Making the Old New: The Recontextualization and Traditionalization of Tree Spirits in Video Games

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MAKING THE OLD NEW: THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION AND
TRADITIONALIZATION OF TREE SPIRITS IN VIDEO GAMES

by

Alexandria Ziegler

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
Folklore

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah
2022
ABSTRACT

Maaking the Old New: The Recontextualization and Traditionalization of Tree Spirits in Video Games

by

Alexandria Ziegler, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2022

Major Professor: Dr. Lisa Gabbert
Department: Folklore

Folklorists study the active rituals between humans and deities, as well as the inactive participation between them in narrative. However, they do not study the active participation that comes in the form of video games between them, though with shifts in society, this new way of engaging through digital forms is wide-spread and accessible. In my research, I studied Russian and Japanese tree spirits in a variety of video games to understand this new form of engagement with ancient deities. These video games are: Okami, The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, Black Book, The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt. Through the lens of original context and the folkloresque, I use the concepts of recontextualization and traditionalization to explain why video games are the best modern format to engage with ancient deities through world building, active player engagement, and deity representations.

(98 pages)
Making the Old New: The Recontextualization and Traditionalization of Tree Spirits in Video Games

Alexandria Ziegler

This thesis examines how video game creators were able to create new homes within video games for ancient deities, specifically, tree spirits from Russian and Japanese folklore. There are three reasons that video games are considered a new home for these deities. The first is how the creators build the world with the use of history and existing folklore. The second is how the creators portray those deities, in both physical renditions and the deities’ personality. And lastly, the way the players themselves can interact and engage with these deities.
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To the faculty and staff who have guided me through these last two years, thank you. Your classes and guidance have broadened my knowledge on folklore and inclusivity. Your expertise in the field has made my journey immensely enjoyable.
DEDICATION

To my heart and love, McKay. Thank you for your support and love throughout this journey. Your love has gotten me through all the tough times.

To my friends, thank you for being my cheerleaders and cheering me on until the finish line.

To my parents and sisters, thank you for the pride you have in me. Your support means the world.
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CHAPTER I: Introduction

The discipline of folklore examines interactions between humans and gods largely through the genres of folk belief, ritual, and narrative. Yet as Linda Dėgh (1994), Kevin Schut (2014), Michael Dylan Foster (2016), and Lynne McNeil (2009) have illustrated, many older forms of folklore also exist in the digital realm, while new forms of folklore are being created. The digital realm is a significant and new type of context. Video games are a digital context that draw on folkloric portrayals of ancient deities as the basis of the game. Video games such as *Hades, Assassin’s Creed, Dragon Age,* and *World of Warcraft* are examples of games that use ancient deities.

Video games are a digital genre in which ancient deities are recontextualized from religious contexts, legends, and narratives, into a new interactive format. In this thesis, I argue that video games are an ideal genre for deities to exist in modern society for three reasons. First, video games create a space where a large range of traditional and folkloresque folk beliefs, narratives, and ritual are recreated through world building. Second, unlike narratives, video games provide a concrete visual representation of deities making them seem more real. Third, video games allow people to interact directly with representations of deities through game play. The players also can ostensively act out rituals within video games, which deities need to be remembered and stay relevant. Taken together, these aspects of video games create an inhabitable world for deities. By using traditional and folkloresque folk beliefs to build a new, digital world, video games create the essential elements of what the entities need to stay relevant. Video games are a new home for them. When I discuss these tree spirits, I do not mean that they are literal spirits who have been placed into video games but are representations of spirits as
imagined by the game creators. As such player interaction is limited. However, given that it is in the interest of all deities to expand their influence and to attract attention, I would also argue that we might consider video games as a new form for these deities to exist in.

Specifically, my research examines Russian and Japanese tree spirits in video games. Russian tree spirits, known as leshy, and Japanese tree spirits, known as kodama, are protectors associated with the natural environment. The belief systems in which they exist are somewhat similar, and they take similar forms and roles in their respective contexts. I initially chose tree spirits for my research due to a personal interest in them and chose them specifically from Japanese and Slavic lore due the similarity of their respective roles in each culture. I was surprised and interested to learn that each culture had their own respective tree spirit, that had the same role in environmental protection and sustainability. I was especially drawn to the tree spirits in these games due to the similarity in how they all want to sustain their local environment, and how the plots of the game revolved around that aspect.

Before the Christianization of Russia (~1000 CE), the pagan religions recognized the existence of supernatural entities as protectors of the home, town, forest, livestock, and many other places within their daily lives. They left offerings in return for protection of livestock, the safekeeping of homes, and the safety of families. The Leshy is one such being—a benevolent creature who protects livestock in exchange for offerings and also protects the forest. The Leshy also was feared because it spirits away villagers for its own gain (Porteous 1996). After Christianity was adopted, supernatural entities, such as the leshy were transformed into demons and devils. The leshy was called “the grandfather of
the devil.” (Ivanits 2015). However, even with Christianization, people continued to believe in the leshy, and they still believe the Lesy protects the forest.

The kodama plays a similar role in Japanese society: they protect of the forest and those that reside within it. Said to have been born from the tree god Kukunochi (Kojiki 723; Nihongi 697), kodama are the spirit of a sacred tree that usually exists on temple and shrine grounds or in the most ancient tree in a forest. Not every tree has a Kodama, but every kodama has a tree from which it draws power to protect the forest, the local villagers, and surrounding land. The demeanor of the kodama is generally calm, but if their tree or land is harmed in any way, the kodama will destroy the village. The kodama comes from Shinto beliefs, which is the traditional lifestyle in Japan. Because of this, kodama and their trees are still found within the sacred grounds of temples and shrines, and their divinity is marked with the Shimenawa—a sacred rope made from rice straw or hemp rope and used for purification.2

Both types of tree spirits come from their respective, traditional belief systems. While the Lesy was adopted into the Christianity (albeit in a negative way), the kodama remained in its original context within Shintoism. In both Russia and Japan, actual rituals still exist, and descriptions of these tree spirits are found in non-religious narratives and legends. The role they play in society is continued within the context of video games.

For my research, I studied four video games. These games are Ōkami (2006), The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (2017), Black Book (2021), and The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt (2015). I chose these video games because they are popular, accessible, and

1 Please see Appendix 2B.
2 Please see Appendix 1A.
because tree spirits play a prominent role in them. While these spirits appear in all kinds of digital and modern media, I chose video games because of their accessibility and broad audience engagement, and because the creators used folk beliefs and narratives in the games. Video games also have an interactive element that other forms of media do not. Players can act ostensively within video games, while with other forms, they remain more passive audiences.

My method was to play through these video games and closely examine world building, representation of the tree spirits, and how players interact with the representations of deities. I then compared these aspects to how they manifested in older folkloric forms such as legends and folktales and, drawing on notions of recontextualization and traditionalization (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Bauman and Briggs 1992; Hymes 1975; Mould 2005) and ostension (McDowell 1982; Ellis 1989), examined how they presented in digital formats. These theories are used for examining how folklore emerges in digital formats.

People engage with deities in an active and religious way in ritual contexts. In narrative, such as legends and folktales, this engagement becomes more passive because the practitioner no longer engages with the deity directly. Instead, they interact with the deity through an indirect form such as storytelling. In contrast, video games create a world where practitioners and deities interact in an active, entertainment form. Kevin Schut (2014) explains this interaction successfully in his chapter, “They Kill Mystery.” He explains that video games are a place where players can either become a god or interact with them.
This research is important for several reasons. First, it contributes to an understanding of folklore in the modern world. Second, it illustrates how folklore adapts and changes in digital contexts. Finally, it shows how ancient deities have cleverly found a new way to garner attention and generate a broader audience for themselves.

**Literature Review**

The primary folklore concepts I use in this thesis are drawn from Charles Briggs’ and Richard Bauman’s work on contextualization and recontextualization. These concepts are useful in analyzing what happens to folklore as it moves across modern contexts and genres. Charles L. Briggs and Richard Bauman introduced the theory of recontextualization in reference to language, stating that it is the process of taking a piece of language and putting it into a new context (1990). The process is made up of three steps. Contextualization is an ongoing process that occurs in the folklore performance and allows participants to orient to relevant contextual aspects. Entextualization is the “process by which circulable texts are produced by extracting discourse from its original context.” (Bucholtz and Park 2009, 486; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Bauman and Briggs 1992). And decontextualization is the removal of information or discourse from its original context and placing it into a new context where it still contains validity (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73). This combination makes up the concept recontextualization, which, in simpler terms, is the taking of a piece of information out of one context and placing it into another.

I also use the concept of traditionalization, a term that appears self-explanatory, but is much more complex. I use this concept because of its focus on tradition as an active process, rather than conceptualizing tradition as an element that inheres in items.
Traditionalization is the active process of making a folklore example traditional (Hymes 1975; Mould 2005). Bauman critiques older definitions of tradition such as the idea that, “tradition refers to the collective social inheritance of particular people, culture, society, group, or collectivity” and that “tradition is generally conceived of as the aggregate mass of cultural forms” (2001, 15819). He continues with his definition of tradition by explaining the continuation of tradition is created by cultural forms that are guided by cultural history and convention (15819). It is this mode of copying social and historical concepts that lead communities to establish their traditions. Traditions encourage and enable conformity (Bauman 2001a, 15819), which leads to the complication of defining tradition due to the different social practices humans may conform to. Even so, the conformity of tradition varies on the groups and social context of many items.

Notions of traditionalization entail focusing on an individual level, rather than a community level, or the focus on the passing down of materials (Ben-Amos 1983, 99; Bauman 2001a). Hymes and Mould say that the act of traditionalization focuses on the action or process of creating folklore, such as the act of decorating a Christmas tree with family members the evening of Thanksgiving after dinner. While the Christmas tree is a piece of folklore, it is the process of putting together the tree that is the tradition. This did not start as a tradition but was traditionalized as the family continued to do it every year and placed meaning on the process. “Tradition is not so much a matter of preservation, as it is a matter of re-creation,” (Hymes 1975, 35). By recreating the process of putting up the Christmas tree every year, the family is traditionalizing the process that would otherwise simply be an activity.
Mould (2005) narrows traditionalization down by defining it as “the act of explicitly referencing some element of the past considered traditional within the community” (26). He breaks this down into five points: “1) a conscious process undertaken by the performer that 2) refers to the past, 3) adopts an anti-modern stance, 4) asserts the continuity of a specific cultural element, and 5) makes reference to and may even reconstruct “the traditional,” rather than simply referring to a ‘tradition,’” (Mould 2005, 261). Therefore, traditionalization is not about the item of folklore being traditional but the way it is made traditional in active performance.

Active engagement is important in understanding how folklore operates in modern genres, especially in video games. Linda Dègh’s approach to mass media, Michael Dylan Foster’s approach to the folloresque, and Jeannie’s Thomas’s approach to the hypermodern are useful. Dègh studied folklore in the mass media, and she argued that mass media are what allowed room for folklore to exist in new genres (1994, 23). Though she focused her studies on fairy tales in commercials or movies, she also claimed that mass media generally is a valid form of folklore transmission (1994). Like commercials and other forms of mass media, video games also use folklore.

Michael Dylan Foster complicates Dègh’s idea that folklore exists in the mass media. He and Jeffrey Tolbert coined the term folloresque to mean, “(1) an item in the “style” of folklore; (2) that it is connected to something beyond/before itself, to some tradition or folkloric source existing outside the popular culture context; and (3) that the product itself is potentially of folkloric value, connected in some way with the processes of folklore creation and transmission.” (Foster 2016, 5-6). Essentially, the folloresque is an item of pop culture that appears to be of folkloric nature but is not true folklore. The
folkloresque creates a space for pop culture to share items of folklore in the same way that Đègh claimed, but instead of calling it true folklore, Foster says that these are pop culture’s own perception and performance of folklore (05).

The Witcher III and the Legend of Zelda can be categorized as folkloresque, while Black Book and Ōkami can be categorized as hypermodern. Thomas’s (2015) concept of the hypermodern means that the digital portrayal has become more authentic than the original (07). Hypermodern fits neatly into Linda Đègh’s discussion of mass media sharing folklore and focuses on the digital aspect of folklore. In my own research I am using the folkloresque and the hypermodern to apply to video games.

Catherine Beavis (2014), an Australian professor of education, has been studying video games as “emergent cultural forms: the ways they work as texts, the kinds of literacies on which they call, and what players need to know and do in order to be able to play” (434). Because games have become cultural forms, they are now new ways of sharing and creating stories that combine physical imaging, and reposition players as creators, readers, and interpreters (435). Games require players to read and watch, make decisions that will determine the outcome of the game, and determine how characters within the game are perceived.

Storytelling through video games is a broader understanding of narratives (Ostenson 2013, 71), because video games provide interactive modes that allow participants to engage more than simply reading a book or watching a film. Video games provide a chance for participants to perform the narratives. The multimodality of video games therefore enables players to engage with folklore elements ostensively.
Kevin Schut states that video games are a medium “ideally suited to represent one aspect of religion: the experience of being a god.” (Schut 2014, 255). Through his case studies, Schut focuses on the elaborate stories and iconography that is used within role-playing video games (265). His argument is that video games are an interactive medium for religion, in which players can be gods and interact with gods. Schut also argues that religions as represented in video games result in them becoming mechanically restricted (263). This means that, due to the physical mechanics of the game, religion does not adapt and evolve naturally as it does in the physical world. It also illustrates that video games have a performance aspect to them that allows players to engage with religion in a new context and genre. Building on his work, I not only argue that video games allow players to interact with religion in new contexts and genres, but also that players interact with the representations of deities from those religions in the new context and genres, making video games an important new digital home for them.

*Methods*

I used a combination of primary and secondary sources to complete my research. I also played through four video games specifically to interact with and see the portrayal of the leshy and kodama. I played at least twenty-five hours of each game to understand the role of the tree spirit in each story. This is how I studied the new world in which they lived, their physical renditions, and how I, as a player, interacted with the portrayal of deities. Playing through the video games as research was necessary because I need to understand their existence in modern media as compared to their original settings.³ I examined how I acted ostensively, and how I reenacted rituals in the games. Playing the

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³ “Original” in this context means their religious and narrative folkloric settings.
video games was necessary because it gave me the experience I needed to interact with these deities in a new way. I used video games as a primary source, with myself as the test subject, and library sources as secondary research and applied the theories to my primary research.
Kodama are sacred beings who protect their land and forests from those who would harm them. Their trees are marked with Shimenawa ropes and are found in sacred areas such as Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, or wrapped around the most ancient trees (Foster, 2015). Though these sacred spirits exist to protect their forests, they are not solely good, but are ambiguous creatures known to spirit away humans (Caddeau, 2004), as seen in the Tale of Genji (Shikibu, 1008). However, in recent years and through pop culture, there has been a shift in how the Kodama are portrayed. For example, in Studio Ghibli’s Mononoke Hime they are small humanoid creatures with black eyes and mouths, while in Hōzuki’s Cool-Headedness, the kodama is a small, innocent child. Though they are no longer portrayed as ambiguous beings and are seen as playful and fun in popular culture, their roles as protectors of the forests stay the same. In the following analyses of Ōkami (2006) and The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (2017), I examine Kodama in its new, digital format.4

4 Please see Appendix 1A for more historical background and narratives of the Kodama
Figure 1 “Kodama” (木魅) from the Gazu Hyakki Yagyō by Toriyama Sekien.

Figure 2 Kodama, Princess Mononoke, Hayao Miyazaki, Studio Ghibli, 1997
Ōkami (2006)

Ōkami was released in 2006 by Capcom and Clover Studios (closed in 2007). Capcom is a Japanese game development company that was founded in 1974. The creators relied on Japanese folklore, architecture, and calligraphy to build the game. Ōkami follows the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, in her wolf form as she travels across Ancient Japan with her companion Issun. In the beginning of the game, the player watches a long cut-scene that shows an ancient evil, the Yamata no Orochi, woken up and set free from his prison. As this evil being curses the land and takes everything under his control, the player witnesses a mystical being save a statue of a wolf from being crushed during a storm. This being is Sakuya, a tree spirit. Sakuya calls on Amaterasu and summons her from the heavens to save the world from the evil that has been released. Amaterasu and her companion use the power of Sakuya, their friends, and themselves to help save Japan from the Yamata no Orochi.

Though Ōkami focuses on Amaterasu, the sun goddess, Sakuya is a key figure. Sakuya, the tree spirit, is the Kodama who inhabits the great Konohana—a sacred Sakura tree that stands atop a mountain and protects the small village that resides below it. The Konohana’s reach, however, goes far beyond this simple village. There are small saplings throughout Japan that have sprouted from the
Konohana, and they protect the areas they reside in. The power reaches far to the north and south of the Konohana’s resting place.

The world of Ōkami was created from the combination of many different Japanese folk beliefs, legends, fairy tales, and material culture. The cities and towns are built with vernacular and traditional architecture, while the quests and plot are taken from various narratives. The characters are based on historical and legendary figures found in fairy tales or myths. This folklore is depicted through game dialogue, cut scenes, and in-game performances that emulate storytelling from the real world. The creators worked folklore into every aspect of the game so that it appears naturally, but obviously, to the player. Players absorb folkloric knowledge simply by playing through the game.

The world building centers around the story of Susanō and the Yamata no Orochi, though the story has been adjusted to make the goddess Amaterasu the protagonist. This is not the only story, however; other traditional narratives are also included to move the plot and create the physical world, such as the story of Princess Kaguya, Issun-boshi (the One Inch Boy), Shita-kiri Suzume (the Tongue Cut Sparrow), the Okikurmi, and many more. Each narrative was recontextualized and turned into a puzzle piece that builds the world and the plot of the game. The stories are traditionalized in the context of the game to give a sense that the players are in ancient Japan and experience Japanese folklore.

This change in genre allows the kodama to exist in the video game more concretely. Genre is an important factor in the process of recontextualization, as folklore often shifts genres throughout the process. As Bauman (2001) says, “The invocation of a generic (genre-specific) framing device such as ‘Once upon a time’ carries with it a set of

---

5 A figure from an Ainu creation story.
Audiences have expectations that come with certain genres, and the expectations are brought to the genre as discourse is entextualized during the recontextualization process. With this, players hold the same expectations for the folklore within Ōkami as they do for the folklore shared in a traditional sense. Because the included lore stems from fairy tales and mythology, the player expects to experience that as they play through the game.

Though narratives are what the world is based on, the physicality of the virtual world relies heavily on vernacular architecture and material culture. By including vernacular architecture and material culture, the creators made a concrete place for the kodama to exist. For example, the buildings and architecture within the game are artistic renditions of historical Japanese buildings from both Shinto and Buddhist backgrounds. These buildings create a feeling of being in ancient Japan and provide a space where kodama can exist in a modern way but are still in an ancient, traditional (albeit digital) place.6

The Konohana, the sacred tree that Sakuya resides in, is an example of how material culture and mythology are used to help create a new home for the kodama in the video game. Kodama reside within sacred trees all over Japan, and the Konohana replicates these trees. The name is derived from the Konohana, the spirit who protects Mt. Fuji, and the tree is a giant cherry blossom tree that rests at the top of a mountain. Its branches reach high, and in true video game fashion, twist into a spiral. The trunk has a

---

6 See Figure 1 for buildings.
Shimenawa rope that wraps around the base, and the player must walk through a Torii gate to reach the tree. A shrine that was erected for a historical hero who saved the local village one-hundred years prior is located at the base of the tree. This tree has all the markers of a tree that would house a kodama, and the creators traditionalized it so they could recontextualize the tree spirit into the game. Sakuya lives both within the tree and within the video game. By including this folklore, the creators made a new home for kodama that not only replicates the real world but is also one filled with the necessary items that the kodama relies on—player interactions, a livable world, and place where the kodama can be themselves.

The kodama’s role stays the same as it is recontextualized. The role relies on more than just how the audience perceives it. The portrayal through the creators’ own experience is important too. Sakuya’s portrayal focuses on the performativity that is tied to a range of formal features and patterns (Bauman and Briggs 1992, 63). While the genre of the performance changes, the patterns, features, and information stay the same, which in turn keeps its relevancy. The creators took the Kodama’s context—it’s role, description, and how it interacts with humans—and placed it into a new genre. Sakuya’s role as a kodama is very true to the original roles of the Japanese tree spirit, and easy to identify—Sakuya’s title when first introduced is, “Sakuya, Tree Sprite.” But, from her actions to her housing, to her physical rendition, Sakuya appears as many other kodama are described in Japanese legends. Historically and legendarily, kodama are described as humanoid and elderly. The father of kodama, Kukunochi, is described as an elderly god (Nihongi 697), and his offspring look somewhat similar. However, as time went on, the kodama began to take on other forms. The legend, “Willow Wife”, tells the story of a
young man who had a deep connection with an ancient willow.\(^7\) One day a young, beautiful woman came to him and told him that because of his deep loyalty and connection with the tree, the spirit of the tree had deemed him worthy of its love. One night the tree was cut down to build a temple for the emperor, and it was discovered that the woman was the spirit of the tree. A similar tale is told in “Green Willow.”\(^8\)

Typically, kodama are depicted as young, attractive women. Sakuya’s own physical portrayal follows this pattern. She is shapely, with sexy, revealing clothes that show off her cleavage and hips. However, the context of Sakuya’s beauty stays the same, despite its sexualization. “If folklore is the collective expression of social groups, it is also the personal expression of the individuals who use it” (Bauman 2001b, 365). The creators of Ōkami recognized their character’s role within the game, expressed the beauty of Sakuya true to the original context that kodama are expressed, but also took their individual, modern liberties with it. While Sakuya’s clothing leans towards the traditional, there are still contextual differences within her design: the differing shape of her kimono, the way it lays across her chest, or the tightness of it around her waist. Sakuya still falls into the unfortunate stereotype of video game portrayals of women being sexualized and objectified, which, of course, fulfills players’ expectations of the video game genre.

Though the physical portrayal of the kodama shifted with time, their powers stayed the same. In both narratives and mythology, the power of the kodama is tied to their tree and they draw their strength from it. Sakuya’s power also comes from her tree,

\(^7\) See Appendix 2A.
\(^8\) See Appendix 3A.
and as the player continues to heal her tree, she gets stronger too. This same narrative is originally seen in “Willow Wife” and “Green Willow.” Both kodama is these tales perish after their trees are cut down, and the player sees Sakuya suffering greatly as her tree is harmed by the power of the Yamata no Orochi.

“Despite the fact that the traditional is constantly being negotiated and that total agreement will never exist within a community, I believe that members of a given group often share a general sense of what objects, ideas, and processes are considered traditional at a given moment” (Mould 2005:260). This suggestion by Mould is seen within Ōkami, from the garb of the characters to the roles of the characters, to vernacular architecture, and even to the legends and fairy tales included within the game. The creators took these items, illustrating their own perspective about what is traditional and placed those aspects within the video game to give it a sense of tradition. The complexity of tradition is not lost within the realm of the game, as a traditional element of Japanese culture is the duality of ancient practices mixed with the modern, technologically-advanced nature of the country. This duality is applied to Ōkami as well, as the original and ancient beliefs are now existing within the new, technological traditions of the country today.
Player engagement within the game goes beyond simply playing the game—the player steps in and immerses themselves within the game through ostension (the acting out of a legend) (Koven 184). In the real world, people normally interacted with kodama through ritual belief practices and recognize kodama for the work they do to protect forests and surrounding areas. While Bauman and Briggs focused on the performance of folklore when discussing recontextualization, the concept can also be applied to the performance of the audience as well. In the case of Ōkami, players integrate themselves into folk narratives by acting them out through the plot of the game. The player’s engagement with Sakuya is the same way, where they learn her roles and goals as a Kodama through their interactions with her.

The way in which the player interacts with Sakuya is laid out by the creators, following a strict timeline that forces the player to not only engage with Sakuya through gameplay. The plot of the storyline also has the player revive Sakuya’s tree, which
returns her to her full power so she can fully keep her village safe from the Yamata no Orochi and other evils. This plot line is a large portion of the game—the player must travel through different regions and heal sprouts from the Konohana all over the country. This makes Sakuya stronger and more powerful, which is essential to the game. The player interaction throughout this healing process is necessary for the progression of the game, but furthers the idea that video games are an exemplary genre for a tree spirit to exist in. The player’s role not only gives the kodama power, but also allows the player to learn about kodama, gathering knowledge each time they play through the game. Each time the player rejuvenates the Konohana’s sprouts is another time that the kodama are remembered and blessed in this format. Sakuya regains her power, and the player recognizes her blessings and protection throughout the game.

These blessings and protections that exist in the physical world are portrayed visually within the game. When the player heals the sprout, the land heals from evil darkness. Flowers, grass, springs, trees, and many other living things return to the land and thrive beneath the protection of the power of Sakuya. These blessings are essential to the player’s success in the story, not only to heal the land from the curse of the Yamata no Orochi, but also so the player has a chance to heal themselves and utilize the protection. Though the player does not have much choice on how they interact with Sakuya, the importance of her existence is not lost on them, as they see her influence and power constantly throughout the game. Interaction with portrayal of tree spirits is recontextualized from their original form in a belief setting to the context of the game, but also traditionalized by the creators to give the feeling of tradition to the players. This is seen throughout the gameplay. When the game first starts, and the players must revive
Sakuya’s Konohana, the roles switch. The player must protect the Konohana and use the power of the gods to revive Sakuya and her tree so she may return to her role as the protector of the village that lays below her. The swapped role stays persistent throughout a portion of the game, and is officially over when the player, together with the village’s elder, perform a sacred ritual dance.

The sacred dance, the Konohana Shuffle, is one of the final steps in the player’s quest to return Sakuya’s full power to her tree and her. The village elder performs the dance, and the player as Amaterasu uses their own powers to bridge the blessings from the dance to the Konohana. The player completes this dance with the elder until the Konohana is entirely rejuvenated and Sakuya has been fully healed. The role of the audience is interactive, and they must help the Konohana and Sakuya become strong again. Dégh and Vászonyi describe ostension as “ostensive action and the showing of actions” (1983, 08). The player acts ostensively by participating in Konohana Shuffle and by performing rituals within the realm of the game.

In their original setting, kodama are revered by those who see them or work with the forests, shrines, or temples they reside in. Those who work in the shrines carefully work with the trees so that they are not damaged or hurt. The player in Ōkami takes on this role as they revive the saplings or visit Sakuya in the village. “The decontextualization and recontextualization of performed discourse bear upon the political economy of texts… and power. Performance is a mode of social production... To decontextualize and recontextualize a text is thus an act of control…” (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 76). The creators of Ōkami recontextualized the engagement that the player has with kodama to keep the context of the engagement the same. The point is to
recognize and respect the power of the kodama in the context of both the game and the real world, thus creating a space for kodama to exist digitally.

Sakuya is given the traditional role of a kodama and placed in a world that emulates ancient Japan, making the players feel as if they are not only experiencing but also participating in the ancient magic and nature of that era (Hymes 1983; Mould 2005). It is thanks to Sakuya’s identifiable role as a kodama that I was able to interact with her ostensively and understand how she can exist in this new genre due to recontextualization and traditionalization.

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

Another game that uses the kodama is The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. The Legend of Zelda series was created by Nintendo Inc., a Japanese company that was founded in 1889, as a Japanese card game company. The creators of this game took a folkloresque approach the depiction of the kodama, meaning that the creators took folklore and reworked it to be a pop culture depiction rather than the original. The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (LoZ) takes place one-hundred years after disaster and calamity have fallen over the mythical kingdom of Hyrule. Link, the Chosen Hero, awakes from a deep slumber to find that he has lost all his memories. To understand his duty and role in the world, Link must travel across the land to recover his memories. Once he has done this, he learns that he must regain his strength and power to wield the sacred Master Sword and save the Princess Zelda who is trapped in Hyrule Castle, using her power to imprison the evil Ganon. Through long treks across the land, dangerous side-quests, and a test to determine his worthiness, Link obtains the Master Sword, fights his way through Hyrule Castle, and releases Zelda. Together they defeat Ganon.
The Master Sword is hidden deep in an ancient forest that is guarded by the Great Deku Tree—an ancient tree spirit meant to guide and mentor Link through his journey. The Great Deku Tree has many small tree spirits that he looks after, which are called the koroks (Figure 3A). These smaller tree spirits also mentor Link, although to a lesser degree. Though the Great Deku Tree does not exist within the real world, when examined closely, it is clear to see that he is a folkloresque form of a kodama.

The world of the Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild is built with subtle Japanese influences. Players may not realize they are experiencing bits and pieces of Japanese culture and folklore. The game’s world has a very European look to it, from the architecture—such as Hyrule Castle—to the clothing. However, the creators infused elements of Japanese influences and beliefs throughout the game. The creators wove these cultural elements into the game to create a space that holds folk belief and folklore.
Though the material culture and vernacular architecture resembles European culture rather than Japanese, the creators implemented Japanese culture and folklore in other ways.

One way the creators built the world to include Japanese culture and lore was with the folkloresque inclusion of *bushido*, the Samurai Code of Honor, through their creation of the Triforce. The Triforce is a sacred relic of power left behind by the goddesses of the Kingdom of Hyrule and holds the divine, pure elements of Power, Wisdom, and Courage. The Triforce represents *bushido* within the game. The Samurai Code of Honor has eight virtues, including honor, loyalty, honesty, courage, and more. The Chosen Hero, Link, embodies these virtues through his ability to wield the elements of the Triforce and his personality. As players unlock more of Link’s lost memories, they come to understand his undying loyalty to his friends and his kingdom, as well as the courage and honor he displays while protecting them from relentless danger. In the end, Link harnesses the full power of the Triforce and uses it to defeat Ganon. The Triforce is a folkloresque portrayal of the *bushido*. The Triforce shares key virtues with the Samurai Code of Honor but has been reconstructed to fit within the parameters of the game and the heroism that Link specifically portrays. Including a folkloresque version of the *bushido* traditionalized the world of Hyrule, which in turn made a space for kodama to exist within. This “emically constructed sense of the traditional” shows how the creators recontextualized already existing traditions within the Japanese culture and traditionalized them within the folkloresque framework to situate them within a new modern genre (Mould 2005, 258).
Japanese culture blends the human and natural worlds. This duality is seen throughout *The Legend of Zelda*. The sacredness of the land is built into different locations throughout the game, such as the Lost Woods. The Lost Woods is the area where the Great Deku Tree resides at the base of a large volcano. The player sees a mysterious forest shrouded in fog, with the branches of a giant Sakura tree rising far above the other trees. The forest is designed to keep those who are unworthy out, and so the player must journey through the maze-like woods to reach the Great Deku Tree. They must solve the puzzle that directs them through the forest, and if they make a mistake, they are transported back to where they first started.

The way the creators built the forest not only creates a setting for both the plot and a new home for the kodama, but it also shows the ambivalent and ambiguous nature of the Great Deku tree. The Deku Tree sits deep within the Lost Woods; the woods represent his physical powers and personality. The Lost Woods are dangerous to those who wish to do harm to any of the forest dwellers. After interacting with the spirit offspring, the koroks, the players learn that Great Deku Tree’s powers that make the woods dangerous. The Deku Tree uses his powers to keep unworthy visitors out and does not care if he harms those who try to enter. His goal is to protect those who live within the boundaries of his forest. The ambiguity of kodama is well established in Japanese
culture and folklore—examples include the liminality of the kodama in the *Tale of Genji* (Shikibu 1008; Caddeau 2004); the playfulness of the kodama in *Princess Mononoke* (1997); the kindness and love in “Willow Wife” and “Green Willow;” and the power and fear from natural kodama protecting their lands (*Nihongi* 697; *Kojiki* 723; Caddeau 2004; Foster 2015). Kodama are ambiguous in nature, and sometimes border on the malevolent (Caddeau 2004). The ambivalence of the Great Deku Tree is the first hint players have that he is a kodama.

When the player meets the Deku Tree in person, they realize he is unmistakably a kodama. In *LoZ*, the kodama is represented as male, due to his bearded face, his low voice, and the fact that the koroks call him, “grandpa.” Unlike the kodama who are portrayed as young women in “Willow Wife” or “Green Willow,” the Great Deku Tree is a giant tree, and the kodama spirit has not separated from it. The only human characteristic that the Deku Tree has is a face that protrudes from the bark. This face, though, looks like an elderly man with facial hair marked with thick branches and knots in the bark. He mirrors the description of Kukunochi no Kami (*Nihongi* 697; *Kojiki* 723). Kukunochi is the father of the kodama, and the Deku Tree has offspring of his own, the koroks. The creators were inspired by this element of Japanese historical belief, as well as the popularized rendition of kodama from the Studio Ghibli film, *Princess Mononoke* (Figure 2). Elderly portrayals of Kodama are not new (Figure 1) and portraying the Great Deku Tree as an elderly man and who is referred to as a grandpa illustrates the idea that the creators drew on multiple sources to create a folkloresque kodama.

“We miss it perhaps when it takes the form of what parents tell children about their own childhoods, or of what old-timers explain to newcomers to an office…Yet in
every sphere of life, occupational, institutional, regional, personal, and familial, one can find expressions of traditionalization” (Hymes 1975, 354). Hymes’ point is that there is traditionalization in all aspects of folklore, and the closer we look, the closer we will find different parts of everyday life becoming traditionalized. The kodama is recontextualized to exist in the video game, while the world is traditionalized to become a new home for him.

The player acts ostensively in the game by inserting themselves into the world and acting out the different tasks and trials that must be completed to save Hyrule. The roles that the player takes in the folkloresque performance relies on more than just the sharing and transferring of folklore. Like with Halloween, where people act ostensively by donning costumes and acting out rituals, the players must don the persona of Link and act out the game trials themselves (Dég and Vázsonyi 1983, 09). The two main ways the player acts ostensively is when they must work their way through the Lost Woods and pull the Master Sword out of its resting place. The Deku Tree gives these tasks to the player and guides them.
The first time the player interacts with the Deku Tree is when they navigate through the Lost Woods to find his small settlement deep within the forest. Upon entering the woods, the player sees a torch, and just beyond that, another. The torches spread out further and further until the player can no longer see them. This is where the puzzle comes into play. The player must look carefully in order to see the flames of the torch drift in the direction of the next torch. As the space between the torches lengthen, the player must carefully follow the direction the flames are blowing to reach the Deku Tree. If they fail, they will be transported back to the beginning, where they must try again.

This portion of the game is a test, one of many that the player must endure. This determines worthiness of Link, and through ostension, the player themselves. It is the player who is playing through the puzzle and using their own wits to find their way through the woods. It is their own worth that is being tested by the Great Deku Tree. Players are acting ostensively by inserting themselves into the game and acting as Link during the test. The player is experiencing an alternate reality by testing themselves to beat part of the game (Dėgh and Vázsonyi 1983). This test helps create a digital home for the kodama by forcing the players to indirectly interact with him. The player must enter the forest and prove themself to the Deku Tree, recognizing his power and rule over the forest. By recognizing his authority, the players are giving power to the digitized kodama, just as they would a kodama in our physical world.

The most difficult test the player completes is drawing the Master Sword, which sits in a pedestal before the Deku Tree. The Deku Tree informs the player that they must

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9 I must be honest here—it took me about twelve different tries to beat this portion, and in the end, I had to look up how to beat the puzzle because I could not figure it out.
be worthy in order to pull the sword from the stone, and if they are not, they will be punished. If unprepared, the player will die when attempting to pulling the sword from its stone. The player must acquire at least thirteen hearts (the health tracker) to pull the sword out successfully. If the player has enough hearts, pulling the sword will drain their health until they have one-quarter of a heart left. This test not only requires the player to prepare themselves in terms of worthiness, but it also shows the ambiguity of the Deku Tree as a representation of kodama. The test becomes exponentially more important when the player pulls the sword from the pedestal, because one of Link’s lost memories unlocks and the Deku Tree informs the player that Zelda is waiting for them in Hyrule Castle. The player now has the Master Sword, and they are worthy and powerful enough to defeat Ganon. The Deku Tree’s aim throughout this entire interaction is to help the player become strong enough to save the world from Ganon.

Pulling the Master Sword out of the pedestal takes several tries, as the Deku Tree is not explicit in his instructions when telling the player that they must be worthy. Players must pull the sword out by trial and error, dying each time until they finally discover how many hearts they need to successfully complete the task. This requires the players to regularly interact with the Deku Tree—interaction that the kodama needs to stay relevant and strong. By acting ostensively, the players provide the Deku Tree with the space and chance to behave ambiguously and act out his own duty of protecting his realm.

The digital performance of the player is recontextualized from how people interact with kodama in the real world into a folkloresque rendition in the *Legend of Zelda*. Though the context is the same—respect and care towards the Deku Tree—the performance has been shifted to fit within its new realm (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73).
Compared to Ōkami, which takes place in a digital rendition of ancient Japan, LoZ takes place in a completely new world that is a combination of many different cultures. The kodama in LoZ was decontextualized from its role in Japanese society and placed into a completely new one. With the unchanging context of the players engagement, the folkloresque kodama still has the same interaction and importance as he would within a ritualistic space in the real world.

The Great Deku Tree’s context may have been decentered and placed into a new, digital realm, but it does not change. The aspects that make the kodama the kodama still apply to the Great Deku Tree, but it is done so in a way that provides him the space to exist outside of the traditional folk beliefs and ritual, and in a way that reaches broader audiences. The transition of the Deku Tree’s context makes LoZ a genre that can house the kodama. The Great Deku Tree falls under the three definitions of the folkloresque, and through the lens of traditionalization, we see how the Great Deku Tree resembles the kodama of our world. The folkloresque is not true folklore but utilizes elements of folklore that allow the kodama to still exist. This is what the Great Deku Tree is, and how he can reside as a kodama within a realm that is not folklore. The Legend of Zelda is a cultural artifact that can claim traditional status (Mould 2005, 262) and does so by presenting elements of folklore—such as tree spirits, belief systems, and cultural practices—with a fundamentally pop culture depiction.

Ōkami and The Legend of Zelda present their kodama in different ways, Ōkami does so through hypermodern folklore. The Legend of Zelda does so through folkloresque renditions. While different, the games still provide new homes for the portrayal of tree spirits in the same way. Ōkami relies on fairy tales and narratives to inform the players on
how to beat the game and save Sakuya from her imminent death by reviving the Konohana. *The Legend of Zelda* does the opposite; the Deku Tree guides the player through a series of tests that prove the player worthy of wielding the Master Sword, defeating Ganon, and saving Princess Zelda. Each world was built with different aspects of Japanese culture and folklore; *Ōkami* recontextualized obvious material culture, while *the Legend of Zelda* took a more subtle approach with cultural practices that were traditionalized to fit within a new folkloresque context.

**Leshy**

The leshy is an ancient tree spirit that inhabits Slavic forests. Prior to the Christianization of Russia, the leshy was thought to be an ambivalent forest spirit who protected the forest and those that reside within it (Ivanits 2015). After Christianity made its way into Russia, and the belief surrounding the leshy changed from being an ambivalent spirit, to a malevolent one (Ivanits 2015; Porteous 1996). The leshy is described as an old man and titled as the “Grandfather of the Devil” (Appendix 3B). Though there are still some who see the leshy as the ambivalent protector of the forest, who will not harm or spirit away humans without provocation (Ivanits 2015; Appendix 2B). The leshy exists in a liminal space, what the Russian call *dvoreverie*, or “double-faith,” where he is seen as both the spirit of the forest, who protects it and those who reside within it, as well as an evil demon. *Dvoreverie* is the existence of two beliefs in one culture, such as the existence of Christianity and Russian folk beliefs in one community. This double-faith is in many narratives and is important to keep in mind
while engaging with a leshy through the virtual world (Warner 2000; Warner 2011; Ivanits 2015:04; Ralston 2015).

![Figure 8 “The Leshy,” Ivan Bilibin, 1906](image)

**Black Book (2021)**

*Black Book* (2021) is a video game created by a Russian company, Morteshka, and produced by HypeTrain Digital. It uses Russian folklore, derived from both pagan and Christian beliefs, and heavily relies on the double-faith of the Russian culture, and the creators stated that they worked with anthropologists and historians to make sure their depiction of folklore was correct (Beletsky 2020). The game is made up of Russian folklore to create the setting and uses *bailichkas* (Russian memorates) to help move the storyline and plot forward (*Black Book* 2021). The game follows a young woman, Vasilisa, who has just lost her fiancé to suicide—or so she is told by the local villagers.
Vasilisa does not believe that her love committed such an act and decides to become a witch to bring him back from the dead. Her grandfather, a longtime witch, agrees to help her obtain powers, and aid her in her quest to revive her deceased fiancé. After Vasilisa gets her powers, her grandfather gives her the Black Book, an ancient, magical tome that is locked with seven seals, each representing a portion of the earth and magic. To become strong enough to successfully revive her dead fiancé, Vasilisa must break each of the seals and obtain the full power of the Black Book.

As Vasilisa, the player encounters leshy throughout *Black Book* several times. For example, the player comes across an offering for the leshy, and one of the seals Vasilisa must break is the seal of the woods. In order to break it she must defeat the ruler of the forest, at which point the player engages with three different leshy. It is easy to identify the leshy within the game for two reasons: first, the leshy are similar to the leshy in the real world, and second, the creators use an interactive platform that educates the players, and the players are told when they are interacting with a leshy.
The world of *Black Book* is based on nineteenth century rural Russia. The creators recontextualized Russian history and folklore, including religious history, folk entities, and folk beliefs to build the setting and plot of the game. They worked closely with historians and anthropologists to ensure the Russian folklore was properly represented (Beletsky 2020). The folklore in the game is obvious and straightforward. The game creators included entities from folklore, used well known folk beliefs within the game, and presented them in a way that clearly illustrates what they are. Even the main character’s name, Vasilisa, is based on a character from many well-known fairytale. The creators digitized these elements, then traditionalized them within the game to create a world that could house the leshy.

To ensure that *Black Book* felt real, the creators pulled on religious histories of the nineteenth century—specifically the *dvoreverie*, dual-faith, of Russian Orthodox Christianity and original folk practices. Throughout the game, the player see evidence of this dual-faith as they move through different regions and villages and interact with villagers. The *dvoreverie* is implemented in the building of the villages as well as village beliefs. For example, many villages have a Christian chapel and a priest, as well as a small dwelling where a local witch or herbalist lives. The priests have the same role that they do in the real world, as do the witches. Vasilisa is one such witch. She takes requests from local villagers to heal sick loved ones and cast out demons. She uses these jobs to help herself grow stronger in order to bring her fiancé back from the dead.

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10 It should be stated that “pagan” is a Christian term for any religion that is non-Christian. I will be using “pagan” and “folk practices” interchangeably.
The *dvoreverie* of Christianity and folk belief within the game work both together and against each other. There are times when the player is condemned and cursed for being a witch by Christians, and other times when Christian priests ask Vasilisa to dispel strong demons. As an example, one time during Vasilisa’s travels a priest requests that the player save a local girl who is possessed and hiding in an abandoned chapel. The player makes a deal with the demon possessing the girl to save her and saves the demon from being killed. The demon accepts the deal and aids the player on their quest to break the seven seals and revive Vasilisa’s fiancé.

The histories and folklore of Russia are recontextualized to create a new home for the leshy. The creators of the game took the structure and significance of Russian folklore and embedded it within the game, taking the magic from the actual world and placing it into the digital realm so the leshy could flourish and survive. By using Russian double-faith, the game creates a realm for other forms of folklore to exist within its space. It also provides the chance to understand the leshy and its role within society.

The leshy often appear as old men but can take the form of anyone or anything. They are said to grow taller than trees or smaller than mushrooms, and their temperament depends on the state of their forest (Warner 2002, 38-39). The leshy is an ambivalent creature, one who is known to either be a protector or spirit away local villagers. In the traditional narrative “The Leshy” (Appendix 1B), a young woman is spirited away from a small village and goes missing for years. A hunter comes across a leshy and shoots him, and then tracks him back to the leshy’s home. The hunter finds the young woman within the leshy’s home; the leshy forced her to be his wife. In this narrative, the leshy is a malevolent being who only cares for himself. However, in the tale, “The Tsarévich and
Dyád’ka,” the leshy mentors a young prince who has been cast out from his home and has been taken advantage of by his evil servant. The leshy therefore exists in a liminal space within Russian folklore due to the dual-faith that guides the beliefs of the folktales being shared. This is true for the leshy in *Black Book* as well.

The first time the player finds evidence of a leshy is when they find an offering to the leshy between a sheep pasture and a dense forest. The game informs the player that this is an offering, and that the leshy is the flock of sheep. But it is later, when the player must break the seal of the woods, that they meaningfully interact with the recontextualized leshy.

The player meets three different leshy, each of whom embody different roles the leshy plays in society. The father leshy, who rules the forest, is ambiguous. He works to protect the forest and those that reside within it. The two sons, however, are less so; one is malevolent, and the other is benevolent. The physical portrayal of the three leshy are similar to the leshy who roam Russian forests today. Leshy are most often seen in the form of an old man or peasant who does not wear a belt. However, he can change his form, and there are reports of seeing a leshy with the same physical elements as the devil—goat legs, horned heads, and fur (Ivanits 2015; Warner 2002, 38; Ivanits 2015, 66). The state of his appearance depends on the forest he protects. The creators used these images in the video game.

The father leshy appears in the form of an elderly man, often with wolves at his side. During the game, Vasilisa saves wolves who escape to his forest, and, after a fight with an antagonist, is stuck in a grove of trees that have caught fire. The father leshy saves her from the fire in return for saving the wolves but leaves her deep within the
woods where she is lost and unable to reach any of her companions. His ambiguity is evident in this example because he saves the player from harm, but then leaves Vasilisa to possibly die in the dense forest.

The benevolent leshy son appears in the form of a raven, and guides Vasilisa to a small village that is trapped in the forest. None of the villagers can escape, Vasilisa learns the malevolent leshy son trapped them to spirit them away and save the forest. The benevolent son becomes a mentor, like the leshy from the “The Tsarévich and Dyád’ka.” He gives the player hints on how to find the malevolent leshy, such as instructing the player who to speak to in the village or providing physical identifiers of his brother. His goal is to protect the forest and those who reside in it no matter what and he uses Vasilisa’s power to do so.

The malevolent leshy acts like the creature from the traditional story, “The Leshy.” He spirits away the villagers and sacrifices them, and then uses their life force to defend of the forest. He appears as an old village shepherd. The key that alerts the players to him being the leshy is when an elderly woman tries to gift him a belt, but he refuses to take it. The malevolent leshy uses humans as sacrifices to protect the forest and the animals instead of relying on his own power, like his father. His malevolence embodies traditional Christian beliefs about the leshy, as a kind of demon, or “the grandfather of the Devil.” (Ivanits 2015; Porteous 1996).

The creators conceptualized the leshy in three different ways that reflect how the leshy are seen in the real world. In the process of recontextualization, Bauman and Briggs say we need to understand the context of folklore and then contextualize it deeper within its culture to understand it (1990, 69). The creators of Black Book presented their leshy in
the same roles as they exist in the real world. The leshy in *Black Book* are profoundly ambivalent, as they always have been, both before and after the Christianization of Russia. Traditional elements are most powerful in pre-modern, community-based societies (Bauman 2001a, 15820), and the creators of the game used these pre-modern elements to create a game where the leshy could thrive.

![Figure 10 Leshy in Raven Form, Black Book, Morteshka, 2021](image)

*Black Book* is also a highly interactive game where the player acts ostensively and engages with the world and a representation of the leshy. The game relies on the decisions and choices of the players. The game has a ranking system that determines the player’s morality level, which is calculated based on the choices the players make. The player makes their decisions based on the information they gain from *bailichkas*, clues.
they pick up while travelling, or the entities they speak with.\footnote{Apparently, I either have a skewed moral compass or don’t pay attention as closely as I should, because my “moral percentage” always sat around 200%, which, according to the game, was evil.} “Mass-mediated ostension recognizes that presented legend materials, whether dramatized or ‘documentary,’ is the medium through which extra-textual debates surrounding the legends veracity occur” (Koven 2007, 185). Koven means here that ostension in mass-mediated formats challenge the integrity of the legend. The same could be said for video games. However, the choices the creators provide still gives the player act ostensively and make decisions based on their own experiences.

The creators relied heavily on bailichkas within the game, which are traditional stories of real-life, supernatural experiences. This process that the creators used “evokes the traditional past not merely as part of a general dialogue with the past, but as part of an attempt to provide authority for one’s own narrative performance…” (Mould 2005, 257). This form of storytelling is still relevant within communities today. Linda J. Ivanits provides several oral histories in her book that share these bailichkas (See Appendix 2B). The creators used bailichkas to give the sense of what they deem traditional in their own culture. In turn, the video game utilizes original forms of sharing by taking the context of the original practices and implementing them in various ways throughout game. The creators took the tradition of orally transmitted folklore and placed it into a digitized, mass-mediated format that allowed it to reach new audiences at a greater scale (Thomas 2015). Players must interview and listen to oral histories of villagers or other travelers. Doing so is what helps the players not only make good moral decisions, but also helps them solve riddles and defeat monsters.
As an example, the player comes across an offering to a leshy just outside of a pasture of sheep. The player chooses whether to leave the offering as it is, take the offering for their own village, or to destroy the offering entirely. The only effect this has on the game is the player’s moral percentage. However, that moral percentage, if too far into evil, prohibits the player’s ability to interact with others in the game. If the percentage is too high, other characters refuse to work with and have less patience with the player. The player must carefully choose their options to successfully gather information and bailichkas. They need to carefully recall what they have learned through the game, and then choose what to do with that knowledge. Ostension, the acting out of a legend or ritual, is required in the game (Dègh and Vázsonyi 1983; Koven 2007). The players must act out not only a choice but also act out the offering to the leshy. If they take the offering, they will have to set up the offering for their own village’s pastures. If they leave it, they recognize the importance the offering holds for the farmer who is currently presenting it.

These decisions are imperative when the player is breaking the wooden seal on the Black Book. The player must collect clues and figure out how to escape the forest to find their way to the raven leshy, the benevolent son. If the player is not careful and does not pay attention to the clues, they will wander in circles. The benevolent son leads the player to the village, where the player must find the malevolent son, who is hiding among the villagers. Within this portion of the story line, the player must interview all the villagers and put together the puzzle to release the village from the clutches of the

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12 Let it be known that I am terrible at this game and did not pay attention. I learned from trial and error instead.
malevolent leshy. When they find the malevolent leshy, the player gets to choose the fate of the forest and by extension, the leshy. The leshy brothers inform the player that their father, the ruler of the forest, is in a cursed sleep. The player must decide who they will side with and determine how the forest will be handled.

The entire storyline boils down to the fact that the fate of the land is in the player’s hands. They insert themselves into the game and make choices for the good of the village or the good of the forest. Throughout the entire game, the players make decisions that impact the world around them, and in turn those decisions impact the leshy. The player must gather information and carefully note the choices they have, as well as the impacts of their decisions.

These examples of ostension provide a digital home for the leshy by creating a way for the player to regularly interact with the leshy through offerings and rituals. By interacting with offerings found while traveling or engaging with the leshy, the player provides the leshy the acknowledgement it needs to exist in its new digital home. It regularly receives offerings from the players or other characters in the game, and it also has personal interactions with humans. The difference is that there is a screen between the player and the leshy rather than a cool forest breeze.

By recontextualizing the leshy and traditionalizing the world of *Black Book*, the creators placed the leshy within the video game and connected him to his original roles. He remains in his liminal, ambivalent space. “…practitioners have generally simply assumed that they and their audiences know what genres are and what makes them work.” (Bauman and Briggs 1992, 145). The creators created the intertextual, generic links between digital leshy and real ones to create the intertextuality of genre and made
that work for them as they created hypermodern folklore and a new digital genre for the leshy. Performance is anchored to and inseparable from its context (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73). The performance of the leshy stays the same in their new digital existence. Hypermodern folklore, the crossover of popular, consumer, and digital cultures (Thomas 2015, 07), is how the leshy can not only be recontextualized, but fully exist within a digital space, and what helps make this digital space become the prime place for it.


Another game that is a digital home for the leshy is *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*. *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* was released in 2015 by CD Projekt Red and is the third installment of a trilogy. CD Projekt Red is a Polish company based in Warsaw, Poland. The company was initially started to create *The Witcher* games. The games are based on the book series by the same name, *The Witcher*, written by Andrzej Sapkowski, a Polish author who relied on Slavic folklore to build the world. The creators of the game relied heavily on the existing content from the books and used additional folklore and belief to create the world. The game follows the story of a Witcher named Geralt, who is trying to find his adopted daughter because she is in danger from a mythical group called the Wild Hunt. Geralt’s daughter, Ciri, is a powerful mage who is prophesied to rule the world. The Wild Hunt wishes to capture Ciri and use her powers to heal and stabilize their own world, which is dying. With the help of old friends, Geralt tracks Ciri down. Together they defeat the Wild Hunt, and depending on the choices the player makes, Geralt helps Ciri take the throne.
Within the game, there is a side quest that Geralt has the option of completing on the island of Skellige. Deep within the island rests a small village that is having supernatural and internal power struggles. The villagers are split into two factions: one faction supports the forest spirit, and the other faction wishes to be rid of the spirit forever. Geralt gets involved after one of the villagers is killed by the spirit. Geralt discovers that the spirit in question is a leshen, an ambiguous being known to be cruel unless tamed by a contract. Geralt discovers that the old contract has been broken, and the villagers are now being harmed for entering the leshen’s forest without permission. As Geralt, the player must decide to either kill the leshen or reinstate the contract for the village.

The Witcher 3 takes place in a medieval, alternate universe that was once connected to our own through a mythical collision of universes. The creators of the game used Slavic folklore and mythology to further build the world inside the Witcher 3. Players may use different folk remedies to heal themselves, and monsters and creatures from Slavic myths and legends roam the wilds. The use of folklore is clear, but this folklore is more folkloresque than traditional Slavic folklore.

Each creature drawn from traditional legends has been tweaked just slightly, from the way they look to their names, such as the leshy—now called a leshen. Herbs and
plants were recontextualized into the game and traditionalized through a folkloresque approach to aid not only in health, but also restore the players’ magic, stamina, and mental fortitude or craft magic items. Different herbs enhance the player in different ways, such as verbena, a woody-stemmed flower that the player uses to make a potion that heals poisoning. In the physical world, verbena is used to treat ailments such as headaches. Even though verbena is used to heal ailments in both the digital and physical world, the creators applied new meanings in addition to the original meanings the plant held (Bauman and Briggs 1990).

The folk medicine, however, is traditionalized in a few different ways, including the way the player uses it to heal themselves or create materials, and the way other characters within the game use them. For example, throughout the world, the player comes across small apothecaries, cottages that belong to herbalists, and healers. These characters provide the players with options to buy or sell plants and other goods. If the player unlocks a story line, they will be healed by the character within the game through potions and other salves. “The concept of folklore as the collective expression or possession of a people has been the basic to folkloristic thought for more than two hundred years and continues to exercise a powerful influence on the discipline today. The social base of folklore…represents an important aspect of its social context.” (Bauman 1983:364-365). Folk medicine and remedies are often used in specific social contexts within the physical world, and this collective expression of the importance healing also exists in TWW. Players must often interact with merchants or herbalists to be healed or to buy healing plants and engage in the social requirements that healing has. By including something as subtle but as important as folk medicine, the creators created a world that
would comfortably house the leshy as its folkloresque counterpart, the leschen. These small inclusions set up the small, key details that are needed to have a concrete world where ancient entities can exist.

The players may wander through a small grove and be attacked by a “Noon Witch,” or a “botchling,” or may enter an unsuspecting house and be attacked by a banshee. Each creature has elements of traditional folklore. While the ties to Slavic folklore is clear, is it also clear that the creators chose to take a modern approach to the creatures, exemplified by their contorted and horrific design. The leshy/leschen is no exception to this. The player has a bestiary where they keep notes on different folk creatures, and it states of the leschen:

“We never hunt in these woods. Never. Even if it means the whole village starves.”  
– Mulliver, ealdorman of Hoshberg in lower Aedirn

Leshens dwell in dense, primeval woods. Fiercely territorial creatures, they hunt with stealth and cunning as their only companions. They use their inborn magic to control the plants and animals within their territory – and so, when stalking them, half the battle is merely getting near enough to strike. Leshens old enough to earn the appellation “ancient” wield advanced skills and tactics that make them particularly dangerous. (*The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*).

The bestiary is a compilation of folkloresque beliefs within the game. No traditional depictions of leshy describe the leschen as stealthy or as having the ability to control animals and plants. Also, the leshy in the real world can change their own appearance, but the leschen does not.

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13 The spirit of a woman who appears at midday, dressed in white.
14 An infant who died of a still birth and was not buried properly and exists in a zombie-like existence.
The leshen’s physical appearance deviates from the traditional leshy. While still humanoid, the leshen wears a deer skull with large antlers on its head, and its body is made of wood. This folkloresque approach differs from traditional descriptions of the leshy in which it appears as an elderly man but does fit the Christian description of a devil-like entity (Ivanits 2015, 66; Warner 2001; Warner 2011). Its body does not change shape or sizes but controls the vines and earth around it. As with the other tree spirits, the creators of tW3 took the leshy from its original context and form and placed it into a new, digital genre. However, this change in the physical rendition of the leshen was a creative liberty taken by the makers of the game who took the leshen from a being who could blend in and change its appearance and made it into a horrific monster that towers above other creatures and humans.

The role of the leshen however, has many similarities to a traditional leshy. The leshen is described as the spirit and protector of the forest. He punishes those who enter or hunt in the forest without his permission and commands the creatures in his forest. For example, when the player enters, they will be attacked by wolves under the leshen’s command. The leshen is fully and truly ambivalent. He only cares about his forest and the creatures that dwell within it, and until the player or any villagers create a contract with him, he will remove all trespassers in his forest, whether they accidentally wandered in or were purposefully hunting. His personality is folkloresque because his behavior is extreme. This makes him different from traditional leshy, who may change his behavior depending on the state of his forest, or the context of which he is being engaged with (Porteous 1996; Ivanits 2015). However, this decentering and recontextualization of the
leshy into the leshen (and the folkloresque) is how the leshy can survive in the dark realm of *the Witcher 3*.

![Figure 12 The Leshen, the Witcher III, CD Project Red, 2015](image)

There are many of instances where the player acts ostensively within the game. The player must act out several important steps in the side quest that either destroy the leshen or reinstate its contract. The player must do the following: investigate why the leshen is attacking the village, find out who the leshen has taken control of within the village, choose to kill the leshen or choose to reinstate its contract. The key point that takes this from playing the game to ostension is the choice of the player and how it impacts the world the leshen resides in. The narrative of the leshen is actively portrayed in the video game, through its malevolent actions. This forces the player to act ostensively by learning knowledge and applying it to game play (Koven 2007, 185).

In the world, the forests determine how the leshy will act (Ivanits 2015). However, in *tW3*, the leshen determines how it will act based on the current state of its
contract with a village. The leshen begins to act out in the game, and this is what causes the player to get involved. When the player learns that the leshen is killing villagers, they must take the time to interview and meet with the village elders, who explain the history of the village and its relationship with the forest spirit. This information leads the players to putting the pieces together and determining that the contract with the leshen has been broken. The players will also discover that the leshen has taken control of a villager, and they must deduce who it is by interviewing several different villagers. In this case, the player must use their wit and deductions skills to find the correct villager. If they make the wrong choices, the villagers may shun them and refuse to speak to them for a while. The player must use their magic sight to verify the mark of the leshen on the victim. When the victim is identified, the player must then decide if they will kill the villager or convince them to leave the village forever in order to stop the leshen.

Such decisions emerge many times throughout this quest. For example, the player must choose whether they will kill the leshen or reinstate the pact. If the player chooses to kill the leshen, they enter a dangerous battle with the leshen and its minions. If they reinstate the contract, they fight and kill five white wolves and give their hearts as an offering. When making this choice, the player ostensibly acts out the ritual that is necessary for creating the pact. They prove themselves first by fighting and killing the white wolves, where the shrine of the leshen sits. They must take the hearts from each wolf and place them on the shrine, and then wait as the leshen determines if the offering is worthy. If the offering is accepted, ravens descend and take the hearts of the wolves. This entire ritual is done through a horrific, folkloresque rendition of a traditional offering to a leshy. In the physical world, an offering to a leshy is left on a stump at the
edge of a forest or pasture. The offering may be a pastry or bread. The creators in this instance created a ritual where the player must kill to protect others from being killed, in contrast to the traditional offering of handmade goods in return for protection. The role the player takes then becomes significantly important to the village, because the player goes from being in a passive interaction to actively engaging with the entity on behalf of a community of people. This active engagement parallels roles within the real world and in legends such as in “The Leshy” (Ralston 2015), or “The Tsarévich and Dyád’ka” (Afanasyev 1916), because the player can either decide to give an offering and make an ally out of the leshen, like the tsarevich did, or can kill the leshen like the hunter did.

These choices and decisions are one of the ways that this game is a digital home for the leshy. They recognize the power and influence that the leshen has on the world and on the village. The fear and feelings of being threatened acknowledges the very real existence of the leshy in the game. Killing the leshen may remove its existence in the game, but the knowledge of its existence still lives on in the players’ mind. If the player reinstates the contract, then they are acting ostensively and admitting the necessity of the leschen’s existence. It will continue to live on and thrive. Dègeh and Vázsonyi state that people are inclined to transmit knowledge by ostensive actions, and this is true within the game (1983, 29). By actively investigating the village, the villagers share information with the player that is necessary to understand the situation and make the most informed decision.

By traditionalizing the way in which knowledge and culture is being shared (through narratives and face-to-face interaction throughout the game), the players act ostensively and engage with the leshy in its new and updated platform. This also provides
the player with a way to experience culture as they might within the real world. It also
gives leshy its perfect, digital space to always have a chance to be remembered, directly
interacted with, and exist without the danger of disappearing.

The leshen in *the Witcher 3*, and the leshy from *Black Book* have similar roles
within their respective games. However, because the leshen is a folkloresque portrayal of
the leshy, its recontextualized existence differs. The folkloresque is pop culture’s emic
portrayal of folklore, and this is seen in how the creators of the leshen made the creature
more horrifying and intimidating than the leshy of *Black Book* (Foster 2016). Both
creatures protect their forest in their own way; neither of them is above killing for it; and
each requires an offering from humans if the humans wish to enter the forest spirits
domain. Though the offerings may differ in the traditional and the folkloresque, the
worlds in which the leshen and leshy reside are designed to rehome them so that they can
continue to live on. Each portrayal has its own traditionalized world that it now exists
within, one that has aspects and elements that support it.
Chapter III: Conclusion

Video games are a prime genre where ancient deities can fully exist in digital worlds. Recontextualization and traditionalization are necessary processes for placing representations of ancient deities into new, digital genres as it allows them to keep aspects of their original contexts and meanings within hypermodern or folkloresque realms. Video games provide an accessible and widely available platform that make it easy for new and old audiences to interact with these ancient entities. I used concepts of traditionalization and recontextualization to understand how they compare to their historical and original roles in society.

It is also true, however, that it is the creators of the games who determine how players and audiences will interact with the representations of tree spirits. Video games open the possibility of interacting with deities in more ways than in ritual and narrative, but this interaction also is limited due to the mechanical nature of video games. Schut explored this limitation and explains how video games have a mechanized relationship with religion due to the bias that stems from the creators themselves (2014). Mechanized religion is religion within video games that appears as a machine-like process, that evidences the biases of the creators (2014, 256). Belief systems become tools to further other agendas within video games, which is how personal biases appear within the creation of those games and religions (257). However, although the makers take creative liberties with belief systems, those mechanized traits are limited, and interpretation is left up to the players through creative liberties (Schut 2014, 272). The same applies the folklore within the games. While there are limitations because of the creators’ own biases, the way the creators use folklore and creative approaches allows players to
interpret and learn the lore. These limitations may prevent players from developing their own imagination of the tree spirits, which may confine the spread of the deities’.

However, I would argue that all religious deities are presented in a way that causes the development of constituent visualization to fit within a specific scope. This in turn allows players to take this knowledge and new imagery to investigate the deities and develop the portrayals in their mind further.

*Black Book* (2017) and *Ōkami* (2006) show how the hypermodern media can be a space where ancient entities exist in their original form and their original context but within a new genre. Recontextualization helps the kodama and the leshy to be decentered from their origins and put into a space that gives these spirits more access to broader and larger audiences (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Traditionalization creates an experience where the player learns about and obtains cultural knowledge that would otherwise need to be shared through traditional and culturally originally methods that can be difficult to access (Hymes 1984).

*The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* (2015) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017) are folkloresque renditions that show how the kodama and leshy are not confined to their original contexts. To recontextualize tree spirits into folkloresque renditions creates a way to share knowledge of the spirits in new settings and through new means that could be more accessible to those who do not have prior knowledge of the folklore (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Traditionalizing the settings through folkloresque means gives the creators the power to share the knowledge they deem important to both the story they are telling and to their audiences (Mould 2005).
Players play an important role in this process as performers. They leave behind spiritual ritualism and play within the spiritual. Kevin Schut stated that the video game is “ideally suited to represent one aspect of religion: the experience of being a god.” (2014, 255). My aim is to further this discussion and say that video games are not only meant for players to be a god, but they also give players the opportunity to interact with gods and other sacred entities. If video games can be home to other types of folklore, such as occupational lore (Gillis 2011), folk narratives (Sherman 1997), and digital ethnography (Miller 2008), it can also be home to the spiritual folklore we reserve for ritualistic engagement. While Sherman (1997) used the Hero Monomyth to examine genre within video games, I examined genre in video games to learn how to interact with deities.

These processes help the folklore exist within the video games, but it is the three aspects—player ostension, entity portrayal, and world building—that are what truly make video games a prime genre for entities. These aspects provide video games with the means necessary to house entities and also open the relationship between video games and folklore to broader conversations. It allows folklorists to examine new modes of sharing folklore as Linda Dègh (1992) suggested and to examine the relationship between religion and the digital age (Schut 2014). It also allows the conversation to steer in another direction, such as the environmental implications that tree spirits hold in their respective cultures, and how that may translate into video games through iconography and folk belief. Video games are a genre for tree spirits and other supernatural creatures to have the chance and space to stay relevant in a digital world as well as stay true to their original roles and ritualistic meanings.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: The Kodama
Appendix 1A: The Nihongi (697) and the Kojiki (723)

The kodama have long been included in the historical and mythical texts of the Japanese people. Kodama are believed to first be introduced into the literature through the Nihongi (697), where Kukunochi, the god of the trees was introduced within their mythos. Kukunochi is believed to be the father of the Kodama (Kojiki 723). Kodama are tree spirits; they reside in forests or in sacred areas—such as temples and shrines—and protect the land they live on from various disasters. These tree spirits are described as ambivalent creatures, they will protect the forest and land, and will do no harm to others unless they deem your presence a threat, or if you have desecrated their area.

While all kodama have trees, not all trees have a kodama. Only the oldest and most sacred trees have a kodama within them. These trees are marked with Shimenawa ropes, usually made from rice straw or hemp. These ropes are found in shrines, temples, torii gates, trees, and landmark rocks (Wu, hisgo.com; Foster, 2015). Some of the most well known trees attributed to having Kodama are the Aogashima shrines in the Izu Islands, where they have been created under large cryptomeria trees (Konno, 1981). It is said that if a kodama tree is cut down without first making offerings and asking permission, the kodama will destroy the village the perpetrators came from, punishing them for hurting the land (Yanagita, 1955).

While ambivalent and ambiguous, the kodama are also known to have spirited people away (Caddeau, 2004). Caddeau’s discussion of the malevolent depiction of tree spirits comes from an analysis of the Tale of Genji (1008), written by Murasaki Shikibu over one thousand years ago. Within the story, a character is abducted by a kodama (Shikibu, 1008; Caddeau, 2004), and this is not the only reference to a kodama within the
story. At different points throughout the *Tale of Genji*, kodama are alluded to through statements like, “is it an oni, a kami, a kitsune, or a kodama?” or “the oni of a kodama.” (Shikibu, 1008). This further alludes to the malevolent patterns of a kodama and insinuates the Kodama’s close proximity to yokai. In the *Book of Yōkai*, by Michael Dylan Foster, kodama are included within the chapter of yokai associated or connected with nature (2015), and states that kodama are yōkai, a type of Japanese spirit or supernatural entity.

Modern depictions of kodama show them to be ambivalent, calm creatures. The Kodama in *Mononoke Hime* (1997) are portrayed as small, bobble-headed spirits that all come from one “Mother Tree,” but rather than appearing as one humanoid entity, there are thousands of small alien-like ones. The depicted kodama are playful and rambunctious, but helpful when asked by someone they deem worthy. In a different format, the manga *Hozuki’s Cool-Headedness*, kodama is small human-like creature (Eguchi, 2011). He is the protector of the forest, but also small and demure, with a soft personality (2011). These depictions follow more closely with the legendary depictions of kodama, found in the following narratives.

**Appendix 2A: “Willow Wife” collected by F.Hadland Davis**

In a certain Japanese village, there grew a great willow tree. For many generations the people loved it. In the summer it was a resting place, a place where the villagers might meet after the work and heat of the day were over, and there talk till the moonlight streamed through the branches. In winter it was like a great half-opened umbrella covered with sparkling snow.
Heitaro, a young farmer, lived quite near this tree, and he, more than any of his companions, had entered into a deep communion with the imposing willow. It was almost the first object he saw upon waking, and upon his return from work in the fields he looked out eagerly for its familiar form. Sometimes he would burn a joss-stick beneath its branches and kneel down and pray.

One day an old man of the village came to Heitaro and explained to him that the villagers were anxious to build a bridge over the river, and that they particularly wanted the great willow tree for timber.

"For timber?" said Heitaro, hiding his face in his hands. "My dear willow tree for a bridge, one to bear the incessant patter of feet? Never, never, old man!"

When Heitaro had somewhat recovered himself, he offered to give the old man some of his own trees, if he and the villagers would accept them for timber and spare the ancient willow.

The old man readily accepted this offer, and the willow tree continued to stand in the village as it had stood for so many years.

One night while Heitaro sat under the great willow he suddenly saw a beautiful woman standing close beside him, looking at him shyly, as if wanting to speak.

"Honorable lady," said he, "I will go home. I see you wait for some one. Heitaro is not without kindness towards those who love."

"He will not come now," said the woman, smiling.

"Can he have grown cold? Oh, how terrible when a mock love comes and leaves ashes and a grave behind!"

"He has not grown cold, dear lord."
"And yet he does not come! What strange mystery is this?"

"He has come! His heart has been always here, here under this willow tree." And with a radiant smile the woman disappeared.

Night after night they met under the old willow tree. The woman's shyness had entirely disappeared, and it seemed that she could not hear too much from Heitaro's lips in praise of the willow under which they sat.

One night he said to her, "Little one, will you be my wife -- you who seem to come from the very tree itself?"

"Yes," said the woman. "Call me Higo ("Willow") and ask no questions, for love of me. I have no father or mother, and someday you will understand."

Heitaro and Higo were married, and in due time they were blessed with a child, whom they called Chiyodo. Simple was their dwelling, but those it contained were the happiest people in all Japan.

While this happy couple went about their respective duties great news came to the village. The villagers were full of it, and it was not long before it reached Heitaro's ears. The ex-Emperor Toba wished to build a temple to Kwannon [goddess of mercy] in Kyoto, and those in authority sent far and wide for timber. The villagers said that they must contribute towards building the sacred edifice by presenting their great willow tree. All Heitaro's argument and persuasion and promise of other trees were ineffectual, for neither he nor anyone else could give as large and handsome a tree as the great willow.

Heitaro went home and told his wife. "Oh, wife," said he, "they are about to cut down our dear willow tree! Before I married you, I could not have borne it. Having you, little one, perhaps I shall get over it someday."
That night Heitaro was aroused by hearing a piercing cry.

"Heitaro," said his wife, "it grows dark! The room is full of whispers. Are you there, Heitaro? Hark! They are cutting down the willow tree. Look how its shadow trembles in the moonlight. I am the soul of the willow tree. The villagers are killing me. Oh, how they cut and tear me to pieces! Dear Heitaro, the pain, the pain! Put your hands here, and here. Surely the blows cannot fall now!"

"My Willow Wife! My Willow Wife!" sobbed Heitaro.

"Husband," said Higo, very faintly, pressing her wet, agonized face close to his, "I am going now. Such a love as ours cannot be cut down, however fierce the blows. I shall wait for you and Chiyodo -- My hair is falling through the sky! My body is breaking!"

There was a loud crash outside. The great willow tree lay green and disheveled upon the ground.

Heitaro looked round for her he loved more than anything else in the world. Willow Wife had gone!

Appendix 3A: “Green Willow” collected by Grace James

Tomedata, the young samurai, owed allegiance to the Lord of Noto. He was a soldier, a courtier, and a poet. He had a sweet voice and a beautiful face, a noble form and a very winning address. He was a graceful dancer, and excelled in every manly sport. He was wealthy and generous and kind. He was beloved by rich and by poor.

Now his daimyo, the Lord of Noto, wanted a man to undertake a mission of trust. He chose Tomodata, and called him to his presence.

“Are you loyal?” said the daimyo.

“My lord, you know it,” answered Tomodata.
“Do you love me, then?” asked the daimyo.

“Ay, my good lord,” said Tomodata, kneeling before him.

“Then carry my message,” said the daimyo. “Ride and do not spare your beast. Ride straight, and fear not the mountains nor the enemies’ country. Stay not for storm nor any other thing. Lose your life; but betray not your trust. Above all, do not look any maid between the eyes. Ride, and bring me word again quickly.”

Thus spoke the Lord of Noto.

So Tomodata got him to horse, and away he rode upon his quest. Obedient to his lord’s commands, he spared not his good beast. He rode straight and was not afraid of the steep mountain passes nor of the enemies’ country. Ere he had been three days upon the road the autumn tempest burst, for it was the ninth month. Down poured the rain in a torrent. Tomodata bowed his head and rode on. The wind howled in the pine-tree branches. It blew a typhoon. The good horse trembled and could scarcely keep its feet, but Tomodata spoke to it and urged it on. His own cloak he drew close about him and held it so that it might not blow away, and in this wise he rode on.

The fierce storm swept away many a familiar landmark of the road and buffeted the samurai so that he became weary almost to fainting. Noontide was as dark as twilight, twilight was as dark as night, and when night fell it was as black as the night of Yomi, where lost souls wander and cry. By this time Tomodata had lost his way in a wild, lonely place, where, as it seemed to him, no human soul inhabited. His horse could carry him no longer, and he wandered on foot through bogs and marshes, through rocky and thorny tracks, until he fell into deep despair.
“Alack!” he cried, “must I die in this wilderness and the quest of the Lord of Noto be unfulfilled?”

At this moment the great winds blew away the clouds of the sky, so that the moon shone very brightly forth, and by the sudden light Tomodata saw a little hill on his right hand. Upon the hill was a small thatched cottage, and before the cottage grew three green weeping-willow trees.

“Now, indeed, the gods be thanked!” said Tomodata, and he climbed the hill in no time. Light shone from the chinks of the cottage door, and smoke curled out of a hole in the roof. The three willow trees swayed and flung out their green streamers in the wind. Tomodata threw his horse’s rein over a branch of one of them, and called for admittance to the longed-for shelter.

At once the cottage door was opened by an old woman, very poorly but neatly clad.

“Who rides abroad upon such a night?” she asked, “and what wills he here?”

“I am a weary traveller, lost and benighted upon your lonely moor. My name is Tomodata. I am a samurai in the service of the Lord of Noto, upon whose business I ride. Show me hospitality for the love of the gods. I crave food and shelter for myself and my horse.”

As the young man stood speaking the water streamed from his garments. He reeled a little, and put out a hand to hold on by the side-post of the door.

“Come in, come in, young sir!” cried the old woman, full of pity. “Come in to the warm fire. You are very welcome. We have but coarse fare to offer, but it shall be set
before you with great good-will. As to your horse, I see you have delivered him to my
daughter; he is in good hands.”

At this Tomodata turned sharply round. Just behind him, in the dim light, stood a
very young girl with the horse’s rein thrown over her arm. Her garments were blown
about and her long loose hair streamed out upon the wind. The *samurai* wondered how
she had come there. Then the old woman drew him into the cottage and shut the door.
Before the fire sat the good man of the house, and the two old people did the very best
they could for Tomodata. They gave him dry garments, comforted him with hot rice
wine, and quickly prepared a good supper for him.

Presently the daughter of the house came in, and retired behind a screen to comb
her hair and to dress afresh. Then she came forth to wait upon him. She wore a blue robe
of homespun cotton. Her feet were bare. Her hair was not tied nor confined in any way,
but lay along her smooth cheeks, and hung, straight and long and black, to her very
knees. She was slender and graceful. Tomodata judged her to be about fifteen years old,
and knew well that she was the fairest maiden he had ever seen.

At length she knelt at his side to pour wine into his cup. She held the wine-bottle
in two hands and bent her head. Tomodata turned to look at her. When she had made an
end of pouring the wine and had set down the bottle, their glances met, and Tomodata
looked at her full between the eyes, for he forgot altogether the warning of his *daimyo*,
the Lord of Noto.

“Maiden,” he said, “what is your name?”

She answered: “They call me the Green Willow.”
“The dearest name on earth,” he said, and again he looked her between the eyes. And because he looked so long her face grew rosy red, from chin to forehead, and though she smiled her eyes filled with tears.

Ah me, for the Lord of Noto’s quest!

Then Tomodata made this little song:

“Long-haired maiden, do you know That with the red dawn I must go? Do you wish me far away? Cruel long-haired maiden, say— Long-haired maiden, if you know That with the red dawn I must go, Why, oh why, do you blush so?”

And the maiden, the Green Willow, answered:

“The dawn comes if I will or no; Never leave me, never go. My sleeve shall hide the blush away. The dawn comes if I will or no; Never leave me, never go. Lord, I lift my long sleeve so....”

“Oh, Green Willow, Green Willow ...” sighed Tomodata.

That night he lay before the fire—still, but with wide eyes, for no sleep came to him though he was weary. He was sick for love of the Green Willow. Yet by the rules of his service he was bound in honour to think of no such thing. Moreover, he had the quest of the Lord of Noto that lay heavy on his heart, and he longed to keep truth and loyalty.

At the first peep of day he rose up. He looked upon the kind old man who had been his host, and left a purse of gold at his side as he slept. The maiden and her mother lay behind the screen.

Tomodata saddled and bridled his horse, and mounting, rode slowly away through the mist of the early morning. The storm was quite over and it was as still as Paradise.
The green grass and the leaves shone with the wet. The sky was clear, and the path very bright with autumn flowers; but Tomodata was sad.

When the sunlight streamed across his saddlebow, “Ah, Green Willow, Green Willow,” he sighed; and at noontide it was “Green Willow, Green Willow”; and “Green Willow, Green Willow,” when the twilight fell. That night he lay in a deserted shrine, and the place was so holy that in spite of all he slept from midnight till the dawn. Then he rose, having it in his mind to wash himself in a cold stream that flowed near by, so as to go refreshed upon his journey; but he was stopped upon the shrine’s threshold. There lay the Green Willow, prone upon the ground. A slender thing she lay, face downwards, with her black hair flung about her. She lifted a hand and held Tomodata by the sleeve. “My lord, my lord,” she said, and fell to sobbing piteously.

He took her in his arms without a word, and soon he set her on his horse before him, and together they rode the livelong day. It was little they recked of the road they went, for all the while they looked into each other’s eyes. The heat and the cold were nothing to them. They felt not the sun nor the rain; of truth or falsehood they thought nothing at all; nor of filial piety, nor of the Lord of Noto’s quest, nor of honour nor plighted word. They knew but the one thing. Alas, for the ways of love!

At last they came to an unknown city, where they stayed. Tomodata carried gold and jewels in his girdle, so they found a house built of white wood, spread with sweet white mats. In every dim room there could be heard the sound of the garden waterfall, whilst the swallow flitted across and across the paper lattice. Here they dwelt, knowing but the one thing. Here they dwelt three years of happy days, and for Tomodata and the Green Willow the years were like garlands of sweet flowers.
In the autumn of the third year it chanced that the two of them went forth into the garden at dusk, for they had a wish to see the round moon rise; and as they watched, the Green Willow began to shake and shiver.

“My dear,” said Tomodata, “you shake and shiver; and it is no wonder, the night wind is chill. Come in.” And he put his arm around her.

At this she gave a long and pitiful cry, very loud and full of agony, and when she had uttered the cry she failed, and dropped her head upon her love’s breast.

“Tomodata,” she whispered, “say a prayer for me; I die.”

“Oh, say not so, my sweet, my sweet! You are but weary; you are faint.”

He carried her to the stream’s side, where the iris grew like swords, and the lotus-leaves like shields, and laved her forehead with water. He said: “What is it, my dear? Look up and live.”

“The tree,” she moaned, “the tree ... they have cut down my tree. Remember the Green Willow.”

With that she slipped, as it seemed, from his arms to his feet; and he, casting himself upon the ground, found only silken garments, bright coloured, warm and sweet, and straw sandals, scarlet-thonged.

In after years, when Tomodata was a holy man, he travelled from shrine to shrine, painfully upon his feet, and acquired much merit.

Once, at nightfall, he found himself upon a lonely moor. On his right hand he beheld a little hill, and on it the sad ruins of a poor thatched cottage. The door swung to and fro with broken latch and creaking hinge. Before it stood three old stumps of willow...
trees that had long since been cut down. Tomodata stood for a long time still and silent.

Then he sang gently to himself:

“Long-haired maiden, do you know that with the red dawn I must go? Do you wish me far away? Cruel long-haired maiden, say—Long-haired maiden, if you know that with the red dawn I must go, Why, oh why, do you blush so?”

“Ah, foolish song! The gods forgive me.... I should have recited the Holy Sutra for the Dead,” said Tomodata.
Appendix B: The Leshy
The Leshy has been in Slavic and Russian folk belief systems since far long before Christianity made its way into the lives of the Russian people. The Leshy belonged to original pagan beliefs, an entity who protects the forest, the lands it dwells on, and the creatures that live in the forest. He would take offerings from local villagers to watch over their flocks in the night or provide safe passage for them as they made their way through his forest. However, the Leshy is not all good, he was also known for spiriting away villagers to become his wife or servant. If a villager did not make an offering to the Leshy before entering his forest, harm or even death would come to them. Permission must have been obtained from the Leshy before entering his domain, as a form of respect for him, his power, and the land.

The Leshy is an ambiguous entity, he lives in a liminal state where he is neither good nor bad and shouldn’t be portrayed as such. Leshy can look and appear as anyone or anything (Warner 2002:38). They can use this to their advantage when spiriting away young woman or harming those who did not gain permission to enter their forest. The leshy are also believed to be able to grow taller than the trees or smaller than a mushroom (38), and their temperament would depend on the state of the forest (39). The leshy are also known as the demons of the forest (Warner 2000; Warner 2011), though this belief of them being demons and evil entities in league with the devil came after the Christianization of Russia (Ivanits 2015). The Russians have what is called the dvoeverie or “double-faith” when it comes to their beliefs (Ivanits 2015:04). Their original beliefs of their pagan entities were still believed in when Christianity was adopted, and soon morphed to fit within the ideology of Christianity. Through many narratives, the Leshy is
described as the grandfather of the devil (Ralston 2015; 152), and many features that are
given to the devil (black horns, hooves, fur) are often given to the Leshy as well (Ivanits
2015; 66).

The leshy is described to be able to change his appearance but is often described
as being seen in the form of a peasant, without a belt (Ivanits 2015; 66). And though his
ambiguous nature is seen as evil and dangerous throughout narratives and bailichkas (a
story of a true event when someone meets a spirit) (Black Book 2021), through legends
and fairy tales, the Leshy can take on the role of a trickster and even a mentor.

Appendix 2B: “Nature Spirits- The Leshii” collected by Linda J. Ivanits (pp. 178-181)

“We were gathering berries on Ian ‘ostrov. The girls had moved away from me. Suddenly
there was a noise in the swamp: it was if Mother Malan ‘ia was crying, “Get up and let’s
go.” I was startled, but there was no one. Suddenly, again, “Let’s go!” I saw that he was
like a woman with a birchbark basket in his hand. Oh! Shishko [the leshii] frightened me
so much that even my heart was trembling and the blood rushed to my face.” -Olonets
Province

“We were walking in the forest. The weather was very bad. We shot a deer and I went up
to it. I saw my father was standing, leaning on his rifle. I went up, had a look: neither my
father nor the deer was there. Evidently I had been seeing things. It became dark, and I
could barely figure out which way to go. I walked and cried out, “Father, Father.” And
terribly bad weather set in. I seemed to see my father walking with a dog, and I cried out
thinking it was my father. Then I saw my father come up from a dry spot, and I cried out.
It was just as if the other one melted away, disappeared.” -Olonets Province
In Nenoksy Petr Kokovin was walking along Solon Creek looking for his horse. Pavel Vasi’evich Nepytayev met him with a bridle that glistened in the sun. And Pavel said to Petr, “Where are you going?” “To seek my horse; I can’t find him.” And Pavel started laughing, “Ha, ha! He can’t find his horse!” And in truth Pavel Vasi’evich hadn’t gone anywhere.

-Arkhangelsk Province

“In Nenoksy there lived the ancient old woman Savikha. She set out for berries and lost her way. A man came along, “Woman, why are you crying?” “I’ve lost my way, my child. I don’t know which side my home is on.” “Come along. I’ll lead you out onto the road.” And so the old woman set out. She walked and walked. “Why is it that the forest’s become greater? Have you led me further astray?” He led her out to a clearing; a large house stood there. The old lady said, “Grandfather, where have you led me away to? This is an unfamiliar house.” “Let’s go, woman, we’ll have a rest, and then I’ll lead you home.” He led her into the house; a cradle was swaying there. “Well, wife, I brought a nanny for you.” The leshii’s wife was Russian, also led astray, stolen. And so the old lady began to live [with them] and set down roots; for three years she lived there, and she got homesick. The wife was sorry for her. “This way you’ll not get away from us. But don’t eat our bread. Say that you can’t eat.” And the old woman began not to: for one day, and another, and a third she didn’t eat. And the wife complained to her husband, “What sort of a nanny did you bring? She doesn’t eat anything and she doesn’t know how to be a good nanny. Take her home.” The leshii took the old lady on his shoulders, sat her down, and dragged her off. He dragged her, threw her down near her yard; her sarafan was all in shreds and the old man barely recognized the old lady. And so she told about how life
with the leshii was fine, there was enough of everything, only it was boring. It’s not much fun when there’s only one household.”

-Arkhangelsk Province

A certain peasant happened to drive in the forest late at night. Suddenly he saw a light. He drove nearer, and he saw an entire pack of wolves around a fire, and in command was the forest master. “Stay, peasant, and spend the night with us,” said the leshii, “everything will be safe and sound.” The peasant thanked him for his kind invitation. He knew that it would be bad to argue with him. The peasant was given a place by the fire, and his horses were given hay and straw. In the morning the peasant started to offer to pay for his lodging. “I don’t need anything,” objected the leshii, “but you can give my wolves what you have at home and are willing to part with.” The peasant thought, “My village is far away. Moreover, how can wolves drag a cow from the cattle shed? After all, it’s not summer now; the cows aren’t in the field.” Several days later the peasant arrived home. “Well, is everything fine with you?” he asked his household. “Fine, indeed! Just the day after you left, we drove the cows out to drink, and wolves tore our best cow to pieces. There was no way we could beat them off.”

-Smolensk Province

In the forest far from any dwelling a certain peasant had some land, and on it a farmstead was placed and he lived there completely alone. Once a passerby came to him and asked to spend the night. The peasant let him in, fed him, and made a bed for him. In the morning this person was about to give him money for the lodging, but he didn’t take it, he refused it. And so the passerby said to him, “You were complaining of having a hard time with your cattle, that the forest is all around, the cattle sometimes stray, sometimes a
beast harms them. In exchange for your hospitality I’ll give you a herdsman. In the morning drive them out the gate; toward evening they will come back to the gate by themselves. You’ll just have to drive them into the yard. But don’t you go and look at the herd after it’s been driven out.” And it really happened that way. The cattle went out for the whole day, and toward evening they returned home well fed and full of milk. The cattle roamed this way for three years, when it occurred to the peasant, “Just what sort of master am I if I don’t know who is herding cattle for me?” He said this and he set out for the forest to seek his cattle. He soon found them: he saw them grazing and in the corner of the clearing stood an old woman, tall as tall could be, leaning downward on a stick—a such a decrepit old lady, constantly rocking as if she were dozing. The peasant walked up to her, took her by the hand, and said, “Grandmother, lie down, take a rest.” And she answered, “Thank you, Benefactor, thank you, thank you …” She started to rock, became smaller and smaller, and completely disappeared. The peasant was amazed: he went home, and from that time the cattle have ceased roaming in the forest alone, and the peasant had to hire a herdsman.

-Tikhvin District, Novgorod Province

My aunt had a daughter-in-law, the wife of her elder son, a young and, by all appearances, healthy woman who already in the second year of her marriage began to lose weight and be sickly. It wasn’t exactly that she’d get ill—she didn’t complain of sickness—but she constantly complained of a lack of strength. At first no one was able to figure out the reason for her weakness, but later it became clear that at night the leshii flew from the forest to visit her. When the daughter-in-law’s husband was not home, then on that night the serpent flew to see her. He would fly in, turn into a man, and make love
to her for the entire night until the rooster’s third crow. The mother-in-law often noticed
that her daughter-in-law would converse with someone at night when her husband was
absent, and she started to position her daughter-in-law at her head crosswise in the
sleeping place. And it happened that once my aunt woke up at midnight and heard her
daughter-in-law talking with someone. And my aunt thought, “With whom is Katerina
talking, and why don’t I just feel around to see if someone is lying near her?” She didn’t
even manage to extend her hand, but only thought of doing this, when she felt such a
powerful blow on her cheek that she could have fainted from pain and fright. She was
unable to move or cry out. In the morning her entire cheek was crimson and finger marks
were evident on it. Three years passed. Katerina wasted away. She found it hard even to
walk and was constantly grabbing at her chest. One time in autumn she set out with her
own aunt for the forest to gather dry wood. They each gathered a bundle, came out of the
forest, and Katerina sat down and said, “Let’s sit down, Auntie. Otherwise, I won’t have
the strength to go on.” And here her aunt beseeched her, “Why don’t you tell why you’re
wasting away?” For a long time Katerina refused, but in the end she told everything. Here
is what she recounted to her aunt: “Three years ago I went into the forest to gather dry
wood and was carrying it home. I was walking along the road when suddenly I saw a
necklace lying there—such a beautiful and good one! I was so happy with my find that I
grabbed it and quickly hid it in my bosom, and I didn’t bother to make the sign of the
cross over it. I came home and hid the necklace in the chest and didn’t say a word to
anyone. In the evening I was walking in the yard and I heard someone whispering behind
me, ‘Give back what’s mine! Give back what’s mine!’ I looked all around: no one was
there. I went into the house, and again there was the whispering: ‘Give back what’s
mine!’ We had supper, lay down to sleep—my husband wasn’t home. And so I woke up around midnight. It was as if someone was shoving me. I looked and saw a man near me, and he said, ‘Hello. Since you didn’t return what you found to me, now take me too!’ In the morning I ran to the trunk, unlocked it, turned everything over in it: the necklace wasn’t there. And from that night he began to visit me every night when my husband wasn’t home. He comes flying from the forest in the likeness of a fiery serpent, turns into a man in the house and sleeps with me. And when he leaves, he always repeats, ‘Don’t tell anyone that I fly to you. If you tell, you’ll die!’ I’ve told you everything, Aunt. It’s hard for me to live and I don’t much want to die, but now I’ve not long to live. He’ll kill me.” And so it happened. On the next day after admitting this, Katerina went to the river to do the wash. She finished the wash and, having returned home, she began hanging out the wet linen, when she cried out, “It burns! It burns!” And she fell to the ground and expired right there. And who burned her?” -Khar’kov Province

Kindle Edition.

Appendix 3B: “The Leshy” collected by W.R.S. Ralston (1911)

A certain priest’s daughter went strolling in the forest one day, without having obtained leave from her father or her mother—and she disappeared utterly. Three years went by. Now in the village in which her parents dwelt there lived a bold hunter, who went daily roaming through the thick woods with his dog and his gun. One day he was going through the forest; all of a sudden his dog began to bark, and the hair of its back bristled up. The sportsman looked, and saw lying in the woodland path before him a log, and on the log there sat a moujik plaiting a bast shoe. And as he plaited the shoe, he kept
looking up at the moon, and saying with a menacing gesture:— “Shine, shine, O bright moon!”

The sportsman was astounded. “How comes it,” thinks he, “that the moujik looks like that? —he is still young; but his hair is grey as a badger’s.”239 He only thought these words, but the other replied, as if guessing what he meant:— “Grey am I, being the devil’s grandfather!”240 Then the sportsman guessed that he had before him no mere moujik, but a Léshy. He levelled his gun and—bang! he let him have it right in the paunch. The Léshy groaned, and seemed to be going to fall across the log; but directly afterwards he got up and dragged himself into the thickets. After him ran the dog in pursuit, and after the dog followed the sportsman. He walked and walked, and came to a hill: in that hill was a fissure, and in the fissure stood a hut. He entered the hut—there on a bench lay the Léshy stone dead, and by his side a damsel, exclaiming, amid bitter tears:— “Who now will give me to eat and to drink?” “Hail, fair maiden!” says the hunter. “Tell me whence thou comest, and whose daughter thou art?” “Ah, good youth! I know not that myself, any more than if I had never seen the free light—never known a father and mother.”

“Well, get ready as soon as you can. I will take you back to Holy Russia.” So he took her away with him, and brought her out of the forest. And all the way he went along, he cut marks on the trees. Now this damsel had been carried off by the Léshy and had lived in his hut for three years—her clothes were all worn out, or had got torn off her back, so that she was stark naked but she wasn’t a bit ashamed of that. When they reached the village, the sportsman began asking whether there was any one there who had lost a girl.
Up came the priest, and cried, “Why, that’s my daughter.”

Up came running the priest’s wife, and cried, “O thou dear child! where hast thou been so long? I had no hope of ever seeing thee again.”

But the girl gazed and just blinked with her eyes, understanding nothing. After a time, however, she began slowly to come back to her senses. Then the priest and his wife gave her in marriage to the hunter and rewarded him with all sorts of good things. And they went in search of the hut in which she had lived while she was with the Léshy. Long did they wander about the forest; but that hut they never found.


Appendixes 4B: “The Tsarévich and Dyád’ka” collect by Alexander Afanasyev

Once upon a time, in a certain kingdom, in a city of yore, there was a King who had a dwarf son. The Tsarévich was fair to behold, and fair of heart. But his father was not good: he was always tortured with greedy thoughts, how he should derive greater profit from his country and extract heavier taxes.

One day he saw an old peasant passing by with sable, marten, beaver, and fox-skins; and he asked him:

"Old man! whence do you come?"

"Out of the village, Father. I serve the Woodsprite with the iron hands, the cast-iron head, and the body of bronze."

"How do you catch so many animals?"

"The Woodsprite lays traps, and the animals are stupid and go into them."

"Listen, old man; I will give you gold and wine. Show me where you put the traps."
So the old man was persuaded, and he showed the King, who instantly had the Woodsprite arrested and confined in a narrow tower. And in all the Woodsprite's forests the King himself laid traps.

The Woodsprite-forester sat in his iron tower inside the royal garden, and looked out through the window. One day, the Tsarévich, with his nurses and attendants and very many faithful servant-maidens, went into the garden to play. He passed the door, and the Woodsprite cried out to him: "Tsarévich, if you will set me free, I will later on help you."

"How shall I do this?"

"Go to your mother and weep bitterly. Tell her: 'Please, dear Mother, scratch my head.' Lay your head on her lap. Wait for the proper instant, take the key of my tower out of her pocket, and set me free."

Iván Tsarévich did what the Woodsprite had told him, took the key; then he ran into the garden, made an arrow, put the arrow on a catapult, and shot it far away. And all the nurses and serving-maidens ran off to find the arrow. Whilst they were all running after the arrow Iván Tsarévich opened the iron tower and freed the Woodsprite. The Woodsprite escaped and destroyed all the King's traps.

Now the King could not catch any more animals, and became angry, and attacked his wife for giving the key away and setting the Woodsprite free. He assembled all the boyárs, generals, and senators to pronounce the Queen's doom, whether she should have her head cut off, or should be merely banished. So the Tsarévich was greatly grieved; he was sorry for his mother, and he acknowledged his guilt to his father.

Then the King was very sorry, and didn't know what to do to his son. He asked all the boyárs and generals, and said: "Is he to be hanged or to be put into a fortress?"
"No, your Majesty!" the boyárs, and generals, and senators answered in one voice. "The scions of kings are not slain, and are not put in prison; they are sent out into the white world to meet whatever fate God may send them."

So Iván Tsarévich was sent out into the white world, to wander in the four directions, to suffer the midday winds and the stress of the winter and the blasts of the autumn; and was given only a birch-bark wallet and Dyád'ka, his servant.

So the King's son set out with his servant into the open fields. They went far and wide over hill and dale. Their way may have been long, and it may have been short; and they at last reached a well. Then the Tsarévich said to his servant, "Go and fetch me water."

"I will not go!" said the servant.

So they went further on, and they once more came to a well.

"Go and fetch me water—I feel thirsty," the Tsarévich asked him a second time.

"I will not go."

Then they went on until they came to a third well. And the servant again would not fetch any water. And the Tsarévich had to do it himself. When the Tsarévich had gone down into the well the servant shut down the lid, and said: "You be my servant, and I will be the Tsarévich; or I will never let you come out!"

The Tsarévich could not help himself, and was forced to give way; and signed the bond to his servant in his own blood. Then they changed clothes and rode on, and came to another land, where they went to the Tsar's court, the servant-man first, and the King's son after.
The servant-man sat as a guest with the Tsar, ate and drank at his table. One day he said: "Mighty Tsar, send my servant into the kitchen!"

So they took the Tsarévich as scullion, let him draw water and hew wood. But very soon the Tsarévich was a far finer cook than all the royal chefs. Then the Tsar noticed and began to like his young scullion, and gave him gold. So all the cooks became envious and sought some opportunity of getting rid of the Tsarévich. One day he made a cake and put it into the oven, so the cooks put poison in and spread it over the cake. And the Tsar sat at table, and the cake was taken up. When the Tsar was going to take it, the cook came running up, and cried out: "Your Majesty, do not eat it!" And he told all imaginable lies of Iván Tsarévich. Then the King summoned his favourite hound and gave him a bit of the cake. The dog ate it and died on the spot.

So the Tsar summoned the Prince and cried out to him in a thundering voice: "How dared you bake me a poisoned cake! You shall be instantly tortured to death!"

"I know nothing about it; I had no idea of it, your Majesty!" the Tsarévich answered. "The other cooks were jealous of your rewarding me, and so they have deliberately contrived the plot."

Then the Tsar pardoned him, and he made him a horseherd.

One day, as the Tsarévich was taking his drove to drink, he met the Woodsprite with the iron hands, the cast-iron head, and the body of bronze. "Good-day, Tsarévich; come with me, visit me."

"I am frightened that the horses will run away."

"Fear nothing. Only come."
His hut was quite near. The Woodsprite had three daughters, and he asked the eldest: "What will you give Iván Tsarévich for saving me out of the iron tower?"

"I will give him this table-cloth."

With the table-cloth Iván Tsarévich went back to his horses, which were all gathered together, turned it round and asked for any food that he liked, and he was served, and meat and drink appeared at once.

Next day he was again driving his horses to the river, and the Woodsprite appeared once more. "Come into my hut!"

So he went with him. And the Woodsprite asked his second daughter, "What will you give Iván Tsarévich for saving me out of the iron tower?"

"I will give him this mirror, in which he can see all he will."

And on the third day the third daughter gave him a pipe, which he need only put to his lips, and music, and singers, and musicians would appear before him.

And it was a merry life that Iván Tsarévich now led. He had good food and good meat, knew whatever was going on, saw everything, and he had music all day long: no man was better. And the horses! They—it was really wonderful—were always well fed, well set-up, and shapely.

Now, the fair Tsarévna had been noticing the horse-herd for a long time, for a very long time, for how could so fair a maiden overlook the beautiful boy? She wanted to know why the horses he kept were always so much shapelier and statelier than those which the other herds looked after. "I will one day go into his room," she said, "and see where the poor devil lives." As every one knows, a woman's wish is soon her deed. So one day she went into his room, when Iván Tsarévich was giving his horses drink. And
there she saw the mirror, and looking into that she knew everything. She took the magical cloth, the mirror, and the pipe.

Just about then there was a great disaster threatening the Tsar. The seven-headed monster, Ídolishche, was invading his land and demanding his daughter as his wife. "If you will not give her to me willy, I will take her nilly!" he said. And he got ready all his immense army, and the Tsar fared ill. And he issued a decree throughout his land, summoned the boyárs and knights together, and promised any who would slay the seven-headed monster half of his wealth and half his realm, and also his daughter as his wife.

Then all the princes and knights and the boyárs assembled together to fight the monster, and amongst them Dyád'ka. The horseherd sat on a pony and rode behind.

Then the Woodsprite came and met him, and said: Where are you going, Iván Tsárévich?"

"To the war."

"On this sorry nag you will not do much, and still less if you go in your present guise. Just come and visit me."

He took him into his hut and gave him a glass of vódka. Then the King's son drank it. "Do you feel strong?" asked the Woodsprite.

"If there were a log there fifty puds, I could throw it up and allow it to fall on my head without feeling the blow."

So he was given a second glass of vódka.

"How strong do you feel now?"

"If there were a log here one hundred puds, I could throw it higher than the clouds on high."
Then he was given a third glass of vódka.

"How strong are you now?"

"If there were a column stretching from heaven to earth, I should turn the entire universe round."

So the Woodsprite took vódka out of another bottle and gave the King's son yet more drink, and his strength was increased sevenfold. They went in front of the house; and he whistled loud, and a black horse rose out of the earth, and the earth trembled under its hoofs. Out of its nostrils it breathed flames, columns of smoke rose from its ears, and as its hoofs struck the ground sparks arose. It ran up to the hut and fell on its knees.

"There is a horse!" said the Woodsprite. And he gave Iván Tsarevich a sword and a silken whip.

So Iván Tsarevich rode out on his black steed against the enemy. On the way he met his servant, who had climbed a birch-tree and was trembling for fear. Iván Tsarevich gave him a couple of blows with his whip, and started out against the hostile host. He slew many people with the sword, and yet more did his horse trample down. And he cut off the seven heads of the monster.

Now Marfa Tsarevna was seeing all this, because she kept looking in the glass, and so learned all that was going on. After the battle she rode out to meet Iván Tsarevich, and asked him: "How can I thank you?"

"Give me a kiss, fair maiden!"

The Tsarevna was not ashamed, pressed him to her very heart, and kissed him so loud that the entire host heard it!
Then the King’s son struck his horse one blow and vanished. Then he returned to his room, and sat there as though nothing had happened, whilst his servant boasted that he had gone to the battle and slain the foe. So the Tsar awarded him great honours, promised him his daughter, and set a great feast. But the Tsarévna was not so stupid, and said she had a severe headache.

What was the future son-in-law to do? "Father," he said to the Tsar, "give me a ship, I will go and get drugs for my bride; and see that your herdsman comes with me, as I am so well accustomed to him."

The Tsar consented; gave him the ship and the herdsman.

So they sailed away, may be far or near. Then the servant had a sack sewn, and the Prince put into it, and cast him into the water. But the Tsarévna saw the evil thing that had been done, through her magic mirror; and she quickly summoned her carriage and drove to the sea, and on the shore there the Woodsprite sat weaving a great net.

"Woodsprite, help me on my way, for Dyád'ka the servant has drowned the King's son!"

"Here, maiden, look, the net is ready. Help me with your white hands."

Then the Tsarévna threw the net into the deep; fished the King's son up, took him home, and told her father the whole story.

So they celebrated a merry wedding and held a great feast. In a Tsar's palace mead has not to be brewed or any wine to be drawn; there is always enough ready.

Then the servant in the meantime was buying all sorts of drugs and came back. He came to the palace, was seized, but prayed for mercy. But he was too late, and he was shot in front of the castle gate.
The wedding of the King's son was very jolly, and all the inns and all the beer-houses were opened for an entire week, for everybody, without any charge.