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Emma Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie: Magic, Shamanism and Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 616 pp., £75/$125 (cloth), £35/$65 (paper).

Emma Wilby's work builds on the "shamanistic paradigm" formulated by Carlo Ginzburg, Éva Pócs, Claude Lecouteux, and Gabor Klaniczay. This book follows her earlier exploration of the area in *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic,* which was shortlisted for the Katherine Briggs prize in 2006. Wilby describes shamanism as the practice of magic that includes entering into alternate states of consciousness to experience visionary phenomena (252), and proposes that some accounts of early modern witchcraft and magic describe elements of European shamanic beliefs and practice. *Visions* retains the problems of its predecessors in its wide definition of shamanism, and in having to make assumptions to fill gaps in history. However Wilby's work is characterized by her description and discussion of these gaps, her detailed historical research, and her bold yet coherent appropriation of other fields; therefore, her hypotheses are well described and delineated, with a clear awareness of where they may have problems, and she leaves readers to draw their own conclusions from the data she presents.

This book deconstructs the seventeenth-century witch trial confessions of Isobel Gowdie, via an extensive analysis of her geographical base, psyche, lifestyle, beliefs, politics, religion, and community, via historical, folkloric, anthropological, sociological, and psychological facts and theories. The author has clearly been subsumed in the life of Gowdie for some years, and her commitment to this opus is such that she discovered the original trial records that had been lost for two hundred years; whatever one finally decides about her thesis one cannot but be impressed by her painstaking contextualization of the cultural and social context of the life and times of one Scottish witch. She explores the biographies of Gowdie's interrogators, their beliefs and relationships with each other, and how their interest in her case allowed her to give such a fulsome confession. She also discusses the folkloristic narratives (especially of fairy lore) and oral story-telling traditions of the Scottish highlands, and how they may have influenced this powerful oratory.

Wilby illustrates how this interweaving of popular fairy-lore and diabolical imagery may be due to an intersection with elite beliefs about witchcraft and diabolism of the time, beliefs which were transferred into Gowdie's narratives by repeated interrogations seeking details of Satanic pacts, creating false memories in the emotionally charged arena of her trials. She discusses how in a heavily Protestant Scotland in which one had to go to kirk, Gowdie was perhaps a proponent of countercultural desires for fun with the fairies, (whose domain may represent an alternative afterlife to purgatory, heaven, or hell), and how confessions of riding with a wild hunt, and shooting elf arrows in acts of malefic magic, may have had other meanings than have previously been considered. Wilby points out the social forces that would make this an attractive proposal to a cotter's wife; at the universality of a peasant wanting to redress the balance of power by cursing the laird, of hard-working, half-starved women wishing to cast off their mundane worries to revel, dance, and feast like royalty—in the Devil's name if necessary. She proposes this may have been done in dream or astral flight, and looks in depth at the fantastic elements of Gowdie's testimony that have been previously more usually attributed to lunacy or ergotism. She attributes elements such as shape-shifting and nocturnal flight to a form of "dark" shamanism that could have been a pre-Christian survival, had its own early modern Scottish elements, but also shared elements in common with other cultures.

Wilby proposes these famous and highly influential confessions may have been based on shamanistic visions and mutual dreams, then perhaps consolidated into false memories under the influence of repeated interrogation with leading questions, thus forming new narratives that fed back into witchcraft lore. She draws on foregoing work by respected scholars such as Normal Cohn and Trevor-Roper, as well as on a broad cross-disciplinary knowledge base to make her proposals. Her use of anthropological research on Amazonian "dark" shamanism to argue her case is interesting, as is her skilfull usage of other fields. As a psychologist I found Wilby's use of psychology to be careful, cogent, and coherently incorporated, though this rather grand narrative may weaken her argument for some scholars who cannot accept her conjecture.

Wilby concludes that popular spirituality in seventeenth-century Europe was influenced by an interaction between pre-Christian shamanism and church which included folklore, beneficent magic and *maleficium*, and visionary rites with shamanistic rationales. She also

says that if such spirituality existed, then there may have been a reasonable fear of *maleficium* behind witch accusations.

I find it interesting that Wilby's work has emerged at a time when many scholars of contemporary Paganism argue that the rise of modern esoteric spirituality is an indicator of re-enchantment and for the end of a universally applicable secularization hypothesis. Wilby's "shamanistic paradigm" acknowledges and draws on social explanations for witch trial confessions, but also offers a magical/visionary explanation for the fantastical elements of early modern witch beliefs that makes secular explanations of this aspect of the witch trials seem part of a particularly rationalist paradigm. Therefore, this book can be viewed not only as an opus in the field of folklore, but as a very interesting addition to the research and literature on (re)enchantment which scholars of contemporary Paganism have been exploring, and may be particularly useful for those working on the imagined and historical pasts that have influenced the Paganisms of today.

There will be some critics who cannot accept Wilby's work, with valid reservations. However, the honesty and clarity of her argument, the extent of her research, and the eloquent fluency of her writing, which vividly re-animates the lived experience of Isobel Gowdie and her community, are impressive; and led to this book deservedly being shortlisted for the Saltire Society Scottish History Book of the Year Award 2010, and the Folklore Society's prestigious Katharine Briggs Award 2010.

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