act enabled by the "internal Familiar".[145]

Conceptions in which the natural and the human kingdoms were intertwined and interchangeable, recurred in myth. These can even be observed in post-Christianised Western European folklore in the literary habit of comparing, through poetical metaphors, aspects of the human body or life to natural or animal ones. As, for instance, in *Early Irish Myths*: "Hair like the blooming primrose there; smooth bodies are the colour of snow… the colour of foxglove every check… a delight to the eye blackbirds' eggs… though fair to the eye Mag Fàil, is a desert to Mag Màr";[146] and: "I see a lofty, noble reign and a noisy flowering that blooms with an abundant spring tide… A gleam of light is lordly countenance. I see his two shining cheeks, as white and glistening and noble-hued as snow. His two eyes are blue grey and brighter than hyacinth… He overtakes like the scalds-crow in battle…."[147] Or in early medieval Welsh folklore: "…the whiteness of her skin was like the snow, and the blackness of her hair and eyebrows was like the raven…";[148] and "…Because of

[139] Green, *Celtic Myths*, 56.
[140] Pianigiani, *Vocabolario Etimologico*, 59.
[141] Ibid.
[142] see note 78, p. 35.
[143] For possible connections between humour and pre-Christian cults of spiritual nature see appendix, note 3 (and 15).
[144] Maier, "Discorso I" in *Atalanta Fugiens*, 30-32.
[145] see p.p. 79-83.
[146] Gantz, trans., "The wooing of Etàin", in *Early Irish Sagas and Myth*, 55.
[147] Ibid, 90.
[148] Davies, trans., "Peredur son of Efrog", in *The Mabinogion*, 81.

her beauty it was no easier to gaze upon her than it would be upon the sun when it is at its brightest and most beautiful".[149]

Celtic Gods are interchangeable with certain animals or aspects in nature (and which could be considered to resemble the European archetype behind the concept of "internal Familiar" or "totemic" spirit). For instance, the Celtic God Cernunnos, the Lord of the Animals; Epona, "the Great Mare" or "Divine Mare"; Epos, a Horse-God; Damona, the "Divine Cow"; Rhiannon associated with the horse as we have seen but also to her three birds;[150] Don, meaning "Deep Sea"; Ardwinna, associated with woodland, who hunted riding a wild bore, Artio, the Bear Goddess[151] and Sirona, associated with the snakes.[152] It seems that each God or Goddess represents an animal or an aspect of nature. In the Roman pantheon, Jupiter, equivalent to the Greek Zeus, is associated with the oak, the eagle and thunder; Gea is the Goddess of Earth as is Demeter (also Goddess of barely); Persephone (also a Greek Goddess like Demeter), is associated, amongst other things, to the pomegranate;[153] Flora, which in modern Italian is synonymous for "vegetation", is the Goddess of flowering and plants and is associated with spring and Pomona is associated with fruits. Diana (also Jana, considered the feminine version of Janus, the Greek Cronos, the primeval God, "the first King"[154]) is associated with the forests and with the moon, and is the Roman version of Artemis, also associated like Artio with the Bear. In Indian myth, Shiva is associated with the bull, Ganesh with the Elephant, Durga with the lion and the tiger, Agni rides a goat, Saraswati a swan, and Vishnu rides Garuda, the king of the birds, half man half vulture. The list could continue endlessly, proving that this "totemic" perception of Gods was spread all across the Indo-European world in which European heritage lies.

In the *Mabinogion* we repeatedly find clues suggestive of a conception of animals perceived as participants of a natural, innocent, blessed guiltless state, free from moral and judgement, almost an ethereal childhood, the identification with whom is perceived as cathartic and purificatory. This is, for instance, found in the case of

[149] "The Dream of Emperor Maxen", in ibid, 104.
[150] see Davies trans., *The Mabinogion*, 32, 34 ff.
[151] Green, *Celtic Myths*, 57.
[152] Ibid, 58.
[153] Pestalozza, *Religione Mediterranea*.
[154] Ugo Bianchi, *The notion of "religion" in Comparative Research: selected proceedings of the XVI A H R Congress, International Association for the History of Religions*. (Roma: L'ERMA di BRETSCHNEIDER, 1994), 312.

Math's tale where he transforms Gwydion and Gilvaethwy into different female and male animals for three years.[155] Apparently his purpose is to humiliate them for what they did to Goewin[156] (Gwydyon had tricked Math into leaving Goewin alone to go to war so Gilfaethwy could rape her). However, it appears later, that the true purpose might have been to give them a chance to expiate their violence by learning to perceive life in different forms, both as male and female animals.

An element of the ability to interchange between humans and nature is also present in the previously discussed zoophilia, which is also represented in myth. Such stories abound in classical myths, both of women mating with divine animals or with Gods in the shape of animals, and of women, nymphs or Goddesses transforming into animals or plants in order to escape the love of some God.[157] Giraldus Cambrensis in *Topographia Hiberniae* (1185) left an account of a ritual consisting of the Ulster King mating with the Goddess of Sovereignty in the shape of a white mare[158] (or pretending to, as claimed by Green[159]) in order to be recognised as the legitimate "Sacred" King. Then the animal is slaughtered, the meat is cooked in a Cauldron and the King sits in a Cauldron drinking the broth and eating the meat.[160] In such traditions of closeness between human and animal (in which humans, however, are always in some way dominating), as well as in those when raw meat of certain animals was eaten to gain prophecy or inspiration (e.g. by the Druid-poets),[161] or divine ecstatic folly (as in the case of the Bacchants[162]), we may glimpse traces of autochthon "totemistic" beliefs. Here the animal becomes a means for man to achieve a superhuman dimension. In such dimensions the normal boundaries of ego-based awareness are temporarily abolished.

Other aspects suggesting "totemic" symbolism in folklore emerge when we witness a hero/ine sharing the same qualities of an animal, or to the birth of certain heroes and heroines in the presence of an animal or on the same day of a certain animal encountered in the same story. In Early Irish myths, for instance, we have Cú Chulainn[163] who is born contemporaneously with the horse, like Pryderi in the

[155] Davies, trans., "First Branch", in *The Mabinogion*, 52-54.
[156] Ibid, 47-51.
[157] see p.p.68-69.
[158] Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hiberniae*, 110.
[159] Ibid; Green, *Exploring the World of the Druids*, 131.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Eliade, *Shamanism*, 382.
[162] see Euripides, *Le Baccanti. Testo greco a fronte*, trans. Giulio Guidorizzi. (Venezia: Marsilio, 1989). cf. p. 62.
[163] Gantz, ed and trans., *Early Irish Myths* 'The Bird of Cú Chulainn', 135.

Mabinogi.[164] Both boys are given the horse as a gift afterwards. In "The labour pains of the Ulaid & the twins of Macha", Macha is like Rhiannon associated with the horse, however, whilst Rhiannon rides the horse faster than a king, Macha runs faster than a horse.[165]

The idea of animal as go-between of different dimensions may also be found in the less sanguinary practices than hunting, notably in the generally Pre-Christian practice of looking for signs/answers in nature, as suggested by Murray's distinction between "divining Familiar" and "private Familiar".[166] What she termed as the "divining Familiar", would be the animal that appears with a sign or a message, and has again the role of go-between between different dimensions, such as the "known" and the "unforeseeable". Other cults that are reminiscent of totemistic concepts are those in which followers of a certain God or Goddess call themselves the name of the animal associated with such worshipped divinity, as in the cults in honour of Artemis Brauronia in Brauron near Athens, with nine virgin child-priestesses called the "little bears".[167] Identification with the animal nature was seen for a long time as a means to reach the divine. I would conclude that such a widespread and strong feature of human life, myth and religious belief was bound to leave traces in everyday traditions and beliefs throughout Christianised Europe too. It is understandable that in times of great religious, political, economical and social shifts/tensions, poverty, endemic illness or famine such everyday "superstitions", beliefs or traditions would periodically become more visible to the authorities, or more significant in people's personal and social lives. However, this did not mean that people *were* still "Pagan" nor that they *were not*, as historical realities are never either all black or white.

[164] Davies, trans., "First Branch", in *The Mabinogion*, 8.
[165] see p. 36.
[166] Murray, *Witch Cult*, 205.
[167] Robin Osborne, *Demos, the discovery of classical Attika*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), 154.

CHAPTER TWO

SHAPE-SHIFTING

Round about the cauldron go,
In the poison'd entrails throw.
Toad that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelt'red venom sleeping got
Be thou first i' th' charmed pot.[1]

Resuscitation *as* Shape-shifting

Cannibalistic "Evidence"

Besides the straightforward transformations of human into animal form recurring in witch-trials,[2] shape-shifting also emerges from witchcraft beliefs in less predictable and more complex ways. It also includes transformations from beautiful into ugly,[3] from visible into invisible, fertile into sterile,[4] and vice versa. The gold, money or food received by the Devil, the Familiar or the Fairies, which become coal as soon as the witch was back home (or the Devil gone) may also be added to the list.[5] Some of these shape-shifting aspects, like fertility/sterility, and invisibility overlap with flying and will be discussed in chapter three.[6] Shape-shifting also includes the alleged power of the Italian witches (by their Lady's or Devil's power) to resuscitate dead animals or people who were eaten at the banquet thereby turning them back to life.

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[1] William Shakespeare, "Act 4, Scene I", in *Macbeth*: *a Tragedy*, ed. Harry Rowe. (York: printed by Wilson, Spence, and Mawman, 1799), 73, accessed May 29, 2010, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?contentSet=ECCOArticles&docType=ECCOArticles&bookId=0154501900&type=getFullCitation&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docLevel='TEXT_GRAPHICS&version=1.0&source=library&userGroupName=uniyork

[2] possibly originated from shamanistic concepts in which the outer ego is assimilated by (turns into) the inner soul or "internal Familiar" as discussed in chapter one. see appendix, note 4, for more examples of transformations into animals. see also p.p. 7-12, 12-13, 26, 79-83.

[3] see p. 63.

[4] For invisibility and fertility versus sterility see p.p. 71,76.

[5] Giovanna Rodi (Leventina 1650) confessed that at Sabbath, after dancing, they had a banquet which had been cooked in a **great cauldron**: "They gave me bread, cheese and meat that a black man cooked in a **cauldron**. Such things seemed tasteless, made without any flavour at all, so that we remained even hungrier than before". Later, the gifts given to the attendants consisted of food, money and ornaments which turned into coal when taken home: self translated from Raffaella Laorca, *Le Tre Valli stregate: documenti per la storia delle streghe nei Baliaggi svizzeri di Riviera, Blenio e Leventina, 1641-1676*. (Locarno: Armando Dadò, 1992), 99. Furthermore Maria Bola (Benio, 1674), a child of ten, said that at the *Barlott* (Northern Italian dialect word for "Sabbath") everything that the participants touched became gold; however, the next day at home such treasures turned into stones: Ibid, 77. The Pendle witches, Anne Whittle and Elizabeth Southern, told similar stories. Anne Whittle "sayd, that she should haue Gould, Siluer, and worldly Wealth, at her will. And at the same time she saith, there was victuals, *viz.* Flesh, Butter, Cheese, Bread, and Drinke, and bidde them eate enough. And after their eating, the Deuill cal|led *Fancie*, and the other Spirit calling himselfe *Tibbe*, car|ried the remnant away: And she sayeth, that although they did eate, they were neuer the fuller, nor better for the same; and that at their said Banquet, the said Spirits gaue them light to see what they did, although they neyther had fire nor Candle light". Thomas Potts, *The wonderfull discouerie of witches in the countie of Lancaster*. (London: printed by W. Stansby for Iohn Barnes, 1613), B4v, accessed May 12, 2011, http://eebo.chadwyck.com

[6] see p.p. 71,76.

Recurrent in association with the idea of resuscitation is the cauldron (in trial accounts and legend), the fire (evident or implied in confessions in association with/substitution of the cauldron's symbol as means of cooking, and in myth) and the wand (in folklore and sometimes in confessions). These three elements do not appear in all these very similar confessions, but particularly the cauldron recurs in several,[7] as well as being central features in Italian public imagination associated with witches cooking children, as also demonstrated by popular nursery rhymes still common today. At the banquets where people or animals were eaten and subsequently resuscitated, Dominae Ludis was usually present and sometimes the Devil. In 1505, Margherita dell'Agnola, from Val di Fiemme (located in Trentino-Alto Adige, in the North East of Italy), after repeatedly undergoing torture recounted a story in which she and the witches "ate an ox at Jori Rizzoli, and then that ox 'dried up', lived another half a year and died".[8] Margherita "Tessardella" said they sucked the blood out of a pregnant[9] woman's breast (on the side of the heart) and threw her in the **cauldron** to cook.[10] Orsola "la Strumachera", still in Val di Fiemme's trials, after enduring tortures, told a story about her alleged first nocturnal meeting. After giving up the faith in God and promising herself to the Devil "in soul and body" they did "*the fires*", took the heart of animals and ate them. The animals, after "being put back together", lived for a few days and then "*die a bad death*".[11] It is unclear what this so-called "bad death" might be but it appears to be a symbolical recurrent feature in the trials of Val di Fiemme and as a concept might have originally symbolised the death of the human, ordinary or non-magical "side", "everything except the heart" of man (or of beasts in some cases), as will be further discussed. Orsola went on to describe the witches dancing and playing music, with the Devil in the shape of a he-goat. Then three men were cooked and eaten, except for their hearts, which were taken out beforehand. Afterwards, the witches took some straw, put it in place of the heart and sent the victims back home prearranging a time for their death. "After a certain amount of days they wasted away, they 'dried up', and were never well". Then they died. The same happened to three little children. They were broken in bits, the heart was taken out and straw put in its place; they were cooked and eaten, then they were restored to life, sent back home, lived a while and died. [12]

[7] See note 5, p. 49 and p.p. 50-52.
[8] Self- translated from: Luisa Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco, La caccia alle streghe interpretata dalle sue Vittime.* (Milano: La Tartaruga Edizioni, 2006), 81. The material provided by feminist Professor Luisa Muraro, co-founder of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Verona, will be much discussed throughout this dissertation.
[9] For the possible metaphorical significance of pregnancy in alchemic language, see p.p. 42-43 and notes 120, 121, p. 42.
[10] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco,* 110.
[11] Ibid, 90.
[12] Ibid.

The idea of the heart being taken out could, if we accept cooking and eating as a metaphoric initiation into a parallel "spirit dimension" in which the ordinary laws are bypassed, represent the fact that in the "victim" (the adept, in this perspective) all must "die" (be transformed) except the heart.[13] Orsola told many such stories. She claimed being the cook of the witches, cooking the meat in a **cauldron** and that the children would be "the sweetest eating in the world".[14] This may be a metaphor for meaning that the initiatory transformation of a child would be easier ("sweeter") as children would be less crystallized in one neat shape than adults, thus naturally nearer to the spirit-world.[15] Valeria Ziroli, who died in jail enduring less torture than others because of her old age, even told a story in which she and other witches, with the help of the Devil, removed a baby from the body of a pregnant woman, roasted it on the *"bronza*" (this dialectal term may mean "**cauldron**, "**oven**" or "**live charcoal**") and ate it. They then put back its skin and bones in the woman's body.[16] Giacoma Vinanti, also from Val di Fiemme, told the story of a trip with the Devil in the shape of a young ox, going to a meeting near Tesero, she riding a steer, Caterina Mick (another witch) a horse, whilst another a pig.[17] The cook prepared the animals and they ate, but the meat was so insipid that the more they ate the more they were hungry. Afterwards they put their "bones and skin" back together, and sent them back to their stalls. The same they did to some men.[18] Amongst the sixteenth-century trials of Val di Fiemme, there was also Margherita, called "La Vanzina di Tresero", who claimed the witches cooked her husband in a **great cauldron** and that the Devil distributed his meat to the witches who ate, then put the bones together again, and once they had turned him back alive "as before", they took him back home. [19] Her daughter in law, who was pregnant, was also sucked by the

[13] This, in alchemy, could correspond to the noted golden nucleus of the compost, without which the remaining metal cannot in its turn be transformed into gold: Michael Maier, "Discorso XIV" in *Atalanta fugiens* (1618), ed. Bruno Cerchio, (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1984), 99. The metaphorical journey into the otherworld could be compared to this transformation of vulgar metals (the worldly) into gold (the otherworldly), as shown in the metaphorical journey described in Dante's Inferno: Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, *vol.1*. (London: 1778), 40-251. accessed June 15, 2011, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW3315303959&source=gale&userGroupName=uniyork&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE: In Dante, this concept is exemplified by the pearl or sun hidden in mud, which in the Inferno is Virtue, as noted by Professor Romani: Matteo Romani, "Introduzione", in Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, *vol. 2*, ed. Matteo Romani. (Reggio: G. Davolio e Figlio, 1859), 20. Also, in the love poetry collection *La Vita Nova*, the same concept is described as "Gentility", or "the Kind Heart", or Love seen as a divine Entity rather than a feeling, awoken by the greeting (*saluto* in Italian, which is etymologically connected to the concept of "saving") of the Gentle Woman, namely Beatrice. For an English translation see Dante Alighieri, *La vita nuova*, trans. David R. Slavitt. (Harvard: Harvard College, 2010). cf. Luigi Valli, *Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei "Fedeli d'amore"*. (Luni: 2004), 311, 587-588. (see also note 181, p. 72. This concept is also mirrored in Guido Guinizzelli's poetry in the concept of the "diamond" in an "iron mine": "Al cor gentile", in Marc A. Cirigliano, ed. and trans., *Melancolia Poetica: A Dual Language Anthology of Italian Poetry 1160-1560*. (Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd., 2007), 36-37.

[14] Self-translated from: Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 96.

[15] The divinity of childhood, still expressed in modern Japan in the belief that children up to the age of three are Gods, is reflected in European ancient cults such as that of the Vestals or the followers of Artemis Brauronia (see appendix, note 10) in which the priestesses are often children, but also in myths of the Goddess in her dual worshipped aspect of mother and daughter e.g. Karl Kerény, *Eleusis: archetypal image of mother and daughter*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1964).

[16] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 119-120.

[17] Ibid, 157-158.

[18] Self translated from: ibid, 158.

[19] Ibid, 149.

witches in every part of her body and thrown in a **great cauldron** to be cooked. [20] The ability to restore life was a prerogative of *Domina Ludis* or of the Devil. [21] Such stories of children, men or animals who after being eaten, live for a period and then die are frequent in Italy. What is interesting is where and how these stories originate. It must be noted that if in England torture was not legal, the psychological, social, physical (imprisonment and deprivation of light and air) and cultural pressure would have been more likely causes behind fabricated confessions or false memory recollections.[22] Furthermore, in Italy, even if a witch were prepared to "confess" *without* torture, she still would have to "ratify" her confession by *repeating* it *under* torture. This was true also in reversal: a witch who confessed under torture had to repeat later the same confession without torture.[23] The Venetian nobleman Marino Sanuto recounted the horror of personally seeing witches being publicly burned alive and told the story of a witch who was made to confess by burning her feet until they "fell off".[24] As discussed by Muraro, the duration and violence which normally "regulated" torture procedures often surpassed the amounts set by the law, to the point that the *Instructio Romana* (*Instructio Proformandis Processibus in causis Strigum*), underwritten by the Holy Office c. 1625, warned against the procedures normally employed to treat witchcraft cases which were considered incorrect. Such "incorrect" procedures included the prosecutors'

[20] Ibid,150.

[21] In place of any missing bone was placed a piece of wood, ibid, 85. For instance in 1390 Friars Beltramino di Cernuscullo and Rugger di Casate, in the unique trials of Pierina and Sibillia in Milan, wrote how Sibillia believed that Oriente (another name given by the witches to *Domina Ludi*, "the Mistress of the Game", in Val di Fiemme called *dona del bon zogo* "mistress of the good game") resuscitated animals eaten by the witches by touching them with the knob of her wand. In ibid, 201, 203, 205.The place of Domina Ludi in resuscitation as in everything else, previously dominant in witches' alleged societies (ibid, 211) is usually taken over in later trials by the Devil (see p.p.50-51). However in the trials of Giacoma Vivanti (again in Val di Fiemme) it was recounted how her father saw the Mistress of the good Game cooking under a nut tree. Still in her confessions, it was at a point one of the witches (Caterina del Mick) to take the role of Mistress of the game where humans were eaten and later resuscitated (Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 157-158) and in another occasion it is said that Domina Ludi "exceptionally" participated, with blinkers on either sides of her eyes, to the game where two fetuses of a pregnant woman were eaten. This time however the bones are not put together as usual, but "made" in a *focaccia* (pastry) to be given to the pregnant woman who will now have only one baby rather than two (Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 159-160). In Orsola's stories (cf. p.p.50-51) Domina Ludi is present under the name of *Patrona* ("Mistress") and speaks "in the name of the Devil" (Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 91). She also appears in other Val di Fiemme trials and in those of Valcamonica (located in modern Lombardia) of 1518, usually under the name of Mistress of the Good Game, or simply of Signora ("Mistress"), but also, exceptionally, of Venus (ibid, 63, 149, 208, 153, 226. cf. also p.p.81, 98). Ginzburg also notes her presence in rites of resuscitation (as *Oriente*) or connected to hypothetical ecstatic cults under then name of *Richella*, *Habonda*, *Bona Domina*, Diana, *Wise Sibilla*, *Bensozia* (*Bona Socia*), *Perchta*, *Holda*, etc. often again with blinkers and/or a turban, which he holds may prove a connection with the Celtic Matroane and the danger of the gaze of certain divinities. Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 91,92, 9495,96, 100, 109, 129,131,132,134, 135, 136. The danger of gazing in the eyes of the God/Goddess may also remind of that of looking directly at the sun, divinized since the dawn of time, and could therefore be very ancient in origin. What is more interesting however is that he notes that in *Historia Britonnum* by Nennius (c.826), the capacity of resuscitation of an animal is attributed to St Germanus d'Auzerre in Britain during the conversion of the Celts and in Snorri Sturlusson's Edda (early thirteenth century) to the Germanic God Thor (ibid, 134). He then goes on to note other variants of legends of resuscitations in different cultures (ibid, 134-135. cf. also "Bones and Skin" in ibid) to finally claim that in the "so many variants of the same myth whose roots lie in a remote Eurasian past" is a divinity "sometimes male but more often female, the generator and resuscitator of animals" (ibid, 135). cf. p.57. This may prove the importance of the testimony of Pierina and Sibilla in regards to *Signora Oriente* and her wand, however unique as a trial account.

[22] A possibility also analysed by Emma Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie: Magic, Witchcraft and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland*. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 214-224, 236-236, 247-248. In regard to false memory syndromes it should be noted that behind the late 80s/early 90s "epidemic of false accusation was the therapeutic movement in the USA in which therapists were considering child sexual abuse to be the explanation for a whole range of symptoms in their disturbed clients. The clients, who may have had no memory of CSA, would be encouraged to believe it and purse the "memory works" suggested by the therapist, thus having a false memory implanted": Marcia Degun-Mather, *Hypnosis, dissociation, and survivors of child abuse: understanding and Treatment.* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2006), 26. Likewise, as claimed by Professor Ofshe with regards to the Ingram's and other such cases, "inadvertent hypnosis during interrogation" has led to false confessions: Richard J. Ofshe, "Inadvertent Hypnosis During Interrogation: False Confession Due to Dissociative State". 40 INT'L J. *Clinical & Experimental Hypnosis* 125 (1992). cf. also Richard J. Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, And Sexual Hysteria*. (Berkley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

[23] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 13.

[24] *I diari di Marino Sanuto.* (Venezia: Stab. Visentini, cav. Federico—Editore, 1879-1902), tomo XXV, 586-587.

biases that the accused would be guilty, the excessive use of torture and the fact that the accused were promised to be released upon confession.[25] Unfortunately by then, witchcraft cases had long been passed to secular courts who continued to employ the old methods.[26] The above considerations, and the fact that suspicion and anonymous charges were enough to imprison (and almost unfailingly torture) the accused, reinforce the idea of the randomness through which potentially anyone could become an accused. The above, together with the methodical repetition of pre-defined sets of questions used to interrogate witches to gain a set of pre-defined results,[27] may further reinforce the generally accepted idea amongst academics that such stories were drawn from a mixture of local folkloric heritages and demonological beliefs. These stories, as discussed at greater length in chapter three, seem simply to be the demonised "alter ego" of previously more joyous folktales, like a "darker" version of the same.[28] We shall return to the discussion of folkloric heritages after clarifying the symbolical role of the Cauldron that through such heritages often emerges.

The Cauldron

In the Italian trials cited above we have observed in what type of confession the Cauldron appears, and how it is connected with elements of cannibalism. A Cauldron that cooks and a Cauldron that resuscitates. Thus, it is in quality of magical container that the metaphorical values of the Cauldron should be discussed, like magical pots, boxes, plates, vases, pans, chalices, and cups emerged through past literary and archaeological evidence. This wider idea of magical recipients, (before leaping to Pandora's boxes, alchemic pots, genies of the lamp, or Daghda's frying pans of remote pasts), could even be reminiscent of the English witches who kept their Familiars in vases, baskets, boxes or pots. Like Ursula Kemp, said to keep her spirits in a pot[29], or Ales Hunt, alleged to keep two little horses in a pot[30] or Agnes Herd, who kept six cows as big as rats in a box and six blackbirds in another.[31] There is a possible link between all such magical containers (of either spirits or simply of magical powers), which consists of the fact that they all retain supernatural forces and connect mundane to magical dimensions. They in fact enable whoever gains their possession to receive

[25] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 257.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Methods which, with regard to note 22, could undoubtedly induce a far more intense state of suggestibility than any current legal methods of therapeutic hypnosis may ever achieve.
[28] Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Bengt Anakrloo and Gustav Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft, Centres and Peripheries*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 206-209.
[29] W. W., "A true and just recorde, of the information, examination and confession of all the witches, taken at S. Ofes in the countie of Essex whereof some were executed, and other some entreated according to the determination of lawe. Wherein all men may see what a pestilent people witches are, and how vnworthy to lyue in a Christian Commonwealth. Written orderly, as the cases were tryed by euidence". (London : Thomas Dawson, 1582), in Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 131.
[30] W. W., "A true and just recorde", in Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 81.
[31] Ibid, 118.

supernatural powers[32] through which they may affect their everyday human reality.

What is interesting to note is the "gender" of such magical containers (with their role in witch-beliefs), for instance in the apparent analogy with traditionally feminine qualities of generation, nourishing, hosting, inspiring and bringing back to life. Such "gender" has previously been noted by archaeologists and mythologists both for the roundness of the containers, their role, or the fact that they were dedicated to/depicted as female deities, as will be discussed below. In Irish, as well as Greek, Southern and Northern European myth and cult-remains, where the "magical container" is round and recurs as vessel, cup, chalice, patera[33] or dish[34], it could be associated with the lower parts of the feminine body, from the stomach downwards, comprising of the buttocks, lower hips and pubic triangle, and can thus be seen to represent maternity, the womb, and female generative and nourishing attributes. This can be likened to the crater of Hephaestus given to Dionysus by Aphrodite,[35] Kadru, the Chalice of immortality of Shivaism,[36] "mother of the snakes"[37] full of the Gods' ambrosia also associated with the growing moon (like the horns of the bull),[38] possible Goddess' symbol apparently recurrent in Neolithic and Palaeolithic art that has been associated with the fallopian tubes[39]) and also know in Shivaism as the goblet/chalice of the sacrificial elixir, the power of creation and destruction filled with seminal liquid,[40] hence the association as the symbol of the female generative organs.

A famous cult-Cauldron much discussed amongst archaeologists, classicists and celticists is the silver-gilt Gundestrup cauldron found in Jutland, Denmark, the provenance of which is contended between Celtic and, possibly but less likely, Thracian.[41] This is because some have recognised Thracian techniques and themes.[42] However, since the

[32] In this view it may not be coincidental the fact that the magic container contains the Familiar, which would be the discussed spirit (see p.p. 29-35, 38,39) or *daimon* (see p.p. 29, 64).
[33] The patera is for instance associated to Rosmerta, the British Mercury's female counterpart (interesting in view of the discussions to follow in connection with alchemy and the *atanor* –see p. 88). Her name means "the Great Provider" (Green, Celtic Goddesses, 125), a meaning intrinsic to the name of Anna, in relation to Anna Perenna and her cauldron (see appendix, note 10).
[34] For instance, the Irish Cauldrons may be associated with the *patera* of Rhiannon Queen of Dyfed, originally known by the Gaulish name of Rigatona, 'Great Queen" and possibly associated with Epona, also a horse Goddess associated with plenty who was worshipped by the Romans: Miranda Green, *The Gods of Roman Britain*. (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications Ltd, 2003), 56.
[35] Nonnus, cited in Walter F. Otto, Dioniso. Mito e culto. (Roma: Il Nuovo Melangolo, 2006), 62-63.
[36] cf. 86-87.
[37] Alain Daniélou, *Miti e Dèi dell'India, I mille volti del pantheon induista.* (Novara: Bur, 2008), 188-189.
[38] Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*. (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2006), 280. see appendix, note 5 and 6.
[39] First noted by Cameron who reckoned the similarity must have been discovered with the development of the excarnation process of burial, D. O. Cameron, S*ymbols of Birth and Death in the Neolithic Era*. (Kenyon-Deane, 1981), cited in Gimbutas, *Language of the Goddess*, 265; see also Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses* ed. and supplemented Miriam Robbins Dexeter. (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), vii, 34-35, 46. see appendix, note 6.
[40] Daniélou, *Miti e Dèi dell'India*, 250.
[41] see Miranda Green, *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art*. (London: Psychology Press, 1992), 8; John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 3*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1996), 855; Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 226.
[42] Flemming Kaul, *Thracian Tales on the Gundestrup Cauldron*. (Amsterdam: Najade Press, 1991), 29, 16.

"Celticness" of the shape[43] and themes seems dominant some have rejected the Thracian provenance,[44] whilst others conciliate this apparent Celtic-Thracian contradiction as a collaboration of silversmiths belonging to different tribes[45] or a cultural co-existence of the two, as the recorded alliance of Scoridsci and Thracians in Macedonia in the late second Century BC.[46] Professor Jan Best and Nanny De Vries attributed a scene on a panel of the Cauldron to the worship of the Phrygian mother Cybele,[47] also popular in Thrace, and very much associated with that of Demeter and Persephone, connected to the underworld and cyclic resuscitation, spring and vegetation. This may be interesting in view of the fact that the worship of the great Phrygian mother-goddess, Cybele, and her young consort, Atys, is recorded both in Northern and Southern Britain and "appears to have centred around a cyclical myth personified by the castration, death and rebirth of Cybele's youthful shepherd lover Atys".[48] In Thrace Cybele was fused with the local goddess Rhea-Bendis and in Greek literary sources, Cybele is referred to as "great goddess", "mother of the gods", "mountain mother" and "queen of the wild beasts".[49] Green discussed the presence on a panel of the Cauldron of a Mistress of the Animals, the depiction of a Goddess surrounded by animals,[50] but also that of a Celtic "wheel-bearing sun God"[51] and also of the undoubted presence of Cernunnos, "the stag antlered god of the Romano-Celtic world".[52]

In regard to the above it is interesting to note Green's analysis of the iconography at Valcamonica, as the earliest known representation of the stag-horned God, "depicted recurrently on the rock-carvings and… subject of, perhaps seasonal, rituals where the spring growth and autumn shedding of deer antlers may have been re-enacted to symbolise the earth's fertility cycle".[53] One of the features also recurring in later representations of the deity are the torc and the ram-horned snake thereby linking, again, to the fertility symbolism which is a self-evident characteristic of Cernunnos.[54] This connection between the Lord of the animals and fertility, which recurs in other

[43] Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 3,* 855. Professor John Koch, who will be frequently cited in the course of this dissertation, is an American academic, historian and linguist who specialised in Celtic studies, both in prehistory and in the middle ages. He was awarded a Ph.D. in Celtic Languages and Literatures from Harvard University, where he has also taught.
[44] Nikola Theodossiev, *North-western Thrace from the fifth to first centuries BC.* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000), 58.
[45] E.g. the classic philologist Prudence Jones, in Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, *A history of pagan Europe*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), 89; or Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 3*, 855.
[46] Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 3,* 855.
[47] Jan Best et al, *Thracian Tales on the Gundestrup Cauldron.* (Amsterdam: Najade Press, 1991), 96.
[48] Green, *The Gods of Roman Britain*, 20.
[49] Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 181.
[50] Green, *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art*, 24.
[51] Ibid, 116.
[52] Ibid, 88, 91.
[53] Ibid, 88.
[54] Ibid.

Gods associated with the Cauldron, itself associable to earth for its symbolic power to create and transform, giving birth and rebirth, may account for the fact that male deities would be considered the keepers of the Cauldron.[55] This could be because of the masculine power to inseminate the Goddess womb or the earth, hence participation to the act of creation, which would therefore be neither a solely masculine nor feminine act but a conjoint, androgynous one. Likewise, this could explain *Domina Ludi*'s possession of the wand[56] as a masculine symbol, pointing to this conception of creation in which male and female deities co-participated and thus co-owned the instruments of procreation in a more androgynous and non-gender-divided perception of birth. This may be testified by traditions where females dressed as males and vice versa, which survived until medieval times in Europe.[57]

In view of this reading of the Cauldron and wand as procreative organs and sources of transformation, it is interesting to note Christine Raudvere's comment about how "in Norse myth, sexual prowess and the ability to shape-shift were frequently linked".[58] Green observed how this appears to be the case for Irish myths as well: "the Morrigàn had power both to aid and to harm humans. The fertility-symbolism of the sovereignty goddess could also manifest itself in the relationship between her and cattle"[59] (possibly one of her "internal Familiars"), since "both the Morrigàn and Medb were closely associated with these animals and both owned herds".[60] Green discussed a ca. first century AD clay triple-vase on a hollow ring base kept at Chester Grosvenor Museum, which she claimed "may have been associated with the worship of triads of deities", and later compared this vase to other instances where triplication occurs,[61] for instance in the relief of Genii Cucullati (Cirencester, Gloucestershire, Corinium Museum) associating them with prosperity, well-being and fertility, and then commented that "triplication appears to be significant and for

[55] see p 58.
[56] see note 21, p.52.
[57] Marie Delcourt recounted how, in rituals in honour of Artemis in Laconia, men dressed as women, and women as men, wearing fake phalluses: Marie Delcourt, "La pratica rituale del travestimento" Claude Calame, ed., *L'Amore in Grecia*. (Bari: Edizioni La Terza, 1983), 87-101. Similarly, in Sparta, the night before marriage the bride was entrusted to a woman who shaved her head and dressed her in masculine clothes and the bridegroom was dressed by women in delicate clothes, wreathed with flowers and scented with myrrh (ibid, 88), probably symbolising how, through marriage, woman and man received qualities from each other.
[58] *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers*. (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 71.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Green, *The Gods of Roman Britain*, 56-57. see appendix, note 7. cf. note 62, p. 57.

the Celts the number three would appear to have possessed magical – perhaps apotropaic importance".[62]

At this regard, triple divinities connected with fortune throughout Europe should be remembered, like the three Graces or Muses (also represented as nine*) linked to the inspiration of arts and divine Beauty. The *Moirae* or *Fates* (curiously, the term *Fate* in Italian means "Fairies", whereas *Fato* means "Fate" not in the sense of doom but in the original sense of "destiny") of Greece, the Roman *Parche*, or the Scandinavian *Norns*, divinities apt to weave the destiny of humans and Gods. The Egyptian hieroglyph representing the Great Mother of the universe consists of three images of Cauldrons.[63] Triplication of Goddesses, priestesses and female figures recurs in archaeological remains,[64] folklore and myth,[65] also in the form of triple threes — hence nine*— a number that recurs in groups of legendary Virgins and priestesses, often in association with the guarding of sacred fires or cults,[66] and often bearing the role of bringing good fortune on their societies.

Symbolism Behind Cauldrons' tales

When analysing the role of the Cauldron in the aforementioned descriptions of the Italian trials, the question of how folkloric heritage[67] could have "inspired" such unlikely tales was raised. In Italian trials shape-shifting-as-resuscitation (in Britain present in myth rather than in trials) emerges as centred around the role of the Cauldron or of *Domina Ludi*'s wand.[68] These symbols may have reached the Italian peninsula through the Celts. The wand is reminiscent of Daghda's club which, like

[62] Ibid. For other archaeological remains in the shape of cauldrons, sacrificial dishes, steatopygic statuettes, vases etc. that could be interpreted in support of the discussed affinities between Cauldrons and Goddess' lap/womb/procreative organs, see appendix, note 9.

[63] Laura Perry, *Ancient spellcraft: from the hymns of the Hittites to the carvings of the Celts.* (Franklin Lakes: New Page Books, 2002), 46.

[64] see appendix, note 8.

[65] For instance, the Norse God Odin stole his power from three Cauldrons of "wise blood" or mead of poetry by entering as a snake in the womb of the earth, the Giantess Gunnlod. By drinking the mead he became a shape-shifter, turning himself into an eagle to gift others with the mead: Paul Acker, Carolyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 32-38. It may be worth observing that Indra, Aryan God of Heaven, also stole the Gods' ambrosia (which was like an elixir of life, with healing properties, reminding of the Alchemists' panakeia (see note 92, p. 88), associated with Kali's three Cauldrons) and also flew away in the form of an eagle: John Rhys, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom. (Forgotten Books: 2004), 296, accessed May 19, 2011, available at ForgottenBooks.Com
cf also Scott Littleton, *Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology, vol. 4.* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2005), 531- 532, 455 about triple Freya; Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 187, about triple Macha; Walter F. Otto, *Le muse e l'origine divina della parola e del canto.* (Roma: Fazi Editore, 2005), 18 28, 79, about the three Muses, the three Charites and the three Nymphs; Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 109, about triple Brigit.

[66] For instance, the nine Vestals. According to Pomponius Mela, nine priestesses of the oracle of a Gallic deity in Sena were devoted to perpetual virginity: Frank E. Romer, *Pomponius Mela's description of the world*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 115; Miranda Green, *Exploring the World of the Druids.* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2010), 103-104; cf. Alexander Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*. (London: Elibron Classics series, 2005), 153. Nine magical virgins of the Isle of Apples are in Welsh literature: Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 1,* 146. Also, nine women dancing around ityphallic male figure, in the Levantine rock art cave paintings at Raco dels Moros at El Cogul, Lerida, suggest the idea of a sacred dance around a God. cf. appendix, note 11.

[67] see p.p. 57-60.

[68] see note 21, p. 52.

that of *Domina Ludi*, can both kill and resuscitate the dead[69] like her Cauldron, which is also reminiscent of his "bottomless" Cauldron: one of the four jewels brought by the Tuatha De Daanans from one of the four cities from which their knowledge allegedly came: "From Muirias was brought the Cauldron of Daghda; no company would go from it unsatisfied."[70] There seems to be a parallel between the Daghda's club ("so big that it must be carried on wheels" and able to kill and resuscitate) as a phallic/virile symbol as it has widely been supposed, and the Cauldron as a metaphor for womb, with its power to give life but also to destroy. The word *Muirias* supposedly comes from *Muir*, "sea",[71] suggesting a connection between Cauldron and sea. This would be significant for the symbolism of sea as primeval life source from where all life begins, in connection to the amniotic fluid and the womb of primigenial Goddesses discussed by Gimbutas.[72] The connection between water or "liquid life source" and magical containers or women as symbols of them,[73] occurs in Europe, also beyond Irish myth.[74] Many more tales of cauldrons found in Britain's folklore and myth somehow mirror one another in themes of resuscitation, endless abundance, and the recurrent presence of the otherworld or underworld.

In the Mabinogi is *Peir Dadeni*, the "Cauldron of Rebirth," given from Bran to the King of Ireland when he marries his sister Branwen, which resuscitates any dead body thrown in it.[75] Like Daghda's the Cauldron of "Irish smith-God", Goibniu provides endless food, but for feasts of the otherworld.[76] Koch noted how "A Middle Welsh tract, "The Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain", includes *Dyrnwch* the Giant's Cauldron, which is probably equivalent to the Cauldron of Diwrnach the Irishman,[77] the gaining possessions of which is one of the heroic tasks demanded by the giant in *Culhwch ac Olwen*[78] for the hand of his daughter to be deserved.[79] In the "Spoils of Annwn", a poem from the *Book of Taliesin*,[80] Arthur recovers the Cauldron

[69] Koch, *Celtic Encyclopedia*, 554.
[70] Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, ed. and trans., *Lebor gabála Érenn: The book of the taking of Ireland, Part IV, vol. 41.* (London: Irish Texts Society, 1941), 145.
[71] David Dorward, *Scotland's place-names.* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1995), 98; see also Thomas Stratton, *The Celtic origin of a great part of the Greek and Latin languages, and of many Classical Proper Names, proved by a Comparison of Greek and Latin with the Gaelic Language or the Celtic of Scotland.* (Edinburgh: Machlan & Stewart, South Bridge, 1870), 76.
[72] see p.p.63-67.
[73] cf. appendix, note 8 .
[74] cf. Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images,* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2007), 95, 116; Barry B. Powell, *Classical Myth.* (Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2004), 121.
[75] Davies trans., "Second Branch" in *The Mabinogion.*
[76] Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 1* , 359
[77] see ibid, 843.
[78] Ibid, 359.
[79] "How Culhwch won Olwen", in *The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 179-213.
[80] attributed to Taliesin, "The Spoils of Annwn", in *Sources of the Grail*: *an anthology*, ed. and trans. John Matthews. (Hudson: Lindisfarne Press, 1996), 31-32.

from *Annwn* (literally "under the earth", the Welsh under/otherworld) and only seven men may return alive.[81] All the above would be all the more significant if the Cauldron was seen as archetypical symbol of feminine intimacy, hence of a Mother Goddess' divine love coinciding with divine knowledge.[82] In fact Cauldrons' complex symbology included wisdom, truth and prophecy as suggested in the *Tale of Taliesin* where Gwion gains the supernatural knowledge that will help him become Taliesin when he tastes three drops from the magic potion boiling in Ceridwen's Cauldron.[83] The Cauldron there found did not cook meat for cowards, like Dyrnwch's Cauldron that distinguished brave men from cowards and the Cauldron of Manannàn Mac Lir in *The Adventure of Cormac in Tàr Tairngiri and the Truth of Cormac's Sword*, [84] which could tell truth from lie by the speed in which the meat was cooked.[85]

This idea of not cooking meat from the coward, if we are to accept the association between Cauldron and female womb, could also be meaningful. On the one hand there could be a social factor (most helpful in times of war), encouraging men to be honest and courageous so to "deserve" female companionship; on the other, there may be a religious suggestion around the divine origin of the Cauldron which may only feed the worthy who "deserved" divine knowledge by bypassing human limits. This reminds us of myths such as that of Atlanta (effectively a semi-Goddess as raised by Artemis), where the human man must defeat his human limits by winning her in a race so to win her love.[86] This parallel between winning the love of a divine woman or gaining possession of a magic Cauldron (giver of prophecy, inspiration, the power of restoring life etc.) and bypassing human limits, seems to point towards conceptions in which the Goddess (as archetypical female) is the source of divine knowledge, creation, inspiration and regeneration, as similarly discussed for the Muses in chapter one.[87] The same parallel is observable in fruits like the apple, the fig, the pear or the pomegranate (symbolising the Potnia's vagina, source of creation,

[81] Perhaps not coincidentally seven, which recurs in legend, corresponds to the seven major planets that have been part of our cultural heritage to the extent that our week days were named after them. Even De Lancre noted the significance of the number seven: Pierre De Lancre, *On the inconstancy of witches : Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons (1612)*, ed. Gerhild Scholz Williams; trans. Harriet Stone and Gerhild Scholz Williams. (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 191.
[82] see p.p. 60, 84, and note 65 p. 57.
[83] Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 1,* 359.
[84] Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 1,* 360.
[85] Ibid, 359.
[86] Dexter, Miram Robbins. "Indo-European reflections of virginity and autonomy, Miriam Robbins Dexter, in Mankind Wuarterly, 26 (1-2) Fall/winter, 1995.
[87] see p. note 78, p. 35.

love and knowledge[88]), which were offered by priestesses to their Goddess, across the Mediterranean where the cult of the Potnia in its different forms was practised. To return to the Cauldron, it would then be interesting that, as also noted by Professor James Carley:

> the underworld of Annwn appears to be identical with the isle of apples; the magic cauldron of Annwn was… kindled by the breath of nine maidens and *Vita Merlini*, our first reference to the isle of apples, states that it was there that Morgan and her eight sisters cured Arthur of his wounds.[89]

This is interesting also for the link to the virginity cult, in connection with good Fate and prosperity.[90] The fact that after the mistreating of Branwen as the woman of divine origin[91] ill fate was dragged upon Ireland and that when the unworthy warriors were thrown into the Cauldron[92] by resuscitating they became instruments of further destruction,[93] may symbolise the rejection of the Cauldron translated into a curse. When misused ("misuse" could be seen as a metaphorical rape of the divine Cauldron) and forced to resuscitate because of its intrinsic power, it destroys life.

On the other hand Italian tales where eaten animals and people were temporarily restored to life for a prefixed amount of time and preordained a *brutta morte*, literally a "bad death",[94] may have originated from pre-Christian initiatory cults[95] where "death" to a human dimension and "rebirth" to a divine dimension is simply a metaphor for the surmounting of human limits and participation of a divine dimension, later translated into the idea of Sabbath, gradually demonised.[96] The acts of eating or sucking blood[97] may represent in fact, as discussed in regard to the Familiars and the Benandanti's caul, a religious[98] connection between human and divine, hence the initiation of the first into the latter.

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[88] see p.p. 59, 84, and note 65 p. 57.
[89] James P. Carley, *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 17.
[90] see appendix, note 10.
[91] The mistreating of the divine woman imposed by mortal men or women recurs in British folklore. see Davies, trans., "The Third Branch", in *The Mabinogion*, and chap.1, p. 35, note 81. It also appears in more recent popular tales, e.g. *Snow White*, *Cinderella,* and *the Sleeping Beauty*, perhaps symbolising the "human alter ego" in contrast with the "inner divine", hence the conflict between men and Gods.
[92] Bran, owner of the Cauldron was significantly Branwen's brother, possible metaphor for her divine male counterpart. His Cauldron passed to the Irish when Branwen married the Irish king.
[93] Davies, trans., "Second Branch" in *The Mabinogion*, 32-34.
[94] see p 49, note 9.
[95] see note 13, p. 51.
[96] Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Anakrloo and Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 206-209.
[97] see p.p. 27, 39, 40, 42.
[98] Amongst the various etymologies of religion there is Latin *re-ligare*, "to link again" supposedly men of the community: Ottorino Pianigiani, *Vocabolario Etimologico*, (La Spezia: Fratelli Melita Editori, 1991), 1125. Yet, it may also be supposed that *re* could assume a double significance, standing also for *rex, regis*, "king", possibly implying conceptions in which religion was seen to reconnect the individual to the noble side (the "inner King" as in alchemy).

Death as Shape-shifting

The Striges

Central to understanding the roots of medieval and early modern beliefs of cannibalism and shape-shifting as traces of metaphors for shifts of consciousness and hypothetical shamanistic cults, is the image of the night witch and its supposedly gradual transformation and subsequent demonisation.

> It happens that demons taking on the likeness of men and women who are alive, and of horses and beasts of burden, go by night in company through certain regions, where they are seen by the people, who mistake them for those persons whose likeness they bear; and in some countries this is called the *tregenda*. And the demons do this to spread error, and to cause scandal and to discredit those whose likenesses they taken on, by showing that they do dishonourable things in the *tregenda*. There are some people, especially women who say that they go at night in company with such a tregenda, and name many men and women in their company; and they say that the mistress of the trhong, who lead the others are Herodias… and the ancient Diana, goddess of the Greeks.[99]

The above is a passage from *Lo Specchio della Vera Penitenza* by Jacopo Passavanti, written around 1354, showing popular belief in shape-shifting. Demons who wander at night, led by Herodias, borrowing the appearances of "respectable" humans and animals apparently so to ruin their reputations. Apart from obviously showing the survival of pre-Christian beliefs around the existence of a Diana's cortege that goes about at night somehow reverting social order, the belief that demons would take the shape of real people and animals is in itself of particular interest. It suggests in fact that at some unspecified point in post-Christianised history when nightly wanderings (the purpose of which was probably –rather than secret "Pagan" meetings– some kind of outdoor social entertainment that clung onto pre-Christian popular traditions or festivals) were no longer acceptable, real people and real owned animals, otherwise "respectable", must have been seen outside at night. What emerges quite clearly is the resemblance with passages of the *Malleus Maleficarum* referring to "unlucky" men accused of some misdeed when actually those

[99] Jacopo Passavanti *Lo specchio della vera penitenza,* (Firenze: ed. F.L. Polidori, 1856), 318-20; cf. Norman Cohn *Europe Inner Demons*, (London: Sussex University Press, 1975), 215.

responsible for the misdeeds in question were demons who had taken his form or meddled in comparable ways with the appearance of things.[100] This echoes stories of possessions which may justify otherwise unacceptable (particularly for the clergy) or eccentric behaviours.[101] It could thus be assumed that pre-existent folktales were adapted into socially helpful popular beliefs to justify socially unacceptable behaviours of otherwise "respectable" people, like enjoying oneself in non-Christian ways.

When exploring folk-beliefs concerned with night demons/witches, Cohn found that Roman literature in the first two centuries A.D. provides reference for the fact that "the ancient Romans already knew of a creature which flew about at night, screeching, and lived on the flesh and blood of human beings… called …*strix*, from a Greek word meaning "to screech".[102] He accounts for how Pliny the Elder "admitted that he could not fit the *strix* into any recognized species of bird; and …added that according to popular belief it offered its breasts to babies to suck", which, according to Serenus Sammonicus "was poisoned".[103] This mingling of human and animal worlds is reminiscent of older beliefs concerning the Bacchants,[104] said to breastfeed wolves' cubs and baby deer, equally demonised far before the advent of Christianity by the classical Greek society centred around Athens. In fact, further exploring possible origins of myths of infanticide, promiscuity/orgies and cannibalism, Cohn noted how these were applied to the first Christians, to the Jews, and even before that, to the followers of Dionysus in Greece.[105] Ovid in the *Fasti* described the *Striges* (plural of *Strix*) as "ravenous birds, with hooked beaks and grasping talons …owl-like creatures [who] may be natural birds, or …old women magically transformed into birds… [who] fly about at night in search of babies unprotected by their nurses" to eat their entrails.[106] Similarly, the Bacchants, overwhelmed with divine *furor* were said to destroy villages and steal children,[107] a fact that according to the classical philologist and dramatist Giulio Guidorizzi "re-confirms the indefinite maternity of the Maenads".[108]

[100] e.g. the man who claimed beating women thinking they were cats: Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), trans. Montague Summers, (Mincola: Dover Publication Edition, 1971), 126-127.
[101] e.g. see ibid, 130-131, 135.
[102] Ibid, 206.
[103] Cohn, *Europe Inner Demons*, 206.
[104] Euripides, *Le Baccanti. Testo greco a fronte*, trans. Giulio Guidorizzi. (Venezia: Marsilio, 1989), 107.
[105] Ibid, 12, 17, 106, 206 228, 260-61.
[106] Cohn, *Europe Inner Demons*, 206.
[107] Euripides, *Le Baccanti*. 109.
[108] Ibid, 193.

However, Cohn does not seem to recognise the night-witch/Good Lady of the night dichotomy as a possibly false one. As I shall attempt to demonstrate, the "baby eating" night-witches could perhaps be seen as a demonised/demonic "alter ego" of the generally beneficial "ladies of the night".[109] Yet, whilst demonisation is undoubtedly part of the process of myths' transformation, this view may be partially limiting. The Striges, in fact, could be the demonised but *already* (in times preceding Christianity) horrific aspect of the Ladies of the Night, displeased at not being honoured in human houses (or minds). Interesting at this regard are legends such as those concerning Melusine, "half woman, half snake whose legend predates the fourteenth century".[110] She "was the progenetrix of the French house of Lusignan and was said to appear to announce the death of each lord until the castle itself was destroyed"[111] but was also the lover of a mortal, whom she abandoned for breaking a promise, sign of disrespect, hence breaking her trust.[112] This flying snake-woman resumes characteristics that may be seen to echo the image of the Strix and of the bird-snake Goddesses of Gimbutas,[113] or what they could have become passing through the alterations of centuries. Legends testifying the double aspect of comparable mythological figures survive in Italy today. The "Befana" (a hag), with her hooked nose and pointy chin with hairy wart, gives coal to children on 6 January if they have been "bad", and sweets if they have been "good". Likewise in the Italian Alps right up until the late twentieth century survived tales of Fairies of the mountains who were said to appear as beautiful young females if passers-by showed them (or those aspects of nature to which they presided) due respect but would show themselves as horrific if not. The same happens in Irish myth, for instance in the story of Niall of the Nine Hostages, where the hero and his brothers are to give a kiss to an old hag in exchange of some water. Whilst the brothers flee, horrified by her looks, Niall kisses and embraces the hag, who transforms into a beautiful woman and, revealing to be the Goddess of Sovereignty, makes him king.[114]

Interesting ideas of demonisation of female figures, beholders of "Good" and "Evil", is the transformation of the concept of demon from Greek to Judaic and Christianity

[109] see Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Anakrloo and Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 206-209. In p.p. 64-67, and note 130, p. 66 in particular, it will be attempted to explain why the Fairy that steals babies and the Strix that kills them may possibly be associated or even reunited in the ambivalent figure of the Lady of the night. Conjectures of gradual demonisation of one figure into the other will be formulated, as well as the possible scission of the beneficial and horrific aspect of the Lady of the night into different figures.

[110] Carl Lindahl, John McNamara, and John Lindow, ed., *Medieval folklore: an encyclopedia of myths, legends, tales, beliefs, and Customs*. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 300.

[111] Ibid, 300-301.

[112] Ibid, 300-302.

[113] see p.p. 65-67 and appendix, note 12, also cf. appendix 13, 14, 15.

[114] Miranda Green, *Celtic Myths*, 19, 27. cf. also: Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers*. (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 84-85.

as explored by Flint.[115] She noted how "the role of 'daimones' is a divided one … in Greek philosophical tradition" and how "Plato's *Timaeus* placed powerful winged forms in middle air, and [how] the *daimones* of Plato's *Symposium* bridge between God and man and thus form the vital connection between two halves of the universes".[116] This description of the role of demons on a universal level mirrors the previously discussed concept of the "internal Familiar". Flint also noted how Plutarch described potentially evil *daimones*[117] and how Plato and Apuleius believed in protective demons, "a belief that grew, perhaps out of the idea that a man good demon's and his true soul were the same".[118] In this regard, Plato noted: "God has given to each of us, as his demon, that kind of soul that is housed in the top of our body and raises us —seeing that we are not an earthly but a heavenly plant" and that "*daimones* are subject, on the other hand, to passions, just like humans".[119] Divination, priestcraft, incantations and soothsaying are inspired by demons in this context. "In such guise", noted Flint, demons "appear to be a force primarily on the side of goodness" even though in Plato's eyes such activities "did carry the pejorative overtones a later age would bring to them …[as] however not naturally evil, they may "slip" into wrong-doing through their accessibility to passion and emotion".[120] Flint further explained the shifting perception of demons through the various views of classic thinkers, exposing the vulnerability of humans to the supernatural, with demons as go-betweens. She pointed to Philo Judaeus as the "most efficient purveyor of Greek ideas on demons" who "describes them as aeary ambassadors or spirit bridge-builders, constantly engaged in going backwards and forwards between God and humans".[121] They may be helpful or maleficent, however, the maleficent ones are still under God and used to chastise, which makes them useful. At which point Flint claimed how "this modification of the demons extensive powers would help Jews and Christians also to accept, and even encourage belief in the service of the demons as illuminators of wrongdoing".[122] We are only a step away from *demonisation* of *demons*, and magic. In fact, "Judaism through its own way of rescuing the 'daimones' polarised the good and bad spirits into angels and wicked demons" and magic then came to be seen "as a means to subdue the most of wicked demons' will",[123] so that

[115] Valerie Flint, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe vol. 2: Ancient Greece and Rome*, (London: The Althone Press, 1999), 282.
[116] Ibid, 40-2.
[117] Ibid, 283.
[118] Ibid, 284.
[119] Plato, *Phaedo*, 107-108C cited in ibid, 284.
[120] Valerie Flint, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe vol. 2*, 284.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid, 295.

demons begun to be seen as entities who after being conjured became personal teachers of magic, like in the *Book of Enoch*, where Evil angels teach women "forbidden and magical arts".[124]

At this point, we may have a clearer idea of how slander towards religious minorities or social outcasts, as noted by Cohn, in conjunction with the above shifting perceptions of demons, might have contributed to the transformation and final demonisation of the ambiguous Good Ladies/Striges in public imagination.

Bird Goddesses behind Striges?

An engraving on a reindeer rib, possibly resembling the head of a water bird and found in a Cromagnon site and dated as c.30.000 BC, was said by Gimbutas (providing it is what it appears to portray) to be the earliest human/water-bird hybrid marked with water symbolism.[125] Yet if it is not, evidence of bird/human hybrids, perhaps Goddesses of life as suggested by Gimbutas, are still widespread, even if not quite as ancient, possibly attesting to cults worshipping of a double nature: human and bird.[126] In *The Living Goddesses* the human-bird hybrid is symbol of the "Bird Goddess, the nocturnal aspect of the Life-giver", who, when represented as symbol of death "is a bird of prey, vulture, owl, raven, crow, hawk".[127] However, Gimbutas reminds us, death in this context appears to be conceived as strictly linked with regeneration, and thus these are Goddesses of death as well as of life and regeneration,: "night bird rul[ing] death and the underworld" for "Old European Owl symbolism fuses death and life".[128]

It appears that this view of death as a part of a process of regeneration and rebirth hence of transformation permits a more profound understanding of the beliefs around *Striges*[129] devouring or stealing babies. These stories resemble in many ways those of changelings, of Fairies who steal human babies and exchange them with their own, as also mentioned in the *Malleus Maleficarum* where, of course, Fairies are evil demons.[130] Perhaps the Striges were originally only night Fairies, like the Good

[124] Ibid, 294.
[125] Cromagnon site, Eyzies, France;dated to c. 30.000 B.C: see appendix, note 13. Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess,* 19.
[126] see appendix, notes 14,15.
[127] Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 186.
[128] Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 20.
[129] It is to be noted that in northern Italy the word *strige* was plural for *striga* or stria meaning "witch"; Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 231.
[130] Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers, 123. The similitude also lies in the fact that Fairies stole babies to take them to their "other" world and Striges in a sense did the same by killing them, causing their souls to go to the "otherworld". In his *Ecstasies*, Ginzburg often superimposes the "world of the Dead", to the "Otherworld" but also "Fairyland".

Ladies of Sicilian folklore,[131] or like the Fairies who stole babies to take them to a partially accessible "Otherworld" (or "Fairyland") and who later became (through the discussed processes of demonisation) the baby eaters/killers. It should also be considered that pre-Christian people might have turned to local folkloric heritages as a way to soothe the impact of high natural death rates in infancy, so that death in this world would not mean a permanent loss or end but rather rebirth in another dimension, more accessible than the distant Christian Paradise. This is a concept evidenced by local folktales widespread across Europe and, more importantly, by apparent beliefs of transmigration for instance amongst the Celts.[132]

Perhaps only later, with the advent of Christianity and changing views on death, death stopped being seen as part of the process of rebirth and the afterlife became distant, much more disconnected from everyday reality, thus creating the need to attribute the now more permanent loss of dead young children to someone evil. In fact, if Christianity retained ideas of rebirth through concepts of resurrection, the Christian God and Paradise belonged to a much more unreachable dimension, much more disconnected with physical/everyday life compared to how the afterlife permeated life in pre-Christian conceptions. A chief example may be seen in the Egyptians, although generally speaking most elitist "Pagan" initiations concerned the knowledge of and integration with the divine (hence the afterlife or the "beyond life") during life. The higher existential scope in the various forms of religion found in pre-Christian Europe was often and quite consistently becoming a divinity, clearing from all human imperfections. Conversely, for Christian priests, God was an entity to admire and fear, to pray to, and to believe in. It was not, however, the aim to reach *during life*, but only *after*, and never as an equal, always as a subordinate (the aim to "become" God would have been sheer blasphemy), thus the more traumatic division between death and life in everydayness.

The archaeological evidence[133] for indicating the possibility of widespread cults of a life-giver nourishing bird-Goddess associated with milk and breastfeeding, may account for the mentioned classical beliefs around striges/bird-ladies of the night breastfeeding

The idea here is that tales of Fairies taking babies to Fairyland could be have been turned into popular legend to lighten the psychological impact of death in infancy. Likewise, tales of Striges eating babies'entrails, could have had similar purposes and may simply account for the increasingly darker vision of death, as well as the human need for blaming it upon supernatural creatures.

[131] p.p. 13, 63, 65, 108.

[132] John Arnott MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts*. (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003), 358, 360, 418.

[133] see appendix, note 15.

babies[134], which could have originated from this figure, life-giver as well destroyer. Another interesting fact to highlight was the notion that the Strix might have been a household deity,[135] ambivalent just like the Good Ladies or Ladies from Outside. The Bird-Goddess may thus possibly represent the older version of the Strix, beneficial to those who paid due respect (by keeping the house clean for her visits, for instance) or punishing those who had not. She would have been the "Mistress of mountains, stones, waters, forests and animals", having appeared "through prehistory and history as a bird-woman, bird, or woman"[136] and worshipped as Goddess in house-shrines and temples in south-eastern Europe.[137]

Echoes of the Striges' abductions resonate in Greek legends where beautiful boys are stolen by enamoured Nymphs who kissing them, drawn them under lakes until they die (supposedly symbolically), continuing however to live forever in magical worlds.[138] Similarly young brides are stolen at their wedding by a mysterious Gentleman who takes them under a lake where they will not suffer any desire and will enjoy eternal joy. The latter legend, still known in Italy, survives to our century and was even put into song by a twentieth century songwriter.[139] This is also reminiscent of the legend of Mydir who stole Ethaun[140] from a mortal king so she could be taken back to the world of the Gods. All these tales seem to be metaphors of initiations into parallel dimensions and of transformation of human into divine, as shown in the confessions of Bessie Dunlop who claimed she had to choose between this world and Fairyland.[141] Isobel Gowdie too, "went into the Downie-hillis; the hill opened, and [she] cam to an fair lairge braw rowme, in the day tym. Thair ar great bullis rowtting and skoylling ther, at the entrie".[142] And Donald Mc Illmichall was attracted by the light emanating from a hill "quhair he entered haveing many candles lighted".[143]

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[134] see p.p.62 and note 103, p.62.
[135] As the Bird Goddess since the Upper Palaeolithic, as suggested by findings in Mal'ta, central Siberia, where "Bird Goddess figurines have been found along the inside edges of the circular mammoth-bone dwellings, Z.A. Abramova": "Palaeolithic Art in USSR" in *Artic Anthropology vol. 4,* (University of Wisconsin Press: 1967), 83, cited in Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 111.
[136] Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 111.
[137] As evidenced at Achileion, Thessaly, in temples dated 6000-58000 B.C. Marija Gimbutas, *Achelleion: A Neolithic Settlement in Northern Greece, 6400-5600B.C.* (Los Angeles: Monumenta Archaeologica, University of California, 1988), in ibid.
[138] cf. Walter Friedrich Otto, *Le Muse e l'origine divina della parola e del canto*, (Roma: Fazi Editore, 2005), 18.
[139] "La sposa rubata", a modern song by Angelo Branduardi.
[140] Gantz, trans. "The Wooing of Ethaun", in Gantz, trans., *Early Irish Tales,* 39-59.
[141] Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, x-xi, xiv.
[142] Robert Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials in Scotland: 1609-1624, compiled from the original records and MSS. vol.3*. (Edinburgh: William Tait and Longman Press), 611.
[143] Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 45-46.

Shape-shifting in Folklore and Myth

I'd rather I were dead and gone,
And my body laid in grave,
Ere a rusty stock o coal-black smith
My maidenhead should have.'…
…Then she became a turtle dow,
To fly up in the air,
And he became another dow,
And they flew pair and pair.
O bide, lady, bide, …
She turnd hersell into an eel,
To swim into yon burn,
And he became a speckled trout,
To gie the eel a turn.
O bide, lady, bide, ' ...
She turnd hersell into a hare,
To rin upon yon hill,
And he became a gude grey-hound,
And boldly he did fill.
O bide, lady, bide, ' …
Then she became a gay grey mare,
And stood in yonder slack,
And he became a gilt saddle,
And sat upon her back…[144]

Ballads like this echo classical myths of Gods chasing women, nymphs or Goddesses who, to avoid surrendering, assume various vegetal and animal shapes, as the chasing God does accordingly. Oversimplifying overly complex conceptions of virginity,[145] the "maidenhead" of this poem, like the denied love, may represent, in a

[144] Extracts from: Francis James Child, "The Twa Magicians" in *English and Scottish Popular Ballads,* ed. Helen Child Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1904), 77-78.
[145] see appendix, note 10.

pre-Christian sense, a symbol of female intact power. A perfect example would be the myth of Apollo and Daphne. Daphne begged her father to let her stay a virgin, like Artemis. Artemis, a surviving pre-Hellenic Goddess, is in the Olympian system Apollo's sister. In one of her earlier forms, she was also the Cretan Britomanis and Diktynna (the Lady of the Mountain as previously mentioned[146]), when Crete, it has been supposed, had a matrilineal system and was possibly centred around a Goddess worship, mother of the universe *apateira*, "without father".[147] The Achaean invasions are then said to have introduced strongly patriarchal male deities,[148] which came to form the known Greek Olympus by marrying Goddesses (previously unmarried) of the previous belief-system.[149] Thus, recurrent myths like that of Daphne who transforms herself into a tree in order not to surrender her virginity may be seen as symbolising the resistance of the previous people's social-religious matrilineal system based on the worship of a multi-faced Goddess (which will then split into different ones) to surrender to a patrilineal/patriarchal system based on the worship of male deities.[150]

Clearly, this does not imply that in every culture where such myths exist there has been a passage from matrilineal to patrilineal/patriarchal social and religious structure. Yet such tales do appear to indicate the possible presence of strong female goddesses' worship increasingly losing power as male deities became more and more dominant. I use the terms matrilineal rather than matriarchal because it is commonly agreed that the usage of a matrilineal lineage in a given society does not necessarily prove that that society *was* matriarchal. For instance, if in Britain there certainly were strong Goddesses and female figures[151] and hypothesises about the existence of matrilineal systems e.g. among the Pictish rulers have been advanced,[152] there is not conclusive evidence to prove the existence of an actual matriarchal society in ancient Britain, or for that matter, anywhere in the world. Whilst carefully avoiding the complex debate about the plausibility/possibility of matriarchal societies in the past, far too entangled and great to be tackled in this context,[153] it

[146] Charlene Spretnak, *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece*. (Boston, Beacon Press: 1992), 18, 75.
[147] Uberto Pestalozza, *Religione Mediterranea*. (Milano: Bocca, 1951); Uberto Pestalozza, Pierangelo Carozzi, *Eterno Feminino Mediterraneo.* (Vicenza: Edizioni NERI POZZA, 1996).
[148] cf. p. 14-15.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Pestalozza, *Religione Mediterranea.*
[151] cf Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, 15-28.
[152] John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, vol. 5*, 1656.
[153] see p.p.16-17, and Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26-309.

could be generally agreed that the aforementioned shifting relationship between the human and natural dimension[154] may reflect such social and religious shifts.[155] The more fluid/egalitarian conceptions between natural and human, where one tended to flow into the other are more likely to belong to societies in which women and goddesses had more power. Conversely, the more static conceptions in which man and the natural world were more neatly divided, with man at the top of the hierarchy, may correspond to social and religious realities in which the feminine dimension is more subdued by the masculine, as in the Jewish conception chiefly crystallised in the previously discussed passages of Genesis.[156] What is relevant here, in order to understand witches' confessions, is the recognition of such passage in folklore, in the shifting perceptions related to shape-shifting.

Shifting Connotations of Shape-shifting

We have encountered conceptions that view the transformation into animal as desirable, as testified in tales in which living or loving in the form of an animal has a pedagogic role;[157] or where transforming into a plant or animal has the purpose of escaping from the unwanted loss of virginity;[158] or, again, in tales such as that of the mentioned Selkies[159] and the Calderdale legend of the witch Sybil,[160] where semi-animal nature is perceived as a privilege associated with magic, power and possibly freedom. From these positive conceptions of shape-shifting, we arrive to conceptions in which transforming into an animal or living a semi-animal nature, is seen as undesirable as in the myth of the Children of Lyr,[161] the legend of Arachne,[162] or that of the Little Mermaid.[163]

To understand this shift it may be useful to achieve a deeper understanding of the positive perception of shape-shifting in relation to the totemic concepts discussed in chapter one. For instance, there is the previously discussed union of Sacred King

[154] see p.p. 43-49.
[155] As also observable in the First, Second and Fourth Branch of the Mabinogion with the old matrilinear Tribes versus the new patrilinear ones: Sioned Davies. trans., *The Mabinogion*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[156] see p. 43.
[157] see p.p. 47, 71.
[158] see p.p. 68-69.
[159] see p. 32.
[160] John Billingsley, *Folk Tales from Calderdale vol. 1, Place legends and lore from the Calder Valley*. (Hebden Bridge: Northern Earth, 2007), 10-18.
[161] T. W. Rolleston, *The High Deeds of Finn and Other Bardic Romances of Ancient Ireland*. (Middlesex: Echo Library, 2006), 29-39.
[162] C. Littleton, *Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology*, *vol. 11*. (New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2005), 142.
[163] Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Santore ed. and trans., *The Little Mermaid: From the Story by Hans Christian Andersen*. (Jackson: Running Press Book Publishers, 2009).

and Land-Goddess[164] in ancient Britain and the idea of "sovereignty personified as a divine female" is "an extremely persistent tradition in early Irish myth."[165] "She was the goddess of the land, the spirit or essence of Ireland itself, and on her depended the fortunes, fertility and prosperity of her territory".[166] This idea of identification between Goddess and nature, [167] her vegetal and animal reflection, finds echo in alleged unions between the bull and the Potnia's priestesses[168] and suggests the belief[169] that the Goddess could act through female animals and women consecrated to her. Her priestesses could, like her, take natural or animal shape and influence nature in any way they wished,[170] e.g. cause the land to be fertile or sterile, as well as to cause good or bad weather. This is an important aspect that survives in witch-beliefs connected to the power attributed to witches, as testified in witch-trials all across Europe, and is strictly inter-related to the idea of inter-changeability between human and animal reflected in witchcraft-related beliefs around shape-shifting and the animal Familiar.

Sometimes in the same myth or tale, we can see a possible overlapping of both positive and negative conceptions of shape-shifting, where the new is only a weak mask to the older, like in the tale of Math[171] or of Circe.[172] As briefly discussed in chapter one, as punishment for the rape of Goewin, Math transforms Gwydion and Gilfaethwy into couples of different animals each year alternating the gender of his nephews so that each may bear children to the other.[173] It seems however that under this idea of punitive "dishonour" consisting in being transformed into an animal (or "worse", a female animal), it is possible to recognise the possibility of an older layer of conceptions that would have viewed this as not a punishment but a sort of moral or spiritual learning necessary for prior forgiveness and peace being restored. Likewise in the story of Circe who transforms men who enter her island into pigs as

[164] see p.p. 47, 56.
[165] Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, 70.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Green notes: "Both Epona and Rhiannon could be both woman and horse" and tells of a Greek legend recounted by Agesilaos in which "Stellos copulated with a mare, the result of the union being a beautiful baby girl who was given the name Epona by the mare herself." Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, 51.
[168] Pestalozza, *Religione Mediterranea*.
[169] Widely discussed in ibid.
[170] This may be reflected, again in the liaisons between mortals and Fairy women, with strong animal connotations (as the mentioned ones between mortal kings and women of divine origin) characteristic of medieval folklore like Melusine and the Lady of Lyin-y-Fan-Fach "typical fairy brides who married a mortal under certain conditions that he must not break under pain of losing her": Lindahl, McNamara, and Lindow, ed., *Medieval folklore: an encyclopedia of myths, legends, tales, beliefs, and customs*, 303-304. see also John Davies, Nigel Jenkins, Menna Baines, *The Welsh Academy Encyclopedia of Wales*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 128.
[171] see p. 47.
[172] Omero, *Odissea vol. I*, trans. Ippolito Pindemonte, (Firenze: Leonardo Ciardetti, 1823), 243 ff.
[173] see p. 47.

soon as they touch food at her banquet[174] we can sense the possible overlap of conceptions. The banquet, also recurrent in Italian sixteenth and seventeenth-century trials,[175] may (in view of the previously discussed views of witches' Cauldrons and banquets) be seen as a religious (possibly sexual) initiatory symbol through which men are transformed into animals. This transformation would be the achievement of a double dimension (rather than a punishment), encompassing body (human form) and spirit (the animal form), and may allow, as we shall see in chapter three, the knowledge of "Fairyland", or the otherworld, symbolised as supposed by Ginzburg (who often terms it, possibly erroneously, "world of the dead") by the Sabbath,[176] which in this case is the magical island of Circe.

The fact that it is Hermes, the God of snakes and of the caduceus presiding over Alchemy and Hermetic cults (and associated with Shiva, Osiris and Dionysus as previously discussed[177]), who gives Ulysses the antidote not to assume animal form[178] (by the time of Homer already commonly belittled), may not be coincidental. The herb which he gives him is supposedly the *Ruta graveoloens*, which has been associated in popular belief as a repellent of snakes,[179] the symbolic animals permitting the transformation of metal into gold,[180] or of human into divine,[181] hence ecstasy, which in view of all the above would be what allows the transformation of human into divine, hence into animal. Thus Ulysses would be prevented, unlike his friends turned into pigs, from abruptedly or fully experiencing the divine (and remaining in "Fairyland"), supposedly to continue his spiritual journey in more gradual ways. To confirm such speculations it may also be said that pigs are sacred both to the Fairies in Northern Italian folklore and to Demeter in the Eleusis' cults,[182] which I would associate with the symbolism of the Cauldron in witches' confessions.

[174] Omero, *Odissea vol. I*, trans. Pindemonte, 243 ff.
[175] see p.p. 49-52.
[176] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*.
[177] see p. 13.
[178] M.R. Mezzabotta, "Ethnoveterinary treatments in Roman antiquity" in ACTA CLASSICA, *vol. 44*, (Johannesburg: Classical Association of South Africa, 2001), 145.
[179] ibid.
[180] For the alchemic concept of the snakes transforming metals into gold through the awakening of the philosophical stone see: Basilio Valentino su VITRIOL (*Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenis Occultam Lapidem*), Basilio Valentino, Azoth. (Roma: Ed. Mediterranee, 1984), 87-95; and Michael Maier, "Discorso XIV" in *Atalanta fugiens* (1618), ed. Bruno Cerchio, (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1984), 99. see p. 87 and notes 82-83, p. 87.
[181] In view of note 13, p. 51 and considering how Dante's language (and that of his followers, *I Fedeli d'Amore*, "the Followers of Love") has been read in alchemic terms, it seems logical to come to the conclusion that alchemic symbolism (vulgar metals and gold, resembling closely the concept of "Cor Gentile" and vulgar qualities) must have referred to the individual transformation of personal qualities, from a human (word curiously connected etymologically with the term *humus*) state in which "vulgar" and "noble" are naturally blended in the individual, to a divine state in which any "impurity" of the "compost" is transfigured in the light of this symbolic "Sun" corresponding with/awoken by *Amore*, which is reminiscent of the philosophical stone awoken by the loving snakes, with strong parallelisms with Left Hand Tantrism.
[182] Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 55.

CHAPTER THREE

FLYING TO THE SABBATH

It is even more impossible
for witches to ride through the air
with Diana or with Herodias,
considering that there is no goddess
named Diana, nor any Herodias.[1]

Celui qui fera magie, sortilège, billets de sort,
pronostic d'oiseau ou se vanteroit
d'avoir chewaché la nuit avec Diana
ou telle autre vielle qui se duit magicienne,
sera banni et payera dix livres tournois.[2]

Medieval and Early Modern Evidence

This chapter will explore the possibility that witch-beliefs around flying may derive —again, in combination with demonological elaborations— from popular legends and folklore, in turn quite possibly originated from pre-Christian shamanic cults. This does not imply the altogether different and radical claim —I will repeat myself here once again— that the people accused of witchcraft during the centuries of the witch-hunt *actually* practised ecstatic cults. Yet, however probably unrelated with the objective reality of that time, there appears to be a connection between fantastical medieval and early modern beliefs around flying and pre-Christian ones. This connection worked at the level of "learned" and "popular" imagination, for such connection is even inter-textual to the earliest demonological texts —as well as the later— as shown by the famous passage below.

> Certain wicked women, turned back toward Satan, seduced by demonic illusions and phantasms, *believe of themselves and profess*[3] to ride upon certain beasts in the nighttime hours, with Diana, the Goddess of the Pagans (or with Herodias) and an innumerable multitude of women, and to traverse great spaces of earth in the silence of the dead of night, and to be subject to her laws as of a Lady, and on fixed nights be called to her service. But would that they alone perished in their falsehood, and did not, through faithlessness, hand over many to ruin with themselves! For an innumerable multitude, deceived by this false opinion, believe this to be true, and *so*

[1] Pierre De Lancre, *On the inconstancy of witches : Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et Demons (1612)*, ed. Gerhild Scholz Williams; trans. Harriet Stone and Gerhild Scholz Williams. (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 107.
[2] Jacques Bournon, ed. *Chroniques, lois, moeurs et usages de la Lorraine.* (Nancy: ed. Jean Cayon, 1838), 19.
[3] Italics mine.

> *believing, avoid the straight faith*,[4] and are again caught in the errors of the Pagans, by judging there to be anything of divinity or divine will beyond the one God".[5]

Through the *Canon Episcopi*, the Church openly condemned "witches" as "subverted and held captive by the devil" who "ought to be cleansed from the holy Church" [6] openly establishing a link between witchcraft and "paganism" —which— in all fairness, was at the time anything that dissociated itself from Christianity.

Is Flying Real? A Demonological Concern

A major early modern demonologist who attempted to tackle this question was De Lancre who in 1612 with remarkable clarity, commented:

> The question of whether the witches travel to the Sabbath is a marvel, a dream or a satanic illusion, and whether they go there in body or merely in spirit, has so preoccupied scholars of ancient and modern times as well as the sovereign judges of the courts of *Parlement* that it seems to me to be proven beyond a shadow of doubt.[7]

To illustrate this dichotomy of belief, it may be useful to initially restrict the debate to a comparison of the thoughts of four major demonologists —King James, Pierre De Lancre, Kramer and Sprenger— and the Inquisitor Alonso Salazar. Given the comments cited from the *Canon Episcopi*, it may be interesting to start with King James who (whilst agreeing on the delusional aspect of flying) suggested that witches may also fly physically:

> they saie, that by diuerse meanes they may conueene, either to the adoring of their Master, or to the putting in practise any seruice of his, committed vnto their charge: one way is natural, which is natural riding, going or sayling, at what houre their Master comes and aduertises them. And this way may be easelie beleued: an other way is some-what more strange: and yet is it possible to be true: which is by being carryed by the force of the Spirite which is their conducter, either aboue the earth or aboue the Sea swiftlie, to the place where they are to meet: which I am perswaded to be likewaies possible, in respect that as Habakkuk was carryed by the Angell in that forme, to the denne where Daniell laie; so thinke I, the Deuill will be reddie to imitate God, as well in that as in other thinges.[8]

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[4] Italics mine.
[5] Regino of Prum, *Canon Episcopi* (ca. 906), cited in Alan Charles Kors, Edward Peters, ed., *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A Documentary History*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 62.
[6] Ibid.
[7] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 104.
[8] Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), trans. Montague Summers, (Mincola: Dover Publication Edition, 1971), 108.

In the *Malleus*, bodily flight is described as starting with an ointment made from the fat of children, alleged instrument of ecstasy. Witches:

> take the unguent which they make at the devil's instruction from the limbs of children, particularly of those whom they have killed before baptism, and anoint with it a chair or a broomstick; whereupon they are immediately carried up into the air, either by day or by night, and either visibly or, if they wish, invisibly.[9]

Likewise, De Lancre noted: "And when they want to be transported bodily, they rub themselves with a certain ointment made with the fat of a little child".[10] King James, on the other hand, described instead the idea of flying *feeling like* "real", where the body of a person is witnessed to be still whilst the person allegedly perceives it to be actually flying.

> …some sayeth, that their bodies lying stil as in an extasy, their spirits wil be rauished out of their bodies, & carried to such places. And for verfying thereof, wil giue euident tokens, aswel by witnesses that haue seene their body lying senseles in the meane time, as by naming persones, whom with they mette, and giuing tokens quahat purpose was amongst them, whome otherwaies they could not haue knowen: for this forme of journeing, they affirme to vse most, when they are transported from one Countrie to another.[11]

Whilst discussing similar concepts, De Lancre cited St. Augustine's claim that "he saw a priest anointed with a certain ointment fall to the ground deliriously ecstatic that he had seen many strange and wonderful things, although he had not moved from the spot."[12] Such accounts suggest the (then unacceptable) idea of a body emptied of its soul lying still in bed or on the ground as the detached soul travels independently in spirit dimensions. This can be associated with those stories in which straw or other such things (which may include the Devil himself) assume the identical shape of the witch's body when left in place of the body to give the impression the person concerned did not move from bed. The *Malleus* provides an example: "For it was possible for the devils to lie down themselves by the side of the sleeping husbands, during the time when a watch was being kept on the wives, just as if they were sleeping with their husbands".[13] Salazar's documents provide more: Catalina de Sastrearena asserted that a figure remained in her place during her

[9] Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers, 107.
[10] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 113.
[11] King James, *Daemonlogie*, 39.
[12] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 14.24, in De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 105.
[13] Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers, 108.

absence in order to impersonate her.[14] Occasionally, we even find stories suggesting something between soul's journeys and the mental projection of flights of imagination,[15] regarding those said to be able to go to the Sabbath whilst awake.[16] Thus we find the account of a servant who was tied by her leg to her master, as recounted by De Lancre, who was prevented from sleep but could nonetheless visit the Sabbath.[17] Another example, again from De Lancre, is that of a teenage girl who claimed she was carried away from the Devil who put "in her place a figure that looked just like her, so that her mother could not find her to talk to. If her mother touched her, she would find this unreal body that would respond to all that her mother might ask her."[18] De Lancre, like many contemporaries did not view such stories as ecstatic experiences of souls separating from the body. Citing Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 220 AD) he noted instead that "The soul never leaves the body as long as the body exists"[19] and that:

> travel to the Sabbath cannot be made with the soul outside the body. Therefore, the Devil transports the witches in soul and in body. And even if the body appears to remain visible to us, this is an image of the body that the Devil makes us behold.[20]

Thus, even though the accounts discussed above in concerning soul-journeys may present links to shamanistic ideas,[21] the early modern Christians justified the survival of such beliefs and dissociated them from Pagan practices by making them into a journey of both body and soul by magical means, rather than soul only, which was an acceptable belief. In other words, if it was no longer possible to believe that the soul could separate from the body, a clearly Pagan idea, it must be a devilish delusion that makes it "look like" the body of the witch is still lying in bed. Belonging to what may be defined as a similar typology of "tales" are accounts of witches who travel invisibly (where invisibility could easily be a metaphor for the immateriality — hence invisibility— of the spirit), or pass through small holes. Between May 1611 and January 1612, Inquisotor Salazar confronted 1,182 suspects. He found that: "almost all those referred to in the first gloss say that they got out through some

[14] Alonso De Salazar, *The Salazar Documents: Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías and Others on the Basque Witch Persecution.*, ed. Gustav Henningsen, (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 308.
[15] It may be useful here to take note of Wilby's ideas around pre-industrial inclinations to vision [cf. Emma Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie: Magic, Witchcraft and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland.* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010),250-251.], although her theories around dream-cults diverge too greatly from the scopes of this dissertation and cannot be debated in this context.
[16] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 122-123.
[17] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 125.
[18] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 124.
[19] Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis*, in De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 125.
[20] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 125.
[21] See p.p. 73-85, 88-90, 92.

chink or hole, window or chimney through which naturally nobody could pass without danger"; whilst a minority stated "they went through the doors and down the staircases of their houses, returning in the same fashion."[22] Also, some 180 people:

> stoutly maintained they never came across anyone else on the way, neither did they hear any noise of people or animals, or the sound of church bells; nor did they see any lights; and what is more nor did they get wet, even if it was raining or snowing at the time.[23]

Similarly, he continued, *all* the children of Iràizoz said "that on attending the aquelarre [Sabbath] the same night they did not feel the rain and storm".[24] The eighty-year-old Marìa de Ecevarriìa from Oronoz said:

> while asleep, not knowing how, and entirely against her consent… was taken to the aquelarre every night…[and] woke up on the way and returned awake, although nobody ever met her or saw her leaving or returning, not even an elderly daughter who slept in the same bed and was a witch belonging to the same coven.[25]

Seventeen-year-old Catalina de Lizardi confessed the Devil (whilst having intercourse with her) "drew forth such a flow of blood that she saw it gush forth and spill on the ground." The next day however, when she returned to the spot, there was no sign of blood.[26] Many "went and came back flying through the air, although on a few occasions they used to go on foot, or on the shoulders of their mistresses who had made them witches."[27] Sixteen-year-old Marìa de Tanborìn Jarra claimed:

> she had been pulled out of bed where she slept with her mother so that her mother could not notice it. Examined as a witness, the mother said that she had heard her daughter remark that when her mistress brought her back from the Sabbath she was wide awake. Eager to check this and to know how it came about, apart from the fact that they slept in the same bed, she tied herself to her daughter's body and kept her hand on the reliquary at her throat so as to notice when the transfer took place. Yet in spite of all this, she never saw or felt anything at all, even though the next morning the daughter on awakening related how she had been to the aquelarre.[28]

Referring to the above, Salazar sceptically remarked "the Devil wants to mislead us into thinking… that witches can pass in front of and approach the witnesses, being

[22] Ibid, 272.
[23] Ibid, 274.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid, 296.
[26] Ibid, 298.
[27] Ibid, 172.
[28] Ibid, 302.

invisible when they pass through the air before them".[29] These stories and debates would suggest, in different ways, the idea of a flying experience in which the boundary between reality and dream is blurred to the extent that the witches themselves often cannot seem to be able to tell the two apart,[30] causing earlier and later demonologists to elaborate complex theories. If we accept, as it has been widely amongst academics, that most confessions were (whether caused by despair, hysteria, boasting,[31] or forced by physical or psychological pressure, or the hope of pardon), based on popular folklore mixed with elitist elaborations upon popular witch-beliefs, the question remains *how in the first place did folklore shape such beliefs*.

One plausible answer seems to be found in pre-Christian shamanistic ecstatic practices. These, by the time the "witch-hunt" begun, had probably been extinguished for many centuries. However, —as will be further discussed— they may all the same, having influenced popular legends and folk-belief for centuries, explain the *origins* of these *tales* about witches' bodily flight, including those according to which people are only dreaming or imagining flying. This is because shamanistic accounts include dream-like visions as well as journeys in the spirit world which feel vividly *real*. As pointed out by Dr. Phyllis Jestice (specialist in the history of religion in medieval Europe) in her cross-cultural study *Holy people of the world: a cross-cultural encyclopaedia*, the Shaman may seek a vision or a dream.[32] This would be a trance like state, in which the body is obviously not flying: yet, to the shaman (or, allegedly, to the "witch") it may "feel like" the flight is actually physical and an objective reality.[33] In this regard, it is indeed noteworthy that De Lancre himself, to explain witches' "visions" as hallucinations, should have observed:

> Others have said, and not without making a great deal of sense, that the notorious female witches were first transported into an ecstatic state through the use of ointments, herbs, or fumigations that dulled their senses and, during their rapture, made them see all that took place at the Sabbath, or something similar to the Sabbath. This is just like the effect of the *cohoba* herb on the Indians in the island of Hispaniola. After a violent and troubled sleep, the Indians awaken and tell fantastic stories. Afterwards the Devil having, often shown them the Sabbath in their dreams during their ravishments and ecstasies, leads them there very easily, both bodily and in reality and sometimes even keeps them

[29] Ibid, 314.
[30] For instance, see De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 113: "They do not know themselves if they have been transported bodily or in their minds". Or Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft & Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Paperbacks Edition, 1992), 16: "Domenica Barbarelli (Novi, 1532) 'lay as if dead for about two hours... seemed to awake and spoke these words: 'I did indeed go there in spite of you'...Here too the going in a dream, 'in spirit', was perceived as something real".
[31] Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Anakrloo and Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 195-196.
[31] Ibid, 198.
[32] Phyllis G. Jestice, *Holy people of the world: a cross-cultural Encyclopaedia: vol. 3*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 786.
[33] cf. p. 102.

> in doubt as to whether this is an effect of illusion or the truth, so that they never know for sure.[34]

Riding to the Sabbath: Shape-shifting, Familiars and Flying

"Some people note that the *Canon Episcopi* describes many things that the Devil cannot naturally accomplish, as, for example, mounting live animals, which because they are earthbound, could not know how to fly through the air, nor travel great distances in an instant", noted De Lancre.[35] Conversely, in the *Malleus Maleficarum* it is claimed that the Devil "at times…transports the witches on animals, which are not true animals but devils in that form."[36] These animals, like the souls who ride them, are not of flesh and bones, but belong instead to a dream-like, ecstatic and parallel dimension, a spirit world that is "alter ego" of the material world. It is impossible to say with any certainty whether the people who confessed having such ecstatic experiences really did so, or really believed to have done so, something which, in any case, remains beyond the remit of this dissertation. What seems more likely however is that most of these stories simply ***sprung from*** **folk-imagination and folklore**, *in turn reflecting* much older *actual* ecstatic practices (*again, by this time probably extinguished*) deeply related to animal cults which gradually died out with the advent of Christianity or possibly *even earlier*. What seems relevant is what such older probably *extinguished* practices might have been and, most importantly, how symbolical language in folklore and folk-beliefs exemplifies them, for the reason that this could explain numerous otherwise unexplainable odd details of witchcraft beliefs. Before proceeding to the discussion of such symbolism, it seems useful, however, to start analysing some of the actual accounts, which seem relevant to this discussion. Through this, it will become immediately apparent that previous discussions about shape-shifting and Familiars will strongly overlap with flying.

Inquisitor Salazar told of two accused going to the Sabbath: "one said that she was wont to go in the form of a housefly and another stated that she went in the form of a raven."[37] Giovanni delle Piatte in Val di Fiemme (1504), during questioning (and induced by the fear of torture which he had already undergone for being unable to produce "appropriate" accounts) was said to have gone with "that woman [Venus]

[34] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 114.
[35] Ibid, 107.
[36] Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers, 107.
[37] Alonso de Salazar, *The Salazar Documents*, 172.

and her company, a Thursday night around Christmas, flying on five black horses and running around the world in five hours".[38] Margherita Tomasina de l'Angnol claimed of being transported back from the *Barlott* by two black cats[39] and that many times "those two cats came and took her to the mountain".[40] According to Margherita, "Vanzina di Tesero", Domina Ludi was *Erodiade*, an ugly black woman with a black blouse and a black tissue tied around her head "strangely" who "sometimes …goes on black horses, other times black cats, broomsticks or other instruments".[41] Benvegnuda called "Piccinella" from Valcamonica, tried in 1518, said that sometimes she went to the "ball" on Mountain "Tonal" riding "her Zulian", (the personal name of) her demon, whom she also called *moroso*, "lover" in regional dialect. "Other times came a demon in the shape of a horse or a goat" to transport her.[42]

De Lancre, as well as believing witches could be transported to the Sabbath by "thought alone", by foot, or in sleep, thought they could also go, as briefly mentioned above, by being transported by the Devil.[43] He told several stories of women or girls being transported either by the Devil or by each other. Even though such transportation occurring through the riding of each other in animal form is not always mentioned, these accounts carry a strong resemblance with those where animal appearance and shape-shifting are mentioned.[44] Jenette d'Abadie from Ciboure (in 1609) said the first time she was taken to the Sabbath was by a woman named Gratiane but once when she was asleep the Devil "led her to the Sabbath in full daylight".[45] Marguerite from Sare said that a woman "who died in Bordeaux prison" used to lead her to the Sabbath, until she "turned her to another woman" who "thereafter…always led her and transported her to the Sabbath".[46] Seventeen-year-old Marie Dindarte of Sare was transported through the air to the Sabbath by the Devil, who one night even led sixteen prisoners, who slept together under the

[38] Self translated from: Luisa Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco, La caccia alle streghe interpretata dalle sue Vittime.* (Milano: La Tartaruga Edizioni, 2006), 75.
[39] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 101.
[40] Self translated from: Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 105.
[41] Self translated from: Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 149.
[42] Marino Sanuto, *I diari di Marino Sanuto.* (Venezia: Stab. Visentini, cav. Federico—Editore, 1879-1902), tomo XXV, in Archivio storico lombardo. (Milano: Società storica lombarda., 1889), 637.
[43] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 113.
[44] In the latter case it is not always clear how they were "transported", whereas in the first case the supernatural transportation emerges quite clearly. De Lancre believed that even witches who were prisoners could take girls and children to the Sabbath just like they were free (*On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 124) and stories such as that of a fifteen-year-old Dijartzabal from Ascain accusing another witch to look for her in her bed in the form of a cat (ibid) do confirm the supernatural (e.g. through flying and/or shape-shifting rather than merely by foot) element in the belief.
[45] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 118-119.
[46] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 119-120.

judges' room, through the window of the Parish of Sare. [47] Catherine d'Arreiouaque of about fifteen, said she "used to stay awake with many other children and girls in order not to be taken by surprise while they slept." However, when her father told her that the woman who wanted to take her had been executed and that she could now sleep, another woman came and continued to take her there in the days when her case was being tried. [48]

Murray, who was accused of removing the supernatural aspects of confessions to justify her theories around real Sabbaths, did indeed report some interesting cases concerning supernatural experiences, including witches riding animals or each other. Rolande du Vernier (1598) claimed of riding a great ram who carried her in the air.[49] Margaret Johnson (1633) said "if they [the witches] desyre to be in any place upon a sodaine, theire devill or spirit will, upon a rodde, dogge, or any thinge els, presently convey them thither".[50] One of Madame Bourignon's girls, aged twelve (1661), stated that "her said Lover came upon a little Horse, and took her by the Hand, asking her if she would be his Mistress, and she saying Ay, she was catched up into the Air with him and the other Girls, and they flew all together to a great Castle".[51] Agnes Spark of Forfar (1661) said she "hard people ther present did speake of Isabell Shirie, and say that shoe was the devill's horse, and that the divill did allwayes ryde upon hir, and that shoe was shoad lyke ane mare, or ane horse",[52] Ann Armstrong, (1673) said that:

> she hath beene severall times lately ridden by Anne Driden and Anne Forster, and was last night ridden by them to the rideing house in the close on the common . . . Whilst …one night a little before Christmas, about the change of the moone, the informant see the said Anne Forster come with a bridle, and bridled her and ridd upon her crosse-leggd, till they come to (the) rest of her companions at Rideing millne bridg-end, where they usually mett. And when she light of her back, pulld the bridle of this informer's

[47] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 127.
[48] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 126.
[49] Henri, Boguet, *An examen of witches: (Discours des sorciers)*. (London: Barnes & Noble, 1929); initially found cited in French in Margaret Murray, *Witch Cult in Western Europe.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 102.
[50] James Crossley, "Introduction", in Remains Historical & Literary connected with the palatine counties of Lancaster and Chester, vol. VI. (The Chetham Society), Ixxiv; initially found in Murray, *The Witch Cult*, 102.
[51] Antoinette Bourignon, *Le Vie exterieur,* (Amsterdam, 1863) 214. Initially found in Murray, *Witch Cult*, 102.
[52] George Ritchie Kinloch, *Reliquiae Antiquae Scoticae.* (Edinburgh, 1848); initially found in Murray, *Witch Cult*, 103. The passage continues: "and that night the said Isablell Shirie went asyd fra hir for som tyme, and that the divill (as shoe suposed) had carnal copulatione with hir", which is interesting if we view beliefs around flying and sex with the Devil as the cultural survival (at the level of popular belief mixed with demonological imagination) of what in a remote past might have been an actual form of sexual shamanism (see p.p. 79-83, 96-99).

> head, now in the likenesse of a horse; but, when the bridle was taken of, she stood up in her own shape[53]

Isobel Gowdie claimed that she would say an incantation:

> I haid a little horse, and wold say, 'Horse and Hattock, ik the Divellis name' And than ve vold flie away, quhair ve vold, be ewin as strawes wold fiie wpon an hie-way. We will flie lyk strawes quhan we pleas; wild-strawes and. We will flie lyk strawes quhan we pleas; wild-strawes and corne-strawes wilbe horses to ws, an ve put thaim betwixt our foot, and say, 'Horse and Hattock, in the Divellis name!'[54]

This possibly echoes Alice Kyteler's "Robin Son of Art" *Artisson* (Son of Art), also called *Robertum filium Artis*,[55] in turn echoing the aforementioned Son of Art of the Alchemic Opera;[56] a rather unusual match of names if it is merely coincidental. As noted by the editors of *The Sorcery Trial of Alice Kyteler*, "either Art means skill or it is the Gaelic form of the personal name Arthur, which means bear at which point the editors remind us of the cult of Artemis Brauronia",[57] the ecstatic female cult of bear discussed by Ginzburg.[58] This proposed link between Ireland and Greece remains uncertain although it would explain much, however, it is not possible to elaborate at this point. For Dame Alice sometimes the Devil appeared in the shape of a cat, or of a "shaggy black dog", others "in the shape of a black man with two companions bigger and taller than himself, one of whom carried an iron rod in his hands".[59] The detail of the rod is to be noted and to be discussed in association with the wand, club, caduceus, stick and other such recurrent masculine, vertical symbols.[60] Again a triad divinity, however masculine now.

In early modern visual arts reflecting witch-related imagination at the time, we find witches riding animals or people. Examples include: Albrecht Altdorfer's *Witches Preparing for the Sabbath*, 1506, where four human figures (one of which is winged) each ride a goat;[61] Johann Zainer, *Witch riding a wolf,* c.1491;[62] Hans Baldung Grien's

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[53] James Raine, ed., *Depositions from the castle of York: relating to offenses committed in the Northern Counties in the Seventeenth Century, vol. 40.* (London: Whittaker & Co., 1861); initially found in Murray, *Witch Cult,* 102-104.
[54] Robert Pitcairn, *Ancient criminal trials in Scotland: compiled from the original records and with Historical Illustrations, & c., vol. III PART SECOND.* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1833), 604; also cited in Murray, *Witch Cult,* 106; and in Wilby, T*he Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 39. cf. also ibid, 60.
[55] Richard de Ledrede,*The sorcery trial of Alice Kyteler, a contemporary Account (1324) together with related documents in English translation, with introduction and Notes*, ed. L.S. Davidson and J. O. Ward, trans. J. O. Ward and Gail Ward. (New York: Centre for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1993), 30, 82.
[56] cf. p.p. 86-93, 96-100.
[57] Davidson and Ward, "Introduction", in Ledrede, *The sorcery trial of Alice Kyteler,* 30, note 15.
[58] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 129.
[59] Ledrede, *The sorcery trial of Alice Kyteler*, 30. cf. also ibid, 63.
[60] see p.p. 88-95.
[61] see appendix, note 17.

woodcut *A group of female witches*, 1510, where a witch rides a goat;[63] or his other woodcut *Aristotle and Phyllis*,[64] which Zika interprets as a metaphor for female sexual domination over man who is reduced to the level of an animal by sexual desires.[65] This interpretation seems limiting in view of the possibility of a more complex shamanistic derivation discussed in previous chapters and to be further discussed later.[66] Interestingly, Zika compared the *Woman riding backwards on a goat*, c.1430, misericord carving to the seventy years older engraving by Albrecht Durer, *Witch riding backwards on a goat*, c.1500, to Master F.B.'s engraving *Five cupids playing*, c. 1475-1500 and to the Roman agate and onyx cameo *Aphrodite Pandemos*, of Late Augustan period. [67] He noted that "the witch as a personification of the lust of Venus is certainly one of the most important themes developed by the new iconography of witchcraft in the first three decades of the sixteenth century";[68] another interpretation which only partially addresses the "animal/human riding" theme. Interestingly, what does emerge is the recurrent theme that mythological symbols and images arising from remote Pagan cults turning into folklore, are incorporated in folk-beliefs and public imagination, and are then further elaborated in different ways by each social class (artists, demonologists, "common" people, etc.).

An initial and partial conclusion about "animal/people-as-animals" riding is that such accounts may only be seen as metaphorical descriptions of the meaning and origin of which was probably completely unknown to both the accused, who "confessed" having such fantastical experiences, and to the authorities who instigated such confessions. It seems likely, in view of the previous chapters, that such symbolisms overlap with the previous discussions related to "internal Familiars" described as "totems", as well to shamanistic ecstatic (in the witches' accounts described as "flight") transformation in such "internal Familiars" or "totems". The shamans (here impersonated by the witches) transform into the animal or animals which represent their "totem" ("internal Familiar", or soul), and ride it "during their rapture" (to cite De Lancre's[69]), "flying" to a magical destination in a dream dimension, the ecstatic vision, the Sabbath, or "Fairyland". The witch may also

[62] see appendix, note 18.
[63] see appendix, note 19.
[64] see appendix, note 20.
[65] Charles Zika, *Exorcising our Demons, Magic Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*. (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003), 301.
[66] see 96-99.
[67] Zika, *Exorcising our Demons,* 306-315. see appendix, note 21.
[68] Zika, *Exorcising our Demons*, 315.
[69] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 113.

transform into her "internal Familiar" to carry another witch or the Devil. Likewise, the Devil or demon or "external Familiar", as well as another witch, either in human or animal form may "carry" a fellow witch to the Sabbath.

The Cauldron and Ecstasy

Henningsen described the Sicilian Fairy cult as recounted by Inquisitioral accounts, with Fairies as participants of ecstatic cults and organised in groups of seven, led by the:

> 'Queen of the Fairies' (*Reina de las Hadas*)…also known as 'La Matrona', 'La Maestra', 'the Greek Lady' (*La Senora Griega*), '*Senora Gracia*', '*Dona Inguanta*', '*Dona Zabella*', or the 'Wise Sybl' (*La Sabia Sybila*). They are … beautiful women dressed in black or white, but their supernatural origin is revealed by their feet: cat's paws, horse's hooves, or 'round feet'. In one or two cases it is stated that they have little pig's tails, and that their flesh is 'soft'…Sometimes one of the group is a male fairy who plays the lute or guitar to the others when they dance with linked hands.[70]

Furthermore, he described a woman from Palermo (1588) who "confessed to the Inquisition that she and her company…rode on billy-goats through the air" and also that "another assembly of witches called 'The Seven Fairies'…have the habit of transforming themselves into dogs, cats, and other animals and into ugly things that they call aydon. They go about killing boys and doing other misdeeds."[71] Henningsen further noted that the term *aydon* "might possibly be interpreted as a distortion of the Greek *aidioion*, sexual organ".[72] The *aidoion* however is more properly the *female* sexual organ and Pestalozza explains how in the Mediterranean, priestesses of the Potnia were believed to be receptacles on earth of her *aidioion*, exemplifying her divine love. For this reason, as previously mentioned, they offered her apples, pomegranates and figs cut in half, as a symbol of offering their intimate selves.[73] We have already mentioned Ginzburg's arguments in support of the idea that Greek, particularly Cretan cults of *Matronae*, had spread to Sicily and the anomalous similarities with Celtic beliefs. If *aydon* stands for *aidoion*, perhaps the idea of transforming "into" it symbolised a metaphorical inner transformation revolving around it, hence revolving around cults that somehow involved the female sexual

[70] Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Anakrloo and Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft,* 195-196.
[71] Ibid, 196-197.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Uberto Pestalozza *Religione Mediterranea*. (Milano: Bocca, 1951); see also Uberto Pestalozza, Pierangelo Carozzi, *Eterno Feminino Mediterraneo*. (Vicenza: Edizioni NERI POZZA, 1996).

organs. This would make very much sense if the *aidoion* coincided with the witches' Cauldron, already discussed in chapter two.

What was so unique about Sicily, according to Henningsen, is that Sicily with its *Donas de Fuera* "retained a particularly archaic form of witch-belief, almost identical with the witch-cult that Margaret Murray attempted to demonstrate on the evidence of north and mid-European material." [74] He does however notice

> one vital difference. Murray saw the Sabbath and the witches ritual as based on the real material world, while the Sicilian documentation shows we must look for the Sabbath and most of the rituals in quite another place: in an immaterial world of vision. Once we have recognised this we can perfectly go along with the grand ambition of Murray and her predecessors: to uncover the popular origins of the Sabbath concept.[75]

Henningsen made a very helpful diagram to show, in simplified form, the transformation of the ancient form of witch-belief, as the Sicilian "White Sabbath" into the demonologists' "Black Sabbath": for example, the Queen of the Fairies becomes the Devil, the beautiful Fairies become the horrible demons, the attitude of these entities towards humans from ambivalent becomes hostile, etc.[76] This diagram may account for why *aydon* (possibly the once sacred *aidoion*) should be described as an "ugly thing"[77] or why the seven Fairies are said to go about killing boys, rather than dancing "with linked hands at the tune of a lute". It shows the "fantasy" (to use Cohn's terminology) had started to transform into a negative, increasingly darker, speculative image, as shown in Henningsen's diagram.

If the *aydon* is the *aidoion*, as it seems likely also in view of the linguistic and cultural overlaps between Sicily and Greece, the *aidoion* is also very easily associated with the Cauldron as already widely discussed in the previous chapter in connection to female generative organs (and associated fruits),[78] and its mythological powers of transformation and resuscitation. The "Cauldron-*aidoion*"[79] may thus be symbol of very ancient ecstatic cults involving totemic transformations and centred around

[74] Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Bengt Anakrloo and Gustav Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft, Centres and Peripheries.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 206.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Anakrloo and Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 208-209.
[77] Also in view of the Christian demonisation of sexuality and in particular of female sexuality. see appendix, note 22.
[78] see p 59.
[79] Also in view of the discussed representation of steatopygia in statuettes or Greek statues of Hellenistic Venus Kallipyg see appendix, note 8.

females' generative organs, believed to "resuscitate the dead" in Irish and Welsh myths, but also in continental sixteenth and seventeenth century Italian witch-beliefs. This resuscitation would not be literal but metaphorical. Possibly a spiritual rebirth, represented by the (ecstatic/visionary) journey to the "Sabbath", which in fact always coincides in Italian trials with the cooking of the chosen "victims" (the adept), the cannibalistic banquets (the initiation of the adept), and the resuscitation, the orgies and the dances. This supposition may be seen as still too strongly speculative, but the connections with alchemy, to be discussed below, appear to be strong and to confirm this initial theory.

Alchemic Symbolism

The Cauldron and the *Atanor*

In order to better understand the symbology of flying, particularly in regard to the Italian early modern witch-trials, and thus of the Cauldron in relation to ecstasy, it seems now necessary to open a long parenthesis and explore parallels in alchemic symbolism, however much this may temporarily distance us from the witch-hunt theme.

We have seen in chapter two how in Irish literature Bran's Cauldron of rebirth in the hands of the Irish returned the corpses to life and that they "would get up the next morning fighting as well as before except that they could not talk."[80] It should be noted at this regard that in modern popular belief, spirits too cannot talk. Thus, the fact the resuscitated Irish could not talk may be a symbol, as discussed for the "victims" of the Italian witches, of their resuscitation in the spirit world, rather than a physical resuscitation. This idea would fit, as well as with esoteric concepts of initiation, with traditional concepts of death and afterlife, both Christian and pre-Christian. When the body dies the spirits remain, perhaps more alive than before, now independent from physical boundaries and restriction, in a spirit dimension. This makes sense in view of the previously discussed interpretations of the Cauldron and *Domina Ludi*'s wand or Daghda's club as primordial givers of life (as well of death): the Gods' generative female and male organs. It is here that we should start

[80] Sioned Davies, trans., "Second Branch", in *The Mabinogion*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 32.

looking for a parallel in alchemic tradition. This is not only because in alchemy every transformation happens in the vase, like here in the Cauldron, but also because in alchemy the idea of "kill the living so to resuscitate the dead"[81] is central. This saying probably means that killing the ordinary human component of the individual allows resuscitation of some inner divine principle, the golden nucleus which must be already present in the individual if one is to transform "vulgar" metals into gold.[82] "The gold of the alchemist it is not an outside gold", claimed Maier,[83] probably meaning it is not a material gold, to be found outside. It is a "natural, internal gold".[84] Every vulgar metal must "die" for this gold to "resuscitate".

The close link between life and death may also be explained by the alchemic idea that everything is poison, nothing exists that is not poison and that only correct dosing and handling permit poison to be healing. "This is really the great miracle … that in the Dragon an excellent medicine is to be found…The Mercury, correctly and chemically precipitated and sublimated, dissolved in its own water and again coagulated".[85] It is claimed that for who is able to kill it [Mercury, the poison] "wisely, his poison will become supreme medicine".[86] The poison, "raw Mercury", is represented by a snake, whereas when "cooked" (and transformed in medicine) it becomes purple red, "like the rose".[87] "With any burned snake a powder is made, extremely powerful against all poisons is made. Once he has eaten its tale…with the help of the dragon an antidote will be made, most powerful remedy against all evil of body and fortune".[88] The poison's transmutation, associated with the transformation of mortal into immortal (the resuscitation of the "dead", the immortal gold), is represented here, as in Norse myth, by a Dragon who bites his tale (Uroborus), also symbol of the circulation of the *Prima Materia* (the mortal component, the individual prior alchemic transformation) in the *Atanor*,[89] the alchemic "oven" or "vase" (body). And, interestingly, as noted by Maier, a snake that eats another snake becomes a dragon[90] so a snake that metaphorically eats itself does too.

[81] Michael Maier, *Atalanta fugiens* (1618), ed. Bruno Cerchio, (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1984), 118.
[82] Ibid, 99.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Lambsprinck, *La pietra filosofale* (1625), ed. Stefano Andreani. (Roma: Ed. Mediterranee, 1984), 39, fig. 6.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Maier, *Atalanta fugiens,* 136.
[88] Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, 92: "Hic est draco caudam suam devoram".
[89] Cerchio, "Note del curatore" (Editor's notes), in ibid, 273, ibid, 92.
[90] Maier, *Atalanta fugiens,* 93.

The Stick and Flying

Hence, the dragon (or the alchemic activity in the alchemic vase/*Atanor* to which the Cauldron may be associated) assumes this double power of giving birth or death. The medicine would derive from the union of two opposite principles, feminine and masculine in the same vase: hot water and cold water, *"ex duabus aquis, fac unam, et erit aqua sanctitatis"*.[91] Such ambivalence of opposite principles conjoint may also be reflected by the Hermetic Caduceus around which climb two snakes: the red and the white,[92] which echoes Simhanada's trident, "with a white snake coiled around it that drips red blood from its mouth"[93] (as shown in *The encyclopaedia of Tibetan symbols and motifs*, a book of Tibetan art), and incredibly similar to Shiva's snake trident.[94] This obviously reinforces the association between Hermes,[95] Hermetism and the previously discussed two Gods of women, Indian Shiva and Thracian-Greek-Dionysus, the Roman Bacchus, who also holds a thyrsus, like his Bacchants, notoriously crowned of ivy and snakes. This returns us to the witches and related beliefs supposedly deriving from folklore, which from such female cults, sometimes led by Gods, sometimes by Goddesses, may have originated. It is probably not by chance that witches' *Domina Ludi* had a wand, whereas the Devil is traditionally represented with a fork, not only with goat feet or horns, like the above pre-Christian Gods "of the women". In all cases we continue to encounter a stick. And it may not be a coincidence that it is on a stick that witches are often said to fly, like the adept "flies" on the snakes' energies ascending the spine and exiting through the seventh chakra, or the Alchemist "flies" upon the snakes ascending Hermes' caduceus and exiting through the same.[96] Yet, before the stick symbolism may be analysed in further detail, it seems necessary to raise the importance of androgyny in alchemy, and its essential relevance to flying.

[91] cf. Maier, "Discorso XIV" in *Atalanta fugiens*; and Lambsprinck, *La pietra filosofale.*

[92] Interestingly, this is still used as a graphic symbol for modern Italian pharmacies; whereas in Germany and sometimes in England we find a snake climbing a chalice (probably the alchemic vase, to drink the alchemic *Panakeia*, the liquid that heals all illnesses, associated with the elixir of life, which gives immortality). see Maier, *Atalanta fugiens,* 205, 259.

[93] Robert Béer, *The encyclopedia of Tibetan symbols and motifs*. (Chicago: Serindia, 1999), 280.

[94] Robert Béer, The handbook of Tibetan Buddhist symbols. (Chicago: Serindia, 2003), 134.

[95] cf. Aldhouse-Green, Miranda, *Caesar Druids, Story of Ancient Priesthood*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 35. Stone sculpture of Mercury British Roman Well (see appendix, note 24) - remember Mercury is the Roman Hermes, which is very significant in terms of the cult of the well, seen as a connection to other world and associable to Cauldron cult. At this regard, many beliefs have been found representing Nymphs under the direction of Hermes whilst Pan plays the flute: Walter Otto, *L'Origine Divina della Parola e del Canto.* (Roma: Fazi Editori, 2005), 13-15.

[96] see note 92, above.

As one travels backwards through the centuries, one may find that in various pre-Christian and more generally pre-Abramitic religions there are Gods and Goddesses (often survivors of an older version of the same religion, or of a different one assimilated into the new one) in which the gender divide of the sex attributed to them is more undefined, almost to the limit of androgyny. An example can be found in the discussed Zagreus, who later became the Dionysus of Classical Greece. Such androgynous divinities seem to have survived in increasingly patriarchal or masculinized times (which interestingly led to a stronger gender divide, one of the stereotypical symbols of male power and patriarchy) in the use of divine couples or brother and sister, like Branwen and Bran, Diana and Janus, Jupiter and Juno, Mercury and Rosmerta,[97] Sucellus and Nantosuelta,[98] Shiva and Parvati, Ishtar and Tammuz, Isis and Osiris and Venus and Adonis.[99] It may also have survived in the warrior attributes of certain Goddesses, such as Artemis, and various Celtic Goddesses.[100] In alchemy, the androgynous being of Plato's *Convito*[101] is reconstructed by the union of the opposites to give birth to the *Rebis* ("Twice King" in Latin). Maier, in his emblem XXXIII, talked of the Hermaphrodite, a bicephalous being both female and male, who lies as if dead in the darkness and winter chill.[102] Only by exposing this cadaver to a warm fire (the alchemic fire, like the witches' fire under the Cauldron, where people and animals are "cooked"), is it possible to resuscitate it since "the fire that all destroys, reconstructs … to all it gives death and to it life".[103] This ambiguous sentence may symbolise a "resuscitation" in a spirit dimension, hence trance, or ecstatic state, represented in alchemy by various metaphors.

According to Huginus "…the fixed part of our Mercury [male] exercise love and a magnetic sympathy towards the volatile parts of the same [female]", as both substances are necessary and must interact intimately because, he claimed, "dry acts on humid, cold on warm…the female dissolves the male and male coagulates the female".[104] Maier in epigraph XVI described two lions, a male and a female, the

[97] Miranda Green, *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art. (*New York: Routledge, 2001), 60.
[98] Green, *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art,* 26; see also ibid, 25, 37, 42, 45-55, 57, 59, 66-8, 70-2, 83, 91, 94-6, 99, 107, 115, 122, 150, 190, 207 where Green illustrates divine couples in Celtic art.
[99] Alain Daniélou, *Gods of love and ecstasy: the traditions of Shiva and Dionysus*, (Rochester: Inner Traditions Ltd., 1992), 36.
[100] cf. Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers*. (London: British Museum Press, 1995).
[101] Platone, *Il simposio di Platone.* (Bari: Laterza, 1946).
[102] Maier, "emblema XXXIII", in *Atalanta fugiens*.
[103] Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, 186 and following.
[104] Huginus a Barma, *Il Regno Di Saturno Trasformato In Eta' Dell'Oro, ed. S. Andreani (1657)*. (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1986), 47, 56, 96.

latter is "a winged Lioness/who, flying wants to raise the male with her/but he stays still and prevents her".[105] Whereas in emblem VII he spoke of a little bird who flies from his nest but falls back again as prevented from his brother without feathers, still in the nest.[106] In *De Lapide Philosphico*, we find a surprisingly similar image, where it is said that the birds are joined in a conjugal embrace.[107] In figure 12, the Son has flown in the Sky, and when he comes back home to the Father, brings him a "virtue".[108] Still referring to the exiting of the soul and returning to the body is figure 11 where the Son of the King is with his winged guide who leads him to the sky and returns him to the earth.[109] This is clearly reminiscent of the Devil, the fellow older witch or Familiar (internal or external) who leads the witch to the Sabbath and returns to her at home. The sleeping Father (described as dead in the Son's absence[110]) would be the body; the Son would be the soul.

In view of the strong parallel between alchemy, Hermetism and Shivaism, it could be said that the golden nucleus, the "natural gold" that is "internal" and immaterial, "a property of the philosophical stone",[111] would be the sacred bone at the base of the spine,[112] "the basic centre - the *Muladhara*" of Indian tradition, where the Shakti is "coiled in spiral form" (Kundalini, the snake representing the basal energies),[113] parallel to Hermes' caduceus and its snakes. The Shakti is also represented as a snake coiled around Shiva's phallus.[114] This mirrors the serpent/phallus stone at Maryport, Cumberland discussed by Anne Ross as a serpent stone[115] whereas Daniélou illustrated both sides of it: the side showing a phallus head and the side showing a snake vertically crossing the back of the phallus.[116] As noted by Daniélou:

> erect stone phalli, sometimes decorated with a face or entwined with a serpent, are found in England, Sweden, Italy, Brittany, Corsica, Greece, Arabia and India, as also the bull-cult and sacrifice, the snake-cult and its legends, springtime carnivals or libidinous festivities, ecstatic dances, and sacred places bearing the more or less deformed name of Nysa[Dyonisus

[105] Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, 100 and ff.
[106] Maier, "emblem VII", in *Atalanta fugiens*.
[107] Lambsprinck, *La pietra filosofale*, 41, fig. 7.
[108] Ibid, 51, fig. 12.
[109] Ibid, 49, fig. 11.
[110] Ibid, 51.
[111] Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, 50.
[112] This could explain the witches' kiss of the Devil's anus, notorious feature of both English and Continental witch-trials.
[113] Daniélou, *Gods of love and Ecstasy*, 120.
[114] Ibid, 160.
[115] Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain.* (London: Cardinal, 1974), 256.
[116] Daniélou, *Gods of love and Ecstasy,* 138,. cf. Marija Gimbutas, 2001, cf, *The Living Goddesses,* ed. and supplemented by Miriam Robbins Dexeter. (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 37; and Miranda Green *The Gods of the Celts*. (Avon: The Band Press, 1993), 100. see appendix, note 25.

> birth place]. We also find legends connected with the cult of the infant-Skanda, the bambino … nourished by the seven Pleiades which later turned into stars. There are numerous accounts relating the universal message of the god born in a cave. Near him is the ox or bull, the sacred animal, although he is also associated with the ass, an unclean animal, on which he rides during his festivals.[117]

This shows a parallel between Alchemy/Hermetism and Shivaistic/Bacchic rituals as well as possibly confirming that between the phallus, the spine/snakes of Shivaism, Hermes' caduceus (Hermes was also associated with the snake and the phallus in Arcadia[118]) and the various sticks, wands and rods so far discussed as virile symbols. The union of the Divine Lovers, Shiva and Shakti (also known as Parvati or Sati),[119] returns the being to the primordial androgyny. After a metaphorical death to this union, follows rebirth.[120] By climbing hermetic caduceus, the two snakes induce ecstasy, each ecstasy represents a death and a rebirth. At the top of Hermes caduceus we find wings, probably symbolising such ecstatic state. In India, these snake-like energies are also called Nadi, balanced by a central straight vertical channel *Susumna*, representing the spine.[121] By climbing the spine the snake-Shakti, or Nadi, induces the same, leading to divine knowledge —awakening— hence the spiritual "resuscitation" in discussion so far, following alchemic death. After a long detour we may have found the meaning of tales of resuscitation in connection to witches' cauldrons. However distorted in early modern belief, these tales do appear to have originated in such older traditions.

Witches' Banquets in a Spirit World

Through the above explorations into myths and sapiential traditions some of the ecstatic symbolism which appears to be present in witchcraft beliefs has been explained. There remains however, aspects of the witches' Sabbath, the explanation of which may benefit from further exploration. For example the cooking of the Italian witches' chosen "victims", the cutting into pieces, and the banquets of saltless

[117] Daniélou, *Gods of love and Ecstasy*, 41.
[118] Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 162. cf. also Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2006), 137.
[119] Daniélou, *Gods of love and Ecstasy*, 57.
[120] Ibid, 172.
[121] Mircea Eliade, *Yoga (Immortalità e Libertà)*. (Torino: BUR, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli,1999), 225. cf .also Julius Evola, *Lo Yoga della potenza: saggio sui Tantra*. (Roma: Ed. Mediterranee, 1981), 187.

food that does not satisfy,[122] reminiscent of the English witches offering food that does not satisfy and fire that does not warm.[123]

Saltless Food

Again, it appears that answers may be found in mythology. Hermes caduceus[124] may in fact be compared to the tree of life present in various ancient religions[125] and to other vertical entities connected with cosmological symbolisms, such as that belonging to a boat described in *Libro Egizio Degli Inferi*,[126] by the mid twentieth century Russian Egyptologist Boris De Rachewiltz, where we find an identical entities wrapped by snakes and surmounted by horns. Also in view of the cultural, geographical and religious closeness between ancient Greece and Egypt, it is impossible not to think of the mainmast of Ulysses' boat (called the "tree" of the boat in some languages), where he asked to be tied so not to be maddened by the Sirens' singing.[127] He now again turns to a symbol (the pole) associated with Hermes to maintain his virility, thus his life, without being overwhelmed by the destructive side of feminine power, here assumed by the sea. The sea, which, in alchemic metaphoric language, assumes an extremely complex, ambivalent and ever-changing symbolism, representing the obstacle to the alchemic "Great Opera",[128] but also, as noted by the celebrated Art Historian Griselda Pollock, can become a bridge to salvation, as well as being a place where to be lost and trapped.[129] We must remember that Ulysses' journey is to reach "those who do not know the sea" (here symbolising illusion, in close association with the Hindu concept of "karma") and who eat food without salt, which, curiously, symbolises the body entrapping the spirit, in alchemy. It would hence appear that Ulysses' destination, his "home", is otherworldly, a spirit world supposedly of immortals where "food without salt" stands for immaterial food for the spirit, thus food that does not fulfil the senses, as in the Devil's food, or the food of the *Barlott*'s banquets, also saltless. The meaning of witches eating saltless food that does not satisfy may therefore originate in this concept of eating spiritual food not made to fulfil the senses.

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[122] see note 6, p. 49.
[123] Ibid.
[124] and its various discussed possible equivalents in different parallel traditions historically connected by geographical and cultural links)
[125] For instance in Egypt we have *Iusaaset*, "tree of life," or "tree in which life and death are enclosed"[George Hart, *The Routledge dictionary of Egyptian gods and goddesses*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 467.]; in India amongst many we have *Banyan* and in Norse mythology the cosmic tree *Yggdrasil*.
[126] Boris De Rachewiltz, *Il Libro Egizio degli Inferi: Testo iniziatico del Sole Notturno* (Roma: Harel Ed., 1996).
[127] Homer, Odyssey, Omero, *Odissea vol. I*, trans. Ippolito Pindemonte, (Firenze: Leonardo Ciardetti, 1823), 307. It is interesting that for his encounter with Circe he was helped by Hermes.
[128] Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, 173, 192.
[129] Griselda Pollock, *Conceptual odysseys: passages to cultural Analysis*. (London & New York: Tauris & Co Ltd., 2007), 124.

To return to the early modern era, we are therefore in the dream dimension that allegedly experienced in ecstasy, which appears to have inspired so many of the myths around witches. Myths that (however increasingly distorted to fit "learned demonisation" of local heritage's archetypical patrimony) seem to have still been part of folk belief in the centuries of the witch-hunt. Still deeply intermingled with everydayness and adapted to local folk-beliefs, in a time in which boundaries between possible and impossible were so fragile, such myths may have provided more than mere material for forced "confessions". In fact, they may have provided entertainment and explanation to supernatural phenomena, comfort and imagination, as possibly demonstrated in those instances in which "boasting" about supernatural deeds were common and an "irresistible" way of entertaining that even the risk of persecution often proved insufficient to stop it.[130]

Broken Limbs

Turning now to the broken limbs of the witches' chosen "victims", thrown, after being eaten, in the Cauldron where they had been cooked, we may find —again— connections both with myth and alchemic tradition. Regarding myth, we find that in India the broken limbs of Prajapati were ritually reconstructed through sacrifice. This symbolised the re-composition of the primordial Divine Being's wholeness, so that its body could give birth to the cosmos.[131] Likewise, in Northern myth we find the primordial hermaphrodite,[132] Giant Ymir, who is broken into pieces after being killed, thrown into *Ginnungagap* (the gap between north and south) and gave birth to cosmos.[133] Also, Osiris is broken into bits by his brother and his organs dispersed over the world.[134] It is interesting that in the decisive fight against Apep, Osiris is assisted by the Snake Mehenand, the magic of the Goddess and four other Goddesses with swords.[135] This returns us to the beneficial healing power of the snake in pre-Abramitic cultures, here also attributed to a feminine dimension, as in the case of the Cauldron.

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[130] Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Anakrloo and Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 198.
[131] William K. Mahony, *The artful universe: an introduction to the Vedic religious Imagination*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 219.
[132] His double nature being represented by the fact that the sweat from his armpits gave birth to a female giant on one side and to a male on the other.
[133] John Lindow, *Norse mythology: a guide to the Gods, heroes, rituals, and Beliefs*. (Oxford University Press, 2002), 322-324; Paola Spinozzi and Alessandro Zironi, *Origins as a Paradigm in the Sciences and in the Humanities*. (Goettingen: Socrates Education and Culture, 2010), 219.
[134] cf. Mircea Eliade, *Mefistofele el 'androgine* (Roma: Ed. Mediterranee, 1971), 88-89, 112.
[135] Geraldine Pinch, *Handbook of Egyptian Mythology*. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2002), 200; Kent R. Weeks, Araldo De Luca, Valley of the Kings. (New York: Friedman/Fairfax, 2001), 126.

Osiris is also mentioned by Maier who recounted of how Isis, sister and bride of Osiris, and symbol of Sun and Knowledge, re-joins his limbs, whilst his phallus falls in the sea.[136] In alchemy, the ritual "breaking in pieces" of the adept (expressed in witchcraft symbolism by the act of eating itself) may be symbolised by that initial phase called the "analysis of the compost", in which every element in the vase must be distinguished and separated.[137]

Flying with Ointments and Toads

Another area deserving exploration, which overlaps again with shape-shifting, is the idea of hallucinogenic ointments as an important component of beliefs around flying. It is widely known how shamanism in the Americas, employs hallucinogenic plants and mushrooms to cause altered states of conscience, and it was in fact known in the seventeenth century too, as noted by De Lancre himself, who had already made connections between shamanistic uses of natural hallucinogen and the witches' ointments to explain their tales as hallucinations, as fruit of their imagination.[138]

Ointments and Phallic Symbolism

Presently it is a well known, established fact that the natural drugs which tribal shamans administer (with effects which remain unclear to us in the West) are dangerous and can have fatal effects if used improperly. However, at the time of the witch-craze this might not have been so widely known Also, the knowledge of drugs used in natural and mainstream medicine was, in view of the concoctions employed by both, probably quite vague, as discussed by Thomas in *Religion and Decline of Magic*.[139] It is also to be noted that the idea of "magical powders" or "ointments to fly" was, since the middle ages (or even earlier), already strongly rooted in public imagination and popular tales about the hallucinogenic powers of drugs may have affected folk curiosity. Hence, from such curiosity that might have caused some people to "sample" unknown drugs to momentarily evade the weighty reality of their existence, and from instances in which drugs probably employed for very mundane purposes (such as healing a toothache) were used improperly, might have sprung fantastical "accusations" and "confessions" of witchcraft, *probably de-contextualised from any objective reality* in order to fit the pre-fixed imaginations.

[136] Maier, *Atalanta fugiens,* 236. This would seem again to symbolise the union of feminine (sea-womb) and masculine (phallus), in fact Maier himself mentions of how "from Uranus' virile member thrown in the sea was born Venus, the most beautiful amongst women" (in ibid, 132).
[137] Huginus, *Il Regno Di Saturno*, 36.
[138] see p. 78 and note 34, p. 78.
[139] Keith Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England.* (London: Penguin Paperback, 1971), 207-209, 264-265.

For instance, Joanina Feraro declared visiting Cattarina Barrera (whom she accused of witchcraft) to be healed by her husband. Because he was not home, Cattarina gave her a powder contained in an eggshell. This was so harmful to Joanina she was "out of her mind for three weeks", thus, since Cattarina had a reputation of being a witch, Joanina "doubted of her".[140] Another example may be found, again, in De Lancre:

> Queyran, a native of Nérac …was condemened to die in 1609 on the grounds that he practised witchcraft, having given some drug hidden in a little hazelnut to a child from a very good family. With this drug he affected the child's ability to speak to the point that he remained practically dumb and, for a long time, in danger of dying.[141]

To such accounts regarding accusations we can add others regarding (often forced) "confessions", evidently sprung from local folklore. Northern Italian witch Joanina Mafinetti recounted how a black ointment was to be spread on a distaff so that it may transform into a horned horse to take her to the *Barlott*. Margherita di Tesero, (called Tessadrella) and Tomasina (1505-1506,Val di Fiemme) were presented by the Devil with a bench and Tessardella sat on it to go away but the Devil would not take her until she denied God.[142] "Up there [at the *Barlott*] the Devil, dancing and doing a thousands tricks…would then anoint the bench" for her and she had to sit on it "in the name of the Devil", otherwise they could not go.[143] This obviously reminds us of Isobel Gowdie and her incantation to fly "in the Divellis name" and of Alice Kyteler invoking "Robin Son of Art".[144]

Anna Tretter (1506, Val Di Fiemme) was asked by the Devil to take the bench she had in the house and she obeyed. Thus the Devil took her "out of the window with the bench"; when they were out he told her that if she wanted to be his own she had to deny God and serve him and she agreed.[145] Tessardella also recounted that one summer day two small black dogs asked her to follow them "in a place where they too wished to go" and she fought them "until night, until when the two dog devils found two sticks". Then she rode them to Villaza where other people were there

[140] Self translated from: Raffaella Laorca, *Le Tre Valli stregate: documenti per la storia delle streghe nei Baliaggi svizzeri di Riviera, Blenio e Leventina, 1641-1676*. (Locarno: Armando Dadò, 1992), 79.
[141] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 128.
[142] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 118.
[143] Self translated from: Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 119.
[144] see notes 55 and 56, p. 82.
[145] Self-translated from Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 151. This alleged intimate, almost amorous, and priviliged relationship, between witch and Devil (see p. 98), may reflect that between pre-Christian priestesses and their worshipped deity (see appendix, note 10).

awaiting to perform a ritual to raise a storm.[146] She also said that after the witches' meeting, the Devil anointed the sticks and she went back home.[147] And in another occasion the Devil beated them all and then put a stick "under" them and they went home. These possible symbols of virility, such as the distaff or the stick, may turn against those who refuse the "ecstatic experience". Caterina del Mick (Val di Fiemme) for instance was beaten with an iron stick and with a rolling pin by a black dog for having been absent from "the game".[148]

Sexual Shamanism?

This leads to the interesting idea that the phallic symbol leading to the "Otherworld" can assume different shapes to suit different functions, as possibly demonstrated by the above accounts. As noted by the Italian historian Raffaella Laorca,

> in order to go to the Sabbath witches grease a distaff or a stick with the left hand in the name of the devil: then the wood transforms itself in a cat, a dog, a horse, an ass, a ox, a pig or a billy goat; black animals that transport Satan's adepts through the air.[149]

Taking this line of argument further, and temporarily returning to the previous discussions[150] about the wand, the club, the caduceus, the spine, the mainmast and the tree of life as virile symbols, it could now be supposed that such symbols may all be enclosed in the stick (which later became the famous broomstick[151]) upon which witches were believed to ride and fly. This may reinforce the sexual symbolism because of the obvious position of riding a stick.

This metaphorical stick, in view of the previous arguments, may be seen as a phallic symbol to stir the elements in the vase, or the "food" (consisting of people or sacred animals, usually cows, already known in zoophilistic practices) in the Cauldron, metaphorical female generative organs, which would induce ecstasy. This view may

[146] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 108.
[147] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 111.
[148] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 61. Which reminds us, other than the punishments mentioned in the *Malleus Maleficarum* and by later demonologists, of the punishments encountered by witches for not obeying ~~to~~ the Devil, of those Shamans who are reproached by the Spirit for having being absent so long: e.g. cf. Christina Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism vol. 1*. (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 2007), xliii.
[149] Self translated from: Laorca, *Le tre valli stregate*, 96.
[150] see p.p. 88-95.
[151] To the phallic symbolism of the stick and the broom, that of sweeping in particular (which does feature in tribal shamanism around the world), adds the symbology of cleansing, leading to concept of prosperity. This may be confirmed by the fact that Alice Kyteler, for instance, used to sweep the streets of Kilkenny up to her son's house, chanting: "to the house of Wiliam my Sonne, Hie all the wealth of Kilkennie towne": (Ledrede, *The sorcery trial of Alice Kyteler*, 63. This may possibly be seen as a demonstration of the fact that this magical-ritualistic idea of sweeping was also part of European traditions up until the middle ages.

further be confirmed by the fact that, as noted by Murray (within a rather different argument however), on Rood Day (known in Germany as Walpurgis Night), or Beltane in Celtic tradition (famous for its fertility value), the witches of Aberdeen were said to go to San Katherine Hill and there "vnder the conduct of Sathan, present with yow, playing befoir yow, efter his form, ye all dansit a devilische danse, rydand on treis, be a lang space".[152] It is possible that behind this metaphor was the discussed ritual embrace that, awakening the "kundalini", induced ecstasy, as discussed in regard to Tantrism but also alchemic metaphoric symbolism. But it might also be related to Wuistic orgiastic dances, comparable to those of Yogini or the rites of the Bacchants with their thyrsus and snakes crowns, again reserved to women,[153] or the later "Maenads of the Loire".[154] This interpretation may echo in the Venus recounted by Giovanni delle Piatte, and who in a mountain near Rome, transformed into a snake from the waist downwards for three times a week, "Saturday, Sunday and Monday till midday".[155] Perhaps the idea of the physical or –more likely– evocative/symbolical use of a stick "to fly" (namely to practise the cults believed to cause the priestesses to experience androgyny, hence ecstasy) also came from the general prohibition against male participation in such practices, except for few circumstances such as when eunuchs would castrate themselves in honour of the Goddess. Such female sexual ecstatic cults may perhaps answer from a folkloric, mythological and religious angle the famous question of why the witches were women.

The fact that the phallic symbol representing the Devil's or "external Familiar" (which may also be the "internal Familiar" of another witch, as we have seen in animal riding) assumes the form of an animal makes sense if sex is viewed not only as means of ecstasy, hence to reach the divine, as suggested by the above discussions in regard of alchemy and left hand Tantrism, but also if sex is viewed as the closest link between human and nature, seen as divine. In view of the above arguments, it may be supposed that witches' riding each other or the Devil in the shape of an animal disguises a strong sexual symbolism. This is an imaginative interpretation which, evidently, was already of public dominion in the early modern era, as testified by

[152] John Stuart, ed., The Spalding Club, *Miscellany, vol.1*. (Aberdeen: William Bennet, 1841),165. Initially found in Murray's *Witch-Cult* ,110,134.
[153] Johann Jacob Maria De Groot, "Part 6", *Religious System of China*, *Book II* (Whitefish: Ed. Kessinger Publishing L.L.C., 2003), 1214.
[154] see note 66, p. 57.
[155] Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 74. (see appendix, note 4).

numerous works of visual art with strong sexual connotations. These may for instance include Baldung's *Three Witches*[156], Barthel Beham's *Death and the three nude women*,[157] and many others discussed by Zika, (who however did not read as *ecstatic* sexual symbolism but simply as *sexual* symbolism),[158] culminating in the engraving by Francesco Parmigiano representing a witch riding a huge phallus.[159]

So, to summarise, we have encountered the stick, the broomstick, the distaff and the bench, which often with the aid of an ointment (that may be associated with the toads[160] of the English witches) are part of witches' flying experience. The stick and distaff as possible phallic symbols, the bench as the place where the witch is "taken" by the Devil,[161] hence again assuming a sexual connotation. In order to fly, whether on the stick, the distaff or the bench, the witch was often requested by the Devil or the older witch to deny God.[162] This may be another sign of the intimate, privileged, and in a sense almost "spiritually monogamous" relationship between adept and teacher, which, as it precedes the act of flying (supposedly symbolising the act of lovemaking between women and Gods) it almost appears to mirror in an initiatory context the vows of lovers in a human context. Certainly, beyond the interpretation of the above instruments of flying, the sexual element is clearly present in continental Sabbath. As noted by Laorca, "at the *Barlott*, reign of inverted world…Satan is worshipped, sacrilege is committed, aliments do not satisfy and what is worse, sodomy is practised".[163] In Italy "the ceremony that bonds the neophyte and Devil is a kiss that the first gives to the second".[164] Witches' "diabolic lovers [*fidanzati diabolici*] are always young and well dressed...with them witches have sexual intercourse".[165] Surely it may be argued that sexual descriptions more popular in

[156] see appendix, note 26.
[157] see appendix, note 27.
[158] Zika, "Chapter Seven, "Visual Representations of Witchcraft and Sexuality", in *Exorcising our demons*.
[159] see appendix, note 27.
[160] Toads, for English witches may be compared to the ointments in the effect. As noted by Professors McKenna and Towers from the University of British Columbia: "special glands in the skin of certain toads produce the hallucinogenic chemical bufotenine (5-hydroxy-DMT) which can be collected and dried for human use": DJ McKenna and GHN Towers, (1984) *J. Psychoactive Drugs, 16,* 347-358 cited in Richard R. Laing, *Hallucinogens: a forensic drug handbook*, (London: Academic Press, 2003), 26.
[161] see p. 95. Also note the three men of Petronilla of Meath's account, "each carrying an iron rod in the hand", which could be a metaphor to symbolise the ityphallic supernatural figures, had intercourse with Dame Alice Keyteler: Ledrede, *The Sorcery Trial of Alice Kyteler,* 63.
[162] Ibid. On older witches seducing younger women into 'diabolic' practices see also Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers, 113.
[163] Self translated from: Laorca, *Le tre valli stregate*, 117. The concept of sodomy in witchcraft belief is worth noting (as the kiss on the Devil's anus) not only because representing sex that is not aimed at reproduction, but also in view of the location of the mentioned "philosophical stone" and *Muladhara*, at the base of the spine, which reminds us of Tantrism, and the possibility of transcendental sex aimed at the awakening of the snake-like energies (see p.p. 15-16, 88, 90-91). This leads back to our initial discussion of the Buggery Act (see p. 23) and may in fact suggest that the aversion of Christianity towards sodomy and sex not aimed at reproduction, was really a rejection of pre-Christian ritualistic sex aimed at "reaching" the God during life.
[164] Ibid, 98.
[165] Ibid.

continental Europe, certainly in Italy, and almost non-existent in England, were caused by the Catholic influence of Rome, also for the already already reason illustrated by Cohn in regard to all persecuted groups throughout history.[166] Yet, even though this might be partially the answer, the question remains how the Church developed such curious sets of questions and passed them onto secular courts, which, it must be further noted, by the sixteenth century were in charge of witch-trials in most parts of Italy. Furthermore, such answers do not seem to take into account the symbolism present in witchcraft instruments and related to folkloric, mythological and alchemic archetypical images, as discussed above. Or the location of the Sabbath, again charged of mythological symbolism related to otherworldly locations, usually on a mountain or over the river.[167] The folkloric/mythological heritage, however distorted does come through in the confessions below.

Benvegnuda, called "Piccinella", during her 1518 trial in Brescia claimed of having sex on the cross with "Zulian", a Devil, and it being pleasurable however "always cold".[168] She said the mistress was a beautiful lady dressed in black with a black cross, called "signora del zogo" (Signora del Gioco), who "was a Goddess…and everybody greeted her saying 'welcome Madona with your people' bowing four or five times and the demons her lovers taught and did not want Christ to be mentioned". The cross was taken from her hands and many other people also had sex on crosses, doing "all the idle things that may be imagined, through all the ways in which one can have sex".[169] Jovanina da Rodi, after torture and heavy questioning, claimed of being taken to the Sabbath at the age of five by Caterina Capuscio who taught her to deny God and the Saints and urged her to accept him as her bridegroom and master; then under further pressure, she claimed to have been sodomised by the Devil.[170] At the Sabbath, she claimed the participants were given fat to grease the distaff to go to the Sabbath and a black powder to do evil.[171] Also, in the *Malleus Maleficarum* we read:

> "the witches...have been seen lying on their backs in the fields or the woods, naked up to the very navel, and it has been apparent from the disposition of those limbs and members which pertain to the venereal act and orgasm, as

[166] Ibid, 12, 17, 106, 206 228, 260-61.
[167] cfr Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 132, 156-158, 165, 189, 234-235, 264; and also: Lambsprinck, *La Pietra Filosofale*, 15, 32, 157.
[168] Self translated from: Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 224-225.
[169] Self translated from: Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco*, 226-227.
[170] Laorca, *Le tre valli stregate*, 114.
[171] Laorca, *Le tre valli stregate*, 114.

> also from the agitation of their legs and thighs, that all invisible to the bystanders, they have been copulating with Incubus devils..."[172]

To this we may add the Sicilian confessions,[173] more clearly resembling folkloric models, and the *Malleus Maleficarum's* mention to how young witches, as opposed to older ones, are seduced into devilish arts, usually by being offered beautiful men.[174] If we join mundane sexual interpretation (such as Zika) and demonized supernatural ones (such as those of early modern continental artists), with shamanistic interpretations such as those of Ginzburg and Wilby, and then leave behind Christian demonisation, we have a theoretical model of sexual ecstatic practices which may well resemble the alchemic and Tantric models described above. A model which seems to be behind the symbolism of witch-beliefs.

Ecstasies or Imagined Ecstasies?

From the evidence discussed above ointments prior to flying and shape-shifting are much mentioned. Supposedly, like a drug, such ointments would have an effect on the individual's perception, transforming objects in her/his eyes, like hallucinogens. We discussed how such accounts and beliefs of magical (often physical) flights are likely to derive from times in which shamanistic ecstatic cults familiar to the use of altering substances, were possibly practised in Europe. And certainly medieval and early modern alchemy, as well as Dante's cryptic poetry,[175] besides the drugs and the witch-trials themselves, that some kind of ecstatic pre-Christian tradition had survived at least at the level of popular and learned imagination.

Surely, acceptance of ointments as a means to alter perception may justify not only descriptions of fantastical flights but also of fantastical transformation, including the transformation of gifts and gold into coal and the tasteless food that does not satisfy or the fires that do not warm. Yet such acceptance may lead to much more pragmatic interpretations of the evidence which may clash altogether with those so far proposed. It may reduce to viewing the whole fantastical aspect of witch-trial accounts as the result of some sort of collective hallucination due to the effect of drugs, with no reference to the fantastical legends, the cults and the myths so far

[172] Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers, 114.
[173] see p. p. 31, 84.
[174] "accidentally" dressed in green, one of the colours chiefly associated with Fairies: ibid, 100, 113.
[175] see Luigi Valli, *Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei «Fedeli d'Amore»*, (Milano: Luni Editrice, 1994).

discussed. Thus undermining the views here proposed, of evidence as originated from local folklore (once we strip it from later demonisation) to be read in turn as a sort of coded symbolical language disguising older beliefs. Yet the clash between the two proposed versions is only apparent. The immediate answer to this clash is better expressed in Cohn's words: "not only the waking thoughts but the trance experiences of individuals can be deeply conditioned by the generally accepted beliefs of the society in which they live." [176] Which means that even alleged collective trance experiences (or hallucinations) would still draw from the local cultural heritage.

However, this apparently satisfying answer contains a paradox, which does not fit the argument held so far. By this statement Cohn appears to accept —paradoxically as we shall see— that people accused of witchcraft might have had actual trance experiences, something which, objectively, could never be proved (or disproved, on the same grounds) on the basis of the evidence we have.

> The Benandanti believed absolutely that their experiences were real, and that they were collective; but they never for a moment suggested that they were bodily - the witches too ... were said to fight only in spirit… What Ginzburg found in his sixteenth-century archives was in fact a local variant of what, for centuries before, had been the stock experience of the followers of Diana, Herodias or Holda. It has nothing to do with the "old religion" of fertility postulated by Margaret Murray.[177]

In this perhaps contentious sentence, Cohn does not seem to realise three fundamental facts. Firstly, that accepting the possibility that collective trance experiences were enacted, means accepting that some sort of shamanistic practice still survived in early modern Europe. Secondly, that, he is somewhat unwittingly providing the very link for the identification of such alleged practices: Diana, Herodias, Holda, the Good Ladies of the night. Thirdly, to say that collective trance experience which were a local variant of the those of the followers of Diana and Holda, hence ecstatic practices in connection to these Goddesses, had nothing to do with the fertility cults shows a lack of understanding of such religions, in which clear proof of a link between the ecstatic aspect of the religion and the fertility cult can be found.[178] Cohn seems in fact to fall into the opposite mistake made by Murray, who

[176] Norman Cohn, *Europe Inner Demons*. (London: Sussex University Press, 1975), 224.
[177] Cohn, *Europe Inner Demons*, 223.
[178] For reasons of space and pertinence a more exhaustive explanation of this point has been transferred to note 10 of the appendix, where it has been attempted to show how in the religions in which fertility cults originate may be found proof of such link.

reduced the "old religion" to the fertility aspect and mistaking surviving traces of belief in this respect for the actual religion itself. Such ecstatic cults were very probably strongly linked not only to the individual spiritual journeys of the strictly elitist groups of the participants, but also to the idea of bringing fertility to the land and prosperity to the community by providing the positive influence of the Gods. Thus they may be considered the metaphysical aspect of the same religions, of which the physical orgiastic fertility rites could have been only the more tangible one, but nonetheless not disconnected.[179]

It is not accepted here that trance experiences were still experienced during the centuries of the witch-hunt. Ginzburg's extensive and extremely valuable research does not conclusively prove that such experiences were still part of people's life, even of the accuseds' lives. Upon reading the surviving evidence, we cannot see with certainty whether trance experiences were lived in the first person or only imagined. The only thing that Ginzburg, Henningsen, Wilby, and other analogous studies seem to prove is that in pre-Christian Europe some kind of shamanistic/ecstatic cults connected with the local divinities were practised. Until when, it seems impossible to say based on any of the evidence we have. Such collective trance experiences, if carried out by larger groups of people (e.g. Murray's "covens") would probably presuppose regular physical meetings, as it happens in tribal shamanistic cults, where the Shaman helps the adept to break the boundaries of normal perception by the use of herbs, mushrooms or other much more extreme practices that lead the body to liminal states.

It has not so far been proved that actual group meetings took place secretly. Even if we had direct evidence of any secret meeting, we still would have not proven that people during such meetings were having any ecstatic experiences as doubtfully described in confessions. As for individual trance experiences, we do not have proof of that either. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the Sicilian woman who could not stop boasting about "flying away with the Fairies",[180] it is more than likely that people were simply drawing from the local heritage to entertain themselves or others. It may also be possible that they imagined having the experiences they described, considering how the boundaries between the objectively real and the

[179] Again, please see appendix, note 10 for further explanations.
[180] Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside", in Anakrloo and Henningsen, ed., *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 198.

fantastical were relatively fragile compared to modern Western perceptions of reality, or that they even believed having such experience in some or several cases. This could be the case of the northern Italians Carlo Velentino[181] and that of Jovanina Mafinetti[182]. They both confessed where to find the powder, the grease and the stick which was used to go to the *Barlott*. The stick and the powder, apparently, were really found in Jovanina's house,[183] as in the case of Alice Kyteler, amongst whose goods was found "a pix and an ointment therein with which she used to besmear a …coulter…and when it was so besmeared Alice with her comrades, mounting upon it was carried withersoever she wished".[184] It is true, however, that someone could have put them there to strengthen the accusations.

In any case, as previously stated, whether people did experience trance-like states in medieval and early modern Europe or only imagined it or only "confessed" it, is irrelevant to the purpose of this research. What is relevant here is that such stories reveal a rich symbolism that seems to point to and *find explanation in* older times of pre-Christian beliefs, cults and religions, which, through centuries of distortions, merged with increasingly stronger Christian elements, until they became what we know.

[181] Laorca, *Le tre valli stregate*, 90.
[182] Ibid, 90.
[183] Ibid, 79.
[184] Davidson and Ward, ed., *The sorcery trial of Alice Kyteler*, 81.

Conclusions

Sathan him selfe is sometime called a god,
sometimes a Prince, sometimes an Angel,
a gouernour, a dragon, a serpent, &c.
and yet is he in verie trueth,
but a wicked lying spirite
…
the witches are sometimes in Poets
improperlie also called Thessalae,
Thessalian witches, Sagae, Wise women,
Magae, Persian witches, Lamiae,
Ladies of the fayrie, Striges, Hegges:
and yet a witch is but a wicked man or woman
that worketh with the Deuill…[1]

Reading through the evidence, particularly that in which the dialogue between authorities and accused emerges more violently, as for instance when torture "punctuates" the dialogue, what comes across "between the lines" is a tenacious zeal, an almost compulsive eagerness to force the accused to confess specific supernatural stories that fit given stereotypes. What is more startling about this is that there is something almost childish in the authorities' attitude; possibly an unwitting need of evasion, of escaping through imagination, through tales of forbidden (hence demonised) pleasures, a society that tended to condemn pleasure. If we look back, even though human history has always been —as far back as we can see— studded with wars, injustices and some kind of violence or oppression, never before the advent of Christianity, and the centuries in which its power was at its highest (namely between the middle ages and the early modern period), had pleasure been so condemned, both on a social and individual level. It could be thus supposed that the explosion of witchcraft aversion was connected with this hostility to pleasure. Supernatural beliefs had always been part of the human experience, but the belief in Fairies and other comparable natural deities were "allies" to human imagination. This gifted human life with wonder and explanation to the unexplainable before Christianity demonised both these divinities and the belief in them. Supernatural beliefs had always held a specific purpose in the psychology of human existence and had always been necessary to humans. The problem with demonising both imagination, and those aspects of the supernatural that were allies to imagination, leads to the same consequences intrinsic to the demonisation of

[1] Henry Holland, *A treatise against Witchcraft: or A dialogue, wherein the greatest doubts concerning that sinne, are briefly answered* (Cambridge: Printed by Iohn Legatt, printer to the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, 1590), B3, accessed July 25, 2011, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D00000998398920000&WARN=N&SIZE=239&FILE=../session/1311692059_123&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR&ECCO=Y

pleasure: the basic human needs that imagination, pleasure and supernatural beliefs fulfil, begin to turn against their oppressors.

The witch-hunt may be viewed as simply the result of the repression and demonisation of aspects of the supernatural (and pleasure associated with it) that before had always served a positive purpose and fulfilled necessary human needs. It could therefore be supposed that the psychological reasons behind the witch-hunt, in combination with the converging social and political ones, laid in the fact that the learned classes, perhaps even more than the common people, suffered this new deprivation. Consequently, the witch-hunt was used to fulfil their suppressed need of the "fantastical", the suppressed nostalgia of "magical beginnings" (to cite Eliade) The need for "magic" and "wonder"; the need for wondrous "fairytales"; the *aurea aetas* of classical accounts[2] of eternal springtime and happiness, the earthly but Pagan paradises, were no longer acceptable as refuges. What emerges from the dialogues between witches and torturers is this nostalgia. It is obvious that when a need cannot be fulfilled in uncomplicated, healthy and natural ways, the subconscious will still attempt to fulfil that need somehow. Once necessary supernatural beliefs had been condemned, people still needed to hold on to those beliefs somehow. Once pleasure had been demonised by religion, people still needed to fulfil the basic human need that is happiness. So what before was lived more simply, with less side-effects and complication, after it was demonised by Christianity, still needed to be part of human life, somehow. If it could no longer be lived as an "alley" of the human experience, something good and natural, it had to be lived as an evil "enemy", something forbidden, deceptive and seductive, hence unfortunately tempting. Witches had, possibly, the role of impersonating such forbidden, deceptive and tempting pleasure, as mortal enemies of Church, State and people. Through condemning them and extorting stories of impossible and evil pleasures (often turned into painful experiences in the narrative process itself, as in the intercourse with the Devil, described as painful more often than as pleasurable), people could still experience the pleasure and the imagination their religion denied them. These mortal enemies through whom authorities and population could (at least virtually) express such repressed needs could be anyone that somehow did not fit social order, that somehow were more vulnerable or exposed to this unwanted social role. The

[2] see Hesiod, *Le opere e i Giorni*, testo greco a fronte, trans. and ed. Virgilio Costa. (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi srl, 1994), 11-13, verses109-119, -; Publio Ovidio Nasón, *Metamorfosi*, trans. Mario Ramous, ed. Emilio Pianezzola. (Milano: Garzanti Libri, 1995), 10, verses 89-90.

obsession for sexual accounts present in Italian trials, in a country where the Catholic Church was powerful, hence the repression of sexuality greater (as opposed to Protestant countries like England where priests were at least allowed to marry), may be further proof of this. It seems that the Inquisitors, witch-hunters and demonologists too were victims of their times and society.

In folklore-derived witch-beliefs that echoed in more or less distorted ways (as it has always been recognised since the *Canon Episcopi* and in spite of progressive demonisation) the magical female figures of legend, both high and low classes found the necessary social and psychological safety valve, the outlet for the fundamental human needs of creativity and imagination. Nowadays we have experimental science and science fiction to supply that need in more "acceptable", if not "sober" ways, as well as countless religions and personal beliefs that can be adopted freely by the most imaginative individuals. We have doctors and surgeons to turn to when ill. But, in the centuries of the witch-hunts people were not ready to let go of their Fairies, Witches and Cunning Folk for an unreachable and punishing God, for authorities that were feared, for doctors that only some could afford and could often fail to heal.

Let us now return to the section on the intellectual approach in the introduction. Let us return, in particular, to Eliade's statement about how "Western Culture [would] be in danger of decline into a sterilising provincialism if it despise[d] or neglect[ed] the dialogue with the other cultures"; how "one day the West w[ould have to] know and to understand the existential situations and the cultural universes of the non-Western peoples"; and how the West would "come to value them as integral with the history of the human spirit and w[ould] no longer regard them as immature episodes or as aberrations from an exemplary History of man".[3] In this light, the necessity for a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary approach has been advocated, as well as that of analysing the evidence from the perspective of the persecuted, rather than only of the persecutors. We have discussed how such evidence should not be taken literally, as Murray did, rather pointing out, instead, the importance of the symbolism revealed by confessions' language and more generally, by witches' beliefs.

[3] Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*. (London: Harvill Press, 1960), 8-9.

The intellectual framework constructed in the introduction was useful in chapter one from the outset because it justified the unfolding of those topics that connect the witch's Familiar to much older beliefs around demons and totems, starting from the Greeks and the Romans views of names and personal demons, to then go on to totemic concepts of tribal shamanism. Such connections clearly reflecting the aforementioned approach in terms of cross-geographical, cultural and temporal comparisons have helped to analyse the symbols present, and uncover the origins of early modern beliefs around witches' Familiars. In chapter two, the intellectual approach constructed in the introduction was also useful. It allowed the discussion of ideas which helped to explain how witchcraft beliefs around shape-shifting could be interpreted (in view of what emerged in the previous chapter) in terms of totemistic ideas and pre-Christian religious initiatory cults based on spiritual self-transformative processes originally aimed at integrating the divine into the human life of the adept. Such ideas, through this comparative approach, may have helped understanding the origins of folkloric beliefs around shape-shifting from which witch-beliefs may have, in turn, originated. Finally, in the last chapter, this comparative approach has allowed the exploration of the origins of beliefs about flying in connection to ecstatic cults. In the distant past, these may have been widespread in various yet parallel forms, as possibly testified by alchemic symbolism closely resembling, in so many ways, left hand Tantrism and Shivaism. This again may have clarified the origin of witch-beliefs around flying and how they may have been drawn from folklore, which in turn originated from such ancient ecstatic cults.

The strength and weakness of my research may be represented by the above comparative approach. Although this may have helped to draw light on those aspects of witchcraft symbolism that have remained obscure, my research at this stage has remained speculative and relies merely on the undeniable similarities identified. The weaknesses of this approach also lie in the lack of detail in regards to each of the specific times and cultures discussed and here so broadly reunited under the name of "pre-Christian". The generalisation of terms stated in the introduction is, in fact, another significant limit which reduces, amongst other things, the possibility of further cross-cultural comparisons. For instance, the impossibility to enquire more deeply (hence using terms more specifically, as only more space could have enabled) in a term like "totem" may have illuminated further links between autochthon European totemic cults from which Familiars' beliefs could have

indirectly originated and those of North America. The problems involved in exploring more deeply cross-continental connections has likewise prevented any exploration of comparable Native Australian beliefs which could have further illuminated our cause. Likewise, had space and time allowed room for a disquisition upon Celtic identity, further light could have been drawn upon the anomalous similarities between Sicilian-Greek and Celtic heritages highlighted by Ginzburg, in connections to the Women from Outside, so relevant to my study. This would have proved particularly helpful when analysing the connections between beliefs around witch-flying and female ecstatic cults which chapter three focused on. In light of the weaknesses discussed, chapter two is possibly the most complete one. However, a greater knowledge of the subject of archaeology could have allowed "wanderings" beyond Gimbutas, Green and Ross, with regard to the possible symbolisms of the discussed findings. Furthermore, more space to explore folkloric symbolism could have possibly helped clarify the significance of witchcraft beliefs' symbolism in greater depth. Overall, it seems to me that my achievements are, if important, still minimal and only introductory to a needed and much more extensive research in which folklorists, Celticists, archaeologists, classicists, esoterists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and historians of the medieval and early modern period would need to join forces. They would need to use their joint knowledge as a tool to uncover in more depth and with greater precision than it would be possible within the confines of a Master's dissertation.

In terms of parallels with previous scholars, my study has parallels with Murray only in the fact that I focus on pre-Christian components in the tales found in trials and confessions. She, however, as previously noted, held that early modern witchcraft proved the existence of an actual organised Pagan religion survived through secrecy since pre-Christian times, and that the confessions analysed by her were literal descriptions of real pagan rites, a theory that is no longer accepted amongst academics and that I do not defend. The main difference between my study and Murray's is that I do not claim (nor believe) that early modern (nor medieval, except perhaps Sibilla and Pierina in the 1390s trials of Milan) witches were survivors of older Pagan cults.

Similarly, my research also differs from Wilby's because it does not suggest the survival of a dream cult in early modern Britain. The comparative evidence provided by Wilby greatly consists (like in this research) of the interpretation of details and strong similarities with shamanistic cults, rather than any conclusive proof. Interpretations provide trails, which may lead to further discoveries but they can also lead to oversights; this is the limit of this kind of approach. Generally, I strongly resist the possibility that witchcraft evidence may represent the survival of collective dream cults or any kind of shamanic practice because the numerous details

embedded in the language of confessions which provide terms of comparisons with ecstatic cults appear to me only as unwitting elements reflecting oral folk tradition of the time. The divergence from traditional ecstatic practices seems too great and to reflect centuries of distortions. The accused seem unaware of the symbolical language present in their confessions. With Ginzburg's most fascinating *Ecstasies* and *Night Battles* I have a similar problem. However much the parallelisms found by him between witch trials evidence and shamanistic practices are based on extensive and extremely valuable research, it does not seem to me we are in the presence of any actual ecstatic cult. Overall, however, I feel my work is closest to Ginzburg's both in the analysis of symbols and cross-cultural, inter disciplinary comparisons.

The approach I have taken here may be applied to future research to reconsider the importance of symbols and metaphors present in witches' confessions but also in witch-beliefs in general. It may help to not overlook such symbolisms and the older realities which they may reflect through centuries of distortions, helping historians to uncover the roots of our heritages, hence of modern societies. Uncovering the roots of humanity is perhaps the most important purpose of history and of enquiring into the past, so that it may not be forgotten hence providing a term of comparison and expanding our often unilateral (and therefore restricted) perception of our present realities. As it is restrictive to mentality, knowledge and understanding hence overall human experience, to ignore geographically far cultures, it is likewise limiting to overlook the past or to constantly filter it or over-simplify it through a more or less undeclared attitude of presumed superiority.