

Приказ

The Other World Conceptualisations in European Traditions and Cultures

Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication. Ed. Éva Pócs. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, 487 pages



The book of proceedings entitled *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication* was published as the result of the international conference which took place in Pécs, Hungary in 2014. It was organised by the University of Pécs and the Belief Narrative Committee of International Society for Folk Narrative Research – IS-FNR, within the framework of the vernacular religion research project (*East – West: Vernacular Religion on the Boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: Continuity, Changes and Interactions*). It is yet another of many undertakings conducted by Éva Pócs, a renowned anthropology and history of religion scholar, in the field of folklore/vernacular and official religiousness

relationships, the cult of the dead, witchcraft phenomenon and shamanism. The monograph is published by a prestigious publisher – Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

The studies collected in the book focus on the problem of the constitution of soul and body representations in various cultures and religious systems, the death and post-mortals existence conceiving, as well as the questions related to the ways, forms and characteristics of communication between the worldly and otherworldly. A wide, comparative look at the aforementioned problematised fields is secured by the fact that the book contains 25 studies of researchers from many European scientific centers (from Hungary, Spain, Austria, Lithuania, Italy, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Great Britain, Finland, Latvia, Norway, Rumania, the Netherlands). The variety of insight is the result of the scientific polylogue which is formed by the voices of the researches of different profiles and specialisations: folk-

lorists, culture and religion historians, linguists, anthropologists, philologists, ethnologists.

The first part of the book includes the research focused on the conceptualisation of the soul/body relation (*Body, Soul, Double*) and the opening study is of a philological profile, signed by Vilmos Voigt (*On Hungarian Lélek 'Spirit, Soul' and the Finno-Ugric 'Soul' or 'Breath' or Simply 'Steam', 2–10*). Deliberating the semantics of one of the Hungarian terms for soul (*lélek*), the author exhibits the mechanism of meaning layering in the forming of dualist concepts, using primarily the methods of comparative etymological analysis, but not disregarding the knowledge from the religious ideas' history field. The study of Virág Dyekiss (*Eyes, Hair and Singing: Soul Concepts in the Belief System of Siberian Nganasans, 11–23*) is also devoted to the semantics of the term used to designate soul in the culture of an ethnic group from the north of Siberia. The connection between the soul understanding and various body parts (especially head, eyes and hair), bodily fluids (blood and urine) and physiological processes (breathing) is established through the analysis of voluminous folkloristic and ethnographic material (which includes myths, oral epics, alongside the stories of famous shamans). The symbolic dimension is defined by the connotations of their presence/absence, size, shape, potential deformations. Focusing on the diachronic perspective, the changes are indicated as a consequence of the Russian culture influence in which heart represents the central symbol. The multidimensionality of the soul understanding is registered in Lithuanian mythology, too. Researching the traditional culture of a Lithuanian community in Belarus, Daiva Vaitkevičienė is considering the beliefs of the visible part (which can be seen as a shadow), soul – the double (which sometimes appears before death, and it is actually the soul and spirit of the dead – *vėlė*) and the part which is manifested through breath and breathing (*dvasia*) (*The Shadow: A Soul Outside the Body, 24–33*). The shadow reflects the vitality of body and the ritual connected to the watching of shadow takes place on Christmas Eve. The losing of shadow i.e., the weakening of the connection between the spiritual and the bodily is the cause of ailments and diseases, while ritual performances can re-establish this connection and reinstitute the disrupted harmony and symmetry. The conception of soul in Judaism is regarded in a special way in the study by Kata Zsófia Vincze (*Body and Soul in Judaism: The Lust of the Body and the Lust of the Mind, 54–61*), which is aimed at the question of corporeal sexuality. The corporeal, in author's opinion, is not connected to the question of morality in the aforementioned tradition, which cancels the hierarchy of body and soul. The papers of Francesca Matteoni (*Familiar Spirits: Blood, Soul and the Animal Form in Early Modern England, 79–91*) and Willem de Blécourt (*Relics of the Second Body? The Spirit Double in Dutch Witchcraft Legends, 62–78*) are devoted to

the witchcraft phenomenon and the correlated idea of the outer soul (most commonly imagined in the zoomorphic shape). The first author is inclined to the research of English tradition, whereas Blécourt's attention is directed at the history of Dutch culture, with special attention to the problematisation and criticism of the sources on which the interpretations of animality as the other body of a witch and zoomorphic spiritual double are based. The forming of the religious discourse of a particular community i.e., the residents of Krishna Valley ecovillage in Hungary is the matter of research of Judit Farkas (*'The Body Has No Soul, the Soul Has a Body': The Concept of Soul and Nature in the Hungarian Krishna Valley ecovillage*, 34–53). The religion narrative is of particular importance in this community since it is the foundation of their entire manner of living, predominantly marked by the idea of the necessity of re-establishing the disconnected link between man and nature. That link is understood to be spiritual, so the chosen way of living is interpreted in the same sense, hinged on the re-interpretations of Hindu texts.

The attention of researchers whose contributions are included in the second part of the volume is directed primarily at the questions of life after death and the possibility to communicate with the dead (*Body, Soul and Spirits of the Dead*). Éva Pócs's comparative study, based on a wide scope of material, prepares the ground for investigating these complex issues perfectly (*Rites of Passage after Death*, 130–160). The author examines the ways of making contact with the deceased through the elements of funeral rites in the traditions of central and eastern Europe. She emphasises that the aim of ritual and customary practices is not only ensuring a successful transition and securing the adequate status of the deceased in the otherworldly, but also redefining the status of the living and establishing new relations with the deceased member of a family. Special attention is paid to the position of the dead before baptism, the unmarried ones and the thirsty dead man topos. The ambivalence in the perception of the deceased (from seeing him/her as a demonic being, to the liminal position, to the idea of the ancestor protector) emerges as a cultural universal, supported by the parallels discovered in the cultures of western Europe. Analysing the beliefs of the post-mortal soul, Suzana Marjanić (*Croatian Folklore Notions of the Post-Mortal and Cataleptic Soul*, 109–129) highlights that they are most frequently connected to smoke, fire and zoomorphic forms (especially goose and bird) in Croatian traditional culture. The second part of the study deals with the analysis of the representation of the cataleptic soul – the one which usually gets detached from the body in specific situations, moments of temporary death or the (ritual) trance and which is associated with some demonic beings such as a *mora*, *krsnik* or witch. Zoo-metempsychosis and zoo-metamorphosis are deliberated and the influence of Christian learning

is established as regards the blurring of the soul multiplicity idea. Imagining the souls of the dead is characteristic of the cultures of the three ethnic communities which inhabit the south eastern region of Ural, as indicated by Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (*Souls and Body of the Living and the Dead*, 92–108). The living, on the other hand, possess, according to common beliefs, a few types of souls – one which ensures spiritual health, the other physical, and yet another which is connected to human appearance itself. Anna Judit Tóth's study (*Vengeful Demons in Ancient Greek Religion*, 161–174) puts Old Greek tradition under the spotlight. The author investigates the concept of soul in Homer, offers an analytical description of practices which make the contact with the dead possible and indicates the continuity of interactions between the world of the living and the world in which the dead exist. Finnish Lutheran beliefs in connection with demonic beings whose genesis is related to the souls of the dead is examined in Kaarina Koski's paper (*Churchyard Beings as Representatives of the Body, Soul and Death: Belief Tradition from Early Twentieth-Century Lutheran Finland*, 175–190). The role of the representation of these demons in the establishing of funeral rites, forming of the idea of the border between the spheres of the dead and the living, but also the moral and social codes – the rules of conduct towards the otherworldly – are particularly scrutinised. Somewhat more prophane aspects of life after death understanding are regarded in the study by Vilmos Keszeg (*Stereotypes of Death in Mourning Cards: Assurances of Eternal Rest, Eternal Light and Eternal Remembrance*, 191–217) which focuses on the stereotypical representations of eternal life in necrologies, obituaries, epitaphs and other texts in which the grief for the deceased and sadness due to bereavement are expressed. Interesting observations are brought up by the examination of the transformations of good and bad death ideas in the period from the end of the 18th century to the present day, which is marked by a very significant role the media has had in their creation.

Beliefs and rituals regarding the double nature demonic beings', which exist on the border between the world of the living and the dead, are in the focus of the studies in the third part of the monograph – *Double Beings: Fairy, Werewolf, Vampire*. Julian Goodare (*Seely Wights, Fairies and Nature Spirits in Scotland*, 218–237) turns to the analysis of a shamanic cult in Scotland, whose central element is the belief in demonic beings similar to fairies. The author thoroughly examines the features of these demons in a wider context of European traditions and describes the ritual practices which enable the contact with them. The study by Lizanne Henderson (*Fairies, Angels and the Land of the Dead: Robert Kirk's Lychnobia People*, 238–257) sheds light on a whole sting of aspects of the relations between fairies and the representation of the dead and death in general in Scottish folklore. Literary and folkloristic sources discover these connections, while the de-

liberation is also directed at the reflecting of the Christian cult of angels in its shaping. The elements of Christian mythology and demonology are incorporated in the Livonic beliefs in devil, witches and werewolves and the process has led to the formation of hybrid forms, as Sandis Laime shows (*Some Notes on the Possible Origins of the Livonian Werewolves*, 258–272). However, as it is highlighted, the demonological complex about werewolves as beings which confront witches and devils is predominantly based on the demonology fieldresearch of Vlachs in eastern Serbia (Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, *Between Collective and Personal Mythology: Oral Narratives about Moroi with the Vlachs of North-Eastern Serbia*, 273–285). Having in mind that the demonological system of this ethnic group has developed in the multi-ethnic environment, the author perceives the demonic being *moroi* distinctively in relation with the being *strigoi* from Rumanian i.e., in relation with vampire from Serbian tradition. Vampire transpositions (female in particular) in literature and cinematography are the focus of the analysis for María Tausiet (*Spectral Mothers: Vampyr (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1932) and its Literary Forebears*, 286–307).

Various forms of establishing the contact with the otherworldly, from ritual practices, to death-like experiences, are observed in the studies which make for the fourth thematic part of the book of proceedings – *Communication with the Spirit World*. Mirjam Mencej brings forth and supports the thesis of circular movement as a dominant feature of communication with the otherworldly in her substantially grounded analysis (*Circular Movement in ASC, Legends and Magical Practices*, 310–340). The circular movement can refer to gestures (e.g., ritual shaman's dance), but also visual representations which occur in narratives of clinical death and the like. Ultimately, this type of movement is recognised in an array of ritual practices which establish the contact with the extra-bodily sphere. The contact between the worlds is enabled in a specific way in the narratives about soul wandering. This material is the foundation of the analysis carried out by Christa Agnes Tuczay (*The Wandering Soul: Medieval Soul Excursions*, 341–364). The so-called visionary genres developed in medieval literary tradition, as the author shows, in two ways: one included the stories (with highly didactic connotations) about soul which is detached from body under specific circumstances (e.g., in the case of a difficult illness) and it visits heaven or hell; the other one included the stories coloured with mystical elements and connected with ecstatic experiences. To a certain extent thematically related research by Gordana Galić Kakkonen focuses on the analysis of *Journey to Saint Patrick's Purgatory* by Ramón de Perellós, which mixes visionary elements and common pilgrimage travelogue motifs (*Ramón de Perellós' Wordly and Otherwordly 'Journey to Saint Patrick's Purgatory'*, 365–374). Alejandra Guzmán Almagro examines exorcism in Greek and Roman antiq-

uity, pinpointing the descriptions of these practices in the works of Pseudo-Quintilian, Plinius and others (*How to Get Rid of a Ghost? Classical Influences in Western Exorcism through Literary Examples*, 376–389). The author shows, among other things, how early Christianity, through Greek and Roman antiquity, adopted (and re-interpreted) concepts from the eastern and Jewish cultures. The studies by Ilaria Micheli (*Soul Loss and Spirit Possession among the Gun of Benin and the Kulango of the Ivory Coast*, 390–399) and Sarmola Tatár (*The Interaction of Dead Spirits and the Material World in Buryat Folk Religion*, 400–410) are devoted to the topic of communication with the otherworldly in traditions outside Europe. The first author offers an insight into the religious life and beliefs of two African communities, while the other focuses on the tradition of Buryats, a people of Mongolian origin, singling out as a peculiarity the belief in the existence of three souls (the first which goes to the other world after death only to return later as an ancestor's soul, the second which can leave the body in dreams and the third which continues to exist in the body after death). An inspirational study in terms of methodology, based on the material acquired through multiple interviews with a 95-year-old interlocutor, is presented by Vilmos Tánzos (*Religious World View of a Moldavian Csángó Man*, 411–449). It opens up the question of the relationship between the individual and official religiousness and the reflections of the religious worldview within the framework of an autobiographical narrative. The author develops the concept of multiple registers of individual religiousness: 1. formal, pragmatical; 2. fanatical; 3. visionary, marked by believing in miracles; 4. magical and folkloristic; 5. festive. The final study by Julia Gyimesi offers an insight into the position of spiritistic teachings in Hungarian culture on the borderline between the 19th and the 20th century (*Spiritualism, Telepathy and the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis*, 450–464). On the one hand, spiritism is regarded as the reflection of the basic need for the spiritual in the disenchanting world, and on the other – as encouragement for the developing of psychologically aimed investigations of parapsychological phenomena, with special attention to the teachings of the representatives of the so-called Budapest School of Psychoanalysis.

By opening up complex questions of the crossing of Christian and Pre-Christian elements in the conceptualisation of soul, body and the otherworldly representation, the studies collected in the book of proceedings entitled *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication* hint at the non-homogeneity of Christian cultural strata (leaning on different traditions – antique philosophy, Old Testament elements, heterogenous theological scripts) and also at the susceptibility of belief system to continuous transformations and re-interpretations which are all but independent from the relations between the official teachings and folklore forms of religious thinking, behaving and acting. Focusing on individual cultures discovers,

on the one hand, the universality of some conceptions and, on the other, the specificity of local, regional, ethnic and national European cultures, suggesting the necessity of the constant critical examining of the existing knowledge and the fruitfulness of scientific dialogue and international co-operation.

Translated by Danijela Mitrović

Smiljana Đorđević Belić
Institute for Literature and Arts, Belgrade
E-mail: smiljana78@yahoo.com

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