Running with the Fairies

Running with the Fairies: Towards a Transpersonal Anthropology of Religion

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‘Prince Enters the Wood’

‘**The Prince Enters the Wood**:
All light and white as a fleecy cloud, / A female form floats gracefully’

In *An Old Fairy Tale Told Anew*, an 1866 illustration by Victorian fairy painter Richard Doyle. He was uncle of Arthur Conan Doyle who wrote the mystical *The Coming of the Fairies* and the Sherlock Holmes stories.

The gaze of the rider on horseback is alerted and altered by the light of the fairy, inviting him into the woods, where his adventure begins.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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FOREWORD

The contents of this book have potential to resonate with people of a variety of ilks.

For students of spirituality and religion, anthropologists, psychologists, and academicians of various sorts, I suggest to begin reading with Chapter One. This heavily-footnoted scholarly introduction lays the academic, theoretical, and methodological background for this work.

For those less academically inclined, I suggest initially skipping the Introduction and starting to read at any point which might stir one's interest or imagination. Chapter Two gives a general overview of the subject of fairies. Chapter Three details how fairyfolk, humans who experience the world of fairies, came to connect with the Fairy World. Chapter Five discusses the process of fieldwork and personal change. Chapter Six discusses previous popular and mystical perspectives and literature.

For those wanting to listen to fairyfolk's often extensive verbatim philosophical and psychological discussion of their spiritual experiences and perspectives, see the many chapters by subject. Most chapters contain occasional analyses and cross-cultural comparisons. Skipping around different chapters might also prove intriguing. For example; those interested in reincarnation could jump to Chapter Ten; those interested in spiritual transformation alongside interpersonal relationships might skip to Chapter Fourteen; those interested in music and art Chapter Sixteen. And so forth.

Thanks.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Within anthropology, sacred experience of spirit entities for European peoples has remained largely unexamined, despite Plato's recognition of "daemones" as intermediaries between gods and men. Anthropologists have long researched indigenous peoples' and Eastern religions' views of and experiences with supernatural beings, but ethnographers have almost ignored Europeans' experiences of angels, fairies, nature spirits, other-than-human persons (Hallowell 1960) and god-like beings of non-human origins. Such research has been risky for social scientists wanting to maintain their reputations in the academy (Salomonsen 2004, Turner 1994, Lee 1987, Winkelman 1982). And to give respectful ethnographic treatment of people who believe in and experience entities such as fairies might dethrone the intentional or unintentional sensibilities that the standards, logics, and spiritualities of organized Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (or Western science) are somehow at the "center." Even though there are supernatural entities and spirit beings in the mainstream and mystical sects of these monotheistic religions, the attention of anthropologists has been directed almost entirely to the existence of spirit beings in "other" cultures. Only theologians, e.g., Garrett (2008) for angels, and folklorists, e.g., Narvaez (1991) for fairy lore, have paid disciplined scholarly attention to Western spirit entities.[1]

The general anthropological and scholarly perspective which has demanded "scientific" explanation, and frowned heavily on "going native" in the arena of religion has been analyzed and well documented by Greenwood (2009), Harvey (2006, 2002), Spickard, Landres and McGuire (2002), Howard and Mageo (1996), and Young and Goulet (1994). They trace the history of rationalist, structural-functional, psychoanalytic, content analytical, and symbolic approaches which in general "explain" or explain away religious and spiritual phenomena. Yet now there is growing acceptance of the work of anthropologists who themselves experience mystical states or spiritual entities in the cultures they study or live in. Edith Turner's brave work and article (1994, 2009), recounting her encounter with an African spirit, alongside the experiences of Harner

(1980), Grindal (1983), Lee (1987), Luhrmann (1989), several authors in Young and Goulet, eds. (1994), and others, and Irving Hallowell's (1960) recognition of the reality of "other-than-human persons" in Ojibwa ontology, are becoming important to what has come to be called a dialogical, participatory, experiential, or transpersonal anthropology.[2]

Although at the time of the fieldwork which is the basis of this book I was unfamiliar with much of this anthropological work and experience, I too came to experience an alternate state of consciousness as a consequence of my fieldwork in County Donegal, Ireland. Presumably it was facilitated by my own cognitive and affective receptivity, and because, among other things, I am a theist. Here, at the outset, I want to reveal any possible biases I had which may have influenced this ethnography. Thus, as I discuss in more detail below, my own propensities, faith, and previous experience made me receptive to others' own claims and experiences of the Divine or semi-divine, and receptive to new experiences and cultural permutations on the theme of God/ Divinity/Creator, and lesser beings.

Actually, the respectful and participatory treatment of European spirit beings by an anthropological scholar is not recent. In I911 Oxford University Press published *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, by Ph.D. anthropologist Walter Y. Evans-Wentz, an Oxford fellow. Evans-Wentz was an American who had studied at Stanford with William James and William Butler Yeats, and then later at Oxford with R.R. Marrett. He dedicated his book to Irishmen Yeats and to George Russell (pen name A.E.), both of whom were mystics who believed that fairies exist. They believed that fairies are nature spirits, elemental beings of non-human origin, who can enter and exit the corporeal world of humans, can communicate with humans, and appear in various forms akin to humans or animals of various sizes. And in contrast to the vast majority of believers in fairies in Ireland, they believed that fairies are creations of a divine God.

For his doctoral research, Evans-Wentz traveled through Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Cornwall, and the Isle of Man to collect experiences and stories of fairies (*sidhe*, Irish Gaelic, pronounced shee) and related entities. He, himself, believed that fairies existed. Possibly his belief in them had been learned early in his life from his parents who were Theosophists, who generally posited the existence of several kinds of spiritual realms and entities beyond conventional Christian cosmology, and that he was familiar with the work of Madame Blavatsky, Annie Besant, and others.[4] Clearly he was not only open to Irish and other

European folk conceptions of the make-up of the universe, which included fairies, but his anthropology was "participatory" (Greenwood 2009).

Psychologist and philosopher William James had published *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902, positing a "stream of consciousness," a part of which is glimpsed by different individuals and cultures in varying religious experiences across the globe. Although discussions continue about the extent to which James' understandings fully accepted the existence of planes of reality beyond the human, he is well known for being, at a minimum, "sympathetic" to religious experience and promoting a "radical empiricism."[5] At the time such an approach which recognized the reality and truth of spiritual experiences and worlds for individuals of different cultures clearly deviated from the general Western academic notions that mystical experience, interaction with deities, and other religious experiences were products of "primitive" or childish cognition. This latter approach within anthropology, and academia in general, which demanded scientific explanation, rather than theological acceptance, became the norm within anthropological circles. But Evans-Wentz believed in Irish and Celtic mysticism, and treated the Fairy Faith as a particular manifestation of the world-wide phenomenon of animism.

The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries has never received any lasting anthropological renown. It has been popular only among some folklorists and "New Age" thinkers. Indeed Evans-Wentz is primarily known for, and is famous for, his later editing of the first translation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927) and for other significant works (1935, 1951, 1954) on Tibetan Buddhism. These have long been heralded by scholars as pioneer works in religious studies and the anthropology of religion. Like Tibetan Buddhism in general, as opposed to the Fairy Faith, anthropological scholars, particularly in the last thirty years, generally treat *these non*-Western understandings as legitimate perspectives worthy of continuing study and nonjudgmental respect. And, even though Evans-Wentz termed the Fairy Faith as mysticism, and had the support of others such as Andrew Lang, John Rhys, and later Carl Jung, no subsequent serious academic scholar, to my knowledge, has diligently treated it in discussions of Western mysticism, spirituality, or religiosity.[6] This is despite the fact that Evans-Wentz parallels fairies to "nature-spirits," as Tylor (1871) in *Primitive Culture* called such discarnate beings, to the elemental beings of medieval mystics, and to the "middle-world" of fairy-like entities found in many cultures across the globe. These include Persian and Turkish *peris,* Islamic *jinns*, Tibetan *dakinis*, Chinese *apsaras*, Jewish *mazikeem*, Seneca

Jo-go-ah, Cherokee *yunwi tsunsdi*, Australian Arunta *alcheringa*, and many others.

Moreover, Evans-Wentz was not simply a sympathetic student of Tibetan Buddhism. He became a practitioner: he studied extensively under a lama, wore robes, ate vegetarian, and intended to spend the rest of his life in India, but World War II broke out. When back in the States, in San Diego, he was active in Buddhist and Eastern programs of various sorts. Thus, despite the general culture of academic anthropology which eschewed scholars "going native," and demanded scientific, usually structural-functional or symbolic explanations for the existence of religious beliefs and practices, Evans-Wentz was a scholar who was native in his theosophy and did "go native" into the Fairy Faith and into Buddhism.[7] Even though he stated outright in *Tibetan Yoga & Secret Doctrines* (1935:219) that certain kinds of usually invisible, sacred Tibetan Buddhist elemental entities, *dakinis*, *are* fairies, only dakinis have received attention as "legitimate" or believable concepts or entities worthy of serious religious scholarly attention. (See e.g., Simmer-Brown 2002, Katz 1992, Willis 1987, Kalff 1978.)

Thus we need to revise the notion that until quite recently anthropologists have been non-participatory (Greenwood 2009). Despite Evans-Wentz's unorthodox anthropology, in writing and in lifestyle, in 1931 Evans-Wentz received an honorary Doctorate of Science from Oxford. (Carl Jung received the same award seven years later.)

As mentioned, there have been some academic discussions of anthropologists' own recognitions of and experiences of various kinds of spirits, nature-spirits, discarnate beings, other-than-human-beings and other intermediate entities or energies between humans and God, the Creator, or the Prime Mover. As Wilkie (1994:164) states in Young's and Goulet's edited book on the anthropology of extraordinary experience, in a discussion of the "spirited imagination," the autonomy of spirits, and the make-up of the "inner worlds,"

> Some spirits are indeed figments of the human imagination, yet there are others who have been around much longer than human beings. Among spirits there is a vast hierarchy, from simple energy-forms and nature spirits to angelic and higher forms of divine and galactic intelligence. These may be terrestrial or celestial, intimately associated with human life or not, but all are aspects of the one Universal Being, conceived of as the totality, inner and outer, or as its creator.

And Young's own article (1994) does give some anthropological credence to spontaneous visions, the kind of visions my informants below

have, and does say that "visions are not that rare. They occur in all cultures and to people from all walks of life" (190). But even though he considers his and others' visions as "real," they exist because humans create energy that produces a tangible form. This approach still eschews the possibility that entities exist independently of the human mind, which mystics and indigenous peoples *know*. The mystics' certainty is not proof of the phenomena, no matter how certain the individuals are. Yet, however unverifiable, that knowledge and conviction are anthropological data.

Almost all of the recent anthropology which examines contact with "spirits" or spirit-worlds is attached to concerns with altered states of consciousness and/or shamanism. Most scholars treat shamanism or other worldly experience with non-humans as a consequence of cultural expectations and specific ritual methods – e.g., drumming, dance, fasting, entheogens – which individuals use to create a trance, ecstatic, or visionary state as a portal to another world. (See Hume 2007). The issue of perception is key here. Preparatory rituals and/or ingested substances are used to alter ordinary perception, a universal biological-physiological trait of humans.[8] Under certain induced and/or environmental conditions and (learned) cultural expectations or models, - which includes affect – these experiences can result in an altered (or alternate) state of consciousness and perception.

Emotion influences cognition which influences perception. Ingold (2000:161) explains the incorporation of emotion into cultural models:

> … cultural models – to the extent that they are fully internalized – do not merely describe or represent the world, they also shape people's feelings and desires. That is to say, they can have 'motivational force' (D'Andrade 1992:28). As Claudia Strauss argues…. The realm of cognition is inseparable from the realm of affect; thus cultural models should be understood as 'learned, internalized patterns of thought-feeling' (Strauss 1992:3).

Thus perception is channeled not only by cognition but by emotion, and helps to explain how individuals' cognitive orientations and emotional preparedness influence their resonance with and adoption of beliefs and their openness to experiences. Yet the epiphanies and first time surprise sightings of fairies by people who did not theretofore believe in fairies, as some fairyfolk discuss in Chapter Three below, challenges the full acceptance of this notion. The sight or sensing of fairies or fairy energy by the *fairyfolk* of this book is usually spontaneous or nearly spontaneous, without much or any specific ritual preparation. [9]

In this book *fairyfolk* refers to human beings mystically ensconced in the experience of and belief in the Fairyworld. The Fairyworld is a non-corporeal, spiritual realm in another dimension of reality where fairies reside and from whence they sometimes come into humans' corporeal plane of existence.[10]

Running with the Fairies deviates from the usual, recent subject matters in the anthropology of religion, not only in its focus on European, particularly Irish, interaction with spirit entities, but also in general in not placing the topic directly in the realm of shamanism or of states of consciousness altered by substances or protracted rituals.[11] I agree with Sheppard's (2007) critique that studies of shamanism have usurped much of the attention of transpersonal anthropologists. Although most studies of altered states of consciousness and shamanism seek to "explain" phenomena such as the appearances of spirits, this book remains primarily descriptive. It is a presentation of those who understand and experience fairies and fairy "things." It places them not only in the context of transpersonal anthropology but, in addition, in comparative contexts of mysticism and transpersonal psychology.

Harvey (2003:9) suggests "At best, a spirit appears to be a being rarely seen except by shamans." But the fairyfolk in this book are not specially initiated or trained shaman or shaman-like persons, nor, like most shamans, are they engaging in "performance" for others. Shamanic spirit contact is much a social phenomenon among human beings. The contemporary anthropological focus on shamanism as performance and as the province of specially trained individuals can potentially distract us from understanding fairy experiences and fairy consciousness as essentially individualized and mystical.

Also, shamanism is much about the mastery of spirits and the use of spirits for the purposes of healing individuals or groups in times of medical need or emotional stress. (E.g., see Jakobsen 1999.) Despite the fact that fairyfolk sometimes understand fairies as helping humans in everyday tasks or (metaphysical) realizations/awarenesses, fairyfolk do not control or use spirits (fairies) in this shamanic way. Fairyfolk understand fairies as more independent entities, subservient to Nature and God, which help humans to accomplish tasks and to understand the sanctity of nature and the closeness of God.

Mageo and Howard (1996) do elevate studies of terrestrial appearing spirits into a discipline, and endeavor "to bring spirits back to their rightful place in theories of religion, beside the gods with whom they coexist"(2). But all the articles in their work treat the phenomena in the context of indigenous Pacific societies. Moreover, the focus is psychological and

sociological explanation for particular kinds of indigenous spirit beliefs and experiences in the context of cultural change. It does not really address the mystical experience of non-ordinary realities. While certainly helpful in clarifying many issues, it avoids a participatory anthropology, as evidenced by the fact that none of the articles make any reference to E. Turner's (1994) own experience as described in "The Reality of Spirits." Thus *Spirits in Culture, History and Mind*, while clearly respectful of native spiritual experience as real for natives, avoids a transpersonal approach which would make more room for the possibility of specific individuals' and cultures' supernatural experience as particular venues for sacred phenomena across cultures – indigenous, East, *and* West.

Hallowell's (1960) introduction of the term "other-than-human-persons" in discussing Ojibwa entities is most helpful in discarding the Western academic and linguistic dichotomy of natural versus supernatural, especially of human (body) versus spirit. Hallowell appreciates native understandings of the continuum of entities, ranging from humans to person-like non-humans to gods or God. In Western contexts fairies (and angels) may well be thought of as other-than-human-persons, spiritual other-than-human beings. Thus I wish to go beyond anthropologist Laughlin's (1994c) call for a transpersonal anthropology required for a full description of the experience upon which the cosmologies of many non-Euro-American societies are grounded to include European and Euro-American settings.

In Pagan Studies (Harvey 1997, Blain, Ezzy, and Harvey 2004), and in studies of Witchcraft (Ezzy 2004, Orion 1995, Luhrmann 1989), anthropologists are beginning to examine Western nature-spirits with minds open to the reality of the experience for subjects and anthropologists. In his book on animism, Harvey (2006), critical of earlier anthropological stances on the subject matter, also discusses Pagan and Eco-Pagan animism. And Greenwood (2009), who equates magical consciousness with mystical mentality, discusses contemporary Western, but unconventional spirit(ual) experience. These studies can lead into my ethnographic study here of experience with fairies and modern fairyfolk in Ireland. Indeed Harvey (2006) does devote three pages to discussing fairies and other elemental spirits among (neo-) Pagan animists, but concludes:

> The most important point about these beings is that they do not necessarily attract a lot of attention in, and only rarely become central to, the everyday life and pursuits of animists. Their existence may well be taken for granted and unremarkable – literally not remarked upon – and their presence, at least in particular places and particular times is casually expected. (124)

The casualness and "unremarkable" nature of fairies in Pagan animism he describes is far from the Fairy Faith described here. This is not only in that the fairies are seemingly in the background, rather than the foreground, but he also says that Pagan animists are generally non-theistic.

Butler's (2011) article in *Ireland's New Religious Movements* does briefly mention belief in fairies as characteristic of some neo-Pagans, who "relate to … traditions connected with fairies" (123) and who have fairy "associations" with particular sites. But in the (only) example she gives of a woman speaking of an experience at a particular site who Butler says has an "awareness of associations between a goddess [Anu] and the fairies" (129) the woman does not mention fairies. Moreover, Butler indicates that "not all neo-Pagans express belief in deities or in supernatural entities" (such as fairies or God). And Letcher (2001, 2006), in another notable, brief exception to the general lack of scholarly treatment of fairies in the anthropology of religion, does say that for British Eco-Pagans "fairies are regarded literally not metaphorically" (2006:182). But his treatments are also of (Eco-)Pagans, and discussion revolves around the politics of enchantment of the landscape for protest movements. One of his articles (2001) is published in *Folklore*, and doesn't quite get fairies out of the realm of folklore into religiosity or mysticism. And one of Taylor's (2010) informants, a mystical radical environmentalist, who practices what Taylor calls "dark green religion," does mention "Fairies" (97) in passing, but there is no other reference or discussion of fairies or fairy-like beings in this book on nature spirituality. And Butler's (2011) article is the only one in the volume which Cosgrove, et. al. (2011:5) say "represents both the 'state of the art' in terms of research on new religion in Ireland and an empirical overview of some of the major *types* of new and alternative religiosities"(italics original).[12] Thus it becomes clear the Fairy Faith is not really discussed by scholars of (neo-)Paganism and alternative religion. Let us return to animism and theology.

Harvey (2006) helps to liberate the term animism from its previous Western biases and I follow his "new usage of animism [which] arises from respectful relationships with indigenous and other cultures in which boundaries are permeable and putative 'opposites' are necessarily engaged in various ways" (xiv). Yet the fairyfolk in this book are not Western animists in the same sense as witches, Neo-Pagans, and other New Age persons or groups, the subjects of some recent approaches to an enspirited earth (e.g., Blain, et. al. 2004, Greenwood 2000, Harvey 1997). The informants in this book recognize the reality of fairy nature spirits as part of a wider monotheistic theology. The Fairy and other Realms are planes of existence under the direction and discretion of a Creator, and thus

fairyfolk are not polytheistic, but theosophical. They see and experience Fairy as both earthly and divine. Their animism is theistic.

Although Pagans and fairyfolk are both nature-oriented, unlike Pagan groups fairyfolk generally do not eschew or avoid Christianity or Judaism or theological perspectives in general. Nor do they regularly participate in collective rituals or seasonal festivals, train themselves in shamanic journeys, congregate in groups, seek feminine energy nor focus on goddess alignments. (Fairies are said to be both male and female). Although believers and experiences in Fairy are sometimes considered "New Age types," their modes of being actually resemble conventional religious and mystical orientations. Also, the mystical Fairy Faith is not a New Age movement in that it is not really a social movement. Prince and Riches (2000) argue that a central feature of the New Age is its opposition to "mainstream", being outside the Church. Although some fairyfolk may participate or sympathize with some New Age concerns, the Fairy Faith does not entail the central characteristics of the "New Age" (Townsend 2004).

Thus in several ways the beliefs in and experiences with fairies are not substantially different from some long-standing beliefs in angels, nature spirits, and elemental beings in the cosmologies of older orders and mystical sects of Western, Eastern, (and indigenous) religions. The Fairy Faith is not necessarily an alternative to organized religion: some of my informant fairyfolk in Ireland invoke Jesus Christ in their conversation and attend church, as well as all of them think fairies are messengers of God. Except for a few earlier mystics such as Kirk (1776), Yeats (1962), and Russell (A.E.) (1965), this latter understanding is a change from the old Fairy Faith in which fairies were not perceived as divine, and were generally feared and avoided. (See Chapters Six and Seven and Briggs 1976). The Fairy Faith might best, I suggest, be termed a "theistic spirituality" (Vincett and Woodhead 2001).[13]

Thus the nature-spirit spirituality of fairyfolk is directly connected to a high-god, unlike Paganism which is generally polytheistic (Harvey 1997). Also, the Fairy Faith is much less institutionalized and is best conceptualized as a form of mysticism in which fairy experience occurs as a consequence of direct mystical experience in what might best be called vision or apparition. Such alternate consciousnesses do not ordinarily occur in our "monophasic" society (Laughlin, McManus and Shearer 1983:144) which

> narrowly confines experience and knowledge to a narrow range of phenomenological phases. For our culture generally, the only phases of

> consciousness appropriate to the accrual of information about the world are those acceptable as "normal waking consciousness".

In Laughlin's terms, fairyfolk's experiences would be a product of "polyphasic consciousness," and when seeing or sensing fairies or fairy energy humans "cross phases" of consciousness.

In his treatise on mystical experience, visions and the famous 19th century Hindu mystic Ramakrishna, Indian psychoanalyst Kakar (1991) identifies four kinds of visions: nightmarish visions (hallucinations); conscious visions, which include visual insights; mystical illusions; and indescribable, unconscious visions. Although I did not use such terminology in discussing fairy experiences among my informants, I conclude that fairyfolk, when seeing a fairy, are experiencing conscious visions with visual insight. Kakar (1991:22) describes conscious visions and visual insight:

> Welcomed by a prepared mind, they fall on a receptive ground. Conscious visions may be symbolic representations of an ongoing psychic process, the symbols taken from the mystic's religious and cultural tradition…. Other conscious visions are visual insights, images full of conviction and sudden clarity, couched either in a universal-mystical or in a particular, cultural-historical idiom.

Seeing fairies is in part a consequence of the "cultural idiom" of fairies in Irish, Celtic and European history and consciousness.

Visions, in Western discourse through the ages, have been experienced by mystics, religious ascetics, and some laymen, such as William Blake. In Catholicism, officials of the Holy See deem, sometimes many years later, only a very small portion of claimed visions to be a consequence of the reality of an actual, real apparition, usually a Marian apparition. Some visions of medieval European women, such as Teresa of Avila and Hildegard van Bingen, have been upheld by the Church. (See Christian Jr. 1981 and and Petroff 1986).[14]

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* describes three types of visions, one of which is called an extrinsic "corporeal vision" which is a spiritual vision experienced in a normal state of consciousness. In Eastern Orthodoxy "vision" (*theoria*) refers to experiencing the "energies" of God, and fairyfolk who sense fairy energy would be akin to this. In anthropologist E. Turner's (2009:150) terms, fairy appearances would be spirit manifestations "which constitute the deliberate visitation of discernable forms that have the conscious intent to communicate, to claim importance in our lives." But, as indicated earlier, visions of fairies have not been discussed in much detail, theologically, psychologically, or anthropologically,

except by Evans-Wentz and a few non-academics discussed in Chapter Seven.

A fairyfolk's "extraordinary claim" (to most Westerners), the seeing and experiencing of fairies, perceived as "real for him/her," can be investigated through ethnographic data "even though it has no basis in science" (Stevens 2011).[15] My purpose here is not to debate the "truth value" (Young and Goulet 1994:328) of religious or spiritual entities, not testable beyond the words and experiences of informants. Their experiences do not scientifically prove the independent objective reality of fairies, but lead us to understand the conditions under which such beliefs and experiences occur and to explore the religious and psychological concomitants thereof. Because I too came to "feel" fairy energy also demonstrates that conditions and preparations exist that also can lead the anthropologist to come to belief and conviction. But I recognize and accept the limits of traditional scientific investigation. (For further discussion of these issues see Greenwood 2009 and Harvey 2006, 2002.)

Beginning in Chapter Three I primarily present the words, experiences, and beliefs of fairyfolk rather than on the "Fairy Faith." This approach honors individuals and avoids a reified notion that could imply that there is a canon independent of individuals or that the Fairy Faith is an autonomous religion unconnected to the theism of Christianity (Judaism or Islam), rather than an elaboration of (Celtic) Christianity. I do not want to obfuscate the experiential, mystical dimension. As Harvey (1997: viii), I

> take seriously people's self-understanding and self-presentation…This is different to theology in which the focus of attention is a set of beliefs held by religious people, usually those who claim the authority to define what should be believed.

As a form of mysticism or experienced religiosity outside the realm of conventional theology, Fairy Faith is, and incorporates, a religious "other" (Knecht and Feuchter 2008).[16] It entails an expansion of conventional Western cosmology and theology, rather than a discarding of mainstream religion. The practitioners of the Fairy Faith thereby influence or transform both conventional Christianity as well as the conventional secular Fairy Faith, as the former for the most part did not consider fairies as real for anyone and the latter did not usually consider fairies as divine.[17] Combining fairy/nature spirits with Christianity, fairyfolk connect with God, historically associated with formal structures of religion, and with numinal beings (spirits), generally personally experienced and counterhegemonic (Levy, Mageo and Howard 1996).

One would be hard pressed to even call fairyfolk members of a "neo-tribe" (Maffesoli 1991; Bauman 1992), a temporary association, a sociality or group drawn together by collective identification to "perform that sense of belonging" to a group (Letcher 2004). At best the fairypeople and fairy conscious people discussed and quoted at length in the following chapters form some kind of amorphous "cell" or network of mystics. Some of them have found one another for occasional sociality and sharing of perspectives and experiences, rather than for a collective practice or experience of visions with other humans.

The nature and degree of mystical experience vary, and students of religion and mysticism have differentiated styles. William James (1902) wrote of a distinction between "sporadic" and "cultivated" mysticism, and similarly Arthur Deikman (1996) distinguishes between "untrained-sensate" and "trained-sensate." As the terms suggest, the former is more spontaneous, while the latter is disciplined. Generally speaking, as I have observed and discussed, fairyfolk have experiences of the first variety, although occasionally some individuals, fairyfolk like Jon, one of my major Irish informants discussed and quoted below, occasionally attempt to contact fairy energy in special areas in the wilds. Yet his and other fairyfolk's mysticism is not of the kind that one would associate, for example, with Sufi mystics or disciplined Yoga practitioners, whose routine often includes training and sustained, regular discipline.

Soderblom (1981) calls one form "mysticism of the infinite," in which an elevated awareness and ecstatic experience in unity with a divine entity remove perception of everyday sensory experience, and may entail trances or visions. This has also been called nature, theistic, monistic, or soul mysticism. The other form Soderblom calls "mysticism of personal life," in which a person in deep faith meets the divine entity in the middle of everyday life's normal consciousness, and could be called "mild." All these differentiations are not necessarily either/or distinctions. Most fairyfolk, as I have stated, have mild, usually untrained experiences or visions.[18] All fairyfolk, however, experience noesis, a deep conviction of knowing of the reality of fairies or fairy energy.

Husserl (1931) used the word "apodicticity" to refer to the sense of certainty in direct experience of any kind and when certainty comes from pure intuitive knowledge he called it "eidetic intuition.[19] I myself have never seen a fairy but, in occasional alternate states, I "feel" fairy presence or energy, a form of eidetic intuition. It is a kind of mild "high" of metaphysical connection with invisible being(s) or energy fields. That feeling and understanding incorporate a lightness, sanctity, otherworldliness,

alliance, and contentedness, often as a mild smile crosses my face and my mind. It entails an attitude of less gravity or attachment to quotidian or corporeal concerns. From my own experiences and from spending considerable time with the individuals discussed below, their literal sighting and intuition of fairy presence have convinced me that for them the presence of fairies is real – authentic, that they are truly experiencing a spiritual reality, as humans everywhere are capable. As indicated earlier, their perception is a consequence of their biological capability which is manifested in specific ways and forms which the (sub)culture has in its repertoire. Simply put, for someone to call an entity a fairy means that they know the (English) word and some associated cultural expectations of meaning and experience.

But, again, the contemporary Fairy Faith I describe here is not a deliberately organized collective or leader-led organization, nor a "revitalization movement" (Wallace 1956). Movement refers to a social gathering, the social impetus, which is undeveloped here, as well as some definitive canon, formal or informal. And Wallace considers movements as "conceived in one or more hallucinatory visions by a single individual" (272). The Fairy Faith is not led by a single individual. Perhaps we can refer to the newer Fairy Faith here as a loose congeries of people who have "vitalization" or "revitalization" experiences. Divine fairy sensibility and experience is a (re)vitalization experience in that it 1) does re-invoke the historical Celtic reality of fairies 2) invokes the divinity of fairies, generally absent from the older common Fairy Faith, 3) vitalizes and re-vitalizes the individual in having life and spirit enhancing mystical experience and 4) re-vitalizes usually-forgotten childhood sensitivities and experiences of fairies (Chapter 3). These changes in the history of fairyology are similar to changes in other belief systems which emphasize, in different periods, different spiritual principles or entities, and differing functions of such entities.[20]

The newer Fairy Faith is one instance of many in history in which there are individual and sometimes collective changes in the organization or elaboration of the "tiers" of the cosmos. These changes and additions are ontic (ontological) shifts in individual awarenesses. The history of changing conceptions and experiences of spiritual entities over the ages, for example with angels (Garrett 2008), demonstrate that there can be a fluidity in the location of god-like beings or spirits in the geography of the cosmos, and changes in the very geography of the cosmos. Each person or group's "cartography"- mental map - of the cosmos may vary, even within established religious orientations. Knowing and experiencing Fairydom alters the "map", giving it more detail, just as Kabbalism does in its

delineation of the emanations of God, or as Theosophy chronicles additional realms of the universe beyond Christian and Western convention. Once and when you come to know another etheric, astral, or spiritual plane or tier, you can then experience it, and perhaps even pay more attention to that plane than others. And in the new Fairy Faith, as informants below attest, awareness and experience of Fairydom may come unexpectedly as a revelation and thus "explode" or shift their previous mental map of the universe.

The fairyfolk below represent an elevation or change in the common emic classification of fairies from often troublesome, mischievous spirits to god-like beings. In Levy, Mageo, and Howard's (1996:14) terms, for fairyfolk here, fairies, rather than, or in addition to, being spirits, are also god-like beings. Fairyfolk believe and know, in contrast to most Irish of the past, of the Divinity of fairies and these divine beings are significantly present in their worldview and experience.

The existence of Fairydom, and fairy consciousness thereof, in its elaboration of the Godly in nature, simultaneously incorporates an ascension and a descension, an immanence and a transcendence. Fairydom is both earthly and heavenly. Fairydom as it manifests in nature on earth is but another divine realm of God's creation.

In this context of experiential, mystical experience, it becomes apparent that the word or idea of "faith" can be misleading. "Faith" implies the notion of personal belief as well as extra-personal institutionalization. (There is no formal institution, literally or figuratively, of the Fairy Faith, no "church" - see Chapter 15.) Moreover, as Goody (1996) suggests, faith implies at least some doubt, as otherwise a person would not need faith as something between conviction and doubt. Kay, one of my primary informants, states that the existence of fairies is a "fact" in the same sense that ordinary physical reality is a fact. Her and others' knowledge of the Fairy Realm is not a matter of faith reified, not a matter of conceptualized belief learned from others, but of inner, personal, received knowledge.

The fairyfolk of this ethnography did not walk around saying that they "believe" in fairies, but rather they spoke of their experiences and understandings concerning them. This accords with the recognition that "emphasis on personal declaration of belief in the tenets of a faith is not only not universal, but in fact is not widespread among other [non-Christian] faiths, particularly religions in small-scale homogeneous societies" (Stevens, Jr. 2011:32). And Glazier (2011), summarizing earlier work, quotes Smith (1998) who says belief statements are almost "impossible to refute" (32) and, when speaking of others' beliefs are "less

precise" and, perhaps most importantly, "believing… is not and has never been a primary focus for most religious people" (34).[21]

In alignment with this perspective, Abraham Heschel (1959), one of the leading Jewish philosophers and theologians of the twentieth century, describes faith:

> Faith is not assent to a proposition but an attitude of the whole person, of sensitivity, understanding, engagement, and attachment. It includes faithfulness – loyalty to the higher moments of insight even during long periods of ordinary living. (17)
>
> The essence of Jewish religious thinking does not lie in entertaining a concept of God but in the ability to articulate a memory of moments of illumination by His presence. (70)
>
> Awe rather than faith is the cardinal attitude of the religious Jew…. In Biblical language the religious man is not called "believer," but *yere hashem* [the awe of God].(53)

Thus for Heschel faith is more a consequence of experience than belief. Replacing Heschel's words "Jewish" and "God" and "His" with "fairy," a particular manifestation of God, we understand that human fairyness is the ongoing awe-full presence of particular fairy experiences in the life of fairyfolk.

Thus Fairy Faith is more mysticism than religion. Yet Mullin's (1997) *The Wondrous Land*, a non-academic book, is subtitled *The Faery Faith in Ireland*. It uses the words "Fairy Faith," only, I suggest, because that phrase – The Fairy Faith - has been a historical convention, as was put forth in Evans-Wentz's own 1911 book title. Fairy sensibilities described below comprise "faith" only in the outsiders' sense that for the often skeptical, if not scoffing, non-experiencer of fairies, faith is a term which describes a mindset that the outsider would consider beyond verification. Thus "faith" in this case is not really emically descriptive: it does not describe the ontology or epistemology of fairyfolk who experience fairies, but of the outsider materialist scientist. This also epitomizes the problem that conventional religious authorities have with personal mystical experience and some mystical sects within larger organized religions, e.g., as with Gnostics within Christianity, Sufis within Islam, Kabbalists within Judaism, as the nature of their religious experience is primarily spiritual, i.e., individual, rather than coordinated through established human hierarchies.

The often overlapping concepts and language, sufficient or not, in discourses on belief, faith, and spiritual or religious experience can be

elusive. Belief or experience can also be quite contextual or situational, dependent on a place, a time, a background, both in inception and reappearance. As the fairy sensibilities of my informants have sometimes waxed and waned, I too have lost a portion of my fairy sensibility, a lessening of the experience and frequency of experience of the intuiting, feeling, of the presence of fairy energy while in an alternate state of consciousness. This also includes (cognitively) remembering less, and paying less attention to, the very existence of the Fairy Faith. I have it less consciously in my thoughts and experience. This is salient for me in the context of being back in the US, back in scientistic academia, back in the modern, busy, technologically-oriented world. If you walk less in the woods or nature, then of course you have less opportunity to sense nature beings.

Various approaches and theories to the nature of religious or mystical experience exist, and more keep getting published.[22] Space here limits a thorough examination of the complexities of belief and experience, but it is not one to be avoided and some of the issues will be woven throughout this work through the words of fairyfolk and in my occasional analyses and cross-cultural comparisons. The existence and authenticity of fairy experience are central to both my informants' mode of being and to me in conducting and relating a participatory anthropology. I am most indebted in this regard to Rodney Needham's (1972) *Belief, Language, and Experience* in conceptualizing what "belief" is, and how I myself came to believe and experience Fairy.

For a long time in Celtic countries, and in Scandinavia, fairies and similar nature-spirit beings were commonly seen and heard about. But Western organized religion, scholarly discourse, and modernity – in their denigration of fairy belief as "folk religion", folklore, or superstition and technological/urban development - in its destruction of natural habitats and contemplative wild space - have diminished the number of people who accepted fairies as real.[23] Yet there are a good number of people, (often formally educated professionals) in Ireland, from whom I learned about Fairy Faith, who experience fairies. Ironically, or perhaps better said, synchronistically, it was happenstance, rather than intention, that led me to work with these people while I was doing a very different kind of research in Ireland. I fell into a kind of rabbit hole or web of Fairydom. Thus my approach was unintentionally participatory.[24] I did not decide to believe. This is in accordance with Needham's (1972) general perspective on belief that we do not decide to believe or actively change our minds. And transpersonal psychologist Washburn's (2000) recognition that

"transpersonal cognition… is as much something that happens or is 'given' as it is something that can be achieved by steadfast effort" (207).

> We do say transitively that *we* change our minds, as though it were in our power to foresee a new idea. Yet all we know, and necessarily only in retrospect, is that we now entertain or express thoughts which are different from those that we were conscious of before. (Needham 1972: 241)

By exposure to new or different religious ideas or beliefs, as Laitman (2008:305) contends, others' ideas infiltrate our subconscious, even without intent, and thus may later reappear as our own ideas or beliefs with our conscious minds, unable to discern that the ideas are not really our own.[25]

As Needham suggests, there really is no objective foundation in the psyche's experience for belief statements.[26] And cross-cultural comparisons of the notions of belief indicate that "it is very difficult to separate what is properly experience from what is properly belief "(Levy-Bruhl 1938:10).

> The very notion of religious 'experience', in other words, is itself a singular and complex concept among others, not a neutral and undifferentiated background against which cultural concepts can be set up for inspection. (Needham 1972:172)

Somewhat similarly, Greenwood (2009), with an eye towards a participatory anthropology, makes a strong case for the legitimacy of various modes of knowledge and consciousness, and thus brackets or puts to the side the notion of belief or disbelief in investigating religion, so as to make room for a mode of magical (mystical) participation. Yet in the transpersonal anthropology and psychology put forth here, I would question Greenwood's conclusion that the question of the reality or non-reality of spirits "appears to be unreasonable," (141) that we should necessarily adopt an attitude of "spiritual agnosticism by not believing or disbelieving in their reality" (140). I think she says this because she is (understandably) concerned with a methodology that might satisfy rational materialists. It can be possible, as it was for me, the investigator, to be influenced by the environment and by others, especially as, when talking to and looking them in the eye, I felt and perceived the fairyfolk perspective and experience as deeply authentic. But the question is not whether there are those spirit beings in an "objective reality" outside people's minds, but whether the anthropologist can access a local alternate state of consciousness.

Greenwood does, nonetheless, concur more or less with Needham's, Glazier's (2011), Smith's (1998) and my own perspective that "belief" may not always be a helpful word describing religious experience.

> Whilst participating in a magical aspect of consciousness, the question of belief is irrelevant: belief is not a necessary condition to communicate with an inspirited world. (Greenwood 140)

is probably true from the insider's perspective and from the anthropologist's point of view. While it may be true that some humans on their own fantasize beings, I, like Young (1994) and some others, ascribe to the perspective of Young's Zen monk informant:

> …many "spirits" are created by ourselves for one reason or another. There are many other spirits, however, over which we have no control. … They are part of the natural world which has many levels, many of which are unavailable for experience by most people. Regardless of their nature, when they appear to us they *take a form which we can understand*. It is natural that an Indian might see an animal spirit, just as it is natural that a Buddhist might see a Buddhist saint, or a Christian an angel. (173) (my emphasis)

And, I should add … "natural that a Celtic Christian see a fairy." (Irish and Celtic connections to fairies are discussed in more detail in chapters Seven and Seventeen.) Although not common for members of conventional European religion, for this Zen monk, and, as he says, for others, the world of spirits is integrated with the world of humans.

This understanding that different individuals and cultures experience variations on central themes of spirits, gods, and mystical experience could be described as part of a perennial perspective. Like James' (1902) "stream of consciousness" and Wilber's (1998) "spectrum of consciousness," it posits a band along which specific mystical/religious concepts/experiences are cultural variations of a universal human spiritual/religious paradigm. If all peoples have religion, and as many have suggested, that every individual is capable of mystical experience (Forman 1998), and that there is an innate drive to seek transpersonal experience (Roszak 1975, de Chardin 1959, Weil 1972), then a starting point can be religious/mystical experience reported in ethnographic data *in situ* and *sui generis*. There need not be a psychological or sociological deconstruction of it. In this light I use anthropological, psychological, and occasionally theological discussions to support, in comparative context, the authenticity of the newer Fairy Faith which experiences fairy things as divine. I use comparison and social science as a forum not for deconstruction but for