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**CHRISTMAS MONSTERS:  
THE PHILADELPHIA PARADE OF SPIRITS IN CONTEXT**

A Dissertation in  
American Studies  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

In December 2011, Philadelphia's Liberty Lands Park began hosting an annual event called the Krampuslauf. The communities involved modeled this processional festival around a traditional European event featuring a masked, costumed holiday monster called the Krampus. The Krampuslauf, later renamed the Parade of Spirits, brings together several groups from Philadelphia and Central Pennsylvania. The neighborhood around the park, a community of contemporary neo-Pagans, and an active arts-and-crafts community in the area adopted the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits as a representative festival. Using ethnographical methods and analyzing the communities as folk groups practice a form of social drama through the parade form, I argue that in Philadelphia and similar locations like Portland, Oregon and Los Angeles, California, the Krampus and other "Christmas monster" figures are being re-contextualized in an American capitalist environment as a way of critiquing the commercialism of the holiday season by those who wish to find personal meaning in seasonal ritual without conforming to mainstream Christmas practices. I simultaneously argue that the festival meets the social and symbolic needs of multiple communities at once, while also providing a unique reflexivity from the folk groups as they negotiate the expansion of the festival and the meaning of winter holidays in the United States.

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## **Chapter 1. COAL AND SWITCHES: MEETING THE KRAMPUS**

### **“Gruß Vom Krampus”: The Christmas Monster in the New World**

At ten minutes before five p.m. on Saturday, December 13, 2014, Liberty Lands Park in downtown Philadelphia hums with activity. Hand-made paper-and-cardboard lanterns rise into the trees. One, shaped like a crescent moon with a long red tongue protruding obscenely, illuminates the area near the fire pit as dusk swiftly covers the grounds. Throughout the park, men, women, and children pull on furry pants, masks shaped like devil faces or wolf heads, and take up bells and drums. Nearly two hundred and fifty people gather in the park and wait for the dark to descend. Just after five, a fur-clad and soot-smeared figure called a “Belsnickel” standing by a four-foot wide banner reading “Heathen Traditions” offers an invocation to spirits of Germanic origin, and the parade begins.

This is a Krampuslauf, my first to attend and the first in which I participated. Krampuslauf is a modern festival honoring the dark figure of Krampus—a punitive companion of the more generous St. Nicholas—during the Yuletide season. With origins in Teutonic folklore, particularly in Austrian traditions, Krampuslauf represents a mingling of Old and New Worlds (Santino 1995; Ridenour 2016). It connects to historical roots of Central Pennsylvania and Philadelphia, and yet also belongs to a broader festival culture celebrating the Krampus figure, including a large celebration in Portland, Oregon. People carry banners reading “Gruß Vom Krampus” (“Greetings from the Krampus”) beat drums and stalk the streets in a four-square-block area around the park, offering bystanders a thrill of the weird as they raise awareness and interest in the old-made-new figure of Krampus and his kin. When the parade is over, revelers gather at a stage in the park to watch fire dancing shows—usually including

children as performers, although the kids are frequently using LED-light torches and hoops—in a dramatic display of fire spinning, spitting, and ritual reenactment by members of Philadelphia dance group Lux Arati. When the evening finally ends, some ninety minutes after the parade began, people make their way back home—some only steps from the park’s borders, and some across the nation.

Founded by an atheist artist in 2011, the Philadelphia celebration has grown to represent an aesthetic expression for some, a spiritual act for others, and a community ideal for most. Commercial interests remain minimal for the celebration—one table selling Krampus-related wares and a single food truck represent the sum total of capitalist ventures present on the day of the parade in 2014. Attendance at the “Lauf” has dramatically grown since its inception. It blossomed from around twenty-five participants its first year to ten times that number in 2014, with some parade members estimating attendance as high as four hundred. The participation dropped a bit after 2015, the height of the Krampus phenomenon in popular culture that coincided with the release of a major feature film dedicated to the creature. Still, even in subsequent years the revelers have numbered in the hundreds and have come from places as far away as Oregon, Arizona, and California. Is there a connection between this celebration and its historical antecedents? What does the Krampuslauf festival represent in the modern American Christmas season, and what does it say about American culture and the problem of studying that culture more generally? These are questions that I will answer in this chapter, and the questions that animate the research of this study.

For several years, I have participated in the Philadelphia Krampuslauf, which underwent a renaming in 2017 to become the Parade of Spirits Liberty Lands (henceforth referred to in this work as “the Parade,” capitalized to distinguish it from more general discussions of parades as a

form of folk performance). I guised as a Belsnickel from Pennsylvania-German lore during the first two years—although I was not the one who offered the invocation mentioned above. In 2017, I crafted a mask that looked like a bleached bird skull and went as a version of the Czech mythical figure of death, Smrt, fitting in with the ever-expanding retinue of spirit figures found in the Parade. Throughout my involvement with the festival’s planning and execution in the years I have been participating, I have had the opportunity to observe and interview people connected at multiple levels of the event. I interviewed the event’s founders and prime movers both formally and informally, and recorded interviews with other participants who were less directly involved in the organizational aspects of the Parade as well. I observed social media interactions among Parade-goers and spoke to other members of the communities connected to the event, such as the Urglaawe Heathen contingent, a neo-Pagan group that has adopted the Parade as a spiritual home. I also expanded the contextual reference of my research by speaking to people such as Timothy Essig, a museum events coordinator in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who has performed the part of the Belsnickel at his museum for many years, long before the Krampuslauf took shape an hour away. Throughout my investigation, I attempted to remain open to both emic and etic interpretations of Krampuslauf and its related performances, although the process of observer-participation and my own sympathies towards the groups involved will inherently bias some aspects of my interpretation. In these pages, I explain how the Krampuslauf, born in a single small neighborhood community, takes its place among Pennsylvanian culture and tradition, meets the spiritual needs of participants who are engaging with its symbolism in ways that are often non-religious but deeply focused on meaning, creates a space for the arts-and-crafts “maker” community to assert its defiance of commercial mass production, and most vitally, unites neighbors and members through symbolic and performative

social expression related to children and holidays. Much of my interpretation depends upon Victor Turner's (1969) concept of "communitas," especially in the sense of an intentional community bound by ritual and symbol. I take Turner's observations about the "social drama" of festival and ritual and build upon those using the specific contextual examples I find in the performative event of the Krampuslauf, while more broadly building a case that the "communitas" of the Parade is not singular, but the reflexive performance of several distinct communities using intersectional symbolic reference points to accomplish collective goals (Turner 1984). Krampuslauf belongs to those engaged in what Sabina Magliocco (2004) calls "subdominance," exerting the identity of minority spiritual and social groups in the public eye, through a processional parade travelling through major American cities and drawing attention to "the discourse of oppositionality" (2004, 187). The problem of performance in the American cultural milieu does not fit neatly in the Krampus's sack, because the performances at the Parade are continually evolving and engaged in semiotic dialogue with one another to create new performative expressions, but the semiotic value of the Christmas Monster to all participants remains central to the communal performance of the Parade.

In four years of direct involvement with the Philadelphia Krampuslauf and its adjacent activities, I have become familiar with the way individuals shape and are shaped by the Parade. Interviews with event founders and participants have also opened up a number of avenues for understanding the ways in which the Parade responds to the needs of participants at different levels. My interactions with and close parsing of social media interactions and digital communications make me both a participant and an observer there, as well, and I have been able to see how these groups—and individuals—practice a Krampuslauf mentality even beyond the physical time and space of the annual procession. The act of participating in the Parade of Spirits

is not a singular event, but a practice of tradition built over extended time and space. If the timeframe of parades as “events” dissolves, practice as a model of community behavior and social meaning-making requires rethinking the models of “tradition” to include the more dynamic contemporary modes of mediation, as well as the way those traditions are applied by the tradition-bearers. Simon J. Bronner (2016) has argued for a redefinition of folklore as “traditional knowledge put into, and drawing from, practice,” an interpretation that implies a reflexive turn in traditionality, and one that can be illustrated by many of the self-aware, intentional community actions and, in a paradoxical turn of phrase, the socially introspective reflections of the Parade of Spirits members. In the pages that follow, I track the genesis of the Philadelphia Krampuslauf and its participants with a special attention to how the Parade addresses group and individual needs simultaneously and at various levels of awareness. I will also detour briefly through two other points of interest—the historical presence of holiday monsters in Pennsylvania who inform Krampuslauf’s representational figures and the comparative roles of similar Krampus-themed events in Central Europe and other parts of the United States. The historical and comparative approaches both emphasize key points of my interpretation of Philadelphia’s event and provide some subtle but relevant contrasts. Krampus is experiencing an ascendancy, appearing in a number of popular media venues, but the vernacular embrace of Krampus appears to be fueled by groups resistant to popularization and commercialization. Krampuslaufs are growing, however, beyond their founders’ comfort zones at times. Even after the slight dip in attendance during the 2016 and 2017 Parades, the numbers have remained stable above attendance counts in 2014. Krampus, it seems, is here to stay, and I will show why.

## **Making Holiday Fright: The People of the Christmas Monster**

Participants in this study were selected on the basis of their involvement with the Philadelphia Parade and its affiliated communities. The neo-Pagan Heathen community of the Central and Eastern Pennsylvanian regions, the “maker” and do-it-yourself artistic community of Philadelphia, and the social network of parents exploring alternative holiday traditions in response to a divisive “traditional” American Christmas are my primary pool of informants. Because children are involved with the study, the general behavior and performance of children involved with the event has been observed and included in the study, and children have been interviewed under the close supervision of their parents and guardians. The utmost care has been used to protect the children involved, and no specifically identifiable information has been reproduced in print without explicit parental consent, except in cases where I cite specific publicly-available information such as the interview series produced by Parade members as part of the official website. Participants in the Parade, as well as participants in other Krampus-inflected events, offer a variety of different perspectives, so for the purposes of research I found it useful to establish a categorical framework for considering potential interviewees. This resulted in a loose structural taxonomy for my investigation, although the categories used are permeable and people often belong to multiple divisions of study. I should emphasize that while I sometimes have favored certain taxonomical groups due to their level of intimacy or involvement with the Parade, my investigative processes do not reflect any hierarchical order within the Parade itself. As I conducted my interviews and observations, the following groupings helped me to create context and analytical structure for the information I gathered:

1. Festival organizers, planners, and administrators
2. Adult festival participants

3. Child festival participants
4. Adult community participants (e.g. artisans who help with crafting costumes or masks, Heathen community members who promote or educate about the festival or its symbols)
5. Subject area experts or adult participants in similar or related festival traditions
6. Adult attendees of the festival
7. Members of the festival social media circuit who participate at a distance or vicariously through the internet or other digital means
8. Adult observers of the festival<sup>1</sup>

Participants were permitted to request pseudonyms for any published materials, although their name and geographic information have been recorded during the ethnographic interviews and remain a part of the raw data. Participants who did not elect to use pseudonyms will be primarily identified by first and last name, and occasionally by geographic region. Some generalized information regarding size, appearance, and age may be included, especially in relation to costuming practices, but was not specifically requested from the actual participants.

In addition to the individual interviews, much of my observational and scholarly work has focused on the groups these individuals form, particularly in relation to the Krampus and other Christmas monster figures. Those who participate in the Parade largely come from three distinct communities I observed, although as I note in my analysis there are several other groups who have unique representation at the Philadelphia event but whose communities were not directly considered for my investigation as their intricacies lie beyond the scope of my scholarly expertise. Additionally, I would note that two other “communities” exist within the framework of this study, ones that have influenced the Philadelphia event but that are not directly represented

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<sup>1</sup> Adult observers are only questioned or interviewed if they volunteer themselves as study participants, and are not solicited specifically for ethnographic data, given the intense emphasis on participation found among Parade-goers.

as distinct contemporary groups within the event or its regular practice. The communities I observed for the study are:

1. **The “maker” community** – A group with a strong emphasis on Do-it-yourself (“DIY”) and handicrafts. The makers are frequently heavily involved in projects like mask-making or creating decorations for the park and are generally part of the local Liberty Lands community in Philadelphia, although makers from throughout the United States also have roles to play in the Parade at times. The maker community emphasizes artistry, creativity, and participation, and values quality without insisting on any particular standard of individual creative skill. The makers are also, on the whole, very resistant to mass-market costumes and the commodification of the holidays and use the Parade as a way to emphasize their localized, “fingerprints visible”-style of crafting.
2. **The neo-Pagan community** – Krampus represents a pre- or non-Christian alternative holiday that still holds spiritual significance for the neo-Pagan participants in the Parade. While Old World contexts almost always place Krampus in the charge of the Catholic St. Nicholas, in the Philadelphia event Krampus usually roams free and is joined by a cadre of other winter seasonal spirits from a wide variety of cultures. The neo-Pagan community emphasizes the ritual aspects of the event, with a special focus on the seasonality and the balance of light and darkness. In particular, the neo-Pagan community that builds its experiential cosmology on Germanic, Scandinavian, or Anglo-Saxon sources—collectively known as the Heathen community—sees Krampus and his kin as spiritual figures, a living embodiment of mythology. In the Philadelphia context, the special role of Pennsylvania German heritage and traditions gets emphasized by the subset Heathen “Urglaawe” community, although neo-Pagans of many stripes—and

indeed many non-Pagan participants who have sympathetic worldviews emphasizing Nature as sacred or special—find ritual and symbolic meaning in the Parade.

3. **The Liberty Lands family community** – The Parade of Spirits is touted as the “maker-friendly, family-friendly festival of winter terror,”<sup>2</sup> and its role as a community event for the families around the Liberty Lands park is crucial. Families from outside of the immediate Liberty Lands area also recognize the importance of children attending—and more vitally, participating in—the Krampuslauf. Frequently parents expressed their desire to have their children at the Parade as a way of confronting a “dark side” of culture, especially an American consumerist culture that emphasizes the “light” and saccharine nature of Santa Claus during the holidays. Children themselves see the Parade as a communal event, one in which they get to separate themselves from the normal flow of their lives and enter a new role, while also forging very close bonds with the children and adults who participate in the event, too. The psychological and rhetorical role of both the Christmas monster and the Parade dedicated to celebrating him received a great deal of attention in interviews.
4. **The historical interpretive community** – While the above three groups are the core of active participants at the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits, several other communities exert influence over the Parade, either directly or indirectly. Historical interpreters, especially from places such as the Landis Valley Farm and Museum in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, belong to a conversation about the role of Christmas monsters in Pennsylvanian and American culture more broadly. Additionally, members of the primary groups at the Parade often draw upon the work of historical interpreters such as

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<sup>2</sup> Official publications produced by the Krampuslauf organizers frequently use this wording. See the official website for the group ([www.krampulaufphiladelphia.com](http://www.krampulaufphiladelphia.com)) for examples.

Alfred Shoemaker (1958; 1999) or act as interpreters themselves, as does one of the key members of the Urglaawe Heathen community. Historical interpretation shapes the types of spirits present at the Parade, as well as offering it a form of legitimacy in its current practice.

5. **The global Krampus community** – The least fixed and most fluid group within this study is the broad array of Krampus performers found throughout the United States and Central Europe. Largely this group is seen through a second-hand lens in this study, although I do have some direct previous experience with the figure of Cért, a Czech incarnation of the Christmas monster, from my time living in Prague. In addition to the observations provided by people like Al Ridenour (2016), I have also interviewed participants at other Krampuslauf celebrations in the United States, such as those in Portland, Oregon or Los Angeles, California. These performances add a comparative context to the Philadelphia event, showing how each parade sets itself apart in unique ways and emphasizing the particularities of the Parade as a Philadelphia phenomenon.

The primary geographical location for observation has been Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, although some interviews incorporate material from participants located in other areas such as those mentioned above. I conducted twenty-four primary interviews, including half a dozen children from eight to fourteen years of age. Primary interviews involved recorded conversations in person or via a voice-over-internet-protocol recording system (such as Skype), and each primary interview generally ran between twenty and sixty minutes long. Some informants were interviewed multiple times for multiple occasions (such as at festival preparation events and during post-festival activities) or were interviewed using methods such as email question lists. Additionally, incidental interviews conducted with festival attendees at group events but not

recorded became a part of background research. Several participants' social media interactions have also been incorporated, especially as the ongoing "practice" of Krampuslauf occurs largely in online spaces.

While the vast majority of the ethnographic data for this research comes from interviews and direct contact, there are also a number of reflexive discourses on the themes and meanings of the Parade that have been generated by participants themselves. The primary group involved has periodically recorded web-based audio broadcasts, or podcasts, of interviews done by one member on another, adding a dozen or so recordings to my data set. Several participants have also spoken publicly about their involvement in the Parade, including one founding member who gave a talk at Oxford University in 2017 about the Philadelphia Krampuslauf as a winter festival. This ongoing cycle of self-examination and reflexive community discourse has allowed me to expand many of my observations by listening through the ears of others, although the constraints of interviews done by other participants should also be taken into consideration. I do not always hear questions asked that I want answered, or I hear answers that need elaboration and depth. Yet I would be lying to say that the self-documentation done by the Parade-goers was not incredibly rich in additional detail and perspective that I might have otherwise missed, so on the whole I am immensely grateful for the availability of that data.

In considering the interviews and other sources of ethnographic material, I often return to a few key figures for specific points. Every interview and interaction provided *something* valuable to the research, even if only as a signpost towards another question for later exploration or as a way of honing the interview process in the future. Still, knowing the key performers within the Parade and a few of the key figures peripheral to this research will offer a reader a more thorough understanding of the individuals and communities involved, as well as some

insight into the ethnographic process behind the research. To that end, I present the following list as an introduction to study subjects who appear repeatedly in the research or who provide specifically important elements of research data:

1. **Amber Dorko Stopper** – Amber is the founder and organizing presence behind the Krampuslauf in Philadelphia. She is also the mother of Béla and Claudia and a maternal family figure to Tucker. Amber conceived of the Parade as a response to her own process of child-rearing and has acted as the de facto host for the event and many of its peripheral activities. She speaks extensively about the importance of the Parade, its symbolic figures, the role of neurodiversity, and the importance of community, and my interactions with her included in-person interviews, numerous online conversations, and even a potluck dinner she organized to help with my research.
2. **Janet Finegar** – Janet is the manager for the Liberty Lands Park where the Philadelphia Krampuslauf is held every year. She is also an experienced craftsperson and performer, having formerly worked with the well-known Bread and Puppet Theatre in Vermont. Janet has largely been the other half of the organizational impetus behind the event along with Amber, and her emphasis is often on the artistic, expressive side of the event.
3. **Robert Schreiwier** – The founder and one of the primary teachers within the Urglaawe Heathen tradition, Robert became involved in the Philadelphia Krampuslauf and the Parade in its second year. He has helped lead many of the processions, often offering an invocation before the Parade “steps off,” and he has generated a great deal of the connective tissue that links Philadelphia neo-Pagan groups and the Parade. I have spoken with Robert multiple times, in-person and via online communications, about his tradition and his involvement in the Parade.

4. "**Arún**" – Arún is the leader of the neo-Pagan and Heathen contingent of the Portland, Oregon Krampuslauf, which began the year before the Philadelphia Parade. Arún has also participated in events in the Philadelphia area, flying to the East Coast specifically to be involved in the Parade of Spirits. He serves as the Portland parade's organizer and publicist at times and spoke to me on several occasions via Skype and social media about his group's performance.
5. **Al Ridenour** – Al Ridenour is the author of the book *The Krampus and the Old, Dark Christmas: Roots and Rebirth of the Folkloric Devil* (2016), a text that serves as a guidebook to the winter festivals of Central Europe and their many variants of the Christmas monster. Additionally, Al has been deeply involved in the Los Angeles Krampuslauf and its accompanying Krampus Ball. I have interviewed Al about both his work in Europe and his involvement in the Los Angeles event, as well as frequently using his book as a source of scholarship on the Old-World practices associated with the Krampus.
6. **Timothy Essig** – Timothy Essig is an educator at the Landis Valley Farm and Museum in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He also is one of the living history museum's annual Belsnickel performers, and it was in that capacity that I interviewed him twice about the history and lore of the Belsnickel in Pennsylvania.
7. **Tucker Collins** – Tucker is a graduate student in Philadelphia and a member of Amber's household, where he is an elder brother figure for Claudia and Béla and a critical part of the family dynamic. Tucker is often heavily involved in the fabrication of Parade materials and props. I have interacted with him several times in person (including helping

him set up the Baba Yaga Hut prop in 2017) and he provided me with thoughtful written responses to a series of interview questions I sent to him via email as well.

8. **Claudia** – Claudia is Amber’s daughter and sister to Béla and Tucker. She has performed as the “Es Meedli” figure in the Parade, and often gets involved as one of the costumed participants. She participates in the Lux Arati fire show, as well, including a “fire dance” using LED lights in 2015 and performing a Latin incantation she composed herself to start the fire show in 2017. I interviewed her in-person with the supervision and permission of her parents.
9. **Béla** – Amber’s son and brother to Claudia and Tucker, Béla is the youngest member of the household. He has also performed as the “Es Meedli” in the Parade, as well as wearing other costumes and helping with the construction of several of the major set pieces and props used in the Parade. As with Claudia, I spoke to Béla in-person with the supervision and permission of his parents.
10. **Sue White and Ilsa** – Sue and her daughter Ilsa have been participating in the Parade since the beginning, with Ilsa and her friend Ruby accidentally leading the Parade at one point because they happened to get ahead of the pack. Both Sue and Ilsa do extensive work crafting costumes and are members of the Liberty Lands community. They also participate in other Liberty Lands events and have tight-knit bonds with Amber and her family as well as with Linda Soffer and Ruby. I interviewed Sue, Ilsa, Linda, and Ruby together in an extended discussion session in Amber’s living room.
11. **Linda Soffer and Ruby** – Like Sue and Ilsa, Linda and Ruby have been involved from the start, and are very much a part of the neighborhood community of Liberty Lands. They are both keenly interested in the Parade as a family event, a community gathering,

and an artistic expression of their psychological worldviews. Ilsa and Ruby are very close friends and have been in the Parade together every year. I spoke with Ruby and Linda as part of the group interview mentioned above.

12. **Sylvia** – Sylvia was the 2017 Es Meedli performer and was very eager to be interviewed.

She knew about the Parade from her friends in the community and from seeing it from the sidelines in 2016, but 2017 was her first year actively participating. She provided insights into being a child performer and learning to use the back-mounted puppet and was interviewed in-person under the supervision of her parents.

13. **Chris Orapello & Tara Love-Maguire** – Chris and Tara are members of the

Philadelphia and New Jersey neo-Pagan community. They host a podcast on neo-Paganism and occult practices called *Down at the Crossroads* and are acquainted with many members of Robert Schreiwer's Urglaawe community. They participated in the 2015 Krampuslauf and offered a number of perspectives on non-Heathen neo-Pagan involvement in the Parade. I have spoken to them several times, both in-person and through online mediums.

The participants in this Parade, as well as the participants in my research, have almost always been eager to share their thoughts on specific aspects of the event. Subjects of research were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Subjects are only excluded if they do not give consent or if they are minors without parental/guardian consent, neither of which were factors within the scope of this project. Following Internal Review Board (IRB) guidelines, written or verbal consent to interviews was obtained prior to the actual recorded interviews in the case of these extant materials. In most cases, subjects agreed to have their identifiable information shared as part of the research. In all cases, subjects were offered the opportunity to use a pseudonym

during the research as well with IRB approval, an option pursued by only two participants. Several events were observed directly, including the Parade itself, in public spaces, and in those cases I have made observations about certain individuals without involving their particular identities. In general, those observations tend to be useful for noting trends or themes in costumes or performance, but they are not being observed for behaviors distinctly connected with membership in any of the primary groups studied, such as costume creation, or questioned directly. The final exclusion criterion only rejected potential interviewees or subjects who seemed unreliable as sources, and in the case of this project no direct interviewees needed to be excluded on this basis. The communities observed and the individuals who participated all did so within the framework of the larger project or tangential research efforts, the processes of which I will outline in the next section.

### **Unpacking the Krampus' Sack: Methodology & Research**

My study of the Parade launched through contact with individual members such as Rob Schreiwer during a period when I also encountered a number of key ideas from the fields of folklore and American Studies. These texts and the contexts they provided shaped my understanding of the groups and individuals I investigated. Simon Bronner's *Explaining Traditions* (2011) provided intellectual challenges to my existing notions of "folklore" and "tradition," especially his chapters on tradition as something connected with direct passage and contact and the ways that the internet provides ways for compartmental folk communities to engage with one another. As I grappled with those definitions, I saw Bronner's analysis of intentional traditionality as a method of resisting cultural homogeneity—a concept he demonstrates has wider support in the folklore studies community—enacted by the Parade participants. They use the figure of the Krampus as a way of exercising control through an

appeal to folkloric roots while acknowledging their intentionally constructed performance as a novelty. That concept of “performance” also piqued my interest, especially as I read Susan Manning’s (2007) contemporary analysis of the term as one suited to the field of American Studies. I will return to Manning’s definition later in this chapter to reimagine the term in light of my findings during my investigation of the Parade. Early research prompted a draft of potential introductory material related to the setting of the Christmas Monster in the American cultural scene more broadly, and to track the development of the primary American Christmas figure of Santa Claus. Close examination of source materials found in Alfred Shoemaker’s (1999) work as well as Leigh Eric Schmidt’s *Consumer Rites* (1995) lit a fuse that led me ultimately to see the contemporary Santa as partially rooted in Pennsylvania German customs, but greatly augmented by literary interpretations by Washington Irving and Clement Clark Moore and commercially appropriated by Thomas Nast and others during the nineteenth century. This research influenced my chapter on historical antecedents, my analytical chapter with particular regard to children’s reactions to Santa and Krampus, and my conclusion with relation to the broader cultural situation of the festival. Additional research in religious ethnography of contemporary neo-Paganism facilitated more opportunities to study Krampuslauf Philadelphia and its communities more intimately, as well. Ultimately, my efforts at historical research and my time spent with the subjects of my ethnographic studies led to a deeper round of analytical research that produced an initial piece of published scholarship for the journal *Contemporary Legend*. That published material is largely a condensed version of the material found in Chapter Four.

I approached my research with three primary methods, reflected in the structure of this dissertation’s chapters. My first approach involved archival research and historical contextualization, which has largely become the body of Chapter Two. I visited several regional

institutions to investigate their collections related to holiday customs, particularly anything related to the Christmas monster as a thematic figure of celebration or festivity. I also used newspaper archives found through library research at the Penn State campus—both at the Harrisburg campus and through the broader Penn State library system—to track the discussions of creatures like the Belsnickel and the Krampus as they appear in print throughout the United States. I draw upon the research of Alfred Shoemaker (1958; 1999) and his papers at the Shoemaker archive at Ursinus College, primarily finding materials related to the Pennsylvania Belsnickel and the evolution of regional Christmas celebrations. I also draw upon the written work of Al Ridenour (2016) for information on the European Krampus traditions. The archives at the Pennsylvania Center for Folklore (formerly the Center for Pennsylvania Culture Studies) at Penn State Harrisburg also afforded me an opportunity to examine archived materials in journals like *Keystone Folklore* and the Archive of Pennsylvania Folklore and Ethnography, where I found several student papers from the late twentieth century discussing holiday customs connected with the Belsnickel. More broadly, I have drawn upon eminent historians in the field of holiday performance, particularly guising traditions. Both E.O. James (1961) and Roger D. Abrahams (1987) inform my vocabulary of study and analysis of the ritualized festive performance, while Ronald Hutton (1996) and Jack Santino (1995; 1996) provided a great deal of context for the specific guising traditions found in European and American holiday celebrations. James, in his sweeping comparative interpretations of European holiday traditions, captures many of the themes of the early and medieval European Yuletide season. His summation of the “misrule” of the period from final harvest into the new year and the pre-Lenten Carnival season supports subsequent readings of that period, including my own, as what Alessandro Falassi (1987) refers to as “time out of time.” The suspended movement of the

calendar leads, in James' evaluation, to other suspensions as well, including a suspension of social order. James also pays particular attention to mumming traditions, to which the Krampuslauf festivities are intimately connected. The intellectual compilation and interpretation in *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals* prefigures other scholars' attention to the phenomenon of "folk drama," which James sees as particularly prevalent during the winter guising season, calling it a mixture of "burlesque" and "sacred solemnities" (278). Roger D. Abrahams (1987) makes finely articulated distinctions between the forms of festive celebration, discerning the finer points of formal structures in "ceremonies" and "rituals," while seeing "festivals" and "celebrations" as having a quality of "openness...the opening of the doors of the community...or through a taking to the streets" (178). Abrahams' distinctions are incredibly insightful, particularly his emphasis on the playful nature of festivity, but I have here opted to use the terms "festival" and "parade" interchangeably with regard to the Philadelphia event as the former term most accurately fits the form that Abrahams would ascribe to the Parade of Spirits, while even through reflexive naming practices the latter term is deeply associated with the event.

Similarly, Stephen Nissenbaum's *The Battle for Christmas* (1996) provides a broad, sweeping view of the historical American landscape in winter. What Nissenbaum charts is a fraught relationship between the public holiday of Christmas with its drinking, guising, wassailing, and rabble-rousing elements in conflict with religious and moral sensibilities of various groups including the New England Puritans and the slaveholding Southern plantation masters. The "battle" he explores follows the struggle up to the early twentieth century, when Christmas had been transformed from its use as an agricultural "punctuation mark" to a "new-styled domestic Christmas," in which the family unit and home life during the holiday season became the de facto, recognizable form of Yuletide merriment (5, xi).

The work of Susan G. Davis (1986; 1992) has been invaluable in specifically locating the importance of festive holiday parading in Pennsylvania and Philadelphia, as well as offering some of the tools for rhetorical analysis I build upon in later chapters. Davis' specific evaluations of parades as collective exercises in identity politics and power dynamics inform my readings of the Philadelphia Parade as an extension of earlier regional parades in their contest with an authoritative public culture dominated by one particular group. At the same time, what Davis describes as a rowdy and disruptive affair fueled by alcohol and a working-class sense of frustration diverges from the intended disruptions of the Krampuslauf. In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century celebrations, young men fueled by alcohol caused authorities to fear for public safety and led to a drive for the domestication of the Christmas and New Year's holidays and parades. In contrast, the current Parade uses disruptive forms like the Krampus to exorcise what the communities involved perceive as toxic influences on their lives, including commercialism and, in a bit of dramatic historical irony, public intoxication.

Moving from the historical to the contemporary in my research, I engaged in a participant-observation of Krampuslauf Philadelphia during three separate years: 2014, 2015, and 2017. I approached this research with an emphasis on a closely-described, closely-read interpretation and analysis of the components before me. I attended the Parades with an eye to capture specific, detailed interactions: costumes and masks; noise-making, music, and invocations; and behaviors among the particular communities involved with the Parade that spoke to the identities they ostensibly wish to display. Because the Parade cannot be taken as a singular, "day-of" event, however, I sought out other opportunities to participate and observe the communities in action. I attended additional workshops for developing the puppets, masks, and other material culture of the parade. Participant-observation also involved attending events run

by the Central Pennsylvanian Heathen and “maker” communities. In addition to participation-observation at the event itself, I have participated and observed—with the approval and knowledge of my presence from event leaders—in the online forums and groups that discuss, organize, plan, and execute the Krampus-related events in the Philadelphia region and its immediate surroundings. As my research will show, this extended practice of festival in the digital realm is the central nervous system of the Parade, underpinning all organizational and interpretive actions and reflections. While the event itself remains at the heart of the Krampuslauf experience, without the online communities that support the Parade it would likely cease to exist, and so observing and participating in the digital environment is key to understanding the event as fully as possible. The work of Victor Turner (1967; 1969; 1984) was my point of departure for examining the Parade through the lens of performance studies, particularly within the framework of a quasi-religious or spiritual experience. Using Turner’s lens of performance as a reflexive “social drama” when done in the public festival sphere, I take Chapter Three to develop a *mise-en-scène* for the Philadelphia Parade with an emphasis on material and performance culture. I expand the scope of the festival beyond the event itself—illustrated most fully by the digital performance of the Parade long after the physical event is over—using the “practice theory” of Simon J. Bronner (2016) and ideas about “digital ostension” developed by Michael Kinsella (2011).

Beyond the direct participation and observation of the Parade, my approach involved ethnographic interviews with participants over the course of several years. My focus has largely been on the adult participants, who make up fully 75 percent of my interviews, although I also intentionally sought out interviews with children—the key factor necessitating IRB approval. My initial interviews focused on event founders in Philadelphia, then expanded to include

additional interviews with those informants who added new voices and insights to the research materials pool. Participants who attended one or two Parades often provided unique perspectives, while all participants frequently returned to similar themes no matter how many Parades of Spirits they had attended. Interviews involved participants beyond the immediate Philadelphia event to include regional Belsnickel performers and participants at Krampuslauf celebrations in other locations such as Los Angeles and Oregon. I followed up with any interested and willing interviewees who participated in the Krampuslauf event and collected the data in the form of recorded audio interviews and logged social media interactions, followed by the transcription, interpretation, and analysis portion of the ethnographic work which makes up Chapter Four.

Each of the groups I study in the context of the Parade has different goals, which required a division of scholarly labor in terms of analysis. The maker community frequently emphasized problems with capitalist and commercial influences on the holidays, areas of study already well-examined by scholars such as Stephen Nissenbaum (1996), Karal Ann Marling (2000), and Leigh Eric Schmidt (1995). The Krampuslauf, however, works as an anti-festival in the context of mainstream Christmas celebrations, and so offers a new form of social critique that is incredibly potent for scholars of American cultural studies. Nissenbaum's extended discussion of the social and religious conflicts in early America over the Christmas holidays demonstrates that the roots of the conflict between secular revelers and institutional authorities stemmed from existing tensions in Europe, a perspective filled out and supported by Ronald Hutton's *Stations of the Sun* (1996) and *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (1996a). Nissenbaum and Hutton describe parallel conflicts emerging on both sides of the Atlantic during the English Civil Wars and the Restoration period, with national and religious politics playing out in the everyday lives of people. Those who embraced the revels of the season could find themselves in conflict with

authorities, often with significant legal consequences, yet the revelries never died away. Nissenbaum illustrates how the areas in which institutional authorities accommodated the season of revelry and worked with it often found more success in establishing a degree of control over events. In cities like Philadelphia and New York, Nissenbaum says, the “Saturnalia of discord” eventually became tamed by authorities through controlling alcohol consumption, the timing of parades, and the criminalization of public rowdiness, while those who still wanted some sort of holiday expression found that women, shopping, and children were all elevated and a “new kind of holiday celebration, domestic and child centered, had been fashioned and was now being claimed as the ‘real’ Christmas” (98-99).

Marling, in her seminal book on the material trappings and historical trimmings of the holiday, titled simply and aptly *Merry Christmas!* (2000), describes the power of the consumer spectacle in the transformational process of Yuletide domestication. Stores like Macy’s drew crowds to their shop windows with bold, exciting displays full of quirky toys and technologies, transforming a trip to the store from an act of need to a form of social entertainment. While the glass separated the well-heeled elite from the street rabble outside, both were participating in the relocation of the holiday from the tavern and street to the storefront and home: “the spectator did not need to want the objects inside—or to look forward to giving or receiving them,” says Marling, “in order to enjoy Macy’s wondrous windows of the 1880s” (85). Marling also describes the ways in which an increasing emphasis on shopping, on decorating, and on other forms coded in gendered terms as part of the woman’s “domestic” sphere of influence shifted the balance of power over the holiday from debauched men to religiously-minded and family-oriented women. She likewise supports some of Nissenbaum’s evaluations of the shrewdness of groups like slaveowners in “allowing” a small amount of Christmas excess by displaying largess

in an almost courtly display of power during gift-giving. Schmidt's book also tracks the domestication of Christmas as one built upon "feminine" gender codes. Poring over trade publications and personal diaries, Schmidt finds that the Victorian Christmas of Eastern North America shifted from one of public parades and male drunkenness to one in which women like New Yorkers Elizabeth Merchant and Clara Pardee gained the upper hand and filled their diaries with accounts of shopping for ever-more elaborate gifts. This domestication process occurred, as Schmidt deftly illustrates with direct citations of shopping lists and diary entries, within the span of only a few decades. The changes wrought by this domestication, however, had lasting consequences for the holiday. Commercial interests transformed shops like Wanamaker's into "Christmas cathedrals," and the sanctity of the holiday became tightly linked to its consumability (159).

Schmidt, Nissenbaum, and Marling, along with holiday folklorist Jack Santino (1996) have all discussed the "war on Christmas" as a cultural phenomenon, and the Parade is a specific and marginal reaction to that battle. On the one hand, the emphasis on families and children remains a key focus for some groups, especially in Philadelphia, while displays of public drunkenness are frowned upon. On the other hand, the hegemonic dominance of the holiday season by commercial interests has led to an embrace of the disruptive, aggressive, and scary figure of Krampus by communities who see capitalism as devoid of soul or meaning for themselves. Similarly, the spiritual communities that are most drawn to the Krampuslauf often stake out their own positions in that conflict, eager to "reclaim" the holidays from mainstream culture and religion. Sabina Magliocco (2004) has done work on the appropriation and re-appropriation of culture by neo-Pagan groups, and has noted the way that tradition can become "fetishized" in practice and eventually commodified. The groups who use the Krampuslauf event

as a spiritual space struggle at times with the tension of commodification, as well, while also seeing the incorporation of Old World holiday practices as an important aspect of the continuity of their own spiritual traditions. Parents and children are a critical component of the social groups involved in the Parade, and so my interpretation and analysis of those roles requires a combination of rhetorical and psychological approaches. Fortunately, Cindy Dell Clark (1995) has already offered a richly conceived interpretation of the Christmas myth surrounding Santa Claus, emphasizing his symbolic importance as a being of warmth and size during a time of darkness, cold, and paucity. Clark specifically sees Santa as the moral authority in children's lives, an approachable omniscient deity of sorts who reconciles conflicting values—"naughty" and "nice," snow and fur, physical corpulence and travel through tight spaces—by signifying the child's own inner conflicts and providing an almost-inevitable reward for the best parts of the child's self. That interpretation reads Santa as an object of wonder, but also opens up a space for interpretive dissonance for children who do not find Santa's size or omniscience comforting, a point that provides an excellent embarkation point for my own analysis of Santa's darker cousin and his kin.

The final chapter of this project is not methodologically different from the other chapters, as it relies on ethnographic interviews and research-based interpretation from context. It does, however, expand the range of my work from the Philadelphia event into a larger American cultural sphere. Chapter Five sets the Philadelphia Parade in comparison with two alternative American Krampuslaufs: the oldest one in Portland, Oregon, and the Los Angeles event that began after the Philadelphia procession. Portland's parade, while sharing a number of sympathetic aims with Philadelphia, differs in its approach to official sanction and emphasizes a spiritual side that makes it a "gateway" activity for regional neo-Pagans, according to the

Parade's founder, Arún. The Los Angeles event, by contrast, emphasizes a continuity with Old World forms, despite frequent accommodations to its New World, Hollywood-influenced environment. I compare the Old-World events found in Ridenour's research with the contemporary celebrations in the United States, noting the key differences in performance and the social environment of the different processions. Al Ridenour is involved directly with the Los Angeles Krampuslauf, which also includes an annual "Ball" to help raise funds for the event and which has drawn performers from places like Austria to come and participate. I also use this chapter as an opportunity to develop the role of the online performance, in Philadelphia and in the other Krampuslauf communities of the United States. While each group has its distinctions, this chapter will also show just how closely networked the communities of the Christmas monster are, with both Ridenour and Arún actively involved in the Philadelphia event through physical attendance or digital engagement. The performance seen in Krampuslauf Philadelphia goes far beyond those who don costumes for a single December night each year, and I probe the pop cultural "gaze" that has been steadily narrowing in on Krampus in the past half-decade. The responses by those involved with the Philadelphia Parade have been instructive, an act of reflexive performance that seeks to maintain a degree of momentum and simultaneously maintain a degree of equilibrium to prevent the "commodification" of the event.

The Parade as it currently exists involves the physical and intellectual investment of dozens of individuals, all of whom have particular goals for the Parade's outcome that must be harmonized to create a unified event. Resistance to commodification provides a convenient anchor for most members of the primary groups involved, since all the participants I interviewed mention that resistance in some form or another. The members of the Parade all deploy their costumes, bells, drums, and growls to engage with the holiday season in ways that do not

conform to mainstream participation. Santa Claus gets subverted by the Krampus, jingle bells become a cacophonous din of various percussion instruments, and the private home celebration spills into the streets and park to join neighbors and strangers together in revelry and festivity. The Parade's functional disruption of dominant culture—what Antonio Gramsci identified as a bourgeois “hegemony” of ideas spread by a particular and empowered class within a society—re-asserts folk control over a holiday season perpetually under contention from religious groups and a commercially secular environment full of Santas selling new cars and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer dance remixes. Concerns over potential trajectories for the Parade, however, loom over each gathering. In the next section, I will offer an extended comparison to another countercultural parade to map some of those trajectories and ask what this research means for American cultural studies as a field. In particular, I turn to Susan Manning's (2007) examination of the keyword “performance” in the American cultural environment, a word that warrants reconsideration in light of my research on the Parade of Spirits.

### **“Alternative Parades” – Comparing the Philadelphia Krampuslauf and the Pasadena Doo Dah Parade**

The rise of the Krampuslauf in American culture followed the “dark night of the soul” period of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The turbulence of the post-9/11 American cultural landscape of paranoia and the rise of an ever-deeper and ever-wider digital culture fraught with numerous perils like identity theft, disinformation (“fake news”), and viral attacks was capped off by an economic recession in 2008. The procession from fears of terrorism to a Krampuslauf in the Northern Liberties is not a direct line, however. The use of festivity to sanctify and express broader cultural anxieties—such as paranoia over dangers one cannot easily see or an omniscient “Big Brother” state controlling information flow—allows groups of people with shared concerns to collectively address those worries. Masks and costumes materialize monsters, but the faces

inside are friendly ones awaiting discovery. One can don a mask oneself, becoming the fearful thing for a few moments, and gaining insight into the world of monsters. The Krampus and his kind demand answers and mete out punishments but do so in a way that might be described as “chaotically neutral,” acting monstrous in the service of a greater good or evading questions of omniscience through direct confrontation. These concerns, and these methods of addressing such concerns, are not novel, although I would argue the specific aspects of Krampuslauf and the specific anxieties addressed by the Parade are worthy of study as a representative practice of ritual drama in response to social concerns. How long will the Parade last, however? While the Parade gives form and function to the participants, will those participants inevitably drift away as those concerns transform or disappear? As one goal of American Studies is interdisciplinarity, however, the exercise of comparative analysis can offer ways of reading the cultural landscape around the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits and seeing markers of likely pathways forward for the event and its affiliated groups.

The 1970s were a similarly turbulent decade to the early 2000s, one full of terrorist attacks and hostage crises, a continued struggle for civil rights for minorities and women, and an environment of political scandal, economic downturns, and war recovery. Making too much of the parallels between the decades is a reductionist exercise, but the social atmosphere that followed both decades resulted in sharp cultural changes that left many feeling displaced, uncomfortable, and eager to criticize the status quo. In 1978, thousands of people in Pasadena witnessed a parade full of “outlandish and unconventional behavior [that] had no rules” (Lawrence 1987, 124). The Pasadena crowd had come for the annual Rose Parade, an official and mainstream festival event with formal approval and an emphasis on beauty. What they experienced instead was the First Occasional Doo Dah Parade, an event that draws upon the

established vocabulary of festivity and procession to intentionally subvert the symbols and meanings of the Rose Parade. Denise L. Lawrence (1987) examined the Doo Dah Parade, with its lawless and ironic skewering of the formal culture around the Rose Parade, and her study offers several potential points of comparison with the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits.

First, both parades exist in the context of a city with a much bigger and better-known “official” parade. The Rose Parade in Pasadena may not be as controversial as the Mummers Parade in Philadelphia can be, but both receive widespread official sanction and encouragement. The secondary parade events like the Krampuslauf or the Doo Dah Parade exist largely because the mainstream parades do not address the needs and wants of the more intimate communities in their respective cities. Next, the Parades both have loose official structures which place some control in the hands of an individual or small group—a “czar” in the Doo Dah’s case, and the small group of founders in Philadelphia. These official overseers guide the parades through the terrain of event organization, official permitting, and behavioral enforcement. To this last point, both parades post regulations, but enforcement is lax. The Parade of Spirits, as noted already, essentially follows two rules: (1) You are responsible for your own fun and part of someone else’s and (2) Do not scare anyone who does not want to be scared. At the Doo Dah parade, the czar enforces rules about cleaning up after pets and a few others, but generally follows the dictum “Never make a rule you can’t enforce.” Since the czar does not want to enforce many rules, few rules are actually ever codified. Finally, both parades encourage institutional resistance through ritualized forms of exaggeration. In the case of the Doo Dah Parade, the exaggeration takes the form of clowning or parody, while the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits uses the form of the Christmas monster as a springboard for countercultural messaging.

The Doo Dah Parade evolved during its first decade of existence and map potential trajectories that could be meaningful for the Krampuslauf in Philadelphia:

- 1) **Social Critique** – The Doo Dah Parade actively began to incorporate images of social critique within its first decade, primarily by tapping into popular culture and media images that could be parodied to make a pointed statement about a societal problem. The group of former and current smokers who organized the Cancerettes troop in the Doo Dah Parade wore costumes that parodied popular cigarette brands, for example: “Old Mold” (Old Gold) or “Yukky Strike” (Lucky Strike). If subgroups within the Parade of Spirits begin to see the Parade as an outlet for social criticism, incorporating elements of the feminist #MeToo or the social justice #BlackLivesMatter movements, for example, the costumes on display will likely begin to reflect those critiques. Many members of the Parade already support social justice movements, and the intersections of those causes with the Parade seems a likely outcome. Already the Urglaawe group has used the Parade as an outlet for making a statement about Pagan Pride, carrying the “Heathen Traditions” banner during the 2016 procession. Amber’s emphasis on neurodiversity and the steadily growing neurodiverse community present at the Parade have already shaped some of the costuming decisions, as Amber noted in her Oxford talk. Yet public visibility has not been a goal yet for that group in the way that it has for the Heathens. Given the controversies about white supremacist groups coopting Heathen spiritual traditions, the Parade of Spirits will begin actively broadcasting messages about diversity, inclusion, and tolerance through irreverent guising, a process that has already begun

- through the embrace of non-Heathen neo-Pagan participants and the emphasis on inclusivity of neurodiverse participants.
- 2) **Rule Creation in Response to Bad Experiences** – In the Doo Dah Parade, Lawrence notes that “most...parade rules and guidelines have been created with a more serious intent, usually following a negative experience with the parade” (128). Because of the laissez-faire approach the czar takes to rules in Pasadena, rules are crafted as a reaction rather than proactively. To date, the Parade of Spirits has managed to maintain its two-rule “official” order, but the likelihood of an eventual injury or a potential conflict among participants means that some kind of official order will inevitably become more engrained. Even in the realm of the “unofficial,” rules have already concretized, as through Janet Finegar’s admonitions to avoid the Running of the Santas crowd and the self-control expected of participants who do engage in any drinking activities. The need for more structure and rules, especially if the Parade of Spirits grows much beyond its current limits, likely sits just beyond the horizon of a single problematic incident.
- 3) **Institutionalization** – Once the rules become more formalized, parades tend towards a degree of institutionalization that shapes them in ways that account for participant safety and minimal liability on the part of organizers. However, as Lawrence notes, when a parade is essentially founded on a spirit of “ritual disorder and spontaneity” institutionalization becomes “pragmatically problematic.” (128). Both the Doo Dah and the Krampuslauf Parades depend upon the thematic power of misrule and disruption of social norms. The fundamental nature of the parades resists institutional control. Yet parades are also events of repetition, practice, and regulation, and their

“transition from collective spontaneity to social structure” is its own liminal experience, a process Lawrence notes in a nod towards Victor Turner as a type of normative *communitas* (134-35). Because the Doo Dah Parade depends upon the central authority of the czar and the Parade of Spirits depends upon Amber, Janet, and others to continue it, the transition of organizational roles will likely require a certain amount of standardization in order to ensure the continuation of the parades. This does not necessarily mean the parades will become fully mainstream and normalized, however, but that their systems of control and organization will need to be regulated and imitable.

- 4) **Movement from the Liminal to the Liminoid** – The experience of the liminal has been a central feature of the Parade of Spirits, and one that has been identified as an attractive part of participation, especially by neo-Pagan members of the community. In the Doo Dah Parade, however, what began with a “fragmented” group of local residents thumbing their noses at the Rose Parade eventually moved into a something “more heterogenous.” Lawrence again points to Turner and his identification of the “liminoid experience; liminal-like but clearly belonging to the partial realm of play and leisure-time pursuits of modern society rather than to the realm of sacred ritual” (Ibid.). The liminoid experience transforms the ritual drama into a type of playtime, still a time-out-of-time but one that subverts mainstream culture without any direct objective. At that point, it is possible that the anti-commercial focus of the Parade will be compromised in favor of a “maximum fun, maximum reach” approach that involves commodification. However, given the intense emphasis on sanctity—religious or more broadly “spiritual”—from at least two of the primary communities

involved, if the emphasis of the Parade of Spirits shifts away from creating a space for sacred play, it will likely be because a new, even more heterogeneous group of participants see the Parade of Spirits as a vehicle for cultural expression that goes beyond what those currently involved in the event have conceived. Incorporation of political messages or ironic parody into guising could disrupt the sanctity of the Parade for its current participants, while growing it in new directions that maintain its countercultural themes.

None of these potential trajectories is fixed, and there are a number of reasons to believe that such trajectories will not play out for the Parade of Spirits. While social critique is certainly on the minds of many participants, few have chosen to make overt statements through their costumes or masks at the Parade, even though they may have intense conversations about social justice in other, related spaces like social media. The Pasadena parade encountered its first problem incident in its third year, resulting in the creation of a new official rule, while the Philadelphia Krampuslauf has successfully completed more than twice that number of processions without needing to expand its official rulebook, even if there are unofficial guidelines circulated among participants. The institutionalization of the Parade of Spirits may be managed by a transition of control in the coming years from Amber and her cohort of founders and organizers to another generation already rising up and taking on leadership tasks, such as Tucker or even Ruby and Ilsa. Finally, while Turner recognizes the “liminoid” as a form of parade devoid of ritual meaning and essentially relegated to the realm of play and leisure, that does a disservice to the intensely ritualistic and symbolic world of play on its own. Turner seems to see a “fakelore” to the institutionalized Parade, or at least something akin to the

“folkloresque,”<sup>3</sup> an idea that can potentially be seen in the transformation of the Krampus into a pop cultural phenomenon. Yet the Parade of Spirits actively works against forces that might strip it of ritual value, such as commercial influence. By resisting those influences, the Parade can remain a liminal experience for some even while new participants use it as a platform for political or social critique.

The Doo Dah Parade has had a lifelong past the initial decade found in Lawrence’s study. The official website for the event in 2018 exclaims boldly that “The 41<sup>st</sup> Occasional Pasadena Doo Dah Parade is Coming, Sunday, November 18, 2018!” (See <https://pasadenadoodahparade.info/>). The timing of the Parade has shifted away from the Rose Parade, which is held on New Year’s Day, indicating that the Doo Dah event has its own particular following. While it no longer centers on the original ironic protest of the dominant Pasadena parade, it still features the merry-making and misrule that characterized the first Doo Dah event, and it has gone on to inspire other Doo Dah events as far away as Ocean City, New Jersey. The Parade of Spirits in Liberty Lands, Philadelphia may yet have that longevity and retain its ties to the communities that founded it. The tightly-knit relationships between various Krampuslauf events throughout the country have already outpaced the Doo Dah events, and the historical grounding of the Krampus figure in folklore and culture provide an ostensible traditionality that more reactive events like the one in Pasadena lack. While Amber and other Philadelphia members have shifted the focus away from Krampus even in the Parade’s name, the specific entity of the Krampus still has a home at the Parade, and the change in name can be read

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<sup>3</sup> While the term “folkloresque” loosely fits some of the phenomena at the Parade of Spirits, the general meaning of the word involves a discursive level of popular appropriation of folklore and folkloric repurposing of popular culture that goes beyond the scope of this particular festival and beyond the scope of this particular study. At a far enough remove, the Parade has been deeply influenced by popular culture and through broadcast and social media has an effect on pop culture as well, but that discourse is still limited by the localized nature of the procession. See Michael Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert’s *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in Popular Culture* (2015, Louisville, CO: Univ. Press of Colorado) for a more extensive discussion of the term and its implications.

as a way of accommodating him by insulating him from commercial exploitation. While the novelty of the Christmas monster within popular culture may have some faddish qualities as I will explore in the next section, the persistence of Krampus and others like him in the communities that put on his fur and bells and horns maintains his folk cultural momentum. So long as there are people who want to dress up in masks and stroll streets in the winter nights, the Christmas monster has a home in places like Philadelphia.

In both the Pasadena and Philadelphia festive performances, the act of “parading” speaks out against a dominant cultural paradigm dictated largely by commercial interests, and in both cases central figures and a minimalist approach to rules have shaped the contours of adaptation that the Parades have undergone in order to survive. The Doo Dah Parade continues, now largely divorced from its origins of direct conflict with the Rose Parade, but still maintaining its nose-thumbing attitude towards contemporary consumerism with business-suited drill squads and people costumed as carcinogenic cigarette brands. Philadelphia’s Parade, just emerging from its nascent period, experiences growing pains and adapts by changing names, broadening the scope of “spirits” involved, and connecting with communities underserved by a popular cultural hegemony that emphasizes sweetness and light in its holiday celebrations. The embrace of darkness, a theme multiple interviewees emphasized, goes hand-in-hand with the power of resistance to conformity.

The course of this research has put me in contact with a remarkable group of people, all of whom are deeply interested in making meaning out of their lives using the Parade of Spirits. In the context of the Krampuslauf, they do this meaning-making by creating something physical, a point that Karen Manning (2007) explains as setting apart a cultural performance from the twenty-first century experience of the everyday because people rarely have “encounters with live

bodies bound in time and framed in space” (2007, 180). The Parade of Spirits in Philadelphia depends upon those live encounters, the event bound by physicality and time and space. Yet it also exists in a realm of practice, and ostension, and liminality. One of my young informants spoke to me during our interviews about why people fear the Krampus, and he pointed out that “he’s just doing his job.” In a cultural environment that deprives people of festive misrule, Santa Claus has become a well-scrubbed marketing tool, a being who has gradually lost his coal and switches over time since they do not jive with the Coca-Cola drinking, M&M-eating, new-car-selling jolly old elf image. Krampus, and those who celebrate him in Philadelphia, restore darkness to the winter season and give participants mechanisms for dealing with their own mundane experience of that darkness. The Parade of Spirits proceeds through the streets not as an attack on Santa, but as a reminder that ignoring the darkness does not make it go away, and that even the most monstrous creature can be lovable in its way, especially at the “maker-friendly, family-friendly festival of winter terror.”

## Chapter 2. HORRID FRIGHTFUL LOOKING OBJECTS

### The “Colony of Aliens”: European Migration and Holidays in Pennsylvania

William Penn’s charter for the creation of a territory between the 38<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> parallels initially set the space apart as a land for English settlement, under the governance of English laws.<sup>1</sup> From the outset, however, Penn’s Woods demonstrated a cosmopolitanism that rivalled Holland’s in the early Modern period. Penn set his land apart with the intention of creating a haven for Quakers persecuted by Puritanical peers in England, and yet even in early Philadelphian history Anglican settlers were welcomed, and the immediate proximity to Lord Baltimore’s territory of Maryland ensured that at least some Catholic settlement occurred. With a flexible attitude towards religious toleration, Pennsylvania rapidly became a refuge not only for Quakers, but for a variety of dissenting religious sects in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

British ascension was all but guaranteed by the rapid rise of Philadelphia as the social, political, and economic hub of the mid-Atlantic English colonies. While British settlers pushed beyond the frontiers west, north, and south of Philadelphia, the mercantile nature of Philadelphia’s commercial economy and the opportunities it afforded kept many British colonists hugging their port city. The Quaker communities of early Pennsylvania did not engage with holiday celebrations like Christmas as religious festivals, at least not in any official capacity, but Christmas traditions with English roots gained a foothold through Anglican and Catholic settlers. The English Christmas backgrounds were hardly the family-friendly, “peace on earth” affairs so often associated with a post-Dickensian Christmas celebration. Instead, they were what Ronald

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<sup>1</sup> See “William Penn’s Charter of Priveleges,” Historical Society of Pennsylvania (<https://hsp.org/education/unit-plans/william-penns-charter-of-privileges>).

Hutton (1996) describes as a “centre of political and religious tensions” that eventually placed all Yuletide celebrations in the crosshairs of governmental restriction and persecution (24). Feasts and public spectacles of drinking and merrymaking defined the experience of the Christmas holidays in England to the point that during the English Civil War period, Christmas became a target for leaders within the religious and civil institutional structures. Mummers, who could hide behind their masks to engage in their revelry, became a focus of many complaints, often with good reason: “At the end of December 1657, [an] inhabitant of a western cloth-making town, Frome, complained to the county bench that he had been beaten up on the 26<sup>th</sup> by a group who had been ‘drinking, playing cards and fiddling all day in disguised habits’” (Hutton 1996, 21). Similar scenes could be found all over England and Scotland, with mirroring complaints made to local magistrates by abused citizens, although it seems that many rural denizens also enjoyed and supported the ongoing Christmas revels. British emigres to the mid-Atlantic colonies often came from that rural class and found opportunities in places like Philadelphia to continue their guising traditions, alongside other forms of festivity and revelry. Encounters with Native tribes such as the Delaware and the Wyandot, both of whom were friendly with the French, may have resulted in an exchange of cultures surrounding the holidays at some level, but such exchanges are speculative at best in terms of their scope. The influence of inherited British rural celebrations, however, can be asserted without a doubt, as the “revellers [sic] disguised by blackened faces, masks, handkerchiefs, or fancy dress” described by Hutton (1996, 26) as part of the English and Scottish countryside very closely resemble the blackface, mock military garb, transvestitism, and burlesque costumes and masks catalogued by Susan G. Davis (1986) in early nineteenth century Philadelphia. The gap of a century and a half, however, provided an incubation period for some distinctly American cross-pollination of holiday revelry customs.

The defining moment for the arrival of European Christmastide customs in Pennsylvania came with the influx of German immigrants during the eighteenth century, a tide bolstered by continuing waves of immigration after the American Revolution and into the nineteenth century. Popular conception paints these immigrants as emigres from an area of Germany called the Palatinate, but while a singular wave of German immigrants did arrive from this area of Germany in 1709, broadly speaking the German settlers of Pennsylvania came from a variety of German principalities extending beyond the Electoral Palatinate (Häberlein 2017). Because Germany in the eighteenth century essentially consisted of a loosely federated series of nations sharing a common language, the arrival of “Germans” in Pennsylvania is not quite so accurate as the arrival of German-speakers, and language became a hallmark of the cultural group that developed in the New World. These German-speakers eventually became the “Pennsylvania Dutch” due to English perceptions of the word *deutsch* (German language) and caused a great deal of concern for early Pennsylvania governors like William Keith and Patrick Gordon, who were concerned that their “English plantation” was “being turned into a Colony of Aliens” (Schwartz 1987; Häberlein 2017). By the time of the American Revolution, however, German-speaking settlers accounted for about one third of the Pennsylvania population, settling further to the interior of the continent in counties like Lancaster, Berks, and Lehigh and setting the stage for a long, rich cultural heritage (Penn. Historical & Museum Commission).

The Pennsylvania Dutch<sup>2</sup> brought with them many of their native traditions, including a variety of holiday customs and celebrations. Christmas trees, for example, reputed to have their origins with Martin Luther, featured prominently in Pennsylvania Dutch homes during the

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<sup>2</sup> I will use the term “Pennsylvania Dutch” throughout this work when referring to the German-speaking peoples who settled in Central and Eastern Pennsylvania, as that is largely the emic terminology used by that ethnic group today and for the sake of consistency with many of the sources I cite.

Christmas season. Many of the eighteenth-century settlers from England who followed their English Reformation Puritan and Quaker traditions eschewed holidays, but Rhineland Germans organized their religious year around liturgy, and thus the celebration of Christmas remained, and even thrived. On the frontiers of Penn's Woods, Pennsylvania Dutchmen and –women encountered other settlers who had continued to rely on liturgical calendars, such as the Moravians of Lititz or the Catholics of Goshenhoppen and Conewago (Shoemaker 1999). The wide variety of religious groups found within Pennsylvania ensured a lively and ongoing tension between the celebrators—“Lutherans, Reformed [Church], Moravians, Episcopalians [Anglicans], and of course the small Catholic group,” according to Shoemaker—and the anti-Christmas contingent made up mostly of the Quakers, some conservative Scots-Irish, Methodists, Baptists, and “Plain Dutch” groups like the Mennonites (ibid.: xiii). The Scots-Irish settlers, while often steeped in Calvinist Presbyterianism, retained the contrarian streak that had earned them the ire of the English crown in the first place, and so many of their folk customs survived the transition from Old World to New, including holiday ones. The British folk customs surrounding Christmas also managed to find a home in the tolerant mid-Atlantic region. Folk rituals involving setting nuts by the fire as a way of fortune-telling and discovering potential lovers persisted in the “open hearth” Christmases of Pennsylvania, very similar to “Nutcrack Night” rites found in Britain. Holiday pranks, such as locking the schoolmaster out of the schoolhouse while creating chaos inside, persisted into the early twentieth century. Large-scale eating and drinking, the latter often the purview of men, appears in a number of the memorates collected by Alfred Shoemaker (1999) from historical newspapers and written accounts. Some communities, such as the Moravians, developed distinctly religious traditions to mark the season, such as the *putz*, or Nativity scene placed in a public space, which had its own processional

traditions: “Between Christmas and Twelfth Night the Moravians in Bethlehem used to go *putzing* [sic] to see cribs or crèches their neighbors had created and everywhere were treated to wine and the special Moravian Christmas cookies” (Mitchell 1947, 219). Processions between houses and communities appear in nearly all rural Pennsylvania communities in some form. Alms begging and “Second Christmas,” or Twelfth Night, carried on in a number of locations both urban and rural, inextricably tied to the tradition most relevant to this study: mumming. Ronald Hutton (1996) details how, despite official condemnation of Yuletide celebrations, the Scottish lower classes continued on with their holiday revelry:

At Aberdeen in 1606, thirty years after the campaign of repression began, the kirk [official church] session had to condemn anew the ‘superstitious time of Yule or New Year’s Day’ and direct that henceforth the citizens should not ‘resume to mask or disguise themselves in any sort, the men in women’s clothes, nor the women in men’s clothes, nor otherways, be dancing with bells, other on the streets of this burgh or in private house’...Every one of those [sessions] before had been defied by revelers disguised by blackened faces, masks, handkerchiefs, or fancy dress; traditional festival costume...At Yule in 1603 a man rode through the town with a cloth over his head, while another was accused of ‘singing and hagmonayis’ [Hogmany celebrations, a Scottish New Year’s practice] at New Year. Two years later a set of Aberdonians got into trouble by going through the streets ‘masked and dancing with bells’(Hutton 1996, 27).

Hutton’s revelries were mirrored on the North American side of the Atlantic in both rural and urban settings. The pitch of the merrymaking veered into the criminal on many occasions. One New York resident, Phillip Herring, was away on New Year’s Eve in 1851, when his wife was surprised by a street reveler entering their home uninvited. The man insulted her, likely because

she refused him the traditional “hospitality” of her station and was then arrested. On Broadway that same year, 150 intoxicated men assailed and nearly destroyed an upper-class restaurant (Nissenbaum 98). In Philadelphia, similar scenes of tumult disrupted the Christmas Eve of 1833, with “[g]angs of boys and young men” who “howled and shouted as if possessed by the demon of disorder” in the streets, according to a newspaper account (Nissenbaum 103). Outside of the cities, groups of “drunken rowdies” often caroused from house to house, as reported by a woman remembering her grandmother’s stories of such goings-on in Kensington, Pennsylvania (Yoder 1951). Rural folk practices also manifested in urban environments, largely due to the mixture of official tolerance and unofficial ethnic insulation that pervaded large mid-Atlantic cities. Philadelphia’s cosmopolitanism ensured that many of these traditions continued to find circulation in the city, a point to which I will return, but it was on the frontiers and in the rural communities of Pennsylvania Dutch country where the most distinctive of the German holiday imports developed: the Belsnickel.

### **“Nicholas in Furs”: Origins and Activities of the Belsnickel**

Accounts of visits from the Belsnickel range from the quaint to the vaguely terrifying, particularly in narratives collected from adults reflecting upon their childhood encounters with the creature:

I was sitting alone, one Christmas time, when the door opened and there entered some half-dozen youths or men, who frightened me so that I slipped out at the door. They, being thus alone, and not intending further harm, at once left. These, I suppose, were Christmas mummers, though I heard them called “Bell-schnickel”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This account is from P. E. Gibbons, “The Pennsylvania Dutch,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (October 1869). Cited by Alfred Shoemaker in his card catalog collection of Pennsylvania German Lore at Ursinus College, Collegeville, PA.

On the other hand, many of those remembering the belsnickling tradition did so from behind the mask, as former participants, a perspective that offered them a different way of understanding the event:

Particularly vivid in my memory is a Christmas eve [sic] when I was one of three or four lads who started out to act the ‘Belsnickel.’ Well each of us boys carried a switch in his hand. We dressed in the clothing we could find at home, tied handkerchiefs over our faces and filled our pockets with chestnuts and hickorynuts. We went to the house of a neighbor where there were children, and expected to have some fun by frightening the children by our singular appearance, throwing nuts on the floor, and belsing [striking with a whip or stick] the children if they should pick up any of the nuts. We tinkled our bells, entered the house and began jumping about and throwing nuts... We knew nothing of Santa Claus, rosy and plump, with twinkling eyes and furry dress making his aerial visitations in a sleigh drawn by reindeers at the dead of night<sup>4</sup>

The ongoing conflict—and conflation—with Santa Claus runs through many of the remembrances of Belsnickels past. Formal features such as the hairy face—sometimes hidden behind a mask—and fur-bedecked traveling clothes, the distinctly male voice and mannerisms, and the ever-present switch and sack all overlap with the broader notions of Santa. The performance of the Belsnickel role, however, was far less about “ho, ho ho” and far more about “no, no, no.” As a figure of social order and correction, the Belsnickel’s visit was anticipated with anxiety by most who remember it, even if their reflections do wax nostalgic. The

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Shoemaker’s book on the subject of Pennsylvania Christmas customs reflects only a fraction of the massive primary source collection he assembled on the topic.

<sup>4</sup> “Reminiscences of Belsnickling,” *The Pennsylvania Dutchman*, v.3, no. 14. 15 December 1951. The account given is taken from one reported by “Mattias Mengel, sixty-five years of age, in 1985 reminisc[ing] about the time he was a lad sixteen years of age in Caernarvon, about two miles away from Morgantown.”

Belsnickel's origins seem readily apparent at a glance. A young man dressed in a shaggy, rough costume and carrying a bag and sticks, he shares much in common with a variety of Old World guised figures who traipsed around the European countryside during the pre-Modern and early Modern era (Hutton 1996a; Santino 1995; Raedisch 2013). Many who reported experiences with Belsnickels in their youth make a connection with the "Kriss-Kingle," "Christ-Kindle," or another variation of German dialect referring to the visit from the spiritual manifestation of the infant Christ from Christian mythos. By the mid-nineteenth century, the use of the term had traveled in two different directions. Among the German-speaking immigrants, the "kriss-kingle" was synonymous with the actual gift or gifts given to children during the holiday season. Among non-German-speakers, the phrase evolved into Kriss Kringle, and began to be used in conjunction with the figure of Santa Claus by the end of the century (Shoemaker 1999). The informants who do discuss the connection frequently emphasize the point that the Belsnickel is not the same thing as the Kriss-Kingle, the latter being primarily a blessing-giver or domestic spirit of gift-giving derived from the story of the Christian Nativity. However, those who discuss the presence of the Belsnickel do speak of his gifts as being "Christ-kindly," aligned with the beneficent purposes of the Christ-child figure (Shoemaker 1950). The Belsnickel clearly has European antecedents, including a number of the same antecedents that inform the Philadelphian Krampus of the Parade of Spirits, but the form of the Belsnickel in the New World seems distinctive and particular, as has been shown by Richard Bauman (1972). I am significantly less concerned with Belsnickling as a "survival" of "fertility cults, midwinter saturnalia, and spirits of the dead revisiting the earth, all in 'dim antiquity,'" than I am in the significance of the figure's evolution and his meaning within the American communities that supported him (Shoemaker 1999: 139). Still, I would be remiss not to discuss the Belsnickel as a creature of a kind with

figures such as Swartze Piet in southern Germany, Pere Foutard in France, Čert in Bohemia, and Knecht Ruprecht in northern Germany. In Central Pennsylvania, as well as in a number of regions touched by the influence of Old World German-speaking immigrants, particularly those from the area known as the Palatinate, the shaggy Belsnickel and his kin represented the time of year closest to New Year's. Since the calendrical celebration of Christmas frequently took up the span of time between Christmas Eve on December 24<sup>th</sup> and "Old Christmas" or Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup>, these figures simultaneously represented the Christmas season as well. Lore and meaning varies significantly, as do the actual guising traditions, material costuming, and community roles assumed by each figure, but on the whole these figures are usually the companion to the holy figure of St. Nicholas, who rewards good children while his diabolical companion punishes bad ones. In a few cases, the two figures merge, giving us Pelz-Nicklaus—and a variety of spellings to go with that—meaning "Nicholas in furs."<sup>5</sup> The hairy Nicholas seems to have been the figure to cross the Atlantic most intact, and it is from him that the Belsnickel takes his shape.

Once in the New World, the Belsnickel began to evolve in four distinct directions. Initially, he appears as a solitary figure within small communities, who acted as both a bogeyman and a wise fool to terrify children and amuse their parents. In his bogeyman form, he amalgamates the realistic fears of children into a supernatural form, bringing them forward to account for their misdeeds and meting out punishments and rewards in response (Widdowman 1971). His role as fool inverts social order, as the parents often knew the youth under the furs

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<sup>5</sup> "The 'Belsh Nichel' and St. Nicholas has been a time of Christmas amusement from time immemorial among us... 'Belsh Nichel,' in high German, expresses 'Nicholas in his fur' or sheep-skin clothing," from John F. Watson's 1830 *Annals of Philadelphia*, quoted in Shoemaker, "Belsnickel Lore," *The Dutchman*, Winter 1954. See also Mac E. Barick, *German-American Folklore* (Little Rock: August House, 1987), 146-47; Gerald C. Milnes, *Signs, Cures, & Witchery: German Appalachian Folklore* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 188; Shoemaker (1999), 138; and Raedisch, 86-9.

and mask and allowed the young man to step into their role temporarily, a sort of “king for a day” (Bauman 1972; James 1961). He simultaneously appears in increasingly urban environments, usually towns or neighborhoods tightly knit together by ethnicity, where he eventually became incorporated into large, frequently rowdy, parades that spanned the entire city. His strong ties to ethnicity make him a signifier on Pennsylvania German-ness as a whole, especially in response to their interactions with other groups, such as the English or African Americans. At some point, he lost his solitary identity and turned into almost solely a trooping figure, with whole groups of Belsnickels traveling through towns or cities in a sort of winter-season trick-or-treat. Even the name Belsnickel became transformed at this point, and the phenomenon of rural guising and “shooting in” the New Year was called “belsnickling.” Finally, we find him in literature, where he came to represent either the quaint customs of the Pennsylvania Germans or to serve as a mold from which the popular Santa Claus figure would later emerge. None of these strands is completely isolated from the others, and the Belsnickel appears in all of his guises in various places right into the mid-twentieth century, a problem which can create a tremendous amount of confusion for someone trying to find him hiding in any one place or time. One person may speak of remembering “belsnickels” from their youth, meaning a raucous parade of rural youth bringing in the New Year with pranks and gunfire, while another person may speak of a favorite uncle<sup>6</sup> who visited during the Christmas season to make the children recite a rhyme in exchange for some sweets.

In addition to the German-inflected manifestations of the Belsnickel, the influence of Scots-Irish immigration and its associated guising traditions seems to have contributed much to

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<sup>6</sup> In some cases, the Belsnickel was not even portrayed by a male family member. See the later account by Fay McAfee Winey of her mother’s performance as a Belsnickel.

the festive performance of rural Belsnickling. Gerald Milnes (2007), in his survey of folk beliefs on magic and witchcraft in the middle Appalachian regions, notes that Northern Ireland retained a strong tradition of mumming during the late fall and the whole of the winter season. Henry Glassie's (1983) examination of Irish Christmas mumming supports the Old-World roots of these practices as well. Surprisingly, the Belsnickel seems to be almost entirely associated with Pennsylvania German culture, with little reference to Scots-Irish heritage, even in Milnes' work. Once in the New World, the mumming traditions of the distinctive ethnic groups began to overlap and support one another. Mumming frequently involved blackface performances, and folklorist Susan Davis (1986; 1992) describes numerous instances in which the white lower classes employed racially coded performances to actively mock or protest black members of the Philadelphia population. The group of men who drunkenly destroyed the Broadway restaurant mentioned earlier were "mostly Irish," according to sources, for example. Boston celebrations of the holidays in the early nineteenth century featured home invasion scenarios similar to the one experienced by Phillip Herring's wife, exacerbating a growing divide between working and elite classes in the city (Davis 1986). One group of Bostonian mummers, the Anticks, made a point of invading the homes of the rich city citizens, from whom the "vagabond" performers believed they were due donations and gifts according to established Old World custom. The Anticks, however, found themselves facing down a shift in the cultural climate, and their "customary 'license'...was coming under challenge" (Nissenbaum 1996, 43). Class and racial divides played out in the street performances of the mummers, but the Belsnickel retained a regional character that was alternately retained in rural areas or eventually stripped away in Philadelphia.

Whatever the European origins, the Belsnickel incubated in Pennsylvania in his most influential form, a nineteenth century fur-clad traveler who carried presents—and importantly,

switches or rods to beat naughty children—to rural households, a grotesque figure who also appeared in Philadelphia’s more cosmopolitan mumming festivities. These threads of development led to the Belsnickel becoming a figure of regional identity, even as belsnickling traditions continued elsewhere in the country. Belsnickels continue to appear as one of the featured “spirits” in the Parade of Spirits, and in many ways they are the access point for at least one of the communities involved in the Parade. Following each strand of the Belsnickel’s evolution provides a rough guide for understanding the figure’s role in the communities that supported him—or in some cases, attempted to reject him. The Belsnickel is persistent and adaptable. He has managed to survive more than two centuries, and even today he appears with renewed life as a figure in both popular culture and living history museums. Timothy Essig, an educator and performer at the Landis Valley Farm & Museum in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, has portrayed the Belsnickel during the museum’s holiday seasonal programs. During interviews, he spoke emphatically of the Belsnickel as an “American invention,” one which combined many of the European forms into something new. Essig also notes that much of what the museum knows about the Belsnickel derives from the work of Alfred Shoemaker, and so the reflexive turn of scholarship has ensured the Belsnickel’s continued performance and survival. The Pennsylvanian identity of the Belsnickel has become the dominant one, and other origins have been obscured or transformed into a background narrative of the Pennsylvania Dutch version of the creature.

Pennsylvania Germans treated the Belsnickel as both a figure of cultural identity and as a figure of resistance during the nineteenth century. When civic legislators—English-speaking ones—perceived that masking and guising parade, which often included Belsnickel figures, were growing rowdy and large, they passed laws designed to quash such festivities, and push them

back towards suburban slums and out of the city proper (Davis 1992). Official culture engaged in a selective targeting of any costumed, masked, or blackface figures like Belsnickels, a move that more generally targeted mummers as a source of social disorder and public drunkenness. Such laws had little or no effect on Pennsylvania Germans, who continued to host visits from roving Belsnickels or bands of Belsnickels long after the laws had been enacted. As the Belsnickel adapted to urban environments and an increasingly connected and domesticated Pennsylvania environment, he joined a number of similar figures shooting in the New Year and generally making life uncomfortable for those legislators and their class.

While early accounts of the Belsnickel's activities depict him as a solitary figure, over time he began to travel in troupes, either with other Belsnickels or with similar figures of misrule and revelry. Entire communities threw themselves into Belsnickel celebrations, and gatherings of Belsnickels were expected:

In some parts of Berks [County], the 'belsnickel' parties have ceased making their annual visits, but in most sections they are still keeping up the old custom and having lots of fun, too. In the northern part of the county parties of this kind are especially large (Shoemaker 1954, 36).

New Year's Day or Bel-Schnickel [sic] Day in Paxtonville, a small village in Central Pennsylvania, was celebrated every year and this despite sub-zero temperatures, falling snow or deep drifted snow...On this day the station agent was angry the whole day through and bitterly complained about the number of people gathered there. Some spent the entire day in the railroad station, leaving it only for a few minutes when the trains stopped, to run out to greet the passengers or mainly to just 'show off.' Others would

leave and come back again a half a dozen or more times during the day. They occupied the seats, stood or lounged against the walls and also sat on the floor (Winey 1970, 10).

Indeed, even during the Belsnickel's solitary days, he frequently finished his evening by gathering with other Belsnickels in costume to consume the cakes and ale they had amassed during their evening visits to the several area homesteads. The close association of the Belsnickel with the New Year eventually wove the tradition of "shooting in" into his performance, and the groups of Belsnickels who had completed their rounds would then make an informal processional, discharging firearms as a way of announcing their grotesque parade (Milnes 2007; Shoemaker 1999).

Such trooping eventually gave rise to the rural custom of belsnickling, which transformed the figural Belsnickel into a verb that simply meant any parade of masked figures raising a ruckus in a rural area. Gerald Milnes recorded such night rides of guised celebrants as late as 2001 in the hills of West Virginia and traced the origins of those celebrations to the influence of Pennsylvania Germans who had travelled down the spine of the Appalachian Mountains (Milnes 2007). As previously discussed, these revels caused some consternation to civic authorities, particularly when the Belsnickels took their parade to city streets.

**“Making Night Hideous”: Urban Belsnickels, Fantastics, and Mumming in a Class-Divided City**



*Figure 1 – An urban Belsnickel. Picture taken in Halifax, PA, 1 January 1910, by Miss A.W. Clemson and presented to Alfred Shoemaker in 1959. Photo from the Alfred P. Shoemaker Archives at Ursinus College*

The Belsnickel was never a stranger to urban environments. He appears in Philadelphia newspaper accounts dating back to 1823 and continues to appear in cities well into the twentieth century (See Fig. 1). As in rural settings, he functioned as a rallying point for ethnic identity and united German-language groups within the Germantown region of the city. He was not alone. In addition to primarily Belsnickel-composed troops, a number of other characters came to be associated with the Belsnickel processions. Events called “Fantastics,” or in some cases “Fantastics,” assembled a wide range of unruly types: people performing in blackface, cross-dressing spectacles, those in costumes of bears and other animals, and any number of marchers in costumes of motley (Shoemaker 1957-58). These processions became critical spaces for

working out tensions among the urban ethnic minority populations. During Fantastics African American and European American immigrant groups would freely hurl insults at one another. Some fighting broke out from time to time, but the space was generally understood to be an opportunity to discharge tension about racial relations within the city environs. According to folklorist Susan Davis, “The racial and ethnic antagonisms within the working class served middle-class interests, fragmenting the potential for class-wide labor and political organization. Not one of the public complaints against masking objected to the strands of mocking supremacism it contained”(Davis 1986, 194-5; See also Shoemaker 1958). The Belsnickel, with his grotesque form and “Dumb Dutch” associations, made a good target figure for the Fantastical processions. Davis indicates that the figure of the Belsnickel was freely incorporated and interpreted within the urban context. One reveler by the name of William Haines “mounted a huge shaggy cap and with mask and flowing beard had drawn a great crowd around him in Chestnut Street” before finally being arrested (106). Since he was sometimes played by smearing soot over one’s face, the Belsnickel’s association with blackface also became deeply entrenched, and in this form he is one of the many “Jim Crows” and other racial mockeries found in the Philadelphia guising parades.<sup>7</sup> In other parts of the country, the racial performance flowed the other way, with African American slaves sometimes dressing in whiteface to perform wassails and mumming rites, like the “John Canoe” ritual of coastal North Carolina (Nissenbaum 1996). The whiteface performances, however, never reached the pervasive levels of the blackface ones,

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<sup>7</sup> While the soot-smearing traditions of the Belsnickel guise do appear to have developed into Jim Crow performances, it would be going too far to say they originated as such racial portrayals. Even in contemporary Danish celebrations the blackface of Swartze Piet is often explained by those donning the guise as “soot,” and more strongly associated with the smoke and fires of Hell whence comes the Christmas monster. One participant in the Philadelphia Parade echoed this explanation in conversations I had with him. However, even with such adamant insistence that the sooty guise is not racially coded, the eventual connection between blackface performance and these figures in Philadelphia’s history indicates that at least to some the racial overtones were intentional and significant.

largely because African Americans parodying whites stood to lose much more than whites in blackface did. Other racialized performances, such as one account of a rural Belsnickel troupe in which a performer dressed as a Native American, “clad in a complete suit of Indian uniform and trappings,” influenced performances in the urban landscape, where Native dress was adopted as part of Mummer’s Parades (Shoemaker 1999, 79).

The Fantasticals of Philadelphia in the eighteenth century grew rowdy and unruly, and as noted above, authorities began to attempt to rein in the revelers. Eventually parades were allowed by permit only, and the Fantastical performers organized into companies and gangs, not unlike in the celebration of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. The Pennsylvania German Belsnickel in his furs and bells faded into the background, although his blackface performance did not, and his influence as a lightning rod for racial tensions remains active even into the twenty-first century.<sup>8</sup> The Fantastical eventually became the Mummer’s Parade, if only in that the long-standing traditions of organized masked carousing now had a legally-controlled time and place for expression. Susan Davis (1992) carefully traces the progress of this transition, including the deliberate shift from nighttime revels to daytime parades as a method of controlling the madness. The urban celebration adopted distinctive and subversive elements that did not appear in rural practices.

Transvestitism, while certainly a part of the Fantasticals and other reveling celebrations, does not seem to show up in most remembrances of Belsnickel visits, nor do the troops of roving Belsnickels which made their rounds prior to the emergence of the urban celebration seem to

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<sup>8</sup> In 2013, a “tribute” to the Mummies’ Parade history included a number of references to previous uses of minstrelsy in the parade, although blackface itself was avoided as it has officially been outlawed since 1964. See Aisha Harris, “A Philadelphia Parade’s ‘Tradition’ of Racial Insensitivity,” *Slate*, 3 January 2013 ([http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/01/03/mummies\\_parade\\_racism\\_philadelphia\\_tradition\\_needs\\_to\\_be\\_reevaluated\\_video.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/01/03/mummies_parade_racism_philadelphia_tradition_needs_to_be_reevaluated_video.html))

have taken on such a role. Quite the contrary, since as noted in the earlier account, women sometimes portrayed the masculine Belsnickel in regional group celebrations. The cross-dressing found in rural British mumming manages to penetrate the Fantasticals, but in the rural setting, transvestite performance disappears almost entirely in favor of the rougher Belsnickel figure, even when that figure is portrayed by a woman—as in Fay McAfee Winey’s account. The descriptions found in Shoemaker and Bauman, which describe one variety of Belsnickel as “a kind of rough transvestitism, or sex reversal,” seem to be drawing upon later conceptions of the figure, and conflating it with some of the revel companions found in the broader mumming traditions (Bauman 1972: 234). Shoemaker more directly associates the cross-dressing with the broader tradition of the Fantastical, in fact, and some of Bauman’s assertions about women generally being averse to belsnickling are not supported by accounts of those who participated or performed as the shaggy old creature.<sup>9</sup>

Even from an early period, Philadelphia’s mumming practices involved a degree of ethnic tension, and more importantly, ethnic performance. In an article on the development of Pennsylvania Fantasticals, Shoemaker includes a clipped account of the practice from an 1834 Easton, Pennsylvania, newspaper, in which the writer describes a procession of “Indians, negroes, hunters, Falstaffs, Jim Crows and non-descripts” who travel the parade route playing a

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<sup>9</sup> See Shoemaker 1958: 30. Several accounts of women belsnickling can be found in Shoemaker (1999), and one of the most detailed accounts of a woman—a married mother, no less—acting as a Belsnickel is in Fay McAfee Winey’s “Belsnickling in Paxtonville,” in *Pennsylvania Folklife*, v.19, no.2 (1970), 10-13. In Winey’s account, her mother is one of many women who participated in community-wide Belsnickling events, and apparently the women took it very seriously. In fact, Winey reports that she got into trouble for revealing who was under the mask: “On one of those New Year’s celebrations the writer [Winey] had not seen or recognized her mother that entire day. But later that evening when she had joined the group in the station, she became attracted to a man sitting on a bench when she saw him cross his legs and begin to swing his foot back and forth. My mother always crossed her legs and swung her foot when seated. Above the din the writer pointed to the man and called out, ‘That is not a man, that’s my mom.’ She was very angry but controlled herself; needless to say the mischief was done and others began to recognize her. That night when mother was helping her brood to return to normal, the writer got one of the worst tongue-lashings of her young life.”

variety of home-crafted instruments such as “Couch-shells [sic]...tin-horns, speaking trumpets...old kettles, pot-lids, dozens of cow-bells strung upon poles and iron hoops” (1958: 30). In addition to the handmade or cacophonously assembled orchestra, the costumes were festively homespun as well, including “One [who] had a leg covered with feathers, another had one of his understandings [legs] compressed into the smallest imaginable space, while its fellow was stuffed out to the dimensions of a moderate sized watchbox. It was high treason for any man’s leg to look like his fellow; whiskers of all materials, and many of the size of an ordinary currant bush graced the masks or painted faces of the heroes” (ibid.). The Easton event parallels Philadelphia’s Fantastics, with the same sorts of performed ethnicity noted by Davis, including acts of minstrelsy (the “Jim Crows” in the newspaper clipping) and portrayals of British stock characters (“Falstaffs”) and Native Americans (“Indians”). Roger Abrahams (2002) describes an extended encounter between a group of white revelers in Philadelphia mumming as the “Sons of St. Tammany” wearing Indian garb as they hosted a Seneca sachem, Cornplanter, in 1786. In this latter case, Abrahams interprets the revels as a form of patriotic tribute that nevertheless involved potentially painful reminders of the American cultural engine that continued to offer white Americans increasing land and power, while diminishing both among Native populations. Philadelphia’s strong tradition of guising and mumming have long provided it a space—a very public one, in fact—where social and racial tensions are enacted in metonymic performance.

The racial portrayals found in the Fantastics root the contemporary conflicts over racial portrayal in the Philadelphia Mummers’ Parade in the past. In some cases, contemporary portrayals bristle with racial overtones, such as the Sammar Strutters who used brownface makeup, sombreros, and imitation Mexican dances to perform a Latinx ethnic identity in 2016,

much to the chagrin of many other participants and onlookers.<sup>10</sup> The “tradition” of such portrayals in Philadelphia is clearly two centuries old or more. The Parade of Spirits approaches the problem of ethnicity differently, a point I will explore in more depth in Chapter Three, but no incarnation of mumming traditions in the holiday context remains completely devoid of ethnic performance of some kind. Historically, the emphasis on ethnicity coincided with the drunken revelry of a crowd of young, lower-class men, as Davis notes:

Though masks and disguises varied, the real identities of the holiday revelers stood clear: the Christmas and New Year's crowds were always described as young and male. Year after year the newspapers railed against the "drunken men and boys in the streets," the "half-grown boys," "the young rioters," "the inebriated young men," the "groups of hobbledehoyes," and "black sheep" "who made night hideous with Galathumpian doings." Similarly, those arrested for masking and shooting and worse were uniformly young and male (Davis 1986, 189).

These “Galathumpian” men all acted out ethnic tensions within their ranks, even as genuine ethnic mixing occurred among the revelers. Davis notes that participants in Philadelphia mumming may have been almost uniformly young and working- or lower-class men, but that “[j]ust as they came from all areas of the city, so the maskers likely sprang from different national backgrounds. Neither were the crowds all white, despite the mocking convention of blackface, for blacks made fantastical parades and played music in the streets as well” (ibid., 191).

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<sup>10</sup> It must also be noted that the Sammar Strutters received support from a number of people as well, particularly in online communities that claim the parade is all in good fun and that criticize parade critics in turn for political oversensitivity. See Dan McQuade, 2016. “People are Angry at the 2016 Mummies Parade,” in *Philadelphia Magazine* (Online Edition – News & Opinion). 2 January 2016. <http://www.phillymag.com/city/2016/01/02/mummies-parade-offensive-brownface-caitlyn-jenner/>

Mumming in Philadelphia continued to grow and evolve, with a variety of performances filling out the ranks of parading groups. The Belsnickel was only one such figure, and yet for the role he played in maintaining regional, ethnic, and spiritual connections, he is absolutely crucial to the eventual development of the Parade of Spirits. While Belsnickels in late twentieth and early twenty-first century Pennsylvania are largely found in rural settings, the presence of Belsnickels at the Philadelphia Parade speaks to a deeper history, and more importantly, the potent narrative groups like the Urglaawe Heathen community share as a part of their own identity, the strongest “ethnic” component that remains in the Parade of Spirits.

In addition to the uncomfortable racial and ethnic friction embedded in the historical holiday parades, the Easton account makes clear the emphasis on hand manufacture of costumes and instruments. That theme has continued both in the contemporary Philadelphia Mummies’ Parade and the Parade of Spirits, although the emphasis on individual artistic crafting is much heavier in the latter, while an emphasis on group uniformity and musical performance is stronger in the “official” Mummies’ Parade. The design and creation of the costumes could range from the haphazard and slapdash collage of household items to a much longer and more painstaking investment in creating and crafting an outfit. Old World holiday guising traditions, such as the Austrian Krampuslaufs of Bad Gastein or the Perchtenlauf in Salzburg, often involve longer-term crafting projects, many of which can take years to perfect and some of which are passed down from one generation to the next (Ridenour 2016). The unifying factor among these costuming traditions is an almost singular resistance to the outright purchase of a complete costume. Jack Santino (1995) has argued that the “homemade holiday” remains crucially important even in the presence of broader mass-market trends, because the nature of a holiday is to reflect individuals and the networks of relationships in small communities. While a costume or

decoration may not be completely created “from scratch,” it is almost always at least some form of an “assemblage,” the gathering of “found objects” that are symbolically deployed to convey particular messages about the person or group doing the assembling (Santino 1995, 34-35).

Individual elements may be bought, but the costume as a whole is a fabricated and personal assemblage. In the historical framing of mumming events, this craft-orientation stems from the availability of resources—working-class people, even in cosmopolitan Philadelphia, did not have access to expensive fabrics and costly prefabricated costumes in the early nineteenth century. Yet even as commercial availability increased, mumming and belsnickling tended to remain largely homespun affairs. Adults would pull together heavy fur coats and hats, cloth masks with roughly-cut eyeholes or fireplace soot to blacken the face, and buggy whips—all items that would be available on many rural farmsteads. Many accounts of the Belsnickel costume involve scraps or remnants from other farm activities, including sheepskins, “cast-off garments made parti-colored with patches,” or natural materials such as feathers or leather scraps to make them look like “birds, animals, [and] Indians” (Shoemaker 1999, 78-83). Children, too, made Belsnickel assemblages, even though they might be afraid of the visiting Belsnickel. In one account, a resident of Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, recalls that he and his schoolmates would “disguise ourselves by putting on a mask and hanging some burlap bags over our shoulders,” before going treat-begging door-to-door (Shoemaker 1950). Folklorist Susan Davis makes a key observation that while many of the revelers in Philadelphia’s mumming processions were young men, many of the costumes were made by women’s auxiliaries, especially once the parade took on a more official cast following an 1871 effort by the city to reign in roving troops of revelers (1986, 197).

Who created costumes, how they did so, and the specific practices of trooping from door to door or through city streets varied from place to place even within the Pennsylvania milieu. These traditions also competed for space and priority with other holiday traditions: drinking and pranks, for example, or even the practices of feasting or fasting and religious observation of the holiday seasons. In Moravian areas, such as Bethlehem or Lititz in Pennsylvania, many of the masking traditions found little foothold because so much energy and time was already being poured into the tradition of making a Christmas *putz*, or Nativity tableau. Too, the Moravians had their own pious version of public feasting in the “Love Feast,” at which congregation members would be served lightly sweetened buns—*streisslers*—and coffee<sup>11</sup> during the Christmas Vigil (Shoemaker 1999). With myriad celebrations possible, selecting holiday praxes in zones of cultural overlap and intermingling becomes an act of identity formation, a way of staking out a position on ethnic or cultural heritage. Yet many who did not hew too closely to specifically religious interpretations of Christmastide also had the ability to fold multiple traditions into their observance. Adding to the chaos and the revelry of the costumes and parading, the length and flexibility of the Christmas season shaped the performance of traditional activities by offering participants an extended period of play and revelry.

### **Seasonal Observation: Time and the Tradition of Parading**

Participants in the contemporary Philadelphia Krampuslauf and its descendant, the Parade of Spirits, receive social media reminders about the upcoming festivities, which typically happen during the weekend closest to St. Nicholas’ Day, December 6<sup>th</sup>. Historically, revelers have staked out their position on the holiday calendars of Pennsylvania communities with less

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<sup>11</sup> In the twenty-first century, the Moravian Love Feast continues. The author has attended several at the Lititz Moravian Congregation. The service now also includes hot chocolate for those who do not wish to consume coffee in the evening, or for young children, for which their parents are very grateful.

organization and rigidity. Strictly religious observations, such as the Christmas Eve Mass in Catholic areas, might be formally set apart from the workday calendar, but the informal practices of rural mumming could take place anytime from late November to early January. There is even some bleed-over into the Carnival season in some cases, with belsnickling taking place late enough to be thought a part of the pre-Lenten rituals (Hutton 1996; Santino 1995). In Philadelphia, the chaos of the Fantastics was often tied to the New Year, but in some cases could take place well before New Year's Eve. The rowdy parades of the pre-twentieth-century Fantastics often involved nighttime carousing, as well as a period of suspension of social restraint, when a number of ethnic groups would not only mix together as participants, but often vent racial and ethnic aggressions openly and without fear of reprisal. Eventually, these parades were limited by civic authorities who saw them as dangerous, and eventually many of the Fantastical elements became incorporated into the—pointedly daytime—Philadelphia Mummer's Parade during the New Year's celebration (Davis 1992, 185-99; Shoemaker 1957-58).

The temporally unmoored guising traditions were tied to the seasonal cycles often by the organization and use of labor as much as anything else. In rural farming communities, a variety of masked revelry traditions, including belsnickling, took place after the harvests were all in, generally between late October and the New Year. As such, the winter-based guising involving the Belsnickel was of a piece with other folk costume celebrations like Halloween, although the two holidays stayed distinct in the calendrical cycles. Halloween has almost exclusively been celebrated at the end of October, although in the late twentieth century communities began to accommodate school and safety concerns by shifting the specific date from October 31<sup>st</sup> to anytime within a week on either side of that date (Santino 1995). The broader belsnickling tradition seldom happened before the very end of November, but then might occur anytime

during December or January. The most popular night for belsnickling in the mid-to-late nineteenth century seems to have been Christmas Eve, or at least during the week thereof. Newspapers in Lancaster, Carlisle, and York, Pennsylvania, during the 1860s and 1870s all report Christmas Eve as the expected night of the Belsnickel's visitation (Shoemaker 1999, 80-1). Parading troops seem to be more drawn to the New Year, instead. Complicating the timeline even further is the inheritance of a calendrical cycle that frequently placed Christmas on January 6<sup>th</sup>, the date of "Old Christmas" or Epiphany.

The revelry of the guising visitors often included a post-visiting gathering, in which the young men who played the part of the Belsnickel would get together to drink and toast their work. Belsnickling and the parading traditions of the Fantastics resembled one another more and more as the nineteenth century shifted towards the twentieth, with a newspaper in Pottstown noting: "This 'bell-snickle' business, which is becoming more of a rough and rowdyish observance of the Christmas season each year, might as well be omitted altogether" (ibid.). European traditions often took place in early December or early January, with the actual Christmas holiday week reserved for less secular observances. Even in the Old World, however, the rough-and-tumble nature of these processions shock onlookers. Observations of contemporary Krampuslaufs in Austria include a contest called a *rempler*, a type of shoving match between competing Krampus troops that seems very much of a piece with the rowdy behavior found in Fantastics and even some roving Belsnickel groups (Ridenour 2016).

Unlike holidays more directly tied to agricultural festivity, the New Year holidays do not celebrate a particular harvest or the preparations for planting crops that will provide for the

coming year, although some traditions do reflect an agricultural society.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the midwinter holidays and the New Year are a “time out of time,” as festival is often conceptualized (Falassi 1987). While many ancient people situated a New Year celebration in the context of the first signs of spring, the gap between the final harvest in late autumn and the spring thaw eventually became host to myriad festivals, including the New Year derived from European calendar cycles. (James 1961). With minimal agricultural activity, the inter-seasonal period has been filled with activities including hunting and preserving, both of which still have representative holiday connections in Pennsylvania: the opening of deer hunting season in late November or early December, and the tradition of eating sauerkraut and salted pork on New Year’s Day, for example (Yoder 2001). Within this “fallow” period of the year, the traditions associated with belsnickling and parading grew in importance as a way of relieving social tensions based in race, class, or political power that the groups involved had bottled up through the more active times of year. In some ways the Fantastics, mumming, and belsnickling all represent distinctly American and Pennsylvanian interpretations of the “misrule” period of Saturnalia, although the correlation between the two is not a direct line. Jack Santino notes that changing calendars—Julian to Gregorian, e.g.—meant shifting holidays, but that many people deliberately avoided adaptation to the new time scheme, resulting in a “kind of calendrical shift” that has “given rise to two or more festivals or holidays arising out of a single source” (1995, 21). In the case of Philadelphia’s Krampuslauf, we see the birth of a new holiday tradition in responses to a calendar crowded with commercial seasonal markers, most of which are determined by the flexibility of a market schedule that continually moves the holiday season “backward,” with

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Don Yoder (2001) describes a New Year’s tradition of wishing one’s fruit trees a “Happy New Year” to ensure better fruit production in Central Pennsylvania, a celebration exactly described in the form of wassailing traditions in Ronald Hutton’s *Stations of the Sun* (1996) and *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (1996a).

Christmas decorations and gifts reaching store shelves before Thanksgiving, or even before Halloween in many cases.

The increasing emphasis on the marketability of the non-agricultural holiday season has prompted a variety of reactions. In some cases, Christian groups have insisted on “putting the Christ back into Christmas,” a battle cry of the twentieth- and twenty-first century culture wars pitting a progressive and secular society against a conservative, religiously orthodox one. The origins of the holiday conflict go back as far as the 1930s, often with a great deal of intentional obfuscation over the relatively limited role Christmas played in Colonial British America. Still, the Yuletide season has certainly become a powerful market force unto itself—an inversion of the agricultural model of the year in many ways, with commercial productivity concentrated into a sixty-to-ninety-day shopping season rather than a six-to-eight-month growing one. The “misrule” of the calendar, then, under the American market economy, generates anxieties at a number of levels and prompts groups like the Christian Family Christmas Committee or Knights of Columbus to attempt some reclamation of a perceived “traditional” past that can be moored in an orderly, moralistic narrative—both the Christian narrative of Jesus’ birth and the historical narrative of a religiously-based America (Schmidt 1995). Christian groups, however, do not have a monopoly on the spiritual dimensions of the midwinter season or its festivals, and in many ways the pious protest against the desacralization of the winter holidays is a common thread shared by both contemporary neo-Pagans and contemporary Evangelical Christians. In Chapter Four, I will sustain a deeper examination of some of the groups who make meaning out of the winter holidays through spiritual lenses other than Christianity. Jack Santino has also pointed out the commercial mutation of guising traditions in another major holiday, Halloween, which has undergone a dramatic revision from its “tricks and treats” roots in pranking and processional

begging to become a highly child-oriented holiday that can also serve as a lightning rod for community safety issues (Santino 1995; 1996).<sup>13</sup> Crucially, many of the groups involved with the Philadelphia Krampuslauf repeatedly cited their desire to subvert the commercial forces of the American calendar in the same way that conservative groups do, albeit with different results in mind.

Pennsylvania could hardly have been better suited to the reemergence of Krampus. The precedents of holiday guising in the forms of Fantastics and regional belsnickling, as well as the less-than-jolly figure of the Belsnickel himself, all created a space for the importation of Krampus. The Germanic heritage of many Pennsylvanians allows Krampus to be simultaneously familiar and alien—not unlike the “Colony of Aliens” described by William Keith and Patrick Gordon. The misrule represented by the frightful figure of Krampus also derives not only from the indirect influence of ancient Saturnalia rites, but from the Calathumpian chaos of mummers and Belsnickels, and acts as a focal point for resisting or revising the calendar of the American economic system, which itself acts as a subversion for more traditional modes of production. When the first Philadelphia Krampuslauf stepped off from Liberty Lands Park in 2011, it trailed not only a few hundred masked revelers, but a few hundred years of distinctly Pennsylvanian history and culture. The stage had been set long before the players arrived.

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most potent example of Halloween’s transition from community revelry to a more commercially-focused holiday is the adaptation of “treats” given out following a number of unsubstantiated scares over tainted candy associated with the holiday. In the wake of contemporary legends regarding fears of intentionally contaminated candy, communities frequently adapted by rejecting any handmade or homemade treats and opting only for purchased, pre-wrapped candy from reputable brands, a major commercial envelopment that nationalized the holiday through candy merchandising. See Brunvand, Jan. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003; Santino, Jack. 1996. *New Old-Fashioned Ways: Holidays and Popular Culture*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

### Chapter 3. YOUR OWN FUN AND PART OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S

#### Setting the Stage: The Parade as Social Drama

This chapter will build upon the historical derivations that have already been discussed in Chapter Two and establish context for the Parade of Spirits as it exists in the early twenty-first century. Specifically, the Parade's performative and material culture elements will take center stage, with an emphasis on the people, places, and things that come together during the Parade each year. My descriptions will attempt to cover three different Parades of Spirits, from 2014, 2015, and 2017.<sup>1</sup> In the first two years discussed, the Parade was generally known as the Philadelphia Krampuslauf, and emphasized the figure of the Krampus most centrally, although in all instances additional holiday folk characters could be found as part of the Parade. By 2017, however, the multifaceted nature of the Parade, its participants, and the types of guising and performance displayed at the event more closely fit the "Parade of Spirits" description—a subtitle often employed in event advertising even prior to 2017. In addition to the Parade event days themselves, I will be incorporating direct observational notes from peripheral events, such as crafting "build days" held in area community centers or art galleries and the frequent online interactions from the Krampuslauf Philadelphia Facebook Group.

The descriptions will be loosely categorized for ease of relation, but in all cases I strongly emphasize that no part of the Parade exists within a vacuum, and many aspects of the categories below overlap or bleed into one another during the larger event. Parades belong to the "performative" genre of folklore, and thus require both participants and observers to have a

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<sup>1</sup> Due to a bout of inclement weather and dangerous travel conditions, I was unable to attend the 2016 Parade, although I had been involved with the group through online interactions leading up to it, and I received several accounts of it from first-hand participants later. Since it was not a primary participant observation, however, most of my description will depend upon the three years listed.

psychological framework with which to interpret the symbols and actions displayed. The most useful framework is that of Victor Turner's "social drama" concept, a lens that provides a suspension of ordinary time and place in favor of a heightened, focused, and exaggerated showcase of "deep values" (Turner 1984). A personal background in theatre and literary studies predisposes me to credit Turner's perspective, because the language of set, scene, props, costumes, actors, and staging are a part of my own vernacular. With that bias in mind, I begin by discussing the immediate physical environs of the Parade and its "home base" location of the Liberty Lands Park in Philadelphia's Northern Liberties neighborhood. I then describe the three parades in terms of their costumes, props, and material objects such as noisemakers or fire-dancing accoutrements. The performative aspects of the Parade follow, with descriptions of its movements, character embodiments, and some of the ways in which participants prepare to be a part of the procession. Finally, I will examine the "before-and-after" performances found among participants, primarily through their online interactions in which they discuss the Parade and share ideas about future plans and projects or inspirations for designs or performances. Since parades are always, on some level, ritual drama enacted before the public gaze, deconstructing the parade in theatrical terms makes sense. After all, the audience for a theatrical performance depends upon actors, sets, props, and costumes to derive meaning from a particular piece of performative literature, even if they are filling in those aspects using imagined forms while reading Amiri Baraka or William Shakespeare on the page. The currency of those forms, established through repeated performative conventions, allow the rhetorical significance of the story, the interactions, or the event elevated on the stage to register with an audience. Crucially, those acting within the play, as well as those in charge of making props, dressing the set, directing the actors, or aiming the spotlights all understand that rhetoric as well, and deploy it—

hopefully—in the successful performance of the play. In the case of a parade, the “script” may be more loose than literate, but the performative elements remain intact and absolutely essential to the rhetoric of a parade’s contextual meaning for both participants and observers.

While at the broadest level these descriptions are intended to give the reader a sense of the Parade as it is for a participant, I again emphasize that the Parade is not a singular event, but an ongoing practice of performative culture. The culture, or cultures in many cases, converging in the Parade of Spirits bring together people of many different skill levels, including trained artists, young children, and working-class families. To be a part of the Parade is to be a part of many performances, and a continuum of practice that starts with seeing a costume or hearing about a figure in the Parade and grows into an experience of embodiment. In general, active participation is the rule at a Krampuslauf, whether it is in Philadelphia or Bad Gastein, but at Philadelphia’s event specifically the drive to drive performance out of formal, officiated control and into the hands—and horns—of participants is central. Amber Dorko Stopper specifically stated in one of her interviews a sentiment that was echoed by multiple others: if you come to Krampuslauf or the Parade of Spirits, “you are responsible for your own fun and part of someone else’s.” While Amber and other “official” Parade members do maintain a degree of control over the event—setting the date and time, for example—performance within the event and beyond its immediate temporal-spatial borders lands in the lap of anyone willing to put on a costume, make some noise, and walk. To walk within the Parade enacts the tension between reverence and misrule.<sup>2</sup> The Parade in Philadelphia reclaims and reflects upon the sanctity of the holiday season by embracing its irreverence and displaces the holy order and hierarchy of “official” holiday

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<sup>2</sup> A much fuller discussion of the role of Misrule and the holiday discourse between “holy” drama and “profane” drama, such as between Nativity pageants and a Feast of Fools, can be found in E.O. James’ *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals* (1961).

customs like Santa Claus or the Nativity by saying “anyone can be a monster here, so long as you participate.”

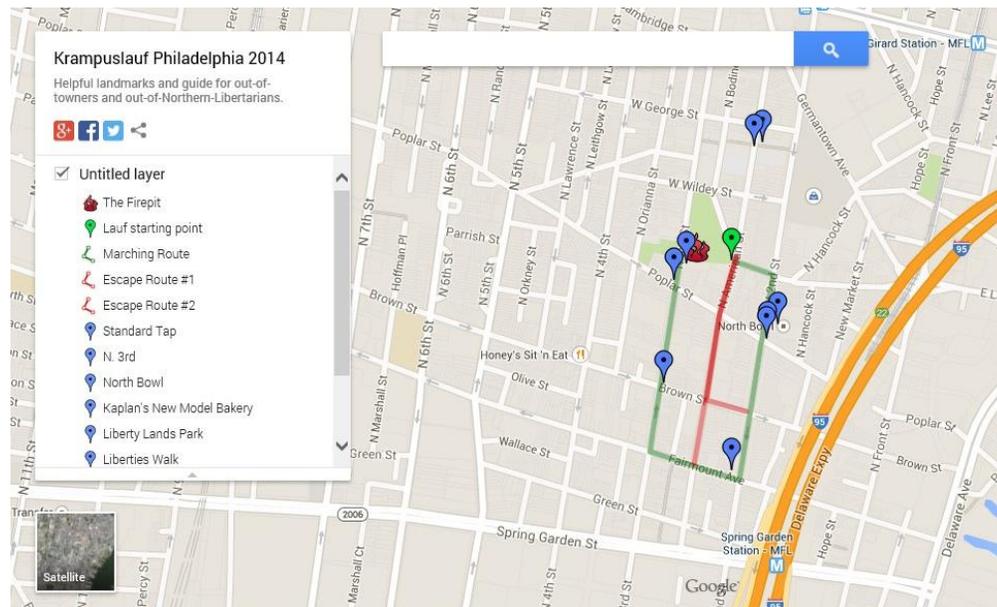


Figure 2 – A Google Maps layout of the 2014 Krampuslauf Parade route, posted by Amber Dorko Stopper in the Facebook group for the parade attendees

## Setting

Invariably, the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits begins and ends at the Liberty Lands Park in Philadelphia’s Northern Liberties neighborhood (see Fig. 2). The selection of the specific location came from a serendipitous intersection of wants from parade founder Amber Dorko Stopper and the park’s coordinator, Janet Finegar. Janet had already been extensively involved with public puppetry and parading through her work with the Bread & Puppet Theater Company in Vermont. When Amber contacted Janet, Janet was immensely enthusiastic about her event, despite Amber’s relative inexperience in putting on a Parade:

The funny part of the story where Amber contacted me and she knew me only as the e-mail address associated with the park, but she had seen it and said, "Well that would be a really good place to do this thing that we want to do...And so, you know Amber you know she is on the computer all the time [and] I'm not so it was a total coincidence that she happened to send a message fairly late at night, when for some reason I was sitting looking at my computer. So it popped up and I read this little description and I had to go Google Krampus. And then basically wrote her back and said 'Hi, I'm the person associated with the park I have a Master's degree in folklore and folk life. I've done puppetry all my life. It's something that's really important to me. I'm really into public spectacle and participatory theater; we're going to like each other. This will work. Yes you can do that at Liberty Lands and this will go well.' And actually the next thing she did was send me a picture of Claudia and Béla [Stopper's children], who were two at the time, with the "teddy Krampus," she had knit for them. And the next message was like 'Ah, yeah, we're going to be friends. We'll be all good.'"

Amber's choice of Liberty Lands was largely directed by its neighborhood location, a part of Philadelphia that had undergone an artistic renaissance in the 1990s and has since become one of the centers of art, fringe, performance, and crafting culture in the city. The immediate conviviality of Finegar and Stopper became a vital force for drawing in other participants, and the park's neighborhood identity contributed to its functional use as a central "base" for the initial Krampuslauf. The park is not owned by the City of Philadelphia, but rather through a neighborhood cooperative—the Northern Liberties Neighborhood Association—which pays for its upkeep and maintenance. There is even a participatory bathroom program, the "potty club,"

through which local residents can pay a small fee to help maintain and gain access to the restroom shed at the park, which has a coded entry lock.

The park is a triangular greenspace bounded by North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and North Bodine Street on its western and eastern borders, respectively. Its northern border is West Wildey Street, and it extends south to a row of buildings—mostly housing with a few first-floor commercial spaces—that extends loosely along the trajectory of West Laurel Street. The park’s total size comes to roughly two acres, and is home to a playground, a community garden, a neighborhood flower garden, a fire pit, performance space, and the aforementioned bathrooms. The buildings at the southern boundary of the park are decorated with murals by local artists, and the rules of the park include its dawn-to-dusk time and park rental instructions, as well as a list saying that park guests should “Control Your Pets” and “Control Your Humans” to keep the park in top condition.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Parade of Spirits, the park hosts a number of other festival events, such as a February WinterFest, a spring and summer Farmer’s & Craft Market, and an annual Fall Festival. Liberty Lands acts as a magnet for artistic interest, and the local community center, situated a few blocks from the park, often hosts events related to neighborhood art. In advance of the 2017 Parade of Spirits, I attended a crafting event on the evening of December 1<sup>st</sup>, during which a group of nearly two dozen adults and children—aged from toddler age through late teens—worked on creating various “God’s eye” decorations out of popsicle sticks and yarn. These crafts were later used by the performance group Lux Arati, hung from the trees around the park during the Parade event. Several of the parents and children in attendance were not

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<sup>3</sup> The bulk of information on the neighborhood comes from speaking with local informants and from the official website of the neighborhood association: The Northern Liberties Neighborhood Association (<http://www.nlna.org/liberty-lands/>). Accessed 19 December 2017.

necessarily planning to be at the Parade, but wanted to contribute to the overall event as a part of the neighborhood's culture.

The neighborhood is, for some, also a marker of social identity. During the crafting event, I noted repeated conversations in which participants would discuss the neighborhood's general superiority to nearby neighborhoods like Fishtown or Germantown, always with an air of good humor and half-seriousness, rather than any bitter rivalry. Germantown's iMPeRFeCT Gallery [sic.] played host to a build day event in 2014, in fact, and many of the participants in the Parade come from outside the neighborhood, yet the Parade's "home" remains firmly situated in Liberty Lands. The vitality of the neighborhood galvanizes support for the Parade as something distinct and welcome, as opposed to something imposed or enforced, as seems to be the case with the "Running of the Santas" event also held nearby around the same time as Krampuslauf. Even though Amber's home residence is not a part of the Liberty Lands neighborhood, her involvement with the people and events in the area has earned her a form of honorary membership, to the point where Janet Finegar noted that she frequently has to remember she cannot simply walk to Amber's house when she needs to talk to her about something.

The procession route begins at the southeastern entrance to the park, then generally follows a path south down the sidewalks of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street until the group reaches Fairmont Avenue, where they turn west. After another block, the Parade-goers turn north again to follow 3<sup>rd</sup> Street back to the park's southwestern entrance. Along the route, the spirits of the Parade pass by a number of local businesses such as restaurants, bars, and corner shops, and are frequently guided through intersections by crossing guards to avoid any accidents. The most visible portion of the Parade occurs during the one-block passage along Fairmont Avenue, which puts Paraders in full view of a busy street. Those who see the procession generally stop and stare, although some may

ask questions of the Parade spirits or the occasional accompanying “human,” such as a crossing guard. A number of neighborhood residents and people working in the bars or restaurants like the Standard Tap make a point to come out and see the Parade as it passes, and during my own participation I heard several echo sentiments such as “I can’t wait for this every year.” During the years I observed, and based on interview reports, there have been no confrontational incidents with anyone from the Parade, nor with any neighborhood residents regarding the Parade.

The park environment is large enough to host the Parade group before and after the actual procession. In general, the fire pit acts as a central hub, largely because it provides much-needed warmth. As a private park, there are sometimes alcoholic refreshments served, such as mulled hard cider or wine, but in general people do not engage in any sort of heavy drinking. Hot chocolate or warm non-alcoholic cider are also always available, too, reinforcing the family orientation of the event. The fire pit, located near the southern end of the park, is only large enough for around a dozen people to comfortably encircle at once, so people usually circulate towards and away from the fire in turn to make sure everyone gets a chance to warm themselves. Tables and costume boxes are usually set up near the fire pit. While the only potential private changing space is the rather small bathroom accessed through membership in the Liberty Lands “potty club,” most attendees come with their major costume elements on or assembled, and the costumes available to borrow at the park are usually easy to put on over regular clothes.

At the opposite end of the park, a downhill slope evens out into a fairly flat plane on which a stage is erected for the post-Parade fire dancing performance. The stage design changes from year to year, and the “offstage” space is essentially relegated to the rear corners of the platform or a small canopy set up near the stage steps. The area in front of the stage is

demarcated by a boundary of trees, and no seats are set up. All attendees of the fire performances have to stand to be able to see anything occurring during the fire dances. Often those in attendance will film the performances, and in 2017 one photographer set up a mounted camera to be able to record the stage as well.

Liberty Lands Park and its environs act as a hub for the Parade activity, but as noted already, the physical location of the Parade during the event day is not an isolated space. The iMPeRFeCT Gallery in Germantown and Amber's home in the Wharton area of Philadelphia, both have hosted events related to Parade construction or costume development. While the Parade's identification with Liberty Lands and the Northern Liberties neighborhood are highly ingrained at the moment, the city of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in general also contribute to the cultural identity of the Parade. As noted in Chapter Two, the tradition of masked parading in Philadelphia has extensive precedents, most notably in the Philadelphia Mummer's Parade on New Year's Day, which itself derives from older Fantasticals. Those Fantasticals embodied many of the same performative elements found in the contemporary Parade of Spirits, and the combination of working-class participation and artistic expression can be found in both the Parade of Spirits and the Mummer's Parade today.

The Krampuslauf route covers ground only about two miles distant from the main parade route for the Mummer's Parade. A Mummer I interviewed for broader context into Philadelphia parade culture noted that while the "official" parade occurs during daylight hours on Broad Street, the "unofficial" parade for the Mummies themselves occurs after dark on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, the same street that forms one of the portions of the Krampuslauf procession route. The overlap between the official, city-sanctioned Mummer's Parade and the less formal, city-permitted Parade of Spirits is geographically minimal, but the situation of both within Philadelphia and

Pennsylvania more broadly speaks to an element of shared heritage, as discussed in Chapter Two.

The Parade of Spirits also exists in a broader spatial context through its social media presence. Many performers and participants are from Philadelphia and even the Northern Liberties area, but just as many attendees travel from other locations and keep informed about the event through the Parade's official website or its various Facebook pages. While the online presence of the Parade will be more fully discussed in Chapter Five and in the last section of this chapter, the interactions of participants in the digital environment are a primary way of creating an embodied, performative event over a large distance. Parade-goers are often crafting their physical costumes and props in distant locations such as Lancaster, Pittsburgh, or even Portland, Oregon or Los Angeles, and then travelling to the Liberty Lands location for the event. While the neighborhood acts as a primary locus of performance and while it has very much adopted the Parade of Spirits as its own, the physical terrain of the Parade extends well beyond the boundaries of the Northern Liberties.

### **Costumes**

When the first procession in 2011 took on the mantle of a "Krampuslauf," founder Amber Dorko Stopper intentionally selected the Krampus figure as central to the parade's identity. She initially came up with the idea of organizing a Krampuslauf after being told that she needed to remove some diabolic imagery in her home while she was in the process of adopting her son. "They would say to you, 'Hide the things that somebody might think are a little dicey,' and my house is full of dicey things, because we have unusual tastes," she says. Stopper had a wall full of Korean demon masks that she said were accepted as culturally appropriate during the home visit, but a Western European depiction of a devil raised red flags. That made her ask,

“Why are the Korean things okay, and this [the devil] not okay?” Stopper, who has a deep interest in handmade crafts and performance art, began to look to worldwide celebrations of figures like her wall-hanging devil, and soon discovered the European tradition of Krampus processions in Austria and other parts of west-central Europe. Many of the traditions associated with guised processions in European contexts put the Krampus figure in conjunction with St. Nicholas, although there are also a number of locations where Krampus is the primary or even only focus of the parades. European guise performers sometimes have masks that were carved by master or professional carvers from wood, or which have been handed down in families for years, as Al Ridenour explains in his work on the Krampus tradition. Ridenour describes a very traditional design of mask called the “Larven,” one of which can take as much as forty hours to craft and weigh up to thirty pounds. These masks, often decorated in bold, high-contrast colors, are intended to be direct, to lack subtlety, and to distinguish those who wear them as highly traditional performers within the Krampuslauf idiom. Deviations from these designs, especially in favor of more contemporary ones, meet with harsh disapproval. According to one of Ridenour’s informants, a person attempting to wear a modern mask in Bad Gastein, Austria, the locals “would put that thing on an outbound train. There was even a sort of implied threat to the person who would do such a thing” (Ridenour 2016, 58).

Traditionalism in the European setting was a recurring theme in Ridenour’s research, with more contemporary masks using lights or modern designs referred to as “Hollywood” masks, although some mask-makers have begun working from DIY mask-carving “kits” in recent years. In the case of the Philadelphia Krampuslauf, however, Amber started from scratch, intending to develop a Krampus parade essentially from the ground up. Early participants wore combinations of store-bought elements and custom-made constructions to portray Krampus or

Krampus-like figures. Stopper's husband wore the body of an old gorilla costume and a Krampus mask that Stopper had knitted for him in the first year of the Parade. As the Parade has evolved, the Krampus designs have become more complex, intricate, and often resemble their European counterparts more, although there are still many participants who put together Krampus masks or costumes much as first-year marchers did. In 2014, many of the Krampusse (the preferred pluralization of Krampus) wore papier-mâché masks with bulging eyes, bared fangs, and long red tongues protruding down over the chin, along with bulky costumes made from faux-fur fabric. In 2017, similar costumes were still being used, as well as costumes that had been carefully molded from clay but which still had the same key physical features. One couple I questioned said they would spend months preparing their masks to get them just right for the parade.



Figure 3 – A Parade reveler in a homemade costume that incorporated ornamental grass fronds as a “fur” ruff, from the 2017 Parade of Spirits.

A number of costumes emphasize particular elements. The Krampus masks all resemble one another in their facial features, but even beyond the recognizable Krampusse, repeated guising forms involve the copious presence of “hair” and/or horns as a part of the ensemble. Frequently

the hair is either a faux-fur in a dark shade such as brown or black, or a material that visually simulates hair, such as ornamental grass or thin strips of yarn or other fabric. Costumes can become quite large and bulky due to the hairy materials used to cover Paraders' bodies, especially in the case of the ornamental grass coverings, which also have parallels in many British traditional mumming costumes. During the 2017 Parade, one participant dressed up using the trimmings from her garden to create a massive ruff of "fur" (See Fig. 3). Fabric scraps are sometimes simply draped from the costume, giving a literally ragged appearance, but still signifying the form of fur through visual texture. My own costumes for each of the years I attended the Parade involved a white faux-fur blanket I repurposed into a "traveling cape" for the costume.

Horns are also frequently used in the costumes. While the European Krampus masks often have actual animal horns attached to them, in the case of the Philadelphia Krampuslauf and the later Parade of Spirits, the horns can be either natural or simulated. One of the workshops held during the 2015 Parade preparation season focused on learning to make horns out of wire forms using painted masking tape, for example. Participants who attach animal horns to their costumes do sometimes get noticed for the quality of their materials, but in most cases there is little difference in the prestige of costumes that are assembled from natural horns versus horns constructed from repurposed or recycled materials. Horns are worn on the head, usually either protruding from the forehead or coming off of the sides of the skull near the temples. In some cases, horns may be store-bought, with a few participants even using felt-and-plastic reindeer antler headbands to accent a particular mask or costume. Indeed, some participants decide to wear antlers as a way of incorporating their interpretation of a specific holiday spirit, such as a

Green Man, a Cernunnos, or a “Holly King” figure. The goat-like horns of Krampus tend to be the most frequently seen forms, however.



Figure 4 – Parade member Robert Schreiwer on front right in his Ewicher Yeger (“Wild Hunter”) costume, leading the Parade in 2015. Photo by Mary Sellers.



Figure 5 – Parade founder Amber Dorko Stopper in her “Frau Perchta” costume, during the 2015 Parade. Photo by Mary Sellers.

While Krampus dominates the imagery of the Parade for many participants, even from very early on he was not the only “spirit” present. By the second year of the Parade, the local Heathen group Urglaawe had become involved with the event, and several figures from Pennsylvania German folklore began to be seen in regular rotation. Robert Schreiwer wore soot on his face and dressed in heavy patchwork clothes to portray a Belsnickel in 2012, and in

subsequent years he has taken to dressing in an old-fashioned Teutonic hunting outfit to portray the spirit of Ewicher Yeger, whom Schreiwer describes as a figure from an inherited Pennsylvania German mythology related to figures found in Black Forest folklore of the Wild Hunt (See Fig. 4). Amber Stopper has frequently portrayed a figure called Frau Perchta, also from Germanic lore, who wears a large white dress and a fearsome visage (See Fig. 5). Dressing as Perchta has precedents in Europe, where Perchten processions are frequently found in and around the same locations where Krampuslaufs take place (see Ridenour 2016). Perchta, like Krampus, is a figure who provides both rewards and punishments—in this case the reward being food or good fortune and the punishment being disembowelment. Similar figures such as the Icelandic Gryla can be found at the Parade, too, especially as it has moved towards the more inclusive “Parade of Spirits.”

The inclusion of more and more figures into the Parade entourage has resulted in a number of different costumes at the event. During the first few years, while it was still called a Krampuslauf, there would frequently be a member or two of the procession dressed as St. Nicholas in his bishop’s miter and robe. In later years, I have not recorded the presence of St. Nicholas among the main costumes in the event. Taking in all of the costumes is a source of tremendous pleasure for most Parade-goers, as they will gather early to mill around the fire pit and see what everyone is putting on. In addition to the European forms of Krampus, St. Nicholas, Frau Perchta, and British figures like the Green Man, the Parade has the Pennsylvania German costumes of Belsnickel and Ewicher Yeger, which have gone beyond and outside the Urglaawe group—both of my first two costumes were Belsnickels, for example. Even contemporary pop culture figures sometimes show up, as they did in 2015 when a pair of young women wore “Blue Meanie” masks from the Beatles’ *Yellow Submarine* film. The strange or unusual costume

without mythological context also finds a home at the Parade of Spirits. In 2017, one guiser wore a large headpiece constructed from papier-mâché and the cleaned jaw of a shark to become an “angler fish,” for example. One costume seldom or never seen is the American Santa Claus in red fur, black boots and belt, and white beard, although some of the St. Nicholas costumes have elements reflective of Santa’s Old-World origins. While there is not any official “theme” for each year’s Parade in the way that the Mummer’s Parade has, each year there is often a zeitgeist that informs multiple costumes. In 2014, the Krampus was still a popular figure, while in 2017 a number of participants had costumes that played on bird imagery, a theme perhaps tied to the Parade’s inclusion of a chicken-legged Baba Yaga hut.



Figure 6 – The “Das Mädchen” wearable puppet, from the 2014 Krampuslauf.

For many first-time Parade-goers, the costumes that stand out the most are the back-mounted puppets. Two main puppets dominate the landscape, as they have done since 2014. Das Mädchen, a nearly ten-foot tall wearable puppet, stalks along the park grounds and the Parade route, crouching and leaning forward like a dinosaur or a dragon (see Fig. 6). Its sharp, avian

beak and claw-like hands swing slowly around a body illuminated from the inside by a battery pack. The puppet itself was the design of Chris Carson, an artist who took up residence in the Stopper household in 2013 to develop the creature. Described as a version of the Habergeis, the “hat-grabbing, bird-goat-hybrid harbinger of Death,” the puppet is named after the German word for “fairy tale” or “story,” and is so large it has to be taken to the Parade site in a moving truck and assembled at the park (Stopper 2018). The puppet’s presence at the Parade looms large figuratively and literally and involves training and preparation for the puppet operator. Das Mädchen is wrapped in white, weatherproofed fabric as well, and often provides some warmth and protection for the person inside. Amber and other central Parade members refer to the puppet as a “she,” and think of her as a “big, silly, clumsy, anxious-to-be-liked girl” (Ibid.). While she was operated by her creator for several years, starting in 2016 the role of Das Mädchen has been given to a new participant each year.



Figure 7 - The “Es Meedli” children’s backpack puppet from the 2015 Parade. Photo by Mary Sellers.]

Das Mädchen has a smaller counterpart in the form of Es Meedli, a child-sized version of the backpack puppet (See Fig. 7). In 2014, Es Meedli—whose name roughly means “story” in Pennsylvania Deitsch dialect as a counterpart to the German of the larger puppet’s name—was worn and operated by Stopper’s daughter Claudia. The child’s puppet costume involves less internal control, as it essentially rests on the back of whomever carries it and only needs to have its illumination turned on or off. By 2016, Claudia had outgrown the costume, however, and once again the mantle passed to another child in the Parade. Children’s costumes within the context of the Krampuslauf and the Parade of Spirits are often just as elaborate or ornate as the adult costumes. Es Meedli requires practice and training to keep balanced, and several of the children involved with the Parade have learned to walk on stilts to be able to wear small rises for their costumes. Participants often bring their children to workshops to help design masks and costume elements, and many of the children at the Parade will put on the guise of a scary monster, such as a small Krampus or an open-mawed wolf, during the procession. Sometimes the children’s costumes reflect on the adult costumes around them or the children’s personal interests, or even both. One informant’s wife wore a “crow-woman” costume in 2017, while his six-year-old daughter wore an “owl-girl” guise partly in conjunction with her mother’s mask and partly because of her personal interest in Greek mythology and the goddess Athena, whose animal symbol was an owl. Children also wear “costumes” to participate in other aspects of the event, such as the glow-bracelets and similar items worn during the children’s portion of the 2015 fire-dancing performance.

The fire dancers of Lux Arati often wear costumes that both reflect the general sensibilities of the rest of the Parade, while forming a unified stage identity for the group. In 2015, their costumes all incorporated the same black tights as a base, accented by forms of

brown fur and antlers. In 2017, the dancers all dressed in costumes that changed from cultist robes to outfits projecting a diabolical appearance, with the central dancer wearing a white dress and alternating between a “hag” mask and finely composed “goddess” makeup as they performed a version of a Perchta myth. Lux Arati’s costumes tend towards a more theatrical and professional design, although they still remain visually harmonized with the rest of the Parade.

In all cases, costumes are welcomed and encouraged, no matter what level of artistry they display. Janet Finegar usually brings along a large plastic bin full of furry blankets, horns, antlers, masks, and other accoutrements that can be put together on the spot by a first-time attendee to make an impromptu costume. Costumes assembled from pre-existing elements may not stand out in the same way that an intricate Krampus mask or Das Mädchen do, but they offer a gateway to Parade participation. The handmade quality of many costumes is central to their appeal, as noted by Parader Stamos Martinos from Pittsburgh:

You know the holiday gets commercialized and then there's a trend away from commercial elements to like something that's considered to be like older and kind of more pure. And then eventually that kind of gets co-opted it becomes commercial itself and then you know something else is found and you know the cycle just kind of keeps going. And so like for the moment anyway this feels like a very you know homegrown organic like you make it all yourself. You get dressed up and you know the costumes are kind of fucked-up and homemade-looking sometimes. But that's part of the charm of them you know is that you know it's kind of like watching you know the old King Kong or Jason and the Argonauts, you can see the fingerprints of the people that made them... That's the nice part about it. The first year it was I made kind of a Green Man mask and we just like you know take cardboard boxes and tape and foil and whatever we

have laying around... One of the kind of rules is to not like really spend anything on it. And to kind of you know pull from what you have laying around you know. This year [2017] with my costume I think I spend like five bucks just to make something because I knew was going to be cold. Kind of like a tattered Cape kind of a thing. With like just you know materials from, there's a place called the Center for Creative reuse here in Pittsburgh and they kind of collect things that might otherwise be bound for a landfill and then you can you know pick them up for cheap and make whatever you want to make it out of them. So for a couple of bucks you know we had our costumes done and, and the masks that we made were just formerly Amazon boxes.

The creation of costumes is seen as an ongoing process, one that happens for months before and after each Parade event. Members of the Parade's social media groups frequently exchange information about how to construct moveable costume elements out of household items, or videos of particularly engaging costume pieces. Reveling in the costumes of other participants is central to enjoying the Parade. Stamatis Marinou described the rush of seeing all the costumes as being too much to take in all at once, and noted how glad he was that he could go back through the online group after the Parade to see what he had missed. In addition to the emphasis on homemade or assembled costumes, the groups behind the Parade often create opportunities for interested community members to learn and grow in their costume-making abilities. In 2014, Tucson artist Mykl Wells came to Philadelphia specifically to host a workshop on mask-making, for example. While participants develop their costumes with great care, in many cases the costumes they wear will change from year to year, marking a stark distinction from the inherited and tradition-oriented Krampus masks of Europe. A costume may be repurposed into something new from year to year or may be put aside entirely or donated to the

general “fund” of costume options to offer someone else the chance to participate the next year. Costumes can require special training, as in the case of the backpack puppets, or might be put together on the spot. Participation is defined as a willingness to put something on, carry something, and walk in the Parade of Spirits, rather than by the particular spirit being portrayed or the skill level of the artist behind the guise.

### **Props and Objects**

In 2017, I arrived early at the Liberty Lands grounds and helped Janet Finegar carry some of her bins, tables, and other items from her hatchback a block away to the fire pit. In addition to bringing the costume bin and tables set up to hold the hot cider dispensers, Janet toted a large, roughly circular object composed of natural fibers, found objects such as twigs and branches, and leaves and twine. This object, which was affectionately called the “Green Man,” was there to be burned, a leftover from an earlier harvest-based ritual event that was being sacrificed to the flames as an offering to the spirit of this event.



Figure 8 – The Baba Yaga hut prop, designed and built by Amber’s family and assembled by Tucker Collins, at the 2017 Parade.

At the same event, I helped Tucker—a young scientist who is extremely close to the Dorko Stopper family—unload pieces of painted cardboard and paper shaped into rough, six-foot long chicken legs (see Fig. 8). We laid the legs out alongside a small, circular enclosure made of wire framing, plastic netting, a number of zip-ties, and natural fibers like raffia and jute stuffed into the holes. Long thin plastic spikes rose off the side of the little round house, surrounding the rough-thatched roof, which Tucker and I adorned with small “skulls” made of masking tape and papier-mâché. This was to be the house of Baba Yaga, the famed Slavic witch of fairy tales, set up in the center of the park. One of the Parade-goers, Bebe, dressed the part and spent much of her time in the hut on a little stool, spinning thread or singing or talking to the curious children who would wander into the tiny door to see her.

While costumes and masks compose the bulk of the parade’s material culture, a significant section of the physical presence of the event comes from objects such as Janet’s Green Man or the Baba Yaga hut. These material props help to turn the Parade into an expression of individual interests and artistic narrative, sometimes disjointed and dissonant in their overall connections, but often mutually contributing to a collective story that happens around and to the Parade-goers. Individuals spend a great deal of time working on their particular costumes, but many of the props are created through collective crafting events, workshops held in places like the iMPeRFeCT Gallery or at the Northern Liberties Community Center. These workshops are usually geared towards those with some knowledge or interest in crafting and “DIY” culture, but also offer space for people of all interests and skill-levels to participate.



Figure 9 – A mask and lantern crafting day at the iMPeRFeCT Gallery in Philadelphia during the preparations for the 2014 Parade.



Figure 10 – “God’s eye” hangings created at the Northern Liberty Community Center in preparation for the 2017 Parade.

In 2014, the Parade founders—Amber and Janet—put on several workshops to help potential Paraders to complete their masks and other projects. One of these events, held at the iMPeRFeCT Gallery in Germantown, specifically focused on making some of the larger puppet components (such as those for *Das Mädchen*’s legs and face), masks, and especially lanterns that would be carried by Parade revelers that year (See Fig. 9). The lanterns were created by cutting out rough cardboard shapes, often a series of trapezoids, then carefully gluing tissue paper into

the empty frames of the cardboard. Finally, the pieces would be glued together and painted, and strung with wire so that they could be carried by hand or dangled from poles or branches at the park grounds. The lanterns became a focal point for the artistic expression of that year, with some lantern-makers choosing to make designs within the cardboard frames more elaborate, a tangle of curves and spirals, or even using old newsprint comics pages for the frame windows to add a punch of popular culture within the context of the old-fashioned looking lanterns. The aesthetic effect was a key part of the creation process, as the lanterns were designed to be illuminated from within by LED lights during the Parade night, creating a stained-glass effect across the park and unifying the different “spirits” of the Parade as they walked, each carrying similar lanterns.

Similar events have focused on creating everything from noisemakers to puppets to “God’s eye” hangings from yarn and wood (See Fig. 10). The 2017 workshop held in the Liberty Lands Community Center focused on this latter craft and involved a number of families from the neighborhood coming out to enjoy pizza and crafting, even though several of them had no intention of attending the Parade. Instead, they saw it as an opportunity to meet neighbors and share an interest, while contributing to an event within their area in a way that might bring some local pride. The workshop was hosted by members of the Lux Arati dance troupe, who used the God’s eyes in their stage decorations at the park that year. Lux Arati’s participation grew in 2017 through this workshop, moving from “performers at” the event to a more substantial “creators of” role. Lux Arati’s stage acts as a focal point for material culture at the Parade, too, with the stage decorations often reflecting broader trends at the Parade. In 2015, the dancers incorporated a children’s “fire show,” for example, in which the participants used glow-stick jewelry instead of actual fire pots to do their dances. The fire pots, sticks, and other flammable accoutrements of

the troupe's performance enhance the material presence of each performer onstage, making her stand out by extending her body from arms, legs, or torso with black silhouetted tools capped with fire. While the fire-dancing performance will be more fully considered in the next section, I emphasize the tools here because they form a piece of an overall matrix of physical components that speak to the Parade members' identity.



Figure 11– The “Hellmouth” stage entrance used in the Lux Arati fire-dancing performance at the 2017 Parade.

Perhaps the most spectacular piece of the Lux Arati stage was 2017's “Hellmouth,” a gaping demon maw which served as a stage entrance near the back center of the stage (see Figure 11). The open mouth, ostensibly there as a “portal” during the performance, also cued the Parade participants into the scare-oriented edge of the Parade and received numerous comments and compliments from those attending. The Hellmouth served as a backdrop for the Parade's official invocation by Robert Schreiwer, and as a photo backdrop for numerous revelers seeking to memorialize the event by capturing their presence in front of it. Both costumed and relatively

plainclothes attendees used the Hellmouth this way, suggesting that it spoke to the heart of the Parade in a way that echoed the costumes without emulating them directly. After the Parade was over, the Hellmouth was broken down and transported back to Amber's house, where it now resides behind a couch in her upstairs sitting room. Thus, the material culture of the Parade extends both before and after the Parade event itself, and into the homes and lives of revelers.

Accenting the costumes, Parade-goers often incorporate noisemakers of various kinds, including small horns, percussion instruments like tambourines, or even custom-made "bombas" that can be used as walking sticks and noise-making devices simultaneously. These noisemakers are tied to the older, traditional role of European Krampüsse and Belsnickels, who would travel during the winter season making noise with bells and sticks and drums. Folklorically, the noise is framed as a way to "frighten off" evil spirits, an apotropaic device for creating a protective barrier around a community during the Yuletide and New Year's seasons. Robert Schreier takes his noisemaker with him as he leads the procession in his Ewicher Yaeger outfit, and the use of the instruments often draws attention from passersby as readily as the costumes. One participant brings his tuba to the event, playing not only during the actual march, but performing traditional Christmas carols during the hours leading up to the Parade as a way of entertaining the revelers. The tuba itself is then a prop, reminiscent of the noisemakers, but also becoming a part of the player's identity and "guise" within the Parade's context. Improvisational noisemakers are frequently found along with the costume's in Janet's "grab bin," offering even the most minimally dressed participants a way to join in with the revelry on the procession.



Figure 12 – The 2017 Parade of Spirits Liberty Lands official poster. Design by Amber Dorko Stopper. Used with permission.

While I described the puppets as material objects in the previous section and will discuss them further in terms of their performance in the next section, I here note their critical role in the Parade as material objects. Much of their use in this capacity does not happen at the event itself, but rather in the circulation of material *about* the event. Those who first saw social media posts or ads about the Krampuslauf would have seen pictures of costumed Paraders, but they would also have been struck by the image of Das Mädchen, crouched and gaping at someone passing on the sidewalk. The puppet also became a centerpiece to the 2017 ads for the Parade of Spirits, which was based on a cross-stitched design by Amber (See Fig. 12). The puppets also serve as one of the most inspirational components of the Parade, and much of the social media discussion about what to do with costumes and performance in the coming year centers on the types of mechanical or artistic puppetry shared by interested members. Those who have worn masks and costumes turn to the Facebook group and note how much they would like to incorporate gloves with finger extensions made out of small strips of wood and painted to look like claws, drawing upon the puppet designs and structures. The online space occupied by the Parade generally emphasizes crafting, either in terms of costume or props, and thus also emphasizes the enormous role played by material culture within the Parade.

The one striking absence of material culture at the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits is of commercial objects. While an occasional collector will put up a display of Krampus-related cards, pins, or prints—some of which may be for sale—there are not kiosks or carts full of Krampus dolls or masks. Nor are there any places to buy commemorative posters or even t-shirts, although both can be purchased *away* from the Parade or online. The de-emphasis of commercial materialism is a major focus of the Parade of Spirits, in both conscious and unconscious ways, and will be more fully explored in Chapter Five.

### **Direction and Action**

Picking a “starting point” for the performative aspects of the Parade of Spirits is a completely arbitrary act. One could just as easily start the entire performance the moment people pack up the last mask and lantern at Liberty Lands Park and head home, thus launching the anticipatory cycle of the next year’s Parade as one could at the moment that Robert Schreiwer offers his invocation before “stepping off” and guiding the costumed revelers down the streets of the Northern Liberties. Additionally, because so many different rituals occur at the Parade simultaneously, focusing on any one necessarily leads to the exclusion of others. For the purposes of this study, I will choose the moments just before Rob’s “stepping off” as a point of embarkation with the full understanding the I must start somewhere and this arbitrary point is as relevant as any other.

The Parade “officially” begins when all revelers are assembled in their costumes, somewhere around 4:30 or 4:45 p.m. The goal is to “step off” by 5p.m., although that timing changes slightly depending on a number of variables, and the broader goal is usually just to get moving by sometime around sunset. People begin arriving in significant numbers around 4p.m.,

setting up their tables or assembling costume pieces, as I noted Janet doing in the previous section. This time frame is also when props and decorations are put up or scattered throughout the park, as with the Baba Yaga hut in 2017. During the pre-Parade moments, those in costumes usually spend a good bit of time wandering the grounds, taking in other costumes and the objects that have been put up for the Parade. This time is essentially a “showcase,” an opportunity to see the final results of the previous year’s preparation fully assembled or deployed, and to enjoy the costumes that others have put together. Multiple revelers specifically talk about how much they like the time before the procession best because they get to see what everyone else has done, which can also fuel imaginations and activities in the coming year. Often this is the last of the natural light as well, so the showcase period is the time when most revelers take photos of their favorite props and costumes. There is often a great deal of camaraderie regarding costumes, of course, and social behaviors are geared towards greetings, brief discussions of costume techniques and Parade-related plans, and requests for the aforementioned photographs. Frequently, those in costume will not know who is under a mask or outfit they particularly admire, which frames later interactive performances which I will discuss shortly.



Figure 13 – Procession moving through the streets of the Northern Liberties in Philadelphia during the Parade in 2015. Photo by Mary Sellers.

Once the Parade crowd reaches a critical density, often around two to four hundred participants in some form of guise, Amber, Janet, and Rob will decide to launch the procession. This is known as the “stepping off” of the Parade and begins with Rob taking a place at the head of the assembly and offering a brief speech, which concludes most often with a form of blessing. In 2014 and 2015, Rob offered his speech, called the “invocation,” at the southeastern gate of the park, where the Parade would be exiting to roam the streets. In 2017, Rob instead went to the fire dancing stage on the other side of the park, partly to be elevated enough to be seen by all attendees and partly because there was a good sound system available that he could use to project his voice (in at least one previous year he had used a bullhorn, which did make him louder, but which also made his words harder to understand for some revelers). Rob’s invocation frequently involves him summarizing his own costume’s mythological connotations, and then a broader discussion of the importance of having a mixture of light and darkness in conjunction with the winter holiday season. In 2014, he also included a brief “blessing” in Deitsch, a dialect of

German found in Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> The Parade's "energy" at this point is focused, and Rob turns toward the park gate and begins banging his timbrel staff on the ground, sounding the start to the procession.

The procession moves through the streets of the Northern Liberties, following the path I earlier described (See Fig. 13). Throughout the movement of the Parade, the guiding policies of "Do not scare anyone who does not want to be scared" and "Make your own fun and part of someone else's" direct the interactions with all onlookers and passersby. While the revelers may pause and interact with a bystander, in most cases the Parade continues on without stopping, and the reveler rejoins the procession at a later point in the Parade. If a reveler gets lost or lingers too long behind the official group, and thus cannot be directed through intersections by a volunteer, they can return to the park via an "escape route" down North American Street. As the Parade members walk, the pace is usually somewhat brisk, although not so fast as to leave behind those who are encumbered by complex costumes or who are accompanied by small children. Interactions among the revelers are limited to brief conversation, and most of the noise made by the procession comes from the various instruments and noisemakers used, as well as growls, shrieks, ululations, and howls vocalized by costumed Christmas monsters. When a Parade member interacts with someone outside of the Parade, they must gauge quickly whether or not the time is right to act in a way that implies mock menace, or if they should act in a milder manner. The latter behavior is more common when interacting with younger children who see the strange procession pass by. Some revelers will even hand out treats such as hard candy or wrapped candy canes to children along the Parade route, although that is not an officially-sanctioned action. Some revelers will perform within the context of their character: a Krampus

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<sup>4</sup> Rob's deep connection with Pennsylvania German/Dutch culture will be more fully explored in Chapter Four, as it relates not only to his ethnic and cultural heritage, but the religious and spiritual dimensions of the Parade itself.

might jump about and bare his teeth and claws or pretend to use switches on someone; a Frau Perchta might imitate the action of slicing at someone's belly, drawing on her role as the "belly-slitter" of folklore; or, a person dressed in an avian costume might spread out their "wings" as widely as possible in imitation of flight. The puppets often involve elaborate pantomimes, their movements resembling a large bird of prey stalking along the streets, then the head turning to focus a glowing eye or beak on a particular bystander. If a reveler sees someone getting too scared—particularly a child—the internal guidelines of the event dictate that they should move on or somehow show that they are not truly threatening. Traditionally, Krampus masks are never removed during processions, but in the Philadelphia performance that rule remains flexible. If a youngster is clearly frightened by a mask beyond an initial feeling of surprise, the performer can remove the mask to reassure the child that the person behind the costume is no one to fear.

The largest display of character behavior, noisemaking, and other Parade-related performance occurs during the brief passage along Fairmont Avenue, when revelers are visible to the largest number of people not associated with the Parade. The presence of the audience, whether in the form of foot traffic moving aside to allow Parade-goers to pass, those watching from across the street, or a captive audience in automobiles at the traffic light, seems to heighten the intensity of jumping, spinning, shouting, and growling. Once the Parade turns back down 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the shift in energy is palpable, and the revelers begin to reign in their performances more, focused more on the safe return to the park than drawing more attention. However, if more bystanders are encountered, the Parade members will usually rise to the occasion and reinvigorate their performances briefly.

Once back at the fire pit, the revelers are more subdued, although depending on the weather and the year the return into the park grounds can be nearly as noisy as the exit. Often the

last hurrah of noisemaking occurs right as a reveler passes through the gates. At the fire pit, those in costumes will sometimes remove the most cumbersome elements of their attire, and most will spend time warming hands, legs, or feet along the edge of the fire pit, then rotating away to allow another Parade member a turn. Some partake of the warm cider or other beverages on offer to help fight off the cold around them and refuel after the walk. The Das Mädchen operator, depending on the year, will find a spot relatively near the center of the park and the puppet will be stationed upright for people to come and examine it. The operator usually remains with the puppet unless relieved by someone with the parade in an official capacity, like Amber or Janet. Often those attending the Parade for the first time will ask questions about its construction, which the operator will attempt to answer, almost as a ritual unto itself.

The Lux Arati fire dancing show that occurs after the return of all revelers is usually announced before it begins, giving those at the fire pit time to get down to the other end of the park. Each year the show is different and incorporates different elements to make the event memorable. In 2014, the fire dancing was limited to the professionals within the Lux Arati troupe, while in 2015 a children's show preceded the main fire show. In 2017, the staging was highly elaborate, with the fully built "Hellmouth" set forming a backdrop not only to fire dancing, but to quick costume changes as well. Special performative elements include the use of spinning fire pots on long chains and specially-made hula hoops, which dancers use to create elaborate arcs and circles around themselves as they move; poles or torch batons with ignitable points that can be used to create beautiful displays of dexterity and danger; and fire spitting or eating within the context of the show. The Lux Arati show usually has a theme, often a narrative one associated with the season, although the narratives are directed by the creative expression of the performers and not by any particular emphasis on a "traditional" story. In 2017, for example,

Amber's daughter Claudia offered an invocation in both Latin and English before the fire show began, explaining the arrival of the belly-slitting Perchta and her revelers.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, Claudia's brother Béla was brought to the stage as the "sacrifice" to Perchta, and she chose to reward him with her "good" face for his bravery. The Krampus then arrived to act as a counterbalance to Perchta and return her to her realm. The narrative of this display is fundamentally inspired by Alpine and Central European folklore about various roaming spirits, but it is not directly taken from any known myth or legend (see Ridenour 2016). Instead, the figural forms of Krampus, Perchta, and even the robed figures taken from pop culture references to the occult, all work as semiotic building blocks to create a novel interpretation of wintertime myth.

Once the fire show has ended, the Parade winds down, with many revelers beginning to pack up and go home. In colder years, the disbanding of the Parade occurs more quickly, while in a warm year like 2015 or 2016, accounts of Parade-goers lingering for several hours are very common. For the most part, the after-Parade events are social and directed by individuals or small groups: people going for drinks or taking a few final photos, or sometimes heading to other holiday celebrations in other parts of town. Sometimes additional activities are planned or available, as in 2017 when a nearby studio space, Gravy Stuidos, was opened up to allow professional photographer Neil Kohl to do some large-format pictures of people in their costumes. The majority of the Parade-goers are usually gone by 9 p.m., with a core group usually doing the work of cleaning up by hauling out tables and boxes.

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<sup>5</sup> The invocation, as performed by Claudia: "Ignis, ice, et nix. Ex ramos en nocte fluant. E fiori ibari. Capientor ex aure inferni, libere capte ebantor. Audite hunc fabula de Frau Perchta. Fire, Bronze, and Snow. From branches in the night. Fire burn and go. By evil spirits, children will be captured. Out of the Hellmouth, the trapped children will be saved. Hear this tale of Frau Perchta." Original invocation and translation by Claudia.



Figure 14 – Cory Thomas Hutcheson dressed as the Czech spirit “Cért” during the 2017 Parade of Spirits, filmed in a 3D format by photographer Rich Wexler. Photo copyright 2017 by Rich Wexler/New Castro Cinema. Used with permission.

The *real* post-Parade activities begin late in the evening or the next day, when dozens of revelers all converge online in social media spaces to begin sharing their photos and stories. People are tagged in Facebook photos or albums are uploaded to photo sites like Flickr, and a gush of interactions begin in which Parade members suddenly discover who was inside of or behind their favorite costume or mask. Those who attend the Parade usually share their work fairly freely, even the professional photographers. In 2017, photographer Rich Wexler of New Castro Cinema took a specialized stereoscopic photograph that allows a viewer with 3D glasses to see the image as three dimensional or “pop-out” (See Figure 14). The circulation of photos is accompanied by stories, which often take the form of people discussing specific costumes they liked or the reactions they received from people on the streets during the Parade. Amber often is one of the most active members of the online groups in the month following the Parade, collecting as many photos as she can from the people who attended, then turning them into a post-Parade summary post on the official Krampuslauf Philadelphia blog page. The experience of “attending” the Parade of Spirits is thus extended both in time and scope, with in-person

revelers reliving their Parade night through the lenses of other attendees and the placement of personal experiences in an online “shrine” of sorts to allow later revisiting and contemplation.

Performances of Parade-related culture permeate the calendar beyond the December-to-January “active” period, too. Almost immediately, those who attend one Parade begin exchanging ideas in online forums about additional materials or costume ideas they want to incorporate into future designs or suggesting potential projects that might be of interest to those in the group. In some cases, those who travel may suggest attending other Krampuslaufs or similar events, such as Tucson’s Day of the Dead Parade or the Heart of the Beast Parade in Minneapolis in May. Additional rituals appear throughout the year as well, such as the more recent ceremony of selecting a new Das Mädchen or Es Meedli operator, which comes with training and a small, hand-made medal for those who take on such central roles in the Parade. When the autumn comes around, craft workshops begin, along with costume design sharing and discussions about the major logistical operations of the Parade. Frequently someone—usually Janet or Amber—will send out a message a few weeks in advance of the Parade to announce final dates and times, and also to warn about the proximity to the Running of the Santas event, another holiday festive display that has become an almost unofficial “nemesis” to the Parade of Spirits.

To describe a parade as a “performance” fails to fully capture the extensive network of rituals, beliefs, customs, behaviors, and practices that coalesce into the singular parade event. Simon Bronner (2016) has theorized folklore as a practice-based system of entangled behaviors, rooted in the way a group thinks about or understands its own actions. In Bronner’s view, actions that are done repeatedly over time gain the traction of tradition, but those actions are selected by the group as representative of themselves in what Bronner calls “phemic processes.” It is the

action of framing expressions as significant symbolically that makes them phemic, that is, culturally connotative and socially reproduced. Similarly, Louis Marin (1987) questioned the act of collective festivity from a semiotic standpoint, distinguishing intent underlying the act of such organized parading. A group with a highly organized structure like ranks or files—as in a military display—would be a “parade” in Marin’s view, while a less organized group working towards or against a specific goal or cause might be better suited within the category of “demonstration.”

The Parade of Spirits has no hierarchy, nor is it overtly protesting anything, although its existence does function for many participants as an indictment of capitalism or commercialization in regards to holidays. The festivity displayed, however, is “misrule,” a topsy-turvy inversion of social order from the bottom up. Monsters that are supposed to lurk in shadows or under beds are out in the open, walking with children, or in some cases with children inside of them, an intriguing form of projected fantasy when one considers all of the fairy tales in which similar creatures devour the young. The roots of the Parade within the European Krampuslauf connect it more closely to what Marin styles as a “procession,” which involves a more religious note enacting ritual without specifically commemorating an event or person. The term “Krampuslauf” translates roughly as a “procession of Krampüsse,” enhancing a reading of the Parade within Marin’s terms (Marin 1987, 222). The movements of ‘Lauf-goers and Parade participants are not limited to the collective body at a distance, however, and any observation of the event will speak to its array of rituals, practices at once repeated through time and singularly experienced. The many rituals all come together to make the greater Parade, and the Parade in turn generates new rituals as it continues.

## Online Interactions

In late October of 2015, the Facebook Group called “KRAMPUSLAUF PHILADELPHIA (Participants Group)” filled with a series of short posts regarding the potential conflict that might arise between the ‘Lauf and a local rival event, the Running of the Santas:<sup>6</sup>

FRAU PERCHTA [Amber Dorko Stopper]: in the "not ideal, but we're better prepared for it than the time we weren't" category... yes, of COURSE! as predicted, the running of the santas is also on 12/12.

i notice that its hub of activity takes place at electric factory, in a ticketed event that runs from 10am -- 11:30pm. this doesn't mean no one will be at finnegan's wake, i'm sure -- but at least electric factory moves things over a few streets at SOME point. (it's better than if the shows were at union transfer,... [Posted 10/22/15 at 8:50 a.m. – Philadelphia, PA]

LINDA SOFFER: Finnegan's is closed, though there are 2 other bars below Spring Garden on 3rd. [Posted 10/22/15 at 9:51 p.m.]

FRAU PERCHTA: what? finnegan's closed? ... so do you recall there being a ticketed aspect in other years to the running of the santas? i like this idea that everyone is over at electric factory, but i bet it still affects many of our drivers, because it's still basically parallel to us. [Posted 10/22/15 at 9:54 p.m.]

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<sup>6</sup> In transcriptions of online interactions, spelling and punctuation is preserved except in cases where meaning is highly obscured. Generally, usernames are left “as-is,” although in the case of some key figures involved with the Parade of Spirits, I have parenthetically noted who is making the post as a way of clarifying roles, such as organizational or administrative ones, within the larger group context.

LINDA SOFFER: I don't know much about it, to be honest. I thought the whole "running" part was about the movement from bar-to-bar, but if they all want to just run around inside of Electric Factory that's fine with me. I say we research street closures & see if anything will impact access to the park, then plan accordingly & share route info with attendees. [Posted 10/22/15 at 10:18 p.m.]

JANET FINEGAR: I am certain that they never do official street closures -- they just take up so much space that it's hard to get across the streets. They cause traffic jams, but not closures. [Posted 10/23/15 at 9:33 a.m.]

NEIL KOHL: In the past they have had the police close the streets. The start was in front of Finnegan's, and the course was a loop that ended at Electric Factory.

I know this from trying to cross Spring Garden at the wrong moment and nearly being taken out by a wave of elves.... [Posted 10/23/15 at 10:29 a.m.]

NEIL KOHL: Both Johnny Utah's and McFadden's are closed as well. Not sure where the bros are drinking these days... [Posted 10/23/15 at 10:36 a.m.]

These interactions represent a singular instance of extended “conversation” occurring over a period of nearly twelve hours, encompassing formal, organizational planning and informal cultural expression. The Running of the Santas has been an historically disruptive presence for the members of the Parade of Spirits, although there is no official animosity between the two groups. Instead, those participating in the Krampuslauf have generally bemoaned the way that the Running of the Santas event has limited access to things like parking and the anxieties and

fears that come along with a large group of young people—many of them men—drinking and engaging in risky behavior in places where children may be present. The fuller ramifications of the Running of the Santas in contrast to the Parade of Spirits will be examined in the next chapter, but here I wish to highlight the way that the digital medium itself is an expressive performance space for those who belong to the Krampuslauf/Parade of Spirits “family.” Internal references to local landmarks, such as Spring Garden Street, the Electric Factory, and bars like Johnny Utah’s and McFadden’s are shared with an expectation that other members of the group will know and care about that information. Amber’s response to the news of Finnegan’s closing, for example, demonstrates the way she operates as both an insider within the community by knowing about the bar and as an outsider in that she did not know it was already shuttered. Amber is generally far more of an “insider,” however, than any member of the Santas event, as shown by user Neil Kohl’s tongue-in-cheek descriptions of the young, male Santas as “bros” and the near-bowling-over he experienced by the “wave of elves.”

Posts shared in the digital arena by group members tend to follow a few specific threads of discussion, and users are often interacting in ways that relate to other areas of Parade participation. Most of the conversations are focused either on things with an aesthetic value in line with the Krampuslauf (i.e., dark, folk, and grotesque artisans or crafting ideas) or on event planning regarding the Krampuslauf. The During an observational period from October 25<sup>th</sup> through the 31<sup>st</sup> in 2015, for example, the top post was post on hand-built and crafted mechanized wings using real bird feathers which received 8 “likes,” and was also the top commented post. The previous week’s top commented post was the one above about the potential scheduling conflict with the “Running of the Santas” event. In these digital groups, interactions primarily circulate among a central five to eight people, with about thirty total

viewers watching the group regularly. One poster (Ed) releases weekly or semi-weekly announcements about his Germantown radio program as well, which don't generally receive comments or likes, but do keep community members informed of the ways that the Parade and its affiliated components are reaching a broader Philadelphia audience.

The use of digital modes of expression offer opportunities to include members of the Parade community who do not live directly in the Liberty Lands area, but who nonetheless have become a part of it through their participation in the Parade. Amber is a prime example, of course, but there are many others who participate largely through the Facebook groups and come to the Northern Liberties almost exclusively for the actual Parade event. I am one such example, although I do not wish to portray my experience as broadly representative or universal solely because it is my own observation. Other participants come from far outside the city. Robert Schreiwer makes the trek into the Parade grounds from Berks County, for example, and Stamatis Marinos and his family travel all the way from Pittsburgh. Visitors from other Krampuslauf events throughout the country also make the journey on occasion, such as Arún from the Portland, Oregon 'Lauf or Al Ridenour from the Los Angeles Krampusnacht. All of these participants, however, are able to maintain their social and artistic connections to members of the Philadelphia community through their interactions with the Facebook group and other social media forums. Additionally, the forums themselves contribute to emic and etic division, with one Facebook group operating as a private "Participants Group," while the Parade also maintains a public Facebook page and group to allow those who are not "insiders" in the community to find out essential information. Of course, those who participate in the public group or attend one event after finding out about it from the public page may eventually become much more active and join the private group eventually. The exclusivity of the private group is less designed to

maintain any strict hierarchies in place and much more about enabling focused conversations on Parade-specific subjects. Still, there are plenty of spaces for both “official” and “unofficial” discussions to occur in the online medium.

Beyond the Facebook group directly devoted to keeping the “inner” workings of the Parade in line, several members belong to groups like “Folk Horror Revival,” a community of several thousand people who share an interest in the “Folk Horror” genre. Built around popular culture and folklore intersections, such as those from the quintessential folk horror film, *The Wicker Man* (1973), the Folk Horror Revival group also involves members sharing tropes from fairy and folktales around the world<sup>7</sup> and frequently performative or material expressions such as dance, costume, song, or crafts get shared. Amber and several other Parade members belong to the group, and occasionally a post from Folk Horror Revival will be reposted in the Philadelphia Krampuslauf Participants Group as a source of inspiration for a costume or performance. The idea of incorporating “found” folkloric motifs led to a vast expansion of the pantheon of spirits and spirit-designs used by regular Parade-goers, which in turn has influenced performers and revelers at all levels. Even Lux Arati’s performance of the Frau Perchta dance in 2017 has roots in online interactions with the Folk Horror Revival and Philadelphia Krampuslauf Participants group from the three to four years prior to the dance. Costume designs and mythic motifs are fleshed out through the information sharing that occurs in the online space, with new combinations and narratives formed through creative reinterpretation, online dialogue, and sub-linking of relevant material.

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<sup>7</sup> I note that the folk horror genre is essentially based on British cultural expression, with some broader ties to both North American and European expressions as well. Those who share folk horror from non-European sources are seldom shouted down or denounced for such subjects, but the overall focus tends to downplay non-Western sources in the aesthetic of the group.

A primary interaction for Parade-goers is the photo sharing that occurs after each parade. Facebook is a central medium for the distribution of photographs, and the tagging feature allows many participants to connect with people in the photographs—the ubiquitous “that was you?” moments that happen in the days and weeks following the Parade events. Additionally, sites like Flickr become hubs of activity as users comb through albums of online photos to see what they missed during the Parade. Many users will share admiration for the quality of the photographs themselves, as well as highly expressive compliments about the costumes and props in the pictures.

In addition to the social media interactions, the Parade maintains its own presence through its website. The site itself still bears the name of “Krampuslauf Philadelphia” in the URL, but the title of the event has been updated in all other ways on the webpage. The site is perhaps even more impressive since Amber and other Parade members use it as a way to share their thoughts and feelings about the Parade in the form of blog posts and comments, both before and after the event of the Parade itself. The expansion of the Parade practice through the digital zone creates a “perpetual Parade” of sorts, one that never really ends so long as new people are discovering it or established members are returning to the site as a shrine to the events of the past or the “backstage” of the events to come. Most impressively, the Parade website also serves as a continual archive of experiences and interactions that stays intact. The archival property of the page is doubly felt since several Parade members also conduct short interviews with one another about their experiences and post them on the website. Thus, the digital space for the Parade of Spirits is performative *and* reflective. The community, despite the existence of a closed Facebook group, seeks to open itself up to like-minded individuals, and to offer them the

maximum resources for future participation and understanding the history and culture of the event.

In 2015, when I returned for my second round of the Krampuslauf, I had already become a part of the community through the inclusive power of digital participation. I had spent the previous year interacting with the group via Facebook, sharing inspiration and talking costumes. I had originally hoped to go as Krampus's sack, using plastic dolls and ModPodge to create facial impressions in the burlap around me to look like a bag full of naughty tykes. As is often the case with craft projects, however, the design did not quite work out, and I returned to my previous year's fur-bedecked Belsnickel. I marched in the parade and offered candy canes to any children we passed from my lantern bucket, and of course, Amber was correct; there was not a single crying child in the parade or anywhere around it. We had come together to have our own fun and generated enough that it spilled over.

## Chapter 4. NO ONE CRIES AT KRAMPUSLAUF

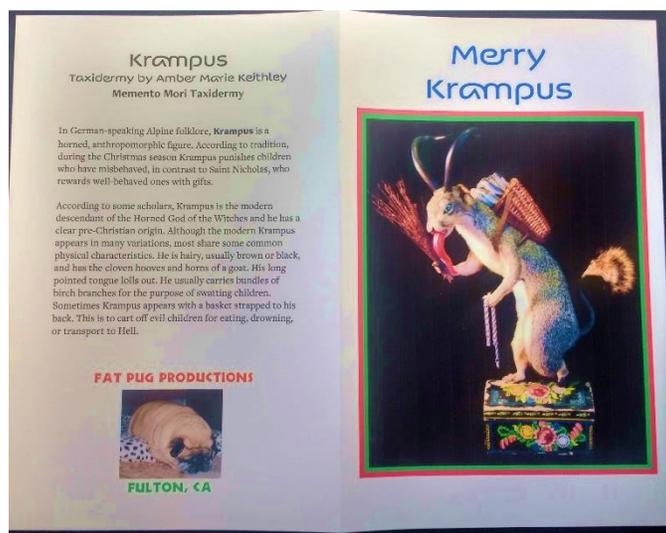


Figure 15– “Merry Krampus” greeting card provided by Thomas Johnson in 2015, produced by Fat Pug Productions, Fulton, CA.

### Cards from Strangers: The Monster that Brings People Together

After the first year of research, I presented some initial questions and observations about the Philadelphia Krampuslauf at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society. At the time, I had met few folklorists and had certainly not discussed the Krampuslauf phenomenon outside of my immediate social and academic circles. Yet at the conference, a man named Thomas Johnson sought me out specifically to hand-deliver a card featuring a squirrel that had been taxidermied to look like a Krampus. The inscription in the card said “May your holiday season be filled with peace & joy and a visit from St. Nicholas and not the Krampus” (See Fig. 15). Sight unseen, the presence of the Christmas monster had inspired Mr. Johnson to make a connection with me.

The experience of community-building through the monstrous figure of Krampus goes well beyond my own anecdotal tale. Repeatedly during my research, I have been reminded that

the Krampus is a lightning rod for specific communities and individuals, gathering them all together to celebrate during a holiday season that they might otherwise ignore or even explicitly reject. Krampuslauf, and its successor the Parade of Spirits, takes a singular performative event and weaves it into a unifying experience for several different groups. This is the very embodiment, so to speak, of Victor Turner's (1969) concept of "communitas," in which the experience of liminal time, space, or social status binds together a group *beyond* any single occurrence of that time, space, or social status. Turner (1969) notes that during the initiatory rituals he observed, he saw individuals stripped of personality within a sacred or liminal environment, including some who "may be disguised as monsters...to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system—in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands" (95). In the Philadelphia event, the liminal space of the Parade similarly strips off individuality from the performers in the ritual drama, but the aims seem to be slightly different. The groups that form bonds over the Parade often have particular reasons for doing so that meet their own smaller-scale needs, yet all participate in similar ways and often have zones of overlapping interest. At Krampuslauf, the Parade is not an initiation, but a recognition of initiated status in which participation is the marker of belonging.

As I turn my attention to the meanings underlying the drama of the Parade of Spirits, I see three distinct groups who share the form of the Christmas monster as a unifying thread. First, the "maker" community, an artistic enclave within the greater Philadelphia area, although it is not limited geographically and draws in participants from other places as far away as Pittsburgh, Arizona, and California. The makers engage with the Krampus as an iconoclast, a form that can be used to undercut the mass-produced, mass-cultural holiday season of department stores and

mainstream consumerism. Second, the Krampus is important to the neo-Pagan community, particularly a set of practitioners oriented towards a cosmology drawing upon Norse, Germanic, and Anglo-Saxon sources. For these participants, the act of joining the Parade has a sacred quality, creating what one participant cogently described as a “traveling liminal space.” Finally, families are frequently very involved in the event, with children taking primary roles and intergenerational participation underlying many of the crafting, spiritual, and performative aspects of the Parade as a whole. Repeatedly, those involved with the Parade talked about “darkness” and its importance in the lives of children, pointing to the Parade as a way in which parents and kids can cohabit a realm of fear while arming children with psychological mechanisms for processing their anxieties. All three of these groups have their own goals related to their participation in the Krampuslauf, although all of them intersect and support one another in important ways as well. Turner explained that liminal events almost invariably display a certain amount of spiritual or religious subtext, even when they are not overtly associated with sacred rites or religious institutions. So, too, do participants in the Parade of Spirits engage in acts of liminal behavior that reflect cosmologies friendly to the neo-Pagan groups involved in the events. The neo-Pagans, for their part, see the value of the anti-structural and liminal figure of the Krampus used by the maker community as a way of questioning capitalist paradigms, which they also question. No single interpretation of the figure or the performance fully captures the event, but instead a ritual drama of “plural reflexivity” emerges, one which emphasizes what Turner—in an interpretive turn of Van Gennep’s tripartite structure of rites of passage—would call the “reaggregation” of the *communitas* in the last phase of rites. Belonging to a Krampuslauf through practice means belonging to the community of Krampuslauf enthusiasts. A person’s initial encounter with Krampus and other Christmas monsters catalyzes into one of several

responses: retreat for those who do not find any connection with the figure, or are actively disturbed by him; intellectual curiosity, which often leads to initial “observer” behavior in the Parade context; and invitation—a challenge to the person to go through the process of joining in the Parade. These responses are not immutable, as a person with initial curiosity may eventually feel the call of the challenge and undergo the initiatory process of donning their first costume, or a person initially repulsed by Krampus may later consider the figure with more curiosity. The response that most interests me, and which drives the communal performance, is the feeling of challenge and the desire to participate. Once that impulse rises in an individual or a small group—such as a family unit—the broader rite of passage begins. The person recognizes their separation from mainstream holiday celebrations—a point driven home by the emphasis on anti-commercialism. They then undergo a literal physical transformation through the crafting and wearing of costumes. Finally, during the post-Parade reflexive moment, they are aggregated into the performance community, sharing their experiences reflexively through photos, oral and written discussions, and preparations for their next round of participation. The communities that come together to celebrate the Parade of Spirits are intentional in their focus but varied in their own valuation of the meanings behind the figure of Krampus and his kin. The coming-together, however, remains the nexus of meaning-making for those who don the mask of the holiday beast.

### **Monster Makers: Art and the Krampuslauf Parade**

A little less than a week before the 2014 Krampuslauf, I attended a workshop at the iMPeRFECT Art Gallery in western Philadelphia where I helped create some of the lanterns used in the procession. For approximately four hours, the tiny space housed more than thirty people using tape, cardboard, glue, paint, PVC pipe, plastic molding, old comic books, fabric, donated clothes, fire, scissors, boxcutters, and a great deal of imagination to create the monsters of winter. For 2014, Stopper and the other organizers brought in professional designer and found-

object artist Mykl Wells, who has been involved with Tucson's All Souls Procession. Amber Dorko Stopper says of Wells that he is "very into open source crafting and making everything available." The artistic elements of the celebration all speak to the importance of creation and crafting in the Krampuslauf experience. The festival's website specifically describes it as "Philadelphia's family-friendly, maker-friendly festival of winter terror!" The craft and maker communities have been intimately involved with Krampuslauf's founding and evolution but may well act as a tether to its growth. Even more importantly, that tethering is intentional.

As Stopper began formulating ideas for the festival, she knew she wanted it to be in the Liberty Lands Park, for a combination of aesthetic and historic reasons. In order to book the park, she had to contact park coordinator Janet Finegar, who, as it turned out, had been involved with Bread & Puppet Theatre in Vermont, which makes large-scale puppets for outdoor shows. Finegar, who has a degree in folklore, was enthusiastic about the event and quickly became a partner in its planning. Almost immediately they began collecting various artists, including jewelry-makers, knitters, and cardboard crafters to help build up a vision for the Krampuslauf. When the neo-Pagan Urglaawe group became involved in 2012, they were shaped in turn by their involvement, and have begun to establish "guilds" within their tradition, many of which are focused on crafts like fiber arts. Despite this overarching creativity at the highest levels of the Parade's organizational structure, the craftsmanship resides in the hands of the participants, regardless of skill level. "It is really run by those involved in it," says Stopper. The tactile nature of the event provides a great deal of its appeal. The beautiful and intricate masks and lanterns represent a cultural outlook which values materials as objects almost spiritual in nature. Indeed, Stopper herself notes that "Materials are important. They are full of memory and full of meaning,

even for someone who has no religion...If you don't have that [memory and meaning], what do you have?"

The material quality of festival intertwines with its performative aspects to create the holistic effect of parade, pageant, and ritual. Intense thought and labor goes into costume and mask manufacture—almost always in the etymological meaning of the word, as masks and costumes must be hand-made or assembled. The communities that gather together to build the props and costumes associated with the event frequently come from backgrounds rooted in other crafting, and many members make connections through the DIY and crafting community prior to engaging with the Parade directly. One interviewee, Addie Metevier, told me that despite attending for the first time in 2017, she had been circling the periphery of the Parade for years because of her connections to Amber and the local crafter scene:

This year I actually had met Amber in person. It's the first time and actually I've known about Amber for years. I think originally I was following her knitting blog, like I don't even know how long ago, maybe fifteen years ago. [And] from there...she popped up in the homeschooling group on Facebook so we really vibed and hit it off, and I'm an art student so this is Like super appealing to me, where you sort of are making masks and all kinds of stuff

Addie met Amber because of a shared love of craft, however, in this case knitting, and the relationship developed both through a family-oriented connection and other crafting interests. Janet Finegar's experience in crafting puppets by hand for use in street performances made her instantly feel at home with Amber as well, and one of the first objects that Amber ever showed to Janet was a Krampus doll she had made by hand for one of her children. At that point, Janet says, she knew they would be friends. Nearly all participants mentioned the role of costume creation

or assembly as an aspect of the Parade they enjoyed or at the very least felt was important to the event. Children frequently become involved in the creation of masks, even some of the most frightening or unusual ones. Amber's son, Béla, describes the numerous ways in which he contributed to the physical materials of the Parade:

CTH: And you helped make some of these masks, too, right?

BÉLA: Yeah. Last year we had a mask making [work]shop in a U-Haul. I helped with my dad's, with mine—I helped most with the positioning and adding pieces. My mom used my one from last year, and my brother's used the one from last year.

CTH: And did you help with the Baba Yaga hut this year, too?

BÉLA: Yeah. It started out like a cage, a dog cage. Then we had, so we had to start with the dog cage and then cut triangles, after my brother did some kind of measurements. And the Baba Yaga, a friend of mine who played the Baba Yaga role, could fit in it when she was standing...[To make the skulls] we used balloons and popped it, and my mom and brother cut the eyes. We did a lot of the weaving, too.

Béla's intimate involvement with all aspects of the Parade creation may be heightened by his proximity to Amber and the frequent workshops and artistic creation that surround him.

However, many participants also emphasize that no one is excluded from the event based on an artistic skill set. Tucker, another participant who helped with the Baba Yaga hut and many of the props and set pieces associated with the Parade, says that:

Everyone has a different range of crafting experience & abilities, varying degrees of self-confidence, and varying degrees of inhibition against exploring the creative process. For these reasons, it would be hard to make a case for it being necessary that every single

person participate in *these* ways. On the other hand, I do feel that *participation* is critical, and it is at the very ethos of this event. It is a participatory event - not a spectator event - even if you just come with a mask made from a paper plate.

What Tucker highlights is the participatory nature of the Parade, and participation comes in the form of creation and performance. The fact that the Parade is “not a spectator event” is driven home time and time again by participants, because they have put so much of themselves into the creation of the Parade. Time, materials, imaginative resources, and labor all coalesce into the physical forms and performed actions of the festival actors.

Why, then, the intense emphasis on crafting and creation? Additionally, I must also ask why the crafting and creation has such an individualistic component while simultaneously drawing upon a community zeitgeist of creativity and manufacture. Philadelphia has a history of developing communities of craftsmanship, and those communities have a history of parading while showcasing their crafts. Susan G. Davis (1986, 121) uncovered a number of working-class parade groups in early twentieth-century Philadelphia who used public processions as a way of demonstrating the labor their jobs required. Davis notes that in workers’ parades, laborers “acted out their jobs, stressing the useful value of their products.” In the case of the Krampuslauf, the useful value of a Christmas monster mask or costume may not have immediately apparent value, but the emphasis is on art and creation as a process and practice among the participants. Many participants see artistic exploration and the manifestation of the imaginative impulse as a validation of their own value. The perception of art and craft as something worthwhile is not endemic to Philadelphia, of course. In Old-World Krampuslaufs, the emphasis on mask artistry is intense, requiring a degree of conformity and skill not easily available to all participants. Al Ridenour notes that while even school children may make paper Krampus masks in parts of

Austria or Germany, in general the costumes used in the official parades tended to “adhere to high standards of craftsmanship, and the costs reflect [that]. A recent survey of participants in the Salzburg region found that average costs for the entire ensemble [of a Krampus outfit] hovers [sic] around \$1,700, while masks alone (especially by respected carvers) can go for over \$1,000” (2016, 50). In Ridenour’s experience, the “value” of the costumes can be quantified financially, and the masks in particular can reflect an investment in craftsmanship.

Where Philadelphia stands apart is in its de-emphasis on quality as a driving force behind participation. There are no rigid standards to which performers must adhere in terms of form or materials. To be sure, the handmade aspect of the event is central to the aesthetic and personal meaning many attendees noted in their interviews. Even in costumes that were assembled rather than completely crafted by the wearers, the unique individual manufacture of the components was seen as valuable:

CHRIS ORAPELLO: I liked all the homemade costumes...that it [Krampuslauf] had a homemade quality to it, a certain quality to it that, you know, just in everyday life you get consumed with mass market polished factory produced things, whatever they are. And you lose that. You don't always get just bombarded with this aesthetic of the handmade homemade thing. And it was just neat to see that *en masse*.

TARA LOVE-MAGUIRE: Yeah and then it gave it an almost like a performance art aspect to it as well...we kind of just assembled it from stuff that we had because it was very on the fly that we went. Like there was no preparation whatsoever so it was all just stuff literally that we had worn to FaerieCon [another costumed festival that attracts many East Coast neo-Pagans] not that long prior. Because Chris had gotten like the woolly vest In the lady section of Burlington Coat Factory that I made him buy. And he

had bought like a handmade, it's like a leather crown piece at FairieCon [where] there's a leather vendor there who makes masks and crowns and things like that. And he had bought a crown from them that had like horns on it. So it was a bought piece but still handmade.

In the case of Chris and Tara, the aesthetic was still one of the “handmade,” even though they had purchased their materials, including a vest from a large department store. Notably, the vest was used against at least one intended purpose, its gender aesthetic re-appropriated by Chris for the sake of performing as something animalistic, monstrous, and—for his purposes—neo-Pagan. The act of creation, and in lieu of “from-scratch” craftsmanship, the act of imaginative participation and self-transformation, lie at the heart of the Philadelphia experience. This is what David Napier (1987) calls the “phenomenon of transformation,” the act of donning a disguise and changing oneself for the purposes of play and metaphysical stimulation. In the context of Philadelphia’s Krampuslauf, the participants can join in at any skill level, because it is the *joining in* that leads to the transformative phenomenon. The deeper the joining, the deeper the transformation, but even last-minute transformative efforts pulled from the bin of materials at the Parade site on the day of the event have value. They validate the role of artistic creation and expression, of play, and of change.

Change and transformation extend beyond the self, however, because the Parade exists as a challenge to the broader cultural trends found during the holiday season. Nearly all participants isolated the holiday season as one in which a juggernaut of “commercialism” has effectively railroaded the social and mythopoetic aspects of the celebration, even as commercial entities employ masked or costumed figures like Santa Claus to enact control. Leigh Eric Schmidt (1995), Jack Santino (1996), and Karal Ann Marling (2000) have all explored the problem of

holiday commercialization in depth, and the emphasis of this study is not on exactly how popular culture and economic interests have gained control of holiday rhetoric. Instead, the Parade of Spirits is worth examining precisely because it is inherently *anti-commercial*. Santino addresses the sublimation of ceremonial and ritual holiday celebrations in *All Around the Year* (1995) by directing scholarly attention to the problems of an increasingly mobile and changeable society, one in which homogeneity dissipates over time—if it ever really existed at all. Instead, he asks, in a nod to Barbara Myerhoff, “Where did all that ceremony go?” For Santino, Schmidt, and Marling, the answer to that questions seems to be “follow the money.” Schmidt, drawing upon commercial records, traces Christmas into the pocketbooks of women in the Victorian era and the shop windows of Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia. Marling sees the flattening of ceremonialism in almost literal terms, discussing the material subjugation of festivity into forms like wrapping paper. Santino, for his part, believes that the power of the “handmade” is a particular kind of response to commercial dominance of the holiday, an idea that can be supported by the individual mask-making and costume construction of the Parade. The deeply engrained rhetoric of resistance to commercial “tainting” of a public folk event shapes almost every aspect of the Parade’s performance. Structurally, the Parade has an official format complete with a permit process and a “home” in Liberty Lands that receives sanction from the neighborhood association. In this way, it resembles the loose centralized formal order of an event like the Pasadena Doo Dah Parade, another folk expression of resistance to commercial influences described in Chapter One (See Lawrence 1987). As in the Pasadena event, the Philadelphia Krampuslauf grew out of a sense of frustration with the official culture around it.

Feelings of frustration in response to holidays are not novel, but they are diverse. Each person’s experience of the winter holidays is shaped not only by the broader social constructs

surrounding the “official” event, but by particular experiences associated with those symbols, times, and event. Schmidt (1995) notes that protests over Christmas in particular surge from all sides, with many Christians bemoaning commercialization at the expense of religious meaning and often unaware of the ways in which Christmas commercialism has been historically used to domesticate and tame a holiday with much more raucous and unreserved celebrations. In the case of Philadelphia, however, the problem that sparked the development of the Parade was not driven by any desire to “put the Christ back in Christmas,” or even a desire to do the opposite and completely secularize the season. Instead, Amber’s disappointment with the cultural gaps involved in her international adoption process led to a response that looked for other meaningful symbols that could provide a feeling of religiosity without any dogmatic adherence to a particular religion. She tapped into a communal sense of disappointment and frustration and helped usher in an event that centralized and united a broader group of people around a symbol of “alternative” holiday celebration that retained ceremony and ritual, eschewed commercialism, and offered participants the chance to create their own meanings through reflexive response. As discussed in Chapter One, the community disappointment with the Rose Bowl Parade’s saturation of local culture both resulted in the manifestation of a processional event to respond to those frustrations. Pasadena’s event, however, focuses on topical humor tied to current events, or to an absurdist rendering of cultural tropes and phenomena. In contrast, Philadelphia’s event repurposes embedded cultural models divorced from specific trends in favor of unsettling the broader commercial appropriation of winter holidays as a whole. The choice of monstrous and devilish creatures is not solely a tip of a social and cultural hat to Old World antecedents, but instead a direct invocation of an anti-commercial consciousness. As Victor Turner says, “Monsters startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of

their environment they have hitherto taken for granted” (Turner 1967, 105). The selection of the Christmas monster in the Philadelphia context comes from Amber’s personal roots, but taps into a broader feeling that participants have about the uncomfortably saccharine or economically oriented holidays they experience every year.

Many involved with the Parade of Spirits noted the ways that their participation has been shaped by their experience of the commercial. In some cases, that experience expands beyond the winter holiday season and into other areas where the realms of craft and performance intersect. Linda Soffer specifically identified the way that Krampuslauf acts as a hand-made, self-directed alternative to the American Halloween traditions:

LINDA: “I think in this festival it [a sense of play] manifests to more so than at, say Halloween. Because there’s so much more commercialization of Halloween, there’s so much more of a kind of a given standard for Halloween costumes. There are a lot of references to, I mean, it’s very much more commercialized.

CTH: Like with popular culture?

LINDA: Yes much, much more popular culture, and possibly because we have Halloween and we also really embrace Halloween, that it makes this festival different. Maybe for some other people who don’t go, they can get so into Halloween, you know. But this might be their only costuming movement of the year [if they don’t dress up at Halloween].

Linda sees the Parade of Spirits filling in for Halloween for people who dislike that holiday because many of the costumes are store-bought or otherwise devoid of personal meaning. She also feels that Halloween complements Krampuslauf festivities, citing the “references,” or

remissions between the two events as evidence of that relationship. Victor Turner (1984) refers to this referential comparison within the “play frame” of a public performance as “reflexivity,” a concept explored by Jay Mechling (1980; 2006; 2008) in his incorporation of photography as an ethnographic tool. Mechling sees the reflexive turn in an ongoing series of daily play behaviors—in his case, the behaviors of communities like the Boy Scouts—as part of a “metacommunicative act” (1980, 38). Those participating in the Parade are commenting on themselves, on the culture around them, and upon their participation in that culture. The power of self-definition takes concrete form through costume and performance, and the narrative power of reflection maintains that control, at least for the time being.

The growing popularity of the Parade and Krampuslaufs more generally, however, worries some who enjoy the “outsider” status of artist-participants. Many worry that the event will be coopted by gawkers and spectators, or those who see the entire phenomenon solely as a spectacle. “We are not here to entertain you,” says Stopper. Others speak to the countercultural aspect of Krampuslauf, with a nod to the irony of its historical continuity. One interviewee, who asked to be identified only as “Ben” for the purposes of this research, explained it this way:

Even though this is somewhat traditional, it’s also on the fringes...It’s not something where you and I are going to show up in jeans and a shirt...Some of the other festivals that are out there on the edge, you don’t wear your normal clothes...by switching your outfit, your uniform...you pick up a more primal in some way—for some people in a lot of ways—side of yourself.

Adult participants are not the only ones to see the fringe nature of the celebration as a positive point, nor are children unaware of the risks that growing popularity can bring. Linda’s middle-

school aged daughter, Ruby, has internalized the message of anti-commercialism, and thinks about the potential problems that rapid growth could induce for parade participants like her:

It actually is growing...There were only thirty or thirty-five people there, and now there's hundreds, so it's obviously grown. I feel like it does have the power to kind of stay where it is. Even if it does grow, like my mom and Sue said, it will still be that kind of people [like those that participate now]. Because I feel like the other kinds of people that would kind of, commercialize it, they aren't really looking for things like this. And I don't think anyone really intends to ruin something, or cause any harm! And I feel like there's already plenty of other commercialized things like that for the people who want those things.

The fringe aspect of the Parade puts it into conflict with its expansion, and to some extent, with its ideals. In order to maintain a participatory feel, it simply cannot expand beyond the size that would allow everyone to take crafting workshops, assemble in the park, and know the other participants. That, at least, is the current perspective. As the Parade grows, those growing pains are shaping the response of participants, especially at the organizational level. Stopper has changed the name of the event, for fear that other events using a similar name will become conflated and devalue the Philadelphia event. The cultural caché of Krampus is beginning to wear out its novelty, even while the Parade participants draw upon Krampuslaufs for continued traditional validation and inspiration. The biggest concern, it seems, is just how much popularity the Parade needs to maintain to keep people interested without spiraling out of community control and transforming into something faddish. "Nobody really wants it to be cool; I have worries about it being cool," says Amber.

### **A Parade of Spirits: Nature Religion and the “Traveling Liminal Space”**

When Amber Dorko Stopper established Philadelphia’s Krampuslauf in 2011, she did so without any spiritual fetters or objectives, at least as far as she is concerned, but with an eye towards subverting a cultural and spiritual hegemony based upon Judeo-Christian principles emphasizing concepts such as “light” and “good” in opposition to forces of “darkness” and “evil.” For Amber, hardline dualistic thinking ignored the nuances of her experiences, and treated many of those experiences as undesirable even when she found they could be constructive and empowering. When Stopper began the international adoption process for her son, who was born in South Korea, social workers would visit her home and make recommendations on cultural elements in the home, as with the Korean wall-hanging of masks. She began to see that the event created a “victim culture” which told her adopted child “we’ll let you have your monsters” but hide our own. Stopper’s creation of the Krampuslauf, then, directly extends from her frustrations with what she perceives as Western culture’s paternalism about “darkness.” To her ears, the social workers’ rubber-stamping of non-United States-based monster figures while simultaneously denouncing the diabolical figures of Amber’s cultural surroundings extended an imperialist mentality that made the Korean monsters “okay” because they belonged to a culture on a different spectrum of civilization because it came from somewhere else. Her response was to embrace a figure that could also come from “somewhere else,” but that directly spoke to the symbolic culture she already understood. She did not conceive of it as a spiritual event, but one which could transcend any singular cultural expression, and get at the heart of humanity by exposing a fantasy of darkness and making it fun through art.

In the years since the festival began, however, a distinct spiritual element has emerged through contact with the local Heathen religious population. Broadly speaking, Heathenry falls into the family of contemporary religions known as “neo-Paganism,” which usually emphasize

pre-Christian mythologies and cosmologies, as well as values such as land stewardship, hospitality, animal and human rights, and a belief in unseen powers such as magic. Heathenry can come in a variety of forms, such as Norse Reconstructionism or Asatru, both of which emphasize distinctly Scandinavian roots, as well as some branches that focus more on Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic traditions. In most cases, Heathenry involves a direct experience of gods as distinct, individual entities, usually rooted in cultural sources such as the Sagas. Heathens engage in ritualized divination, often using markings called “runes,” which may also be incorporated into other rituals. Honoring the dead and ancestors also plays a key role in the practice of Heathenry, with a ritualized drinking-and-toasting ceremony known as a *sumbal* performed in honor of the dead, or in some cases to commemorate the valiant deeds of the living. The mythic worldview of Heathens involves the division of the known universe into “worlds,” each inhabited by different deities or beings. Humans are thought to live in a “middle” world (often called “Midgard”), while other beings like giants or elves get their own worlds (Jotunheim and Alfheim, respectively). Heathens also emphasize a clan or tribal structure in their communities, with affiliations based on ancestry and worship, a practice that sometimes causes significant strife in fringe areas of Heathenry, especially as groups like the Asatru Folk Assembly claim their Heathenry as racially exclusive. The vast majority of Heathens, however, see ethnic or ancestral affiliation as only one dimension of practice, and as a way of informing contemporary ritual forms and beliefs.

In Pennsylvania, with its history of German immigration, a distinctly Americanized version of Heathenry has taken hold. Known collectively under the name “Urglaawe,” which loosely means “original faith” in Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, and separated into regional groups, the Heathens see Krampuslauf as a calling. The primary regional chapter, the Distelfink

Sippschaft of Central Pennsylvania, has been participating in the Krampuslauf parade since its second year, and in 2015, Rob offered the opening dedication and his group carried a banner proudly announcing their faith with badges from other Heathen groups throughout the country.<sup>1</sup> The Urglaawe perspective equates the winter with the myth of the Wild Hunt, when underworld gods would traverse the skies and countryside, collecting those who had died in the previous year (Santino 1995; Schreiwer 2014).

Urglaawe is a constructed tradition, as are many Neo-Pagan and post-modern magical belief systems. As Tanya Luhrmann (1989) has shown, however, the creation of tradition within these groups often accompanies a strong desire to anchor practices to demonstrable history, even if the link is somewhat tenuous. Luhrmann oversimplifies that desire and underestimates the historical methodology of the neo-Pagan groups with whom she studies, perhaps, but in many cases the history constructed by neo-Pagan groups is “mythopoeic,” with an emphasis on authenticity derived from meaning rather than historical methodology. The experiences of participants justify the sanctity of the sources, whether those sources are literary ones like the poetic *Eddas* of Iceland or the ritual forms passed on by leaders to religious neophytes. In the case of the Pennsylvania German-rooted Heathens, history and mythology are deeply entwined. Schreiwer himself has conducted dozens of interviews with elders in the Pennsylvania Dutch community and speaks the language fluently. Through his research, he has come to understand Pennsylvania German history through a neo-Pagan lens, and Krampuslauf is a form of ritualized myth. To those within Urglaawe, Krampus and the Belsnickel are a variant of the god Woden in his “seeker” phase, as he searches for intelligence among humanity. “This time of year is a very

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.distelfink.org](http://www.distelfink.org) or [www.urglaawe.net](http://www.urglaawe.net) for more on this group and its beliefs/structures. Schreiwer has also produced a book of literary and folklorically informed myths that coincide with the Urglaawe cosmological perspective, entitled *The First Book of Urglaawe Myths* (Bristol, PA: Robert Lusch-Schreiwer, 2014).

isolated time,” says Schreier, and this event allows people to transcend that isolation, and share common space, and particularly, to deal with common fears. The fire dancing display after the main parade contained a number of mythic elements as well, including a ritualized drama in which a Krampus figure pursued a forest spirit, only to be repelled by another forest spirit with a fire implement during a stylized dance. The symbols of fire against darkness and the mythologizing of the struggle reinforce the Neo-Pagan links to the festival.

While the connections between winter solstice rites and ritual festive drama has been explored academically from an historical perspective (Hutton 1996; James 1961), the deployment of the Krampus figure and the re-appropriation of seasonal rites by neo-Pagans in contemporary America involves complex systems of history, rhetoric, mythopoeics, and social status. In essentially all manifestations of American Krampuslaufs, neo-Pagan groups seem to find a public nexus for their spirituality. Many want to point the pre-Christian Yule rites, with an emphasis on bonfires and ribald entertainments that were eventually reinterpreted by the official Church to become Christian festivals. In some cases the acts of guising and performing as Christmas monsters have been retrofitted into a narrative of frightening “evil spirits” from an area, or of incorporating local deities under the guise of Church-sanctioned festivals, since St. Nicholas eventually exercised control and power over the heathen spirits of the past. Al Ridenour (2016) finds that the Church was largely responsible for crystalizing the Krampus performance traditions, yet he also warns against ascribing too much meaning to any ancient mythos underlying the performances of European Krampuslaufs and Perchten processions. One of his informants in Bad Gastein, Austria, sees the figure as something evolving from a “whole complex of customs” in which,

[T]he Krampus and the *Perchten* [italics in original], evolved simultaneously, so there are all these things happening at the same time—different people coming up with different, very localized traditions, all these kinds of rural entertainments going on over the winter. People would just meet and play cards and drink and just try to entertain themselves, put on these plays for each other. These were probably the only weeks during the year they really had time for a bit of fun, so I think something like this is a much more logical explanation than to say it was about a fear of the winter, and the long nights, and driving out the devil by dressing up as the devil, all that. (Ridenour 2016, 238)

Ridenour, too, likes this explanation, calling it “no-nonsense” and paying proper tribute to the “spirit of fun” behind the events.

The perspective that these sorts of festive events do provide a space for play and revelry works very well in the agricultural environs of pre-Industrial Europe and America. E.O. James described such festive misrule celebrations as the “strange and unedifying burlesques...an example of the survival and revival of the buffooneries, crude jesting and absurdities which were so prominent in the seasonal festivals...throughout the ages” (1961, 279). Reading the Krampuslauf through the lens of agricultural festival and ritual, or as a release valve for rural peasant impulses, can illuminate some of the Philadelphia Parade’s roots. Nonetheless, there is a challenge, to integrate the experience of the Parade of Spirits with contemporary neo-Pagan spirituality and the urban environment, neither of which seem to fit the “unedifying burlesques” model of rural entertainments.

Schreier’s Urglaawe community takes pride in its heritage, and views itself within the context of revivalism and pre-Christian traditions. Yet it also stems from the uniquely Pennsylvania German culture of North America, and benefits from the social networks and urban

concentration of Philadelphia. The Christian contexts surrounding many Pennsylvania German traditions and customs can be difficult to reconcile with Urglaawe's Heathenry, and other neo-Pagan traditions as well. One point that repeatedly arose in conversations with neo-Pagan practitioners attending the Parade of Spirits emphasized that this Parade was overtly non-Christian, yet it can exist within the surrounding community without raising any fits of intolerance, at least for now. Additionally, the Krampuslauf's embrace of an Old World figure does not preclude its inclusion of any number of other spiritual entities, all of which may be relevant to individual participants. Those who come dressed as the pan-Celtic Caellich, a British-influenced Green Man figure, a generically "Horned God" deity, an Italian Befana, a Slavic Baba Yaga, or a Germanic Frau Perchta are all welcomed into the procession. Figures of animal-like spirits nod at Native American folklore, and even a masked figure in a Mexican *luchador* wrestling match has had a prominent place as one of the "spirits." For some neo-Pagans and those outside the community, anxieties over cultural appropriation shape their spiritual exercises, and at Krampuslauf those anxieties have not yet become a flashpoint of controversy. What folklorist Sabina Magliocco (2004) has identified as the double-edged sword of appropriative spiritual behavior does not trouble neo-Pagan participants in the Philadelphia Parade, because the context of performance does not require spiritual belief. Those who do have a particular belief system are free to incorporate spiritual meanings through costuming and performance, but their expression of that belief remains their own and can be appreciated by others through other lenses, such as the aesthetic or counter-cultural ones.

The pride in heritage has also been a magnet for problems within the broader scope of Heathenry, too. Just as the Fantastics of Philadelphia highlighted racial and class tensions, so too, do Heathen festive celebrations elevate the anxieties extant within neo-Pagan circles

regarding what many see as religion either explicitly accommodating racist ideologies or invoking anti-Christian sentiments. To the latter point, neo-Pagan authors, teachers, and leaders have spent years endeavoring to dissuade the public from believing that their traditions are anti-Christian, instead often turning the dialogue around to point out the Christian coopting of pre-Christian traditions that were considered “pagan.” In some cases these histories are highly constructed, but in many instances the pre-Christian roots of ongoing traditions that are re-adopted or reinterpreted under the neo-Pagan umbrella of religions does have some historical basis, albeit a loose one (Luhrman 1989; Magliocco 2004). The more contemporary and potentially vitriolic conflict specifically connected to Heathenry is racially inflected. A relatively small but vocal number of groups operating with Heathen spiritual cosmologies and symbol sets have taken up positions that are either race-exclusive—denying membership to those who cannot demonstrate some sort of Scandinavian or Teutonic heritage—or white supremacist (Strmiska 2000). Often the Heathen contingents adopting positions of racism or white supremacy have political interests in mind and take deeply nationalistic views of their native states, as has happened in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century in places like Sweden or Norway.

In the United States, similarly nationalistic and racist ideologies have been espoused by Heathen groups such as the Asatru Folk Assembly and other groups using the label “folkish” for their broader social networks. The Heathen groups participating in events like the Parade of Spirits have had to make very clear that their spiritual adoption of the Parade denounces such ideologies in a forceful way. The Urglaawe website, for example, specifically includes a “Fruchsfriede Policy” that states “We respect the rights of individuals to express their personal truths in a constructive manner... We do not tolerate racism, bigotry, homophobia, or sexism as these forces are destructive to the self and to community. Harassment and uninvited displays of

affection are verboten.”<sup>2</sup> These efforts have, in large part, provided a significant buffer against any concerns of racial discrimination from other, non-Heathen participants in the Parade. At the same time, there are still potential negotiations regarding race being made. Robert Schreiwer, for example, has repeatedly dressed as a Belsnickel, sometimes using the “sooty” makeup reminiscent of blackface that has raised eyebrows in places like Denmark with the Zwarte Piet figure. In 2017, Schreiwer’s performance had shifted from the Belsnickel to the less controversially-clad figure of Ewicher Yeger, the “Eternal Hunter” of Urglaawe lore.

While Heathen spirituality aligns with Krampuslauf’s symbolism and spiritual figures—Schreiwer offered an invocation in 2014 partly in Pennsylvania German dialect in a nod to the distinctly Pennsylvanian nature of his group’s Heathenry—it does not exercise a spiritual monopoly over the event. People of all faiths are welcome, so long as they abide by the rules of the event. Stopper and Finegar still oversee the event’s direction and planning, and they embrace the Urglaawe community as a partner rather than fearing for any appropriation. The festival’s official name—“Krampuslauf: A Parade of Spirits”—has even grown to incorporate the growing pantheon of entities represented in the event, becoming just the “Parade of Spirits” in 2017. How does founder Stopper feel about the Heathens at the event? “Rob is one of the most spiritual people I know...one of the kindest. If he’s representing the Heathens, then that’s what he’s representing.” Inclusiveness is key among the masks and fur of the various Christmas monsters. The Heathens have offered opening invocations for the event in 2013 and 2014, and they remain one of the most vocal and organized presences at the Krampuslauf. Neo-Pagans from non-Heathen traditions, such as Chris Orapello and Tara Love-Maguire, do not feel sidelined by the Heathen community, but welcomed by them, and see the Parade as an event that creates a

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<sup>2</sup> For the complete policy, see <http://urglaawe.blogspot.com/p/etiquette-policy.html>

spiritual experience open to all who want it. Chris laughingly admitted that he tends to thumb his nose at conformity, even within the neo-Pagan community, but that the Parade was different, because it felt like an “otherworldly procession” in which participants were in contact with spiritual entities without necessarily needing any kind of formal ritual structure. The participation *is* the ritual. Tara described the procession as a “travelling liminal space,” one in which the mundane world could be suspended through a pair of horns or a mask or—in her case—a blaring accordion.

Repeatedly and often, my non-Pagan informants said things about the Parade that would have been right at home in a neo-Pagan ritual circle or a discussion of Heathen beliefs. Remarkably, the most overt comments about the relevance of “Nature” as a spiritual or personally resonant force behind the Parade came from people who did not have any direct connection to neo-Pagan practices. For example, one of my informants clearly connected the timing of the Parade with its seasonality:

ELLEN ROSENHOLTZ: So it’s like this seasonal transition moment where you’ve just harvested everything, to a time of solitude and quiet. So like the harvest is this very active momentous time, and everybody’s acting together. But then you, you know, nestle in for like the next eight months. And so, it’s a really nice celebration of that. You know, the beginning of that time period. Like we’re all together, but now we’re going to let the fall go.

Ellen’s reflections resemble many of the comments made by E.O. James about the ancient agricultural festivals among pre-Christian and rural Christianizing societies. The observation of the passage of time, and the clear connection Ellen makes to the post-“harvest” period in which the Krampuslauf occurs, speak to an understanding of the calendar year as the background for

ritualized performance. Other participants went even further with the connection between a spiritual experience of Nature and the experience of Parade performance. Ruby Soffer talked about her costumes' evolution from being largely animal-based—she loves animals—to being more abstractly interpretive of nature:

RUBY: I loved animals and I still do. And I want to look like that, because I thought it looked cool. And it was kind of cool, you know, seeing the folklore behind it. And then, dressing up as it, and really realizing that this was an actual thing. And as I've gotten older, I've more and more felt that spiritual connection. And I definitely agree with Sue and my mom and Ilsa, that you definitely feel, you embody these spirits when you dress up.

The sense of embodiment that many informants describe as part of their Parade experience expresses a form of spiritual identification with these Christmas monster. People see pieces of themselves in the creatures they portray. They use horns and fur to describe animal parts of themselves, and at the same time they incorporate pieces of themselves into their costumes. Sue White talked about the way she incorporated her garden into her costume in 2017, using trimmed fronds from her ornamental grasses to create a massive collar of “fur” for her Spirit, a type of witch creature. Sue's love of gardening became a component of her performance through the act of guising. Similarly, in 2011's Krampuslauf, Janet Finegar used the cleaned remains of a recent meal to create a “vest” of bones for her outfit, literally turning the act of eating into something elevated and sacred through its recontextualization in the Parade environment. The emphasis on myth and folklore within the Parade, particularly for neo-Pagans, gives it a spiritual shape, but all who participate are members of a “travelling liminal space,” and an “otherworldly procession,” regardless of their individual spirituality. Whether they know it or not, they are going beyond the

dictums of the Parade rules, providing not only fun, but their own spiritual experience and part of someone else's.

Additionally, the multicultural dimensions of the Parade are leading to a broader inclusion of spiritual forms than in its nascent years. The Heathen contingent involved has begun to incorporate figures beyond the Belsnickel, possibly as a way of mitigating some of the concerns over racism and blackface, but also often to expose attendees to the deeper mythology of Urglaawe. Similarly, Amber's children have been studying the Japanese spirit creatures known as *yokai* in the hopes of incorporating some aspects of these figures into the Parade, and Amber's daughter has been taking African dance classes that may become a part of her performance. Many other participants draw from mythology and folklore beyond their own cultures to find spirits that speak to them at a personal level, raising questions of appropriation in the name of inclusivity. As of 2017, however, the open embrace of spirits and cultures and the intimate relationships between participants has staved off any direct commentaries on race or appropriation, and the general feeling has been that the more spirits that attend the Parade, the more everyone's fun is heightened.

## The Devil You Know: Children and the Krampuslauf

Throughout the interviews I conducted for this research, participants echoed one another on a few key points. Mostly, they emphasized the simple list of rules for the Krampuslauf: scare only those who wish to be scared and participate. Frequently, however, the importance of children at the event surfaced. During the 2014 crafting day at the iMPeRFECT Gallery, many children worked on their costumes, doing everything from cutting cardboard and using glue guns to practicing plate-spinning and stilt-walking. The show after the parade prominently features the Parade children and their “safe” version of fire dancing, and communications about the event even include admonitions that participants should make a point of attending the children’s performance:

also, giving lux arati [the fire-dancing group] another few minutes of bumper time, will be our kids' flow mini-showcase. this showcase has a playlist that is exactly one song long, so not only should it be endurable even if any of them refuse to GO to the stage, you could literally applaud that long and not get terribly tired.<sup>3</sup>

While the event certainly incorporates children, all those who participate have high expectations for the kids who get involved. Stopper’s young daughter worked on building up back strength for weeks before the event so that she could carry a smaller version of one of the remarkable whole-body puppets in the parade, as did her successor, Sylvia, who described the job of being Es Meedli as, “Hard. Very hard.” She remembers that it was cold when she removed it and not comfortable to walk in, but that she still made it through the whole parade—a point of pride for her. Children learned not only arts-and-crafts construction, but also performance arts such as the

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<sup>3</sup> “Frau Perchta”/Amber Stopper - KRAMPUSLAUF PHILADELPHIA (Participants Group) Facebook Page. Retrieved 31 October 2015.

aforementioned plate-spinning and stilt-walking in order to fully participate. Children also form a psychological core for the event, in addition to their roles as performers.

“We certainly started with the idea of the whole Krampus figure and the idea of that darkness and fear and how that was something good to expose children to, a healthy thing to expose children to,” says Amber. That sentiment, a healthy relationship to darkness, particularly for children, repeated throughout conversations at the event. As I built lanterns, a therapist who was working on a mask discussed how constructing monsters let children see them as fabrications, something controllable and fun, rather than something to be feared. “This teaches children to confront fears... We spend way too much time in our society shielding children from things they can control and exposing them to things they can’t,” says Robert Schreiwier. “Reckoning with fear is a natural instinct.” Even Stopper, who personally avows no belief system, sees the value for the relationship Krampus inspires in her children: “My metric for everything is ‘What do I want for my children?... They don’t worry too much about Krampus, but they also sort of believe.’”

Many participants expand the idea of confronting fear and darkness beyond its relationship to children, seeing it in a broader social context. “You cannot be a spectator at this event. It just doesn’t work,” says participant Ben, and adds “It helps them grow and mature as a person because they have been introduced to it in a safe environment.” Ben and others connect the darkness with a repressive instinct in Western society and believe that such repression inevitably leads to an explosion. “The more submersed it gets, the more it manifests in more twisted ways,” says Schreiwier. He also notes that the darkness does not have to be harmful, but can actually fuel a person in useful ways, even growing them spiritually and creatively: “It parallels the entire concept of why Yule is important spiritually... We all have a little bit of a

dark side. We don't have to surmount it or quash it, but manage it. For instance, some people are very creative through this dark side, and they can bring forth a lot of really great works from that." Stopper summarizes her position as one of perspective: "In the long run, is it the thing with the horns and the bells the scary thing, or is it the oncologist? We have a real world to deal with." She adds, "We've also never had a crying child at Krampuslauf. I've seen way more crying children in Santa lines than at Krampuslauf."

The parallels with Santa are important, especially because Santa is what children are *supposed* to associate with Christmas and the winter holidays. Yet Krampus and the other spirits at the Parade all offer them alternatives and new ways to interpret their family and social cultures that move away from the paternalistic, omniscient Santa. Krampus is coded as a monster unequivocally. Santa, however, seems to be more nebulous for children, not least because his role and symbolic aspects can be unclear. Anthropologist Cindy Dell Clark (1995, 50) interprets the psychological rhetoric of Santa through his appearance:

Not only are the excesses of Christmas encoded in Santa's physical size, but perhaps, too, in his grandfatherly age, insofar as grandparents are widely equated with the unchecked indulgence of children... Another contrast occurs in Santa's red attire, a prominent, lively, fiery, warm color, set in vivid opposition to the frigid, icy, white or gray, lifeless natural environment of the winter solstice.

Clark goes on to note that Santa is a creature of these "contrasts," his age in opposition to the infancy of Jesus associated with the religious side of the Christmas holiday, and his red garb opposed to his reputation for secrecy and "invisibility." His omniscience is belied by the isolation and remoteness of his North Pole dwelling. Clark indicates that the universal eye cast about by Santa, waiting to pass judgement on children, gives him immense power: "To juvenile

believers, Santa is not only immortal but omniscient, capable of supernatural ('magic') acts, and an enforcer of moral behavior. Such godlike qualities are attributed to Santa in the context of children's daily behavior" (1995, 53). The conflation with a supreme deity is so embedded in the children's perceptions of Santa that it has become a point of anxiety and contention for parents, who do not want their child to lose religious faith when they learn the "truth" about Santa. Santa's supernatural abilities and omnipresent omniscience describe a figure that strikes unease into the hearts of children and grown-ups alike, yet Santa is usually coded as "jolly." His bright colors and vast size speak to abundance and joy, yet children also see a stranger in a fiery suit who has the power to judge them as "naughty" and deprive them of presents. Little wonder, then, that the thankless mall Santa should have so many screaming and crying youngsters herded towards his lap.

Clark identifies the necessary contrasts inherent in Santa's nature, and yet the Americanization of the Father Christmas figure into the popular Santa Claus stripped away the duality of St. Nicholas' companion. The emphatic coding of Santa as "good" also rings false to many children, because they understand his nature as godlike and potentially wrathful, a creature who "sees you when you're sleeping [who] knows when you're awake," according to one holiday song. Krampus returns the power of the monster to the child, offering those who are willing to face the creature a chance to overcome judgment and wrath in a world of natural—or supernatural—consequences. Stopper's daughter, Claudia, talked about the way she understands Krampus within the context of the broader winter holidays:

CTH: So if you had to tell people why do you do this parade, what do you tell them?

CLAUDIA: Well I talked to my friends earlier, they were here...I told them that we were going to put on this parade, and she seemed interested, but didn't make it. But she did

make a headpiece. She was going to be a green...like an emerald that could blend into the trees.

CTH: Why do you think we need a parade for Krampus and all of these spirits?

CLAUDIA: I don't know. To recognize them maybe? Because like, all the good spirits, they get all the attention! Like, all the bad spirits are just kind of, you know, shoved to the side. So let Krampus work. He isn't really bad at all. He's doing his job by taking children. I think that Santa, like St. Nick, gives Krampus a list of all the bad children and Krampus does his job by coming and taking them...wherever he takes them, maybe to do chores to teach them to be better. If it was the opposite way around, it would be totally bad!

CTH: So why do you think we do this parade in the winter?

CLAUDIA: Because it's around Christmas. The parade is around the time that Krampus starts to go out. Last year, we had, like two St. Nicholases, which meant that we had hope. And there were two Krampuses, because there were only two of us....and we just you know, changed our act together like that! [snaps!]

With Krampus out there "doing his job," as Claudia puts it, children know that the threat of kidnap or retribution for their actions has a real embodiment, as opposed to the passive-aggressive judgment of Santa Claus, which results in an *absence* of reward, rather than the *presence* of punishment. Children's resilience in the face of the Christmas monster comes up repeatedly in Old and New World contexts, with stories of frightened children taking the opportunity to touch a Krampus in costume or dress as one themselves. That is not to say the Krampus and other holiday spirits do not frighten children; they do, often very much. Stopper's

youngest son, Béla described his fear of the Krampus even in the context of a Parade that he has been part of most of his life:

CTH: So you've been doing this for a while. Do you ever get scared by any of the masks?

BÉLA: Yeah! Yeah!

CTH: Oh, you do? So which ones scare you?

BÉLA: This year there was one near the fireplace, on the other side, so I had to stick to one side of the fireplace. Um, a scary Krampus...I mean, even though I'm scared of them, they make really cool masks, and they look so lifelike...

The Krampus does not get declawed or defanged by children but remains frightening to them at a visceral level. The children, however, devise their own strategies for coping with the threats posed by these monsters.

In the case of the Parade of Spirits, donning the guise of a monster can be one such coping strategy. The children involved with the Parade take pride in their work, and are even rewarded for participation. The 2017 Es Meedli, Sylvia, describes the process that led her to become the smaller of the two "walker" monster spirits:

CTH: You got a pretty big role at this year's parade. How did that happen?

SYLVIA: Well Amber was asking if anyone wanted to wear the [Es Meedli] costume. And she asked us, if it would fit a seven to a ten year old. It took a little while for me to think about it, but I said I would do it because I really like costumes. So then we got the fitting and it fit, wasn't too heavy or anything.

CTH: Did you have to practice a little bit?

SYLVIA: Yeah, the wings go out a little bit

CTH: I hear you got something for being willing to do that?

SYLVIA: Yeah, so you get this necklace...you know, Es Meedli, you can get it as a pin or a necklace. The two grownups wanted the pin, but I wanted the necklace...The only thing is, with the scariness, my brother...was scared, so he didn't go. The only thing we thought he'd be scared of were these masks.

CTH: But you weren't scared of those

SYLVIA: No. I more, like, blended in...I felt like I'm actually the spirit

CTH: If you had to describe what that spirit feels like, what's the personality of that spirit?

SYLVIA: Sort of happy, sort of sleepy...

CTH: [ASKING SYLVIA'S MOTHER, ELLEN]: So mom, were you happy for her to take on this role?

ELLEN: Yeah, Amber posted, and when she found out she was going to be doing it, she was really excited.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I was!

The sense of accomplishment, reinforced by the medal, justifies the extra effort required to participate as Es Meedli. Similarly, children see one another at the Parade and take their cues from their peers. Addie Metevier says that her daughter grew much more enthusiastic about participating in 2017, particularly after seeing Sylvia in the Es Meedli costume:

ADDIE: Once she [Addie's daughter] saw Sylvia in it she was like "Oh that looks pretty cool!" So she wasn't really scared at all. She did get a little nervous about Ben [Amber's spouse, who wore a Krampus costume] giving her a cookie because the Krampus, you know, is creepy in that terrifying mask...but [it was okay.]

CTH: So then she's going to be eager to go again next year?

ADDIE: Oh yeah.

The cycle of experience leads children to become active participants in the events of the Krampuslauf, taking on specific roles and getting involved in the creation process. Many participants emphasize how much they appreciate the children being at the event. Several noted the irony of the Krampuslauf being so family-friendly when the nearby Running of the Santas event tended to be a very much "adults-only" affair due to its emphasis on drinking and sexuality. The monsters are far less frightening than young adults in their underwear, it seems.

Frequently, the importance of "play" within the Parade of Spirits comes up in interviews, with participants describing the event as one in which they, too, can reclaim some aspect of their childhood or innocence. Even though the event is family-friendly, it is not for children alone, but makes space for them to participate alongside adults. The liminality of the event creates intergenerational exchanges in which children take on mature tasks and roles, and adults don costumes and act like kids. This phenomenon of "plural reflexivity," as Turner calls it, demonstrates a culture "fed by affectual and volitional as well as cognitive sources...suffused with desire and appetite, as well as involved with knowing, perceiving, and conceiving" (Turner 1984, 23). As each generation reflects the other, their cultural experiences begin to overlap and transform one another. The folkloric traditions of guising, intellectually understood by adults, become the practices of the children, who then offer inspiration to adults to lose themselves in

the performance of their roles. The “desire and appetite” to create, to join in the community of the parade, and to engage in acts of physicality and social disruption all manifest through the costumes, procession, and noise-making of the event. Children at this event play with fire, and adults let them. Adults at the Parade of Spirits wear masks and fur, and children let them.

What do the children make of the event, then? What do they say of the Parade when asked directly? I put the question to several of the kids involved in the Parade and found many of them talked about concepts that the adults had addressed: light and darkness, winter and sunlight, the changing of seasons, monsters and fear. Under those intellectualizations, however, was a sense of belonging—socially and spiritually. The children saw within the Parade the importance of community, as informants Ruby and Ilsa describe:

CTH: If you had to tell somebody “this is why I do this parade,” what is your what is your elevator pitch to people like, ‘This is this is why it's worth doing’?

ILSA: I think I always think of it as like this really fun parade and I usually say if somebody asks. And what is this about I say oh my neighborhood we come together at our neighborhood park Liberty Lands and we and all of us wear these great costumes that celebrate spirits that type of stuff and everything and at the end of the night we parade around the neighborhood and banging loud objects and it makes everybody look at us and our costumes are then at the end of the night we just go home and drink hot cocoa because we're cold and just like snuggle up.

RUBY: Well you know I usually say along the lines of what everybody else has said. I feel like it's this thing that's like super fun and everyone gets to dress up in these cool costumes and how I always love like the process of actually making and wearing the costumes and sometimes scaring people. And it's just these great costumes and there's

always like hot cider, and again there's a fire going and the fire show, and Lux Arati comes and they're always amazing, and even if, like I said earlier, you come back afterward you go home and you're wet and you're soggy, so you take a shower, you usually end up like I always do. Ilsa and I we like curl up on the couch with a mug of hot cocoa and watch a movie or maybe sometimes just go straight to bed if they're really tired. I end up having no plans but to just watch a movie or binge watch a T.V. show...I feel like for me, the reason I do it is one, I love dressing up in costume and sometimes scaring people. Although I try not to scare anyone who doesn't like to be scared, like you guys said.

ILSA: Like me.

RUBY: Yeah, Like you! Yeah, I always feel like kind of, you know, embracing the darkness in you, the darkness in winter. Everything has some form of darkness, and I feel like that's really important. I feel like if you don't do that it kind of gets pent up inside of you. It's super fun, and I feel like it is kind of important spiritually.

Ruby and Ilsa find value in being a part of the Parade, even when it scares them. Children grow up, however, and what happens as the fun of the Parade fades? Ilsa's older, teenage sister has already stopped dressing up to attend the event, although she does still show up for it. Concerns about the potential survivability and transmission of tradition have not yet become a major issue, but they may be on the horizon as the Parade nears the beginning of its second decade of existence. It seems that for now, many of the participants are simply hoping that the Parade of Spirits will continue to generate enthusiasm and involvement among youth and adults alike.

Cindy Dell Clark counters the concerns parents have about conflating God and Santa Claus by making space for the movement from the magical, irrational worldview of childhood into a realm of mature faith and hope in adulthood:

If children's voices are taken to heart, Santa Claus is anything but a threat to children's generalized capacity for faith. Imaginal experience is not single-minded and exclusive so much as it is open-minded and organic. That is, a child can lose literal belief in Santa but retain the visionary powers to believe in whatever still provides sanctuary and meaning. The human capacity for faith seems able to transcend a loss of the concrete meaning of a symbol. (1995, 58).

What Clark sees as true for Santa can be just as true for the Krampus and his kin. The Christmas monster seldom starts from a place of faith, as children know from the outset how the masks are made and the community of people behind those masks, even if they may fear the imagery of the masks. The Krampuslauf works counter to the cultural notions of Santa Claus, then, providing a concrete symbol to the imaginal Santa, and a set of strategies for building communities among the generations that does not depend upon a godlike watcher sitting in judgement, but upon the willingness to go out and play together in masks and costumes on a dark, snowy night.

### **Reclaiming Darkness & Embracing the Monster Without/Within**

In Susan G. Davis' examination of nineteenth century parades in Philadelphia, she makes the point that every parade event is, at its core, using "[t]he conceptual tools of folklore, social history, and communication" as "rhetorical means by which performers [attempt] to accomplish practical and symbolic goals" (1986, 5). While Davis largely looks at the parades put on by working-class groups as a form of social protest or celebration, her point remains valid in the

context of Philadelphia's Parade of Spirits. The groups involved in the Parade are all incredibly conscious of the rhetorical value of their actions. Makers see their performance in terms of its dismantling of capitalist hegemony. Heathens see participation as ritualized, and the procession itself as heightened sacred space and time. Parents speak of "darkness" in relation to their children's fears, and children speak of the friendships and "coming together" that occur because of all the "cool" masks. Each group wants to accomplish its own goal but views the goals of the other groups as compatible with their own, at least for the moment, and all participants work to support the Parade as an event that offers shared rhetorical space for all of them.

The individuals who take the largest roles in the physical Krampuslauf construction and execution have particular needs they are trying to meet, but those needs are echoed by their larger communities. They also allow the groups to exert some authority over their identity in a broader culture by defining their own narrative through a ritual—a processional. The ritual-like nature of the festival performance encompasses an entire community self-narrative in the expression of festival, a point noted by folklorist Jack Santino (2009). That narrative element, which Santino locates as an aspect of "identity politics," offers scholars a novel way of thinking of festival, particularly festival in newer contexts, as in the Krampuslaufs. These emergent festivals are doing the work of exhibiting their emic groups to the etic community, and as such can be caught in any number of rhetorical traps. The Heathen groups could easily be accused, for example, of using Krampus as a way of leveraging some cultural capital, particularly in the wake of some negative publicity during the early twenty-first century for Icelandic Heathenism, which turned out to be housing some intense racism among some practitioners.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For an extensive examination of the burgeoning problem of white supremacy groups becoming entangled with Heathen ideologies, see Michael Strmiska. 2000. "Ásatrú in Iceland: The Rebirth of Nordic Paganism?" *Nova Religio* 4, no. 1: 106–132.

Is Krampuslauf, then, a type of Heathen pageant? The artistic communities which participate in the Parade may not have specifically spiritual identities they are incorporating into the costumes and props, but their countercultural attitudes are frequently expressed through Parade participation. Both groups are under a microscope when they march. Folklorist Jay Mechling (2006) insists that observers make the meaning of the events they interpret, but that assertion loses momentum when the group observes and comments upon itself as happens within the broader Parade experience. By associating themselves with the Heathens, non-Heathen participants are intentionally providing interpretive value to all observers, including other members of the Parade. Similarly, Heathens and other neo-Pagans who participate in the Parade for spiritual reasons are bound to the rules of the Parade community, such as a respect for the role of families and the limiting of alcohol within Parade activities. All groups are heightening their awareness of themselves and boosting the awareness of the other groups alongside them. This “hypervisibility” can turn a marginal community into one under a glass dome, which attracts a sort of shocked wonder but little understanding or sympathy. Worse, at least according to Krampuslauf organizers, it can set up festival events like the Parade of Spirits as potential novelties, easily packaged and sold. Indeed, in my conclusion I will point to the ways in which Krampus has experienced a resurgence of interest in popular culture during the past decade.

The final element of the Krampuslauf’s value is its position as a community event, specifically centered on Philadelphia. While the parade draws attention and participants from all over the country, including Arún, the founder of the Portland, Oregon, event this year, it primarily exists as an event for those in the central and eastern Pennsylvania areas. One young woman indicated that she had been coming every year simply because it was mere steps from her home near the park and it looked different, like something holiday-adjacent she had not seen

before but was curious about. The incorporation of other local groups, such as Lux Arati, and the use of local spaces for the organization and planning, such as the iMPeRFECT Gallery, demonstrate a level of commitment to the community by the organizers and participants. In 2015, the group also organized a food drive for the Mazzoni Center Food Bank and the Forgotten Cats charity to help benefit Philadelphians—two- and four-legged—as a part of the social outreach of Krampuslauf (“Frau Perchta”/Amber Stopper - Krampuslauf Facebook Participants Group 2015). At no point would I assert that the three communities I have analyzed here are the only ones that participate in the Parade of Spirits. Other members of other groups are finding the Parade and making it their home, too. One of the areas I have left unexamined in this study has been the realm of gender, but here, too, rhetoric and *communitas* intersect. When those intersections occur, they often relate to the structures I have presented here. One of my informants, a transgendered man named Leo, explained how he had suffered a lack of family connection and belonging due to his gender. He had been isolated from his mother because of it, and she had loved the holiday season, so the holidays have become a period of anxiety for him. He had formerly played the euphonium—an instrument similar to a small tuba—because of his mother, but had not been playing it regularly in recent years. The Parade of Spirits, however, offered him a unique opportunity to heal:

Christmas time is a particularly hard one for me as with any one. There are several layers to that. I am a queer person, I am trans[gendered], and I have a rocky relationship with my mother who loves Christmas. So like I find myself gravitating to little Christmas things but like also being repulsed. So like that's one of my personal struggles. Like even the euphonium. I I didn't pick that instrument. She picked that. She's a tuba player. So like that was a way of like me like trying to turn something that's kind of a negative

experience...but[now] I'm an adult, and I'm like you know what I'm just taking this thing it looks like it will fit in. They want noisemakers and I can be loud without an amp.

Leo's sense of belonging, his *communitas* within the Krampuslauf, illustrates the intersections of family, mainstream holiday culture, and performance found in the other three groups, but Leo's experience also remains unique. The queer community has a presence at the Parade—Leo is not the only member of that group participating by far. Similarly, neurodiverse community members make up a significant portion of the event's active participants, too. The Parade's power as a rhetorical device that can help different groups accomplish particular goals does not grow weaker through diversity, because the symbols remain semiotically “open,” without any particular orthodoxy beyond the dictums of participation and good—if mischievous—behavior. Binding the members of the Parade together is the “global, unstructured character” in the ethnographic terms of Victor Turner (1969, 113), that invites all to come and make some noise on the cold December streets of Philadelphia.

## Chapter 5. BLACK SHEEP AND DARK COMPANIONS

### Performing Old Monsters in New Places

The Philadelphia Krampuslauf is one performance in one context, that is, it is a contemporary interpretation of a traditional festival in a specific location. The European antecedents for the figures in the Parade of Spirits, as well as Philadelphia's extensive history of guising processions in the form of rural belsnickling or urban Fantastics, set the stage for Krampuslauf to get on its feet in 2011. The Philadelphia event, however, was not and is not the only event of its kind. Not only are there Old-World precedents for Krampus processions, but the eruption of similar events in the United States since the start of the twenty-first century has created an expansive network of performances. These different parades do not exist in a vacuum, but rather feed off of one another, with many participants crossing over into other events or helping to build up the momentum of newer parades. In some cases, the competitive spirit emerges, but seldom do the Parades come into direct conflict with one another. Instead, the various Krampuslaufs, Krampusnachts, Krampus Balls, and other Christmas Monster events have become a web of folk performances among a widely distributed folk group sharing a common thread of dissenting response to mainstream holiday cultural hegemony and the repurposed symbolic performances of that dissent.

In this chapter, I will briefly compare the contemporary processions of Europe to their New World counterparts and critically gloss the dynamics of different Krampus festivals throughout the country, especially as they relate to the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits. Much of the European context will come from Al Ridenour's *The Krampus and the Old, Dark Christmas* (2016), which to date remains the most comprehensive presentation of the various contemporary Central European Krampus traditions. Ridenour's work provides some critical analysis of the

European festivals, usually through the lens of his academic informants such as anthropologist Matthäus Rest. Ridenour also looks to historical antecedents and in pre-Christian and Christianizing medieval Europe. As I will show, his book and his informants support many of the same ethnographic interpretations I provide in my exegesis of the Philadelphia Parade, while also providing a foothold for interpretive comparison based on some key differences between the two spheres of performance. My ethnographic focus on Krampus events in the United States will draw upon interviews and interactions with members of two primary events: the Portland, Oregon Krampuslauf, which predates the Philadelphia event by a year; and the Los Angeles Krampus Ball, which came after Philadelphia's event largely informed by Al Ridenour, who helps organize and promote the Los Angeles performances. Tertiary contexts will come from public records and materials related to events in Bloomington, Indiana; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Austin, Texas, all of which have their own particular events related to the Krampus. What emerges from all of these events is a *zeitgeist* of counter-commercialism in the holiday season, although the specific meanings and goals of the different groups creating the events varies greatly. In some cases, the rejection of Santa Claus-capitalism in the holiday season has resulted in a new type of commercialization of Krampus and his ilk, while in other cases the emphasis on Krampus as a figure of spiritual or moral importance receives greater emphasis.

The growing popularity of Krampus also requires a deeper consideration. The act of ostension, here presented as the signifying of a performance in contrast or relation to its overt representation (see Dégh and Vázsonyi 1983), shapes the ongoing act of "performing" the Krampuslauf in public digital and popular cultural zones. The Parade in Philadelphia never really stops because of online interactions, and similarly all of the many different Krampuslauf-like events, particularly those in the United States, interact in online spaces. Building on the final

portion of Chapter Three, the Facebook communities frequented by participants from Portland, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, I show that the members of the various festival groups are all in a continual process of feedback and renewal, a dynamic example of “tradition” being transmitted in the twenty-first century. The sudden surge of interest in Krampus also shapes the Parade experiences in all locations, in some cases leading to an uneasy suspicion of the Krampus’s popularity. The dynamic between the popular embrace of Krampus creates and his use in the Parade environment leads to reflexive actions among those who participate in Portland, Los Angeles, and—especially—Philadelphia. The communities engaging with these events grapple with their own success, and other groups seek to employ the signifying power of the Christmas monster for their needs, leading to a struggle for authenticity between the “organic” Parade participants who create and perform within the processional model and those who engage with Krampus and his kin through the more mainstream, capitalist consumption model. How is the celebratory nature of a festive event specifically targeted at darkness, one that is ostensibly resistant to a dominant cultural ideal of light? How, and why, are the makers, the Heathens, the families, and the other groups that find footholds at the Parade of Spirits part of a dialogue between monistic “America” and the “small group” of the folk community, even in an age when that folk community can be largely disembodied in the digital realm for most of the year and geographically dispersed throughout the country or the world? Most crucially, what problems does the Parade of Spirits face immediately, and what problems does it create for those of us analyzing folk behavior in the American context? In this final chapter, I will address these questions as I present potential trajectories for the Parade and its study, the event and its reflexive turn.

### **“The Dark Companion”: Old-World Krampuslaufs in the Contemporary Era**

When Al Ridenour set out to discover the Krampus of Europe, he had only a vague notion of what he might find: a monster, yes, but would it resemble the postcard pictures he had seen from early twentieth century sources. Would it be essentially a red-and-black-tinted satyr, furry from the waist down with horns upon its head and a long, lolling scarlet tongue protruding from between its lips? As he rode in a taxi to the Austrian town of Bad Gastein, he heard a loud sound: “a ponderous, metallic clatter somewhere out in the dark.” Soon he saw the humped, beastly forms of shaggy-costumed young men travelling through the streets ahead, “moving hillocks of fur and bobbing horns, chains, and...bundled switches wagging in the creatures’ fists.” By the time he reached the town square and staked out a spot to observe his first Krampuslauf, he knew that these were not singular companions of St. Nicholas, nor would they be easy to represent in two-dimensional illustration. These were monsters in motion, creatures of action, and as such he soon found himself pulled into the fray:

Immediately I found myself jostled forward. Snow and mulled wine wafted through the air, and there were shouts and laughter as a herd of Krampus pushed into the square. They progressed with a sort of dancelike hopping motion, a choreographed tantrum that sent their ells bouncing in cascading rhythms. Spectators scrambled as more devils tumbled forward. Some spilled wine, and I was spun into a mound of snow-damp sheepskin that smelled of wet livestock. I looked up in to the monster’s face. Breath steamed through his painted teeth as he growled, and I thought I caught a whiff of brandy. He rattled a chain and slashed the air with switches. I lurched back, slipping in snow, and felt the blow land on my back. (Ridenour 2016, 29).

Ridenour's accounts of the Austrian Krampus events in Bad Gastein and other areas around Central Europe depict an event full of fur-clad, ferociously masked monsters that swat at spectators, engage in a wild wrestling match called a *Rempler*, and drink warming liquors to stave off the frosty winter air. These figures are the contemporary Krampus in action, participants in the various European incarnations of the Krampuslauf, which has gone on sporadically in places for centuries. The figure itself—a hulking, furry beast making noise and wearing a mask—very much has its counterparts in the Philadelphia event. Many of the Krampusse who walk the streets of the Northern Liberties owe their form and existence to the European monsters that Ridenour examined during the course of his Krampus-hunting expedition. Yet in a number of ways, the European form of the Lauf is distinct and separate from the versions found in Philadelphia, and even set apart from the interpretations of Krampus more broadly found in North America.

Ridenour's experiences in chronicling European Krampuslaufs during the first decade or so of the twenty-first century focus largely on the Krampus figure as a symbolic representation, a form of rural folk belief rooted in pre-Christian traditions but crystallized through medieval Church pageants and more recent regional performances.. The description above is characteristic of his encounters, and he frequently finds performers donning carved wooden masks and heavy fur costumes throughout the regions of Austria, Northern Italy, Switzerland, and Southeastern Germany that he visits. In the places where he finds the Krampus, he usually also finds St. Nicholas. In the Bad Gastein account, he notes how the various Krampüsse engage in their wild frolic only up to the point where a singular Nicholas figure begins to speak a traditional rhyme about the holiday. From the moment the Krampus performers hear the Saint performer's voice, each one falls "to his knees, bowing his mask almost into the snow." Ridenour gleans from the

invocation a description of the holiday's purpose, with stanzas about "the saint appearing but once a year, good deeds, rewards, bad deeds, and in more solemn tone: the consequence" (Ibid.: 30). The saint then leads the procession, which rolls through the streets, with the diabolical companions swatting at the crowd, growling, and otherwise making mischief. In some cases they encounter another troop of Krampüsse, at which point a shoving match called the *Rempler* begins, a sort of "turf war" between the two groups that can be very violent, even to the point of broken masks or bones. Ridenour can only date the *Rempler* to 1949, indicating that the performance may be a response to larger populations or any number of cultural factors circulating in a post-war Europe. Philadelphia, by contrast, and many of the American celebrations, are not directly tied to the specifically European contexts that gave rise to the *Rempler*. The organized structure of the Philadelphia procession including its pre-planned route, is distinctly different from the European marches where the monsters follow the lead of the Saint, but don't always know where they are going or how long they will take. As Ridenour described to me in a 2016 interview, in the European tradition, "There is no route, there is no plan."

Ridenour's work indicates that the European Lauf has old roots, but experiences waxing and waning periods of interest, and the revival in the mid-twentieth century may well be a response to the economic turmoil of a post-World War II European state. If we allow for that reading, the revivalist impulse in the United States could potentially reflect the anxieties present in the uncertain economy following the 2008 recession and early twenty-first century U.S. military campaigns. Given the fierce resistance to commodification of the Krampus figure at the Philadelphia event, the potential impact of economics makes a degree of sense, especially since one of the key differences between Philadelphia and a place like Bad Mittendorf or Bad Gastein

is the minimizing of the St. Nicholas role. The European form of the parades generally has all the Krampüsse in service and deference to the titular holiday saint, while the saint's presence in Philadelphia—and at most American locations—becomes that of a monster peer. Nicholas holds roughly equal weight when he shows up at an American event, one among many potential spirits, and in most cases a spirit without any power to tame the wilder or more mischievous spirits like Krampus. The 2017 Parade of Spirits fire dancing show specifically told a story in which Krampus was not tamed by the forces of saintly benefaction, but instead by the keen and belly-slitting hand of a witch-goddess, Frau Perchta. If the resurgent Krampuslaufs of mid-twentieth century Europe express anxieties over rebuilding in uncertain economic circumstances, Nicholas then acts as a reassuring paternal shepherd who can quiet the tumult of a post-War economy. Not so at the American Laufs, where all spirits have equal sway, representing a marketplace of beasts with similar strengths: “bulls” and “bears” in constant contention. The equitable attitude towards spirits also reflects the American approach to power more generally, deemphasizing even holy “king” figures in favor of a confederation of monstrous peers.

Just who is at the heart of those monsters highlights another Old World/New World distinction, although one that may be a much more recent divergence? The performance of the Krampus in Ridenour's observations seems to be largely the purview of young men, although exceptions appear throughout the various parades he observes. On the whole, however, those who play the Krampus in Austria and the surrounding areas are similar to those who performed the Belsnickel in rural Pennsylvania. They are men beyond childhood, often in their twenties or early thirties, who tramp the streets in their Krampus regalia and engage in physical displays of aggression almost like a masked rugby tournament. In addition, the presence of alcohol is very common in the European Krampuslauf, although in some instances it may be downplayed or

even frowned upon, particularly if inebriation leads to a subpar performance as the monster. Ridenour notes that public intoxication has become enough of an issue that it has garnered negative press, and some groups have taken to banning any form of drinking before a run: “have a beer before the Lauf and you’re out,” according to one of Ridenour’s informants (74). However, there are still the proverbial “black sheep” even in the groups that impose restrictions on pre-Lauf drinking for their members, and the major concern is performance. A solid performance by a drunken Krampus will be better received by the community than a lackluster one even by a sober Krampus. If alcohol happens to shift that balance, and a Krampus performer gets worse due to inebriation, the reproach comes in double strength.

The Philadelphia event, by contrast, takes a much less nuanced view of alcohol. Because of the focus on family-friendliness, those who participate in the Philadelphia Krampuslauf have long been warned to keep any intoxication to post-event gatherings, although there will sometimes be a bit of alcohol available at the fire pit after the Parade. For the most part, however, town organizers represent drinking as something that other groups do, and not something that anyone wants associated with the Parade of Spirits. One of the founders, Janet Finegar, posted the following message on the Facebook group in advance of the 2015 Parade:

Many Krampus participants enjoy an alcoholic drink if their age and health allows, but drunkenness is gross and doesn't belong at the Lauf. We build a bonfire to keep warm and dance with fire because it's pretty, but no one else is allowed to set fires at the park. We wear scary costumes of spirits whose main purpose in life is to terrify children, but anyone who ACTUALLY frightens or threatens another person will quickly learn why

we're called the Liberty Lands Militia. Don't mess with my park, my kids, or my neighborhood for that matter.<sup>1</sup>

In this case, Finegar captures the essence of the overall Parade attitude toward drinking: it may be around, but it should not be noticeable, and more importantly it is seen as part of the behavior associated with events like the Running of the Santas, and thus antithetical to the Parade of Spirits.

Finegar's post also draws a key distinction between some of the European events and those found in Philadelphia and other United States locations. The Krampüsse in Europe frequently engage in high-contact and terrorizing behavior. Often someone playing the Krampus will specifically pursue a particular bystander with the intention of hitting them forcefully with their bundle of branches or rod. At both American and European events, the fear element is certainly present. However, the rule in Philadelphia directly addresses someone's desire to be scared: if someone does not share in that desire, they are to be left alone. In European contexts, showing up to a Krampuslauf is tacit approval to being targeted, but even in European parades Ridenour describes how a Krampus can balance his terrifying performance with the specific contours of his audience:

I observed one such incident at a Krampus parade in Munich, where a trembling boy was gently urged forward by parents. Those around couldn't help but notice the situation, and by the time the child stood close enough for contact, a dozen or so spectators had fixed sympathetic eyes on the boy. As the parents spoke encouragingly to their son, an approaching Krampus crouched low and ever-so-delicately extended a clawed hand. The

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Finegar. Post in KRAMPUSLAUF PHILADELPHIA (Participants Group) Facebook Page. Retrieved 7 December 2015.

moment the boy touched the beast, his face exploded with pride, as did the faces of those gathered around. Strangers patted his back and chuckled, exchanging friendly words with the parents, and the boy remained on the frontlines eager for his next encounter.

(Ridenour 2016, 64)

This encounter is remarkably similar to narratives encountered at the Philadelphia event. One young attendee, Ilsa, recalled being afraid of the large back-mounted puppet, Das Mädchen—which they sometimes referred to as the Habergeist—and hiding behind a tree with her friend, Ruby. However, over repeated years, Ilsa began to move away from fearing imposing and dark creatures like Krampus and Das Mädchen, choosing to take on those roles herself:

SUE WHITE [Speaking to daughter ILSA]: So can I ask you a question? Do you remember when you were afraid?

ILSA: Yeah, I remember...

SUE: Well now your costumes are kind of scary! That's sort of switched, like you used to be scared, but now you are scary. How does that make you feel?

ILSA: Yeah, I feel like when I was out I was when I was younger and just, I like really just wanted to be an animal so I would dress up as animals, but now I, I still love animals but now I want to dress up more like a spirit.

SUE: Right, because you're not scared anymore. So, like, does this make you feel stronger?

LINDA SOFFER: Does this, you know, give you a sense of power in that costume?

ILSA: Yeah I would say that it could be that. I think yeah.

Ilsa's ready adoption of the darker, more frightening aspects of the Parade's spirits developed into a sense of power and pride, just as the child in Munich expressed joy and excitement after encountering the Krampus. Children reared around Krampus traditions in Austria and Germany spend time in advance of the holidays preparing to meet the monster, learning poems or songs and even occasionally creating their own masks out of school supplies like paper. The children who participate in the Philadelphia event, then, would feel right at home in a place like Bad Gastein, with the weeks of preparation for the Parade, although they might feel left out as they would not be likely to parade with the "real" Krampus performers.

Of course, a comparative analysis of the events found on different sides of the Atlantic Ocean will inevitably turn up differences, and my attention to those distinctions in performance should not be construed as a judgement of value. Each Parade has its own context, even within the European and American frameworks. Ridenour painstakingly points out the vast differences between the types of monsters and parades he encounters, many of which do not feature Krampus at all, but focus instead on other spirits such as the Perchten—a troupe of masked creatures in service to Frau Perchta—or La Befana, the Italian Christmas witch. He also sees a kinship with the parades in the United States, particularly the Philadelphia event, and invokes the historical presence of the Belsnickel in Pennsylvania as a way of tying intercontinental performances together:

Even a small taste of fear can itself be a treat, as described in a December 1900 article from *The Lutheran*, in which the author recalls memories of the Belsnickel in the area around Philadelphia, and how children would 'find a sort of delight and exhilaration in the very fright they experienced when the ominous birch of the 'Pelznickel' brushed against the window panes or shutters.' This remembered feeling is timeless, having little

to do with prevailing values or moral instruction. A child's delight in a certain measure of fear never goes out of style. (Ridenour 2016, 248).

The desire to bring back the darker side of the holiday season in North America lies at the root of the various Krampuslaufs, although the particular events handle the darkness differently, and the emphasis on children is not present at all of them. In the case of Philadelphia's event, however, the connection between children and the Krampus—among the many other fabulous holiday beasts—remains as strong as it does in Europe.

### **Raising the Devil: The Origins of the First Contemporary American Krampuslauf**

In October and November of 2015, I spoke with the founder of Portland's Krampuslauf, a man who goes by the pseudonym Arún. I had encountered him originally through the Philadelphia Krampuslauf's Facebook page. Arún is a Heathen, which means he follows a form of neo-Pagan faith based largely on Germanic or Scandinavian origins, related to, but distinct from, Rob Schreiwer's Urglaawe tradition. Arún had been involved with the Philadelphia community from a distance in its early years, and eventually made it to one of the Philadelphia Parades in 2014. He also participated in the self-documentary project that the Parade has created, called "Krampuslauf Voices" (and now renamed "Parade of Spirits, Liberty Lands Voices"). In speaking to Arún, I found that many of the motivations behind his creation of the Portland parade stemmed from similar impulses that drove Amber, Janet, and others in Philadelphia to create their version of the Krampuslauf. Arún's interviews and recordings also helped me to see that like the European events chronicled by Al Ridenour, every region distinguishes itself in the way it approaches the symbols, structures, and meanings of the event.

As Arún saw it, celebrating Krampus was a perfect fit for what he already wanted to do, spiritually. He wanted to follow its traditional form, at least as far as he understood it:

I was trying to do an actual procession...instead of a party or themed burlesque night or any of the other ways that the Krampus idea could be explored was to ask ‘How does this want to happen?’ What is, what is the form for this. There were all these ideas and then, it was 2010, and I, uh, then found that the way that it wanted to happen, was the way it did happen...which was a Lauf, was a procession, and um, that’s basically the winning formula so far, you know, for what we want. Which is a self-organized community-created event, where, um, it’s family inclusive, there’s no fourth wall, no tickets. It’s not a bar crawl. You’re not with a bunch of bored singles out with yet another costumed themed night, other than you. It’s in public, coming at you, down the sidewalk. And it involves everybody. All ages are a part of it. The idea is that a lauf or a procession is it goes to being not something that is contained on a stage or something that is turned into ‘flavor of the week’ at a venue...we were the first to do that in that actual form.

Arún’s perspectives are shaped to some extent by his life in Portland, which has a decidedly white, young-adult population demographic compared to some of the other locations where the Laufs arise. Still, his desire to attempt some sense of traditionality and his emphasis on decoumercializing the experience—“family inclusive...no fourth wall, no tickets,” as he puts it—are thoughts which get echoed by another Krampuslauf founder, Amber Dorko Stopper. As noted in Chapter Four, Stopper is an atheist, and therefore her approach to the darkness embodied by Krampus largely stems from a psychological understanding which attempts to integrate the parts of self we are often told to suppress or reject in healthy, moderate ways. Arún, on the other hand, is a Heathen within the broader neo-Pagan “umbrella” of spiritual practices, so

his take on darkness comes from a more mythological vantage point, a perspective echoed by Robert Schreiwier, who heads the Heathen Urglaawe<sup>2</sup> group in the Philadelphia Krampuslauf. Schreiwier and his group joined in the Krampus celebrations beginning in 2012, and quickly became the de facto secondary leaders of the event. They help with organization, costume building, and actually kick off the parade on the day of the event. Schreiwier sums up his group's involvement: "What appeals to me is that it's an old tradition with different forms and it gave me an opportunity to bring the Pennsylvania German traditions and include them....Amber...has been more than hospitable to us and made this a community event." He indicates that this event was exactly what he had been looking for, and that his group had even been working on doing something similar. "Years ago we were discussing having a Belsnickel parade...This time of year was the original Pennsylvania-German time of tricks and treats." The Urglaawe perspective equates the winter with the myth of the Wild Hunt, when underworld gods would traverse the skies and countryside, collecting those who had died in the previous year (see Santino 1995). To those within Urglaawe, Krampus and the Belsnickel are a variant of the god Woden in his "seeker" phase, as he searches for intelligence among humanity. "This time of year is a very isolated time," says Schreiwier, and this event allows people to transcend that isolation, and share common space, and particularly, to deal with common fears.

For Arún, the spiritual dimension of the Portland Lauf is also a social one. It offers him an opportunity for contact with other Heathens, or a way to introduce people to Heathenism generally and get them interested. Arún specifically talked about using Krampuslauf as a "gateway holiday" to draw in interest for those thinking about exploring Heathen spirituality (as

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<sup>2</sup> Schreiwier, who has taught Pennsylvania Deitsch at several schools and universities throughout Central Pennsylvania over the years, has compiled a dictionary of the Pennsylvania German language. His group gets its name from a combination of words which roughly translates from Deitsch as "original faith."

well as non-Abrahamic spirituality generally). In some ways, the Lauf functions as a recruiting ground for Heathen groups, at least inasmuch as it offers education and information on their community to those who have an interest in it. Arún also discussed about contact between people as “mediated through custom” via the symbolic figure of Krampus and all the accompanying parade figures. The emphasis in Portland is on resisting assimilation and expanding specific community relationships, which are somewhat different aims from the Philadelphia Parade. He also perceives the importance of reclaiming a season that he believes to be one overrun with ideas and images that do not speak to him or people like him. In a reflexive podcast recording he provided for the Philadelphia Krampuslauf website, he expounded upon his perceptions of the psychological symbolism of the holiday for himself:

That's really the key in this holiday of Krampusnacht, was to transform my experience of the winter season the Christmas season was that it was something that I was feeling alienated from beforehand and was either ignoring it or was just being another one of the people who doesn't feel so much connection or actually has a negative connection to the holiday. And so those [feelings] could be negative about it [the season] or just trying to like get through it but suddenly when I actually found something that aroused my interest and creativity and inspiration and was able to then make something happen it completely changed it and just made it my favorite time of year (Arún 2015).

Many of the other participants in these events felt the same sense of reclamation and cited the Krampus-related events as ones in which the dominant or mainstream culture's emphasis on light or commercialism could be subverted or rejected. One attendee of Philadelphia's 2017 Parade noted that while he could easily have gone to a Krampus-themed parade closer to home in

Baltimore, the Philadelphia event felt more authentic and less commercialized, so he made the two-hour trek to attend that one instead.

Part of the Portland authenticity for Arún is the event's spontaneity. From the outset, his event was not organized or planned in the same way the Philadelphia Parade has been. The first Krampuslauf in Portland in 2010 resembled a flash mob, more than anything, according to his account. The participants agreed on a time and place, and simply showed up in costume to walk through a few blocks of Portland neighborhoods before dispersing at the parade's conclusion. While several participants gathered in the aftermath in smaller groups, the overall event was born out of a rejection of authority. Yet Arún does not perceive Philadelphia as less authentic for having its official components: Liberty Lands Park as a home base and the official permission from the city. The acts of creation underlying the events on both coasts speak a similar language for Arún, showing at once how even though their resources and approaches to city authority might be different, they have core values in common:

I definitely found that kinship between the two [Parades] that it definitely was an event that was participant-generated. Although there's definitely people that work all year to coordinate aspects of it. There's also the sense that people were themselves creating their experience and that's always a good thing. I feel vitalized by an event that everyone's participating in. It [Philadelphia's event] is a little bit bigger and more developed in the sense of actually having Liberty Lands. It's a wonderful resource to have a space that is openly welcoming and hosting the event does allow for more things to happen, [like] wonderful fire performances and such that were going on that were made possible by that. We [in Portland] generally just kind of have to do it yourself and do it as spontaneous-seeming as possible I guess you could say. Even though we're working on

masks and things throughout the year, particularly closer to the event. Just meeting some people in the park and marching from there down the sidewalks and back. [That] seems to have been a formula that's worked so far and hasn't gotten to the point that it's been problematic so it's just been keeping it like that, but who knows this year (Arún 2015).

Rooted in the act of subversion and symbolically linked to the Old-World Krampus, the Portland event reflects the rejection of the mainstream that so many of its participants value. Arún remains open to shifts and changes that may come, but his primary concern is to keep the Portland parade focused on the figure of Krampus as a spiritual embodiment of the season, and to reclaim the December month from commercialized holiday cheer. He sees the Philadelphia Parade as one with which he can identify, even if their approaches remain somewhat different, because at their hearts they are both driven by acts of creation and reclamation. They acknowledge their Old-World roots while adding layers of invention and creativity to the performance of the Parade, and use the event as a platform for other types of social connection. What Al Ridenour saw in the contemporary European Krampuslauf forms a root system, but the methods of interpretation and practice of Christmas monster culture need new contexts in American locations.

### **“A Considerable Investment”: Krampusnacht in Los Angeles and Beyond**

Another West Coast Krampus event returns us to Al Ridenour, this time working with the knowledge he gleaned from studying festivals in Europe and helping to interpret them for the Los Angeles region. The L.A. parade was not Ridenour's brainchild specifically, but early on founder Al Guerrero—someone who shows up in the online communities associated with the Philadelphia and Portland events, too—wanted to bring on Ridenour for his expertise on the events. The Los Angeles event mixes highly “traditional” European forms with the contemporary

Los Angeles setting in a number of ways. The event's main group, the Krampus Los Angeles Troupe, describes itself as "the first troupe of its kind in the Western US," with "unique suits...largely made from scratch, in some cases borrowing readymade elements, and in all cases, the product of long hours of work by hand" (Guerrero and Ridenour, "LA Troupe" 2018). The claims about the troupe's identity as the first to don the Krampus costumes on the West Coast notwithstanding—Portland's event includes many handmade costumes and began in 2010, while the first Los Angeles events began in 2013—the Los Angeles group certainly has organized itself along the lines of a Central European Krampuslauf troupe. The Los Angeles event welcomes all comers in any level of costuming, but those who participate in the parade itself must "adhere to certain standards that approximate the look of traditional European costumes. A pair of horns and a furry shawl is perfectly good party-wear, but troupe membership requires head-to-toe costuming based on an authentic prototype, and this inevitably requires a considerable investment of time and resources" (ibid.). There is an exclusive element to this kind of costuming, aimed at retaining a certain degree of authenticity based on European precedents, which largely seems to be derived from Ridenour's work abroad.

Another European element that Ridenour has supplied in Los Angeles is the "Krampus play," a work he translated and produced as part of the 2014 event, based on nineteenth-century texts he had collected during his research. The play essentially resembles a morality play in the medieval tradition, with Saint Nicholas acting as a moral instructor to children while Krampus waits in the wings to provide punishment for those who would deviate from "good" behavior. The Saint's presence has also been a staple, with a single actor—Rick Galiher—performing the role since 2014. The Los Angeles event has attracted European participation, as well, as the Alt Gnigler Krampus Perchten Pass group from Salzburg sent members to observe and join in during

the 2014 event, and in 2015 the Moorpass Troupe from Maishofen, Austria joined the parade in full. The intense emphasis on Germanic and Central European identity has created a framework of “authenticity” around the Los Angeles event, but in many ways the parade has also found itself altered by its American, West Coast contexts.

When Al Guerrero began to put together his concept of the L.A. Krampuslauf in 2013, he depended upon Ridenour’s research, but he also needed to make sure the Parade could stand on its own in the Los Angeles environment. To that end, one of the very first events put on by the group was a Krampus Ball in 2013, an event which has acted as a pre-Krampuslauf appetizer and fundraiser in the subsequent half decade. Rather than a parade, this event involved costumed and masked participants gathered together in a “lodge-style venue” in Highland Park, with a number of live bands performing and games such as “Toss the Brat in Krampus’ Basket.” The bands, including a fully costumed Krampus-themed group called Krammpstein playing industrial heavy metal, take the stage while others revel together in the crowd below. Many of those wearing costumes are in Krampus or Krampus-like gear and masks, but a significant number of participants also wear “Alpine” clothing, such as leiderhosen and Tyrolean hats. A Bavarian dance troupe—G.T.E.V. D’Oberlander—performs as a way “to provide Angelenos another too-brief glimpse of the dress, music, and dance of the Miesbach region of Bavaria” (Guerrero and Ridenour, “Krampus Ball 2014” 2018). Other entertainments such as marionettes and a vocalist performing Schubert’s “Der Erlkönig” go on throughout the duration of the Ball as well.

The focus on entertainment at the Los Angeles event highlights the performative nature of the events in the extreme. Rick Galiher’s Saint Nicholas is seen as the “emcee” of the Krampus Ball. The music and games all focus on Krampus, but also add an element of kitsch to the earnestness of the ethnic heritage that is so central to the event. The Parade itself follows

permitted paths overseen by city-provided crossing guards and police, as well as barricades and barriers to help direct the traffic flow, something very much unseen in Ridenour's examination of the European events. Recall his emphasis on the lack of routes and planning for the processions in places like Bad Gastein and the contrast between Old and New World performances is evident. Additionally, a distinguishing characteristic about the Los Angeles event is the significant incorporation of the marketplace. The Ball operates as a fundraiser, with tickets being sold officially in the twenty-dollar range, and the "Toss the Brat" game offering players three tries for five dollars. Even more noticeable is the corporate sponsorship of the events surrounding the L.A. Krampuslauf. A number of local businesses such as Green Apple Books and Stiegl Brewery join national entities such as alt-travel website Atlas Obscura in supporting the Los Angeles event. Those who attend the event find half a dozen or more vendors selling jewelry, photographs, Krampus memorabilia, and German-inspired treats like Pfeffernüsse cookies. Show staging for the concerts is modest by Los Angeles standards, but still full of lighting effects and amplification.

None of the trappings associated with the Krampus Ball or the Los Angeles Lauf need to be construed as an abandonment of the European traditions, nor as accommodations materially different from those made by other groups in the United States. Philadelphia's Parade has its post-march performance with the Lux Arati fire-dancing group, of course, although the lighting effects on the east coast seem to be provided largely by the flaming torches used by the dancers, and the stage elements are usually constructed by event artists. The Portland event is smaller and spontaneous but lacks the organizing force of the Saint and the emphasis on traditional European costuming found in Los Angeles. To some extent, the size of the events seems to shape their levels of accommodation, with smaller events being less likely to incorporate vendors and large-

scale fundraising, while places like Los Angeles and Bloomington, Indiana—which also has a sizeable Krampus event with thousands of attendees—have a larger sphere of obligation to performers and attendees to provide entertainment and financially support themselves.

At their core, however, these events focus on similar psychological and spiritual outcomes. The Los Angeles Lauf takes in official support from the local Pagan Day Fest, a type of Pagan Pride event that cements its bonds to a nature-oriented spiritual community in ways very similar to the Portland Heathen and Philadelphia Urglaawe communities. The focus on preserving aspects of European ethnicity within the Parades' contexts also form a core, with Belsnickels appearing in Philadelphia's Parade and the L.A. Lauf's connection to German heritage informational groups like the Goethe-Institut LA. At all of the events, the experience of encountering darkness or fear, and the mastery of those elements, frames the whole festive performance. In an interview, Ridenour recounted to me a moment at one Los Angeles Krampus event that resembles both an encounter he witnessed in Munich and Ilsa's first brush with the Das Mädchen walking puppet at Philadelphia Krampuslauf in 2013:

It's not that they're not scary; they are scary. But also...because we also do Krampus events here in L.A. We dress up in costumes and we have kids come to the things. And the kids are there, and you can see they get scared and then they're so—beaming! They're running around smiling. And we have the kids, well you know we do a Krampus play, it's a traditional play, and one of the performers we have was a little girl and she was terrified by the costumes and then afterwards she was running around smiling and telling everybody how terrified she was because she was so proud to relate that! She thought it was funny she was scared. So you see that change take place and it's a clearly positive thing.

The central role of fear, and the ways that children interact with holiday monsters like Krampus at all of these events, remains the heart and soul of the Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Portland, and European Krampuslaufs. While some locations like Charlotte, North Carolina, have seen their Krampus events transferred largely to an adult population in the form of a bar crawl, most Krampuslauf events in the United States are still focusing on the valuable role that facing fears in concrete, exaggerated forms like the Krampus can provide.

### **The Wild Hunt Online: The Role of Digital Folk Communities in Krampuslauf Performances**

My first year at the Krampuslauf only occurred because of online interactions. I had heard about it through Robert Schrewier, whom I had interviewed for another reason connected with Pennsylvania German culture on another project. Rob found that I had moved to Pennsylvania to pursue Ph.D. studies at Penn State Harrisburg, and quickly let me know of some of the other activities related to things Pennsylvania German and Urglaawe-oriented that he thought might be of interest. My first step was to join the Philadelphia Krampuslauf's Facebook group, which I soon discovered was the extended hub of the group's activity. Many primary interactions with the Krampuslauf group all occur online, specifically within the digital sphere of Facebook, where the participants and organizers coordinate their efforts. Essentially, the Parade arises from a very net-savvy generation's earnest desire to create in an offline environment, but much of the reflection and culture of the Krampuslauf self-perpetuates through online interactions. There are two key groups that see members interacting. The primary one, "KRAMPUSLAUF PHILADELPHIA (Participants Group)," is ostensibly the organizing forum for all things Lauf-related. Another group already mentioned, "Folk Horror Revival," is not directly related to Krampuslauf, but often features posts that interest members of the

Krampuslauf community. In reality, both groups essentially serve as forums for sharing artistic inspiration and creative methods, rather than managing dates, times, etc. As I noted during one observational period in 2015, I found that the most liked and commented post in the Krampuslauf group was about the design and use of pneumatic angel wings as a costume piece. Posters tried to figure out just how they could recreate those wings as part of their own costumes. Crafting and costume creation make up the bulk of the group's discussions, with users often seeking out tutorial videos or design ideas that could be incorporated into later Parades. Other posts showed Krampus figures from other cultures that might serve as inspiration for costumes. In addition to the groups, which involve member interactions, the Parade of Spirits has its own Facebook page, which acts as a public-facing informational bulletin board, and a website that houses a number of blog posts, images, and links related to the Philadelphia event and other Krampus-related events throughout the country and around the world.

Following my initial foray into the online world of the Philadelphia Krampuslauf, Amber, who uses the online name of Frau Perchta (another mythological character associated with the Teutonic midwinter), let me know about an upcoming "maker day" at the iMPeRFECT Gallery in Philadelphia. I attended the crafting day on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and helped build a number of paper lanterns and small prop items for the parade and managed to interview a few of the founders and participants. In 2015, I returned for my second round of Krampuslauf. I had spent the previous year interacting with the group via Facebook, sharing inspiration and talking costumes. The parade grew from the two-hundred and fifty participants in 2014 to what several people calculated as between three-hundred and fifty and four hundred marchers in 2015. By 2017, the overall attendance seemed to mirror 2014's number's again, although some Parade-goers attributed this to the cold snap around Philadelphia. Online interactions, however,

remained steady and frequent, often involving the same dozen posters talking to one another but never excluding additional voices that wanted to enter the conversation.

The digital communities of the Krampuslauf events frequently support one another but can also open up zones of conflict with events that are seen as antithetical to the spirit of the Parades. In Philadelphia, the primary conflict comes from another public event, the Running of the Santas. The series of posts earlier in this chapter discussing the different approaches to alcohol at Krampuslaufs came directly out of the experience many parade-goers had with the Running of the Santas. In Chapter Three, I included a series of posts between Amber, Janet Finegar, Linda Soffer, and Neil Kohl in which they attempted to parse out logistics related to the Parade route while also planning to avoid any potential conflicts with the Santas group. The deep conflicts with the Santas group are muted in a public capacity but underlie the Parade of Spirits organizers' anxieties about the dangers that the Running of the Santas can pose to members of the Krampus-revelers' group. Often, these dangers are limited to simply space and logistics—parking is limited around Liberty Lands, and two different parades in the same area strains the availability of spaces. Yet there are also undercurrents of social concerns that emerge, as Finegar noted in one interview:

The Running of the Santas the anti-Krampus. I agree I hate it but in part that's because it's very difficult to live in Northern Liberties and not hate the Running of the Santas. And now that it is a little further off so it doesn't disturb us as much as it used to and setting it against Krampuslauf I'm kind of delighted that it's happening now, because it's such a perfect antithesis to the Krampuslauf. And for years, in the earlier years when they were much more “right there” on Spring Garden Street and you couldn't get away from them. It gave me a chance to be able to say to people well on this Saturday it'll be very difficult

to move through our streets because there will be these loud, wildly costumed kind of scary horrible people who are ruining the whole idea of Christmas. And then we're also doing the Krampuslauf. So the Christmas devils thing is family friendly, run by parents, totally participatory, not supposed to get in your face and be a problem for you. And [it's] the drunken teenagers dressed up like whores with Santa hats on that will scar your children. It's a different thing. But with all that grouchiness said there's no question that they're absolutely do are going to same kind of thing that we are; they're dressing up silly and going out making noise in public. And basically if it weren't so much about being drunk for that event I would probably like it just as much.

Janet recognizes the kindred spirit of public revelry, but like many Parade-goers, is suspicious of the emphasis on alcohol found at the Running of the Santas. Additionally, the sexualization of the holiday that happens with the Santas—many of whom run in very little clothing other than underwear and a Santa hat—comes into direct conflict with the motivations of the “darker” Krampus parade. The place where members work out their anxieties over these problems, and the place where organizers can help participants plan to avoid potential friction points, is in the online realm.

Both the Los Angeles and Portland events also remain connected to the Philadelphia event through online mediation. Arún frequently posts in the participants' group for the Parade of Spirits, and Al Ridenour communicates with Amber via shared interests, especially in the Folk Horror Revival group. The Parade's presence in the online world has also created a number of extended relationships that have led to real-world interactions at incredibly intimate and close levels. Linda Soffer and her daughter Ruby talked about hosting Tucson, Arizona artist Mykl Wells during his stay in advance of the 2014 Parade of Spirits, where he offered a workshop on

lantern-making. The following year, Amber and her family, as well as Linda and Ruby, visited Mykl in Tucson during the All Souls Procession. Linda and Ruby used the Arizona event as a way to honor departed loved ones, both people and animals, and noted just how the extension of the community beyond Philadelphia exists because of the Parade of Spirits:

LINDA: It's been so wonderful to connect with these other artists... That's been another wonderful element. Mykl shared with me his guidelines for these workshops that he does—cardboard lantern-making, mask-making—for the All Souls Procession in Tucson.

RUBY: We actually visited him and went there.

LINDA: That's right, we visited, and stayed with him and his wife...

RUBY: It was awesome!

LINDA: We went there and honored, I honored a friend of mine who had died and Ruby...

RUBY: I honored all the pets, our pets...

LINDA: All the pets who have passed away. And it was an incredible connection we made through participating in this event [the Krampuslauf].

The connections forged through the Parade are maintained and expanded by online interactions, primarily via social media, and in the case of participants like Linda and Ruby, the Parade becomes a single point along a spectrum of festive activity among a widely diverse and dispersed group of community members. Fire performer Nicole Vergalla noted that despite close relationships with Amber and despite performing on-stage with her children—around live flames no less—most of her actual socialization occurs through online mediation. In Nicole's case, she

lives several hours away in Brooklyn, but the geographic distance is largely overcome by digital means. The artistry binds them all together, and the mediation of the internet helps to retain those bonds. In some cases, the bonds are not craft-oriented. Both Robert Schreiwer and Arún discussed the ways in which the winter monster processions act as “gateways” to participation in other spiritual activities. Those who attend a Krampuslauf may discover others who identify with their spiritual worldview, as happens in Portland, or may consider participation in the Parade of Spirits an extension of Uriglaawe practice. In all cases, the connections are real, but frequently lead to participation in the online communities associated both with the parades and the spiritual groups.

The self-documentary nature of the Parade and its participants also uses the online world to extend the practice of parading and festivity. As I noted in Chapter Three, almost immediately after a Parade of Spirits ends, people begin uploading photos to social media and sharing them with one another. Posts may be public and visible to non-participants via things like a personal Facebook timeline, but the vast majority of comments, likes, shares, and tags that go along with photo posting happen among participants. Amber will frequently write follow-up blog posts about the event within the month after parading and chronicles a number of extended activities related to the Parade including workshops and traveling to visit other Krampuslauf-related events, such as the All Souls Day Procession in Tucson mentioned above. The Parade website also features a number of participants interviewing one another, discussing why they got involved with the Krampuslauf or Parade of Spirits initially, and what they would tell someone the Parade is about. Many people who view the blog posts or photos are already participants, however, and so are extending their experience of the Parade beyond a single day. This is largely an ongoing practice of parading, with guisers revealing their identities only post-event and

through the lens of social media interactions. Costumes that were missed in-person can be enjoyed and examined online, where they receive comments and likes. Even the “feed” of photos associated with each Parade rolls out in digital procession, with people posting favorite costumes most often and first, and then sharing aspects of the Parade grounds, the fire dancing performance, and post-event get togethers. The initial photos are taken with camera phones and loaded quickly into Facebook, Flickr, or other sharing sites. Within a few days to a month after, the more professional photographs emerge from people like Rich Wexler of New Castro Studios or photographer Neil Kohl. Both amateur and professional pictures get circulated on social media, and the commenting and identification involved with photos can continue for a month or more after the Parade has ended.

The practice of extending the Parade through digital means into new spaces—whether those are physical locations like Tucson or Portland or digital ones like the Folk Horror Revival Facebook group—involves a level of ostension. While “ostension” normally explained through folkloric contexts of legend and belief, the dissonance between the explanation of ritualized behavior and its enacted performance applies in the case of festival activities like the Krampuslauf. Guised behavior like trick-or-treating at Halloween already falls under the critical purview of those who study ostension, and in the case of the various Christmas monster processions the guises employed and the enacted performance are analogous. Further, the Parade and the Christmas monster in general exemplify a form of continued, disembodied performance, a type of ritualized behavior understood in contemporary folklore studies as “virtual ostension” (see Brunvand 2012; Kinsella 2011). The ongoing performance of the Parade makes its festivity permanently accessible. The Wild Hunt can happen via a search engine, revealing revelers in action, and revelers reflexively commenting on their reveling. Anyone can become a participant

by expressing interest, by viewing photographs and videos, by commenting on posts and sharing costume ideas. Digital performance is expected to lead to physical performance, although that relationship is not necessarily a reflexive or reciprocal one. Many participants are more likely to be involved in the actual Parade than its online life, yet a significant number of revelers use their online presence as a way to augment the Parade experience well beyond the temporal and spatial limits established by a date, time, and place for a group of masked holiday monsters. Michael Kinsella (2011) has discussed the role of online performance and its impact on the cycle of legend tripping, as well as the circulation of any number of contemporary legends and rumors. Kinsella's notion that vernacular traditions emerge in online space as a result of "deterritorialized" community members converging on digital "locations" is one that casts the contemporary Krampuslauf in new light. In the case of Philadelphia, Portland, Los Angeles, and even to some extent Old World locations like Bad Gastein, the physical procession of the Krampus is but one stop on a much longer and far-reaching route. The Parade of Spirits as an event requires a physical manifestation, but its practice requires digital communities. The territory of the Northern Liberties is, in many ways, the physical heart of the Parade, but its brain and nerves exist in cyberspace, and they weave into the physical bodies of other performative events like Portland's Lauf, the Krampus Ball in Los Angeles, and Tucson's All Souls Procession, each with their own physical hearts. The process creates something of a strange beast—many hearts and bodies, conjoined by an expansive nervous system of social interactions online. The image of a beautiful monster is hard to shake, even at a meta level.

### **The Krampus on Your Screen: Pop Culture and the Christmas Monster**

As each Krampuslauf came to a close, I had already begun planning costumes for next year. Pictures went up online within twenty-four hours. People enthusiastically talked about what

might come next, the growing size of the crowds, and the effect of the weather (in 2013, a sudden snow shower had reduced the number of participants, although there were still plenty who came to join in the procession). New participants arrive throughout the night at any given Parade of Spirits, many not sure if it had started or surprised to find the procession over. In 2015, some people attended based upon the recent wide release of the holiday horror film *Krampus*. Two girls who came up to me to ask about the Parade and the fire dancing show were attempting to put the finishing touches on their masks: modified Blue Meanies from the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* movie. The de facto emcee for the dance show wore a Mexican *luchador* mask, completely divorced from anything Krampus-related. The food truck for the event sold out of several Krampus-themed dishes. While the core of the Parade remains resistant to commercialization, at the fringes of the Parade experience fragments of consumerism and popular culture already have a foothold, even if it is only a tenuous one. There is a significant risk, of course, to Krampuslaufs, as popularity, American consumer sensibilities, and media representation clearly finds their way into the event and then into the community, where those influences transform the participants and their performances.

Yet Krampuslauf has never really been about authenticity. Despite Arún's assertions that the Portland Krampuslauf happened as it has "always happened," no American version of the Krampuslauf really resembles its European antecedents. Arún is correct that the processional form has offered shape for the events on both sides of the Atlantic, but the emphases between the two sides remains divided. On the one hand, European Laufs emphasize St. Nicholas often as much as the Krampus figure, and focus on national or regional identity. While the Urglaawe group can certainly claim the Germanic lineage of Central Pennsylvania as a regional connection to Krampus, that thread is secondary to the celebration's greater role as an assertion

of identity for the communities which *choose* to come together in America. To that end, the inclusion of St. Nicholas in American events can be a statement on its own: in Los Angeles, St. Nicholas is a link to the “traditional” European form of the Krampuslauf, while in Philadelphia St. Nicholas is simply one potential spirit among many that might be present. Selective traditionality cuts both ways, however, and the heavy weight of popularity for the Christmas monster means that many non-participants see Krampuslauf events in the United States as a fad or a trend based on other commercial cultural cues.

Commercial interests make Krampuslauf organizers nervous. The 2015 film’s popularity caused momentary excitement, but that enthusiasm quickly faded as the potential for outsiders to capitalize on the hard work done in Philadelphia and Portland, among other places, has become increasingly apparent. Popular culture has a “gaze,” a way of looking at things that changes them. In the case of the Krampuslauf, the initial gaze of the popular culture has already had enough impact to alter the name of the event. No longer is it the Philadelphia Krampuslauf, but the Parade of Spirits Liberty Lands. This shift is a conscious redirection away from the commercial coopting of Krampus and other spirits, and it does seem to be insulating the Parade as a whole from the altering gaze of popular culture for now. Attendance at the 2017 event dropped slightly from previous years, although the temperature may have caused that change, too. More importantly, without the overt reference to Krampus in the name of the event, fewer outsiders knew of the connection between the figure they knew from popular sources like Hollywood and the strange masked procession that wended through the Northern Liberties neighborhood in early December. Poster art for the event has shifted over time, too. Amber, who usually oversees the designs, specifically emphasized Das Mädchen as the focus of the 2017 poster, for example. The festival of the Christmas monster exists in a spirit of defiance and

resistance, but American culture digests any unique offering placed on the potluck table if given enough time, so what will be the lasting impact of the Parade of Spirits once it is in the maw of American fascination, or once American cultural tourists get a taste for the oddity of the event?

One of the Parade's most powerful tools in resisting the gaze—and the teeth—of American cultural homogenization derives from its intensely physical nature. As the culture around Americans has become increasingly distended into a digital medium, the opportunity for direct interaction has become a sort of “treat,” a cause for delight and interest. Anything that pushes the physical body into contact with other physical forms can offer potential novelty and engagement. Susan Manning (2007) discusses the way in which Americans “perform” their identities, and the complicated nature of performance in general, as a tension between understandings of “high” and “low” culture, a concept expanded from Lawrence Levine (1988). In the twenty-first century, Manning argues, the ever-increasing pervasiveness of media and mediation has dissolved components of physically performative culture, leaving a cultural performance in the hands of the performer in the mediated space. A person can represent themselves as a member of one class based upon the types of images they share on social media for example, or by changing the patterns of their speech to coincide with others in the online world, as when members of anonymous comment boards use coded language to indicate their connection with that community. Removing physical bodies from expressive culture, even as people share their bodies in video and images more than ever, has resulted in a “preoccupation with performance” in culture. More importantly, it has heightened the power of physical events in physical spaces “at precisely the cultural moment when encounters with live bodies bound in time and framed in space have become increasingly rare occurrences.” Because the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits involves the performance of a physical act of cultural resistance using physical costumes and

masks on physical bodies around other physical bodies, the performance becomes a heightened critique of American cultural capitalism. The Parade-goers disrupt the mediated culture, deny commodification, and shroud aspects of cultural separation—the “high” and “low” cultural codes—behind grotesque images and exaggerated guises.

As I have demonstrated throughout my study, the event is not a “day of” affair, but an ongoing cycle of practice, performance, and reflection, much of which occurs within the same mediated spaces that Manning sees as reframing American cultural distinctions. While many within the Parade do worry about the potential for a corruptive media influence or a popular interest that commodifies the event and its central figures, message boards for the participants often circulate images of other Krampus-related events throughout the Old and New World, and even draw in forms from unrelated cultural spaces. For example, several of the participants in 2017 circulated images of Japanese *yokai*, household and domestic spirits, as a part of regular interactions. Similarly, the emphasis on Baba Yaga from 2016 to 2017 represents a drawing-in of a cultural connection that does not exist within the Old-World performances, even though there are witch figures like Perchta and La Befana found in some of the regional guising rituals. The life of Krampus and other Christmas monsters depends upon the live performance, of course, but that performance exists because of an increasingly digital network of relationships that have allowed new influences to shape the event or new connections to be forged among widely dispersed communities. Arún’s attendance at the Philadelphia event, Mykl Wells’ workshop on masks and lanterns, Linda and Ruby’s travels to Tucson for the All Souls’ Parade, Amber’s trip to Oxford, and Al Ridenour’s transfer of knowledge from Central Europe to Los Angeles demonstrate the ways in which the digital roads that participants travel between Parades can become real, physical journeys. The American notions of performance as something increasingly

mediated that Manning describes very much exist, even in the context of the Krampuslauf, but the “real-world” impact of those performances still insulate events like the Parade of Spirits from becoming a completely ostensive exercise in a digital medium.

The American Studies field can also gain a reflexive understanding of itself from the study of a festival like the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits. Former President of the American Studies Association Philip J. Deloria wrote in 2009 that “American Studies might be defined by this pithy phrase: ‘it’s not what we choose to include, but what we refuse to exclude.’” That sentiment, one not of direct inclusion but of a refusal to exclude, mirrors the experience of Krampuslauf participants. For example, in a conversation between Parade participant Tucker and Rob from the Urglaawe community, the two made a reflexive turn towards the nature of their non-exclusion of one another:

**TUCKER:** I remember that, I remember seeing you guys there. But at no point, when either you guys have been at the workshops, or we’ve been at Pagan Pride or anything else, I’ve never felt like – “You’re the Heathens, and we’re the people... who aren’t Heathens.” Or anything like that. There’s no – it doesn’t feel like there’s a separation. And there shouldn’t be.

**ROBERT:** There shouldn’t be. You know, there are reasons to separate from some people. For instance, the thing I was talking about earlier, where people are committing acts of violence [referring to white supremacist groups adopting Heathen symbols] – I don’t want to be associated with them. But why wouldn’t I want to be associated with people regardless of what their spiritual belief is who have community welfare and friendship and camaraderie as the driving force behind them? It’s actually a beautiful thing. And it’s something that is all too uncommon in our society. But yet there’s people

everywhere who are searching for this. It's just nice when you actually come across it, and when you come across it in an authentic and organic way, which comes back to Amber and Janet and a few other people, who really go out of their ways to create something where people can thrive and share of themselves without having to worry about not fitting in.

The camaraderie that Schreier observes is not necessarily about including people from outside the Urglaawe faith in Urglaawe rituals and ceremonies. Schreier recognizes that the meanings he and his group derive from their participation are different from the meanings that Tucker or Amber or Linda or Sue or any of the other participants glean. The goal of festival, of community action, especially within the "organic" context Schreier notes, binds up the various groups who don the masks, share photos online, circulate ideas through social media, organize and attend workshops, and discuss the mythical and symbolic meanings of the event. American Studies, with a goal of interdisciplinarity that arises out of the organic intersections of various fields, is an academic Krampuslauf. What the field has inherited from its predecessors it has changed, but not to the detriment or exclusion of any field on its own terms. Participants in Krampuslauf perform their spirits and build a community; participants in American Studies perform their scholarship and build their academy.

More remains to be done in understanding the Krampus and his phenomenal growth. What I can say through my work with the Parade and the extensive study of its contexts is that the growth is a combination of intentionality within a set of communities and a broader cultural response to the winter holiday season as one suffering from a commercial hangover and voided of significant meaning through capitalist overconsumption. The Krampuslauf as a physical event replete with disorientating costumes, themes of darkness and fear, and built upon foundations of

face-to-face interaction responds to the Coca-Cola Santa Claus, flailing switches and growling ferociously as it disrupts the commercial flow between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The ongoing performance of the Parade and its sister events in digital spaces offers an opportunity for outsiders to find the event, and for insiders to validate their experience of something rooted in community, creation, and action, while also providing a space for community members to set boundaries—as best they can for now—around the commercial potential of the Christmas monster. This study has focused on three specific communities that come together through the Philadelphia event, but even with such narrow focus other connections have inevitably been made clear: the digital extension of processional performance, the network of history and culture running between Europe and the New World, and the representation of communities like the neurodiverse one that Amber emphasized in her talk at Oxford. Several other communities are also within the substrata of the Philadelphia Krampuslauf, like the LGBTQ+ community and feminist activists, who have not made their presence as widely known yet, but that are likely to shape the Parade in the years to come. Throughout the country, numerous other Krampus-themed events are appearing. In South Carolina, Texas, Indiana, and parts of California outside of Los Angeles all launched variations on the Krampuslauf within a few years of Portland and Philadelphia, and a multi-site study would yield a trove of data on comparative performance. As in the Old World, Krampus and his kin appear to vary in form and meaning depending on where they are, but they all invite community engagement with themes of creation, resistance, alternative spirituality, and reinterpretation of winter festivals. Popular cultural appropriation of Christmas monsters as figures for entertainment has resulted in a Belsnickel on the television show, *The Office*, and Krampüsse on screens in shows like *American Dad* or films like the 2015 *Krampus*. The festival celebrations themselves, however, have not disappeared in the wake of an

intensifying popular gaze. To those who participate in the Parade of Spirits and similar events throughout the country, the embodied act of guising, tied to resisting capitalist hegemony and mainstream holiday images, remains strong. In fact, it is growing. As study and research into these festivals continues, scholars will find more local festive communities like those in Philadelphia and Portland, but more importantly, more communities like the Heathens and the Makers will find Krampus. As they do find the Christmas monster, they are likely to reinvent traditional materials for their own needs and purposes, using extant form for new functions.

### **The Beautiful Data Potluck and the Reflexive Turn**

On the night of February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, I pulled into a Philadelphia glistening green like the land of Oz. The Eagles would be playing the next day in the Super Bowl—which they won—but that was not what had brought me to the city. Instead, I had come to participate in “The Beautiful Data Potluck,” an event that Amber had pulled together in the aftermath of the 2017 Parade of Spirits, specifically to ensure I could get the interviews I needed or had missed during the course of my research. Amber opened her home, invited nearly thirty participants past and present, and provided me a back room in which I could sit down with individuals or groups and talk with them about their experiences in the Parade. She called it the “Beautiful Data Potluck” because, as she said in the event description on Facebook, “we are asking ANYONE who had ever been to Parade, helped with Parade, or watched Parade from Standard Tap (or another restaurant) to come to our home...to eat, drink, chat (with Cory and with each other) and to craft...NO ONE is "too peripheral" to come to this event.”<sup>3</sup> Amber sees the study of the Parade as intensely valuable, something that she herself wants to encourage and participate, and finds it moving that

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<sup>3</sup> THE BEAUTIFUL DATA POTLUCK: Parade of Spirits Liberty Lands (Facebook Event Group). Retrieved 5 March 2018.

Parade-goers can become a piece of a larger picture through academic analysis. The participants in the Parade of Spirits, in her mind, are very much “beautiful data.”

The Parade and its primary participants have all been deeply reflexive about the meaning and role of the event in the world. Amber presented her own perspective on the Krampuslauf and its value to the neurodiverse community at Oxford University in England in 2017:

2013 brought another big change in our household. A 19-year-old college student who had been a family friend had come to live with us to attend a college program in Philadelphia. And he has Asperger’s Syndrome, which I recognized—he was not diagnosed at the time—but we felt really sure about this. The longer we lived with [him], the more we realized it was something that did need to be addressed every day. And at 19, after living in our house for a while and getting diagnosed, was able to live as an autistic person and use the sensory communication interventions that are helpful to him. And he was about to experience his first Krampuslauf. He took a physics final at 8:30 in the morning, then came home and made [his] mask. But he wanted to wear it on his chest, and he also wanted to wear a veil over his face... This all sounded like a good idea until we put the...veil on. Then things weren’t so good. We talked about it. He was just uncomfortable with having his face covered, felt that he couldn’t communicate with people. So we said “okay, that’s something we can take into mind” (Stopper 2017).

Amber prioritized working with the autism-spectrum individuals who wanted to be a part of the Parade, developing a survey to find out what was most useful and valuable to them, and found that they appreciated the sense of community more than the aesthetics or the social status and political visibility it gave to their spectrum. At the Oxford conference, Amber noted that there had already been two gallery exhibitions of Krampuslauf-related materials at the local sites the

Gravy Studio and the iMPeRFECT Gallery. The local Philadelphia National Public Radio (NPR) affiliate, WHYY, interviewed Amber in her first year of organizing the Parade, which led to an uptick in attendance, and an uptick in interest in the festival as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Many of the participants have been actively involved in documenting the Parade's costumes, people, and meanings through the "Krampuslauf Voices" and "Parade of Spirits Liberty Lands Voices" web-based podcast series hosted at the official Parade website.

My own study is only one aspect of a much broader reflexive turn that continues to shape etic and emic understandings of the Parade as both a performance and practice. The constant acts of thinking about, talking about, and planning for the Parade have extended the life of the event well beyond the winter months, and even the exhibitionist qualities of the event exist far past the date of the physical procession. Victor Turner's (1984) characterization of the ritual drama of festival as a performative process accounts for the thoughtful extension of festival life into the everyday experience of a group by juxtaposing a primary process that he calls "flow" with "discriminative reflexive secondary processes," the "author's metatstatements" about meaning beyond the performative singular act (27). The community of the Krampuslauf constantly provides these reflexive opportunities and members of the Parade such as Amber and Janet recognize their participation as metatstatements of meaning with relation to the culture around them. They consider their Parade to be more than an event, but an example of "processional arts" that involves performance and material culture, but also explication and participation for full comprehension. More recently, Simon J. Bronner (2016) has emphasized that the shifts in "tradition" as component of folklore study brought about by the digital age should require a "call

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<sup>4</sup> The interview focused largely on the figure of Krampus rather than the Parade itself or its connections to Philadelphia history or lore. Peter Crimmins. 10 December 2011. "Horror for the Holidays: Meet the Anti-Santa." Weekend Edition Saturday (NPR). WHYY Philadelphia. <https://www.npr.org/2011/12/10/143485735/naughty-or-nice-krampus-horror-for-the-holidays>

for finding cognitive sources for the production of folklore, rather than leaving it to surface behavioral descriptions of social interaction-based outcomes” (14). I could hardly have chosen a better event to study to validate this emphasis on cognition and reflexive use of a folk event by the group—or in this case, groups—participating in the festive performance as a cognitive, deliberate act. The Parade of Spirits encompasses individuals who think frequently and often about the Parade as something larger than themselves, an event with a collective significance that also offers personally reflexive value to them, emphasizing their individuality and resistance to a commodified mass culture.

The reflexivity of the Parade, however, can also become a mire for a researcher, because the boundaries of the event are nebulous and ill-defined. Attending a single Parade will provide a meaningful experience to individual participants but researching the role the Parade fills in the lives of participants involves a wide-ranging net of data collection, including the interviews I have done and the interviews done by the Parade-goers, which do not always ask or answer the same questions. The materials they do provide are invaluable as they create an opportunity to seek out patterns and turn a critical eye towards the dissonance of ostension in the Parade environment, as I have done in this study. Participation in the Parade also leads to participation in communities. I also participated in Urglaawe spiritual ceremonies, Philadelphia neighborhood crafting events, a Belsnickel visit at an historic farm in Lancaster County, and became the subject of 3-D photographs during the 2017 Parade. Those levels of participation involved physical relocation and engagement, as well as my own reflexive turns recording field notes on a handheld microphone or transcribing my thoughts into written analyses. The Parade’s existence in the digital realm means that it is “always open,” the shingle always hung out for anyone to come by and see photos, read essays, and hear the voices of the Parade. Participants engage

consciously and cognitively with the folk materials of the Christmas monster—costumes and masks, noisemakers, fire. Participants also engage with the communities that offer them interpretive meanings for contextualizing their own involvement, whether that is through spiritual lenses like Urglaawe and neo-Paganism or the self-directed and creative fulfillment provided to crafters at a lantern-making workshop.

If the Krampuslauf participants are thinking hard about their Parade, scholars should be thinking even harder about it. The implications for intentional communities, festival studies, and intersectional examinations of folklore and popular culture in America are extensive. Is it possible to uncover the layers of the Philadelphia Parade of Spirits and make significant meaning from the symbolic figure of the Krampus? My research indicates that the Christmas monster functions as a flagpole, a gathering point for groups actively seeking meaning-making activities that fit their own distinct social and cultural needs. It is the darkness in the light, filling a subtle hole in the American festive cycle and a need in the contemporary human spirit.

### Coda

During the Krampuslauf season in my house, my children often heard me discussing the many different forms of the Christmas monster. They knew about the potential visit from the Belsnickel, having met him during a winter visit to the Landis Valley Farm and Museum in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. They knew that Daddy liked to dress as the Belsnickel, too, and carry his large wooden staff decorated with twine and bells and a metal hook to hold a lantern. That staff spends the rest of the year by the front door of the house, tucked into a corner, the occasional tinkle of its bells a reminder of the presence of the Belsnickel in our lives. The children also know about Krampus, having seen him in masks, pictures, and even videos Daddy uses for research—and because he looks “cool.” As a family, we leave out our shoes on the night of December 5<sup>th</sup>, and in the morning, they are full of candy and small toys, a tradition I inherited from my mother the teacher, who loved incorporating traditions from other lands into our lives. In my childhood, the role of Krampus was nearly non-existent, although I knew that there was a “dark companion” who might travel with St. Nicholas to punish naughty children. My own son and daughter are deeply aware of Krampus, and possibly even a little fearful of him at times, but despite all my time working with the Parade of Spirits in Philadelphia, they have never met him. They have never been to the Parade.

The work required to do scholarly research requires the creation of boundaries and barriers around the subjects of that research in many cases. Even in situations where an anthropologist or folklorist “goes native,” most scholars seem to intuitively seek out a space at the margins of participation from which they might establish their panopticon of study. In my case, the boundaries have largely been self-imposed. No one at the Parade would ever tell me not

to bring my children. In fact, I have been actively encouraged to do so on many occasions. The people involved with Philadelphia's Parade of Spirits have continually sought to bring me into their world in any way they could. I have been invited to Urglaawe holidays and festivals and have even attended an Urglaawe funeral. I have exchanged homeschooling ideas with members of the Parade group, especially Amber, ranging from the study of myths to the creation of pocket electronic synthesizers. Many of these exchanges and events have been valuable to me not only as a researcher, but as a friend and fellow of the community members involved with the study. It remains, however, a study, and as such I have required that pocket at the margins for my work. Part of that pocket has required me to remain untethered to non-research responsibilities during the Parade itself. I can don a costume and march with the other Spirits, but even from that vantage point I know I have the ability to make observations and record notes by seeking out a few private moments in a quiet place. Bringing my children along adds a layer of responsibility that supersedes any research interests, and so for the past four years, they have remained at home while Daddy goes to the Parade.

This year, that will change. The children, who have helped build masks for my costumes and run from my shaggy Belsnickel, will have the opportunity to craft their own masks and costumes along with me. I expect this to add a layer of significance and meaning to my involvement with the Parade surpasses my research interests. The twentieth-century philosopher of festivity, Josef Pieper (1963), has said that "[t]here are worldly, but there are no purely profane, festivals" (34). He indicates that even the most mundane of festive gatherings has the potential for profound sacred meaning, largely because the act of festival celebration is not externally enforced but arises from within the celebrants and from among their communal connections. The Parade of Spirits has profound spiritual meaning for many of its celebrants, as I

have already elucidated through the course of my analysis, but at some level my interpretations here must be tempered by the presence of my scholarly “mask” at the event. For those who participate in the Parade, total immersion creates type of ecstatic experience that I have yet to experience fully. Allowing my children to be a part of the Parade may change that, as it has done for so many of my informants in this study.

Pieper has also discussed the importance of “handing on” a festival, making it “a *traditum* in the strictest meaning of that concept: received from a superhuman source, to be handed on undiminished, received and handed on again” (35). In this, Simon J. Bronner’s (2011) explanation of tradition as something that is “handed down” through a process of “cultural sifting” points to a source of power, one often deployed for political or commercial means. The invocation of “tradition” can be used as a bridge to change, or as a cudgel to actively resist the force of change in the culture around those pointing towards their traditions as sacred. Pieper calls that power “superhuman,” while Bronner more explicitly invests it in the people and groups wielding the tradition, but in both cases the use of tradition indicates that the real power of “tradition” is in its passage. The tradition binds the group in a way that shapes both community and individuals. “Tradition” exists in the spaces between cultural participants, in the kinetic energy of the tradition-bearer initiating the novice, bringing them into the world of the tradition.

Festival is a mighty manifestation of tradition’s power. It puts participants in communion yet can take them outside of themselves and even outside of their established role in the group. As I have shown through this study, individual members of the Parade of Spirits do not always share one goal but through their communal actions meet the collective goals of all participants. This is what Pieper calls “a crucial component of festivity...to do something which is in no way tied to other goals, which has been removed from all ‘so that’ and ‘in order to.’ True festivity

cannot be imagined as residing anywhere but in the realm of activity that is meaningful in itself’  
(9). I read Pieper’s statement as saying not that a festival cannot have goals, but rather that a festival generates meaning independent of any one set of goals. Krampuslauf, the Parade of Spirits, or whatever name it takes on in the future will meet the needs of its participants by continuing to wield tradition by hand, crafting and making masks and costumes while passing on those practices and behaviors to new hands as well.

This year, I will be crafting masks that do not have scholarly goals, but parental ones. I will help my children craft masks that meet their goals of creative expression and challenging their own dichotomies of light and darkness. I will lead them, or follow them, among a procession of strange spirits through the streets of Philadelphia. The Parade will meet our needs, and we will lend it our power to help meet the needs of others. We will be our own fun, and part of someone else’s.

**APPENDIX: INFORMANTS**

“Arún” (Portland Krampuslauf Founder). Interview with author. Skype. 2 October 2015.

“Ben” (Parade participant). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 7 December 2014.

Collins, Tucker (Parade Participant). Interview with author. E-mail. 11 November 2017.

Essig, Timothy (Landis Valley Farm & Museum). Interview with author. Skype. 12 December 2014.

Essig, Timothy (Landis Valley Farm & Museum). Interview with author. Lancaster, PA. 9 February 2016.

Evangelista, Leo (Parade participant). Interview with author. Harrisburg, PA. 3 February 2018.

Finegar, Janet (Liberty Lands Park). Interview with author. Skype. 14 December 2017.

Johnson, Anne (Mummer’s Parade participant). Interview with author. Skype. 8 January 2018.

Larochelle, David (Parade participant). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 3 February 2018.

Levin Dorko, Béla (Parade participant). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 3 February 2018.

Levin Dorko, Claudia (Parade participant). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 3 February 2018.

Marinos, Stamatis (Parade participant). Interview with author. Skype. 8 January 2018.

Metevier, Addie (Parade participant). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 3 February 2018.

Orapello, Chris, and Tara Love-Maguire. Interview with author. Skype. 28 February 2018.

Ridenour, Al. (Krampuslauf Los Angeles leader). Interview with author. Skype. 19 December 2016.

Rosenholtz, Ellen (Parade participant). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 3 February 2018.

Rudolph, Sylvia, and Ellen Rosenholtz (Parade participants). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 3 February 2018.

Schreiwier, Robert L. (Urglaawe and Krampuslauf Philadelphia leader). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 7 December 2014.

Soffer, Linda, Sue White, Ruby, & Ilsa (Parade participants). Group interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 3 February 2018.

Stopper, Amber Dorko (Parade organizer/participant). Interview with author. Philadelphia, PA. 7 December 2014.

Vergalla, Nicole (Parade participant). Interview with author. Skype. 13 February 2018.

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### EDUCATION

- Ph.D. • 2014-2018 • **Pennsylvania State University (Harrisburg)** – Degree in American Studies
  - Graduate Certificate in Folklife and Ethnography (2017)
- M.A. • 2013 • **University of the South (Sewanee)** – Degree in English Literature
- B.A. • 2003 • **Middle Tennessee State University** - Degree in English Language & Literature

### AWARDS, SERVICE, AND HONORS

- 2018 – Pennsylvania Center for Folklife – 2018 Folklore Symposium Assistant
- 2017 – Harold F. Martin Award Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award
- 2014-current – *Cultural Analysis: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Folklore & Popular Culture* – Copy Editor
- 2015-2016 - Center for Pennsylvania Culture Studies – Graduate Assistant
- 2015-2016 – Pennsylvania State University (Harrisburg) – American Studies Student Association (ASSA) – Vice President
- 2014-2015 – Pennsylvania State University (Harrisburg) - Graham Fellowship recipient

### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Chapter: “Domestic and Automotive Folklife,” in *The Oxford Handbook of American Folklore and Folklife Studies*, Simon Bronner, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Forthcoming (2019).
- “Christmas Monsters: The Rise & Meanings of the Philadelphia Krampuslauf.” *Contemporary Legend*. Winter 2017.
- “Domesticating the Ogre: Horror Play and Fatherhood.” *Midwestern Folklore* (Hoosier Folklore Society, Fall 2015).
- Articles: “Name Lore,” “Old Betty Booker,” “Old Granny Tucker,” “Pata de Gallo,” “Tailypo.” *American Myths, Legends, & Tall Tales: An Encyclopedia of American Folklore*, Christopher R. Fee and Jeffery Webb, eds. (Denver: ABC-CLIO, 2015).