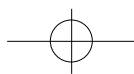
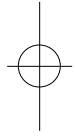
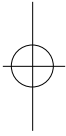
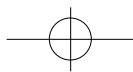
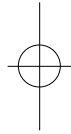
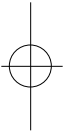


Supernatural Enemies





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Edited by

Hilda Ellis Davidson

and

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Introduction

Hilda Ellis Davidson and Anna Chaudhri

Our mothers maids have so terrified us with . . . bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, syrens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaures, dwarfes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors, nymphes, changlings, Incubus, Robin good-fellowe, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hellwaine, the fierdrake, the puckle, Tom thombe, hob goblin, Tom tumbler, boneles, and other such bugs, that we are afraid of our owne shadowes (Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584).

Supernatural enemies form part of the world picture in every age. In the sixteenth century little Reginald Scot was terrified by the host of threatening characters who, the serving women assured him, were all around him, indoors and out. Tales of such dangerous characters from the Otherworld may well have given him his lasting obsession with destructive magic and witchcraft. These particular beings, which he lists with such exuberance and which originate in many different traditions, mean little to us now. Yet we are able to name a fair number of supernatural enemies of our own time. They are to be encountered in science fiction and films of hauntings and vampires, as well as in sinister legends “told for true.” They have surfaced again in the present preoccupation with enemy aliens and supernatural kidnappers.

In an age when both the media and the public find it difficult to distinguish between reality and fantasy, a sober appraisal of beliefs in different types of supernatural enemies is most relevant. Such enemies may be defined as hostile, destructive forces coming from outside the familiar world, with power to influence or change individuals or events. Their supernatural nature renders them beyond the control of those who have no skill in magic or ritual. Supernatural enemies may be ambivalent in nature and not invariably hostile, but they are always potentially dangerous. They may not confine themselves to one form: they are often

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shape-shifters, able to appear as unfamiliar monsters or phantoms or in apparently familiar human or animal form, but they are always endowed with monstrous or terrifying characteristics.

This book does not seek to provide an exhaustive analysis or history of supernatural enemies in different societies and traditions. Such a study, which would require several volumes, has never been attempted, although much work has been done on separate aspects of supernatural enemies. Here the range of expertise of the authors allows us to present, for the first time, a variety of approaches to the subject and to give an access to some rare material drawn from ancient iconography and from texts and literature in languages inaccessible to many readers, as well as from records, archive material and contemporary fieldwork. From this wealth of sources, we obtain vivid portraits of the hostile forces which have so inspired the imagination throughout the ages. It will become clear that there are many striking resemblances between the enemies by which some feel threatened today and the supernatural terrors of the past.

Different types of supernatural enemy are represented in the four sections of this study, although it is sometimes difficult to make clear distinctions, since one supernatural enemy often combines several repellent and dangerous characteristics. The Demons and Ogres of Section One display a fine range: the ogres are aggressive and fearsome in aspect, some are man-eaters and shape-shifters and, in the case of the Green Knight, a representation of death itself. The demons are monstrous and unpredictable, the source of confusion and destruction in the world and an eternal menace to the human race. In the case of the Antichrist, the disguise of his demonic nature in the form of a man renders him even more dangerous, in that one may not immediately recognise his malicious power. In this respect he is also a deceiver.

The representation of monstrous demons as composite creatures with the features of many different animals is allied to the perception of the supernatural enemy in animal form, treated in Section Two. Here supernatural enemies are encountered in the well-known guise of the serpent, including the deceptive Lamia, the great saucer-eyed black dog who relentlessly pursues the unwary traveller, and a variety of sea creatures. The latter include the fiend of more recent times, Davy Jones, variously described as a shape-shifting demon and a “vampire of the sea.”

The third section deals with Witches and Deceivers. Popular beliefs in the powers of magic and the supernatural are explored here in the

treatment of witches in Europe in recent times, the representation of the witch figure in folk tales and the exploitation of folk beliefs in the supernatural for criminal purposes. The malicious and treacherous nature of the witch is stressed, but so too are her shape-shifting, monstrous, even cannibalistic aspects.

Pursuers and Abductors are the subject of Section Four. These enemies include the dark hosts riding the wild night skies of northern Europe in an endless and terrible pursuit. In Japanese tradition, divine beings abduct boys, to take them on a miraculous but often traumatic flight over great distances, and ogriish men emerge from the mountains to abduct human brides. In the final chapter, the panic induced by threats of supernatural abduction is examined among children and adults in a modern context.

In putting so many different concepts of the supernatural enemy side by side, we have, no doubt, exposed ourselves to criticism. Since we have not confined ourselves to evidence of only one type, this book is bound to raise many questions and leave many interesting subjects untouched. However, the common themes which emerge from these studies, viewed through the eyes of the historian of religion, the archaeologist, the psychologist, the art historian and the folklorist, fully justify the interdisciplinary approach.

Our earliest evidence is to be found in the chapter by J.R. Porter on Ancient Mesopotamia, a society riddled with lore about destructive demons bringing plagues and calamity into the world, with little prospect of a happier existence in the next to offer comfort. Here the evidence of archaeology is able to throw additional light on recorded appeals to dangerous beings and possible means which might be used against them. There is a wide distance in time and space between this and the final chapter, dealing with panics among local schoolchildren in Glasgow, terrified by rumours of mysterious Killer Clowns touring the streets in small blue vans; this is based on evidence collected very recently. In both these studies, however, and indeed throughout the book, the overwhelming sense of menace inspired by the supernatural enemy is paramount. Moreover, the strength of belief in these different hostile forces has allowed them to survive in legend, art and custom, long after any ritual associated with them has died out.

The power to terrify has long been used as a form of social control. The nursery bogey, so vividly and variously described by Reginald Scot, is an effective means of dealing with badly-behaved children. The adherents of religion are made aware of the consequences and causes of sin,

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through graphic representations of supernatural tempters and punishment. Fear of the supernatural has also been used to mask criminal activity. This has been expertly described by Samuel Pyeatt Menefee in his chapter on the World of the Smuggler. Accepted concepts of supernatural beings may be manipulated by those who wish to keep their crimes secret. The references to the Klu Klux Klan in this chapter are significant because they show the sinister possibilities of the abuse of folklore and the creation of a climate of fear, to pursue dangerous and criminal ends.

The readiness of human beings to believe in things they cannot see in the conscious, daylight world is striking. We can observe the rapidity with which these ideas spread and the imaginative concepts by which such fears are expressed. Even nowadays, when vampires are largely considered to be the stuff of horror films, we find Scottish teenagers organising vampire hunts in Glasgow graveyards. It seems that we often enjoy the sensation of fear and the investigation of a shadowy, supernatural world from the safety of a cosy fireside or a large company of friends. Yet, as Jennifer Westwood shows to great effect in her chapter on the Black Dog, the fear of the lonely road at night and the audible pit-pat of supernatural feet behind us is as deep-rooted in modern man as it ever was. The uneasy sense that there may be truth in the old traditions after all comes upon us with force at such times.

It is important to learn how certain societies gave expression to fears and apprehensions about a hostile, supernatural world, finding in this a way to account for the ill luck and calamities they suffered. It was a comfort to blame illnesses, painful accidents, loss of children, plague among cattle or enterprises that failed on outside forces which could not be controlled or prevented. The story-tellers let their imaginations invest such forces with personalities and pictured them in vivid forms. People were only too willing to listen: the idea that we may bring ill fate upon ourselves through ignorance or incorrect treatment of supernatural powers is as ancient, widespread and tenacious as our faith in miracles. There were also strange mental or physical experiences, still hard to explain, such as nightmares and sleep paralysis, which might give rise to tales of supernatural attack from forces beyond everyday existence.

We find over the centuries persistent rumours of the Wild Hunt, which included circumstantial accounts of abduction by supernatural bands which moved individuals far from their homes and left them bewildered, even dying, and similar tales are recorded of local people car-

ried off by the fairy host. It is surprising to find, in the chapter by Carmen Blacker on Supernatural Abductions in Japan, that tales were previously current there which bear a striking resemblance to modern accounts of abduction by enemy aliens. While once the invaders rode out of the fairy hills or the realm of death, or were followers of Satan pursuing the sinful dead, they now come in spaceships from far-off planets.

Another source of enmity from the supernatural world was that of neighbours or strangers causing damage through evil powers, acquired or borrowed. In medieval times it was the witch who, like the Mesopotamian demons, took the blame for calamities large and small, for illness and accident, for sending children into fits, as well as preventing the cows from giving milk or the butter from churning. Jacqueline Simpson's chapter on Cunning Men and Witches brings out this particular aspect of supernatural enmity with great clarity and detail. Witches are also the subject of David Hunt's analysis of some Caucasian folktales, which shows how witchcraft beliefs find their way into folktales and the oral tradition, and how beliefs and tales undoubtedly work together to strengthen one another.

It is important to stress that this book is not simply a collection of folklore past and present, showing the influence of hostile supernatural forces in our lives. Such a collection would have been easy enough to put together, but the subject of supernatural enemies offers a far wider range than this. The possibilities of the treatment of this theme in art is shown by the opening study of the Arch-enemy, the Antichrist, by Rosemary Muir Wright. The concept of this being was derived from the lore of the Book of Revelation and the teaching of the church and was developed by artists and theologians. We are shown how such ideas can flourish and give rise to impressive art in learned Christian circles.

A further example of a supernatural enemy inspiring art is found in the chapter by Miranda Aldhouse Green, dealing with representations of the divine rider trampling down his enemy on a series of monuments of the Roman period in northern Europe. Her extensive work on the cult of the Sun-god, as well as on various Celtic deities in early Europe, enables her to explore the possible mythological implication behind these striking monuments and to give a valuable new interpretation of a powerful motif.

Popular beliefs, arising from myths and legends, can be given new life in creative literature. One example is Mary Brockington's study of the part played by ogres in the Indian epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where she argues that the poet has deliberately manipulated the plot in his treat-

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ment of the traditional enemies of the gods and goddesses. From medieval times we have a further instance in the figure of the mysterious knight who is steeped in greenness, with his holly bough and terrible axe, in the magnificent poem *Gawain and the Green Knight*, discussed by Derek Brewer.

In addition to the supernatural enemies in anthropomorphic form, there are those which belong to the animal world, including the monsters of various mythologies. In John Heath-Stubbs' chapter on the Lamia, recorded verbatim, he draws on the rich reserves of his memory, to make his own observations about the dangerous snake-woman, beloved of story-tellers from classical times onwards, who makes regular appearances in literature.

The serpent has been represented as the enemy of mankind from early times, and Anna Chaudhri's chapter deals with one mythological figure, the serpent Ruimon, a strange and monstrous enemy whose memory has been preserved into recent times among the Ossetes of the Caucasus. By investigating the Ossetic sources of the legend of this creature, she discusses its struggle with the thunder-divinity and its peculiar association with the dead.

In the chapter by Alan Smith we find a different approach, linking creatures of the natural world with those of popular tradition. He has made a special study of the folklore of sailors in the nineteenth century and here he discusses their traditional enemies: the shark, the mermaid and the mysterious Davy Jones, in whose locker drowned seamen are stowed away, a figure which has not been investigated previously. These hostile figures were viewed half in jest and half in fear by the sailors who spread tales about them and, in the case of the shark, cruel vengeance was taken against a wild creature to whom almost supernatural powers and deliberate malice were attributed.

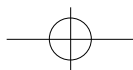
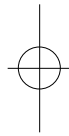
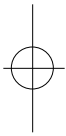
The importance of the dogs in the Wild Hunt in English, German and Scandinavian tradition has been discussed in the chapter by Hilda Ellis Davidson, which fills a gap in continental studies on the Hunt by including material from the British Isles. New and important information is also brought forward by Patricia Lysaght, based on fieldwork in the south-west of Ireland, where there are traditions of the Hunt passing over the sea. The dog in folk tradition is the subject of Jennifer Westwood's chapter on Shuck, the Black Dog of Norfolk, which contains valuable material from local records as well as recent fieldwork.

It seems that supernatural enemies are essential to every age because

there is a need to rationalize and give a name and face to the instinctive terrors which are part of our human inheritance. Like our ancestors in the Ancient World and the Middle Ages, we remain aware of that last enemy threatening us all, inevitable death. Throughout these chapters the terror evoked often seems to come from the hostile world of the dead, outnumbering the living. Belief in supernatural enemies is such a fundamental part of the human imagination, that its creative power is still active. Story-tellers turn to such characters when creating themes of battles against fearful odds, when heroes are threatened with supernatural hostility. But what shapes will the story-teller choose and why? We hope that some of the material collected here may provide answers to such questions. Folklore, historic accounts, art and literature act in concert to produce images of the supernatural enemy. They enrich one another, constantly forming and reforming our concepts of this dark and terrible but essential part of our lives.

Note on the Katharine Briggs Club

This book is the result of a conference of the Katharine Briggs Club held in 1995. The aim of the club is to bring together scholars from different disciplines to exchange ideas, discussing subjects which were explored by the writer and folklorist, Katharine Briggs, who died in 1980. An interdisciplinary approach of this kind seldom fails to yield a fruitful harvest and the sixteen studies which make up this collection demonstrate how rich this can be. The interest of Katharine Briggs in the changing concepts of supernatural beings in literature and folklore, and in the way in which oral and written evidence influence one another, makes the subject of supernatural enemies a most appropriate choice.





Supernatural Enemies

