

When They come courting: Spirit marriage and related relationships

Spirit Marriage and Godspousery in Lore, History, and Contemporary Practice

by Fjotr Lokakvan

The following text was prepared as the script for a presentation at Many Gods West 2017.

Hi. I'm Fjotr Lokakvan, and this presentation is on spirit marriage, godspousery, and related relationships.

I will be posting the script I'm using on my blog after the conference, which contains a list of references and other resources as well as what you'll be hearing here.

Introduction

This talk is broken into 3 parts: first, I'm going to briefly cover some of my personal background to give you a sense of where I'm coming from and what I hope to accomplish with this presentation. Then I'm going to go over a selection of examples of romantic and/or sexual relationships between human beings and spirits, from myths, historical sources, and some contemporary non-pagan traditions, and then I'll provide a sort of overview of experiences of people today. In that section I am also going to go over some cultural biases and misconceptions that cause problems for people in spirit marriages, including problems between us and the broader pagan/polytheist community.

My goals behind giving this presentation are to educate people and hopefully help reduce some of the stigma attached to people today who claim to experience the divine in this way. I know that many people don't know anything about the history of the existence of these types of relationships, in a wide variety of cultures and pantheons, and that alone can help diminish criticism.

As my bio in the program says, I am a godspouse and spirit spouse; I have several non-corporeal spouses, with my most significant marriage being with Loki. I've been a polytheist for a little over 5 years now; prior to that I'd been a lifelong atheist.

Since I've only been a part of pagandom for only a bit more than five years, why am I qualified to talk about this?

Well, I am a representative of what seems to be the most-mocked kind of godspouse:

I'm a Lokean.

I'm on Tumblr a lot.

And I'm part of the "Avengers" generation of Lokeans and Lokean godspouses, meaning I became a Lokean and polytheist in part due to the influence of Marvel's film.

All of this means I have seen a lot of the discussion about godspouses and spirit marriage within modern reconstructionist polytheism and paganism. A lot of those conversations have included someone expressing massive skepticism about the phenomena, sometimes because they think everyone using Tumblr - the only place they've seen people writing about it - is full of shit, and if they're speaking in any kind of Norse context, they can also be super skeptical about anyone who came to worshipping any Norse gods because of the Marvel films.

I was raised non-religious and an atheist, and that's where I was a little over five years ago when I

converted. There were several factors that came together to draw me into actually believing gods are real, but one that had some particularly major impact came as a result of seeing "The Avengers" movie. My then-girlfriend was a big Marvel fan, so we went to see it. I was kinda unenthusiastic about it, because when I saw who they made the villain I was really unthrilled. Loki had always been my favorite mythological figure, and I'd been rolling my eyes at the "Loki is the Norse Satan, Loki is evil" bullshit since I was teenager, and here was this crap again. But I like action movies, and my girlfriend was into it, so we went. The movie was really fun and I was happy to leave it and find myself totally unattracted to the villain. I just didn't get the enthusiasm for that character that I'd been seeing on Tumblr.

Then I got swamped with fandom stuff on Tumblr, and character analysis of Loki, and got super-obsessed, started rereading Norse mythology, and then one day I had this weird thought that Loki was my patron god. That sounded like nonsense to me - I mean, how could it possibly BE true, since gods don't exist? - but it felt true, and I knew better than to ignore things that "feel true," even if I had no idea what a patron god even was.

I fought it off for a little while but then I got really obsessed with trying to find that out, and pretty quickly realized the only way to get that answer was to ask the god Himself. So on summer solstice, I set up an altar and after sitting in front of it mentally rehearsing my words, very nervously made a statement about what I was doing and asked if there was anything to this crazy idea. Within a couple weeks, I started to believe some things happening were really Him, talking to me, and it also became really blatantly obvious pretty quickly that there were some very strong emotions and encounters that were going on that were really not platonic.

In the few weeks I was obsessively reading up on modern worship of Loki, and falling for Him in a big way, I'd found some blogs written by people who claimed they were married to Him, and I thought it completely unbelievable. I didn't understand how people could come to that conclusion - but I also didn't have any idea what it was like to have any experience and believe yes, that was really a god interacting with you, and not just . . . a dream or something.

So then all this intense stuff happened, and while I was trying to be smart and hold on to the possibility that I was mistaken about what I was "seeing" and "feeling" and comprehending through omens, part of me was like, "yeah. That's Him, and this seems like it's turning into a serious relationship." So I started rereading all the godspouse blogs and everything else I could find because even if my relationship wasn't going to turn into marriage, the godspouses were the only people writing about encounters with gods that I could relate to, in terms of the type of emotions I was feeling, as well as some of the types of interactions I was having.

Loki was really clear about His interest in marriage very early on, though I both could not allow myself to believe it - it was "too early" for that sort of thing! I was surely only being influenced by what I'd read - and I was terrified to believe it. I'm divorced. My first boyfriend and I married while we were in college, and he was abusive, and that left me feeling like marrying again was a terrible no-good awful idea. I could not trust myself to make that decision again.

But then here was Loki, and I was crazy about Him, and it was very quickly clear that my fear of intimate relations with men was getting in the way of that relationship developing the right closeness - and He kept doing things, asking me to give more trust, to take tiny steps with just small approximations of "commitment," to bring up those fears again and again so that I could work through them, and after several months, I was at the point where I could admit that actually, yeah, I did want to marry Him, and finally accepted His proposal. I say "finally" as if it took a long time, but it was only about 5 months of actual interaction, and then I gave Him vows about a month after that, which I know

is really fast, but sometimes that's how these things happen, and given some of my personal history, it felt very right to face this kind of commitment in a short time span, and realize that yes, I actually did know I wanted it, completely, with no doubts. I *could* trust myself to take this massive step.

I went through another round of terror about marriage - and fears about the potential impact on my relationship with Loki - when another god showed up a couple years later and started mentioning marriage right off the bat. Things with a "fae" spirit I'm married to weren't quite as intimidating - but he's not as intense as the gods are, so I think that's made things easier. All of the proposals have put me on guard in various ways, and since each relationship has been different from the beginning, they have also challenged my own beliefs about what I require in a relationship to be comfortable considering it a marriage.

So that's my history in a nutshell. I got swept into this about as fast as I started worshiping gods, and almost as quickly started to see other pagans being real jerks about godspouses. And I get the skepticism - I was super-skeptical of it myself! - but I got tired of the sneering attitudes and misogyny pretty quick. You know, all Lokean godspouses are just "delusional teenage Tom Hiddleston fangirls." The male godspouses and the nonbinary godspouses get ignored. Those of us who are clearly NOT teenagers are "lonely middle-aged women," and the godspouses who have human spouses or girlfriends or whatever also get ignored.

I slowly started collecting links about examples in myths and folklore and existing traditions, and sharing those around when skeptics showed up, because that helps defuse some of the criticisms. If nothing else, it shows it is NOT a modern invention, it's not a Tumblr invention, it is something that just happens in some percentage of human-spirit relationships.

My experience with human community under these circumstances has been mostly Norse-oriented, though I spend very little time in groups that call themselves "heathen" or "Asatru" because a lot of them hate Loki, Lokeans, pretty much any kind of mysticism, and they're often full of bigots. I've followed people involved with other pantheons on Tumblr and Wordpress, but I do not have any kind of in-depth knowledge about what, for example, the standard attitudes of Hellenic polytheists are towards spirit marriage. But while my knowledge is limited to a pretty small slice of modern polytheism I've seen enough commonalities regardless of what pantheon a person is dealing with to go ahead with a public presentation.

In the second part, I'll be talking more about godspouses than people whose spirit spouses aren't known gods, since this is where I've seen most of the discussion. Because spirit marriage is new for us in the modern polytheist revival or whatever we're calling it, we don't have long-standing solid traditions yet, AND we've got modern cultural baggage affecting perceptions of romantic relationships, sex, how humans "ought to" relate to gods, and what people who are deeply devoted to deities actually do and look like.

So, to start off the historical piece, I feel we have to get going with one of the classics.

Part 1: Myth, History, Non-Pagan Contemporary Traditions

Greek

I can't cover any of the examples in this first section in the depth they deserve, and it hurts to gloss over the richness that exists, but my priority was to provide a wide variety of examples. So, my apologies to everyone who knows a lot about these topics and cringes at the simplification.

Greek myth is really rich with examples of gods having mortal lovers. Overwhelmingly rich, to me,

When They come courting

who is not a Hellenic polytheist, but I can't not mention it either, since the general knowledge of Greek deities having mortal lovers is pretty widely known.

Zeus is probably best known for having had lots of lovers outside of His marriage to Hera, and many of those lovers were human. But Zeus is far from the only one! Apollo, Hermes, Selene, Eos, Aphrodite, Dionysus, and Poseidon are among the other gods and goddesses with lists of mortal lovers, some of whom are considered married to the god.

Many of these relationships also lead to children, and often ended badly for the mortal - sometimes a god would harass or kill the mortal lover of another god, sometimes other mortals would persecute them. Deities were not always upfront about Their identity when having the relationship and disguise Themselves as a mortal. There's one story where Zeus disguises himself as the husband of the woman he wants, and she doesn't find out until after the child from this relationship is born. For some people, the relationship with the god would eventually lead to the mortal becoming an immortal, sometimes after their death.

Gaelic

Some of the Gaelic gods and goddesses have reputations for wooing mortals, too.

Manannán mac Lir has several myths in which he has relationships with humans. There is also a Manx traditional belief that he visits their Midsummer celebrations in the form of a heron in order to find women to court ("Ritual within Gaelic Polytheism").

The goddess Fand, who is married to Manannan, has an affair with the famous Cu Chulainn ("The Sick-Bed"), whose father is said to be the god Lugh ("The Birth of Cu Chulainn"). Lugh is also said to have married two daughters of the King of Britain ("Nas"). Many Irish poets and nobles have also claimed descent from Lugh, which implies that sometime in the past, Lugh must have hooked up with one of their human ancestors.

Norse

There are also examples from Norse history of people claiming descent from Norse gods, like the Ynglings, a Scandinavian royal lineage, who were considered descended, literally, from the god Yngvi-Freyr ("Legendary Ynglings").

There's otherwise not a great deal in Norse lore about deities and mortals marrying or being lovers, but I have a few examples.

There is a story preserved in the Eddas, the Lay of Rig, in which the god Rig - another name for Heimdall - sleeps with three different mortal women and their husbands - and the children from these arrangements then become the "fathers" of the three different classes of human beings: thralls/slaves, carls/freemen, and jarls/nobles ("Rigsthula"). In this poem, Rig is always described as staying 3 nights, and laying in the middle of the bed, with the couple on either side of him. Rig shows up when the third of these children is growing up, claims the boy as his son, and gives him the name "Rig" as well.

There's another part of the Eddas, called the Lay of Hárbarð ("Harbarthsljoth"), in which Odin, disguised as a ferryman named Hárbarð, insults Thor, who just wants to get across the river. Odin boasts about his exploits while insulting Thor and asking Thor what worthy accomplishments he has made. Some of Odin's boasts are that he's been seducing a lot of women.

There is a goddess called Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr (Thorgerdr Holgabrudr) who may have been considered the divine spouse of one or more kings; the name Hølgabrúðr literally means "Holga's bride" (or

"Helgi's") - Helgi is the mythical founder of Halogaland, a province of Norway ("Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr and Irpa"). There are a couple of scholars who believe that she may also have been the wife or sexual partner of each ruler of the kingdom after Helgi.

We also have a story from 14th century Iceland about a man named Gunnar who travels from Norway to Sweden and encounters a priestess of Freyr who was also referred to as the god's wife ("Freyr," "Ögmundar þátr Dytts"). She drove a cart around, carrying a statue of Freyr, which was claimed to speak to people who came to worship the god. Freyr did not like Gunnar at first, but the priestess and Gunnar start having sex - and eventually marry - and when she becomes pregnant, this is seen as proof that Freyr was real and had blessed his priestess.

Okay, so myths are great, they give us some hint that the ancients had concepts of gods and mortals having sexual and romantic relationships, including marriages, but how should we really interpret these stories? How symbolic are they? What, if any, literal truth do they point to? While for a modern person it is nice to be able to point to old myths to say, yes, the gods sometimes do pursue humans, a skeptic could just as easily point out that myths are carriers of symbolic truths, and we shouldn't take them literally, or as justification for what's going on in our current experience.

However, we also have folk belief about what relationships with spirits could entail, as well as records of real people who described encounters with a range of spirits that included sex or marriage, and sometimes also included becoming parent of children with the spirit.

Folk Belief

There is also a lot of folklore and fairy tales, some of which shade into historical records, about people having fairy lovers or spouses. One of those classics is the man who steals the selkie-woman's sealskin, and she marries him and bears him children, but eventually she finds her sealskin and leaves. The story of Thomas the Rhymer includes his marriage to a fairy queen, which takes him away from the human world for several years but gives him the gift of prophecy.

In Scotland in about 1691, the Reverend Robert Kirk wrote *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves Fauns and Fairies* which included a couple of remarks about how fairie women would seduce human men: "For in our Highlands, as there may be many fair Ladies of this aerial Order, which do often tryft with lafcivious young Men, in the quality of Succubi, or lightfome Paramours and Strumpets, called *Leannain Sith*, or familiar Spirits (in Dewter. 18. 11.)" (Kirk).

Cunning Folk and Witches

Emma Wilby's book *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits* shows that documentation from trials of witches and cunning folk in early modern England and Scotland, in the late 1600s, includes multiple references to people having sexual or marital relationships with their familiars, whether they were considered demons, the Devil, or fairies of various sorts (Wilby 105, 106). In some cases, the person was coerced into the relationship, but others were consensual. These experiences as reported by the people on trial were consistent with popular folk belief about what relationships between humans and fairy-folk could be like, which includes marriage and being taken by the fairies as breeding stock (106, 107). The Scottish witch Andro Man was one of those people. He said he had a lengthy relationship with the Queen of Elphame and had begotten several children with her (106).

One of the points Wilby makes throughout her book is that many of the experiences reported by people on trial are very similar to what is reported by spiritual practitioners in a variety of animistic or polytheistic traditions, including the sexual or marital relationships. One of the other similarities she

describes is the familiarity that can exist between the human and their spirits:

"Although early modern encounter-narratives indicate that the interactions between popular magical practitioners and their familiars could range between the extremes of 'coercion' and 'devotion', they also suggest that on a day-to-day level these relationships were defined by high levels of intimacy: frequent, neighbourly exchanges which could range from the simple giving of comfort to the intensity of a sexual encounter. These intimacies, which have in the past been viewed with condescension and bemusement by some historians, take on an altogether new significance if we view them as indicative of the profound closeness which can develop between a mystical adept and their envisioned guide.

"In religious traditions throughout the world, interaction with sacred beings is characterized by varying degrees of both familiarity and reverence." (233)

Spiritual Practitioners Elsewhere in the World

If you want an easy way to find a list of other examples, Wikipedia has a "spirit spouse" page that lists several examples from around the world, describing the phenomena as "one of the most widespread elements of shamanism" ("Spirit Spouse").

In Thomas A. DuBois' book *Introduction to Shamanism*, he has a brief chapter on this subject. He describes several examples of spiritual practitioners from different cultures who have a spirit spouse who also holds the role of a tutelary spirit, a spirit who guides and teaches the practitioner but is also a husband or wife to them.

His lengthiest example comes from the Saora in India, where spiritual practitioners can have both a tutelary spirit spouse and a human one, as well as children with both spouses (DuBois 77-78). While there is a sexual aspect to these marriages, the primary role that the spirit spouse performs is to teach the human spouse and provide guidance while she performs her duties.

The spirit suitor tries to woo the woman into both consenting to marriage as well as a professional life as a spiritual practitioner. Typically, the women first refuse, for that life is not easy, but this leads to nightmares, including threats from the spirit suitor, and often illness and significant emotional distress. This doesn't usually strike out of nowhere, for they have usually been in training for a while already. When their parents are informed, they then arrange the marriage with the spirit. This includes painting an icon of the spirit, preparing a sacrifice, and staging an elaborate ceremony - more elaborate than is typical for a human wedding. Despite the rough start there could be to the relationship, apparently women with two husbands could not easily say whether they preferred the human or the spirit.

Baule Spirit Spouses

There is a very different tradition among the Baule people of Cote d'Ivoire, who believe that every person has a spirit spouse, because every person had an existence in the spirit world prior to their current one in this world, and the spirit spouse from that other life remains your spouse in this one (Baikewicz "More..."; Van Damme 222). Some people will have carved wooden figures made to represent their spirit spouse, but generally only if their dreams of their spouse, and follow-up divination, indicate it is a good idea (Baikewicz "More...").

The statuette has to be cared for, which includes providing a shrine space, making offerings, and sometimes ornamenting it as well (Baikewicz "More..."). People with human spouses have to dedicate one night a week to their spirit spouse, so they must either sleep in a separate space, or not touch their human partner on that night (Baikewicz "keeping..."; Van Damme 222). Because of the upkeep, some people would prefer to avoid having the statue made and developing a deeper relationship with their

spirit spouse, because if you have one and don't take care of it, this will anger the spirit spouse and they can give you bad luck (Baikewicz "keeping..."; Van Damme 222). Conversely, having a run of bad luck can lead to people creating such statuettes, in the hopes that feeding it will please their spirit spouse, who will then increase their luck and improve their lives (Baikewicz "keeping...").

Haitian Vodou

Another contemporary religion in which spirit marriage is part of the tradition is Haitian vodou.

If people can afford to do so, there are weddings much like a marriage between human beings, with formal ceremonies, clothing, rings, and community witnessing and celebrating the marriage (Oungan). While there is a community celebration and acknowledgment of the relationships, the marriages are not about the human partner taking on a role of service to the community, they are basically private between the humans and their spirits, though the human partner does take on a lot of responsibility as part of the relationship (Oungan).

I asked a houngan I know a bunch of questions about this, and what he had to say about the reasons people marry their spirits includes:

"Sometimes it's because they just love you so much that it is the best way to balance that love. Sometimes it's utterly practical in that you need balance or mitigation of certain things in your life and marriage is the best way for it to happen. Sometimes it's for protection, since marriage sort of creates a wall o' spirit around you, or even other stuff." (Oungan)

Marriage to one spirit may require a person to marry another spirit, and have multiple spirit spouses, because the relationship that exists between those two spirits also has to be balanced by how the human partner relates to them (Oungan; Pauline).

Hinduism - Bhakti, Myth, and Mysticism

In Hinduism, the term bhakti basically refers to devotion to, and love for, a god. There are several different devotional kinds of relationships a person may have with the deity, which include that of a friend for a friend, a servant towards a master, a mother towards her child, a lover towards their beloved, and conjugal love.

There are stories about Krishna having numerous human spouses, and a number of Hindu mystics who have written about their devotion to a god as being a marriage; one of the first I heard about is the poet-saint Mirabai, who wrote about Krishna as her husband, and was powerfully determined to focus her life on worshiping him, which caused her some difficulties in other aspects of her life, since she did not want to do what her family and culture said a woman of her social position should be doing ("Meera"). I'm not going to go into details about her in part due to time but also because Silence is giving a talk later today about Mirabai and two other Hindu poet-saints, so you should go to that!

Brides/Spouses of Christ

I have a few examples of historical documentation of marriage to deities, starting off with one many people have heard of, but which seems rarely taken as evidence of mystical experience, despite so many of these mystics reporting it.

Many people have heard of nuns referred to generally as "brides of Christ," but I get the impression that most people take it as symbolic of their commitment, and never consider it might include a strong mystical component. "Bride of Christ" can and does refer to a variety of other things: the Bride can be

meant as the church, for one, and many people who have been considered a bride of Christ did not report any mystical experience; their status was based upon their vows or living their life in accordance with certain standards. There have also been a lot of people for whom the relationship had an intense mystical component. These experiences were not limited to women who were officially considered religious the way a nun is - there were men in this category as well as women who were married or widowed at the time of their experiences, and never became nuns.

There is quite a lot written on this topic, including a really great dissertation called "*Marrying Jesus: brides and the Bridegroom in medieval women's religious literature*," you can find it online, and if you are at all interested in this topic, I highly recommend it. There are also a number of really interesting sections that discuss how mysticism caused problems within convents and between individuals and church hierarchy, which I think is worth reading for similarities with mysticism in current polytheistic communities.

Something interesting she reports is that "As the number of Christ's brides increased in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, women who claimed this special relationship were less likely to be automatically recognized as holy" (Gregory iii) and goes on to say "the number and nature of brides of Christ in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contributed to growing doubts about women's religious writing and creativity, resulting in the introduction of a new model for female sanctity that de-emphasized mystical experience and the bridal relationship in favor of virtuous actions." (iv)

Or, to put a modern spin on it, when becoming a bride of Christ started to be perceived as "trendy," it became treated as less legitimate than when it was the sole purview of people who had dedicated themselves to a religious life separated from normal society.

I found a lot of these women's experiences really relatable, particularly in how the intensity of the experience and emotions impacted their lives and how overwhelmed they felt by some of their visions and experiences. Some of them were mistreated pretty harshly for being women involved in mystical practices that the authorities were uncomfortable with. In some places, women's mystical writing was forbidden, and mystical practices were sometimes considered subversive and disruptive to established hierarchies.

Blessed Bernardo Francis de Hoyos y Seña (1711-1735)

One specific example I want to tell you about is Blessed Bernardo Francis de Hoyos y Seña, who lived in the early 18th century. He was a Spanish Roman Catholic, a Jesuit, who started his studies at the Jesuit College when he was ten, and took his vows when he was 17 ("Blessed Bernardo"). He was dedicated to spreading devotion of the Sacred Heart, and had intense mystical experiences that drove this, which included those of a mystical marriage. He documented his experiences extensively; here is a short excerpt describing the bridal imagery:

"Always holding my right hand, the Lord had me occupy the empty throne; then He fitted on my finger a gold ring.... 'May this ring be an earnest of our love. You are Mine, and I am yours. You may call yourself and sign Bernardo de Jesus, thus, as I said to my spouse, Santa Teresa, you are Bernardo de Jesus and I am Jesus de Bernardo. My honor is yours; your honor is Mine. Consider My glory that of your Spouse; I will consider yours, that of My spouse. All Mine is yours, and all yours is Mine. What I am by nature you share by grace. You and I are one!' " (Cherry)

There was a biography of Father Hoyos published in 1907, in which the author had this to say about Fr Hoyos' visions: "Generally speaking the young religious' visions are substantially veracious; on a few occasions, however, all unwittingly he may have added a few flourishes. No one cognizant with mystical literature will be surprised." (Lewis). I thought this was a really interesting and amusing

comment because it sounds so much like what we hear today about people's mystical experiences.

Victorian America: Ida Craddock

Ida Craddock was an American woman who was an ardent advocate for sex education at the end of the 19th century. She believed it was vital that married couples have fulfilling sexual relationships, which included making sure the woman also enjoyed sex. She also believed that through controlling oneself through married sex, you and your spouse could achieve union with the Divine, and have really incredible mystical experiences. In some of her writing, she mentioned that she knew all about how to have a good sex life, and to experience this union with God, because of her marriage to a spirit. She was never married to a man, and seems to have never had sex outside of marriage, either.

Because she sent her writing through the mail as well as instructed people in person, she was heavily persecuted by Anthony Comstock for spreading obscenity. She was arrested several times, and finally put on trial twice for the same supposed crime. Comstock basically made some things up because he hated her so much, and she'd escaped conviction previously, and these last trials were set up to not be anything like fair. She killed herself rather than be sent to a federal penitentiary, because she figured that imprisonment would be a death sentence. This made her a martyr among the Freethinkers, spiritualists, and medical professionals who had admired her work, and that outcry took Comstock down a notch. Even aside from Comstock's persecution of her, she was dismissed and considered insane by others for writing what she wrote while being an unmarried woman who claimed a spirit spouse, and who was not a scientist or physician.

Her mother was one of the people who tried to have her committed to an asylum, and Ida escaped to England for a while to avoid that, where she did a lot of research into the history of sex and religion, and put much of that together in a book called *Heavenly Bridegrooms*. One of my favorite quotes of hers:

"It has been my high privilege to have some practical experience as the earthly wife of an angel from the unseen world. In the interests of psychical research, I have tried to explore this pathway of communication with the spiritual universe, and, so far as lay in my power, to make a sort of rough guidebook of the route. For not all wives of heavenly bridegrooms travel the same path at first. There are roads running into this one from every religion and folklore under the sun, since the pathway of marital relations on the Borderland was once, and still is, as I hope to show, one of the main thoroughfares connecting our world with the world beyond the grave. This thoroughfare, along part of which I hope to conduct the reader in imagination, is marked with signposts, many crumbling under the religious storms of centuries, others preserved as sacred trellises upon which to train a rank growth of flourishing superstition, and still others fresh with modern paint and gilding." (Craddock)

Her writing about her spiritual experiences has a lot in common with experiences reported today. Her spirit husband, Soph, was involved in her life in a variety of ways, from the intense and sexually intimate, to helping guide her around doing day-to-day activities. (Schmidt 249-251)

Part 2: Pagan Spirit Marriages and Godspousery

Okay, onto the second part. My information and opinions here come from reading lots of personal accounts, and talking with people, mostly online, about their experiences. I don't consider all of my opinions or conclusions to be representative of what all godspouses or spirit spouses believe, so please do not take this all as the only truth there is.

Terminology

The terms "marriage" and "spouse" often get used as defaults, but there are other terms used for similar relationships. "Consort" is a common one. Some people use that interchangeably with "spouse" to describe their relationship while others use it because it does NOT imply "marriage," and their relationship, while it may have a lot in common with a marriage, isn't a marriage. I've also seen people refer to themselves as the lover or concubine of their non-corporeal partner.

Terminology has been a problem at times, because not knowing how to quickly describe what's going with you and a spirit is frustrating and also makes it difficult to discuss, or find resources to help you, and the way that "godspouse" gets used as a catch-all term ends up leaving a lot of people feeling like they don't belong in the conversations. A lot of people with marriages to gods don't even like that term. People whose spirit lovers or spouses are not gods feel excluded, and people whose relationships have a lot of the same emotional qualities, but don't include the agreement between the relevant parties that it's a "marriage" also feel left out. A lot of the other English terms we have to refer to human partners - like "girlfriend" - don't always work well, though "significant Other" is one I'm partial to. I've also semi-jokingly used the term paraparamour as a general way to refer to the spirits, but it doesn't convey the sense of commitment that consort or spouse does.

Anyway, regardless of the specific term, we all have a lot of the same problems and experiences, and I hope someday someone comes up with a better umbrella term.

What do relationships look like?

There is a lot of variation.

If there's one thing I would like everyone to keep in mind, it is this. There is a lot of diversity in spirit marriages in other cultures and traditions, and there is a lot of diversity among pagans and polytheists. There are many things that show up often BUT there are also many, many ways things can be different from person to person, and having a given relationship look different in some major way does not mean there is anything wrong with it or that it isn't "really" a marriage.

Some people's relationships have a very strong tutelary element - the spirit has a very strong role as a teacher or guide, and that may be more important than the emotional connection. The spirit may be guiding the mortal partner's work in this world in some way, and the marriage exists as a support to that. Other people's relationships are very strongly devotional and internally focused; this seems to be *very* common with marriages to deities. Some people report that there's a strong "domestic" element to the relationship, which can include the spirit spouse being involved in smaller, day-to-day things going on in the mortal's life. Some people do a lot of serious formal ritual work and others hardly do any of that. And, of course, there can be a lot of overlap - a relationship with a big devotional aspect may also include spouse-as-teacher.

Common experiences and challenges

Many of the struggles we experience are no different from what people experience with other kinds of spirit relationships, but bringing marriage or other kinds of intimate partnered love into the relationship adds some extra challenges.

Initial difficulty coping

Confusion, disbelief, and maybe fear often occur when the topic is first brought up, especially if the suitor is a god. A lot of people do not come to this with a lot of background knowledge about the

history of human-spirit relationships being able to include marriage. Spirits often bring it up earlier in a relationship than we tend to think of as normal, like, before we've had time to get to know Them, or develop the kind of love for Them that we need in order to want the relationship. It's really normal for people to question the signs and communications they are getting - which is a good thing, for sure, but it isn't a pleasant experience to go through. If you come into this believing it isn't possible, or you "shouldn't" relate to a god in an intimate manner, the desire to behave properly and to believe you're not losing your mind is going to affect your ability to trust your own experiences.

"Long distance" - forever

It's a permanent long-distance relationship, with extra communication challenges.

Obviously, communication with spirits is very different from communicating with a human being, so adjusting your expectations about how to communicate with a romantic partner who cannot talk with you like a human would can be really rough. In trying to get clearer communications, some people end up in situations of spiritual abuse, because they find someone who can channel the spirit for them - and that channeler turns out to be manipulative, or fraudulent.

Lack of physical touch can be really difficult. If you are monogamous, or the relationship is simply intense enough, you might not even want a human partner, so if you really need physical touch or presence, that can be very hard to live with if the one partner you have and want cannot provide it.

What does it mean with a non-corporeal?

Figuring out how to have a romance or "marriage" when your partner is non-corporeal and isn't going to have the same kinds of needs as a mortal does, is tricky. A lot of assumptions we have about what these relationships entail need to be adjusted, especially if marriage is the term being thrown around. Is it actually going to be something that seems like "marriage" or is there another term that suits it better? Maybe the goal isn't marriage or any other kind of commitment to Them, it is to get you to examine your own beliefs and feelings about relationships. Maybe there will be a commitment, but it won't be permanent, but it may not be possible to get clarity on that until months have gone by.

Even if you and They agree on having a marriage, different marriages will have very different goals and structure to them, which requires adjusting our beliefs and attitudes about what marriage means.

For myself, Loki is very, very involved in my life, but my other spouses are not, and the emotional intensity of those relationships is also not as strong. It was a struggle - a repeated one! - to deal with my feelings that I could not marry the Others because I didn't have the same kind of love for Them as I do for Loki. I got over it, but it took some time to decide that yes, I did want to commit and call it a marriage, even if I wasn't as crazy-in-love for Them.

Polyamory-related challenges

For people married to known gods, dealing with the fact that your Spouse has other human spouses can create problems. For some people who are monogamous, seeing other people write about *their* marriage to the same god can bring up a lot of feelings of jealousy or envy. For anyone, paying too much attention to what other mortal spouses of the same deity/spirit are experiencing can affect your discernment or your comfort level with what's happening in your relationship. Sometimes that's because those people are insisting their experiences are the only way for things to be, and sometimes it's because you keep comparing what you have/don't have to other people, and feeling inadequate.

Worthiness

It can be hard to feel worthy of being loved like this. This can be a problem in any human-divine relationship, or with a human significant other, but if your partner is a deity, there is so much out there about how deities are so much bigger and better than humans are, that believing we are worthy of being loved in a romantic fashion adds to it. It can be very hard to believe They really do love you and that you deserve it.

Equality between partners

If you believe marriage or romantic partnership should have equality between partners, this is really not. First of all, whatever kind of spirit they are, they're a spirit, there are fundamental differences in how we experience existence. For people with a deity partner, it is common to perceive a power imbalance, or try and give Them authority you shouldn't, or that They do not want to have. It is also a huge challenge to believe that - not only do They love us like that - but that what you do for Them really IS meaningful for Them, because deities are so much bigger and etc., so how could our relatively small mortal efforts or affection be worthwhile, especially when we compare our actions for Them to the huge impact They can have in our lives.

Changes over time

Navigating a close relationship with a spirit who shows you more and more of themself over time can also shake up your certainty in the relationship, your trust in yourself and them, and potentially even what it means to be "married" to them now.

Skepticism and other community-related problems

Mysticism isn't generally accepted by most of the population, and marital relations with non-corporeals even less so. You may not feel comfortable telling your family or closest friends or coworkers about an extremely important fact of your life, even if they are okay with the concept of religion or other aspects of your practice and beliefs. And since marriage and dating are common topics of conversation, if you are not comfortable talking about your noncorporeal significant Other, you have to pretend you have NO relationships with that kind of emotional importance in your life - and hiding that is never a good time - and then potentially deal with nosy folks asking you when you're gonna settle down or whatever social bullshit that comes up.

The way the broader pagan/polytheist community talks about this kind of relationship also makes it difficult to figure out where (and with who) it is safe to discuss your relationship, or ask questions about how to navigate various aspects of it.

Other spirit spouses - especially godspouses - behaving badly make it harder for the rest of us to be treated with respect.

Problems Caused by Godspouses

Some godspouses have, unfortunately, contributed to all of us having a bad reputation. Some have made claims that, just because they were married to the deity, they knew that god better than other devotees, and they should be a special kind of authority figure on all sorts of things about the god. Yes, as a spouse you are going to have a different perspective on your partner than someone who sees Them as a teacher or an aunt, but by that same token, the people who see Them as a teacher or an aunt have insights that a spouse will not. Some have stated that if the god really loved a devotee, then there would be a marriage proposal. I've seen some make statements that in order for a marriage to a specific deity to be legitimate, a person would have to have certain other spiritual experiences, like get permission

from other gods in that pantheon - because that person had those specific things as requirements for their relationship, and then assumed, somehow, that everyone would have the same requirements.

This kind of bullshit leads to other devotees feeling their relationships are inferior or lacking; that the deity does not love them as much – which leads to unnecessary pain/struggle within those people's devotional relationships, and can lead to further emotional/spiritual abuse.

Talking about sex is really off-putting to a lot of people. It is not culturally acceptable to be super open, let alone explicit, about sex. It is definitely off-putting to a lot of ace people, who often feel excluded or erased by lots of discussion about the sexual aspects of deities they worship. It can also be distressing for people who perceive a deity as a parental figure because they don't want to hear about that part of the deity's experiences with other people.

So there are some really valid complaints about godspouses, based on things people have actually done. But there are also a lot of misconceptions about what is normal or required in a spirit marriage, especially when gods are involved, and a lot of cultural beliefs that affect criticism of spirit marriages as well. Some of the big ones are about celibacy, assumptions about gender and sexuality, and what spiritual work a spirit spouse, especially a godspouse, needs to do.

Misconceptions

Celibacy and number of partners

Celibacy is not a requirement. Well; it might be, but it also might not be. Or it might be requested for a limited time, or in a certain manner (like, no human partners for a while, but no limits on your spiritual sexy times). Likewise, polyamory happens. People may have multiple non-corporeal partners, or a mix of corporeal and non. Sometimes a divine spouse will help set the human partner up with another human partner.

Heterosexuality, with emphasis on the "sex"

Women with marriages to deities generally perceived as male have been more visible than men and non-binary folks, but women are not the only people marrying gods and other spirits. There are asexual and aromantic spirit spouses, including married to gods Who have well-deserved reputations for being really sexual, like Freyr and Loki.

Lots of people are in same-sex relationships with a deity, including deities with only heterosexual relationships described in historic sources. Our gender expectations, or beliefs about Their sexual preferences or gender, are not always going to line up with how an individual relationship works out. Gods are a lot more complex than Their myths can tell us, and They are not limited to our definitions of gender or sexuality.

Marriage to a god and service to others

Being a godspouse does not imply you will end up providing spiritual services to a human community.

One of the things that has come up in numerous examples outside of contemporary pagandom is that the spirit spouse is also a tutelary spirit. And to some degree this seems to be true of gods Who marry humans, since They don't seem to be able to avoid teaching us things, no matter what else we've got going on magically or spiritually. However, one of the most noteworthy differences between godspouses and the spirit workers written about in so many anthropological studies is that for many of us, we are NOT working in service to a human community as part of our relationship with our partner. Many of us are not witches or magic-users who provide services to other people and there is no requirement from a

divine spouse to do that kind of work, even if They might help us out with personal magical efforts. For many of us, the relationship is about . . . the relationship, and part of Their role is to support us in our lives, whatever that looks like for us individually.

This doesn't mean there is no "hard work" involved, or that people who have that kind of relationship are lazy or not respecting their divine partner. Every intimate relationship is going to require some level of work, but for a lot of people it is internal to themselves and their relationship. Sometimes, what the gods most want of us is simply to love Them back, and to get to know Them, which can feel both too easy to be what They could truly want, and absolutely impossible to achieve. At least in a way that ever feels like "enough" from our perspective.

This lack of "service" to a community has been used to attack godspouses sometimes because according to some people, we're "supposed to" use this relationship, this "special access" to the god, to benefit our greater community no matter how well suited we are for any kind of spiritual community service. I've seen people in Norse contexts point to the example of Freyr's priestess-wife and say, well, here's our historical example, and since the god's spouse served the community, modern Norse godspouses should, too. Never mind what we say the god has to say about it.

This kind of pressure has really screwed a lot of people over, because when this was a more dominant part of the discussion about what makes a godspouse a godspouse, people who were NOT getting signs from their divine partner to take up priestly work often assumed they are doing something wrong, that they must be failing their Spouse, that if they just tried harder or were a better person, then they'd figure out how to do the work. This can harm the actual relationship the divine partner is trying to have, as well as cause a lot of unnecessary stress to the mortal partner.

Believing that service to others must be part of divine marriage has been one of the biggest misconceptions out there - I think it may be less of a problem than in the past, since godspousery is being discussed in more public spaces than it used to, which means the variety of relationships is easier to learn about, and the number of people whose relationship is of that personal nature, rather than community-service, is pretty large.

This relates to some other beliefs about how relationships between humans and gods "ought to" work, including those about who is the higher being, and what that "should" imply about our relationships.

Cultural Baggage & Criticisms

The same assumptions we have that affect how we relate to our spirit partners also affect how other people react to us. These beliefs include that gods are higher and better than us, that marriage is a relationship between equals, that marriage is the best relationship you could want, and a lot of weird expectations about how people would or wouldn't talk about the relationship if it were real. Misogyny plays a really big role, too, because generally speaking, women are not trusted to be telling the truth about any of our experiences, whether it is how another person has treated us, our expertise, or internal experiences like pain, our emotional state, and our spiritual experiences.

Marriage and Hierarchy

There is a big cultural belief that marriage is the best kind of relationship to have, it is superior to all other kinds. It is presented as especially desirable for women, and we get a lot of messaging about how wonderful it will be to be a bride and have this perfect fantasy wedding and happily-ever-after scenario.

This really devalues other kinds of important emotional relationships, which does a lot of harm to people who are not romantically involved with a deity. People sometimes fear their relationship isn't as

When They come courting

important to a god as that of a mortal spouse, and so they worry that the primary god in their life doesn't really love them "as much" as a mortal spouse is loved.

Since we tend to believe marriages should have some form of "equality" between partners, women marrying male gods have been accused of being "anti-feminist" (Lykeia); there are also assumptions that anyone who gets involved in this is turning themselves into some kind of divine servant or slave.

Marrying a god absolutely does not mean you have to obey Them in everything. We can make vows that detail what we will and will not do. We are allowed to set boundaries. The fact that They aren't human, and have access to knowledge we don't, does mean there are some built-in inequalities, but that doesn't imply we're all automatically godslaves - it actually seems quite common for Them to encourage us to set firm boundaries and be clear about what WE need and want from Them. Despite the inequalities that exist, the relationships still can be, and I argue *should* be, partnerships between two beings who love each other and want each other to be happy, which requires communication and negotiation. My spouses have all indicated that They are here for me, They are here to support me, that is part of what our marriages entail.

Another problem that comes up with the notion that marriage *MUST* be between equals is that people then claim that anyone who says they've married a god is like claiming you *ARE* a god, or are on Their level, or are just like that god's divine spouse, or that you're demeaning the god by making this claim - dragging Them down to our level, apparently. Claiming marriage to a god thus also means you're automatically claiming you are better than everyone else. Some people believe that even if they have never been exposed to some of the bullshit a few godspouses have actually stated.

It's just the trauma talking

Some people are positive that the only explanation for our experiences is that we have unresolved issues with relationships and we're working them out through pretending or wrongly believing that we're married to a god.

My own experience with my spirit marriages is that the gods have played massive roles in helping me process being abused by my ex-husband, and I've seen other people write about confronting previous relationship trauma through their spirit marriage. But if you've had relationship trauma, pretty much any relationship has the potential to bring it up and put you in a position to have to deal with it. People who have had bad experiences with a human parent have sometimes found a lot of healing in a relationship with a deity Who interacts with them in a parental role, but I haven't seen those relationships be dismissed as total fabrications the same way deity-marriage is attacked. Maybe part of the reason some of Them act as spouses to us *IS* to help us with our problems, but it doesn't mean the whole relationship is imaginary.

If you were serious/legitimate, you'd act different

And then there are a lot of weird ways people try to discredit us based on how we write.

Some people believe that silence, or relative silence, proves legitimacy. If you were really married to that god, you wouldn't talk about it, especially in detail, because writing about it means you want attention or are trying to make yourself look more authoritative than you deserve, or something, and therefore nothing you say can be trusted. You especially wouldn't and shouldn't talk about sex! That should always be kept private and it's not respectful to the god. Spirits, however, are quite capable of letting us know if they do *NOT* want us writing things about Them or our relationships.

Certain styles of writing, and certain topics, are considered indicative (or not) of "real" experience and proper, respectful attitude, especially when a god is involved. The arguments tend to follow these

patterns: If you were really married to a god, or, if you really loved/respected your Spouse - you'd be taking this all much more seriously in the way you write, you'd only talk about big massive spiritual things because that's the only "real" kind of encounter a person can have with the divine; you wouldn't "trivialize" the relationship or write about it in a "silly" manner; gods aren't ever interested in the minutia of our lives or just "hanging around" while you're doing boring normal things.

This is essentially a variation on the belief that because gods are bigger than us, They couldn't possibly be interested in any of us in a romantic way, period. Or, for some people, the gods simply aren't interested in interacting with humans, period. This variation is that if we state we have experiences that suggest They care about our "trivial" mortal lives, we are delusional or lying. "The gods are not your imaginary boyfriend" is my favorite way that some people put this.

I've seen numerous people who aren't spirit-married report experiences of deities just, being present in a casual manner, which tends to unnerve people, since it seems kind of weird and unusual, but it appears that sometimes They want to either just observe us, or enjoy being around us in a way that doesn't require Them being on "god duty" or teaching us some major lesson. Sometimes They seem to take comfort just from being with human beings, and having us be open to Them that way. A number of godspouses and consorts have specifically said that it that what they understand as part of their role is to to be someone the deity can just relax around. We provide Them a home where They can put the deity job aside and be loved. And it seems that sometimes the gods like to chill with other people as well, not just Their spouses. And why not? We have myths about gods disguising Themselves as mortals, sometimes to seduce us, and sometimes to test our hospitality. Is it really unbelievable They might today do the equivalent of putting on a mortal guise to interact with us, on a more personal, human level as best They can? "Trivial" interactions help us build strong relationships with other human beings - why can small interactions not happen as part of building a relationship with gods? We're told that even doing small devotional activities helps strengthen our relationship with Them - surely They can and will reciprocate sometimes? If we believe that deities are complex, sentient beings, why is this kind of activity considered outside of Their scope?

Regarding the charges of "silliness" and lack of "seriousness," it seems that if you appear to be having fun, or too much fun, you must be making it all up, or disrespecting the god. People who criticize what others write about don't seem to make any allowance for the fact that people have different topics they are comfortable writing about. Some are not comfortable writing in detail about the difficulties that crop up, or their major spiritual experiences. Lots of people use online platforms to relax and let off steam as a way to cope with the weird, uncomfortable shit that comes along with dealing with spirits. In addition, we cannot all be gifted writers and create beautiful prose or poetry that convinces people we are "serious" mystics.

I think the accusation that being silly implies disrespect falls apart when you look at how a lot of people actually talk about people and relationships they value. Everyone probably knows a human couple who write very fluffy things about each other on Facebook, but who would assume this means those people do not take their relationship seriously? Joking around can imply a huge amount of love and affection and trust in the relationship.

Silliness, and fun, and a casual attitude about religion is also attractive to a lot of people - especially if their previous experiences with religion were in a setting that was very strict and would not permit anything like that. I've seen a lot of people describe their happiness and relief at seeing polytheists writing about their faith in a way that showed we can have religion AND have fun with it.

Too many people - and this includes other godspouses - really will not grant any allowance for mystics to act like normal people, to act human, writing about our abnormal relationships like normal people

When They come courting

write about their mortal relationships, including varying degrees of comfort being open about sex, frustrations, poking fun at partners, you name it. It is like they expect us to be some sort of perfect being, instead of revealing ourselves to be human.

What all these criticisms come down to is that if we don't fit into someone's preconceived notions about what we ought to look like, we simply can't be trusted to be reliably reporting ANY of our experiences. I do not have a problem with people asking serious questions about why someone believes their experience is a "marriage" or whatever other kind of "weird" is being reported - being skeptical of unusual experiences is reasonable and important. However, there are ways to ask people about unusual-sounding experiences without putting them down, dismissing them as liars, or telling them they are incapable of understanding what is going on.

Why community hostility is a problem

My concerns with the community at large being hostile towards spirit marriage comes down to two bad outcomes I've seen, repeatedly.

If you treat people like they don't belong, that they are not doing devotion right, or that they are liars or untrustworthy, they will find company with whoever does accept them – which can lead to circumstances where groupthink and spiritual and emotional abuse occur.

This hostility also makes it harder for people to get help when they are having major struggles with their practice and spiritual relationships, because we don't know who can be trusted to take us seriously, and we can't always properly describe our problems without the context of it happening within a romantic relationship.

So I would really like it if there was less stigma attached to all of this, so that people won't be abandoned by their supposed community and left to struggle far more than is necessary.

But why do They do that? What do They get out of it?

The last thing I want to cover is one of the biggest questions that comes up, and is perhaps the hardest to answer: Why do spirits, especially gods, desire any of us as an intimate partner, particularly in a spousal role?

Often it simply seems like They just love us in that way, and hope that we will return Their affections in a similar way, as best as we can. They also desire to help us in our lives, and some find taking on a spousal role a good way to bring us that aid.

In return, They get what They get from other devotional relationships, though I suppose it is possible that we might give more time and attention to a divine spouse than to a divine parent or teacher. I've known enough people not married to gods who have pretty intense relationships going on, so I'm not willing to say that marriage always provides more devotion - and considering the small amount of time I put into some of my spirit marriages, it's certainly true that some people give much more time and attention to their non-spousal spirit relationships. All the same, attention is attention.

I have asked a few of my suitors why They were using the term marriage, why couldn't we just, you know, appreciate each other's company without that kind of commitment. I've been told things like "this suits you" and "it makes things work easier," and while I admit polyamory comes pretty easily to me, and I do like having the commitment made once I feel comfortable with it - I am not sure what They have meant about it making things easier. I do not know how or why having that bond makes it easier for Them to do things for us, or with us. I also don't know if or how a marriage oath is different than other kinds of oaths, especially other life-oaths. I've had Them explain that it simply indicates that

When They come courting

it's a serious relationship with benefit for both partners.

Several people have described that their marriage helps create a link between the spirit realm and ours, and this helps draw our worlds closer together, and the mortal spouse functions as a way for the god to be more in our world. It gives Them more access here. I don't know how much of this is a reason They seek this out, or if it's a side effect; I suspect Their motives vary. I also do not know if They can get the same or similar access through other kinds of connections with us, or if romance or marriage really does create a different kind of access to our world. I suspect it probably depends on exactly what kind of bond you have, since different spirit marriages have different levels of entanglement.

I have yet to feel satisfied with any of the answers I have, but it seems that understanding what They really want, and trusting what They show us, is simply part of the long-term process of being involved with Them, whatever form that takes.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to a number of people for helping to make this possible:

Danica and Ealasaid for saying it sounded like a good idea when I first mentioned it on the way back from Many Gods West 2016.

Duffi, Silence, Jolene, Geoffrey, and Amber for additional encouragement and feedback.

The Many Gods West program selectors for giving me this opportunity and a deadline. Without this, my desire to turn a half-assed collection of links into something more coherent would still be little more than a half-assed collection of links and good intentions.

Eddie Marsson, for resources about Gaelic mythology.

Bonkira Bon Oungan, for answering my questions about maryaj lwa.

The many, many people who have written publicly about their spirit relationships, of all kinds. You've not only helped me understand that the weird things in my own closest relationships were perhaps not too weird to be real (or at least as real as anything else spirit-related), but that there is amazing and immense variety out there. It is also comforting that I am not alone in having extreme struggles at times or having overwhelming love and passion for the Others in my life. Navigating my relationships with spirits would undoubtedly have been trickier and even more confusing if I had not had access to your collective knowledge.

There have been many spirit spouses, godspouses and consorts, and various and sundry others-in-that-general category who I've met and learned from online. I have lost track of everyone, but a few of the folks I've benefited from the most include Devo (of "The Twisted Rope"), Jolene Dawe (of "Strip Me Back to the Bone"), and Laurie Beth Dawe (of "Wytch of the North"). I am especially grateful to the first person to blog publicly about being a Lokean godspouse, Elizabeth Vongvisith, whose now-shuttered websites had some of the best writing on being god-married that I've had the fortune to read, as well as some of my favorite writing about Loki.

Thank you for sharing so much; I could not have written this without you showing some of the ways forward.

Works Cited

- Baikewicz, Melissa. "Keeping the Spouse Happy." *Partners in Spirit: The Baule Spirit Spouse*. St. Michael's College, n.d. Web. 30 May 2017.
- Baikewicz, Melissa. "More than Just a Figure: Form and Function." *Partners in Spirit: The Baule Spirit Spouse*. St. Michael's College, n.d. Web. 30 May 2017.
- "The Birth of Cu Chulainn." *Celtic Literature Collective*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 May 2017.
- Cherry, Kittredge. "Bernardo De Hoyos: Mystical Same-sex Marriage with Jesus." *Q Spirit*. Q Spirit, 28 Jan. 2017. Web. 12 Apr. 2017.
- Craddock, Ida. N.d. TS. *Heavenly Bridegrooms*. Idacraddock.com. Web. 2 July 2017.
- DuBois, Thomas Andrew. *An Introduction to Shamanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.
- "Freyr." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 24 July 2017. Web. 2 July 2017.
- "Ögmundar þáttur Dyttis." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 25 Mar. 2017. Web. 2 July 2017.
- Gregory, Rabia. "Marrying Jesus: Brides and the Bridegroom in Medieval Women's Religious Literature." Thesis. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007. Carolina Digital Repository. Web.
- "Harbarthsljóth: The Poem of Harbarth." *The Poetic Edda: Harbarthsljóth*. Internet Sacred Text Archive, n.d. Web. 22 May 2017.
- Jones, Terry. "Blessed Bernardo Francisco De Hoyos Señá." *CatholicSaints.Info*. N.p., 19 Nov. 2016. Web. 1 June 2017.
- Kirk, Robert. "The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns & Fairies: The Secret Commonwealth: Conclusions." *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns & Fairies: The Secret Commonwealth: Conclusions*. Internet Sacred Text Archive, n.d. Web. 25 July 2017.
- "Legendary Ynglings: Descendants Of The Norse Gods And Oldest Scandinavian King Dynasty." *Ancient Pages*. N.p., 21 July 2017. Web. 27 July 2017.
- Lewis, Hedwig, SJ. "Blessed Bernard Francis De Hoyos, SJ." *BLESSED BERNARDO FRANCISCO DE HOYOS*. Hedwig Lewis, SJ, 15 Apr. 2010. Web. 12 Apr. 2017.
- Lykeia. "PBP: G Is for "godspousery"." *Beloved in Light*. Lykeiaofapollon, 18 Apr. 2013. Web. 25 July 2017.
- "Meera." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 15 July 2017. Web. 17 July 2017.
- "Nas." *Part 5 of The Metrical Dindshenchas*. CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts, n.d. Web. 20 May 2017.
- "Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr and Irpa." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 30 June 2017. Web. 1 July 2017.
- Oungan, Bonkira Bon. "I Have a Lot of Questions about Maryaj Lwa..." *Rock of Eye*. Tumblr, 20 Mar. 2017. Web. 20 Mar. 2017.
- Pauline. "Samedi: Maryaj Lwa." *HoodooQ*. Blogspot, 01 Jan. 1970. Web. 27 July 2017.
- "Rígsþula." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 26 July 2017. Web. 5 July 2017.
- "Rígsthula: The Song of Rig." *The Poetic Edda: Rígsthula*. Internet Sacred Text Archive, n.d. Web. 21 May 2017.

When They come courting

"Ritual within Gaelic Polytheism." *An Chuallacht Ghaol Naofa | Gaelic Polytheism*. An Chuallacht Ghaol Naofa, n.d. Web. 20 May 2017.

Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Heaven's Bride: The Unprintable Life of Ida C. Craddock, American Mystic, Scholar, Sexologist, Martyr, and Madwoman*. New York, NY: Basic, 2010. Print.

"The Sick-bed of Cuchulainn, and the Only Jealousy of Emer." *The Sick-bed of Cuchulainn, and the Only Jealousy of Emer*. Trans. Eugene O'Curry. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 May 2017.

"Spirit Spouse." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 09 June 2017. Web. 2 June 2017.

Van Damme, Wilfried. *Beauty in Context: Towards an Anthropological Approach to Aesthetics*. Leiden: Brill, 1996. Print.

Wilby, Emma. *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic*. Brighton: Sussex Academic, 2010. Print.

Resources by Category

This list includes works cited above as well as additional online sources and book titles that I could not work into the main presentation, some of which I haven't read (yet) but are relevant to the general topic. There are multiple versions and translations of a lot of the myths; I've only included one or two links, but I recommend reading others, too.

Contemporary Experience (mostly pagan)

These are a very very few of the things I've read in the last few years; many contain links to additional related reading.

Maestas, Silence. *Walking the Heartroad: The Devotional Path for Spirit-Workers*. (about much more than spirit marriage, and of value for everyone, not just spirit workers)

Strieber, Whitley and Jeffrey J. Kripal. *The Super Natural. A New Vision of the Unexplained*. (this is good reading alongside Wilby's book)

"Astral relationships" <http://thetwistedrope.tumblr.com/astral>

"God Sex" <http://sexgodsrockstars.wordpress.com/2012/07/20/god-sex/>

"Godspousery: Mysticism and the Hieros Gamos"

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/betweentheshadows/2015/08/godspousery-the-hieros-gamos/>

"Godspousing: So You Want To Marry A God, Do You?" <https://hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/Godspousing-So-You-Want-To-Marry-a-God-Do-You>

"Icelandic woman claims elves are better lovers than men" <http://icelandmag.visir.is/tags/hallgerdur-hallgrimsdottir>

"It doesn't have to all look the same, and that's okay!" <https://naiadis.wordpress.com/2012/08/28/it-doesnt-have-to-all-look-the-same-and-thats-okay/>

"PBP: G is for "godspousery"": <https://lykeiaofapollon.wordpress.com/2013/04/08/pbp-g-is-for-godspousery/>

Baule

Van Damme, Wilfried. *Beauty in Context: Towards an Anthropological Approach to Aesthetics*

Partners in Spirit: The Baule Spirit Spouse http://academics.smcvt.edu/africanart/Melissa_2/homepage.htm

Christian

Gregory, Rabia. "Marrying Jesus: Brides and the Bridegroom in Medieval Women's Religious Literature." <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:dbcaac3a-c91e-4eb3-bb18-852a84d09859> (PDF; can be found at multiple locations)

Muir, Diskant Carolyn. *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms: The Mystic Marriage in Northern Renaissance Art*

Review of the above book: <http://jesusinlove.blogspot.com/2014/04/mystical-same-sex-marriage-affirmed-in.html>

When They come courting

Blessed Barnardo de Hoyos y Sena

- <http://catholicsaints.info/blessed-bernardo-francisco-de-hoyos-sena/>
- <http://qspirit.net/bernardo-de-hoyos-mystical-marriage/>
- http://joygift.tripod.com/blessed_bernardo_de_hoyos.htm

Fairies

Kirk, Robert. *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves Fauns and Fairies*. <http://robscholtemuseum.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Kirk-Secret-Commonwealth-1691.pdf>

Wilby, Emma. *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic*.

Gaelic

Clíodhna

- and her mortal lover Ciabhán: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/gafm/gafm22.htm>

Fand

- and Cú Chulainn: <http://sejh.pagesperso-orange.fr/keltia/version-en/cu-sickbed.html>

Lugh

- married to Buí and Nás: <http://celt.ucc.ie/published/T106500C/text005.html>
- father of Cú Chulainn: <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/cuchulain1.html>

Mannanan mac Lir

- the heron at Midsummer: <http://www.gaolnaofa.org/articles/ritual-within-gaelic-polytheism/>
- and Tuag Inber: <http://celt.ucc.ie/published/T106500D/text014.html>
- fathering a son with Cáintigern: <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/mongan2.html> and <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/mongan.html#birth>
- fathering Deirdre: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/gafm/gafm18.htm>

Niamh

- and Oisín: <http://www.luminarium.org/mythology/ireland/oisinyouth.htm>

Greek

Too many to list separately; see the Theoi Project: <http://www.theoi.com/>

Haitian Vodou

"I have a lot of questions about maryaj lwa..." <http://rockofeye.tumblr.com/post/158637687154/i-have-a-lot-of-questions-about-maryaj-lwa-like>

"Samedi: Maryaj Lwa" <https://hoodooq.blogspot.com/2011/04/samedi-maryaj-lwa.html>

"Marrying a Lwa (or Two) in Haitian Vodou" <http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/haiti-archive/msg07744.html>)

Ida Craddock

<http://idacraddock.com/> - her "Heavenly Bridegrooms" is available here

When They come courting

Craddock, Ida C., and Vere Chappell. *Sexual Outlaw, Erotic Mystic: The Essential Ida Craddock*.

Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Heaven's Bride: The Unprintable Life of Ida C. Craddock, American Mystic, Scholar, Sexologist, Martyr, and Madwoman*.

Krishna

"Krishna Stealing the Garments of the Unmarried Gopi Girls" <http://www.harekrishna.de/stealing-cloth.htm>

"Madhurya-rasa - Conjugal Love" <http://www.harekrishna.com/philosophy/associates/rasas/madhurya-rasa.htm>

Other Traditions & General Discussion

Blacker, Carmen. *The Catalpa Bow: A Study in Shamanistic Practices in Japan*.

DuBois, Thomas A. *An Introduction to Shamanism*

Hanegraaff, Wouter J., and Jeffrey J. Kripal. *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*.

Machacek, David W., and Melissa M. Wilcox. *Sexuality and the World's Religions*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirit_spouse

Norse:

Freyr's Wife

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freyr>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%96gmundar_%C3%BE%C3%A1tr_dyttis
- https://www.carlaz.com/phd/cea_phd_chap3.pdf (Anderson, Carl Edlund. *Formation and Resolution of Ideological Contrast in the Early History of Scandinavia*.)

Lay of Hárbarð

- <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe08.htm>
- an amusing retelling in modern English: <http://thenorsegods.com/the-lay-of-harbard/>

Lay of Rig

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe14.htm>

Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr (Thorgerdr Holgabrudr)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%9Eorger%C3%B0r_H%C3%B6lgabr%C3%BA%C3%B0r_and_Irpa

Ynglings

<http://www.ancientpages.com/2016/10/30/legendary-ynglings-descendants-of-the-norse-gods-and-oldest-scandinavian-king-dynasty/>