

Making the Old New



The Recontextualization of Tree Spirits in Video Games

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Introduction

- Thesis: Video games are prime genres to engage with ancient deities for three reasons.
 - World Building
 - Deity Portrayal
 - Player Ostension
- I engaged with tree spirits from two folk belief systems:
 - Japanese Shintoism: Kodama
 - Slavic Practices: Leshy

Context and Background

- Played four video games to engage with these entities.
- Today, I will discuss two:
 - Ōkami (2006)
 - Black Book (2021)
- Used the lens of hypermodern (Thomas 2015) folklore to situate the video games within the folklore discipline.
- Used recontextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990) and traditionalization (Hymes 1975; Mould 2005) to explain how these deities could live within video games as a new, modern home.

Definitions

Hypermodern Folklore: Digital portrayal of folklore has become more “authentic” than the original.

Traditionalization: The active process of making something traditional in a society and practice.

Recontextualization: Taking an item from its original context and placing it into a new context.

Ostension: The acting out of legends.

The Leshy and Kodama

Leshy: Slavic tree spirit, protector of the forest.

- Appear as elderly men.
- Does not wear belts, and wears shoes incorrectly.
- Can appear as big or small, and in any form.

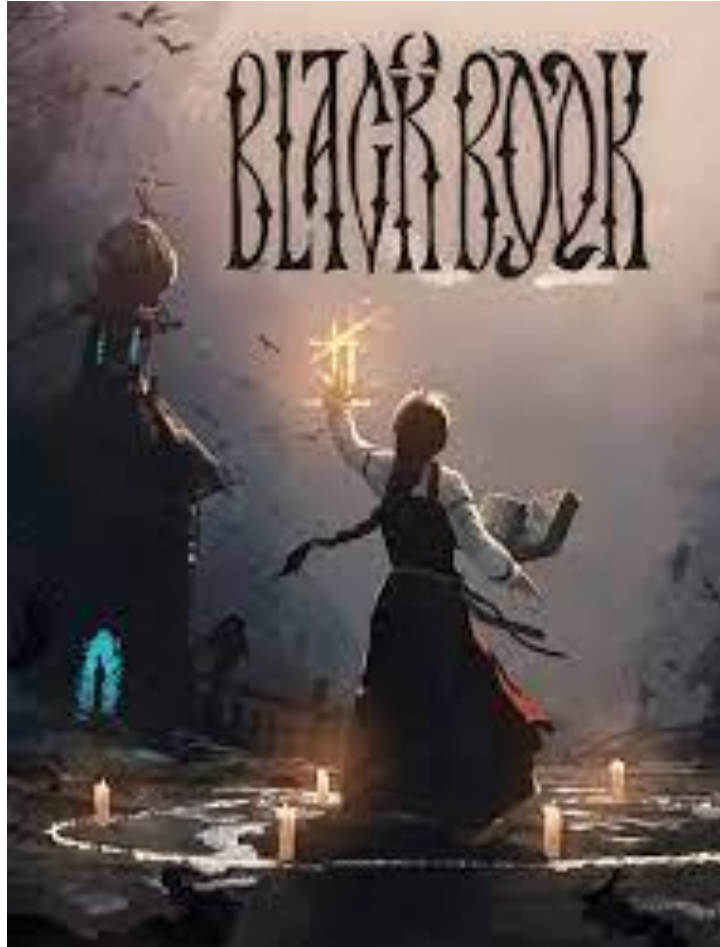
Kodama: Japanese tree spirit, protector of the forest.

- Appear as young women.
- Used to appear as elderly men, in the form of the god, Kukunochi

Both exist in a liminal state of ambiguity.

- Ambivalent entities who will do anything to protect their lands.

Tree Spirits in Video Games



- Hypermodern portrayals
 - Ōkami and Black Book
- The kodama and leshy are recontextualized into the video games, while the video games themselves are traditionalized to be able to house the tree spirits.

World Building

- Ōkami
 - Vernacular Architecture
 - Buildings and Torii Gates
 - Material Culture
 - Shimenawa Ropes
 - Shrines
- Black Book
 - Historical
 - 19th century
 - Folkloric
 - Folk Belief, *dvoreverie* (double-faith)





Entity Portrayal

- Ōkami – Sakuya
 - Young Woman
 - Protector of the Land
 - Benevolent
- Black Book
 - Three leshy
 - Ambivalent – Appears as an old man accompanied by wolves.
 - Benevolent – appears as a raven.
 - Malevolent – Older Man, does not wear a belt and his shoes are on incorrectly.



Player Ostension

Ōkami

- Reviving the Konohana
- The Konohana Shuffle

Black Book

- Interaction with Leshy Offerings
- Wood Seal Quest

Conclusion

- Video games are an ideal genre for ancient deities to exist within, as seen with tree spirits in the aforementioned games.
- Because the games have worlds built from folklore and folk belief, the games become a space that can house tree spirits.
- The portrayal of the tree spirits allows the spirits to act and play their original roles through the game.
- The active ostension that players do allows them to interact and actively engage with the leshy and kodama, giving the tree spirits the interactions necessary for them to be remembered.



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