"THERE'S A PIECE WAD PLEASE A BROWNIE"
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF OFFERINGS TO THE FAIRIES IN TRADITIONAL CULTURES AND CONTEMPORARY EARTH-CENTRED RELIGIONS

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"There's a Piece Wad Please a Brownie"
A Comparative Study of Offerings to the Fairies in Traditional Cultures and Contemporary Earth-Centred Religions

by

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For those who came before.

Abstract

The object of this thesis is to compare the practice of giving offerings to the fairies between two broad groups: the traditional or "folk" cultures of the Celtic areas and contemporary Earth-Centred spiritual groups. These offerings are discussed in terms of form and function in each of the two groups, and compared between groups.

The data for this study comes primarily from printed sources in the case of the folk tradition and printed and online sources in the case of Earth-Centred Spirituality. Information for both groups has been supplemented by personal communications and e-mail correspondence.

The emphasis of this thesis is on comparison *between* the folk tradition and Earth-Centred Spirituality, however, differences *within* each group are also noted. Most people following Earth-Centred Spiritualities have looked to folklore to some degree for inspiration or at the very least for enjoyment. It is this which forms the basis for the relationship between the two groups.

Acknowledgments

To quote my favorite author, fantasy writer Charles deLint: "No creative endeavor takes place in a vacuum." So it is with this thesis, and as usual there are many people who deserve thanks. My supervisor, Peter Narváez, believed the topic was possible and helped me narrow it down, as well as doing many other supervisorly things. Rowena provided long-distance life-support and unfailing logic, and then came to visit. My family kept asking, "Is it done yet?" and Mom provided some much-needed books for a birthday present. The people of Imbas, Nemeton and Celtic-Well kept my mind sharp with lively debates about things other than fairies, and the many people I spoke to in person and online provided much of the data. Deva, Jane, Julia and my other fellow graduate students let me know I wasn't the only one. Tim annoyed me into getting it finished, helped edit, and made sure I got out of the house once in a while. The fairies, or course, made it all possible, whether they exist or not.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Focus

The focus of this study is the custom of leaving offerings for the fairies, as found in two contexts: the Celtic folk tradition as practiced by people in the British Isles and Newfoundland, and among people following Earth-Centred religions. The phrase "folk tradition" refers to fairy belief and custom as it has developed indigenously and encompasses both past and present. "Earth-Centred Spirituality" refers to the practices of people who follow a religion or spiritual path that focuses on the Earth as sacred. This category includes groups commonly referred to as "New Age," as well as Neo-Pagan religions. I will look at the forms that offerings to the fairies take, as well as their meanings and functions (see below for a discussion of "offering").

The geographic focus for the beliefs and practices of the folk tradition referred to in this thesis is what is sometimes referred to as the Celtic areas—Wales, Cornwall, Isle of Man, Scotland and Ireland—as well as Newfoundland. I have also included England, as it is an ex-Celtic area and much Celtic lore remains there. I have omitted from this study Brittany, as there is little published information in English, and other parts of North America, for which there is very

little published on fairies.[1] The term "Celtic" is properly used to refer to a group of languages and, by extension, to the culture of the people speaking those languages (Kondratiev, cf. Green 3-7). Celtic languages are no longer spoken by everyone living within a Celtic area, but many of the customs and traditions associated with Celtic culture persist. Because the folk tradition I am studying is Celtic I am primarily interested in the uses of Celtic fairylore in contemporary spirituality, and this tends to be found largely among people of Celtic descent.

For the beliefs and practices of people involved in Earth-Centred Spirituality the geographic spread is even broader. In theory the area covered is global, but in practice most of the information will come from the English-speaking areas of North America and the British Isles.

Temporally, I draw on printed sources from the earliest recorded stories up to the present. This means that effectively, the folk tradition can be studied from the 1600s (Kirk's *Secret Common-Wealth*) up to the present, while the Earth-Centred Spirituality material largely dates from the last twenty years. The firsthand material I have collected from either tradition refers largely to the present and the recent past.

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[1] Richard Dorson's view that there are no fairies in the New World is belied by presence of a fairy tradition in Newfoundland (Narváez, "Introduction" xii-xiii). There are also scattered references to fairies in other parts of North America (see Roth 42-50).

Why fairies?

Fairylore is a subject which has been fairly extensively treated in folklore and other fields as well as in publications directed at a non-academic audience. So why another thesis on fairies? Despite the many books on fairies, there is still more to be learned from contemporary perspectives. Many of the recent works on fairylore, especially the popular ones—such as Carol Rose's *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins* and Niall Macnamara's *Leprechaun Companion*—are largely re-writes, compilations, or re-organizations of earlier works. While I don't purport to have any startling new evidence to add to the body of lore already collected, and I will be drawing heavily on earlier collections, I believe that a comparative analysis of a sector of the fairy belief complex that draws from traditional and contemporary practices has much to offer.

I began my current exploration by combining my interests in fairies and material culture. I thought it would be worthwhile to explore fairylore from the point of view of the material objects, such as flint arrowheads and holed stones, that are associated with it. I soon found that all material culture associated with fairies made too immense a topic for a single thesis, so I have narrowed my focus to one aspect in particular that interests me: the leaving of offerings for the fairies. I have since discovered that not all offerings are material objects—one can play an instrument or recite a poem as an offering, for example (see Chapter 2).

What is a fairy?

It may seem unnecessary to provide a description of what a fairy is, but since, in practice, people do not always use the word to refer to exactly the same group of creatures, a brief discussion is in order. Stewart Sanderson's attempt to define what people believe are fairies, in his introduction to Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth*, resulted in the statement that they are "supernatural creatures, usually but not necessarily small in stature, of approximately human form but endowed with more than human powers." These beings are in a "special relationship" with humans for good or evil purposes, and may dwell in the landscape or in the hidden corners of a dwelling or barn. Whatever they are and wherever they are found, "[t]hey are at any rate close to man and liable to be encountered by him" (Sanderson 31).

Katharine Briggs provides a distinction between two different uses of "fairy." The first use of the word refers to supernatural beings "of a middle nature between man and angels" that have varying attributes but are somehow distinct from non-fairies such as mermaids, hags and monsters. The second use of "fairy" is "the more general extension of the word to cover that whole area of the supernatural which is not claimed by angels, devils or ghosts" (Briggs, *Dictionary* xiii). Evans-Wentz refers to fairies as "beings halfway between something material and spiritual" (145), while Rose situates them "[b]etween the gods and heroes and mere mortals" (ix).

Another useful concept is that of "owners"—beings who "rule[ ] over a certain region or a certain animal species." A human who hunts an animal or encroaches on the territory of an owner is at risk unless he or she performs "rites calculated to secure the owner's permission or to conciliate him for an action already performed" (Hultkrantz 7). These rites often include offerings. The owner is a liminal being, mediating between humans and nature itself.

To continue the "betwixt-and-between" theme, I would place my own usage of the word "fairy" somewhere in between Briggs' two uses, including some, but not all other supernatural creatures along with those beings "of a middle nature between man and angels."[2] Because fairies fall somewhere between human and deity, models for ways of relating to them can be drawn either from ways of relating to other humans, or from ways of relating to one's gods. This makes available to the study of fairylore much of the anthropological theory on religion.

Fairy vs Faery

Without getting in to an extended discussion of the uses of the various spellings of the word "fairy," it will be useful to the present thesis to briefly look at two of these spellings as used by the groups under study. In the folk tradition, where stories are generally passed on orally, spelling does not much matter, and

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[2] Or of a middle nature between human and deity.

there are a wide variety of regional variants in pronunciation. Academics use the spelling "fairy" most often, although "faery" has been used in some older sources, as have some other spellings (see Williams for an in-depth discussion of the etymology of the word "fairy"). In Earth-Centred Spirituality, however, a difference in spelling of these words may indicate an entirely different concept. Most New Age sources use the spelling "fairy" and refer to a lesser member of the angelic hierarchy or to a "deva" or nature spirit. New Age authors may also use the spelling "faery," but usually synonymously with "fairy." To Neo-Pagans, on the other hand, there is an important distinction. "Fairy" refers to the literary fairy, or the Victorian diminutive, winged sprite. "Faery" refers to the "real" fairy, a land spirit or semi-divine being; the same beings described in traditional folklore (R.J. Stewart xviii). Many Earth-Centred Spirituality practitioners would agree that "[f]aeries are living beings which are one step, one change of awareness, beyond humanity" (R.J. Stewart xvii), while Neo-Pagans in particular also believe that "they are much like us" (AACT, "AACT"). In Earth-Centred Spirituality "faeries" are thought to be elementals, "owners," and/or *genii loci*, spirits of place, as will be discussed throughout this thesis.

Belief

As David Hufford has written, scholars tend to base their work on the assumption that certain beliefs, belief in fairies included, are false ("Traditions" 19). Latent functions of these beliefs are proposed as the sole functions (Hufford,

"Reason" 179-180). We must keep in mind that functions do not cause experiences; experiences must occur first, to cause the belief, to *allow* the belief to have a function (cf. Hufford, "Reason" 181). Subjects such as fairylore can be much better explored without a prior commitment to the idea that supernatural beliefs are false and it is only their latent functions that keep them around in the modern world (Hufford, "The Supernatural" 24).

It is not necessary for a person to believe in fairies in order for them to transmit fairylore, but the existence of the lore indicates that *somebody* believes in them. Many of the people whose words appear in this study do believe in fairies, and searching for the functions of these beliefs only within the realm of "what does this irrational belief do for people," or even "how do these activities integrate the social units of these people," severely limits the exploration. One would not limit a study of the mechanics and functions of human interaction with another group of humans to only those functions relating to the beliefs that one group has about the other group's nature and existence, but would look also at the functions of real interaction. The study of human-fairy interaction should be treated in the same manner, and I have tried to do so in this thesis.

To underscore the reality of human-fairy interaction, I have tended to collapse the customs I am studying in time, by referring to actions in the present tense. Although much of the material I have used was recorded in the past, fairylore is still a living tradition in many places and thus exists in the present.

Practitioners of Earth-Centred Spirituality also tend to collapse folklore in this way.

Earth-Centred Spirituality

Practitioners of spiritualities or religions that hold the Earth as somehow sacred often use the term "Earth-Centred Spirituality" to refer to a larger group of paths encompassing their own. Although the term Earth-*Centred* (a variant being Earth-*Based*), implies primacy of the earth, groups and individuals classified within this category may not see the earth as the main focus of their spiritual path. It is, however, seen as sacred and is reverenced in some way, perhaps through intermediaries such as earth spirits. Fairies are generally thought to be such earth spirits. As I am using it, Earth-Centred Spirituality encompasses two sub-categories: New Age spirituality and the Neo-Pagan movement. In fact, these groups form a continuum with the New Age at one end and Reconstructionist Neo-Paganism at the other.

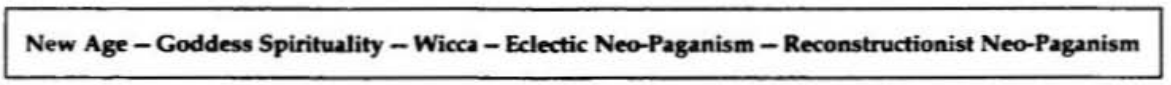

Figure 1 The New Age--Neo-Pagan Continuum

The groups near the middle of the continuum—Goddess Spirituality, Wicca and Eclectic Neo-Paganism—tend to be influenced by both ends, although they are

generally more Neo-Pagan.[3] In addition, Neo-Paganism refers to a group of related religions, while "New Age" refers to concepts which can be included in almost any religion. For the purposes of this study, "New Age" is used to refer to concepts attached to religions other than Neo-Paganism, because some of the concepts important to this study, such as the nature of the physical world, are very different in Neo-Pagan and New Age thought. That said, many Neo-Pagan religions are very much influenced by New Age ideas, as depicted in the continuum above.

New Age

While the New Age movement itself does not have easily definable boundaries, the other groups and movements with which it overlaps are themselves distinct (Kyle 3-4). New Agers practice what is known as religious syncretism: they borrow from any religious tradition which has something to offer them, because they believe that all of the world's religions contain parts of a greater truth. This results in a kind of spirituality which can be added on to almost any religion (Porter, "New Age Worldview"). The New Age worldview is monistic, meaning that everything is part of a greater whole; the universe, as that whole, is conscious and has a purpose (Porter, "New Age Movement" and "New Age Worldview;" Kyle 15). New Age spirituality may not be particularly "earth-

[3] For discussions of the influences on several different Wiccan groups, see *Ethnologies* 20.1, special issue on Wicca.

centred," at least in a physical sense, since it tends to focus on the spiritual as a separate thing from the corporeal. In fact, some New Age paths teach that the physical world is an illusion (Porter, "New Age Movement") or that individuals are "energy in the form of matter" (Kyle 167). However, there is generally some idea that the earth exists in a spiritual sense, and that it is sacred or spiritually important (Kyle 106-107).

Neo-Pagan

Neo-Paganism (often confusingly called simply "Paganism") is a term, used by its practitioners, that refers to contemporary, non-Judeo-Christian/Islamic religions which have generally been recently created or re-created (though some Neo-Pagans claim ancient origins for their paths). Within these paths, the earth is sacred and deserving of care and reverence, and is often conceptualized as a Mother Goddess (Harvey 1, 16). Since the particular Neo-Pagan path followed may have an influence on the way that fairies are perceived and related to, I will briefly describe some of the main sub-groups within Neo-Paganism.

To those who are interested in further exploring the variety of Neo-Pagan paths I recommend a few books as starting points: for North America (especially the United States) Margot Adler's book *Drawing Down the Moon* is still the best reference, although it could use another update. For Britain, Graham Harvey's *Listening People, Speaking Earth* presents a basic overview, although it is not as

comprehensive as Adler's book. A good supplement to these books is *Paganism Today*, edited by Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey, with individual articles written by the practitioners of the particular religions under discussion.

Wicca and Witchcraft

The terms "Wicca" and "Witchcraft" are used synonymously in North America to refer to a religion (or group of religions) which is generally bi-theistic and eclectic (Harvey 36). These groups can trace their origins to British occultist Gerald Gardner who constructed the religion by amalgamating folk ritual, ritual magic and other Western occult practices, and published the result in 1954 (Orion 16, 24-28). Gardner claimed to have learned much of the religion from a group of Witches who initiated him in 1939.[4] Wiccans and Witches believe in a Goddess and a God, generally conceptualized as the Mother Goddess and the Horned God and sometimes abstracted as "the divine Feminine" and "the divine Masculine" (Orion 19). All goddesses of the world's pantheons are thought to be aspects, or "faces," of the Goddess, and all gods are aspects of the God. In Britain, "Wicca" refers to groups with structured levels of initiation that can usually trace their formation directly to Gerald Gardner himself via the "hiving off" of groups as the original group acquired more and more members. "Witchcraft," on the other hand, refers to groups (or individuals) that are non-

[4] While there is no conclusive evidence to support Gardner's claim, the evidence *against* it—namely that he made up the religion based on the works of Margaret Murray and other folklorists—has been called into question in a recent article by Donald H. Frew.

hierarchical and eclectic (Harvey 36). Anyone who desires to be a Witch can become one without formal training or initiation. Throughout this study, I will use whichever term is used by the practitioner in question.

Eclectic Neo-Paganism and Druidry

There are two main differences between Wicca/Witchcraft and eclectic Neo-Paganism. The first is that Neo-Pagans tend to be polytheistic, believing in many individual gods and goddesses, while Wiccans and Witches are bitheistic (Harvey 1, 39). Secondly, many Neo-Pagans do not use Wiccan/Witchcraft ritual forms which tend to be based on ritual magic, opting instead for adaptations of a variety of indigenous rituals, or rites made up by inspired members of a group. Druidry or Druidism can refer to a wide variety of spiritual paths, from a philosophical add-on to Christianity or other mainstream religion, to eclectic Neo-Paganism with a fancy name, to a form of Reconstructionist Paganism (Harvey 29). Druidry today is most often a kind of eclectic Neo-Paganism that primarily honours Celtic deities.

Reconstructionalist Neo-Paganism

Reconstructionalist Paganism refers to polytheistic groups who concentrate their practices on a single pantheon, such as Norse or Celtic, and seek, through accurate scholarship, to reconstruct the ancient worship of those deities, and adapt it for modern use. Ritual forms are based, as closely as possible, on historic and prehistoric evidence, filled in with educated guesses and

creative inspiration. Examples of Reconstructionalist Neo-Paganism are Ásatrú, a religion which honours the Germanic gods and uses ritual reconstructed from the Sagas, Eddas and other literary and historic sources, and Celtic Reconstructionalism, a religion honouring Celtic deities and attempting to reconstruct Iron Age Celtic ritual and belief through use of mythology, the work of Classical historians and archaeology (Gamlinginn; IMBAS).

Offerings

Although it can be argued that the terms "offering" and "sacrifice" denote different things, they are often used as synonyms. In fact, very little can be found in the anthropological literature by looking in the indices of books for "offering." However, because the two words are used synonymously, much relevant information on offerings can be found in the literature on sacrifice. A simple definition of "sacrifice" is: "As prayer is a request made to a deity as if he were a man, so sacrifice is a gift made to a deity as if he were a man" (Tylor 375). In order to see to what extent the theory of sacrifice can be applied to offerings, I will outline some of the distinctions between the two.

According to some, the word "offering" may be used when one is referring to "the presentation of food and material objects" while "sacrifice" is reserved for "the slaughter of animals and human beings" (Malefijt 209). If one admits that animals and human beings can be classed as material objects, then this distinction does not contradict Paul Radin's assertion that a sacrifice is a

specific kind of offering, one which has lost "its character as an object with a definite exchange value and becomes . . . a gift charged with deeply emotional and symbolic significance to the suppliant" (Radin 178). He also comments that any offering is potentially a true sacrifice from the point of view of the offerer (178). In other words, sacrifice is an offering which deprives the offerer of something significant. While Hubert and Mauss refer to offering and sacrifice as "two kinds of operation" with "different degrees of solemnity and . . . differing efficacy," even they would agree that a sacrifice is just an offering in which "the religious energy released is stronger" (12).

While not all scholars agree on exactly what it is about sacrifice that sets it apart, most seem to agree that it is a *kind* of offering, thus much of what has been written of "sacrifice" can be applied to "offering," keeping in mind the more general nature of "offering." I will be using the term "offering" as a sort of catch-all etic term encompassing sacrifice and any other acts in which something is given to the fairies or other beings. In some cases, offerings may include such non-material things as prayers or songs.

E.B. Tylor saw the origins of sacrifice (and offerings) in gift-giving. He wrote that the original idea of giving a gift to a deity was that "the deity takes and values the offering for itself," and this idea developed into two other concepts: "the idea of mere homage expressed by a gift" and the idea that "the virtue lies in the worshipper depriving himself of something prized" (Tylor 375-

6). The first of these three ideas is referred to as the gift-theory, the second is the homage-theory, and the last is the abnegation-theory.

Paul Radin had a similar view of the history of offerings, which he divided into three stages:

1. "a mechanism for ensuring the separation from the undesired and unwilling proximity of a spirit"[5]
2. "a free exchange of gifts and amenities between voluntary parties to a contract"
3. "an expression of gratitude and thankfulness on the part of a humble suppliant toward a wise and understanding deity"[6] (Radin 177)

Durkheim, as in Radin's second and third stages, saw offerings or sacrifice as "a gift, an act of renunciation. It always presupposes that the worshipper relinquishes to the gods some part of his substance or his goods" (Durkheim 347). From this discussion, we can see that offerings may function as preventatives—both of harm and of envy, as parts of a reciprocal exchange, as means of communication with the otherworld and as gifts of homage.

Theory

Because fairies are neither humans, nor deities (though some of them probably were, once), but somewhere in between, the ways that people interact with them are drawn from both human interaction and religious interaction. The functions of offerings discussed above fit into these two categories, although

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[5] "In the interests of the community, as well as for the Shaman's own profit, the evil tendencies of all the spirits and the machinations of wholly evil spirits must, however, be prevented, nullified, or rendered harmless, and this was done by presenting them with gifts" (Radin 176).

[6] "Sacrifice . . . can sometimes be mere homage free from ulterior motives" (Money-Kyrle 177).

there is bound to be some overlap. In the realms of human interaction we find gift exchange and reciprocity, and mechanisms for dealing with envy and the fear of envy. Among the forms of religious interaction are found communion or religious communication, offerings of prevention or supplication, and offerings of homage.

Gifts and Reciprocity

There are three basic types of reciprocity—generalized, balanced, and negative (Sahlins 145-149)—of which the first two are probably the most important to fairy offerings, although the third may play some part. Generalized reciprocity is the giving of gifts without expecting any immediate return, although it *is* expected that the giving and receiving will even out in the end (Sahlins 145-149). Many offerings to the fairies may perhaps be understood as generalized reciprocity, as one gives gifts in the hopes of establishing neighbourly relations with the fairies and eventually getting something in return. Balanced reciprocity has a more short-term and immediate expectation of return (Sahlins 145-149). Generalized reciprocity can become more and more immediate, eventually resulting in balanced reciprocity and a trading partnership between humans and fairies, where offerings always result in reciprocation. Negative reciprocity involves receiving without giving, or trying to receive more than is given (Sahlins 145-149). While this is not as applicable to

fairy offerings as the other two forms of reciprocity, there are some examples which seem to fit this type.

Envy Behaviour

Cultural control of envy takes four forms: concealment, denial, the sop or symbolic sharing, and true sharing (Foster 175). Concealment is an attempt to appear unenviable, while denial refers to protestations and acts which deny that there is any reason for envy (Foster 175-7). The sop is "a device to buy off the possible envy of the loser," and is also referred to as "symbolic sharing." With the sop, the person or being who may be envious is given a part of what one has in order that they will not take or destroy other things (Foster 177). True sharing is a "leveling influence which reduces the envy that is based upon differential access to desired things." It is "a significant sharing going well beyond symbolic sop levels" (Foster 179).

Communication/Communion

Offerings, especially sacrifices, can function as a means of communicating and/or communing with the spirits or deities. The sacrifice, in other words "*consists in establishing a means of communication between the sacred and the profane worlds through the mediation of a victim, that is, of a thing that in the course of the ceremony is destroyed*" (Hubert and Mauss 97, italics in original). Offerings of food, particularly where a deity is given a part of what the givers themselves eat, such as in a sacrificial banquet, "have the faithful and the god commune in one

and the same flesh [the food offered/eaten], to tie a knot of kinship between them" (Durkheim 341).

Preventative Offerings

Preventative offerings are given specifically to prevent negative events and are primarily magical in nature. Related to preventative offerings are offerings given to propitiate the fairies after one has offended them. Such offerings are preventative in that they can prevent further harm from occurring by re-establishing an appropriate relationship between humans and fairies.

Homage

In Hubert and Mauss' evolutionary scheme of the development of sacrifice, offerings given in homage are the final stage. Offerings of homage are those in which the offerers do not expect to gain anything in return for the offering (Hubert and Mauss 2). Such offerings are given as an expression of reverence or as part of a complex of religious actions.

Sources

The sources used in this study come in a variety of forms. I draw heavily on printed sources—books and articles—for information on both the folk tradition and Earth-Centred Spirituality. In general, printed sources for the folk tradition were written by outsiders, though this is not always the case. Books on Earth-Centred Spirituality, on the other hand, tend to be written by Earth-Centred practitioners themselves. There are relatively few works on Earth-

Centred Spirituality written by outsiders, perhaps because it was not an academically respectable subject until fairly recently. I also make use of archival sources for Newfoundland material.

The Internet offers a variety of sources, primarily, in this case, on Earth-Centred Spirituality. These range from extensive web sites to online and e-mail list discussions. As with the printed sources, these are usually written by the practitioners themselves.

In terms of face-to-face collection of data, I have spoken to many people regarding Newfoundland folk tradition, primarily in a conversational format. I have also drawn on extensive participant observation in Neo-Pagan communities.

Printed Sources: Folk Tradition

Printed sources of folklore are of a number of different types. Collections present stories with little or no editorial comment. The editing of the stories themselves can range from no editing at all, with the stories quoted exactly as told to the collector, to stories that are completely re-written. Regional studies present the folklore, or a particular aspect of the folklore, of an area and may include descriptions of customs, stories, and other related items. Other works present arguments using folklore as evidence for a particular position, such as David MacRitchie's use of fairylore to argue that the fairy tradition originated from the interaction of Celtic peoples with earlier inhabitants of the islands.

Some books, on the other hand, are discussions, or studies which look at a body of lore to see what patterns appear in the data itself, without attempting to impose anything on it. Most of the printed sources I used in this study were edited to some degree, but for my purposes, such editing is not as important as it might be to other studies. Although it is always good to have verbatim versions of stories which will usually provide more information, having a story or description re-told or heavily edited does not render it useless. Merely having a statement that a person gave a particular offering may not provide much information on the meaning or intent of the offering, but it still shows that the offering occurred, or was believed to have occurred. A more in-depth discussion of individual sources will be found in Appendix 1.

Printed Sources: Earth-Centred Spirituality

When looking at Earth-Centred Spirituality, it is useful to distinguish between New Age and Neo-Pagan sources (see Earth-Centred Spirituality, above). New Age books tend to be either accounts of personal experiences or how-to books, with some being a combination of the two. Accounts of personal experience describe events that happened to the author (or person on whose behalf the author is writing) and how those experiences affected their life. In general, these books are written to serve as examples to others who are having, or wish to have, similar experiences. How-to books are like recipe books on how

to make contact, or otherwise interact, with fairies. Individual sources are further discussed in Appendix 1.

Archival Sources

The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) is a rich source of Newfoundland folklore. Much of the information there is in the form of papers, written by students assigned to collect and analyze folklore as part of their university coursework. Many of these students are Newfoundlanders, and much of the lore they collected comes from their own home communities. While there is a great deal of fairylore in MUNFLA, a surprisingly small amount of it has to do with offerings. This seems to be a feature of Newfoundland fairylore, rather than any fault of the collectors. Archival sources are referenced by their accession numbers and page numbers in the form: (MUNFLA accession/page), for example (MUNFLA 86-392/4).

Online Sources

There is very little for the researcher of fairylore in the folk tradition on the World Wide Web. There are a number of sites that a person with a casual interest could find of value, but only a few for the serious researcher, and of these, most are either bibliographies or compilations of printed materials. A few web sites are maintained by cultural organizations, and describe the culture, sometimes including the folklore, of particular areas.

For someone interested in Earth-Centred Spirituality, on the other had, whether New Age or Neo-Pagan, the Web has a vast amount of useful information. Both organizations and individuals have web sites describing their own practices and experiences, though finding the specific information you are interested in can take a bit of searching.

Aside from the World Wide Web, there are other resources on the Internet. On Usenet, there are numerous New Age and Neo-Pagan newsgroups, some of which were used for collecting information for this study. This was accomplished by posting a query about people's beliefs and practices, along with an explanation of why I wanted to know. Examples of this correspondence are in Appendix 2. Similar to newsgroups, but somewhat more private, and functioning differently, are listservs or mailing lists. Lists tend to be more specialized than newsgroups, and there are many New Age and Neo-Pagan lists. I joined several of them and collected information partly by listening in, and partly by explaining who I was and what I wanted to know, as with the newsgroups.

Participant Observation and Interviews

I have been able to draw upon my past experiences in the Neo-Pagan communities of Victoria, British Columbia, and Calgary, Alberta while working on this study. I have also been able to use my more recent, but more peripheral, involvement in the Neo-Pagan community of St. John's, Newfoundland.

Although I cannot always directly quote people who have taught me in the past, my experiences in these communities has informed my work on Earth-Centred Spirituality in this study. In some places throughout this thesis I make statements about Earth-Centred Spirituality that may not be referenced. For these I have drawn upon my own experiences and knowledge, and thus I should outline my experience to give these statements more authority.

While interested in mythology and religion for as long as I remember, I did not become a student of Neo-Paganism until 1989. I studied for more than a year with Wiccan priestess Alison Skelton Faulkner, with some instruction from her father, the late poet, scholar, and Witch, Robin Skelton. In February, 1990 I was initiated as a Witch, and began to take on more of a role in leading and writing ritual. I continued to study Wicca, taking a particular interest in the history of Neo-Paganism in its many forms, for the next eight years. At this point, for reasons of my own, I began to look for a path which based itself on scholarship as well as on creativity, and found the Celtic Reconstructionist movement. The studying that I have done throughout the ten years I have been involved in the Neo-Pagan community took various forms, including reading a wide variety of printed materials, talking to and arguing with other members of the community, writing and leading rituals, and corresponding via mail and e-mail with other Neo-Pagans. I feel that more than ten years of experience and an emic perspective gives me some authority to make statements about Earth-

Centred Spirituality, although I do, of course, have my own biases and shortcomings. Where possible, I have referenced other sources for my statements.

Concluding Remarks

To explore the forms and functions of fairy offerings, and to compare folk and Earth-Centred practices, the information collected has been arranged according to the divisions used in discussing theory (above). Chapter 2 is an overview of the varied forms that giving offerings to the fairies can take. I also compare and contrast offerings in the folk tradition with offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality. In Chapter 3 I will look at fairy offerings in terms of Gifts and Reciprocity. This will primarily be an examination of how offerings to the fairies function as items of exchange within different kinds of reciprocal relationships. Envy behaviour and fairy offerings as envy-control mechanisms are discussed in Chapter 4. A few types of offerings, including first fruits, uncultivated land and house sharing, are examined in detail. Chapter 5 focuses on offerings as means of communication and communion. Offerings can function as bearers of messages, or may be related to communal meals or sacrificial feasts. Chapter 6 is about preventative offerings—offerings given to avert harm or to propitiate angered or offended fairies. I discuss offerings as homage and the particular importance of this kind of offering to practitioners of Earth-Centred Spirituality in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 is the conclusion, in which I

will summarize the other chapters and answer the questions posed in the Introduction: What forms do offerings to the fairies take? What are the functions of the offerings? How are Earth-Centred practices related to the folk tradition?

CHAPTER 2: FORMS OF OFFERING

Introduction

This chapter is meant as a broad overview of the types of offerings found in the Celtic areas, and in Earth-Centred spiritual practices that claim to be Celtic. Most of the offering types here will be further discussed in upcoming chapters.

Offerings to the fairies can be divided into two broad categories: food offerings and non-food offerings. Food offerings are the most common in the folk tradition, while non-food offerings dominate by a small margin in Earth-Centred Spirituality. I have grouped food offerings by region within the folk tradition. There are also certain kinds of food offerings which are considered inappropriate.

The range of non-food offerings within the folk tradition includes items of clothing, hospitality or living space, water for bathing, and animals. In Earth-Centred practices, non-food offerings are drawn from a wide spectrum of possibilities, according to the occasion. These may include small material objects like crystals and feathers, as well as non-material items like songs, poetry or music. In New Age or New Age-influenced practices, non-material offerings can even include energy or good intentions.

Food Offerings: Folk Tradition

Leaving a food offering for the fairies is usually a domestic event, occurring within the home. The offering is commonly left in the kitchen, either in a bowl on the table or hearth,[7] or in the case of some beverages, poured on the hearthstones. Less commonly, domestic offerings are left outside the door of the house. Non-domestic food offerings, left outside the domestic sphere in liminal areas closer to the fairy realm, may be placed in the barn, at the edge of the woods, or in the sea. These liminal offerings are usually given to specific beings or for specific purposes. Liminal offerings often consist of household provisions like bread, but certain kinds of fairies may require specific food items. Beverages are offered in a bowl or hollowed stone or are poured on the earth, since "all liquids spilled on the ground are supposed to go to their [the fairies'] use" (W. G. Stewart 124). In some cases, it is believed that the fairies eat the food itself, but in other cases it is thought that they "extract the spiritual essence[8] from the food offered to them, leaving behind the grosser elements." For that reason, food that has been put out for the fairies "is not allowed to be eaten . . . by man or beast, not even by pigs. Such food is said to have no real substance left in it. . . " (Evans-Wentz 44). Food that has had its essence consumed by fairies may even make humans and animals ill (Evans-Wentz 164).

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[7] George Laurence Gomme viewed the hearth as "the residence of the house-god" and thus the domestic altar (91-92).

[8] Kirk refers to this essence as "foyson" (50).

It is often important that offerings not be made obviously. Fairies are "shocked at anything approaching to the name of a bribe or *douceur*, yet . . . allow [their] scruples to be overcome if the thing be done in a genteel, delicate, and secret way" (Keightley 358). Though Keightley indicates that some types of food and drink were inappropriate as offerings, it is more important here to note the results of the way the food is given:

> . . . offer Brownie[9] a piece of bread, a cup of drink, or a new coat and hood, and he flouted at it, and perhaps, in his huff, quitted the place forever; but leave a nice bowl of cream, and some fresh honeycomb, in a snug private corner, and they soon disappeared, though Brownie, it was to be supposed, never knew anything of them. (Keightley 358)

In the one case the item is obviously offered, and in the other it is quietly left. Drawing attention to the offering can be seen as bragging on the part of the offerer, and gives it the connotation of charity rather than hospitality. Briggs writes about how, in the case of brownies, "the housewife was careful not to offer the tidbit to the brownie, only to leave it in his reach. Any offer of reward for its services drove the brownie away; it seemed to be an absolute TABOO" (*Dictionary* 46, caps in original). There are also indications in other stories that leaving an obvious offering, especially of clothing, constitutes payment, after which the employment of the fairy is at an end, and it departs.

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[9] A kind of fairy that is small and male, and takes care of the house or farm in which he dwells (Briggs, *Dictionary* 45).

Ireland

It has been said that that "the majority of present-day country people in Ireland still believe in magic and the little folk, or will say 'Give them a bit of milk, even if they don't exist'!" (Marron 137). Respect is shown to the Irish fairies by a variety of means, including "making offerings to them (as of the beestings[10] poured at the roots of fairy thorns or into forts)" (Ó Giolláin, "The Fairy" 202; see also Evans 303-304). Spence and Wood-Martin mention a stone in County Antrim that was well-known as a place for leaving offerings of food for the *grogan*,[11] a fairy in the North of Ireland (Spence, *British* 177). Specifically, "the food offering consisted of butter and oatmeal cakes" (Wood-Martin 307). Irish fairies might also be offered "pots of potatoes" (Evans-Wentz 37). In County Armagh, one of a pair of gate piers may be flat, "whereon, it is said, the fairies like to dance." There is no indication of whether or not the top of the pier is deliberately made flat as an offering to the fairies, but "people used to place the first two plates of champ—the Hallowe'en festival dish of mashed potatoes—on the top of the pier" (Evans 103).

May Day, like Hallowe'en, is an active time for fairies and "it [is] a wise precaution to pour milk on the threshold, or at the roots of a fairy thorn" for them on this day (Evans 272). MacManus refers to offerings for the fairies of

[10] The first milk from a newly lactating dairy animal.
[11] A brownie-like fairy (Briggs, *Dictionary* 206).

"milk or butter, honey or bread, and suchlike produce of the earth" (22). He elaborates on this custom further on in his book:

> It is well known to right-minded country people who have a sense of what is due to a neighbor that when one lives in fairy territory, even when one only spends a night there in passing, one should pay some friendly tribute to the unseen world about one before settling down for the night. And so the wise housewife will leave a sup of milk or a saucer of stirabout or a bit of soda bread beside the hearth or even perhaps outside the cottage door before she retires. (MacManus 100)

Despite the emphasis on "friendly tribute" it is also clear that Irish fairies will take whatever they like "if they do not get the tribute or attention they feel they are entitled to" (MacManus 100). When making butter in some parts of Ireland, as soon as the butter begins to form "a small ball of it is traditionally taken and smeared on the wall or tossed on top of the dresser to bring luck to the house" and as an offering to the fairies (Evans 305).

Although most stories of leprechauns[12] mention meeting them in liminal areas there is some "resemblance to the household familiar tradition" (Ó Giolláin, "The Leipreachán" 99), and sometimes "the Leprecawn is very domestic and . . . attaches himself to a family . . . and never deserting them unless driven away by some act of insolence or negligence" such as forgetting to give him his portion of food or giving him an inappropriate offering (McAnally 141). Attitude is also important in giving the leprechaun his portion "for, though he

[12] Usually described as a fairy shoemaker, though the term is also used "to represent all kinds of Irish fairies" (Briggs, *Dictionary* 264).

likes good atin' he wants phat he gets to come wid an open hand, an' 'ud laver take the half av a pratee that's freely given than the whole av a quail that's begrudged him" (McAnally 141). There is also a custom of placing furniture and food in a newly-built house, to see if the fairies would allow you to live there. If the food was gone and the crumbs swept away in the morning, then it was safe to move in; otherwise the house could not be occupied (Evans-Wentz 75).

Liquor was considered an appropriate offering in certain circumstances. For example, "you must 'never drain your wine-glass at a feast, nor the poteen flask nor the milk pail' if you wish to 'keep in with' the fairies" (Spence, *British* 89). This kind of offering may also be connected to a specific kind of event, as in the following example:

> When the old fishermen of Tory got a big catch of fish it was a custom to buy a fine bottle of whiskey. The bottle was handed to the oldest man of the crew to pass around, but before he gave a single drink to anyone of them, he would pour a drop into the glass and empty the glass onto the earth or, if he were in a boat, he would throw it into the sea for the wee gentry.
>
> Indeed, the people who made poteen on the island long ago had the same custom. Three drops from the first of the poteen used to be thrown out for the gentry. The one who did not do so would have no success nor luck with his distilling. (Ó hEochaidh 243)

An offering of the first of the poteen was especially important if the liquor was being made illicitly. As Ó Súilleabháin explains:

> When the latter [poteen] was being secretly distilled, the first drops of it were always thrown against the roof as a libation for Red Willie, one of the fairies, who would then lead the gaugers and police away; if, however,

> Willie was ignored in this regard, he would lead the police to where the still was located. (Ó Súilleabháin 83)

Scotland

Among the list of Scottish "custom, practice and belief" given in the commentary on Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth* is mentioned "[a] wooden bowl of cream left outside the kitchen window at night" (Sanderson 45). The *grugach*[13] is a Scottish fairy that looks after the cattle and who is given "nightly offerings of milk" (Spence, *British* 5). To facilitate these offerings there are hollow stones all over the Highlands into which milk for the *grugach* is poured (Spence, *British* 5). There is also mention of a custom, current in 1649, of pouring a portion of milk down a drain in order to "augment the quantity of milk from cows" (Dalyell 193). As the milk was poured the person giving the offering would say "God betuch ws to, they are wnder the yird [earth] that have as much need of it as they that are above the yird" (Dalyell 193). Although Dalyell, who first published the custom, saw this as a sacrifice to "infernal beings" (193), Spence points out that it is just as likely (perhaps more so) that it refers to an offering to the fairies as those spirits were commonly thought to dwell underground (Spence, *British* 177). Brownies[14] are also given milk, and usually left something in return for it (Briggs, *Vanishing* 55).

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[13] Generally, *gruagachs* are naked and shaggy male fairies who perform brownie-like tasks, though the word is sometimes used for other types of fairies (Briggs, *Dictionary* 206-207).
[14] Also called *broonies* in Scotland.

Clean water at night is also an important offering in Scotland because "the Fairies would suck the sleeper's blood if they found no water to quench their thirst" (Campbell 20). In the West Highlands when people drop crumbs, "they leave them for the Frids"[15] (Carmichael, quoted in Spence, *British* 89). It is thought that "if you were eating and food fell from you, it was not right to take it back, for the fairies wanted it" (Evans-Wentz 70). In the Aberdeenshire Highlands there are two hills where travelers propitiated the banshee[16] by putting cakes of barley-meal near a well on each hill (Evans-Wentz 437).

England

In England "[h]uman food seems to be necessary to them [the fairies]. . . , either poured as a libation or left out for them at night" (Briggs, *Fairies* 96). Not only was it necessary, but it was a "tithe that was considered due to the fairies" (Briggs, *Anatomy* 24). A woman in Staffordshire said that her mother "had counseled her to be good to the fairies" by giving an offering of "a piece of cake and a bottle of home-brewed ale" (Baker 75). A woman in Foxley, Hereford, in the early part of the twentieth century said "that her mother. . . so firmly believed in the existence of the little people that as long as she lived she left the door ajar, and food on the table at night" (Briggs, *Fairies* 98). Similarly, Burton

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[15] Elves (Spence, *British* 89). Briggs calls them "supernatural creature[s] which live[] under or inside rocks in the Highlands (*Dictionary* 182).

[16] A "death spirit" (Briggs, *Dictionary*14) and perhaps not a fairy at all (see Lysaght), though her name means "Fairy Woman" or "Woman of the Fairy Mound" (Ó Giolláin 147).

mentions "Hobgoblins[17] and Robin Goodfellows,[18] that would . . . grind corn for a mess of milk" or do other work, and were "adored with much superstition, with sweeping their houses, and setting of a pail of clean water, good victuals, and the like" (quoted in Keightley 291).

Brownies are also found in England, and often do chores for their chosen families. In return, the brownie

> is allowed his little treats. . . and the chief of these are knuckled cakes, made of meal warm from the mill, toasted over the embers and spread with honey. The housewife will prepare these, and lay them carefully where he may find them by chance. When a tidbit is given to a child, parents will say to him, "There's a piece wad please a Brownie." (Henderson 210).

Faulding commented on brownies "who will gratefully accept any dainties, curds or cream, which may be set aside for them" (14), and Harsenet wrote that a "*bowl* of curds and *cream* were . . . *duly set* out for Robin Goodfellow"(quoted in Keightley 291, italics in original).

Wales

Food and hospitality are important offering types in Wales. Welsh fairies were able to survive because "they would receive butter and milk and eggs from the farms" (Gwyndaf 177). A kind of fairy called a *bwca*[19] became friendly with a

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[17] Sometimes used to refer to "wicked goblin spirits" but more properly refers to benign, brownie-like fairies (Briggs, *Dictionary* 223).
[18] Robin Goodfellow is a hobgoblin frequently referred to in 16th and 17th century literature (Briggs, *Dictionary* 341).
[19] A Welsh brownie-like fairy (Briggs, *Dictionary* 56).

maid and did work for her in return for a bowl of sweet milk and a piece of bread (Briggs, *Dictionary* 56). In other stories, it is a *pwca*[20] who does the work for a basin of cream (Thomas 249). The *bwbach*[21] similarly does work, such as churning butter, if a bowl of fresh cream is left for him (Sikes 30). A man in one oft-repeated legend won a beautiful fairy bride after he was counseled to "assail the fair spirit with gifts of cheese and bread" (Keightley 410).

After being visited by a group of fairies who needed a place to wash and dress, a man in a Welsh story "used to keep his fire of coal balls burning all night long, leaving a vessel of water on the hearth, and bread with its accompaniments on the table. . ." as an offering to his nighttime visitors (Thomas 156-158). The *Bendith Y Mamau*[22] are fairies who "steal children, elf-ride horses and visit houses." They were given offerings of bowls of milk (Briggs *Dictionary* 21).

Cornwall

In Cornwall, "knockers"[23] were said to lead miners to rich veins of ore and warn them of cave-ins. Miners would "leave a portion of [their] underground meal—a piece of pasty, maybe—for one of their number to enjoy" (*Cornish*). A fairy known as *bucca*[24] was given offerings of fish, "left . . . on the sands" and at

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[20] The Welsh cognate of the English puck (Briggs, *Dictionary* 337).
[21] Another Welsh brownie equivalent (Briggs, *Dictionary* 55).
[22] "The Mother's Blessing," a name for fairies in Glamorganshire (Briggs, *Dictionary* 21).
[23] Cornish mine fairies (Briggs, *Dictionary* 254).
[24] Perhaps originally a minor deity, *bucca* is a fairy of the hobgoblin variety (Briggs, *Dictionary* 50).

harvest time a piece of bread and a few drops of beer spilled on the ground for him ensured good luck (Briggs, *Dictionary* 50). This particular fairy was often described as being the only one of his kind, and is probably the remnant of an old, local deity or *genius loci*. Water is also commonly left for the fairies at night (Briggs, *Personnel* 56).

Isle of Man

Customs on the Isle of Man include stories about fairies who favoured particular families or individuals, such as the *Liannan shee,*[25] or White Lady who "attached herself to old Harry Ballahane of Rushen Parish" (Gill 29). Ballahane apparently gave this being food, as it was said: "and when he would sit to meat wouldn't he be throwing her a sup of porridge" (Nelson MSS, quoted in Gill 29). There was also a man in Jerby who, when preparing his own meal, would "put spoons under the table for the fairies in order that they might help themselves" (Crellin 3). Leaving offerings was supposed to have been very important to the older people who "used always to leave bread and water in the house for the fairies when they went to bed at night, and if there was no water in the house, they would go out and fetch some rather than neglect doing this" (Crellin 3).

It was most important, when baking for the household, that one also baked "the fairies' share" (Gill 33). This was the *soddhag-rheynney*, or "dividing

[25] "The Lhiannan-Shee of Man is generally treated as a vampirish spirit who attaches herself to one man, to whom she appears irresistibly beautiful, but is invisible to everyone else" (Briggs, *Dictionary* 266).

cake," which was "an extra bit of dough baked in a flat cake, broken into small pieces, and scattered on the kitchen floor or just outside the house for the fairies to enjoy in the night-time" (Gill 33). The "hogmen" or "hillmen"[26] are "among the more formidable of the Manx fairy people," and were given propitiatory offerings of fruit (Briggs, *Dictionary* 225). One offering was given to a specific spirit: men in Port St. Mary would give offerings of rum to the *Buggane*[27] of *Kione Dhou*. These offerings were either poured into the sea from the boat as the men passed a cave at *Ghaw-Kione-Dhou* (Black Head Inlet) on their way to the fishing grounds, or was thrown from the top of the cliff (Gill 36).

Newfoundland

Although many Newfoundlanders' ancestors came from Ireland and the west of England, their traditions appear somewhat different. First of all, the custom of leaving offerings does not seem to be very widespread. In Barbara Rieti's book, *Strange Terrain*, there is mention of a woman who carried bread with her when going into the woods. This she "would place . . . on a nearby stone if she wanted a favour" (242). Similarly, the custom in Renews, on the Southern Shore, was to leave an offering of bread at a particular rock to prevent harm when trespassing on fairy territory, if such an area could not be avoided (Lawlor). A woman from that community also told me an anecdote about

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[26] Unpleasant Manx fairies (Briggs, *Dictionary* 225).

[27] "The Manx Buggane is a particularly noxious type of GOBLIN, adept at SHAPE-SHIFTING . . . ." (Briggs, *Dictionary* 51, caps in original).

picking apples with her mother. Some of the apples rolled out of reach under the tree, and her mother said to leave them as they ought to leave some for the fairies anyway (Lawlor). Gary Butler quotes an informant in French Newfoundland who said "When she would go out in the evening, she always carried something in her pocket to give to the fairies! Some [unclear] or lettuce!" (Butler 15, bracketed section in original).

Inappropriate Food Offerings

Occasionally, a fairy will find a gift of food inappropriate, either in the way it was left, or in what was left. A brownie in the Scottish Lowlands was offended by "a mess of bread and milk" that had been left out for him (Keightley 359), while an Irish *cluricaun*[28] took revenge on the cook for leaving him cold leftovers (369). A servant-girl in Wales who had the favour of a *pwca* once substituted "some stale crusts of barley bread and a bowlful of dirty water" for his usual bread and milk. The *pwca* responded to this mischievous prank by beating her the next morning (Thomas 249-50). In some cases, the inappropriate offering may be left out of ignorance, rather than mischief or malice, an in the following story of an Irish *púca*,[29] or puck, who appeared in the form of a dog:

> . . . it was the custom of the people of the castle [Slane Castle] to leave a dinner in it [a house made for the puck] every night. A new maid came to the castle and was told to leave the dinner in the house for the Puck and she asked what kind the Puck was and being told that the Puck was a

[28] An Irish solitary fairy (Briggs, *Dictionary* 77).
[29] The Irish cognate of the English puck. Puck is a kind of hobgoblin (Briggs, *Dictionary* 336).

> large dog she said to herself that it was a shame to see such a grand dinner going to a dog so she changed meat for potato skins and herring bones and left the dish for the Puck. When the Puck came and found the dinner he got vexed and went to where the maid was sleeping and got her by the heels and pulled her down a long flight of stone steps . . . . (Breatnach 109)

It is apparent from the above discussion that in giving an offering to the fairies both the item given and the manner in which it is given are important. Although a number of different items are appropriate for offering, ranging from baked goods to a portion of the family's meal, the quality of the item is crucial. A fairy must always be given the best portion, or at the very least an equal portion. One must never brag about giving an offering by announcing it—the offering must be placed quietly in the proper place for the fairy to find.

Food Offerings: Earth-Centred Spirituality

Within Earth-Centred Spirituality, the custom of leaving offerings for the fairies is a conscious revival, a tradition selected as being something worth doing. This is particularly so in Neo-Pagan communities, where a connection with the past is sought. A custom which honours the spirits of the earth fits in with other aspects of Earth-Centred belief. Despite being a fairly common practice, offerings to the fairies are not extensively treated in Earth-Centred spiritual literature, aside from a number a very recent fairy-specific books. For example, Janet and Stewart Farrar add at the end of their description of a

Samhain[30] ritual: "And if you, like us, are in the habit of putting out a little offering of food and drink afterwards for the *sidhe*[31] or their local equivalent—on this night of all nights, make sure it is particularly tasty and generous!" (136). Pauline Campanelli comments that, "for many, a portion of the cakes and the wine blessed during the sabbat rites is left for the spirits" (190). In another book, which had surprisingly little on the fairies for a book with "Fairy Lore" in the title, author Ann Moura writes:

> It was my mother who taught me to set out milk for the fairies . . . . I generally set out milk on days when it seems appropriate, and wine or Irish Whiskey on full moons, and sometimes these days we use amaretto [sic] or some other liqueur. (86)

She also instructs: "On Imbolc[32] eve, leave buttered bread in a bowl indoors for the fairies who travel with the Lady of Greenwood" (200). Echoing Kirk's comments about fairies consuming the "foyson" of a food offering, Moura recommends "next day, dispose of it [the offering] as the 'essence' will have been removed" (200).

Elien Evert Hopman, in her book on Druidism, makes several mentions of food offerings, drawing heavily on the precedent of folk tradition. At Candlemas,[33] she writes, "offerings of food or drink are placed in the new furrow or thrown into the fields (39), while at the spring equinox "offerings of food and

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[30] Hallowe'en, the Celtic new Year, and a festival honouring the ancestors.
[31] The Gaelic name for the fairies, used in Ireland and Scotland (Briggs, *Dictionary* 364).
[32] February 1 or 2, also called Imbolg, Iombolg, Oimelc and Brigid's Day.
[33] Another name for Imbolg.

milk are left for the fairies and other spirits who live in and around rocks and are responsible for the fertility of the land. A few fruits from the previous year's harvest are left for the nature spirits" (47). Beltaine[34] "is the time to offer libations and cakes to the guardian spirits of the flocks and herds" (54).

In her book specifically for Wiccans/Witches who want to contact and work with fairies, Edain McCoy writes that "milk, butter, bread, and honey are most appreciated. So [is] birdseed" (125). In her book on a similar topic, Kisma Stepanich described some of the implements used in Wiccan ritual. She writes: "In ceremony, the cup is used to offer the traditional cream" while "the pentacle[35] is used as a platter upon which are carried the cakes" which will be offered to the fairies (189-190).

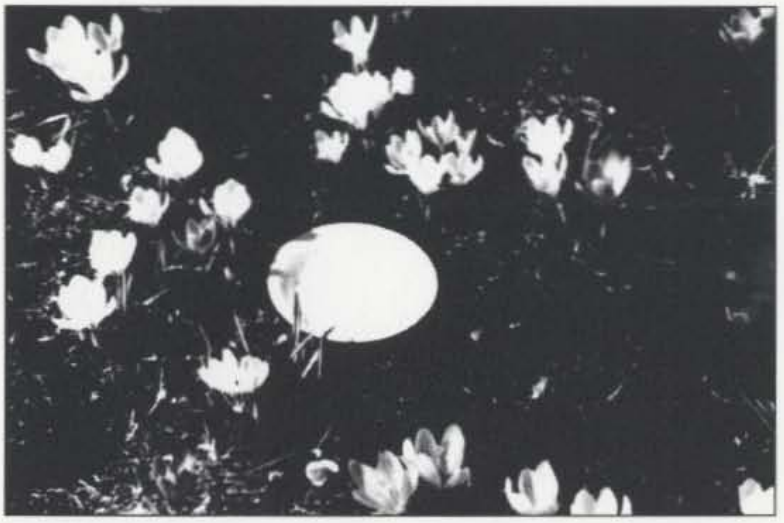

Figure 2 May Day Milk Offering, 1998 (photo by the author)

[34] May Day, May 1.
[35] A disk, often of wood or ceramic, with the design of an interlaced five-pointed star, or pentagram, on it.

Neo-Pagan offerings are almost always given outdoors, since fairies are generally thought to be spirits of nature or the elements. These offerings are sometimes left at the end of rituals and celebrations in which fairies are thought to have participated, or to which they may have been drawn. In cases like this the offerings are quietly left behind at the ritual site after the participants have gone if the ritual took place outdoors and might take the form of "beer and honey poured on the ground" (Wisteria, "Nature"). If the ritual was indoors, the offering is taken outside and left in a quiet place. On the eve of May 1, 1998, I participated in a brief Beltaine ritual, held outdoors in suburban St. John's, Newfoundland. After the unobtrusive celebration, we left a bowl of milk among the crocuses on the lawn (see Figure 2) and a chocolate chip cookie at the roots of a tree (see Figure 3) as tokens of appreciation for the fairies. In the ritual outline provided by Aisling, a Celtic Reconstructionist pagan association, offerings to the *sidhe* are given, along with a number of other offerings and prayers, before the main body of the ritual, rather than after. Instead of thanking the fairies, which may be included as part of the ending of a ritual, these offerings of grain and honey are given to welcome the *sidhe* "that they might worship with us." Nature spirits are given a separate offering of barley and maize "because we offer to both the native Spirits [of North America] and those who might have arrived with our ancestors" (AACT, "Ritual").

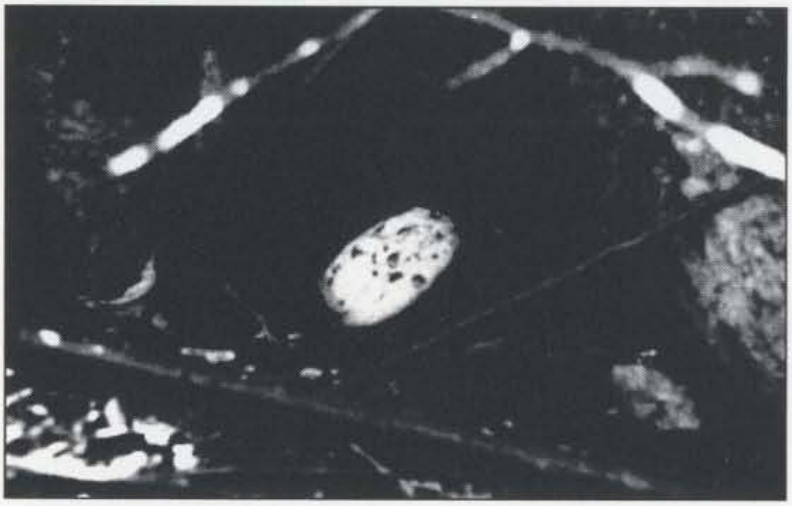

Figure 3 May Day Cookie Offering, 1998 (photo by the author)

Offerings may also be the object of a specific ritual conducted for just that purpose, and Stepanich states explicitly that "[i]t is important to inform the ally [fairy helper] that the crystal you have planted in the earth [or other offering] is a gift to their realm" (152). She considers this point important enough to remind readers to "[b]e sure to inform it [the fairy] that the [offering] is a gift" when describing another offering a few pages later (154). This is contrary to the folk idea that offerings should not be announced. It is possible that this is thought to be necessary as fairy-human interaction is believed to be rare in the modern world, especially in urban and suburban locations. Thus the fairies need to be alerted to the offering and to human willingness to develop a relationship with them.

An Internet newsgroup post to "alt.pagan" asking for advice on offerings was met with suggestions such as elderberry wine or water (McRae). On a list of "Celtic Samhain Customs" posted to "tx.religion.pagan" was "leave some fruits outside for the fairies to ensure a good crop in the next year" (Burton). In a similar post on "alt.religion.wicca" about the origins of Hallowe'en suggesting customs that might be appropriate for use today was listed: "an offering of food or milk . . . left for them on the steps of the house" (Moonstone).

Mushrooms can be either food or non-food, depending on the species. Since many people believe that even poisonous mushrooms are edible to fairies, mushroom offerings are discussed here. Regarding a query on the "magickal"[36] uses of mushrooms, a poster on "alt.religion.wicca" replied in part:

> Perhaps a good use for wild mushrooms would be as an offering to the Fey, or as altar decoration at Mabon[37] or Samhain, as many mushrooms are out during the autumn, as well as thriving on decay and leaf-mould, which could be symbolic of the waning of the year, and the surcease of abundance as the Cycle passes into the fallow season. (Stormcrow)

Following folk tradition, some Earth-Centred Spirituality offerings to fairies are given in a domestic context. For example, web-site author Wisteria describes a "hob"[38] in her recipe section and says, "Leave a little offering of sweet milk and bread on your stove for the hobs to encourage their presence"

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[36] A term used by Neo-Pagans and ritual magicians to distinguish "real" magic from stage magic or illusion.
[37] The Autumnal Equinox, usually conceived of as a harvest festival.
[38] A generic name for the group of normally beneficent fairies which includes brownies (Briggs, *Dictionary* 222).

("Fairy"). The stove in this example is a stand-in for the hearth, since few modern kitchens have fireplaces. Wisteria also provides a list of recipes for foods that can be used as offerings to the fairies, including stuffed mushrooms, elder flower fritters and "noodles in faery butter" (Wisteria "Fairy").

Food offerings to the fairies in Earth-Centred Spirituality include all of the kinds of offerings found in the folk tradition, such as milk, ale, and specially baked items, as well as number not found there, including mushrooms, wine, chocolate and any number of other edible goods.

Non-Food Offerings: Folk Tradition

While food offerings are the most prevalent form of offering in the folk tradition, certain non-food items are also given, often in specific circumstances. As with food offerings, the manner in which the item is offered is crucial.

One of the most common non-food offerings to fairies in the legends, though I have not seen it in any personal accounts or descriptions of customs, is that of clothing, either a single item or an entire suit. Such a gift usually causes the fairy to depart, as in a story of a Manx *fenoderee*[39] who carried all the stones for a new house up Snafield Mountain. The gentleman who was having the house built wanted to show his gratitude, and "ordered a fine suit of clothes to be made for him [the *fenoderee*]" whereupon the fairy recited a rhyme, as is usual

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[39] A Manx brownie-like fairy (Briggs, *Dictionary* 170).

in these cases, and "went wailing away" (Briggs, *Dictionary* 170). In Wales a woman "seeing a little fairy lady poorly clad, had, in the kindness of her heart, given her a gown." The fairy "was furiously angry and tore it to shreds" (Thomas 165).

Sometimes the fairy takes offense at the offering, and in other cases the clothes are seen as wages or final payment for work done, whereupon the employment term is at an end. Another explanation is that most domestic fairies are raggedly dressed, and the new suit of clothes means they can go off to the fairy court (Briggs, *Dictionary* 328). Like the *fenoderee* of Mannin, the brownie is reputed to be in "exile from the Fairy Court and to desire his fine new clothes so that he may prank it again among the revellers" (Briggs, *Vanishing* 49). While most gifts of clothing seem to have caused the fairy they were offered to to leave, some fairies were given clothing instead of, or in addition to, the food items described above. In Lincolnshire, a brownie "was annually given a linen shirt," an offering which did not offend him, until "a miserly farmer . . . left him out one of coarse sacking" (Briggs, *Dictionary* 46). There are a few other stories in which the fairies will accept clothing—perhaps it is all in the way it is offered. The following example is from Wales:

> A shepherd of Cwm Dyli used to spend the summer with his sheep on the mountain. Waking up one morning in his hut he saw a little fairy mother washing a baby close to his bed, and he noticed that she had scarcely anything wherewith to clothe the shivering little creature. Stretching out his arm to reach a ragged old shirt, he threw it to her, saying, "Take that,

> poor thing, and wrap it around him." She took the shirt thankfully, old as it was, and departed. Every evening after this, as regularly as clockwork, the shepherd found a silver coin in an old clog in his hut, and this lasted for many years. (Thomas 163-164).

Offerings of hospitality, or the sharing of one's home or land, is another common offering type. Such offerings can consist of welcoming a fairy in and sharing a meal, as in the story of a Manx man who left spoons out for the fairies to use (Crellin 3) or the Scottish shepherd who spent the evenings sharing porridge and revelry with a group of "little people" (Campbell 73). In a story from North Wales, a miller accidentally leaves out a tubful of water, and after seeing a fairy use it for bathing, made it a nightly offering (Parry-Jones 14-17). In Cornwall, some people leave a fire burning for the fairies , especially on stormy nights (Evans-Wentz 182), and one man left a hole in the wall of his house as a door for the piskies[40] (Gomme 69-70). Making the house tidy and ready for visitors at night is another form of offering (Evans-Wentz 138).

This type of offering can also involve leaving a part of one's house to the fairies at night. An example of this is the story of the family in the Isle of Man who, alerted by the arrival of a white dog, would retire upstairs to bed every night and allow the fairies to have the use of the rest of the house (Evans-Wentz 122). This is probably one of the reasons that the woman of the household would

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[40] A small fairy found in Cornwall. In Somerset and Devon they are called pixies or pigsies (Briggs, *Dictionary* 328).

ensure that the living area was tidied and the fire properly tended before retiring for the night. Although it is not specified whether or not the human hosts could be present, the *Fir Darrig*[41] demands hospitality as an offering (Croker 397). This Irish fairy

> has many traits of resemblance with the Scotch Brownie, the German Kobold,[42] and the Hobgoblin of England . . . . They all love cleanliness and regularity, are harbingers of luck, and in general . . . are, like cats, attached to the house rather than to the family. (Croker 400)

The area of uncultivated land set aside on some Scottish and Irish farms, known as the "Goodman's Croft," is a similar kind of offering. Untouched land is generally recognized as being fairy property, and by leaving a part of the farm for the fairies use, a farmer can attract their goodwill, or at least avoid their displeasure (Spence, *British* 26). A similar tradition in Newfoundland is that of building houses for the fairies. People, usually younger people, build small houses in the woods, using only natural objects. An effort is made to make the fairy house as pleasing as possible, and in "a place a fairy would like," so the fairies will prefer to use it, instead of taking over human houses (Hood). Avoiding tampering with fairy land is a related offering, such as in a Scottish story where two ploughboys "carefully avoided disturbing a fairy thorn tree" (Menefee 176).

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[41] Fear Dhearg is thought to be a human captive of fairyland (Briggs, *Dictionary* 178). The term is Gaelic and means "Red Man."

[42] Kobold generally refers to a German brownie-like household spirit, but can also be used to refer to a mine spirit like the knocker of Cornwall (Rose 182-183).

Another common offering is water as a non-food item, generally for bathing purposes. In Cornwall, *muryans*[43] visit houses at night, "and if water is not left out for them they wash their babies in the milk" (Briggs, *Personnel* 56). In Devon, women leave out a basin of water for the pixies (Keightley 299). On the Isle of Man "a tub or pail of clean water was always left for them [the Good People] to bathe in" (Keightley 397-8).

Help can also be given as an offering, though it may be more of a general indication of a person's good nature than a deliberate offering. A story from Wales shows the results of helping the fairies:

> A farmer was rounding up his sheep in Cwmllan when he heard the sound of weeping. As a general rule, only human beings weep noisily, and as the farmer had not observed any human beings in the vicinity he was considerably surprised. He went in the direction from which the sound came. For some time he could not discover who was causing it, but after a bit he saw a wee little lass lying on a narrow ledge of rock on the face of a great precipice, and sobbing as if her heart would break. He went to her rescue, and with great difficulty extricated her from her dangerous position. No sooner had he brought her to safety, than a little old man appeared. "I thank thee, " said he, "for thy kindness to my daughter. Accept this in remembrance of thy good deed," handing a walking-stick to the farmer. The farmer took it, and the moment it was in his hand both the wee lass and the little old man disappeared from his sight.
>
> The year after this every sheep in the farmer's possession had two ewe-lambs, and this continued for many years. His flocks during all this time were singularly free from accident and disease. Sheep-stealers were always frustrated in their evil designs upon them: birds of prey never ventured near to them to pick out the eyes of the young lambs: even when a murrain devastated other flocks, these were untainted: when they were

[43] *Muryan* is the Cornish word for ant. It was used to describe fairies who had "dwindl[ed] down until they became the size of ants" (Briggs, *Dictionary* 304-305).

> buried under snow-drifts in winter, and had to be dug out, they seemed better rather than worse for their experiences: and their wool was finer than that of any other sheep in the country. The farmer became rich, and all envied him. (Thomas 126)

Whether or not the help was given as a conscious offering, it was treated the same way by the fairies—the man gave them something, and they did something in return. In this story, as in many others like it, the man loses the prosperity brought to him by the fairies, though not because he offended them. He simply lost the walking-stick in a storm-raging river, and all the wealth was lost by morning. Helping the fairies can also take the form of mending a broken fairy implement, as in the stories referred to as "The Broken Peel" (see Menefee, especially 173).

Another offering, not always given intentionally, but accepted nonetheless, is music. A Welsh fiddler played his favourite tune when passing through fairy territory and "[w]hen he passed the greensward where the fairies used to revel he felt his fiddle suddenly becoming very heavy, and he heard a rattling and a tinkling inside it." Upon arriving home, he found his fiddle filled with enough money to pay his rent, which he would not have been able to pay otherwise. Although the money later turned to cockleshells, it was not until after the fiddler has paid his rent and had a receipt to prove it (Thomas 128-130). Although the fiddler never actually saw the fairies, they enjoyed his music, accepted it as an offering, and helped him out in return.

Sacrifice of animals seems to be seldom required, although at least one story indicates that it could be. In Leitrim, Ireland a cottager was told by a fairy man[44] that

> elfin treasure could be acquired, but that to gain it a life must be lost: "a dog or a cat would do." The seeker was to raise his hearthstone and place the victim beneath it. The man followed his instructions, found a crock of gold in the cavity, and was about to replace the hearthstone without making the necessary sacrifice, when his daughter fell in and was never seen again! (Spence, *British* 178)

I also found one mention of animal sacrifice on the Isle of Man where "a woman . . . remembered seeing a live sheep 'burnt for a sacrifice' on May Day" (Spence, *British* 177). Although it is not specified that this sacrifice was for the fairies, Spence speculates that it probably was, as "systematic efforts were made to protect man and beast against elves and witches" on this day (*British* 177, quoting Rhys). Spence's source for this anecdote, J. Rhys, does not think that this was a yearly custom, but simply an event which occurred once and became confused as an annual Old May Day custom by an elderly informant (Rhys 307-8). There are no mentions of human sacrifice but, following the idea of fairies as diminished gods, Spence suggests that changeling stories may be the legendary remnants of such offerings (*Fairy* 253).

As with food offerings, both the quality of a non-food offering and the manner in which it is left can determine whether it is acceptable or not. Clothing

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[44] Someone who knows a great deal about the fairies and how to deal with them.

may or may not be a proper offering, depending on the fairy and the circumstances. If clothing is accepted, it must be either of fine quality, or of the proper type, and must be left unobtrusively. Hospitality as an offering must be given freely, even if the givers don't know for sure that their visitor is a fairy. Not only must the house be shared, but it must be properly prepared to receive guests. With all non-food offerings, the item must be the right item and left in the right place, with the right attitude, or else one may as well not leave an offering at all.

Non-Food Offerings: Earth-Centred Spirituality

Among practitioners of Earth-Centred Spirituality, non-food offerings are at least as common as food offerings, and probably somewhat more common. Some of the other offerings suggested to the man who inquired on "alt.pagan," previously discussed, included the advice "Make an offering of your seed" (Shem). Since the offering was to be made to the fairy of an elder tree that the man needed to prune, one reader made the following suggestion: "Chip the prunings up and replace it either as mulch or add it to the compost pile and add the compost when it is ready to the roots of the tree. Use the wood withes [sic] to make bird houses you hang in the branches" (Profit). Druid Ellen Evert Hopman recommends that one "sprinkle some [vervain] on the garden as an offering to the elementals and other nature spirits" (111). This is especially good at

Midsummer when sage and tobacco, given in the same manner, are also good "as an offering to the fairies and elementals who help it [the garden] grow" (66).

One of the Beltane (May Day) rituals of the *Ár nDraíocht Féin*[45] includes an offering to the *sidhe* in the form of a "fairy tree" to which strips of cloth, ribbons, and "sparklies" are attached (Corrigan "ADF," see Appendix 2). This offering was probably inspired by the May Tree of folk custom as well as the rag bushes found at many holy wells. Incense is also a common offering in Neo-Pagan circles, and scents may be blended especially for the fairies or chosen because the plants they are made with are appropriate. I have a recipe for "elfin incense" that I copied down many years ago, from a book I no longer recall, which would be considered a good offering, and a friend of mine includes a special incense as part of her Hallowe'en offering (MacNeill, personal communication). Several online "metaphysical," New Age and Neo-Pagan stores offer fairy blends of incense and scented oil especially for use as offerings to attract the fairies.

Small natural and handmade objects are also commonly given as offerings. Kisma Stepanich, author of *Faery Wicca*, recommends such things as decorated feathers (153), crystals (152), handmade and decorated boats (154), and things which can be burned (155) as offerings for the elemental fairies of air, earth, water and fire, respectively. Similarly, Katlyn recommends gifts of

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[45] "Our Own Druidism," an American Druid organization.

feathers for the fairies of the east and air, flint for the south/fire fairies, a seashell for west/water fairies, and a crystal for the fairies of the north and earth, in her book, *Faery Call* (114), while Edain McCoy writes that precious stones are good offerings in almost any instance (125) and Wisteria suggests tobacco ("Nature").

Songs, poetry and music can also be given as offerings (Shallcrass 64), either physically—written on paper and left in an appropriate place—or non-physically—sung, read or played aloud. New Age offerers may give "light" or "energy" or objects imagined into existence on the astral plane, while in an altered state of consciousness (see O'Rush 36; for examples of this kind of offering in Neo-Paganism see Stepanich 163 and 167, McCoy 155 and Wolfe 12).

In Earth-Centred Spirituality, as in the folk tradition, both the item offered and the manner in which it is given must be appropriate. Although there is a wider range of possible offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality, items for offerings are carefully chosen to suit the occasion. It is also important that an offering be something of value, and not something that the offerer decides they do not want any more. Stale cookies and the chocolates left in the bottom of the box because no one likes them do not make appropriate offerings (see Chapters 4 and 7 for discussions of appropriate offerings). While many Earth-Centred offerings are surrounded by ritual, it is not the ritual itself that is significant in giving the offering, but the attitude one has while giving. The offering should be

given with feelings of generosity and appreciation, and left in a place that the fairies like to be.

Conclusion

The forms of offerings given by people in the folk tradition and Earth-Centred Spirituality are similar in many cases. Many practitioners of Earth-Centred Spirituality have borrowed the folk repertoire of offerings and have expanded on it with a wide variety of other offering types. Despite the similarities, offerings in the folk tradition are more often food than non-food. Within the food category, most offerings are of baked goods coupled with milk or water, and within the non-food category offerings of hospitality are most common. In Earth-Centred practice, however, the emphasis tends to be on non-food offerings, though food offerings are also quite common. Food offerings tend to consist of a portion of whatever the participants at a gathering are having, while non-food offerings are most commonly small natural objects.

Despite the physical similarity of the offerings themselves, the manner of leaving them is quite different. Folk offerings tend to be left quietly and unobtrusively, while Earth-Centred Spirituality offerings are usually surrounded by ritual or left at the closing of ritual not specifically related to the offering itself. In the following chapters we will see that the functions and motivations behind the offerings also differ.

CHAPTER 3: GIFTS AND RECIPROCITY

Introduction

Sometimes the giving of offerings to the fairies functions as one half of a system of reciprocal exchange. In both the folk tradition and Earth-Centred spiritual practices, the emphasis is on establishing good reciprocal relations, though the reasons behind the desire to establish such relationships are different in the two categories. In the folk tradition, it may be an attempt to remain on good neighbourly terms with potentially dangerous beings, while in Earth-Centred practice it is more a way of gaining magical allies or establishing some kind of direct connection with nature. These different reasons will be explored in this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter 1, fairies can be viewed as minor deities or at the very least as supernatural beings cognate with deities. Reciprocal relations between humans and fairies may be modeled on those between human neighbours or on those between humans and deities.

Although fairies are most definitely not humans, they are beings with which humans share the world, and human-human interaction can serve as one model on which to base human-fairy interaction. Marcel Mauss said, in *The Gift*, that "contracts are fulfilled and exchanges of goods are made by means of gifts . . . . In theory such gifts are voluntary but in fact they are given and repaid under

obligation" (1) (but see chapter 7). Reciprocity consists of "giving and taking, without the use of money" and ranges from true gift giving to equal exchange to cheating" (Ember and Ember 264; cf. Sahlins 145-149). Note that "the use of money" should be understood as buying and selling, and that money as a gift can and does figure in reciprocity and gift exchange. Gift-giving and reciprocity are not always the same, although there is the general conception that gifts bring with them an obligation to reciprocate. According to Mauss the generous offering of a gift is the form taken by some types of exchange, but the behaviour surrounding such gifts is actually "formal pretence and social deception," hiding what is basically a self-interested economic exchange (Mauss 1). He goes on to say that

> what they exchange is not exclusively goods and wealth, real and personal property, and things of economic value. They exchange rather courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts; and fairs in which the market is but one element and the circulation of wealth but one part of a wide and enduring contract. (Mauss 3)

This human-human model of interaction can be seen in offerings to fairies and their results. As Menefee says, "human help [to the fairies] is generally seen as what one might expect of a good neighbour" (178). Both the human and fairy partners in the exchange can provide labour rather than material goods. Hospitality and/or privacy may be offered to the Good People, and luck or good fortune may be received in return. A human might offer his or her musical

talents at a fairy gathering, and be rewarded with extraordinary skill. The unstated rules of reciprocity dictate that exchange disguised as gift giving "carries with it the obligation to repay gifts received" as well as "the obligation to give presents and the obligation to receive them" (Mauss 10). In fairylore this implies that offerings must be left whether or not something has been, or will be, given in return, and that fairy gifts should never be refused.

Another model on which human-fairy interaction can be based is that between humans and their deities. This model is particularly appropriate since many fairies are or were deities of some sort, and all fairies are somehow more than human. Malefijt comments that in both secular and religious contexts items can be offered "in order to express gratitude, to celebrate specific events, to pay homage or tribute, to expiate wrongs, to establish good relationships," and for many other reasons, and may not always imply equal reciprocity (Malefijt 210). Gift giving for homage or tribute will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Offerings and sacrifice are often part of a formula wherein a particular result is expected in return for a specific offering—a kind of ritualized exchange between the human and divine (or supernatural). With the deities, but also applicable to fairies, Mauss said "it was particularly necessary to exchange and particularly dangerous not to" but "with them exchange was easiest and safest" (Mauss 13). Durkheim describes offerings as

> a mutually reinforcing exchange of good deeds between the deity and his worshippers. The rule *do ut des,*[46] by which the principle of sacrifice has sometimes been defined, is not a recent invention by utilitarian theorists; it simply makes explicit the mechanics of the sacrificial system itself. (350-351)

As discussed in Chapter 1, sacrifice is a specific kind of offering. Just as "deity" is cognate with "fairy" in the statements above, so "sacrifice" is cognate with "offering."

The following sections will illustrate how many offerings to the fairies are part of a system of reciprocal exchange. In some cases giving the proper offering brings about an expected result, while in other cases the offering is given in return for a favour or gift already received.

Types of Reciprocity

Before applying a model of reciprocity to fairy offerings we must first examine the different kinds of reciprocity. These types will also serve to organize the examples I discuss in this chapter.

There are three basic types of reciprocity—generalized, balanced, and negative (Sahlins 145-149)—of which the first two are probably the most important to fairy offerings, although the third may play some part. Generalized reciprocity is "gift giving without any immediate or planned return," in which it is expected that all will even out in the end (Ember and Ember 264; cf. Sahlins 145-149). Balanced reciprocity may involve labour or

[46] "I give in order that you might give."

work in addition to food or other goods and "is more explicit and short-term in its expectations of return than generalized reciprocity." There may be a time limit on repayment, and the motivation is usually economic (Ember and Ember 265; cf. Sahlins 145-149). Negative reciprocity "is an attempt to take advantage of another, to get something for nothing or for less than its worth" (Ember and Ember 267; cf. Sahlins 145-149). While this is perhaps not as applicable to fairy offerings as the other two forms of reciprocity, there do seem to be some examples which fit this type. In the following sections each type of reciprocity is examined along with examples of offerings to the fairies which fit each type.

Generalized Reciprocity

Many offerings to the fairies can be understood as generalized reciprocity, as one gives gifts in the hopes of establishing neighbourly relations with the fairies and eventually getting something in return. An informant of Lady Gregory said: "If we know how to be neighbourly with them, they would be neighbourly and friendly with us" (quoted in Arensberg 167-8). In addition to providing a system of economic exchange, reciprocity ensures peace between the trading parties. As Mauss wrote, "In order to trade, man [sic] must first lay down his spear" (80). This makes a reciprocal relationship particularly important in dealing with fairies, as they are always potentially in opposition to humans.

Generalized Reciprocity: Folk Tradition

There are numerous instances in the folk tradition where offerings are made to the fairies on the chance that they might reciprocate because, as McAnally wrote in his book of Irish supernatural stories, "Kindly disposed fairies often take great pleasure in assisting those who treat them with the proper respect" (100). A woman in Foxely, Hereford, England "so firmly believed in the existence of the little people that as long as she lived she left the door ajar, and food on the table at night. In return for which they left her money sometimes, and always silver money too" (Briggs, *Fairies* 98). The fairies were not obligated to pay the woman every time she left food for them, but they sometimes did so. The fact that it is mentioned that the money was silver implies a high value, so presumably it made up for the trouble the woman took each night. A similar instance, from Devon, is as follows:

> [T]he good dames in this part of the world are very particular in sweeping their houses before they go to bed; and they will frequently place a basin of water beside the chimney-nook, to accommodate the Pixies, who are great lovers of water; and sometimes they requite the good deed by dropping a piece of money into the basin. (Keightley 299)

Again, there is no need for immediate compensation by the fairies, but their occasional gift of money makes leaving an offering for them worthwhile. Spence mentions that offerings of milk were given by milkmaids in Western Scotland and in some of the Hebrides islands, and "sooner or later, it was thought the offering would be repaid 'a thousandfold'" (*Fairy* 315). The following narrative

was collected in Newfoundland: "If I caught a butterfly when I was a child I would put it under a rock and hope that the fairies would change it into money. White butterflies were supposed to change into silver coins and orange ones into copper coins" (MUNFLA FSC 76-109/5). This example is an attempt by a child to establish a reciprocal relationship with the fairies, by offering them butterflies and hoping to get money in return.

In addition to leaving offerings in the hopes of getting money in return, food may be left for fairies who help out around the house. Faulding commented on brownies "who come to help and to pinch or punish the slattern, who will gratefully accept any dainties, curds or cream, which may be set aside for them" (14). This is similar to stories discussed in the next section as balanced reciprocity, but in this case the "payment" is not specific, and may not even be required. A poor man in Staffordshire who was unable to pay for the repair of his plough "went to look at the implement and found that it had been mended," all because "[h]is wife had always been good to the fairies and left food for them" (Menefee 188).

Wood-Martin writes that "the fairies often reward good earthly musicians in the manner they think will be most acceptable" (20). As evidence, he cites a story from Thomas Crofton Croker about a hunchback who overheard the fairies

singing *"Da Luan, Da Mort,*[47] *Da Luan, Da Mort, Da Luan, Da Mort,"* and improved upon the song by adding *"augus Da Cadine."*[48] As a reward, the fairies removed the hump from the man's shoulders (Croker 14-16). One must be especially careful when giving an offering of this sort, however, as it is easy to offend the fairies and rudeness is not tolerated. Another hunchback who heard the story told by the first sought out the fairies and heard them singing the improved song. Thinking to gain a reward, he jumped in and added *"augus Da Hena."*[49] To punish his rudeness, the fairies not only declined to remove his hump, they also gave him the first man's hump in addition (Croker 18-20; see also Colum 211). This story also gives an excellent example of the importance of the manner in which an offering is given. The first man gave a new song from a genuine sense of wanting to help, and he waited until the fairies had paused in their singing to give the offering, and so he was rewarded. The second man gave the song out of a desire to profit from it, and rudely interrupted the fairies' song with his own, and so he was punished.

A case in which the exchange seems to develop from generalized (though perhaps originally accidental) reciprocity into a definitely more balanced form is presented in the following story:

> There is a story told of a miller in North Wales, Robert Francis, that at the time of the year when he was drying corn he used often to stay up

[47] *"Da Luan, Da Mort"* is phonetic Irish for "Monday, Tuesday" (Croker 21).
[48] "And Wednesday."
[49] "And Thursday."

> late at night to attend to the fire, as a constant heat was essential. One night he happened to leave there a large vessel full of water, and on visiting the mill just before retiring he was surprised to see two little people there whom he took to be a man and wife busily having a bath. Being a kind-hearted man, and not wishing to disturb them, he went back and told his wife. "Oh," she said, "they are the fairies." After the lapse of some time he returned to the mill, but they were gone; they had, however, left the place perfectly clean and in good order, and in addition had left behind them a sum of money. This was not the end, they came again—and brought their friends with them—for the miller had now decided to leave that bathful of water there every night. As their number increased, so did the sum of money left behind. This went on for a long time to the benefit of both parties, until one day the miller was foolish enough to tell his neighbours all about it. At once their visits and the money ceased. One invariable condition of their help and friendship was absolute secrecy. (Parry-Jones 14-17)

Additionally, this story shows that it is not only a bathful of water that is being offered, it is also secrecy or privacy. When that privacy ends, the reciprocal relationship ends, just as if the miller had ceased to leave the water. The gift of privacy can be seen as an extension of hospitality—when a guest's privacy is intruded on, the laws of hospitality are broken. Hospitality is a key issue in dealing with fairies, and we will see it come up again and again in this study (see especially Chapter 4).

These stories clearly show the principles of generalized reciprocity at work. In the examples from Hereford and Devon, offerings left do not always bring about an immediate return as would be expected in a balanced system. Instead, the fairies leave money every once in a while, and the higher value of the money eventually evens out with the value of the offerings left, and may

even exceed it. Many stories of brownies doing work in the house indicate a balanced reciprocal relationship. In the example quoted here, however, food is left for fairies who sometimes do work, and the fairies work for whatever is left out for them, indicating a more casual and generalized relationship. The final example, about the Welsh miller, illustrates how a generalized relationship—leaving water by accident and receiving a clean mill and money in return—can develop into a more balanced relationship—the miller decides to put out water every night, and every time they visited, the fairies left money.

Generalized Reciprocity: Earth-Centred Practices

The focus of Earth-Centred practices seems to be on balanced rather than generalized reciprocity, but there are a few books which recommend leaving offerings to help establish neighbourly relations or because the fairies *might* decide to help out or give their blessing in return. Among the information on "Faery Magick" on a New Age influenced website was the following instruction:

> When you do seek them out, be sure to leave behind you a bowl of fresh milk, sweet breads and cakes, strawberries or the current seasonal fruit, pats of real butter and even wine and ale. This ensures the goodwill of the Wee Ones and they are more likey [sic] to help you out next time. (Cooper)

This kind of offering is made during the attempt to establish a reciprocal relationship with the fairies, in the hopes that one or more of them will be pleased enough to take on the role of magical helper (cf. Cooper). Another

example, which also illustrates a connection between the folk and Earth-Centred traditions, is the following:

> One group, the Brownies, wear brown (or have brownish skin), and prefer a friendly house or cottage to the forest. If they are treated well (and they don't ask for much, just a bit of bread and some cream), they will make themselves useful around the house and be very protective of the family. (Campanelli 67)

The figure of the brownie and the offering left for him has been borrowed entirely from folk tradition, but his function has been adapted to the Earth-Centred Spirituality idea of a supernatural protector which in turn originated in Western occultism. A similar suggestion deals with gaining fairy blessings for your garden:

> If you have a garden or farm that you wish to have benevolent faeries bless with fertility, then leave their favorite foods out in the garden for them. Do not toss these out like you might for an animal. Instead, set them out on a plate or in a bowl and say aloud that this is a gift to the blessed faeries of the garden. (McCoy 131)

Both of the above examples not only describe offerings to attract the goodwill of the fairies, but they also give an indication of the attitude necessary for making a successful offering. The fairies must be "treated well" according to one example, while the other example specifies that fairy offerings must not be left as though feeding an animal. Interestingly, this second example differs significantly from the folk tradition that it purports to draw upon (McCoy xii-xiv). In the folk tradition it is not uncommon to leave offerings on the ground, and sometimes even to break them up first, as with the "dividing cake" of the Isle of Man (see

Chapter 2). There are almost no mentions of saying anything when giving an offering in the folk tradition—it is assumed that the fairies will know it is for them and it is considered rude or otherwise offensive to announce an offering (see Chapter 2). This example illustrates the superficial use of folk examples sometimes found in Neo-Pagan practice.

As with the folk tradition, some Earth-Centred offerings are left in the hopes that the fairies will be pleased and will grant blessings and favours to the offerer. It is assumed that when and if the fairies decide to reciprocate, whatever they give in return will make leaving the offerings worthwhile—that the giving and receiving will even out. Many practitioners of Earth-Centred Spirituality would consider the simple presence of the fairies to be a gift worth any offerings they could leave and more.

It often seems that generalized reciprocity in both the folk tradition and Earth-Centred Spirituality is carried out, in some instances, in the hopes that the giving will not only even out, but will develop into a more balanced relationship. The giving and receiving of generalized reciprocity can become more and more equal and immediate until it results in balanced reciprocity.

Balanced Reciprocity

It is perhaps the case that, in offerings to fairies, generalized reciprocity is the first step on the way to balanced reciprocity, or a kind of trading partnership between humans and fairies, where people leave gifts and offerings and can

always expect something in return. Leaving milk and bread for a brownie who does the housework at night may be such a relationship (for examples see Baker 75 and Keightley 289-91). In other words, some offerings to fairies may be generalized reciprocity which has balanced reciprocity as its goal. The division between these two forms of exchange is not always clear (Ember and Ember 267).

Balanced Reciprocity: Folk Tradition

A number of stories in the folk tradition seem to hint at rules of reciprocal exchange. McAnally wrote that, since favours done by the fairies "always take a practical form, there is sometimes a business value in the show of reverence for them" (100). Certain offerings to the fairies were expected to produce certain effects in return, while failing to provide those offerings would lead to a loss of the desired effect, and perhaps even an active retaliation for breaking the agreement. This obligation on both sides can be clearly seen in an Irish story in which a fairy known as Red Willie would lead police away from the still if given his portion of illicit alcohol. If this offering was neglected, however, Red Willie would lead the police *to* the still (Ó Súilleabháin 83; see Chapter 2). In Newfoundland, a Flatrock woman would leave a piece of bread on a stone in the woods when she wanted a favour from the fairies (Rieti 242). Presumably she gained whatever favour she requested each time she left the offering.

Food is a common item left for the fairies in exchange for work. Of domestic fairies of any sort—brownie, boggart,[50] hobgoblin or cluricaun—Gomme writes "his fee is white bread and milk; and overnight he does all the household work" (100, long "s"s changed). In Staffordshire, "for a piece of cake and a bottle of home-brewed ale they [the fairies] might be relied upon to find lost iron plough-pins and prevent hedgehogs sucking the cows during the night-time" (Baker 75). English "Hobgoblins and Robin Goodfellows. . . would. . . grind corn for a mess of milk, cut wood, or do any manner of drudgery work" (Keightley 291). In Wales, a story of a Monmouthshire *bwca* who made friends with one of the maids on the farm and "washed, ironed and spun for her and did all manner of house-hold work in return for a nightly bowl of sweet milk and wheat bread or flummery" (Briggs, *Dictionary* 56). The *bwbach* will also gladly churn the butter at night, if a "basin of fresh cream" is left for it (Sikes 30). A Welsh *pwca* helped a servant girl with her work, "washing, ironing, spinning and twisting wool." Perhaps the girl was not familiar with the principles of exchange with fairies, because the *pwca* told her "that it was very mean of her not to provide him with food and drink for helping her so much," after which it became her custom "to place a bowl of fresh milk and a slice of white bread (the latter was a great luxury at that time) on the hearth every night for him before going to

[50] A kind of brownie that behaves much like a poltergeist (Briggs, *Dictionary* 29).

bed" (Thomas 249). All of these examples illustrate a direct exchange of *x* offering for *y* item or result.

In the story commonly known as "The Broken Peel" [51] the human partner in the exchange does the work, while the fairies provide the food (see Menefee). In an English example of this story:

> A farm labourer, crossing the moor, heard the sound of someone crying. Within a few steps he found a child's peel broken in half. Being a father himself, he stopped and mended the implement without noticing that he was near the barrow known as Pixy Mound. He put the peel down, saying, "There 'tis then—never cry no more," and continued on. When he returned from work, the peel was gone, and a newly baked cake was in its place. Despite warnings from his companion, the man ate the cake and found it "proper good." He said so, calling, "Goodnight to 'ee"—and prospered in all his endeavours. (Menefee 188)

In addition to the cake itself, prosperity or luck is generally given to the human if he accepts the food. As with many exchanges with the fairies, misfortune will follow if the gift is refused, as in the following Scottish example:

> Two lads were ploughing a field which contained a fairy thorn. One of the boys made a circle about the tree to protect it. On ending the furrow, they were surprised to find a green table, heaped with choice cheese, bread, and wine. The boy who had marked off the thorn sat down to eat and drink, saying "Fair fa the hands whilk gie." The other lashing his horses refused to partake. The courteous lad "thrave like a brekan, and was a proverb for wisdom, and an oracle of local knowledge ever after! (Menefee 190)

It is notable that the boy who accepted the food and prospered is explicitly identified as the one who circled around the tree. Perhaps refusing the meal was

[51] A peel is a baking implement.

not the only offense the other boy committed. This is similar to an Irish example where the man who mends a fairy churn is also the one who eats, while his companion, who continued to plough while the first man did the mending, refused to partake of the fairy food and fell off his horse and the way home, breaking his neck (Menefee 192). In a Lancashire version of this story, a farmer mends a broken spade and is rewarded with "a handful of brass" money (Bowker 50).

Hospitality can also be part of a reciprocal exchange, as in Ireland, where a *Fir Darrig* was given a place by the fire and a pipe to smoke. In return, the fairy brought luck to the household (Croker 397-400). In Wales:

> Ianto Llywelyn lived by himself in a cottage at Llanfihangel. One night after he had gone to bed he heard a noise outside the door of the house. He opened his window and said, "Who is there? And what do you want?" He was answered by a small silvery voice, "It is room we want to dress our children." Ianto went down and opened the door: a dozen small beings entered carrying tiny babies in their arms, and began to search for an earthen pitcher with water; they remained in the cottage for some hours, washing the infants and adorning themselves. Just before the cock crew in the morning they went away, leaving some money on the hearth as a reward for the kindness they had received.
>
> After this Ianto used to keep his fire of coal balls burning all night long, leaving a vessel of water on the hearth, and bread with its accompaniments on the table, taking care, also, to remove anything made of iron before going to bed. The fairies often visited his cottage at night, and after each visit he found money left for him on the hearth. Ianto gave up working, and lived very comfortably on the money he received in return for his hospitality from the Fair Family. (Thomas 156-157)

This exchange went on until Ianto married and his wife discovered the source of his income. The fairies considered this a breach of hospitality, a violation of their

privacy, and ceased to visit Ianto's house, as well as turning what money he had left into paper (Thomas 158; see also Chapter 4).

A similar kind of exchange—a sort of payment for services rendered—can be seen in some descriptions of the functioning of healing wells. When a person goes to such a well for a cure, "[i]nvariably, a pin, a button, or something else made of metal, was dropped in the well as a gift, or offering, to the presiding spirit or entity." The specific well referred to in this example was understood to be a fairy well (Parry-Jones 132). Bord and Bord mention several wells where people "threw gifts of pins and buttons into [them] for the fairies" in exchange for the curing of illnesses or the granting of wishes. They specifically mention the Cheesewell in Minchmoor, Peebles where cheese is offered, and the Well of the Spotted Rock in Inverness where milk is offered (66).

While some stories mention only what will happen if the proper offering is left, many also specify the results of breaking the reciprocal obligation by *not* leaving the offering. For example, a kind of Scottish fairy called *grugach* looks after the cattle and "[u]nless nightly offerings of milk were made to him, the best cow might be found dead in the morning" (Spence, *British* 5). A similar fairy called a *glaistig*,[52] also Scottish, filled a similar role: "For the night they left the pail full of milk for her, they would find everything right next day; but the night

[52] A female cattle-tending fairy thought to have been human before being *taken* and given a fairy nature (Briggs, *Dictionary* 191).

they neglected to do this, the calves would be let out of the fold, and the cows would be sucked dry next morning" (MacDougall 52). Campbell describes the *glaistig*'s portion as follows:

> She seems in all cases to have had a special interest in the cows and the dairy, and to have resented any want of recognition of her services. A portion of milk was set apart for her every evening, in a hole for the purpose in some convenient stone, and unless this was done, something was found amiss in the dairy next morning. Others left milk for her only when leaving the summer pastures for the season. (Campbell 156)

Although it appears to be debatable how often this offering was to be given, there is no doubt of its necessity.

The services of a *gruagach* or *glaistig* would be given whether the owner of the cattle wanted them or not, and they always had to be paid for. These fairies seemed to have a *right* to the care of the cattle, and were able to force a reciprocal relationship that might not be wanted by the human party. On the other hand, the relationship could be quite beneficial for the human as well, since the cows would be exceedingly well cared for if the fairy continued to be properly compensated.

In an example from the northern islands of Scotland a man said that

> a fairy hit him on the ankle with a hammer and demanded some of the water used to boil the fish he had just caught fishing from the rocks. The pain in his ankle left him when he complied with the fairy's request by pouring a quart of it round the boulder the fairy had come out from under. (Bruford, "Trolls" 131)

Although it does not state that the water was due to the fairy, perhaps for the privilege of fishing from those rocks, it is possible that the injury might have been avoided altogether if the offering had been given first. In any case, the incident does become a reciprocal exchange of sorts.

The fairies will not hesitate to take back favours if the person they were done for violates the proper relationship. An Irish story tells of a farmer who had a good relationship with the fairies. He paid them their proper respects, and they rewarded him with favours. On one occasion, the fairies brought in all of the farmer's hay for him when it began to rain while he was at market. Unfortunately for the farmer, the drinks he had while at market made him bold and he interrupted the fairies' after-work revels, rudely trying to insist on joining in. The next morning he found that they had returned all of the hay to the fields as punishment for his violation and it was ruined by the rain (McAnally 100-102). This story illustrates that it is not only important to give appropriate offerings, it is important to not intrude on the fairies unless invited, no matter how good one's relationship with them may be.

In the folk tradition, it is emphasized that not only must the proper offering always be given in a balanced reciprocal relationship, but that there are consequences for neglecting to leave that offering. As described at the beginning of this chapter, being a part of a reciprocal relationship carries with it the obligation to give and the obligation to repay what is received. There is also an

obligation to receive, and "refusal of the proffered portion [or item] . . . was strictly punished" or otherwise "brought misfortune" (Menefee 175-176). The relationship cannot be suddenly terminated by either party without consequences, no matter who initiated it, though the consequences to the human partner are usually more than just losing the benefits of the relationship. In an Irish story a man is advised to get rid of a cow that he has allowed a fairy in the form of a hare to take milk from. When he does so "all his cattle die or are killed, and he is reduced to poverty" (An Seabhac 326). The consequences of breaking a reciprocal relationship with the fairies usually involve active retaliation such as ill luck, the destruction of property and physical violence.

Balanced Reciprocity: Earth-Centred Practices

Like people in the folk tradition, Earth-Centred practitioners also follow the principles of reciprocal exchange when receiving help from the fairies. As one Wiccan put it, "By giving first, you will receive generously back" (Stepanich 152). In a New Age example, the fairies are thanked in advance for their aid by offering them love and psychic or "astral" energy. The author of the book from which this is drawn, Claire O'Rush, comments: "This is *your* gift to the fairies, and your fulfillment of the contract you make with them when you request them to work for you" (O'Rush 36). A similar example from a Wiccan source is as follows:

> Because of the elemental nature of faeries most of them prefer to protect plants and animals, but a number of them will watch over you or your children. The Bean-Tighes, Korreds, or Dinnshenchas are good faeries to call upon when you feel the need for added protection. To enlist their help, cast your circle and ask them to come to you. Offer them food, warmth, or your home, and tell them what you need and why. (McCoy 132)

This author repeats this idea later in her book when she writes about enlisting the help of fairies in magical work. Regarding the ending of such work, Francesca De Grandis instructs: "Make thanks for the visit, and for any help you were given. At this point it may be appropriate to give or promise a gift, EG [sic] a bit of food and drink left out at night." Similarly, McCoy writes "As you start to close your circle, be sure not to verbally thank the faeries who aided you, but instead offer them some token of appreciation for their aid. Present them with food, fire, animal food, or a precious stone" (McCoy 140). This example also illustrates the use of the folk tradition, in which it is often mentioned that the fairies do not like to be thanked (Briggs, *Dictionary* 387), although the idea of a fairy as a supernatural protector comes from Western occultism. The idea of a reciprocal relationship in which a fairy is given offerings in return for acting as a protector is further described in McCoy's book. She recommends "[t]ell[ing] the faery you will keep her well fed and housed in return" for the service, and comments that "reciprocity is the key to getting along" with such a fairy (134). Stepanich says that one is "simply asking them to be your helper when needed,

in exchange for a gift you render their realm each and every time you work with it" (155).

Another Wiccan author echoes the idea in the folk tradition of offerings bringing about specific and necessary results:

> On this night [Samhain or Halloween], it is traditional to leave food out for the ancestors, spirits, and Faery who might be wandering about. If the food disappears by morning, it is a sign that the beings of the Otherworld have taken it (for no one would dare to touch or eat of the food so left!), thus insuring a blessing of prosperity and protection upon the giver (Stepanich 75).

The reference to tradition is explicit here. It is very common in Neo-Pagan writings to refer to "traditional" items and practices, and this tie to the past is highly valued. Whether the thing referred to as traditional actually is traditional in the sense the word is used in folklore, or is perceived to be traditional depends on the author and the depth of their research.

In Chapter 2, I mentioned a man who posted on the Internet newsgroup "alt.pagan" asking for advice on what kind of an offering to leave for an elder tree he needed to prune. One suggestion was to offer some of the elderberry wine that the original poster made from the fruits of the tree in question (McRae), and another was to mulch the pruned branches and return them to the soil (Profit). This is another example of the kind of attitude shown by Neo-Pagans and others following Earth-Centred paths towards the idea of reciprocal exchange with the fairies and other "nature spirits." There is a very strong belief

that when taking something from nature, as when receiving help from "natural" beings, something of one's own should be left in return. Those offerings are often conceptualized as being given to the fairies as spirits of nature. When collecting trefoil plants for decorating an altar, Ann Moura recommends that one leave "a bit of ginger or milk poured into the ground as payment to the fairies" (56). Similarly, Pauline Campanelli writes of gathering vervain "it is sometimes instructed that . . . an offering of honey should be made to the Earth; but in fact, honey attracts ants which could eventually harm the vervain. An offering of water or plant food would be far more appropriate" (84). This illustrates a tendency common to many Neo-Pagans—that of giving offerings which are not only appropriate to the spiritual world, but which are beneficial to the immediate physical environment where they are left.

A Wiccan example which clearly illustrates the Neo-Pagan ideal of giving something of one's self when taking something from nature follows. This passage is quoted at length to illustrate the kind of ritual common in Neo-Paganism, especially Wicca/Witchcraft and eclectic Neo-Paganism.

> **Faery Wand of Promise Cutting Ceremony**
> At dawn prepare yourself to visit the apple tree from which you will cut the Faery wand of promise. When you arrive at the tree, at the base of the trunk lay out the above listed items on the ground, then face the tree. Close your eyes and perform the Ground and Center format.
>
> Espurge (sprinkle) the spring water on the ground around the base of the trunk in a deosil (clockwise) direction, creating a circle large enough in which to walk around the trunk. By performing this act you are

designating a boundary of Sacred Space in which both you and the tree now stand.

Sit with your back against the trunk and pray to the Tree Fairy. Tell the Spirit why you have come, that you will be cutting away a branch from its boughs to use for healing yourself, and eventually for bringing health to your relations. Allow the Tree Fairy to speak to you by remaining quiet. Should the Spirit indicate that the time you have chosen is not right to perform such a ceremony, then honor this message by thanking the Tree Fairy and leaving.

When the message to continue has been received from the Tree Fairy, present the offering/gift you have brought. Explain the meaning behind the gift and then bury it in the ground at the base of the trunk.

Next, take the knife, stand before the branch soon to be cut away, and sing an honoring song, such as:

Many go into the soul,
with eyes shut tight
and mind asleep,
But Silver Branch upon this tree,
I call to you
come unto me.
Gently guide my soul to health,
with open eyes
and mind awake.
For health and help, I come to you.
For health and help, I cut you free.
For health and help, let healing begin this day.

Continue to sing this chant/song as you cut away the branch. When it comes away in your hand, hold it to your heart and envision it filled with the health and help of the loving Spirit of the Tree Fairy. Wrap the branch in the black cloth, and once again, thank the Tree Fairy for giving away part of itself to you. (Stepanich 179-180)

In this example, the offering is contained within a formal ritual which follows a common format:

1. "grounding and centering." This is generally a process of visualizing an energy connection to the earth.

2. creating a circle
3. focusing on or connecting to the object of the ritual
4. performing the spell, invocation, homage or other "work"
5. thanking any participating deities or spirits to close the ritual

This is the usual format for almost all Wiccan/Witchcraft rituals, as well as that of many other Neo-Pagan and some New Age groups. In this example, the offering is an integral part of the ritual, but that is not always the case. In rituals that are unrelated to reciprocal exchange, an offering may still be given, often immediately after the ritual, as an act of homage, as a thank-you to any fairies or other beings that may have participated in the ritual, or both. Many offerings given as a part of reciprocal exchange are made the focus of a specific ritual, as are many offerings of homage.

Some Neo-Pagan offerings given as part of a reciprocal exchange also come very close to being homage. In the summer of 1991 I went on a nighttime hike in the forest with a group of Witches in Victoria, British Columbia. One of the other people on the hike had a bottle of scented oil in her pocket, and when she discovered she had lost it, she commented "Oh well, I guess that's my offering to the forest." Even though she had not intended to leave that particular item as an offering—we left incense a little further on in the hike—she was not unhappy to have lost it, because she felt it was fair compensation to the spirits of the forest for allowing us to be there (Faulkner).

In the example above, where we went into a forest at night, we decided to leave offerings not because we were afraid of any harm coming to us or that we thought we might get lost (our guide was the Warden of the park and an experienced night hiker), but because we wanted to thank and honour the spirits. Our motivations were both reciprocation and homage. During another hike with many of the same people, this time during the day, we left offerings of incense and cider upon leaving the forest. Many of the participants viewed the offerings as gifts of homage, but the person leading the hike insisted that the offerings must be given to the forest spirits, or fairies, for allowing us to use the area (Fenris). Leaving an offering when entering a forest also shows up in some folk traditions, such as in Germany, where hunters give an offering of milk before they start the hunt (MacManus 100), in Scandinavia, where a portion of the results of a hunt should be left for the *skogsrå*[53] (Rose 295), and in Russia, where the forest-guarding *leshii*[54] should be propitiated with salt and bread (Rose 197).

When collecting natural objects, Neo-Pagans and other practitioners of Earth-Centred religions usually ask permission. In the "Faery Wand of Promise" example, permission is actually sought before the ritual (Stepanich 178, not included in quoted passage) as well as during it. In addition to asking permission, Earth-Centred practitioners usually leave an item in return for what

[53] A Scandinavian female wood spirit, her name means "Woods Woman" (Rose 295).
[54] A Russian male nature spirit who guards the forest and the animals in it (Rose 197).

they have taken, and sometimes even if they have enjoyed a natural area without taking anything. McCoy describes this process:

> Whenever you take anything out of the wild or cut a plant, it is traditional for a witch to explain to the plant or stone why this is being done, ask its permission for its sacrifice, and then thank it by leaving a gift nearby such as animal food, a precious stone, or a coin. (126)

She also says that it is proper to ask the permission of the fairies as well as that of the natural object itself. Generally, the same process is followed when seeking aid. The fairies are first asked for their help, and then an offering is left. Most Neo-Pagans leave the offering before receiving the hoped-for aid, thus giving the fairies the choice of accepting the offering and/or the request or not, rather than trying to force the relationship by withholding the item as a reward. Quite often a second offering will be given after receiving help as an expression of appreciation.

Negative Reciprocity: Folk Tradition

While most stories of reciprocity in the folk tradition are examples of generalized and balanced reciprocity, a few are about negative reciprocity. In these stories, it is usually the human partner in the reciprocal relationship who is trying to get more than their share. These stories are not about outwitting a fairy "trading partner," but about what happens when one *tries* to outwit them. In one example, from Ireland, a *cluricaun* called Wildbeam dragged the cook out of bed and down the stairs after she "left him nothing but part of a herring and

some cold potatoes" (Keightley 369). Similarly, a servant-girl in Wales who had a *pwca* to do many of her chores in return for a bowl of milk and a slice of white bread, once substituted "some stale crusts of barley bread and a bowlful of dirty water." The angry *pwca* retaliated by beating her the next morning (Thomas 249-50).

Stories like these may be examples of attempts of people to get the better of the bargain by cheating on their part of the deal. In addition, it is sometimes said that in a trade, the fairies have to take whatever is offered them, even if it is of less value than what they are giving (Keightley 391). This obligation does not prevent them from laying curses (even if only verbal) on someone who tries to use this to their own advantage at the expense of the fairies. These narratives probably function as warnings and examples of how not to behave. They are as important to the transmission of fairy offering lore as stories about the good results of proper offerings.

Negative Reciprocity: Earth-Centred Spirituality

There do not seem to be any instances of negative reciprocity in any of the Earth-Centred spiritual paths I investigated. In fact, there was an emphasis on being fair and always giving an appropriate offering. This may be partly related to the "Law of Threefold Return" followed by some Neo-Pagan groups—that is that everything one does returns threefold, thus it is best to do positive things whenever possible. Even groups which do not adhere to this "law" generally

have some concept of one's actions returning upon one, whether in the present lifetime, or in some future one. Being fair ensures that you will receive fair treatment, being generous means others will be generous to you (Orion 34; Marron 202). In addition, Earth-Centred practitioners are attempting to attract fairies, not trying to cope with their presence. Being unfair to the fairies means they will leave or not come in the first place, not that they will take revenge as in the folk tradition. Earth-Centred people leave offerings because they *want* to, not because they *have* to.

There is one motif that may possibly be related to negative reciprocity, and that is the tendency of some how-to type books to write about enlisting the aid of the fairies and other beings in terms of "summoning" and "dismissing" - i.e. in terms of controlling them (for examples see McCoy 121-2 and 125). However, even in these cases, it is usually stressed that the spirits should be compensated for their help.

Conclusion

Offerings to the fairies are often given in the context of a reciprocal relationship—whether generalized, balanced or negative. Most stories in the folk tradition describe generalized exchanges—where a person leaves an offering in case a fairy happens by and may or may not get something in return—and balanced exchanges—where the giving and receiving is more regulated and a particular result is always obtained by leaving the offering. A few accounts

describe the consequences of negative reciprocity, or the attempt to get more out of an exchange than you put into it.

In Earth-Centred Spirituality the emphasis is on balanced reciprocity, and being fair or even generous in an exchange is important. Generalized reciprocity does exist in the form of offerings made in the hopes of attracting fairies into a balanced reciprocal relationship. Negative reciprocity, on the other hand, is non-existent.

CHAPTER 4: ENVY BEHAVIOUR

Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine offerings to the fairies with reference to George Foster's ideas about envy behaviour as described in his article "The Anatomy of Envy." I will discuss in greater detail several kinds of offerings that can be considered attempts to avert any envy the fairies have for humans, including offering the first or best part of something, sharing one's home, and setting aside an area of land.

Causes of Envy

In comparing fairy offerings to envy behaviour, it is interesting to first look at Foster's comments on things that cause envy:

> The objects producing envy are legion. Yet some are generally more desired than others . . . . In primitive and peasant societies three items—food, children, and health—rank far above others. Following these come economic values such as cattle, good crops, and productive gardens. Interestingly clothing and shelter seem less likely to cause envy than the foregoing. (Foster 169)

Notice that all of the most envied items are also those which are often thought to be in danger of fairy desire, attack or theft. Food is a desired item which, as it can be given in smaller amounts, is often left for the fairies to prevent them from taking or damaging the other items. Children are often thought to be in danger of being stolen by the fairies, and changelings left in their place, and a person's health and the health of their livestock are at risk if the fairies are offended—

people may be bitten, beaten and pinched if they forget a fairy offering, and livestock may be injured, elfshot, or caused to sicken. Gardens and fields may produce poor yields, cease producing at all, or be badly damaged by some natural disaster that bypassed neighbouring fields.

Clothing, on the other hand, which is listed as one of the items least likely to cause envy, is seldom, if ever, damaged (except perhaps when one is wandering pixy-led in the forest), and often causes fairies to depart when given as an offering. Whether it is offensive as an offering, or is considered full payment for services rendered, or is of fine quality and allows a fairy to appear in the fairy court again is debatable (see Chapter 5), but the result is generally the same. The other item Foster mentions as less likely to cause envy is shelter. This is something that is mentioned in a number of narratives, and usually involves giving hospitality rather than giving the fairies one's home, not counting instances when homes have been built over fairy paths and have to be removed—that is a different matter altogether. Most of the stories either involve allowing a fairy to come in and bathe or warm itself, or giving one's home over to the use of the fairies at night (some examples are in Evans-Wentz 122, 136, 182). Since hospitality is such an important concept in the Celtic world (Arensberg 74), it is perhaps not surprising that it should turn up in a few stories.

If fairies are viewed as minor deities, it may perhaps not be envy they are feeling for human's possessions, as "often we find that the gods feel anger or

moral indignation at the *hubris* of the successful or daring man, for which they feel it necessary to punish him" (Foster 172). This may certainly be the case where humans have trespassed on fairy territory or attempted to either trick the fairies in some way or have neglected to give the fairies their due. In a commentary on Foster's "Anatomy of Envy," Isidoro Moreno-Navarro suggests that whether it is envy or moral indignation does not matter as the result is the same: "Hence envy, disguised as moral indignation or not, of superiors toward inferiors generally results in aggression, utilizing the mechanisms, seldom symbolic and almost always directly destructive, that wealth and power can put into play" (Moreno-Navarro 193).

As fairies are sometimes associated with the dead in one way or another, it may also be worthwhile to consider briefly the envy that the dead have for the living. Foster writes that "man sees the envy of the dead as particularly threatening because it is sparked by his supreme and most valued possession, the one which normally he fights hardest to hold on to: life" (Foster 172). In many stories, the fairies are thought not to have the same kind of life as humans; somehow they do not *live* in they same sense as we do—their life is "form without substance" (Menefee 178)—and this may be something that they envy. In addition, it is often thought, as illustrated in stories about fairies as fallen angels and similar narratives, that fairies do not have souls or may not find salvation at the end of the world, and they may envy us this (L. Smith 400,

Spence *British* 165-166). As MacManus puts it, "[t]hrough all their gaiety, their fun, and their activities there runs an inescapable vein of sadness, for they have lost heaven, while we can attain it . . . " (24).

Control of Envy

According to Foster, there are four forms of cultural control of envy that are used by a person who fears envy. These are concealment, denial, the sop or symbolic sharing, and true sharing (175). Concealment is an attempt to not appear enviable (175). In fairylore, this form of envy control may perhaps be seen in the practice of hiding the sex of a child until a certain age, such as "the old custom of dressing boys in girls' clothes, in long frocks, until they were ten or eleven years of age" that was noted in Ireland (Evans 289). According to E. Estyn Evans, this practice was "a means of deceiving the fairies, who were always on the lookout for healthy young boys whom they could replace by feeble 'changelings'" (Evans 289). This type of envy behaviour may also be related to avoiding talking about the fairies or using euphemisms when referring to them, so as not to draw their attention to oneself.

Foster describes denial as verbal protestations and symbolic acts which are a "denial of reason to envy" (Foster 176-7). This seems to have little relation to fairylore and, in any case, would relate little, if at all, to offerings.

One of the most relevant of the forms of envy control to fairy offerings is the sop or symbolic sharing, which is "a device to buy off the possible envy of

the loser" (Foster 177). The fairies are given a part of what one has in order that they will not take or destroy the rest. While this portion does not have to be a lot, it generaliy must be the best part, or some of the best. While many fairy offerings can perhaps be better explained as gifts or attempts to develop a reciprocal relationship, certain offerings are most likely sops. Particularly notable in relation to this are the Newfoundland stories of escaping capture by giving the fairies the bread one is carrying in one's pocket (see Chapter 6). The sop, especially where it involves "firsts" and "bests," is closely related to sacrifice, as "first fruits" is a common sacrifice. Giving a part to represent the whole in sacrifice is very similar to giving some of your best (or first) so the fairies will leave the rest alone.

True sharing is defined as a "leveling influence which reduces the envy that is based upon differential access to desired things" and is "a significant sharing going well beyond symbolic sop levels" (Foster 179). True sharing is related to homage in that the desire to give honour or pay homage can result in true sharing (see Chapter 7). The "goodman's croft"[55] or setting aside of a piece

[55] Tylor, among others, equates the "goodman" with the devil, but I think it can be argued that it originally referred to a fairy. The *Oxford English Dictionary* also defines "goodman" as a term "applied euphemistically to the devil," and cites the phrase "goodman's croft" in the earliest example of its use (vol. IV 295). This does not mean it could not have been used as a fairy euphemism at other times or in other areas. Reasons for associating the Goodman's Croft with fairies and not the devil are explored further on in this chapter. The goodman's croft may also be a sop rather than true sharing, in cases where "the piece of land allotted was but a worthless scrap" (Tylor 408).

of land (left wild or simply uncultivated) for the use of the fairies (see below) may well fit into this category, as may leaving one's house clean with a new fire at night so the fairies can use it (for examples see Evans 71 and Arensberg 168-9). Another example is the story of the man on the Isle of Man who would set out spoons for the fairies when having his Sunday dinner, "in order that they might help themselves" (Crellin 3). See Chapter 7 for more on true sharing and homage.

"Firsts" and "Bests"

As we will see shortly, when giving a "sop" to the fairies the amount does not necessarily need to be large, but the offering must be of good quality. One way of ensuring this is to offer "firsts" -first fruits, the first portion of a meal, the first drops of liquor—and "bests"—the best part of something, or an item made specially, using the best of one's ability. An old man from Lindsey spoke of offering "firsts":

> In the gardens the first flowers and the first fruit an the first cabbage, or what not ud be took to the nighest flat stone, an' laid there for the Strangers; in the fields the first years of corn, or the first taters wor put to the tiddy people; an' to hoam, afore they gan to yeat their vittles, a bit of bread an a drop of milk or beer wor spilled on the fireplace, to keep the greencoaties from hunger an thirst. (Briggs, *Vanishing* 155)

In the Irish County Armagh practice of offering mashed potatoes on top of the gate pier on Hallowe'en (see Chapters 3 and 7), it is the first plates of the dish that are offered, and the first milk of a newly calved cow is also important as an

offering (Evans 103, 304). This first milk is particularly rich, and can also be considered a "best" offering. Similarly, the first drops of a new batch of an alcoholic beverage are often given to the fairies, such as in Ireland, where "[t]hree drops from the first of the poteen used to be thrown out for the gentry. The one who did not do so would have no success nor luck with his distilling" (Ó hEochaidh 243). In fact, I was told that in some modern Irish distilleries, the volume loss in aging kegs is said to be caused by fairies taking their portion first (Drover). In Scotland, "all liquids spilled on the ground are supposed to go to their [the fairies'] use; and there are some people even so charitable, as purposely to reserve for their participation a share of the best they possess" (W.G. Stewart 124).

There are not many stories that specify that a person *must* leave some of the best of what they have for the fairies, but there are many accounts of what happens when substandard offerings are given. For example, the story discussed in Chapter 2 about a servant-girl in Wales who had a *pwca* to do many of her chores in return for a bowl of milk and a slice of white bread ("a great luxury at the time"), illustrates the consequences of not leaving the best possible offering. When the girl substituted "some stale crusts of barley bread and a bowlful of dirty water" the angry *pwca* retaliated by beating her the next morning (Thomas 249-50). In a similar story from Ireland, also mentioned in Chapter 2, an Irish *cluricaun* called Wildbeam dragged the cook out of bed and down the stairs after

she "left him nothing but part of a herring and some cold potatoes" (Keightley 369).

The necessity of giving "bests" is not limited to food. If clothing is accepted as an offering without causing offense, the clothes must usually be of good quality. Katharine Briggs mentions a Lincolnshire brownie who "was annually given a linen shirt." This fairy was not offended by the gift of clothing, at least not until "a miserly farmer, succeeding to the farm, left him out one of coarse sacking" (Briggs, *Dictionary* 46). One must take care in this, however, as some fairies will accept clothing of common quality, but if given some of fine quality, will leave to show off their new clothing at the fairy court (Briggs, *Vanishing* 49).

Another way of offering "bests" is to give as an offering a specially made item, either one which has been made to the best of one's ability, or one which is made in a specific, prescribed way. One such specially made item is the Manx *soddhag-rheynney*:

> The *soddhag-rheynney*, 'dividing cake,' was an extra bit of dough baked in a flat cake, broken into small pieces, and scattered on the kitchen floor or just outside the house for the fairies to enjoy in the night-time. When a Kirk Bride girl baked, cleaned up, and went to bed without having made the *soddhag-rheynney*, the fairies gave her a smack in the eye to wake her up and remind her. Perhaps this was November Eve or May Eve, when such offerings were compulsory. (Gill 33)

The "Goodman's Croft," discussed in more detail below, "consisted of a small portion of the best land" (Henderson 241).

Firsts and Bests in Contemporary Earth-Centred Practices

"Firsts" does not seem to be a common offering form in Earth-Centred Spirituality, though it can be an important one. In the Neo-Pagan groups I had contact with in Victoria and Calgary, it was a common custom to set aside a portion of the "feast" at a celebration for the spirits before it was shared by the participants. Although "first fruits" are not often offered, "best fruits" may be. One example is from a Druid book, and it echoes the words of the old Lindsey man quoted by Briggs (see previous section):

> The very best produce from field and forest is placed on the altar at Meán Fómhair (Fall Equinox). We give thanks to the fairies and the elementals who helped the garden grow. It is considered wise to pick one of each flower and vegetable of the harvest (choose only the very best specimens, free of blemish or blight) and leave it on an outdoor shrine for the nature spirits in thanks for their kind work all summer. (Hopman 83)

A web page of "Faery Recipes" includes the comment that "the Tuatha de Danann[56] . . . will bless your home for a small portion of your harvest," though it does not specify that it must be first fruits, or even best fruits (Wisteria "Faery"). "Last fruits" can also be an important offering, as in a Wiccan/Witchcraft source which says:

> It is an excellent idea to leave the last fruit of any harvest out for the faeries, and also a small portion of any of your sabbat[57] feasts. It is also

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[56] The magical Tribe of Dana, the old gods of Ireland who became fairies (Briggs, *Dictionary* 418).
[57] A generic Wiccan/Witchcraft term referring to one of the eight major Neo-Pagan festivals.

> traditional in many pagan sects to leave out left over food from the Esbat[58] (full moon) feasts to the faeries. (McCoy 17)

The operative idea of both "firsts" and "bests," and even "lasts" in Earth-Centred Spirituality is to make sure the fairies get a portion, regardless of which portion.

The concept of making specially made items to give as "bests" can be seen in a Neo-Pagan context in the offerings suggested by Wiccan author Kisma Stepanich to establish communication with elemental fairies: a decorated feather for the sylphs or air fairies (153) and a hand-made and decorated miniature boat for undines or water fairies(154).

A discussion on the listserv "Imbas" about appropriate offerings to the deities is also applicable. "Imbas" is an e-mail list for practitioners of Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism (CR), a form of Neo-Paganism that stresses accurate scholarship in addition to creativity. Most CR pagans are of the opinion that fairies, often referred to as "spirits of place," are "gods and not gods."[59] The discussion referred to above began when a recovered alcoholic e-mailed the list asking if others felt that alcohol was essential as an offering, or if other items could be used. Since Neo-Pagans often consume a portion of the offerings they give it was important for the questioner to avoid using alcohol as an offering. While most people responding felt alcohol was not necessary, there was some

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[58] A Wiccan/Witchcraft monthly celebration, usually held on the night of the full moon.
[59] A description from ancient Irish literature which described the Tuatha de Danann.

difference in opinion as to what *was* appropriate. One woman, also a recovered alcoholic, said that she "offered Guiness [sic] or whiskey to the Powers that Be, but kept an O'Douls (non-alcoholic beer)" for herself to drink (Dawn). Another person made the following comments

> Regardless of what we offer from the finest MacAllen's to Guinness or even water, if done with an open heart and mind AND given in the knowledge of the occasion, then I for one don't feel it will be turned down. (Dabhaid, in Corrigan "Re: Alchohol" [sic])

This expresses an attitude towards offerings that is common among many Neo-Pagans: It is not what you offer that is important, it is *that* you offer, and the attitude you have while offering. Not all Neo-Pagans are so casual where the appropriateness of something is concerned, especially not CR pagans. In response to the comments by Daibhaid above, Ian Corrigan wrote:

> That's a fine sentiment, but I think we should be careful not to go too far into the 'it's the thought that counts' approach. I think the principle of sacrifice says that the biggest, finest sacrifice you can afford is the best available sacrifice.
> Choosing to give clear water because you're saving the guinness [sic] for yourself, for instance, would be a Bad Thing. In the same way, a prayer accompanied by a noble offering should have more merit, be more likely to be heard and answered, than a prayer alone, or even one with a lesser offering. (Corrigan "Re: Alchohol" [sic])

I have quoted that last passage at length because it illustrates the self-reflexive nature of debate in many Neo-Pagan groups. Corrigan's comments reveal the importance to many Neo-Pagans of giving the best offering they can, whether it is the best because it is the nicest or most valuable of a number of options, or

because it is chosen or made specifically for the occasion, or because it is the most appropriate offering for the specific being and occasion.

Sharing the House

One form that true sharing can take is that of sharing one's house with the fairies. In some stories, a family vacates the main part of the house and retires to the bedrooms after a certain time of night, in order to make the house available for the use of the fairies. In other stories, the house is prepared for visitors just in case the fairies want to use it—they may never actually arrive, but the intent is there. An example from Ireland follows.

> They [the fairies] very often put up at a house in the night. They would come to certain houses, and if they liked the house and it was good and clean and everything swept for them, they would come often to the same house, and that house would be prosperous. (Arensberg 168)

Similar customs can be found in Newfoundland, where many areas have high concentrations of people of Irish descent. An example from the MUN Folklore and Language Archive is:

> [Another] old woman, an old Mrs. Mulrooney, used to live alone, and every night before she went to bed she'd make in a big fire, put all the chairs around the stove, leave the door unlocked, put bread, water, whatever she had on the table, and go to bed. This way, if the fairies came in, they could sit on the chair and warm themselves, get a bite to eat, and wouldn't bother her. She said if you're good to the fairies they won't bother you. (MUNFLA 79-435/39, quoted in Rieti 33-4)

In some cases, it seems that this vacating of the home was required, such as in the following narrative:

> Where my grandfather John Watterson was reared, just over near Kerroo Kiel (Narrow Quarter), all the family were sometimes sitting in the house of a cold winter night, and my great-grandmother and her daughters at their wheels spinning, when a little white dog would suddenly appear in the room. Then everyone there would have to drop their work and prepare for *the company* to come in: they would have to put down a fire and leave fresh water for *them*, and hurry off upstairs to bed. They could hear *them* come, but could never see them, only the dog. The dog was a fairy dog, and a sure sign of their coming. (Evans-Wentz 122)

In other cases, the giving over of one's house was entirely voluntary. A house might be prepared just in case the fairies needed it, as in this Cornish story: "My grandmother used to put down a good furze fire for *them* on stormy nights, because, as she said, '*They* are a sort of people wandering about the world with no home or habitation and ought to be given a little comfort'" (Evans-Wentz 182). A narrative from Wales is similar: "I remember how the old folk used to make the house comfortable and put fresh coals on the fire, saying, 'Perhaps the *Tylwyth Teg*[60] will come tonight'" (Evans-Wentz 138). One Cornish man even "allowed a hole in the wall of his house to remain unrepaired"—and "would not have it stopped up on any account"—for "the piskies . . . to come in and out as they had done for many years" (Gomme 69-70, long "s"s changed).

These stories may illustrate forms of envy behaviour such as the sop—letting the fairies use part of the house, part of the time so they won't envy it—or true sharing—freely allowing the fairies to use whatever parts of the house they

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[60] The Welsh name for fairies (Briggs, *Dictionary* 419).

wished. This form of offering can also be seen in terms of hospitality. All guests, whether invited or not, should be made welcome and treated well, and the fairies are no exception. Incidentally, it can also be argued that the necessity of giving hospitality to all originated with, or was exaggerated by, the fear of receiving harm from an offended fairy. Since fairies can take any form they choose, the beggar at the door might just be a beggar, but he might be a fairy in disguise, come to test your hospitality, and reward you if he is satisfied or punish you if he is not (Briggs, *Dictionary* 421). W. Jenkyn Thomas writes about such tests of hospitality in Wales:

> A company of fairies who lived in the recesses of Cader Idris were in the habit of going about from cottage to cottage in that part of the country to test the dispositions of the cottagers. Those who gave the fairies an ungracious welcome were subject to bad luck during the rest of their lives; but those who were good to the little folk who visited them in disguise received substantial favours from them. (96)

Stories of such occurrences were certainly often told by itinerant storytellers and musicians, who would themselves benefit from such beliefs.

House-Sharing in Earth-Centered Spirituality

Although the idea of sharing one's home with the fairies is perhaps not as evident within the beliefs and practices of people following Earth-centred spiritual paths, it is present. Several books on working with fairies mention attracting fairies to one' s home, though none mention vacating the place so the fairies can have the use of it. For example, in describing a protection spell Edain

McCoy recommends offering the faeries "food, warmth, or your home" in exchange for their help (132), and later mentions that fresh strawberries with cream and "a share of your home" are good offerings for a *Bean-Tighe* (183). Ted Andrews suggests having "plants and flowers inside your house or apartment" as a way of "inviting their [the fairies] presence" (21). Similarly, Ellen Evert Hopman, a Druid, writes that holly in the house at Yule "symbolizes a willingness to allow the nature spirits to share one's abode during the harsh, cold season" (36).

There was one person I corresponded with via e-mail who commented, in a kind of tongue-in-cheek manner, that allowing fairies to have the use of her house was a sort of offering. I asked what kinds of things she usually offered, and she replied: "Seems to me the Fey feel free to use anything they can find in my home as offerings. Especially keys, earrings, and stew pots." She then described some more formal offerings that she was accustomed to leaving under an elder tree (CRD).

Many Earth-Centred practitioners live in urban settings, where privacy tends to be valued over hospitality, so it is perhaps not surprising that there are few instances of offerings one's home to the fairies. Hospitality is also not a tangible item, and perhaps does not seem to have much value in the "modern" commodity-based urban worldview. On the other hand, some Neo-Pagans, especially Reconstructionist pagans, do believe in "reconstructing" some of the

values and ideals of the past, as well as the religion. These Pagans place a high value on things like hospitality, and one Druid wrote that "[h]ospitality extends to the fairy realm as well. After a ritual, a gift of spirits, a plate of food, or a bowl of milk is left at the western side of the house for the fairies' pleasure" (Hopman 177). Another Celtic Reconstructionist pagan commented that Samhain "is a time when the Sidhe, the Gods and the Ancestors might come visiting and should be offered proper hospitality; food, drink, a place to rest" (ní Dhoireann, "Samhain"). Reconstructionists like these believe that reviving some of the attitudes of the past will help to counter that very "modern commodity-based urban worldview" I mentioned, and hospitality is primary among these revivals.

The Goodman's Croft

One kind of offering that may be considered true sharing, or at the very least a generous sop, was the setting aside of a piece of land for the express use of the fairies. This was generally land that was wild and had never been cultivated, although land that was once cultivated and then allowed to return to a wild state could be acceptable. Spence comments that the fairies had "the ownership of all waste land until it was cleft by the spade" (Spence, *British* 26), whereupon it was tainted by humanity. If the land was shared with the fairies by designating a part of it as exclusively theirs, they might be more amiable towards their human neighbours. These "untilled patches in fields" (Spence, *British* 189-90) were

known in some areas as "Goodman's Croft," "Goodman's Acre" or "Cloutie's Croft"[61] (Tylor 408; Henderson 241).

This kind of taboo land is likely related to such things as fairy paths, forts, hills and other such features. The avoidance of fairy land can perhaps be seen, in part, as a sharing of the landscape with other beings. Such areas were not always easily visible, and tests had to be made to ensure that new areas could be used:

> In Tyrone it is said that ' no man would build a house till he had stuck a spade into the earth'. If the fairies had not removed it overnight the site was safe. In Cavan I was told that a small line of stones was first built at the site: if it was intact the next morning the fairies were not displeased. (Evans 30)

The Goodman's croft differs somewhat in that it does not have any visible differences from the land around it, and seems to be a section of land chosen by the farmer to give to the fairies, rather than an area designated taboo by the fairies themselves.

In parts of Scotland Goodman's crofts were thought of as offerings to the Devil, so that he would leave the inhabitants of the farm alone, but they "may have originally been fairy demesnes, set apart and uncultivated for the express purposes of the elves" (Spence *British* 190). Gomme agrees that "translating the modern term 'devil' into its archaic equivalent" provides evidence of tribute to the fairies in the form of "leaving a corner of the field uncultivated for 'the aul man'" (Gomme 146, long "s"s changed). This idea of this piece of land being for

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[61] In the Irish-derived tradition of Ontario this land was known as "the fairy corner" (Hand 143).

the fairies and not for the devil is also supported in Mollie Hunter's wonderful children's novel[62] *The Haunted Mountain*, where it is described:

> Now it was the custom in those days for every man to have a Goodman's Croft on his farm, and this custom arose from the people's fear of the *sidhe*; these creatures being so quick to take offense and so revengeful that it was considered wise to keep in their favour by giving them this croft, or little piece of land, to use in any way they might desire. (Hunter 11)

In Ireland, however, these areas of land were specifically identified as being for the use of the fairies (Spence, *British* 190).

An idea that may be related to the Goodman's croft is that of creating a garden for the use of the fairies. This is not a common idea in the folk tradition, although there is one much-repeated story:

> An old woman who lived near Tavistock had in her garden a splendid bed of tulips. To these the Pixies of the neighbourhood loved to resort, and often at midnight might they be heard singing their babes to rest among them. By their magic power they made the tulips more beautiful and more permanent than any other tulips, and they caused them to emit a fragrance equal to that of the rose. The old woman was so fond of her tulips that she would never let one of them be plucked, and thus the Pixies were never deprived of their floral bowers.
>
> But at length the old woman died; the tulips were taken up, and the place converted into a parsley-bed. Again, however, the power of the Pixies was shown; the parsley withered, and nothing would grow even in the other beds of the garden. On the other hand, they tended diligently the grave of the old woman, around which they were heard lamenting and singing dirges. They suffered not a weed to grow on it; they kept it always green, and evermore in spring-time spangled with wild flowers. (Keightley 304)

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[62] It is perhaps not good scholarly practice to draw upon fiction in the way I am doing, but since Mollie Hunter lived in the Scottish countryside and drew on local folklore for her novels, I felt she was as reliable an authority on this matter as many scholars.

There is no indication of whether or not the old woman was aware of the fairies and their love for her garden, so it is impossible to say if the tulips could be considered an offering or not. However, the woman did have a good neighbourly relationship with the pixies, even if she didn't know about them, and this story has been an inspiration to people in Earth-Centred Spiritualities, as will be discussed below.

The Grove of Faunas: Earth-Centred Goodman's Crofts

The idea of setting land aside for the fairies is one which seems to resonate with people following paths of Earth-Centred Spirituality. This may be because these people view the earth as sacred and many of them would like to see as much land as possible returned to a wild state since wild lands are sacred lands (Harvey 162-163). Leaving an area of one's own property wild, or allowing it to become so creates a small sacred space nearby. Such areas are also often conceptualized as sanctuaries, both for wildlife and for spirits of nature, including fairies. (Campanelli 151) An excellent example of this is in American Witch Pauline Campanelli's book, where she describes an acre of land that she and her husband planted with trees as a cash crop:

> I guess it was the morning that we saw the two newborn fawns, all rusty orange with rows of white dots, tip-toe out of the sumach and honeysuckle thickets of New Forest [their original name for the wooded area], to explore the world, that we decided never to cut the trees. (Campanelli 151)

They decided to set aside the area as a sanctuary for wildlife and "other children of the Horned God and Mother Goddess," and renamed the area the Grove of Faunas, after the Roman nature god. The dedication ritual the Campanellis used for the area included leaving offerings at each of the marker stones they set up at the four points of the compass (Campanelli 151). A similar, but much less elaborate area is described by Ted Andrews, who lists as a way of inviting the presence of nature spirits into one's life: "[l]eave an area in your yard to grow wild so that the faeries can play freely" (Andrews 21). New Ager Penny Kelly also has a "wild area" that was left "untouched and in its natural state" for the use of the elves who help her with her vineyards (Kelly, 2nd page of plates).

In addition to wild lands, many books on Earth-Centred Spirituality recommend creating gardens of plants associated with fairies in folklore. A good Neo-Pagan example follows, quoted at length to illustrate another typical Neo-Pagan ritual.

> If you don't wish to visit a Faery forest, but prefer to create an environment for them in your own backyard, begin gathering and planting trees, ferns, and wildflowers that you feel are especially appropriate and best adapted to the type of environment you are able to provide. Many nurseries and mail-order catalogs sell a wonderful variety of less common and endangered species of wild flowers and ferns. Wood chips, straw, pine needles, and leaves are all excellent mulches, and certain ones are necessary to certain plants; but they also encourage the growth of some strange and wonderful mushrooms that the Faeries might find attractive. A piece of moss-covered log will also do this.
>
> Once the garden has been started, you might want to ritually dedicate it as a Faery garden sanctuary. Begin describing the boundaries

of the garden with an athame.[63] Then sprinkle the perimeter with a branch of fir dipped in salted spring water. Finally, describe the boundaries of the garden with a stick of burning incense, which can be left in the ground to burn out afterward. Then with a hazel wand slowly walk about the garden and greet each species of plant with words like:

Spirits of the Jack-in-the-Pulpit
I welcome your presence in this garden.

Feel your love flow from your heart, down your arm and out through your wand, directed toward the plant. Address each plant (or grouping of plants), tree and stone, this way being sure not to overlook any because it is said that Nature Spirits are easily offended. You might wish to conclude the ritual with words like:

In the name of the Goddess
(most of the names of the Goddess in her aspect of
Goddess of the moon are also names of the Queen
of the Faeries)
And the God (in his aspect of Lord of the Greenwood),
I declare this garden a sanctuary
For the Spirits of Nature
And the Children of the Gods.

It would then be appropriate to leave a gift to attract the Spirits; cookies, soda, ale, or cream are all appreciated. So are bright and shiny things like rings or beads. Certain stones, too, are favored by Faeries. (Campanelli 62-63)

Like the one quoted in Chapter 3, this ritual follows the general Wiccan/Witchcraft formula, though it leaves out "grounding and centering." It begins with creating the circle or boundary of the working space, focusing on the object of the ritual by feeling the love flow, conducting the ritual by going to each plant and speaking some words, and thanking the participating beings by leaving a gift, thus closing the ritual. A New Age example of this "Goodman's Croft" is found in *The Enchanted Garden*, which describes how to attract fairies to

[63] A black-handled ritual knife used by many Wiccans and Witches for such things as casting magic circles.

one's garden and communicate with them. In this book, author Claire O'Rush retells the story of the old woman and her tulips quoted above and uses it as an example for the kind of relationship it is possible to have with the fairies by sharing one's garden with them (O'Rush 76-7).

Sharing living space or giving hospitality to the fairies is not as prevalent in Earth-Centred Spirituality as it is in the folk tradition, but the offering of land is. In the folk tradition, both house sharing and the Goodman's Croft are usually sops and sometimes true sharing. In Earth-Centred Spirituality on the other hand, these offerings are seldom sops, but often true sharing or homage, and may also be part of a reciprocal exchange.

Conclusion

It can be clearly seen from the above discussion how the practices of people following Earth-centred spiritualities mirror the practices of the folk tradition. The similarities between the two traditions is partly a result of people in Earth-religion groups drawing upon collections of folklore for inspiration. Folklore is seen as the remnants of the practices of the past, of our ancestors, and a connection to the past is often seen as a very important aspect of spirituality . While there are differences in the uses of means of controlling envy between the folk tradition and Earth-Centred Spirituality—the folk tradition emphasizes the sop while Earth-Centred Spirituality emphasizes true sharing—the same general

categories of offerings—firsts and bests, sharing the house, and the Goodman's Croft—are found in both.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNION

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the ways in which offerings can be used to communicate and commune with the fairies. Most messages carried by communicative offerings are simple and somehow inherent in the offering itself. In the folk tradition these offerings tend to be unaccompanied by any verbal component, but in Earth-Centred Spirituality words or concentrated thoughts may be added to an offering to transmit a more complex message.

Communion also involves communication but, more significantly, it establishes a bond between the parties communing. In the folk tradition, sharing food with the fairies serves to create such a bond, decreasing the danger involved in having fairies around. In Earth-Centred Spirituality, shared food is also used, though some New Agers use shared energy instead, to establish such a bond. In Earth-Centred Spirituality a relationship with the fairies is desired not because of the danger involved in dealing with them, but because it is a religious connection, and allows the human partner to get in closer touch with nature and the universe.

Communication

While all offerings communicate in some way, some have communication as their primary goal. An offering can be given to express a general feeling such

as thanks or veneration, or to communicate a more specific message like a wish. The function of the offering may be to express something that cannot, for whatever reason, be communicated verbally, it may reinforce or echo a verbal message, or it may draw attention to a separate message. Following this reasoning, offerings given to the fairies are sometimes a manifestation of religious communication, which has two main forms: prayer, or verbal communication, and ritual, or non-verbal communication. In actual practice, one form is not generally found in isolation from the other, although one tends to dominate (Malefijt 196). The purpose of this religious communication, or communication with supernatural beings including fairies, is to convey messages of "man's [sic] knowledge, feelings, needs, emotions, moods, and desires" but may also be "directed towards acknowledging or re-establishing man's [sic] relationships to his gods" or to the spirits (Malefijt 197).

Sacrifice, a kind of offering, is "a particularly good example of a form of nonverbal communication, for it involves an exchange of goods and services" (Malefijt 209; see also Chapter 3). A sacrifice *"consists in establishing a means of communication between the sacred and the profane worlds"* via the mediation of the item offered (Hubert and Mauss 97, italics in original). An offering to the fairies can be such a mediating item.

Communication: Folk Tradition

The use of offerings as means of communication in the folk tradition tends to be limited to fairly straightforward messages – things such as welcome and unwelcome. These offerings, especially those of welcome, are not accompanied by any verbal component.

It is a fairly common custom in many Celtic areas to leave clean water out at night for the fairies. In many instances the stated reason for doing this is to make sure the fairies are provided for so as not to anger them (for examples see Keightley 291 and Evans-Wentz 136, 146) or to ensure that other liquids were not used for bathing or baking instead (see Evans-Wentz 127-8; Briggs *Personnel* 96). On the other hand, a number of stories mention that "the houses that they [the fairies] deigned to visit were thought to be blest" (Keightley 397; see also Arensburg 168), and providing a basin of clean water is one way of indicating to the fairies that they were welcome.

Food offerings can also be a way of communicating one's intentions to the Good People, as in the "most well-known of all Welsh tales" (Gwyndaf 195), about the fairy spirit of "a beautiful and romantic piece of water, named The Van Pools" (Keightley 109).

> Many years ago there lived in the vicinity of this lake a young farmer, who having heard much of the beauty of this spirit, conceived a most ardent desire to behold her, and be satisfied of the truth. On the last night of the year, he therefore went to the edge of the lake, which lay calm and bright beneath the rays of the full moon, and waited anxiously for the first hour of the New Year. It came, and then he beheld the object of his

> wishes gracefully guiding her golden gondola to and fro over the lake. The moon at length sank beneath the mountains, the stars grew dim at the approach of dawn, and the fair spirit was on the point of vanishing, when, unable to restrain himself, he called aloud to her to stay and be his wife; but with a faint cry she faded from his view. Night after night he now might be seen pacing the shores of the lake, but all in vain. His farm was neglected, his person wasted away, and gloom and melancholy were impressed on his features. At length he confided his secret to one of the mountain-sages, whose counsel was—a Welsh one, by the way—to assail the fair spirit with gifts of cheese and bread! The counsel was followed; and on Midsummer Eve the enamoured swain went down to the lake, and let fall into it a large cheese and a loaf of bread. But all was vain; no spirit rose. Still he fancied that the spot where he had last seen her shone with more than wonted brightness, and that a musical sound vibrated among the rocks. Encouraged by these signs, he night after night threw in loaves and cheeses, but still no spirit came. At length New Year's Eve returned. He dressed himself in his best, took his largest cheese and seven of his whitest loaves, and repaired to the lake. At the turn of midnight, he dropped them slowly one by one into the water, and then remained in silent expectation. The moon was hid behind a cloud, but by the faint light she gave, he saw the magic skiff appear, and direct its course for where he stood. Its owner stepped ashore, and hearkened to the young man's vows, and consented to become his wife. (Keightley 109-110)

Other versions of this story have the young man offering bread, or bread and cheese, only to have it rejected because the bread was not baked the way the fairy woman wanted. On his third try he got it right and she agreed to marry him (Jones 61-2; Parry-Jones 75-82; Gwyndaf 188). In this story the young man is using the bread and cheese to communicate his desire to marry the fairy woman. Although in Keightley's version, above, the fairy does not acknowledge these offerings until a full year later, the fact that the farmer kept making the offerings perhaps communicated his determination to win her. Juliette Wood comments that it is making the right offering which is key and that "the motif of

appropriate gift plays a part in inducing the fairy bride to enter into marriage" ("The Fairy" 63).

In many stories an offering of clothing to a hard-working brownie or other fairy will drive that being away. Several causes for this were suggested in Chapter 2. Briefly, the clothing may be the final wages for work done, it may allow the fairy to be finely enough dressed to go to the fairy court, or the clothing may be somehow offensive. It is also possible to see the leaving of clothes as a means of communicating that the fairy is no longer welcome. When the services of a fairy are no longer wanted in a house (as Evans-Wentz comments "it is not always easy to find work for them to do" (88)), a garment—the *Denham Tracts* specify that it should be "a *green* cloak and a hood" (Denham 56, italics in original)—can be made and presented to them. Apparently "[t]his method of getting rid of them is often resorted to" (Evans-Wentz 88).

People can communicate welcome to the fairies by leaving out offerings, such as water for bathing, that will allow them to feel comfortable and at home. Unwelcome can also be communicated by way of offerings, in legends if not in practice, by leaving an offering such as clothing that is known to offend fairies and induce them to leave, but without exacting revenge on the offerer.

Communication: Earth-Centred Spirituality

In the practices of people following Earth-Centred Spiritualities, offerings are often given to honour the gods and spirits, and to communicate reverence

(see Chapter 7). As Graham Harvey writes in his study of contemporary Paganism: "In Pagan cosmologies the role of these other-than-human people . . . is not to receive praise and thanksgiving but to relate" (174), thus communication is a common motivation for making offerings. Offerings may also be used to establish communication, or to accompany a verbal message, rather than to carry messages in themselves.

As in the folk tradition, some practitioners of Earth-Centred Spirituality use offerings to express a message of welcome. Ellen Evert Hopman, a Celtic Reconstructionist Druid, writes that houses decorated with greenery at the Solstice are "prepared to welcome the nature spirits" (31). Fresh evergreens in the house are "a sign to woodland spirits that they may find safe refuge in your home" (Hopman 32). Similarly, offerings may be left to invite the fairies to come to a particular place, such as a garden, as in the following example, from a New Age book.

> Pluck vervain and yarrow, mistletoe and rue, thyme and bay; dice each leaf and bake them into a little oaten cake, which must be sweetened with honey and three drops of rose-oil. Take it, freshly baked, at the time of the full moon, or at moonrise on Lady Day, Walpurgis Night, May Day, Midsummer's Eve and Midsummer's Day, Candlemas Day or Lammas-Tide, Christmas Day, Christmas Eve, Hallowe'en, Easter Day or Whitsuntide, or any day or eve of the saints, and set it under a tree or a bush in a little wild spot in your garden or just beyond its boundaries. Bless the cake and say:
>
> Fairies, the true work of my spirit I give thee,
> Be lovers true to my garden, I bid thee.
>
> If the cake can be placed as you watch the moon rising, and if it be a waxing moon, that is all the better. You will know if your craft is good,

> for you will begin to see a new radiance steal into the blooms and a fresh vigour vivifying all the garden. Furthermore, you will perceive fairy rings where the folk of Elfhame hold their revels. It may be that on still summer nights, or yet at dawn on a spring morning, you hear a fairy piping, which is the wildest, reediest sound mortal ears ever gladdened to. You will notice their woven baths in the bushes, which are like tiny silvery hammocks spun from spiders' webs; these are sustenance for their own dancing, luminous selves. And you may note that your flowers and trees, of themselves, begin to form natural bowers and arbours, exquisite in their beauty and magical artistry, fit for the finest queen. (O'Rush 33-35).

This kind of offering is essentially the same as leaving out fresh water to let the fairies know that they are welcome in one's house (see above), and is also an example of offering "bests" in the form of a specially made item (see Chapter 4).

The use of offerings to establish communication is a common reason for giving offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality. A woman in Maine who recently bought a piece of land posted to the Celtic Reconstructionist Pagan e-mail list "Nemeton" asking for advice on ways of "connecting" to her new property. She described her own practice of leaving offerings for the spirits of the land in terms of trying to establish a relationship with the land and its spirits:

> After the closing I plan to visit the site and make an offering of bread and wine to the spirits of the place. Does anyone have any suggestions or experiences to offer in establishing a respectful and positive relationship with a specific piece of land? (Raeburn)

One person, in responding to this post, commented that they thought that

> [l]eaving offerings of bread, water, wine, etc. is a good first gesture. I also like singing (poorly), dancing and playing music to/with the spirits. Offerings to springs or rivers on the land is also probably a place to start, whether this is bringing flowers, food, or prayers. (Scott)

The emphasis is not on communicating a specific message, but on indicating a willingness to communicate. Many Earth-Centred Spirituality practitioners, Neo-Pagans in particular, feel it is polite to leave offerings to the local land spirits when entering a new natural area, especially if they intend to visit that area often or make use of it as a ritual site (see also Chapter 3). It is most important to do this when taking ownership of an area because presumably one will be spending a great deal of time there, and a rapport with the local beings is necessary to avoid offending them—an action that could result in bad luck, among other things.

Another example of indicating the desire to communicate with fairies by way of offerings is found in Edain McCoy's book, *A Witch's Guide to Faery Folk*. McCoy recommends using "a bowl of milk or a bit of fresh butter" as an "inducement for them to manifest in the physical world" (42). Later in the book, she suggests setting out strawberries, burning green candles as the fairies favourite colour is green, and "play[ing] the folk music of their native lands" to indicate that you wish to communicate (52-3). Similarly, Kisma K. Stepanich, in Book One of her *Faery Wicca*, mentions giving offerings when seeking to contact elemental fairies—burying a crystal in the earth is recommended for initiating contact with gnomes or earth fairies (152), music and a decorated feather for the sylphs or air fairies (153), a hand-made and decorated miniature boat for undines

or water fairies (154), and "something burnable which you value" for salamanders or fire fairies (155).

The use of offerings to establish contact with spirits of land is also illustrated in an article by Philip Shallcrass, a British Druid. In his article Shallcrass compares getting to know the Celtic landscape and its spirits with Australian Aboriginal practices of singing the "Songlines" (52). His goal in communicating with the spirits of the land is to learn the song of that particular piece of land, and eventually rebuild the mythic landscape of the Celtic lands (61-2). The first step in establishing this communication is to bring an offering, preferably one specifically suited to any known spirits or deities associated with the particular piece of land addressed. As Shallcrass writes, "it is fitting to take along some token offering in exchange, perhaps a coin, or some food or drink. At Tara, for example, the Goddess Meadhbh would undoubtedly appreciate a gift of mead, the drink which shares her name" (62). Once the gift has been given , one should try to contact those spirits, to see if the gift has been accepted and communication established (62-3). At the end of this process, "when you have made it [the Song of the Land] to the very best of your ability, return with it to your holy place and sing or chant it to the indwelling spirit, offering it as a gift to her, and for the healing of the land" (Shallcrass 64). This example illustrates two different communicative offerings. The first offering consists of something, such as mead, suited to the spirit or location addressed, that serves to indicate a

willingness to communicate further. The second offering is that of a song, which communicates not only thanks to a spirit of place, but also the form of the mythic landscape to any who hear it.

Many Earth-Centred people feel it is necessary to thank the fairies and deities for any assistance that has been received. In fact it is considered rude to neglect such thanks, yet the fairies are supposed to dislike being thanked (Briggs, *Dictionary* 196; see Moura 43 for a Neo-Pagan perspective). Offerings can be used as a means of expressing thanks without offending the fairies by actually saying it. Edain McCoy writes about ending a ritual in which fairies have participated: "As you start to close your circle, be sure not to verbally thank the fairies who aided you, but instead offer them some token of appreciation for their aid. Present them with food, fire, animal food, or a precious stone" (140). One can also "leave out extra portions of milk, butter or bread for them by way of showing your appreciation" (McCoy 15) or hang sprigs of rosemary on your Christmas tree "as an offering and expression of gratitude to the elves for their assistance throughout the year" (Andrews 153). Many offerings given in a reciprocal relationship (see Chapter 3) may also carry thanks as well as being a repayment for whatever was received. Offerings of homage (see Chapter 7) are sometimes thought of as a way of thanking the spirits and deities for the day-to-day work of keeping the world functioning properly.

The message communicated by an offering can be as simple as letting the spirits know that they are not forgotten. A Celtic Reconstructionist pagan wrote of the fairies: "Give Them honor, give Them food and . . . let Them know that they are remembered and not all humans are intent on destroying Nature or denying Their existence. Start leaving milk on your doorstep or balcony for Them" (ní Dhoireann, "Beltaine"). One cannot begin a positive relationship with someone who thinks they have been forgotten, so letting them know they are still remembered and revered before approaching them for further communication or commerce can be vital.

Offerings can accompany wishes and prayers, acting as reinforcements or attention-attractors for whatever the message or request is. In the following excerpt from *Ancient Ways* by Pauline Campanelli, an American Witch, offerings are used to continue to communicate a message after the person doing the wishing or praying has finished and gone away.

> When you feel you have attracted the attention and approval of the spirit of the tree, take one colored strip of cloth at a time and hold it, concentrating on your wish and visualizing a logical way in which it might come true. Then, with the words appropriate to the color and the wish, hang the cloth in the tree by piercing it on one of the thorns and chanting your wish. (Campanelli 60)

The strips of cloth act something like recording devices—by concentrating on the wish while holding the cloth, the cloth is impregnated with the wish itself. After the person wishing has left the cloth continues to communicate the wish. This

particular spell or ritual is adapted from the folk practice of leaving strips of cloth, ribbons and other items on bushes near holy wells. In the folk tradition, the power behind the spell seems to derive from the well, and the cloth is sometimes representative of an illness that needs to be cured rather than being an offering in itself. In this example the power for the spell comes from the tree and there need not even be a well present. There is some evidence that, in ancient times, it was the combination of a well, a tree and a large stone that marked a well as sacred, although only about half of the wells in Ireland today have all three of these elements (Brenneman and Brenneman 67-70). Using the tree in isolation, as in the example above, is thus not any more incorrect than the folk custom of visiting holy wells without trees or stones.

Offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality can communicate a variety of messages. Simple messages such as thanks and welcome can be delivered by an offering alone, while more complex wishes and prayers require a verbal component or the use of an offering as a recording device for concentrated thought and visualization. The use of offerings for communication can also occur in conjunction with other uses of offerings, such as an offering given as part of a reciprocal relationship also communicating thanks or the willingness to continue the relationship, or offerings of homage also communicating appreciation and reverence. In Earth-Centred Spirituality, as in the folk

tradition, the messages tend to be simple, unless accompanied by another component.

Communion

Offerings in the form of a meal, and other food offerings which are somehow shared with the being to whom they are offered, can become something closely related to communication: communion. In fact "communication" can refer to the act of giving or taking communion (*OED*, vol. III 578).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines communion as "intimate personal intercourse, mental or ideal," "religious fellowship" and "sharing or holding in common with others; participation" (*OED*, vol. III 579-580), indicating that communion is almost a kind of communication, but on a very personal level. Communion also refers to the Christian ceremony in which worshippers consume the body and blood of Christ, imparting a sacred connotation to the word. Communion can take the form of a sacrificial feast, which is a meal "taken in common to create a bond of artificial kinship among the participants" and "since food constantly remakes the substance of the body, shared food can create the same effects as shared origin" (Durkheim 341). Food and beverages shared with the fairies can create such a bond, and reduce the likelihood of the fairies taking offense from other events.

Communion: Folk Tradition

There are not many examples in the folk tradition of the sharing of food between humans and fairies where both are present for the meal. Some of the offerings discussed as envy behaviour in Chapter 4 might be viewed as a kind of communion, however. In cases such as this a portion of the meal is set aside and left out for the fairies after the human family has gone to bed. Items like the "dividing cake" of Mannin may also fit in this category as such cakes are made from the same dough and at the same time as the baking done for the humans. Whether such offerings should be considered sops or communion depends on the attitude and motivation of the giver, which is sometimes difficult to determine from a printed source. It is also possible that both motivations can be in effect at the same time.

There are a few stories and customs from the folk tradition that do seem to indicate a communal meal. The setting up of a "harvest queen," a figure made of wheat ears dressed up, to preside over the harvest supper seems to indicate a meal, shared in actuality by the human participants, that is also shared, at least symbolically, with a deity or harvest spirit (Gomme 145). In the following story a Manx man makes a gesture that may be interpreted as a sacrificial feast of sorts (this story is also discussed in Chapter 4):

> Not many years ago a man of the name 'Gill-y-Currie' living in Jerby, was accustomed always on Sundays, when he came from church and was preparing for his own dinner, to put spoons under the table for the fairies in order that they might help themselves. (Crellin 3)

While there is no indication of whether the fairies actually participated in the meal, the potential for communion is there. This placing of spoons for the fairies is not as formal as the various rituals usually considered to be sacrificial feasts, but it is structurally similar, and has a similar goal—that of establishing or maintaining a relationship with the supernatural—and it communicates that goal in a ritual manner involving food.

In a similar story from Scotland, a man communes with the fairies via shared porridge:

> Ewen, son of Allister Óg, was shepherd in the Dell of Banks (*Coira Bhaeaidh*), at the south end of Loch Ericht (*Loch Eireachd*), and stayed alone in a bothy far away from other houses. In the evenings he put the porridge for his supper out to cool on the top of the doubie wall (*anainn*) of the hut. On successive evenings he found it pitted and pecked all round on the margin, as if by little birds or heavy rain-drops. He watched, and saw little people coming and pecking at his porridge. He made little dishes and spoons of wood, and left them beside his own dish. The Fairies, understanding his meaning, took to using these, and let the big dish alone. At last they became quite familiar with Ewen, entered the hut, and stayed whole evenings with him. (Campbell 73)

In this example, the shepherd turns the fairies' act of helping themselves to the porridge into a communal meal. In addition to the sharing of a feast, this story also illustrates the use of another offering—the little bowls and spoons—to communicate a particular message. In this case the message is that the fairies are welcome to stay and partake of the food, but could they please refrain from eating out of the same dish. This story also involves hospitality and its

conclusion, not quoted, deals with a lapse in communication and its consequences, when the shepherd misinterprets the facial expressions of a woman the fairies bring with them and neglects to offer her any food. It is perhaps because of the bond established between the shepherd and the fairies by the sharing of meals that there is no active retaliation for the slight. The fairies merely cease to visit the shepherd and he never sees them again. A ploughing custom from Scotland also hints at communion in the form of a shared meal:

> When the plough was "strykit," *i.e.*, put into the ground for the first time in autumn or spring, to prepare the soil for the seed, bread and cheese, with ale or whisky, was carried to the field, and partaken of by the household. A piece of bread with cheese was put into the plough, and another piece was cast into the field "to feed the craws." (Gomme 143, long "s"s changed)

Much of the motivation behind folk offerings to the fairies seems to be the reduction of danger from the presence of those beings. This can be accomplished by establishing trading partnerships, as in Chapter 3, by reducing their envy, as in Chapter 4, or by establishing communication or creating a bond by sharing food, as in the present chapter.

Communion: Earth-Centred Spirituality

Due to the perception of fairies as spirits of nature and the focus on nature as sacred in Earth-Centred Spirituality, communion is a common form of offering, especially in Neo-Pagan practice. The kind of "communion" generally practiced by New Agers, as well as some Neo-Pagans, is more of a mind-to-mind

communication, and will not be discussed here (but for examples, see Wolfe). In New Age practice communion also takes the form of a sharing of energy, while in Neo-Pagan ritual, communion tends to be in the form of a sacrificial feast. Some communion-like offerings will also be discussed in Chapter 7.

Since much New Age philosophy revolves around the primary importance of the non-material, it is not unusual for New Agers to give non-material offerings. New Age practitioners often seek to connect with and share the energy of the universe, which is thought to unify all beings. People may also seek to contact fairies and other beings in the non-material, or "astral,"[64] world, and to share both the energy of the universe, and their own personal energy, with them. A good example of this is in Claire O'Rush's *The Enchanted Garden*. In this book, the symbol of a six-pointed star is used to represent the love and energy of the universe (16). This energy, combined with one's personal love and energy, can be given as an offering by visualizing the angels or fairies being in the star or bathed by the light-energy of the star, as in the following example:

> When you make a request, thank them [the fairies] in advance for their co-operation, and always hold them and the garden in the light of the star, asking the Angel [of the garden] to help you to open your heart so that the light may stream forth unimpeded. This is *your* gift to the fairies . . . . (36)

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[64] Actually, there are several non-physical otherworld or planes of existence in the New Age wordview. The astral is the one closest to the physical, is the easiest to reach, and is the dwelling place of the fairies (Porter, "New Age Movement").

Since food is material, it makes sense that non-material communion does not use it, opting instead for that non-material product of the consumption of food: energy.

Unlike New Age thought, Neo-Paganism recognizes the importance of the material or physical, and celebrates it, most prominently in the form of nature. One of the most common forms of Neo-Pagan offering is shared food; a "sacrifice" or plate of food offerings and a cup of wine or other beverage is frequently kept on the altar at all times during a ritual. In Wicca/Witchcraft, there is a specific step in a formal ritual when the wine is consecrated and the food is blessed. Janet and Stewart Farrar include such a consecration in their *Eight Sabbats for Witches*:

> A male witch kneels before a female witch in front of the altar. He holds up the chalice of wine to her; she holds her athame point downwards, and lowers the point into the wine . . . .
>
> The man says:
>
> *"As the athame is to the male, so the cup is to the female; and conjoined, they become one in truth."*
>
> The woman lays down her athame on the altar and then kisses the man (who remains kneeling) and accepts the chalice from him. She sips the wine, kisses the man again and passes the chalice back to him. He sips, rises and gives it to another woman with a kiss.
>
> The chalice is passed in this way around the whole coven, man-to-woman and woman-to-man (each time with a kiss) until everyone has sipped the wine . . . . (Farrar and Farrar 46-47)

The plate of cakes is blessed in a similar way, with each person taking and eating a cake. This particular example is highly formalized; many Wiccans/Witches would use a similar, but less formal version (such as in Moura 150). The

remainder of the food and wine, or a special portion set aside ahead of time, may be placed in an appropriate outdoor location as an offering to the deities and/or spirits, the wine being poured upon the ground as a libation (see also Chapter 2), or the group may finish it all, with the assumption that the deities and spirits took their share of the essence of the food while the feast was sitting on the altar.

When an offering is left, it may be placed quietly where the fairies will find it, or it may be accompanied by words to express its purpose, as in an example from a Wiccan source:

> When you make your libation to the fairies, you must do it ritually. Raise again the cup of Ale and tip it to all four directions, saying:
> *Faeries and blessed creatures of the elements who came here to join in the worship of the Mother Goddess – I offer you a portion of the Esbat Ale, blessed of water.*
> Do the same with the Cake, saying:
> *Faeries and blessed creatures of the elements who came here to join in the worship of the Mother Goddess – I offer you a portion of the Esbat Cake, blessed of earth.* (McCoy 152)

Other Neo-Pagan groups have similar communal offerings. In the Wiccan/Eclectic Neo-Pagan group that I was involved with in Victoria, we often raised the wine cup to toast the spirits before drinking, and left a portion out for the fairies afterwards.

Offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality, such as those described above, are often given for the express purpose of communion. A connection is sought with the deities and spirits via the medium of something partaken of in common, be it energy, a beverage, or a meal. Although folk offerings may not always be given

with the express purpose of communing with the fairies, they do sometimes serve the purpose of establishing a connection between humans and fairies, which can provide protection and facilitate other relationships. These motivations are also found in Earth-Centred Spirituality.

Conclusion

As shown by the examples in this chapter, communicative offerings can consist of items given to express simple messages of welcome, unwelcome and thanks, or they can be coupled with verbal or thought components to transmit more complex meanings. Malefijt compares the mechanism of communication via sacrifice to communication via prayer:

> The communication model used for prayer is applicable to sacrifice. Here, too, a 'sender' and a 'receiver' must be present, but, instead of words, the sacrificial items are now the symbolic medium of communication. The meaning of the sacrifice and the expected reactions depend upon cultural symbolism and the given circumstances of the ritual. Ritual sacrifice is, therefore, a form of exchange between man and the supernatural and is, in this respect, similar to verbal communication. The human actor presents goods; the divine receiver reacts. Once the sacrifice has been made, subsequent events are interpreted, positive or negative, as the supernatural reaction. (209)

Communion, such as the sacrificial feast or communal meal, can also involve communication but, more importantly, it establishes a bond between human and deity or fairy. By sipping the consecrated wine and eating a portion of the feast then offering the rest to the fairies, one is participating in a shared act of consumption. Offerings of food where a deity is given a part of what the givers

themselves eat "have the faithful and the god commune in one and the same flesh [the food offered/eaten], to tie a knot of kinship between them" (Durkheim 341).

Communication is a two-way thing, just as reciprocity is—in fact communication can be said to be a specialized form of reciprocity, in which thoughts or ideas are exchanged, rather than goods or services, although the goods and services may be used as means of communication, or bearers of messages. Communication can also be a way of beginning a reciprocal relationship of another kind—that of "trade" or exchange of goods and services. Communion may be a result of the desire to give honour or reverence to the spirits, a desire which may also be expressed in the giving of gifts. From this communion other forms of communication can develop, sometimes resulting in a reciprocal exchange relationship. Even the giving of gifts itself can be seen as a way of communicating reverence.

As with many offerings to the fairies, communication and communion seek to establish a positive relationship with potentially dangerous beings, or beings with whom it is otherwise desirable to be in a relationship with. Creating such a bond both reduces the risk of negative encounters and opens the way to positive interaction.

CHAPTER 6: PREVENTATIVE OFFERINGS

Introduction

Many offerings to fairies in the folk tradition are intended to prevent things—ill luck, the misuse of one's possessions, or physical harm to one's person or livestock. In this chapter, I address such preventative offerings. Bread is thought to be particularly effective as a preventative and is discussed in detail. This type of offering is common in stories from the folk tradition, but is only rarely found in Earth-Centred spiritual practices. Some possible reasons for this are explored.

Preventative Offerings

A preventative offering is an offering given to prevent negative or unpleasant things from happening. This type differs from offerings that communicate unwelcome in that offerings of unwelcome are primarily domestic and incite the fairy to leave. Preventative offerings do not cause the fairy to leave, but prevent it from doing harm. Preventative offerings also differ from other preventative or protective *objects* in that offerings are given to the fairy while protective objects keep the fairy away. Protective objects seem to function by the possession of some property that the fairies cannot tolerate—such as the holiness or Christian nature of Bibles, crosses and prayer books, or the presence of iron, a metal the fairies are said to avoid at all costs, as in placing a pin in a

child's clothes to prevent her from being *taken* (see Hartland, *Science* 95-97). Some protective objects such as bread crusts may have originated as preventative offerings (see The Protective Qualities of Bread, below).

I have distinguished preventative offerings from homage partly because preventative offerings are usually given out of fear or caution rather than reverence. The key distinction that I am making between preventative offerings and offerings of homage (see Chapter 7) is that, while the latter may have preventative aspects, they are primarily religious in nature and the fairy has the free will to respond or not. Preventative offerings, on the other hand, are given specifically to prevent negative events and are primarily magical, the fairy being compelled to do as the offerer wishes by use of a ritual or formula. However, there is an overlap between these categories. Related to preventative offerings, and thus included in this chapter, are offerings given to propitiate the fairies after one has offended them. Such offerings are preventative in the sense that they can prevent further harm from occurring by re-establishing an appropriate relationship between humans and fairies.

In *Primitive Religion*, Paul Radin describes the development of sacrifice as a series of steps. According to this model, offerings were originally given to a shaman or other religious specialist as payment for interceding with the supernatural world to prevent harm. This developed into offerings for the spirits or deities themselves, for the same purpose (Radin 176). From here, according to

Hubert and Mauss, sacrificial rites developed in which the things offered had to be sacralized in order to reach the deities. The final stage in this evolution was homage, in which the worshippers expected no return for their offerings (Hubert and Mauss 2). Preventative offerings to the fairies are offerings given directly to the deities or spirits themselves, to prevent harm.

Preventative Offerings in the Folk Tradition

Preventative offerings are made to keep the fairies from doing mischief or causing harm. These offerings are given in two contexts: domestic and liminal. Domestic offerings are given in the house or very nearby, are usually left by women, and function to prevent harm from coming to the household. The offering itself is usually of milk, water and/or baked goods. Liminal offerings are left in betwixt-and-between areas—pastures, forests, seashores, and so on—which are outside of domestic space and close to the fairy realm. These offerings are frequently left by men, function to protect livestock, crops and the offerer him- or herself, and may consist of a wider variety of items then domestic offerings.

Offerings in Domestic Space

Offerings of milk, water or baked goods are frequently set out for the fairies of the household. The woman of the house usually leaves the offerings in the kitchen—often on the hearth—after she has tidied the house and immediately

before she goes to bed. Things that can happen if these offerings are not given are described in numerous stories. For example, in England,

> . . . if that the *bowl* of curds and *cream* were not *duly set* out for Robin Goodfellow, . . . why then, either the pottage was burned the next day in the pot, or the cheese would not curdle, or the butter would not come, or the ale in the fat [vat] never would have a good head. (Harsenet, quoted in Keightley 291, italics in original)

Similarly, in the lowlands of Scotland, fairies "often came to people's houses at night, and were heard washing their children. If they found no water in the house, they washed them in *kit*, or sowen water" (Campbell 77). More morbidly, "the Fairies would suck the sleeper's blood if they found no water to quench their thirst" (Campbell 20). Likewise, in Cornwall, "[t]he muryans visit human houses at night, and if water is not left out for them they wash their babies in the milk" (Briggs, *Personnel* 56).

This type of story can be found in Irish tradition, as well:

> In any case a careful housewife should always, before retiring to rest, leave a large vessel full of good drinking water in the kitchen. One night a woman was awakened by a great noise, and on entering her kitchen, found the fairies in possession, some of them cooking victuals before the fire, whilst others were preparing the food. The good people cautioned her to go back, so she wisely retired again to her bed. The next morning everything in the kitchen appeared undisturbed, except the large vessel used for holding drinking water, which was full of blood, a hint to leave in future plenty of pure spring water for the self-invited guests. (Wood-Martin 9)

McAnally describes a domestic Irish leprechaun who got revenge when he was left an inappropriate offering:

> . . . what he eats must be specially intended for him, an instance being cited by a Clare peasant of a Leprechawn that deserted an Irish family, because, on one occasion, the dog having left a portion of his food, it was set by for the Leprechawn. "Jakers, 't was as mad as a little wasp he was, an' all that night they heard him workin' away in the cellar as busy as a nailer, an' a sound like a catheract au wather goin' widout saycin'. In the mornin' they wint to see phat he'd been at, but he was gone, an' whin they come to thry for the wine, bad loock to the dhrop he'd left, but all was gone from ivery cask an' bottle, and they were filled wid say-wather, beways av rayvinge o' phat they done him." (McAnally 141)

The family tried to make up for the slight, but the fairy never returned. Another Irish fairy, the *Fir Darrig*, is given hospitality as a preventative offering, for if it is denied him some mishap will befall the cattle (Croker 397-400). In the Isle of Man, the fairies were given a special cake:

> (Bride) remembers a girl baking at his house and forgetting to break the 'thollag rheiny' ('sullag rhenny', 'dividing-cake'). When she got into bed she received a blow in the eye which knocked sparks out. This she knew to be from the fairies, and she went down and baked another cake and broke it for them. (Crellin 3)

(See Chapter 4 for another quoted passage, and a discussion of the dividing-cake as a "best" offering).

The basic rules that can be gleaned from the preceding stories is:

give appropriate offering = no trouble with fairies

give inappropriate offering = harm from fairies

no offering = possibility, or even certainty, of harm

This is a kind of magical formula (see Malefijt 13), and works on the same principle as that of giving a particular offering to a supernatural being to bring

about a particular result. In these stories, however, one is not asking the fairies to do something, rather one is asking them not to interfere at all. In particular, one is asking them not to interfere with the household—be it the smooth running of day-to-day affairs, or the health of its inhabitants.

Offerings in Liminal Space

Liminal areas, those outside of the domestic sphere but not quite in the supernatural realm, are the most likely places for direct human-fairy encounters, and are thus the most dangerous places for a human to be. Giving offerings in such areas is thus very important, as there are both "potential rewards and dangers attendant on contact with the liminal world" (Wood, "The Fairy" 61). Most Newfoundland stories of fairies take place in such areas, and will be discussed in the next section. Offerings given in liminal space protect humans who go into these areas, as well as livestock, which frequently occupy liminal territory. In the following Irish example the fairies are already doing the mischief, and the offering is to get them to stop:

> A farmer bringing his cows home late in the evening hears children in a *lios* crying for milk. Their mother tells them they will have it when the farmer's cows are milked. During the milking one of the cows upsets the milk-can and some milk is spilled. The same thing happens next evening. On the third evening the farmer goes to the *lios* and offers the milk of his best cow to the fairies if they will cease to upset his milk pails. They agree.
>
> Later the man gets into financial difficulties and the bailiffs come and seize all his cattle. When the bailiffs try to drive the cattle they themselves are thrown and tossed about and beaten by some unseen

> assailants, the cattle escape and are all driven back to their owner by the fairies. (An Seabhac 325)

As indicated by the second paragraph of the story, the preventative offering led, in this case, to a reciprocal exchange in which the fairies return the cattle to their master as an exchange for the milk he gave them. Offerings are also important when passing through fairy territory. One risks gaining ill-luck from the fairies if they "pass a fairy haunt without leaving some offering there, a piece of cheese or other morsel" (Spence, *Fairy* 314).

Many Scottish stories deal with the results of not leaving a portion of milk, or other appropriate offering, for cattle-minding fairies such as the *glaistig* and the *gruagach*. Of the *glaistig*, it was said:

> In summer she accompanied the cattle to the hill pastures, and there had her portion of milk duly poured out for her in the evening in a stone near the fold. Unless this was done the calves were found next morning with the cows, the cream not risen from the milk, a cow was found dead, or some other mischance occurred. . . . She disliked dogs very much, and if a present of shoes or clothes were made to her, she was offended and left. (Campbell 160)

These same motifs are found in stories about brownies—including offering milk, giving assistance in return for food, and the dislike of clothes. While it is usually clear that brownies are given offerings as payment for work done or as a reward, the offerings to the *glaistig* are to propitiate the fairy—not for an offense given but to *prevent* such an offense. In a few stories it is indicated that the *glaistig*'s help is not even wanted but cannot be avoided, that, as Jenkins commented on

Irish fairies, "the health of the family's cattle, and hence its survival, was in the custody of the fairies and could not be withdrawn at will" (Jenkins 318). If the *glaistig* departs, "no one misses her" (MacDougall 51). Another description is as follows:

> Many a tale has been told about her, and many a pail of milk was spent on her by dairymaids at the shielings of the Glen. For the night they left the pail full of milk for her, they would find everything right next day; but the night they neglected to do this, the calves would be let out of the fold, and the cows would be sucked dry next morning. (MacDougall 51-2).

Spence mentions that there was a specific cavity in the ground at a ruined Scottish convent where milk was poured for the *glaistig* (*Fairy* 54-55). In a sense, the milk offering is a payment for the work of minding the cattle, yet the feared consequence of not leaving the offering is that harm will come to the cattle, not that the benefits of having the fairy do the work will be terminated.

The *grugach* is a Scottish fairy that, like the *glaistig*, looks after the cattle and "[u]nless nightly offerings of milk were made to him, the best cow might be found dead in the morning" (Spence, *British* 5). To facilitate these offerings "[a]ll through the West Highlands hollow stones are found in which milk-offerings to the *grugach* were poured, and these are still popularly known as 'grugach stones'" (Spence, *British* 5). Another narrative is this:

> A Gruagach was to be found in every gentleman's fold (*buaile*), and, like the Glaistig, milk had to be set apart for him every evening in a hollow in some particular stone, called the Gruagach stone (*Clach na Gruagaich*), kept in the byres. Unless this was done no milk was got at next milking, or the

> cream would not rise to the surface of the milk. Some say milk was placed in the Gruagach stone only when going to and returning from the summer pastures and when passing with milk. (Campbell 185)

In some areas, a specific "rune" or charm was spoken while giving the offering, to ask the fairy to protect the herd and keep away "death-spirits" (Spence, *Fairy* 57). This is unusual in the folk tradition, where it is generally thought to be offensive to draw attention to an offering by announcing it (see Chapter 2). There is very little difference between the *glaistig* and *gruagach*, except that the former is always female and the latter usually male. In fact, there are cases in which the names are used interchangeably (MacDougall 48) or where *glaistig* is described as a kind of *gruagach* (Campbell 186). Whatever the case may be, both of these fairies serve the same function, and both are given preventative offerings of milk which are propitiatory in nature. In Ireland, just after a cow has calved her first milk, called "beestings," is poured on the roots of a fairy thorn or in a fairy fort. This offering is meant to prevent fairy malice towards the cattle and the cowherd (Evans 304).

In parts of Scotland, banshees were also given offerings.[65] In the Aberdeenshire Highlands there are two hills "where travellers had to propitiate the banshee by placing barley-meal cakes near a well on each hill; and if the traveler neglected the offering dire calamity was sure to follow" (Evans-Wentz

[65] According to Patricia Lysaght banshees are not actually fairies, but their lore does connect them to the fairy tradition, and in many folk sources, they *are* considered to be a kind of fairy.

437). Encounters like this are unpleasant, and offerings were made to prevent them. An Irish preventative offering is described:

> Those who made poteen long ago had a lot of stories about the good wee folk who often visited them when they were distilling. For fear of the law it was out on the hills and in the mountain glens they made it. They always spilled three drops of the first run and of the best run on the ground. If they did not do this they believed they would have bad luck with the run and they might expect that the searchers would come on them before they were ready and had everything hidden away. (Ó hEochaidh 111-113)

This story is very similar to stories in which the fairies are given poteen or other illicitly brewed alcohol as payment for keeping away the law. In this example, however, the offering is given to prevent the fairies from *bringing* the law. Other offerings of liquor were given to prevent something unspecified, but no doubt very bad, as in this Manx example:

> Port St. Mary men used to pour a noggin of rum (half a gill) into the sea from their boats as they passed the headland of Kione Dhoo on their way to the Kinsale and Lerwick fishing-grounds. The object of their sacrifice was a cave called *Ghaw-Kione-Dhou* ('Black Head Inlet'). The late J.J. Kneen told me that rum was occasionally thrown from the top of the cliff also, with the words *'Gow shen, y veisht!'* ('Take that, evil spirit! or 'monster'). (Gill 36)

If one did offend the fairies in some way, it was possible to propitiate them by giving an offering after the fact, if one had enough time, as in Ireland, where "[a] libation of some of the thick new milk given by a cow after calving, if poured on the ground, more especially in the interior of a rath or fort, is supposed to appease the anger of the offended fairies" (Wood-Martin 6-7). In

England it was sometimes possible "to restore fertility to land rendered sterile" by performing a remedy that included an offering of "oil and honey, and barm, and milk of every cattle which is on the land, and part of every tree which is grown on the land, except hard beans, and part of every wort known by name, except buckbean" (Gomme 139, long "s"s changed). Although it is not stated that this offering is given to the fairies, it seems to be related.

The key difference between preventative offerings proper and propitiatory offerings is in the timing. In order to prevent something, the offering is given beforehand. To propitiate an offended fairy, and thus prevent more or worse from happening, the offering is given as soon as possible after the event which caused the offense.

As with domestic offerings, liminal offerings are given not to get the fairies to do something, but to prevent them from doing something. With items given in liminal space, the offerings are intended to prevent the fairies from interfering or doing harm to livestock and humans who must work in or travel through fairy territory. Propitiatory offerings attempt to reestablish the proper relationship between humans and fairies, thus preventing the fairies from causing further harm.

Preventative Offerings in the Newfoundland Folk Tradition

In Newfoundland, most stories about offerings to the fairies are preventative in nature. The popular idea is that most fairy legends in

Newfoundland come from communities where most residents are of Irish descent (Rieti 6). One should therefore expect to find stories like those from Ireland, however, this does not seem to be the case, indicating that fairy legends are found among Newfoundlanders of varying cultural and genetic ancestry. A St. John's resident who was born and raised in Ireland recalled that one need not be afraid of the Irish fairies unless one has harmed or offended them (O'Neill), while Newfoundland fairies do not seem to need a reason to do mischief. Many Irish stories of fairies refer to harmless pranks, while others describe the helpfulness of the Good Neighbours. In contrast, I have found very few Newfoundland stories which tell of fairies helping people,[66] and none of those mention offerings, with the single exception of a previously cited story in which a woman left bread in return for favours (Chapter 3).

A woman from Renews told me that the custom in her community was to avoid places that fairies were known to inhabit but, if these places could not be avoided, an offering of bread should be left at a particular rock so that no harm would come for trespassing on fairy territory. She also told me that her mother, who was not originally from Renews, had a similar tradition in her home community, also on the Southern Shore of Newfoundland (Lawlor). In "The Fairy Faith," a CBC radio programme, a woman who grew up in Carbonear

[66] Narváez presents a few stories in which people encountering the fairies are given musical or artistic gifts ("Newfoundland" 347, 351) and in other narratives people may be fed by the fairies to keep them alive (for examples, see Narváez, "Newfoundland" 345, 346).

spoke of berry picking with her mother, who taught her to always take bread along. "We also, always, left a piece of the bread on the hills for the fairies," she said. Since berry picking is a task which takes place away from human areas, in liminal space, there was increased danger of contact with the fairies. This kind of bread offering could help insure the safety of the berry pickers. These stories also follow the general Celtic idea that it was unlucky to pass a fairy place without leaving an offering (Spence, *Fairy* 314). In another narrative an old woman gives an offering of hospitality—a fire, chairs set out, and food and water on the table—to prevent fairy mischief (Rieti 33-34, see Chapter 4 for quoted passage).

One woman that I spoke to described the childhood practice of people that she knew, of "build[ing] little places for them [the fairies] in the woods." She told me that "they'd always go into the woods and find a place they thought the fairies would like, and make homes for them, so they would leave the human's houses alone" (Moores). Another woman told me about building these houses, first as a child and then with her own children. "We'd go into the woods and find the kind of place that fairies would like," she said. She also explained that the houses had to be made entirely of natural materials—things that you would find in the woods (Hood). I have not come across any offering like this in the Old World folk material, but in the recent movie *Fairytale: A True Story*, which recounts the Cottingley Fairy incidents, the young protagonists give the

fairies a tiny house built of natural materials. Whether or not this is an indication of the existence of a corresponding folk tradition is difficult to say.

In the preceding examples offerings are given to prevent encounters with the fairies. The rules at work in these stories is:

leave offering = no harm

no offering = harm is possible

This formula is almost identical to that of the folk tradition of the Celtic areas of the Old World and is likewise a magical formula.

The Newfoundland offerings so far mentioned avoid harm by preventing contact with the fairies. There are also narratives which describe the uses of propitiatory offerings when one *does* meet the fairies. In a story from St. Brides, some children were doing mischief near the place where a fairy known as Peggy Birch lived. This greatly annoyed the spirit, who said "the only way that she wouldn't bring harm to them is that if they gave her a piece of bread and molasses and some water. So they gave it to her and, after this, all the youngsters ran off" (MUNFLA 95-268/21). A similar story comes from Bell Island: A girl met a fairy in the woods, who chased her right to her house. The last line in the story is: "The only way to get read [sic] of a fairie was to give the fairie a loaf of bread" (MUNFLA 95-286/11). Another story tells of two girls who met a fairy forest blocking their way home one night. They were given bread and told to

> [m]ake the sign of the cross over yourselves and go on. And when you reaches over to where the trees are, throw some pieces of bread. Put a piece of bread in your left hand and throw it with your right hand all around everywhere, and you'll be alright. (MUNFLA 79-374/16, quoted in Rieti 17)

In these stories, bread and other offerings are given so that the offerer can safely get where they are going without being harmed or led astray.

There are also narratives describing what happens when such offerings are not made. A couple who met a herd of fairy horses that snapped at their baby and bread "didn't have the sense to give 'them' some of the bread" and the baby soon died (Rieti 27). The offerings in these stories, which refer to events that take place upon meeting the fairies, fall somewhere in between preventative offerings and propitiation after giving offense. They are not fully preventative, since they did not prevent a negative encounter between humans and fairies, but they are given to prevent harm from occurring when the fairies are encountered.

There are very few stories of offerings in Newfoundland which are not preventative in some way, and almost all human-fairy encounters are negative. Many of the items offered are some form of bread. The reasons for the efficacy of bread as a preventative are discussed in the next section.

The Protective Qualities of Bread

Bread is a common offering in all of the Celtic areas, but in Newfoundland it is particularly useful as a preventative. Newfoundland stories that involve

bread offerings as a protection from the fairies are common. Barbara Rieti suggests four reasons for its effectiveness:

1. the bread is carried so a person will have something besides fairy food to eat if abducted
2. bread represents the Host, and fairies are repelled by Christian religious artifacts
3. bread is a talisman of domesticity, and protects by its mundaneness
4. bread is a sop (see Chapter 3) (Rieti 75-6)

The first possibility, that the bread is for a person abducted by the fairies to eat, seems logical when one considers stories about people becoming trapped and unable to return to the human world because they ate fairy food. However, this is not such a plausible idea when considering the Newfoundland material, since I have not found any stories about people becoming trapped in fairyland by eating the food there. In fact, there do not seem to be any stories in which a person consumes the protective bread they are carrying. There are many accounts of people being led astray by the fairies, but they seldom seem to be taken to another realm (but see Narváez, "Newfoundland" 344-353, especially narrative 17). Sometimes people *taken* in Newfoundland are fed by the fairies, but eating such food does not trap them, rather it keeps them alive until they can be found by their friends (see Narváez, "Newfoundland" 345-346). Fairy abduction stories are very rare in other parts of North America (Hand 143),

although this could be a fault in collecting, rather than an actual lack of stories. This idea makes better sense in an Old World context, where people are more frequently carried off to fairyland, however, I did not come across any Old World stories in which people who were carried off ate food that they had brought with them, either.

Rieti cites two examples in which Newfoundlanders relate bread to the Christian sacred Host. In one, an informant always called bread "blessed and holy bread," but did not connect this holy property to its use as a protective charm (MUNFLA FSC80-282, in Rieti 75). In the second example, bread was stated to be an effective protection from fairies and other malign beings because it "was supposed to be blessed in that it resembled the sacred Host" (MUNFLA FSC80-295, in Rieti 75). There is precedent for this idea in Irish tradition where priests, "in special danger of attack from the fairies on [their] way to baptism," carried such things as "salt, bread, urine and blessed water" as protection (Ó Héalaí 612). In addition, there are instances in Old World folk tradition where it is reported that the fairies were driven out of various areas by the building of churches or the sound of church bells (Briggs, *Dictionary* 20). However, I do not believe the resemblance of bread to the Host is related to the *origin* of the use of bread as a protection from the fairies, which is more likely to be found in the leaving of offerings.

Katharine Briggs refers to bread as "[t]he prototype of food, and therefore a symbol of life . . . ." (*Dictionary* 41), in reference to Old World traditions, which probably derives from the fact that bread was an important staple food in many European populations and remains important as a food to the present day (Braudel 132-133). This is related to Rieti's proposal of bread as a "talisman of domesticity" the protective nature of which is found "in its very mundaneness " (Rieti 76). Rieti does not offer any Newfoundland examples that support this idea, and the only example I found was a mention that, in Scotland, "a basket containing bread and cheese was placed on the bed to keep to fairies at a distance" when a woman was giving birth (Gomme 111, long "s"s changed). There is no indication of why this worked, and it is quite possible it originated as a sop. Bread might work as a protection through its nature as the essence of culture if the fairies it is protecting against are seen as the essence of the wilderness, to which culture is opposed. In Newfoundland, it can be argued that this is so, since most fairy encounters occur in wild, or liminal, areas, such as the woods or berry patches, outside of the cultural sphere. In the Old World, however, many of the fairies are themselves domestic and are encountered within the household, so it is unlikely that bread as a symbol of domesticity would threaten them. In addition, there are stories, including some from Newfoundland, in which bread actually has to be used rather than just carried.

These stories specify that one must offer the bread, or give it to the fairies in some other manner, such as throwing it at them (see previous section).

Another possibility for the effectiveness of bread as protection against fairies, that of it being a sop or substitute for a person who might otherwise be abducted (Rieti 76), has the most direct supporting evidence. Narváez presents two stories in which his informants explicitly state that bread carried in one's pocket was to be given to the fairies if they were encountered. One of these people said, "At this time the people believed that if you went into the woods you had to bring some bread with you to feed the fairies so they wouldn't bother you." The rest of the narrative concerns what happened to a man who forgot the bread and encountered fairies ("Newfoundland" 351). The other informant said "All were very cautious when going out at night to carry a piece of bread along in their pocket to give to the fairies to eat so they would not be stolen by the fairies" (363). Some of the Newfoundlanders I spoke to also said that the bread was used for this purpose. One woman spoke of being an archaeologist's assistant, surveying along the Labrador coast. She said, "You'd be walking along, and suddenly you'd come across perfect, beautiful circles of rocks. Nobody goes there now, and you knew no one had been there in the past. Fairy rings, they called them." People in the towns would give her a piece of hard bread to keep in her pocket as protection against the fairies. She supposed that it was to offer to the fairies if she met them (O'Brien). Another woman agreed that

the bread was for offering, so the fairies would not hurt you or lead you astray (Murphy), but a third woman I spoke to said her mother had also given her bread to protect her against fairies, but she had never heard it was for offering. "You just carried it in your pocket," she said (Reilly). Narváez cites a student in Newfoundland who said her family always carried a piece of bread while berry picking "to keep the fairies from 'leading you astray'" ("Introduction" xii), and Briggs mentions that, in the British Isles, "[b]efore going out into a fairy-haunted place, it was customary to put a piece of dry bread into one's pocket" (*Dictionary* 41), but there is no indication of how the bread was meant to work.

Of the four reasons Rieti gives for the protective effectiveness of bread, it appears that the idea of bread as a sop (or preventative offering) is the emic explanation, which has the most supporting data. In other Celtic areas, bread is one of the most common foods left for the fairies, and we have seen how forgetting to put out the offering sometimes resulted in violence from the neglected spirits. Similarly, in Newfoundland, people captured or pursued by the fairies will be left alone if they give the creature some bread. These stories link the custom of offering bread to the fairies with the idea of carrying it for protection.

The Lack of Preventative Offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality

Preventative offerings are extremely rare in Earth-Centred practices. Neo-Pagans and others with similar beliefs are often located in urban areas, and

believe that fairies are no longer in contact with humans in such areas. Thus one does not have to prevent them from doing anything, since they are already gone. Rather, if one wants to benefit from an acquaintance with the fairies, one has to first attract them. As R.J. Stewart commented in his Neo-Pagan book *The Living World of Faery*, " . . . while our ancestors often sought to break away from the faery realm, many modern contacts are intentional" (8). This may be a reason for the emphasis on offerings of homage in Earth-Centred practices (as discussed in Chapter 7).

One book, Edain McCoy's *A Witch's Guide to Faery Folk*, made mention of giving offerings for what is almost a preventative reason. McCoy writes: "To ensure fairy goodwill, especially as you start to seek them out more and more" it is a good idea to leave frequent offerings (17). Even this instance refers to ensuring goodwill from the fairies, rather than preventing ill-will. I also interviewed one person involved in eclectic Earth-Centred Spirituality who described, in preventative terms, one of the reasons that she gave offerings.

> Having had experiences like the old hag,[67] and living in a haunted house—I find myself quite motivated to do anything that will help alleviate a genuine sense of awe which can be a little scary. I also think that by offering a gift to the something-that-isn't-quite-there, or the half-perceived and undefined presence that seems to permeate my perception of the world around me, maybe—just maybe I'll get a good night's sleep. Maybe I won't have any nightmares. Things that go bump in the night are fine in books and movies—but much less so at 3:00 am when you are

[67] An Atlantic Canadian term for a particular kind of supernatural visitation or nightmare involving sleep paralysis.

> alone in the dark and the wind howls to come in. I feel a little cleaner (like the bad guys are gone), safer and protected, when I leave an offering and spend a little time being aware of this presence. There's even a sense that things will be better now, maybe I will have good luck. (McNeill, "fairy feast")

This woman had numerous supernatural experiences which were not related to the fairy tradition, and which she distinguishes from it. Yet she indicates that by leaving offerings for the fairies—usually cookies and incense, and sometimes milk or wine poured on the ground (McNeill, personal communication),—she may be getting on friendly terms with one part of the supernatural realm which may somehow help mediate relations with other supernatural beings (McNeill, "fairy feast"). She also lived much of her life in rural Nova Scotia and is probably much closer to folk tradition than other practitioners of Earth-Centred paths, and her beliefs were likely influenced by ideas about protection, and the need for protection that are found in the folk tradition.

One final example of a preventative offering in Earth-Centred Spirituality comes from the web site of AACT (Aisling Association of Celtic Tribes, also referred to as "Aisling"). In their basic ritual outline, "step 9" is an "offering to the outsiders," described as an offering "to those Gods and non-Gods who might wish us harm we offer to outside [the ritual space] so that we make treaty with Them and They might leave our rites alone. Grain, bread, beer—whatever seems appropriate" (AACT, "Ritual"). AACT is a Celtic Reconstructionist Pagan group, drawing extensively on folk tradition and scholarly research of the past, so it is

not surprising that their practice includes preventative offerings. Reconstructionist Neo-Pagans tend to pay more attention to both positive and negative aspects of folk tradition than some of the more New Age influenced groups.

The extreme rarity of preventative offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality probably results from the idea that humans and fairies no longer interact on a day-to-day basis. In order to interact with the fairies in the modern world one must first attract them to you. In addition, Earth-Centred practitioners tend to view fairies as friendly and beneficent, or at least generally non-dangerous, and most do not feel the need to protect themselves from these beings.

Conclusion

Preventative offerings work on the principle that if the appropriate offering is given, no harm will come to the offerer, or a specific negative event will be avoided. Similarly, propitiatory offerings are given after a human has offended the fairies, to prevent harm from occurring at all, or to prevent further harm. In the folk tradition, preventative offerings follow the magical formula of offering = no harm, no offering = harm possible. The formula in the Newfoundland folk tradition is the same. However, in Newfoundland, the offerings in nearly all of the stories I examined were of the preventative type.

A common item given in preventative offerings is bread, which was almost the only thing offered in the Newfoundland folk tradition. Bread has

protective qualities, which may come from it allowing kidnapped people to avoid eating fairy food, from its resemblance to the Host of Christian tradition, from its nature as a talisman of domesticity and culture, or from its use as a sop or offering, the last of which is by far the most common in Newfoundland. Earth-Centred spiritual paths are almost entirely lacking in information about preventative offerings, probably because fairies are considered benign creatures and contact with them is unusual and almost never occurs without deliberate invocation.

CHAPTER 7: HOMAGE

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss offerings that are given as acts of homage to the fairies. In Hubert and Mauss' evolutionary scheme of the development of sacrifice, such offerings are the final stage. Offerings of homage are those in which the offerers do not expect to gain anything in return for the offering (Hubert and Mauss 2), and are given as an expression of reverence (see also Chapter 4) or as part of a complex of necessary religious actions. Some offerings in the folk tradition are the remnants of pre-Christian acts of homage, although the "fairy faith" became as much a part of "folk" Christianity as is had been of the earlier religious system (Ó Giolláin 199). Reverence and respect for the fairies continued using Christianity as its new frame of reference (Ó Giolláin 202-203). The bulk of offerings to fairies within the context of Earth-Centred Spirituality are also offerings of homage. Because New Age and Neo-Pagan homage offerings differ, they will be discussed separately.

Remnants of Homage in the Folk Tradition

Some scholars have argued that many folk customs are remnants or survivals of more ancient practices (for examples see Arensberg 163; Gomme 91; Evans 296; Spence, *Fairy* 307-334). George Laurence Gomme, in *Folk-Lore Relics of Early Village Life*, made a survivalist connection between English folklore and

ancient religion when he referred to the man of a household as the chief priest, the hearth as altar, and the domestic fairy as an "ancestral house-god" (Gomme 91). He also describes a Cornish custom of "resorting to the hearth, and touching the cravel (the mantle-stone across the head of an open chimney) with the forehead, and casting into the fire a handful of dry grass, or anything picked up that will burn." This practice, says Gomme, "is, to all intents and purposes, a hearth sacrifice" (96, long "s"s changed). There are numerous folk practices which likely have their origins in ancient religion, including the many examples of offerings to the fairies which seem to be made for their own sake and not because they will bring about a particular result. In fact, Evans-Wentz says that food offerings, which he explicitly refers to as "food sacrifice," are "without any doubt . . . a survival from pagan times" (279). Briggs writes that, while some offerings are "normal and neighbourly associations," others, such as "putting flowers on stones sacred to the fairies and pouring milk into the holes of cupped stones," are "observances half-way between acts of neighbourliness and worship" (*Dictionary* 411).

Wood-Martin connects the Irish fairy-faith with older religion, just as Gomme does with the English material. He gives this description of an old type of offering:

> On May eve the peasantry used to drive all their cattle into old raths, or forts, thought to be much frequented by the fairies, bleed them, taste the blood, and pour the remainder on the earth. Men and women

> were also bled, and their blood sprinkled on the ground; but this practice has, it is believed, now died out, though sacrifice through blood, or the taking away of life, is still considered sacred and beneficial. (Wood-Martin 6)

Incidentally, this is also one of the extremely rare mentions of a blood sacrifice being offered to the fairies. Wood-Martin also writes about Irish peasants who spill a portion of their beverage on the ground before drinking as a libation to the Good People, and compares this practice to Italian peasants who spill a few drops of a newly opened bottle of wine "Per Bacco." The Irish example, says Wood-Martin, is an unconscious sacrifice to "the ancient gods of the land," just as the Italian example is "a relic of a libation to the rosy god [Bacchus]." He even connects the accidental spilling of milk by children to this idea, as it is unlucky to scold the child because the milk so spilled goes to the fairies (Wood-Martin 7). Other writers, including some in Earth-Centred Spirituality, have also used this idea (for examples see McCoy 54; Wisteria, "Faery Recipes").

The Tuatha Dé Danann, the old Irish gods, "became and are the Fairy-Folk" (Evans-Wentz 284). Spence writes that the fairies of the British Isles are also the guardians of agriculture, like their predecessors, the Old Gods, and as such are entitled to "the same tithe of corn, milk, and other agricultural produce as was exacted by the Tuatha Dé Danann " (Spence, *British* 26-27).

In Cornwall, a fairy called *bucca* was given offerings. Cornish fishermen "left a fish on the sands for *bucca*, and in the harvest a piece of bread at lunch-

time was thrown over the left shoulder, and a few drops of beer spilt on the ground for him" (Briggs, *Dictionary* 50). It is sometimes implied that the *bucca*, who is often stated to be a single being, rather than a class of fairy, is the remnant of a pre-Christian god (Briggs, *Dictionary* 50). E. Estyn Evans compares the gate piers used as an offering place in a County Armagh, Ireland, practice of leaving the first two plates of champ, a Hallowe'en mashed potato dish, for the fairies to megalithic "flat-topped monoliths." He points out especially that, just as one gate pier is pointed and one flat, megalithic monuments are often alternately pointed and flat-topped (103).

Spence mentions "a 'magical stone' at Altagore, County Antrim" that was "famous as the site of food-gifts offered to 'the Grogan,' the name for a fairy in the North of Ireland" (*British* 177). This "food offering consisted of butter and oatmeal cakes" (Wood-Martin 307). Unfortunately, neither Spence nor Wood-Martin provides much context for this offering. Although it appears to be a remnant of pre-Christian ritual, there is no way of knowing if it was an offering of homage or if the offerers expected it to bring about some result or prevent harm, although these possibilities need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, Bruford comments that the story he describes about a northern Scottish man who was hit on the ankle by a fairy and had to give it water by pouring it around a boulder to make the pain stop (see Chapter 3) "sounds more like an offering for a divine cure than a transaction with a neighbour" ("Trolls" 131), while Spence

claims that milk offerings in hollow stones, found "in many parts of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland," are "vestiges of what would appear to have been offerings or sacrifices" to the fairies (Spence, *Fairy* 40).

If the practice of giving offerings is partly derived from pre-Christian religious practices it is possible to see some of these offerings as the remnants of acts of homage. This does not mean that the people giving these offerings today (or even in the more recent past) do so as acts of homage. They may be giving offerings in order to gain something in return, and although no such return is mentioned, it may be understood to other members of the folk tradition.

Homage in Earth-Centred Spirituality

Among all of the offerings to fairies made by people on Earth-Centred spiritual paths, offerings of homage are by far the most common. This is consistent with the philosophy, found especially among Neo-Pagans, that "Earth is alive" (Harvey 15). Fairies, though not quite deities,[68] are representatives of the earth, and thus deserve reverence. Although the practices of most people on Earth-Centred spiritual paths are similar, there are differences, particularly between the New Age and Reconstructionist Pagan ends of the continuum (described in Chapter 1). As I shall illustrate, these differences are based on differences in underlying philosophy. Because Neo-Pagan paths tend to have

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[68] With the exception of the Tuatha de Danann, and some individuals who *used* to be deities.

more in common with each other than with New Age spirituality, I have grouped all types of Neo-Paganism together for the purposes of this discussion. Some varieties of Neo-Paganism have been influenced by New Age ideas, however, and this will be noted where applicable.

New Age Homage

The reverence for the fairies expressed by people on a New Age spiritual path is not necessarily a reverence for the representatives of the earth, but for beings on a "higher plane" than our physical world. In fact, fairies are thought to be located somewhere in the lower echelons of the great angelic hierarchy (see Chapter 1). Because of this, offerings may be "astral" rather than material or physical. O'Rush describes an offering of light or life energy as "*your* gift to the fairies" (O'Rush 36). Similarly, the people of the Findhorn Community in Scotland and Penny Kelly, an American grape grower and New Age counselor, wrote of interacting with fairies, elves and devas on the astral or "devic" plane and seeing them with their astral vision (see Findhorn 73 and Kelly 213-221, especially 216). Both the people of Findhorn and Kelly made non-material offerings of astral communion (see Chapter 5), as well as a commitment to working with the fairies in both the physical and non-physical realms. However, in both of these cases offerings were also made on the physical level by using environmentally friendly gardening and farming methods. Whether offerings are material or astral makes little difference to New Age practitioners who, like

many Neo-Pagans, believe that other planes of existence, and thus a person's actions in those planes, are as real as the physical world (Blamires 15). In fact, in many New Age philosophies the "higher realms" are *more* real than the physical world, and the physical world may even be viewed as illusory (Harvey 220).

New Age ideas of what fairies are and the kinds of offerings one can give are quite different from the folk tradition, though the New Age concept of fairies as lesser angels is similar to the folk idea of fairies as fallen angels or neutral angels that were cast out of heaven (McAnally 92). As we shall see, New Age concepts of the nature of fairies and practices relating to them are quite different from many Neo-Pagan ideas and practices, though some of the offerings are quite similar. One offering, recommended by the same author who wrote of "the light of the star," is "a gift of homemade bramble jelly, put into a little pot marked 'for the good folk' and buried near to the bramble bush" (O'Rush 62). This simple food offering can be compared to the folk tradition, although the people in the folk tradition are not as likely to leave the jelly in a jar, but would put it on a biscuit or slice of bread. O'Rush also described the folk tradition of wassailing as an appropriate means of giving homage in a New Age context:

> It is for the sake of this Apple Tree Man that the custom of wassailing the apple trees is performed upon old Twelfth Night (17 January). For this, you must repair to the orchard, or to the apple tree in the garden, choose the eldest and drink to it by taking a sip from a tankard of cider which you have mulled over ashen-wood. Throw the rest over its gnarled roots, and place a mite of toast which has been steeped in cider in a fork of its boughs. (O'Rush 48)

In the folk tradition, this offering would part of a reciprocal exchange, in which the offering is given to ensure good apple crops. The wassailing song given by O'Rush is nearly identical to versions from folklore sources, and even includes the reference to the expected size of the apple crop. However, the placement of this ritual in *The Enchanted Garden,* her book about honouring the angels and fairies through one's garden, indicates that the author views it primarily as an act of homage, and only secondarily as part of a reciprocal exchange. The same is true for the cake offering described in Chapter 5 (O'Rush 33-35).

New Agers tend to concentrate on non-material acts and offerings, since they believe fairies to be primarily non-physical beings. They may sometimes give material offerings because fairies can sometimes materialize in physical form. In addition, physical acts have non-physical intentions behind them, and these intentions may be seen as offerings in themselves.

Neo-Pagan Homage

Although some Neo-Pagan authors draw on New Age theories about what fairies are and how to communicate with them (see McCoy 5, 38-41), fairies are given reverence primarily as representatives of the natural world and not as higher beings, though they are often given the same kinds of offerings as the deities. As spirits of nature, fairies may be either elementals, representatives of a particular aspect of nature, or *genii loci*, spirits of particular places. One Celtic

Reconstructionist group, Aisling, refers to nature spirits as our "Kindred of . . . this world" while the gods are our Kindred of the Otherworld, and the ancestors are our Kindred of the Underworld (AACT, "AACT"). This group also makes a distinction between nature spirits and the *Sidhe*, the latter being identified with the fairies. There is no mention of what this distinction is based on, and most other Neo-Pagan groups I have encountered do not make it.

The Beltaine rite of *Ár nDraíocht Féin*, an American Druid organization, illustrates the Neo-Pagan view of fairies as elemental beings, referring to them as "you who rule the wildwood." Some of their attributes are described in the ritual.

> To all the Sidhe-folk of the soil, tillers and reapers, cattle Sidhe and arbor Sidhe and folk of the hearth . . .
> To all the Sidhe-folk of the Earth, stone and soil, stream and pool, bird and beast . . .
> To all the Sidhe-folk of the sea, merrow[69] and selkie,[70] of sunlit shallows and the deeps . . .
> To all the Sidhe-folk of the air, trooping sidhe and the voices on the wind . . . (Corrigan "ADF," see Appendix for the full version of this ritual)

In this quote, the *sidhe* are identified with various functions and positions within each of the three realms of the Celtic worldview—land, sea and sky.[71] A Nova Scotia resident, subscribing to Neo-Pagan thought, also described her ideas of fairies in elemental terms.

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[69] An Irish mermaid cognate (Briggs, *Dictionary* 290).
[70] Scottish fairy seals whose natural form is human (Briggs, *Dictionary* 353-354).
[71] This threefold division is derived from Celtic mythology and is frequently used by CR pagans to replace the four elements—earth, air, fire and water—of Western occultism.

> I suppose I think of the little people as being not so much people as more like elemental beings (like the spirit of the wind or a tree) or intelligent-animal-like spirits, or maybe like ghosts. It's hard to put into words. I feel a strong need to acknowledge their presence—especially when I'm feeling vulnerable, or at special times—new year [sic], changing seasons, birthdays, anniversary of important dates—that sort of thing. (McNeill, "fairy feast")

This expresses an important concept in Neo-Pagan philosophy: that of acknowledging the spirits. It is considered polite to greet the spirits of a place and express reverence or appreciation, especially if one has not visited that place before, as we saw in the discussion of hiking in the forest in Chapter 3 .

A good example of the concept of acknowledging the spirits comes from a discussion on the Druid and CR Pagan e-mail list "Nemeton" in which a new landowner asked for suggestions for rituals to honour the land and establish a relationship with it (see Chapter 3 for the full quote). She commented that she wanted to respect the land and the spirits of that land, and asked "Does anyone have any suggestions or experiences to offer in establishing a respectful and positive relationship with a specific piece of land?" (Raeburn). One person who responded to this query suggested offerings of bread, water, wine, singing, dancing and music (Webber, see Chapter 3 for quoted passage).

The range of items considered appropriate as offerings of homage is similar to that of other offerings in Neo-Pagan practice. As previously mentioned, Neo-Pagans frequently draw upon the folk tradition for inspiration, so all of the offerings found in the folk tradition, such as milk, water, alcohol,

baked goods, a piece of land and sharing one's home, are also found in Neo-Pagan practice, though sometimes in slightly different forms. One person e-mailed me, commenting that they had

> From Celtic friends, the tradition of placing honey, butter, and milk out in the garden for the major celebrations. This has evolved to where I gladly put out under the elderberries silver coins, earrings, small bells, small tokens. Not to mention chocolate treats left around the keyboard [of the computer]. (CRD)

A wide variety of other items are also found, including mushrooms (Stormcrow), milk and honey (Storm), and chocolate (Taylor). Some of the examples I have quoted in previous chapters also mention offerings not found in the folk tradition. These include a precious stone (McCoy 140), green candles and "the folk music of their native lands" (McCoy 52-3), feathers or bright colored things (Landy), a crystal, music, a decorated feather, a hand-made and decorated miniature boat, "something burnable which you value"(Stepanich 152-155), and a specially composed song (Shallcrass 64). I also found a recipe for a special "Elfin" incense containing *Rhus aromatica* (fragrant sumac), juniper berries, willow bark, red sandalwood and honey in one of my old journals. Unfortunately, I did not record the source.

Campanelli suggests fragments of coloured egg shells as an offering (48). There is some similarity here to the tradition of crushing one's eggshells to prevent witches from using them as boats, however in this case the shells are viewed as something pretty to give the fairies and not as a preventative of any

sort. The only other folk example connecting fairies to eggshells that I am aware of is the story known as "The Brewery of Eggshells." In this story, the woman of the house in which the baby is suspected as a changeling pretends to brew beer or cook supper in an eggshell to excite the curiosity of the fairy and cause it to give itself away (Hartland 113-116; Croker 41-46).

Almost anything of value is potentially an appropriate offering, though some things are thought to be more appropriate, depending on the purpose of the offering and the being to whom it is offered; for example mushrooms would only be appropriate at certain times of year, such as Mabon and Samhain, two autumn festivals. This is the time when mushrooms are in abundance, and would be considered appropriate as a representation of the waning year (Stormcrow).

As previously discussed, Neo-Pagan offerings appear quite similar to New Age offerings. Indeed, some New Age practitioners give material offerings and some Neo-Pagans give astral ones, depending on what influences the individual believer has had. It is clear, however, that Neo-Pagans have more of an emphasis on physical offerings, especially where offerings of homage are concerned. Since much of the inspiration for Neo-Pagan practice comes from the folk tradition, the way fairies are viewed is also similar. Whether or not they have physical mass, fairies are something real with a tangible effect on the physical world. Thus, they are treated as physical beings and given physical

offerings. There are exceptions, of course, in cases where a person's thought and practice have been heavily influenced by New Age (see Wolfe for a good example), rather than folk, ideas. In these cases, most offerings are given in "the other realms" while the practitioner is in an altered state of consciousness. In Neo-Paganism in general, however, there is almost always a physical component to offerings. This is especially true at the Reconstructionist end of the continuum, where actions are thought to be more important than ideas, sometimes even more important than belief.

The appropriateness of the item offered is often considered to be of utmost importance for offerings of homage. These offerings are used to express reverence, especially those given at major festivals or holy days, and the depth of that reverence is thought to be reflected in the appropriateness of the offering. Someone who takes the time to choose and find or create the best possible offering likely has a deeper commitment to their spirituality than someone who offers whatever is at hand. This idea is reflected in the discussion of offerings on the listserv "Imbas," discussed in Chapter 4. One of the list members put it best: "Of course daily work is likely to some to involve token offerings—a stick of incense, a spill of ale or water. I think these are accepted because the Powers know they will receive more fitting gifts at the greater feasts" (Corrigan "Re: Alchohol" [sic]).

Conclusion

Some folklorists have described many folk practices, fairy offerings among them, as remnants of pre-Christian religious actions. Fairies, in some cases, are thought to be diminished gods or minor deities. Whether or not this is true, many offerings are given without any apparent motive for gain on the part of the giver. These could be considered acts of homage. This may, however, simply be a result of the way a custom or belief was recorded. Many of these offerings may, indeed, be given to achieve specific results which, for whatever reason, are not apparent to someone looking at the custom as an outsider. In addition, reverence for the fairies is as much a part of popular religion in many areas as worship of the Saints, and there is no conflict between these beliefs (Ó Giolláin 202).

The practices of New Agers and Neo-Pagans (at opposite ends of the continuum of Earth-Centred Spirituality) are similar in many ways, but the beliefs and philosophies underlying these practices can be quite different. While there are New Age practitioners who have been influenced by Neo-Paganism and vice versa, these two groups of people tend to focus on different things. New Age practice centres around the belief that fairies are a part of the angelic hierarchy, and are thus higher beings who must be contacted and interacted with on the non-physical astral level. Neo-Pagans, on the other hand, believe that fairies, while they exhibit characteristics of higher beings, are primarily physical

beings existing within the landscape. Because of this, giving appropriate offerings, especially those of homage, is very important.

Neo-Pagans frequently look to the folk tradition for inspiration. They, like some folklorists, believe that many folk customs are survivals of pre-Christian religious practices and represent a tangible connection to the past. Because of this, there are more similarities between Neo-Pagan and folk practices than between Neo-Pagan and New Age practices, despite the sometimes superficial way folklore is used for models of Neo-Pagan practice.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

What Forms do Offerings to the Fairies Take?

Fairy offerings can be arranged into two broad categories: food offerings and non-food offerings. Both of these categories are found in the folk tradition and in Earth-Centred spiritual practice. Food offerings in the folk tradition often consist of baked goods such as bread, oatcakes or barley-meal cakes. Other food offerings include potatoes, honey, butter, eggs and cheese. Among the less common offerings are pasties, fish, fruit and assorted other items. Water, milk and cream are commonly left beverage offerings. Alcoholic beverages, including the last wine in a glass, poteen, rum, homemade ale and the first whiskey after a good catch of fish are also common.

Offerings of food can be given in either a domestic or liminal context. Domestic offerings are frequently products of the domestic sphere, such as bread and butter or oatcakes, while liminal offerings are often products of the fields such as milk or poteen.[72] However, domestic products can be and are given in liminal contexts, and vice versa. The most important thing to consider in giving food offerings in the folk tradition is that they must be given in an appropriate manner: freely, generously and without drawing attention to the offering. Inappropriate offerings like stale food, dirty water, peelings, bones or cold

[72] This illicitly made alcohol was often distilled in a hidden valley or other location away from the house.

leftovers should not be given to the fairies any more than they should be given to a human guest.

Food offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality primarily consist of items mentioned above for the folk tradition, but may also consist of other food items. Some of the offerings mentioned in this thesis are butter, bread, honey, grains, fruit, mushrooms, chocolate, birdseed, animal food and specially cooked dishes containing ingredients associated with fairies in folklore and literature. In Earth-Centred Spirituality, water is sometimes mentioned in print as a folk tradition, but is seldom actually used as an offering. Milk, cream and alcohol are much more common, perhaps because they are more "valuable." Alcoholic offerings cover a wider range than found in the folk tradition. Wine, mead, beer, whiskey and nearly any other alcoholic drink are offered, although many practitioners will select an offering that seems appropriate to the place, occasion and specific fairy.

In Earth-Centred Spirituality, food offerings are often left as part of a ritual, thought that is not always the case. Such a ritual may be done for the express purpose of giving the offering, there may be a specific section of an otherwise unrelated ritual for the offering, or it may be left as part of closing the ritual. As with the folk tradition, offerings must be given generously and they must be of good quality – the best available.

Non-food offerings in the folk tradition are somewhat less common than food offerings, though they come in several varieties. These include clothing—which generally causes the fairy to leave; hospitality—such as vacating part of the house, welcoming strangers, or leaving a fire, bathwater, a clean house or food and drink on the table; land—such as the Goodman's croft; music; and help—such as fixing items or rescuing fairy children. As with non-food items, these must be of high quality and given generously but not obviously.

In Earth-Centred Spirituality, non-food items are nearly as common as food items. There are counterparts for most folk offerings—hospitality is offered by some Neo-Pagans, land may be set aside, music is played, and so on. Incense and scented oils, as well as more tangible things such as quartz crystals, polished stones, feathers and other natural or handmade objects are considered appropriate offerings. Mulch, herbs, tobacco, a decorated tree and seashells are also potential offerings. Anything that "feels right" for the specific time or place can be offered. New Age practitioners also give non-material offerings while in an altered state of consciousness. These non-material offerings, whether they consist of good wishes, one's own energy, or objects visualized into existence on a non-physical plane, tend to be more common than physical offerings in New Age contexts. Once again, offerings must be freely and generously given and of high quality. Like food offerings, Earth-Centred Spirituality offerings are frequently given during the course of a ritual.

What are the functions of the offerings?

In the main chapters of this study I have examined fairy offerings in terms of some of their social functions. In Chapter Three, I illustrated how these offerings can be seen as part of a system of exchange between humans and fairies, where offerings are given in order to receive something in return, and to maintain neighbourly relations. In the folk tradition, this reciprocal exchange creates a bond, a trading partnership, between humans and fairies, helping to reduce the danger that fairies pose. In Earth-Centred Spirituality, such exchanges are sought partly to gain magical allies and partly to create a closer bond with the sacred earth, via the supernatural representatives of the earth: the fairies.

Chapter Four examined offerings as a means of preventing any envy fairies might have towards humans. Fairy offerings can function as sops, or symbolic sharing, as well as true sharing. In the folk tradition, the emphasis tends to be on the sop, though not exclusively. The reduction of envy from the fairies is important as it also reduces the likelihood that the fairies will take envy-induced action, thus reducing the danger to humans. In Earth-Centred Spirituality, though envy-reducing offerings are emulated, few people actually feel that fairies envy them. If anything, the fairies themselves are envied. Sharing what one has with the fairies brings humans and fairies closer, thus bringing Earth-Centred people closer to the sacred earth.

The use of offerings as a means of communication from humans to supernatural beings was examined in Chapter Five. To people in the folk tradition, offerings represent a means of expressing simple messages like welcome or unwelcome where face-to-face or verbal communication is impossible or dangerous. In Earth-Centred Spirituality, offerings are a way of communicating when face-to-face or verbal communication is impossible or *inappropriate*. People in Earth-Centred Spirituality do not generally fear the fairies, but they do not want to do anything to offend them and drive them away.

Communion with the fairies establishes a bond with them ("a knot of kinship" (Durkheim 341)). In the folk tradition this bond decreases the possibility of harmful action on the part of the fairies, while in Earth-Centred Spirituality it brings the humans closer to nature and closer to the deities. In both cases, other forms of communication or exchange can develop out of ritual communication and communion.

Chapter Six focused on the preventative nature of offerings: the use of offerings to supplicate the fairies and prevent them from causing harm, and their use to re-establish a positive relationship when a taboo has been violated. This kind of offering is important within the folk tradition, but quite rare in Earth-Centred Spirituality.

Finally, in Chapter Seven I examined the nature of homage and the possibility that many offerings to the fairies, especially in Earth-Centred spiritual

contexts, are a form of gift giving without any expectation of return. In the folk tradition, some offerings may be remnants of pre-Christian ritual, rather than actual fairy-worship. This type of offering is one of the most important in Earth-Centred Spirituality. By emulating folk offerings, one is making a valuable connection to the pre-Christian past. In addition, offerings of homage represent a chance to get closer to one's deities. To New Agers, fairies are lesser angels, and getting closer to them gets one closer to God. To Neo-Pagans, fairies are the representatives of nature and the sacred earth and becoming close to them also means a closer relationship with the sacred.

In the folk tradition these functions seem largely to relate to the idea of reducing danger and gaining a measure of control over a vast, impersonal universe or a natural world that is cruel as often, or more often, than it is kind. Fairies are often seen as having control over aspects of the natural (or even domestic) world or as being able to impart luck to chosen individuals. Thus, by giving offerings to these spirits, one can hope to gain their favour, or at least avoid their disfavour, and through them, gain some control of one's own over the indifferent world. Briggs' "old Lindsey man" perfectly articulates this idea in his own way (see Chapter 4 for a quote that follows this one).

> Folk thought as the Strangers helped the corn to ripen an all the green things to grow, an as they painted the purty colours o' the flowers, and the reds and browns o' the fruits in autumn, an' the yallering leaves. An they thought as how, if they wor frathched, the things ud dwine and wither an', the harvest ud fail an the folk go hungered. So they did all

> they could think on to please the tiddy folk, an keep friends wi' em. (Briggs, *Vanishing* 155)

I talked to a woman whom I knew left offerings for the fairies every Hallowe'en, and one of the things she expressed was that it was a way to help get control over her fears. In an e-mail message, she wrote "Having had experiences like the old hag, and living in a haunted house, I find myself quite motivated to do anything that will help alleviate a genuine sense of awe which can be a little scary." She added that giving offerings made her feel that she might not have nightmares, and might instead have good luck (McNeill, "fairy feast," see Chapter 6 for full quoted passage). Not only can one acquire a measure of control over the universe by dealing with the fairies, but one can acquire goods and services, just as in a trade with human partners.

Perhaps the most common reason for leaving offerings in Earth-Centred Spirituality is that they are a means of connecting with, and offering respect to, nature. It is not unlike the practice of some North American Native groups of offering tobacco to any spirits that might be in a place before entering or using the area. The same woman who mentioned the old hag in the previous paragraph (a Neo-Pagan with some background in the Nova Scotia folk tradition) also said that she sees leaving offerings for the fairies as a way of giving reverence to nature. She wrote of feeling the need to acknowledge the presence of fairies as elemental beings (McNeill, "fairy feast," see Chapter 7 for

quote). While offerings in the folk tradition seek to reduce danger, those in Earth-Centred Spirituality seek a connection with the fairies that is spiritually rich. In addition, one stands to gain magical services by trading with the Good People.

Another possible function of these customs is that they fill a desire to believe in magic. An example of this may be seen in the childhood devotion to Santa Claus by most Westerners. What is Santa's milk and cookies after all, but an offering to a "right jolly old elf"? There is even the hope that if Santa is pleased with the offering, he will leave more or better presents.

How are Earth-Centred practices related to the folk tradition?

From the preceding chapters it can be seen that people practicing Earth-Centred religions have drawn, and continue to draw, on the folk tradition for inspiration and instruction, and often make explicit reference to folk offerings. New Age theory on fairylore has tended to be somewhat more separated from the folk tradition than Neo-Pagan theory has, though one of its ultimate sources, via Theosophy, is Robert Kirk's seventeenth century description of Scottish fairy belief.

Within Neo-Paganism, the folk tradition has been given more emphasis, as folklore is seen as largely the remnants of past belief and practices and is highly valued for that reason. Even the folk tradition among contemporary people is seen as a living connection *to* the past. This can be seen not only in

fairylore, but also in other aspects of Neo-Paganism. Many Neo-Pagan books make extensive reference to the folk tradition. For example, the Farrars' book, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, though it follows the ritual forms of Gardnerian Wicca (derived from various sources by Gerald Gardner), contains extensive descriptions of local (Irish) customs that occur at the same time of year as the major Neo-Pagan holidays. The book *Ancient Ways*, by American witch Pauline Campanelli, takes as its specific goal the adaptation of past and present folkways to contemporary pagan practice. Because folklore is seen as remnants from the past, using the folk tradition for examples of how to give offerings to the fairies allows contemporary Neo-Pagans to get closer to their spiritual ancestors, the pre-Christian Pagans.

Such offerings also allow people to get closer to the fairies themselves, though not for protection as in the folk tradition, but as a means of getting closer to the sacred earth. In the words of one Neo-Pagan, "working with Nature Spirits can . . . bring a deep sense of partnership with Nature, and bring new levels of attunement" (Wisteria, "Nature"). In addition, many Earth-Centred people feel a responsibility to take action against the destruction of the natural world. As R.J. Stewart comments, "contact between human and non-human beings . . . is now sought actively as a potential source of re-balance in a time of environmental crisis" (8). The idea is that as humans become closer to the earth

and its representatives, we will cease doing things which harm it, and seek to take positive actions to avert an environmental crisis.

Suggestions for Further Research

While formulating and refining the topic for this thesis, and during the research and writing of it, I encountered avenues of inquiry that I had no room or time to explore in the present work. I focused almost exclusively on Celtic folk material and Celtic-influenced Earth-Centred Spirituality material, but there are many other cultures besides Celtic ones with fairy traditions, and many of them have influenced practitioners of Earth-Centred religions. In particular, Norse/Germanic fairylore and the uses of that lore by Norse/Germanic Neo-Pagans would be a fruitful topic of research.

Practitioners of Earth-Centred Spirituality, especially Neo-Pagans, are making more and more use of folklore of all kinds. A broad view of how Neo-Pagans employ folklore would be valuable to the continuing study of both contemporary religions and contemporary folklore. More specific studies are possible on an almost infinite variety of subjects relating to Earth-Centred Spirituality and folklore. The papers in volume 20, number 1 of *Ethnologies* (formerly *Canadian Folklore canadien*), and Sabina Magliocco's essay "Rituals are My Chosen Art Form" are excellent examples of this kind of study.

Final Comments

This research and the resulting thesis have had enormous personal meaning for me. Fairylore has been a particular interest of mine for a very long time, and having an opportunity to deepen my knowledge of the subject was a dream come true. I did not have to feel guilty about reading fairy books when I should have been researching my thesis because by reading fairy books I *was* researching my thesis.

As a Neo-Pagan, I have always tried to honour the land spirits, the elementals and the "owners" of nature as part of my religious practice. This research has allowed me to better understand the nature of offerings. I also discovered other, and often better, ways of honouring the fairies than those I had tried before. I hope that others have found reading this thesis to be as enlightening as I found writing it.

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APPENDIX I: PRINTED SOURCES

I have not attempted to cover every single fairy book in existence in this section. Instead I have concentrated on the books that I used in this thesis, and those which are appropriate to the immediate discussion. Although many fairy-related books are thus not described here, the major works are covered.

Printed Sources: Folk Tradition

The history of printed material dealing with fairies begins with Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth*, written in 1691 or 1692, but first published in 1815. This book is a detailed description of the nature of Scottish fairies including information on human interaction with them.

First published in 1825, Thomas Crofton Croker's book *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* was the next major fairy book to appear. In 1870 the two volumes of legends were published together, resulting in a nearly 500-page collection of Irish fairy stories. Briggs refers to Croker as "the first field-collector of folk tales in Ireland" and comments that, although the stories in this book were edited "nevertheless they represent genuine folk traditions, and a few of them are described as written down verbatim" (*Dictionary* 82). In a recent article, Jennifer Schacker-Mill writes that, in fact "Croker makes no claim to verbatim transcription; rather . . . it is an attempt at rendering the legends in 'the

style in which they are generally related by those who believe them' that is his express goal" (27).

One of the best-known collections of fairylore is that of Thomas Keightley, written after Keightley contributed to Croker's book. *The Fairy Mythology* was first published in 1828 and was revised and enlarged in 1860 and 1878. Keightley read through countless books and manuscripts to collect the stories for this book, and drew on his own boyhood memories of Irish stories. The result is a collection of stories about fairies and fairy cognates from the literature of the Middle Ages, the Norse Sagas and Eddas and Persian and Arabian romance, as well as the folk traditions of Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, England, Ireland and other Celtic regions, Greece, Italy, Spain, France and areas of Eastern Europe and Africa. The stories are arranged by their place of origin, with similar stories grouped close together within those geographical areas. The amount of editing varies, with some stories quoted directly from their original sources, and others re-told or paraphrased. The stories are presented largely without editorial comment in the main text, but there are many footnotes.

Wirt Sikes' book *British Goblins: Welsh Folk-Lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions* was published in 1881. Sikes was the United States consul for Wales, and not Welsh himself. He collected folklore primarily from South Wales, but also includes material from North Wales and some of the border counties. Of four sections of Welsh folklore, only the first section of the book is concerned

with fairylore. The lore is mostly organized around a classification of Welsh fairies. This classification is somewhat oversimplified, but the book is still a potentially useful source.

Goblin Tales of Lancashire (1883), by James Bowker, though mostly about fairies, also contains stories about other supernatural beings. It is difficult to tell how much editing the author has done on the stories—some seem to be presented in dialect, while others are in polished prose. In any case, Bowker indicates in his "Introduction" that he views "the unlettered peasant" as being isolated in a vast, awesome countryside whose "bleak fells," "deep and gloomy gorges," "wild cloughs" and "desolate moorland wastes" could easily inspire beliefs in supernatural beings.

Edwin Sidney Hartland's *English Fairy and Folk Tales* (1890) contains a "collection of fairy anecdotes" (Briggs Dictionary 217), that were "selected and edited" from other sources (Hartland *English* title page). *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology* (1891), had the goal of "the application of the principles and methods which guide investigations into popular traditions" to Celtic and Teutonic folklore (v). After a couple of introductory chapters on storytelling and "savage ideas," Hartland examines various categories and themes of fairy stories, such as human midwives, changelings, robberies, time in fairyland and swan maidens. Hartland's main method is comparative, and he includes commentary on the "meanings" of some parts of the stories.

1907 saw the publication of William Jenkyn Thomas' *The Welsh Fairy Book*. This book was produced because Thomas, a schoolmaster, wanted to encourage his students' interest in fairy tales while teaching them about their own culture, but could not find any collections of Welsh stories. The book is composed of stories taken from other printed collections, with some individual episodes being organized into longer narratives (Wood "Introduction" xi). All of the texts are altered to some degree, some quite extensively (xvii). The stories are presented as "national, in this case Welsh, variants of universal story patterns which relate to a way of life which was dying out" (xviii).

James MacDougall collected Highland fairy legends which were edited from his manuscripts after his death and published in 1910 as *Folk Tales and Fairy Lore in Gaelic and English*. This book is one of the first collections of Scottish lore dealing specifically with fairies. No sources are given for the stories, although they are proclaimed as being "collected from the oral tradition" on the title page. The stories are generally re-written, though "perhaps reproducing some of the phrasing and probably the dialogue" of the original tellers in the Gaelic versions (Bruford "Introduction" ix). Variant versions of stories and similar stories are presented separately, rather than being amalgamated into a single narrative.

Possibly the best known of the older books on fairy traditions is W.Y. Evans-Wentz' volume *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, first published in 1911. The purpose of this book was to compile and examine the evidence for the

existence of fairies, in which Evans-Wentz believed. In the process, he presents a sizable collection of stories and lore about fairies, acquired during his travels through the Celtic areas, and sent to him by corespondents. He methodically examines each of the then-current theories used "to explain away the fairy-faith" (Shepard xi), and correlates the evidence with that of other "psychical phenomena." Evans-Wentz concludes that it can be scientifically proven that fairies and other supernatural beings exist. Although most folklorists are not, today, interested in proving or disproving the existence of supernatural beings, this book remains immensely useful, both for its collection of fairylore from Ireland, Scotland, Isle of Man, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, and for its careful examination of theories of the origins of fairy beliefs.

In 1913 a little volume called simply *Fairies* was published. This sixty-four-page volume, written by G.M. Faulding, is basically an essay on fairies primarily concerned with the literary tradition. It is pleasant to read, but offers little of use to folklorists.

1919 saw the publication of Michael P. Mahon's book *Ireland's Fairy Lore*, which was a compilation of a series of papers on "Ancient Irish Paganism" originally published during 1910 and 1911 under the pseudonym Gadelicus. The topics covered include ancient Irish paganism, history and mythology, as well as fairylore. The book is based on previously published works in Irish and English and the stories have been heavily re-written. The author was a Christian

Reverend, but considers the remnants of ancient Irish religion to be "feeble survivals . . . harmlessly and beautifully pervading innocent pastimes and customs of the present day" (7).

Lewis Spence wrote two well-known books on fairylore. The first is *British Fairy Origins* (1946), which is "concerned entirely with the development and origin of the British belief in fairy spirits" (*Fairy* ii), somewhat like Evans-Wentz' book, but without any newly collected material. Spence does, however, do a thorough job of compiling information from a vast array of earlier printed and archival sources. He concludes, regarding the origin of fairy belief, that "the whole tradition of Faerie reveals quite numerous and excellent proofs of its former existence as a primitive and separate cult and faith" (vii). *The Fairy Tradition in Britain* (1948) similarly draws together information from many earlier sources and contains a section on the "fairy cult," but it has a broader scope and is arranged geographically (England, Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Man, Ireland) and by theme. Spence writes of this volume: "This essay deals exclusively with the sources—literary, traditional and legendary—of British fairy record, life, custom and legend" (ii). Both of Spence's books provide excellent starting points for any exploration of fairylore.

Welsh Legends and Fairy Lore by D. Parry-Jones was published in 1953. The stories in this book were assembled largely from rare books and magazines, most in Welsh. The author believed that the readers would want to read the stories

"as they were told around the fireplaces of Wales in the hey-day of story-telling" and attempts to present them that way in his own telling, but he "reserve[d] to [him]self the right—often used—of cutting out vague and waste verbiage" (2).

D.A. MacManus' *The Middle Kingdom* (alternately titled *Irish Earth Folk*) was published in 1959. The book was intended "to pull the subject [of fairylore] out of the morass of nonsense and counter nonsense and to get it into the realm of logic" (11). The stories in the book were collected by the author, primarily from his friends and from "reliable" witnesses. MacManus readily admits to being a historian, and not a folklorist, but he presents much useful material.

Katharine Briggs is known, at least in name, to folklorists and non-folklorists alike. She was an acknowledged expert on fairies and wrote several books on the subject. Like many books before hers, Briggs' works draw largely on previous collections; it is as an organizer and commentator on the lore that she has provided an invaluable contribution to the study of fairies. Her *A Dictionary of Fairies* (published in the United States as *An Encyclopedia of Fairies*) is an excellent starting point for any exploration of fairylore. Some of her other fairy books include *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (1967), *The Personnel of Fairyland* (1969), and *The Anatomy of Puck* (1977).

Síscéalta ó thír chonaill/Fairy Legends from Donegal, published in 1977, is a collection of Irish fairylore presented in a dual-language, Irish/English, edition. The stories were mostly originally published in *Béaloideas* and *Gaeilge Theilinn* in

the 1950s and 1960s. The collector, Seán Ó hEochaidh, recorded the stories between 1939 and 1954, all but one in Irish.

1991 saw the publication of two fairylore books. *Strange Terrain* by Barbara Rieti is a study of the fairylore of Newfoundland and is based on research begun in 1983. It uses information from the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive as well as that collected by Rieti during her research on the Avalon peninsula. The book is primarily about the narrators of stories about fairies, and explores the contexts of storytelling as well as the nature of the fairies themselves. *The Good People,* edited by Peter Narváez was also published in 1991, and is a collection of contemporary fairylore essays on a wide variety of topics. It includes both reprinted and original work.

In 1996 *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins: An Encyclopedia of the Little People* by Carol Rose was published. In this book, the author attempts to provide entries for every kind of "little people" worldwide. The result is an enormous list of beings with entries of various lengths—most of a paragraph or two. What make this volume particularly useful is that Rose also provides a list of references for each being, allowing a person to look up a particular kind of fairy and get a list of printed sources in which that fairy is mentioned.

Though not specifically on fairies, there are a number of books with substantial sections on fairylore, as well as innumerable books which make at least some mention of fairies. One such book with a goodly amount of fairy

information is *The Popular Superstitions and Festive Amusements of the Highlanders of Scotland* by W. Grant Stewart, published in 1823. The author records lore and seems to attempt to write down stories as told to him as faithfully as he can. The author's purpose was to preserve as much as he could of lore that he believed to be disappearing. Although he wished the lore to be preserved, he was not sorry to see it disappearing from life. As for editing: "The length of those primitive relations is necessarily much abridged, but a strict regard has been had to their original style and phraseology" (xv).

In 1866, William Henderson's *Notes on the Folk Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* was published. It grew out of a magazine article and was supplemented by contributions from the author's friends. Chapter 7 is on "Local Sprites" and contains bits and pieces of lore about brownies, red caps, dunters, Peg Powler and various other fairy folk.

Folklore Relics of Early Village Life by George Laurence Gomme, published in 1883, sets out to record a wide variety of lore. G.L. Gomme saw folklore as the remnants or survivals of earlier practices, especially religious ones. Fairies, which he usually calls "house-spirits," he equates to gods, particularly gods of agriculture.

Superstitions of the Highlands & Islands of Scotland is another general folklore book with a substantial section on fairies. This book, by John Gregorson Campbell, published in 1900, purports to be "collected entirely from oral

sources" (title page). The stories were collected between 1861 and 1891. The purpose of the book is to present "a statement, as complete and accurate as the writer can attain to, of the Superstitions and Antiquities of the Scottish Highlands and Islands" (vii). Although much of the lore and many of the stories have been re-written, the author was careful that "no statement be made conveying an idea different in the slightest from what has been heard" (x).

J. Rhys' well-known two-volume work *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* was first published in 1901. Rhys collected folklore both by writing down narratives as they were told to him, and by way of letters that were sent to him. Much of his material was collected in Welsh. Although much of the lore was collected by Rhys himself, he does frequently refer to other printed sources. Only Volume I contains lore on fairies specifically.

In 1902 the two-volume *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, by W.G. Wood-Martin, was published, the second volume of which contains a chapter on fairies. Wood-Martin takes the stance that much of what we call folklore is remnants of older religious practices. Due to this, there are a lot of comments within the text of the book, and many comparisons of Irish material to that of other countries. However, the book is still a rich source of custom and lore, though few, if any, stories were left unedited.

Printed Sources: Earth-Centred Spirituality

New Age

Although it was not written within the context of Earth-Centred Spirituality, Robert Kirk's 17th century book, *The Secret Commonwealth*, is the ultimate printed source for Earth-Centred fairy books, particularly New Age ones. Later writers, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Coming of the Fairies*, 1921), Geoffrey Hodson (*Fairies at Work and Play*, 1925), Edward Gardner (*Fairies: A Book of Real Fairies*, 1945, later titled *Fairies: The Cottingley Photographs and Their Sequel*), and Dora van Gelder (*The Real World of Fairies*, 1977) also wrote of fairies from a Theosophical perspective.[73] Theosophical ideas of the nature of fairies draw heavily on Kirk, and Theosophism was one of the parents of the New Age movement (Porter, "New Age Movement"). These Theosophist books are concerned with the nature and functions of fairies, and are almost completely detached from the folk tradition.

After these early books there is a bit of a gap between Theosophical and New Age books concerning fairies. In 1975 a small New Age community in Findhorn, Scotland published a book called *The Findhorn Garden* in which each of the members of the community wrote about their experiences of working with

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[73] Paul Smith's article "The Cottingley Fairies: The End of a Legend" includes some discussion of Doyle's, Hodson's and Gardner's books.

devas and angels, which they equate to fairies. This book is followed by another gap in New Age fairy books, although fairies were sometimes mentioned in books about angels, as they are considered to be in the lower ranks of the angelic hierarchy.

There has been a recent fluorescence of fairy books within Earth-Centred spiritual publishing, as well as in more mainstream publishing. Of these, most are neo-Pagan (discussed below). One New Age book is *The Enchanted Garden* by Claire O'Rush (1996) which describes how people can contact angels and fairies through gardens. Unlike the previous New Age authors, O'Rush draws as much on folk custom as on New Age theory,[74] and presents suggestions for both material and non-material offerings.

The Elves of Lily Hill Farm was written by Penny Kelly, a New Age counselor, in 1997. It is much like the Findhorn book, describing the author's encounters with elves and devas (which she distinguishes as different kinds of beings) and their bargain for growing grapes on the farm. The book is written something like a journal, detailing each significant episode in the growth of the farm and the author's learning to communicate with the devas associated with different plants and animals.

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[74] While subscribed to a listserv for New Age practitioners interested in angels and fairies, called "Light," I noticed a surprising ignorance of folklore as a source for fairy information.

One final New Age book is *The Secret Life of Plants*, by Peter Tompkins, published in 1997, which rehashes Hodson and other Theosophists and attempts to correlate those theories with physics and other sciences to prove the veracity of Theosophist claims, the existence and nature of fairies included.

Neo-Pagan

In neo-Pagan literature, there has been little published about fairies until recently. For a long time, neo-Paganism consisted largely of Wicca/Witchcraft, which grew out of ritual magic and the interest in fairies was primarily in their function as guardians of the four elements. As Wicca/Witchcraft developed its practitioners became more interested in folk traditions, and small amounts of information on fairies could be found in some books. *Eight Sabbats for Witches* by Janet and Stewart Farrar, published in 1981, for example, contains a single sentence about leaving fairy offerings.

At the same time, the neo-Pagan movement continued to expand. It is among groups and individuals who draw on Celtic myth and folklore for inspiration that the most interest in fairies is found, and it is in this context that most neo-Pagan fairy books have been published. Since many neo-Pagans, especially Wiccans/Witches, are also interested in New Age ideas, the fairylore in many of these books draws upon New Age theory as well as on folk sources, resulting in a blending. The use of folklore may also be quite superficial, especially in groups closer to the New Age end of the continuum.

Enchantment of the Faerie Realm by Ted Andrews (1993) is basically a how-to book from which one "can learn to communicate with a whole world of unseen beings, including elves, devas and nature spirits" (back cover). This book has strong New Age influences, but looks to folklore for some of its information, combining these with Western occultism.

A Witch's Guide to the Faery Folk by Edain McCoy was published in 1994. It is another how-to book, specifically for Wiccans/Witches who want to work with fairies and gain their help in doing ritual and magic. Although the book draws heavily on folklore, the information is used in a superficial and at times erroneous[75] manner, as well as being combined with some New Age concepts.

The Faerie Way by Hugh Mynne (1996) was written to "provide[ ] a much-needed . . . , shamanic alternative to standard Western magical cosmology" (inside front cover). It is a how-to book for "faery shamans" that blends New Age concepts and fairylore with almost no reference to the folk tradition.

Wicca/Witchcraft continues to become more folklore-oriented while still holding to its origins, resulting in books like *Faery Wicca* by Kisma Stepanich (1994), which describes the author's own brand of Wicca/Witchcraft in which the primary deities are the Tuatha de Danann of Ireland. While claiming to be "the Ancient Oral Faery Tradition of Ireland" (front cover), this book makes only

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[75] For example, in the dictionary section of the book, "Dinnshenchas" is listed as a type of Irish fairy (206). In fact, *Dindshenches* refers to a class of story in Irish mythological literature.

superficial reference to the folk tradition. The path described is a Wiccan/Witchcraft one set against the background of the Irish literary tradition.

Green Witchcraft: Folk Magic, Fairy Lore & Herb Craft (1996) by Ann Moura presents a variety of topics from the perspective of the author's spiritual path. Despite the title, there is not much fairylore in this book, but it does make fairly extensive use of the folk tradition as well as the usual Wicca/Witchcraft sources.

I have left the discussion of *Ancient Ways* by Pauline Campanelli until last, even though it was written earlier than some of the other books, in 1991. Subtitled *Reclaiming Pagan Traditions*, this book shows the full extent of the way many Wiccan/Witchcraft groups can make use of folklore. It presents a wide variety and a large quantity of folklore compared to the other books listed here. The specific aim of this volume is to "reclaim" old folk practices and incorporate them into contemporary neo-Paganism, especially Wicca/Witchcraft.

Neo-pagans who lean more towards reconstructionalism and strive for historical accuracy generally ignore the New Age, especially regarding fairylore. These people turn entirely to folk tradition for information, both as recorded in books and as practiced currently. Books like R.J. Stewart's *The Living World of Faery*, published in 1995, look only to the folk tradition for information, but change it into something the "folk" would probably not recognize. More strict reconstructionists tend to be more faithful to folk examples. So far there have been no strictly reconstructionist fairy books, though some material can be found

in more general books such as Ellen Evert Hopman's 1995 *A Druid's Herbal for the Sacred Earth Year*.

APPENDIX II: ONLINE SOURCES

Online sources are documents found on the Internet, a vast global network of computers. It consists of a number of different parts, including the World Wide Web, e-mail, Telnet, Gopher and Usenet (Hoopes 1), each of which uses a different format and is accessed in different ways. For this project I used Usenet (see "Newsgroups"), e-mail (see "Listservs"), and the World Wide Web (see "Web Sites").

Newsgroups

Newsgroups are hierarchically categorized discussion groups located on Usenet. Messages are archived on Usenet for a limited period of time (how long depends on the number of messages posted to the newsgroup each day) where they can be read and replied to by anyone with newsreading software (Hoopes 27, 70). In addition, newsgroups are archived elsewhere for a much longer period of time, and old messages can be accessed and searched via DejaNews (http://www.dejanews.com/).

Listservs

A "listserv" is a program on an Internet server that manages and distributes messages to subscribed e-mail addresses (Hoopes 48, 69). "Mailing list" refers to the list of addresses to which the messages are sent. In general use, both "listserv" and "mailing list" are used interchangeably to refer to the whole system, and are shortened to "list." Members of a list send e-mail to the listserv, which copies and sends the e-mail to all members (Hoopes 25). Lists have to be

subscribed to, by sending a command to the listserv via e-mail, in order for a person to be able to send and receive messages. As a consequence, lists tend to have fewer off-topic posts than newsgroups. Some servers house archives of mailing list messages that are accessible via the World Wide Web or as downloadable files.

Web Sites

A web page is a document on the World Wide Web that is viewable with web-browsing software (Hoopes 71). These documents are usually written in HTML (hypertext markup language) which describes the formatting of the document to the browser (Hoopes 69). Other document types which are viewable with a web browser, such as text files, can also be called web pages. A web site is a group of interrelated and interconnected web pages.

Samples of Online Sources

To illustrate the format of online sources, I have reproduced a few examples here.

Sample Newsgroup Messages

Date: Fri, 24 Jul 1998 19:58:48 -0400
Newsgroups: alt.mythology,alt.religion.druid,alt.pagan,alt.religion.wicca
From: "Harold Leahy" <[e-mail deleted]>
Subject: Re: Faery offerings

> >By posting this message I am hoping to do two things: 1) make contact >with >people who would be willing to tell me about their beliefs and practices, and 2) >generate some on-list discussion about faery offerings, and faerylore in general.

You can start by examining why people throw money, usually small change, in public fountains. I do this myself and don't know why, but it feels good for some reason.

The Celts throw or placed offerings in sacred springs. Look up any good reference to what has been found in the 'Roman' baths at Bath, England for example.

My actions and this could be related, but I have been throwing money in fountains, long before I knew what Druids and Celts were.

Date: 25 Jul 1998 00:45:54 GMT
Newsgroups: alt.pagan
From: [e-mail deleted] (Cee61)
Subject: Re: Faery offerings

My daugter [sic] and I give offerings of milk and honey.

Storm

Date: 25 Jul 1998 06:29:01 -0700
Newsgroups: alt.mythology,alt.religion.druid,alt.pagan,alt.religion.wicca
From: joshua geller <[e-mail deleted]>
Subject: Re: Faery offerings

Niko Silvester <[e-mail deleted]> writes:

> By posting this message I am hoping to do two things: 1) make contact >with people who would be willing to tell me about their beliefs and practices, >and 2) generate some on-list discussion about faery offerings, and faerylore in >general.

Dear Mr or Ms Silvester,

Sensible people don't talk about their dealings with the gentry.

my best,

josh

Date: Sat, 25 Jul 1998 08:57:55 -0400
Newsgroups: alt.mythology,alt.religion.druid,alt.pagan,alt.religion.wicca
From: Dave Taylor <[e-mail deleted]>

Subject: Re: Faery offerings

I usually give chocolate. Thay [sic] seem to like that. :)

Dave

Date: Sat, 25 Jul 1998 19:22:04 -0400
Newsgroups: alt.mythology,alt.religion.druid,alt.pagan,alt.religion.wicca
From: "Alice Turner" <[e-mail deleted]>
Subject: Re: Faery offerings

Harold Leahy wrote in message <[e-mail deleted]>...
>> By posting this message I am hoping to do two things: 1) make contact with >>people who would be willing to tell me about their beliefs and practices, and >>2) generate some on-list discussion about faery offerings, and faerylore in >>general.
>
>You can start by examining why people throw money, usually small change, in >public fountains. I do this myself and don't know why, but it feels good for >some reason.
[snip]

But, I beg you, please, please don't throw coins or anything else into water where animals or fish live (zoos, for starters). They do enormous damage--animals can try to eat them, they can influence the mineral content of the water. Just don't.

Alice Turner.

Sample List Messages

Date: Wed, 17 Jun 1998 20:51:45 -0400 (EDT)
To: nemeton@technovate.org
From: pjane <[email deleted]>
Subject: (nemeton) land blessing

As of Friday I will be the owner (at least legally) of four beautiful acres here in Maine. I will, alas, be building a house, not a particularly earth-friendly thing to do. However, as a Pagan I do want to respect the land and its spirits.

After the closing I plan to visit the site and make an offering of bread and wine to the spirits of the place. Does anyone have any suggestions or

experiences to offer in establishing a respectful and positive relationship with a specific piece of land?

blessings,
Jane Raeburn

Date: Wed, 17 Jun 1998 18:33:02 -0700
To: <nemeton@technovate.org>
From: "Scott" <[e-mail deleted]>
Subject: Re: (nemeton) land blessing

Jane wrote...

>>"As of Friday I will be the owner (at least legally) of four beautiful acres here in Maine."<<

Congratulations!

>>"After the closing I plan to visit the site and make an offering of bread and wine to the spirits of the place. Does anyone have any suggestions or experiences to offer in establishing a respectful and positive relationship with a specific piece of land?"<<

Before spending time in any wilderness area I like to offer a short prayer to spirits of the place, and spend a few moments 'getting clean' and connected to myself and the universe before I enter. This is very informal, more of an "I'm aware that I am at once a guest, brother, father and a son here." I offer my respect and honour the land.

In terms of forming a relationship, I have found that simply walking around the land, spending time there, is often a good beginning (although not always!) You reach a point where you know you've been welcomed: you're no longer walking on the land, but with it; you become a part of it. Leaving offerings of bread, water, wine, etc. is a good first gesture. I also like singing (poorly), dancing and playing music to/with the spirits. Offerings to springs or rivers on the land is also probably a place to start, whether this is bringing flowers, food, or prayers. It strikes me that a particularly effective ritual might involve a ritual bathing in the spring/river/lake of that area.

In "my" area, there are a few particularly sacred places where land spirits are strong. I visit these places occasionally. Sometimes I leave a gift, but not often. I'm never quite satisfied just leaving foodstuffs, although I'm

lost as to what would be more appropriate. It wasn't too long until I felt accepted, but it has taken more than a year to approach more than the most general relationship with the goddess of the place. I am only beginning to know her. As far as land spirits in my backyard go, there is one special "fairy-tree" which I often will offer the leftover milk from my cereal bowl. :-)

I will often watch the sunset from this land, and have performed a few small personal rituals, but besides these little personal things, I have done no great ritual. Getting to know the land seems to me to be just that. Big rituals are great for people, but it seems to me that the little things are most important to the land spirits.

Scott [e-mail deleted]

Date: Thu, 18 Jun 1998 08:21:27 -0400
To: nemeton@technovate.org
From: Alix MacIntyreHall <[e-mail deleted]>
Subject: Re: (nemeton) land blessing

> Jane wrote...
>
> >>"As of Friday I will be the owner (at least legally) of four beautiful acres here in Maine."<<

This is a wonderful thing....and might I suggest that you seek for how folks in the area...who are/were indiginous [sic] to the area saw this particular piece of land...and approach with this in mind. I have found that most land spirits on this continent do not appreciate alcohol in any form and are more likely to appreciate corn or tobacco....but this is a general rule not an absolute....and spending time there...BEING and listening...and perhaps asking...being aware that in the eyes of the law you own this land, but it isna really yours until it owns you and recognizes you....patience and approaching as any stranger who wants to become a beloved friend.....

Alix

Date: Fri, 19 Jun 1998 14:04:24 -0400 (EDT)
To: nemeton@technovate.org
From: Mara Riley <[e-mail deleted]>
Subject: Re: (nemeton) land blessing

On Thu, 18 Jun 1998, Alix MacIntyreHall wrote:
> > Jane wrote...
> >
> > >>"As of Friday I will be the owner (at least legally) of four beautiful acres here in Maine."<<
>
> This is a wonderful thing....and might I suggest that you seek for how folks in the area...who are/were indiginous [sic] to the area saw this particular piece of land...and approach with this in mind. I have found that most land spirits on this continent do not appreciate alcohol in any form and are more likely to appreciate corn or tobacco....but this is a general rule not an absolute....and spending time there...BEING and listening...and perhaps asking...being aware that in the eyes of the law you own this land, but it isna really yours until it owns you and recognizes you....patience and approaching as any stranger who wants to become a beloved friend.....
>
> Alix

Here we get into the question of whether the land spirits actually are associated with the races that were here before us, or whether they just 'are' and we (and previous peoples) simply relate to them in the ways appropriate to our respective cultures. Personally I'm in the latter camp and think that of course a Native American would see the land spirits through NA eyes, and a Celt would presumably see them through Celtic eyes. Sort of like Europeans portraying Christ with blue eyes and white skin, and Africans portraying him with brown skin, curly hair, and brown eyes. You relate to the Divine via a certain amount of anthropomorphism. And I feel that, although it's important to know the history and heritage of the land you're on, still, assuming that I can only relate to it in the ways it's been addressed before puts (IMO) an additional layer of separation between me and the land, since I have no right to claim NA traditions for myself.

Just my opinion...

Corbie

Sample Web Page

The following example is printed directly from the Web to give a better idea of what the web page looks like. The original is in colour.

Beltainne Rite

by Ian Corrigan

Purpose and Precedent

Slainte agus failte! Welcome to the offering rite of Bealtainne, the Hinge of Summer, the Day of Blessings. Now the earth grows green again in fact, warmed by the power of the Sun and the Waters' cool strength. Shoot has become bud and bud is flowering as all life burns with the kindling of love's fire. Now we rejoice in the heat of May, and look forward to the greater heat of summer.

In elder days the feast of Bealtainne was a day of power and duty, when every fire was extinguished and every clan held fast to its luck for the coming season. The folk left their work and went into the fields and the greenwood. They roved among the blossoms and made love to one another to celebrate the Power of Life. They went into the Groves and made their worship of the God/desses that sustained them.

As the ancients did before us, so we do now, and so our descendants may do in the future. We are come into the Grove to worship as they did, to offer to the Ancestors; to offer to the King and Queen of the Sidhe clans and all the Nature Spirits; and to offer to the beloved Shining Ones. Today we honor Aine, the Queen under the Mound, the erotic power of renewal. Today we honor the Mac Oc as Aengus the Harper, the enchanting life of the Earth. Today we kindle new flame in ourselves as we dance among the Bealtainne fires. And tonight, may we practice the Rites of Love in whatever way our spirit may guide us, to sustain the Power of Life. *Ta go maith!*

Honoring the Patron Powers

A cloaked woman emerges, stands to the north of the Hallows with head bowed and cloak closed. Druid speaks:

> In elder days, Erin the goddess was the mother of clans, called Aine, queen of the noble ones. Aine the mighty mated with mighty men and from them she bore many peoples. As each of them grew old she would renew her youth and love again.
>
> So for us is the living earth goddess, who grows old with the winter and renews her youth in this merry, magical time. With each of her renewings she brings the flowing of new life, the erotic blossoming of every kindred, not just for the continuing of clans, but for the delight and regeneration of all beings.

Aine the ancient
Calleach the mighty
Bones of the Earth
Answer your children

Mother to maiden
Winter to summer
Root into blossom
Answer us, changer

Flow now the waters
All hearts rejoicing
Laughter and loving
Bounty and blessing

Now in the hinge-time
Wise ones are caling
Show us your wonder
O maiden of May!

all: **Aine, accept our sacrifice!**

An offering of scented oil is made to the Fire. The woman removes her cloak to reveal a young maiden, erotically dressed. All cry: **Hail the queen of the May**!

The May Queen speaks, saying:

> Let the goddess of Earth hear our call as I hear it! Blessings upon all who do honor to the shining ones. In this season of renewal we do honor to the goddess of the wells, for the sacred well is the eye of the earth, the giver and receiver, the gate of the Sidhe!

Maiden holds large bundle of cut flowers, says:

> Now let the well be dressed, honoring our simple symbol of all the worlds' sacred wells.

Nine men come forward in turn to dress the Well, surrounding it with flowers. All sing 'Way to the Well'. When all are finished the Druid speaks:

> Surely it is true that when the maid of May appears in any place or any heart the delight of love cannot be far behind. In Erin the power of love's joy was worshipped in Aengus Og, the son of Dagda and Baonn. He is the golden harper, whose music wakens longing and fulfillment in mortal hearts. He is the silver voice, calling all to come away from earthly care and join in the joy of May. Now let us welcome the young lord.

The young son Maponos
Aengus the harper
Son of the Dagda
Whose staff is the strongest

Born of enchantment
The son of the Mother
Sing, O enticer
Delighter of maidens

Sap in the branches
All making merry
Bee to the blossom
Hie to the Maying

Raise now the May-rod
Aengus we name you
Wonder child rising
Come to our calling

all: **Aengus Og, accept our sacrifice!**

An offering of scented oil is made to the Fire. The Bile, or other phallic rod is passed from woman to woman with much merry jesting, kissing of the pole, etc. ... The May Queen then places the pole in the Earth again, saying:

> Awake, O King-To-Be! Enter now the maiden Earth and bring joy and blessing to us all! *Beannachtai!*

Offering to the Sidhe

The Faery Tree is brought out, or the Druid walks to the Tree (at the South?) Clouts of many colors, sparklies and amulets are available to hang on the Tree. Druid speaks:

> In the elder days Aine the goddess was a queen of the Sidhe-folk, ruling form her mound in the south of Erin. Likewise Aengus was a king of the gentle people, making the faery music beneath the Brug Na Boyne. Now we call to them to open the way to the people of peace.
>
> On the feast of Bealtainne the veils between the worlds are thin. Now we honor the nobel clans of the otherworld, the spirits of Earth to join our dance and receive due offering.
>
> Come to the gates, gentle and lovely ones. Hear our call, we the children of Earth, who remember you. We offer you our worship, our reverence and our blessing.
>
> You who rule in the wildwood, who give luck or bane, you who teach us the hidden ways and aid the wise, receive now these offerings made in your honor:

The druid will recite the various Powers of the Sidhe, and one of the folk will tie a ribbon or clout or whatever to the Tree for each. This should go on for ?9, ?27 things, such as:

> To the queens under the hill – Oonagh the Lovely, Cailleach the Ancient, Medb the Mighty and all...
>
> To the kings under the hill – Finvarra the Handsom, Bodb the Red, Eochaid the Stallion and all...
>
> To all the Sidhe-folk of poetry and wisdom – Inspirers and singers, you who grant sight and hearing...
>
> To all the Sidhe-folk who are warriors, wardens and keepers, champions and hunters, wrathful protectors...
>
> To all the Sidhe-folk of the makers, iron Sidhe and gold Sidhe, wood Sidhe and clay Sidhe and the folk in the loom...
>
> To all the Sidhe-folk of the soil, tillers and reapers, cattle Sidhe and arbor Sidhe and folk of the hearth...
>
> To all the Sidhe-folk of the Earth, stone and soil, stream and pool, bird and beast...
>
> To all the Sidhe-folk of the sea, merrow and selkie, of sunlit shallows and the deeps...
>
> To all the Sidhe-folk of the air, trooping sidhe and the voices on the wind...
>
> To all o fyou we give these gifts and ornaments, asking you to bless us in the joy of the living...
>
> all: **Noble Sidhe, accept our sacrifice!**

Praise Offerings

The company is instructed that if they do not have a praise offering they may come quietly to the Tree through the rest of the rite and make their offering. The Tree will be planted in the country after the rite.

The Blessing

Following the Hallowing and Drinking of the Waters the Druids work the Fire of Blessing. Druid Speaks:

> Now as we stand filled with the power of our Goddess and God, let us work the spell of the Beltainne fires to drive away ill and bring us luck in the coming summer.

Two fire-vessels are brought out and prepared. Sacred woods are available as in the charm. One man and one Woman bring fire from the Fire. Fires conjured, saying:

We kindle these magic fires
In the presence of the mighty ones
In the power of the lovers
By Dagda the fire and by Brigid the fire

By oak -- grant strength
By rowan – grant magic
By hazel – grant wisdom
Spring from darkness into light

Rise as the warmth of summer's sun
This Beltainne day
Kindle within each of our hearts
A flame of love and wit and might
To friend and foe and all beings
Bring peace and beauty to the land
As life begins anew.

Ta Go Maith!

Now join hands all...
Step lightly in the dance and leave your winter cares behind
Receive the blessing of the shining ones
As you pass between the faery fires
Dance now, in the joy of May!

Final Blessing:

Music is struck up and a line dance led by one of the Druids, dancing between the two Fires, maybe doubling back for kisses. All finally spiral into clump with a roar/om. Druid deepens trance one last time, then speaks:

Bless, O great ones true and bountiful
Ourselves, our kind and our friends
Our work and our wealth.
May the Waters of Life sustain us
May the Fire of Passion enliven us
From day to day through every turning moon
From season to season
Through all the sacred year.
May the ancestors strengthen us
May the Sidhe-folk open our ways
May the goddesses and gods grant us wisdom.
Let the seeds of spring shoot and bud
And let our lives blossom with the May.
By our magic and gby the blessings of the old ways
Let all our blossoms come to fruit!
Ta Go Maith!

Closing

As usual.

Core : Rituals : Celtic : Beltainne

About the Author - *Ian Corrigan is ADF's Vice Archdruid, and a Co-Preceptor of the Magicians Guild. He is deeply involved in various aspects of creating rites and training to enhance our growing spiritual work. [bio]*