



Cunning-Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic

Emma Wilby

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This book examines the folkloric roots of familiar lore in early modern Britain from historical, anthropological, and comparative religious perspectives. It argues that beliefs about witches' familiars were rooted in beliefs surrounding the use of fairy familiars by beneficent magical practitioners or "cunning folk," and corroborates this through a comparative analysis of familiar beliefs found in traditional Native American and Siberian shamanism. The author then goes on to explore the experiential dimension of familiar lore by drawing parallels between early modern familiar encounters and visionary mysticism as it appears in both tribal shamanism and medieval European contemplative traditions. These perspectives challenge the reductionist view of popular magic in early modern Britain often presented by historians

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