

I

INTRODUCTION

In his celebrated “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus of Nazareth makes reference to one of the oldest beliefs in the ancient world—the malignity of an Evil Eye (Matt 6:22–23): “If, however, your Eye is Evil, your entire body will be full of darkness.” Another of Jesus’s references to the Evil Eye appears in his parable concerning workers in a vineyard and an eruption of Evil-Eyed envy (Matt 20:1–16). At the parable’s conclusion, a generous vineyard owner chides disgruntled workers envious of their fellow laborers: “Is your Eye Evil because I am good?” (Matt 20:15). The apostle Paul also mentions the Evil Eye in his emotional letter to the Galatians. As he struggles with rival authorities for winning the hearts and minds of a vacillating mission outpost in Galatia, Asia Minor, he writes impatiently and asks rhetorically: “O you uncomprehending Galatians, who has injured you with an Evil Eye?” (Gal 3:1).

Jesus and Paul are only some of the biblical persons commenting on the Evil Eye. The Holy Scriptures in their original languages contain no less than twenty-four and possibly more references to the Evil Eye, although this is obscured by most modern Bible translations. Nor is this belief in any way restricted to the biblical communities. Quite the contrary. Written and material evidence attests to the existence of this belief across the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds of antiquity. From Mesopotamian incantations and the amuletic Egyptian Eyes of Horus to the *baskania* of the Greeks and the *fascinatio* of the Romans, the *‘ayin harah* of the Hebrews and the *ophthalmos ponêros* of the Christians, belief in the Evil Eye haunted the ancient world, prompted the production of vast arsenals of amulets, and engendered an array of spoken expressions, gestures, and social customs, many of which are with us to the present day.

2 Beware the Evil Eye

The story of the Evil Eye is a theme of the human drama that weaves its way through history from a fictional New Jersey crime family (“The Sopranos”) and international rock stars (Madonna), from deposed heads of state (Manuel Noriega) and the menacing look of American football linebackers (Ronnie Lott) to calamity-causing Italian popes to medieval witch trials to Jewish Talmudic wisdom, death-dealing rabbis, and the apotropaic practices of Jews and Christians of late antiquity to the sermons and biblical commentaries of the Christian church fathers to the words of Jesus, Paul and Israelite sages of the Bible, to the Greco-Roman, Egyptian and Mesopotamian worlds of myths of petrifying glances, restored eyes of gods, and Sumerian incantations against the roving Evil Eye.

Our study describes this belief and associated practices, its history, its voluminous appearances in ancient cultures, and the extensive research devoted to it over the centuries. The study’s chief focus, and its novel contribution, is a full-scale examination of the numerous references to the Evil Eye in the Bible and their meaning within the context of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Evil Eye belief and practice. The study in other words is a contextual analysis of the Evil Eye in the Bible shaped by the conviction that traces of biblical Evil Eye can only be understood in relation to ancient Evil Eye belief and practice in general. The chapters on Mesopotamia and Egypt (chap. 2) and Greece and Rome (Vol. 2) are prelude to and context for Volume 3 on the Evil Eye in the Old and New Testaments. Volume 4, chaps. 1 and 2 trace the continued dread of the Evil Eye in the cultures of both post-biblical Israel and post-biblical Christianity down through Late Antiquity (sixth century CE). This concentration on the Evil Eye belief and practice in the ancient world, however, will be accompanied by constant comment on Medieval, Reformation, Enlightenment, and modern traces of the belief in the diverse realms of philosophical and theological commentary, art, literature, and popular culture.

DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

What is this phenomenon called the Evil Eye? One recent writer opens his study with the astute observation, “the evil eye is perhaps the most widespread complex system of beliefs in the world and in history, yet, to anybody who is not part of an Evil Eye culture, the Evil Eye is an enigma.”¹ This book intends to unravel this enigma for readers who have never heard of the Evil Eye and its presence in the Bible. It also aims at providing more information to those who know a bit but want to know more.

1. Gravel 1995:3.

The concept of the Evil Eye is a millennia old and geographically widespread folk belief complex and one of the most widespread and behaviorally influential beliefs in the ancient world. This belief holds that certain individuals (humans, gods, demons, animals, and mythological figures) possess an eye whose powerful glance or gaze can harm or destroy any object, animate or inanimate, on which it falls. Through the power of their eye, which can operate involuntarily as well as intentionally, such Evil Eye possessors (also known as “fascinator²”) are thought capable of injuring, withering, or obliterating the health and life, means of sustenance and livelihood, familial honor, and personal well-being of their hapless victims.³ The Evil Eye is believed to harm nursing mothers and their babies, breast milk, fruit bearing trees, crops in the field, milking animals, and the sperm of men. All persons, things, and sound states of being, however, are deemed vulnerable, but especially children, the beautiful and successful, and what is most prized and essential to survival. The more attractive, beautiful, flourishing and outstanding the object, the more likely an attack from an Evil Eye.

All persons and creatures of all classes and social ranks are deemed potential Evil Eye possessors, but especially those with unusual ocular features or physical deformity, those manifesting anti-social behavior, or strangers and foreign peoples. Dangerous occasions include birth, marriage, and encounters with strangers. Thought to be animated by some malevolent disposition such as envy, miserliness, greed, or malice, an Evil Eye is believed to convey, project, and cast forth particles of energy that damage or destroy the object struck. In some cases, it has been believed, an Evil Eye is inherited and can work involuntarily, injuring even loved ones and the Evil-Eyed person her/himself. When exercised voluntarily, an Evil Eye directs malice arising in the heart through the eye against external objects with the intent to harm others and destroy what makes them stand out or gives them pleasure. It can be the cause of illness or death to humans (especially children) or animals, damage to crops or means of livelihood, loss of battles or contests, and ruin of reputation and honor.

Persistent anxiety concerning the omnipresent danger posed by the Evil Eye has led to a variety of efforts to ward off or counteract its power through the extensive use of apotropaic charms and amulets, words and gestures, the

2. From the Latin *fascinare*, “to cast, to harm with, an Evil Eye.” This and other ancient terms for “Evil Eye” are discussed in chap. 2 below and Vols. 2–4.

3. For definitions and descriptions see also Jahn 1855:31–32; Elworthy 1912:608; Seligmann 1910 1:2–9; Maloney 1976:v–vii, 3. Seligmann (1910 1:3) notes that when an admiring eye is accompanied by words of praise, this action is known in German as “berufen” or “beschreien,” utterance by which the object of admiration is exposed to harm and damage; cf. also Perkmann 1927.

4 Beware the Evil Eye

great majority of which are common to numerous cultures and periods from past to present. An *apotropaic* is that which is thought to possess the power to repel and “drive away” threatening evil forces (from the Greek *apotropein*, “to drive away”). Amulets, words, and gestures are various forms of apotropaics. These will be itemized and discussed at various points in our study. Many of these apotropaics have been thought to operate according to the ancient (and later homeopathic) principle of *similia similibus*, “like influences like.”

Evil Eye belief and practice is a vivid indicator of social relations and interpersonal dynamics. “The evil eye,” Blum and Blum have noted,

symbolizes the intensity of community interaction; it indicates that each person is under observation by others. Everyone is measured from moment to moment and regarded with admiration or envy, with approbation or censure. Implicit awareness of the consequences of the opinions and action of others towards oneself emerges in the evil eye concept which attributes one’s own health and welfare to the judgments made and feelings held about one by others. Community-wide interdependency and sensitivity to the feelings of others is demonstrated. There is evidence for the very considerable importance attached to interpersonal relations and the interplay of pride and envy as a source of disaster. The feelings of humans towards one another are understood as a source of illness, disability, anxiety, injury, and death . . . Good fortune is a dangerous blessing and its enjoyment, for the most part visibly through its flaunting, is an invitation to destruction. Those who have or achieve that which is valued (having a child, getting married, enjoying the sexual favours of another, acquiring property or reputation), must expect the congratulations of the neighbours to be but a mask for jealousy.⁴ Success is the forbidden fruit: to taste it is to know joy at the certain risk of alienation oneself from one’s fellows.⁵

Fear of the Evil Eye and its devastating effects was intense and pervasive in antiquity. Dread of the malevolent eye still lingers today.⁶ From

4. Envy, not jealousy, is the salient emotion; on this point see below, pp. 21–23.

5. Blum and Blum 1970:221.

6. Descriptions of the phenomenon in general, its suspected origin and dissemination, and selective documentation are offered by Smedley et al. 1855:205; Story 1860; 1877; Andrée 1878:35–45; Pitré 1884; 1889; 1913; Anonymous, *The Celtic Magazine* (1887); Potts 1890; Elworthy, 1895/1958, 1912; Blau 1898:152–56; 1907b; Vigouroux 1899; O’Neil 1908; Kuhnert 1909; Brown 1909–1910; Mather 1910; Seligmann 1910; 1912–13; 1914; 1922; 1927a; 1927b; Anonymous, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., (1911) 10:21–22; Ranke 1911; Park 1912:9–31; Anonymous, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

antiquity onward, it has remained a powerful belief with powerful social and personal consequences. “One may conclude that present evil eye beliefs have survived without important changes over several thousands of years.”⁷ Over the centuries, the Evil Eye has played a significant role in conceptualizing evil, identifying sources of hostility, explaining causes of illness and disaster, interpreting emotions and moral dispositions, regulating social relations, and reinforcing norms of moral conduct.

References to the Evil Eye occur in Old and New Testaments of the Bible and in fact appear in cuneiform texts of the Sumerians as early as 3000 BCE.⁸ From its origin in the ancient Near East and Circum-Mediterranean area, Evil Eye belief spread eastward to India, European Russia, and Asia and westward to Spain, Portugal, and Britain, northward to continental Europe and southward into North Africa. Eventually it traveled the seas from Old World to New World. European colonists brought the belief to North, Central, and South America. Islam carried it to Indonesia and the East.

Evil Eye belief and practice over the centuries is represented by an astounding range of evidence. Antiquity has given us Mesopotamian/Sumerian art and incantations (3000 BCE), myths of Horus and his restored eye with anti-Evil Eye power, the *baskania* of the Greeks, the *oculus malus* of the Romans along with Greek and Roman poetry, drama, literature and amulets; the *ra’ ayin* of the Hebrews and biblical stories of the patriarchs, matriarchs, and kings, advice of the sages; the *ophthalmos ponēros* condemned by Jesus and the *baskainein* deplored by the apostle Paul; the anti-Evil Eye theological treatises and homiletical warnings of the Christian

14th ed. (1929) 8:915; Waterman 1929, 2006; *Enciclopedia universal ilustrada. Europeo-Americana* 1907–1930, 32:408–12; Taylor 1933; Vijaya-Tunga 1935; Probst-Biraben 1936; Servadio 1936; B. L. Gordon 1937; Rolleston 1942; Schoeck 1955/1992; Deichgraeber 1957; Anonymous, *Dizionario Enciclopedico Italiano* 1957 6:24; Gifford 1957, 1958; Robbins 1959; Baroja 1965:38, 142, 234–35; Sanders 1967; Edwards 1971; Noy 1971; Steinbach 1973; Rush 1974:33–34, 57–77, 137–44 (healing ritual); Maloney 1976 passim; Moss and Cappannari 1976; Morris 1977, 1985:57–60; Morris et al. 1977; Stephenson 1979; Izzi 1980; Muthu Cidambaram 1980; Bronzini 1981; Lykiardopoulos 1981; Potts 1982:5–16; Bourguignon 1983; Lauer 1983; Maple 1983; L. Sachs 1983; Shimizu 1983; Cavendish-Deutsch 1983 4:885–894; *Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology* 1984 1:454–56; Morris 1985:57–60; Perdiguero Gil 1986; Berke 1988:35–56; Djéribi 1988; Dundes 1992 passim; Gravel 1995; Pavesi 1995:43–51; Racokzy 1996; Stevens 1996; Morris 1997b:120–60; Elliott 1988 etc.; Kunesh 1998 (eye in hand amulet); Salmon and Cabre 1998; Ribichini 1999; Elsie 2001; Centini 2002; Vanel 2004; Greenfield 2006; Spence 2006; Campo 2009; Avar Nuño 2012a, 2012b.

7. Blum and Blum 1970:310.

8. On the Evil Eye in antiquity, beside the general studies (listed in n. 6), see Jahn 1855; Story 1877; Budge 1978/1930:354–65; Racokzy 1996; and the works listed in Vols. 2–4.

6 Beware the Evil Eye

church fathers; Israel's Hand of Miriam (*Hamesh*), Islam's protective Hand of Fatima (*Hamsa*, lit. "five" [fingers]), and the vast body of amulets employed by all the populations of the ancient Circum-Mediterranean and Near East. Throughout the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation eras, Evil Eye belief and practice continued unabated.

In the Middle Ages and beyond, many luminaries, including Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, Leonardo da Vinci, Martin Luther, and Francis Bacon spoke of the Evil Eye.⁹ The sublime *Commedia Divina* of Dante Alighieri tells of a thief, Vanno Fucci of Pistoia, in the bowels of hell defying the Almighty by holding out both hands toward heaven and making a double *mano fica*—a potent gesture generally employed against the Evil Eye: "When he had finished with his words, the thief /raised high his fists with both figs cocked [*le mani alzò con amendue deliche*] and cried: 'Take that, O God; I square them off for you'" (*Inferno*, Canto 25.1–3).¹⁰

In the medieval period, Jews were held to be wielders of the Evil Eye. In fourteenth-century Spain, Jews were forbidden by canon law from standing among ripening crops in order to keep the fields safe from their Evil Eyes.¹¹ Germans designated the Evil Eye not only as *böser Blick* ("evil glance") but as *Judenblick* ("Jews' glance").

The famous *Malleus Maleficarum*, or "Witches' Hammer," authored by the Dominicans Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger,¹² discusses the *fasciatio* of the Evil Eye and the deadly gaze, references to it by Aristotle, Avicenna, Al-Gazali, and Thomas Aquinas, its link with witches and old women, and its threat to children (Part One, Question Two). The comments of church reformer Martin Luther on the Evil Eye in the Bible and in his own day are discussed in Vol. 3, chap. 2 in connection with Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Francis Bacon, philosopher and essayist, includes among his fifty-eight learned *Essays of Counsels, Civil and Moral* (3rd ed., 1625) a ninth one "On Envy," the longest of them all. It begins by reflecting on the relation of envy and the Evil Eye (and witchcraft) and illustrates the striking stability of this belief complex from antiquity to his own time, including the presumed extramission theory of vision:

9. See Story 1877:183–205 and the list in Seligmann 1910 2:472 n. 1.

10. Translation by Allen Mandelbaum, vol. 1, *Inferno*, 1982. I am grateful to Prof. Romano Penna (personal communication, 11/17/98) for directing me to this famous instance in the *Commedia*. My thanks also to Dante expert, Prof. Brenda Dean Schildgen, for guidance on this text and Dante's thought about envy.

11. Maloney 1976:5–8.

12. Kramer and Sprenger 1487/1948.

There be none of the affections which have been noted to fascinate or bewitch, but love and envy. They both have vehement wishes; they frame themselves readily into imaginations and suggestions, and they come easily into the eye, especially upon the presence of the objects, which are the points that conduce to fascination, if any such thing there be. We see, likewise, the Scripture calleth envy an evil eye, and the astrologers call the evil influences of the stars evil aspects, so that there seemeth to be acknowledged, in the act of envy, an ejaculation or irradiation of the eye; nay, some have been so curious as to note, that the times when the stroke or percussion of an envious eye doth most hurt, are when the party envied is beheld in glory or triumph, for that sets an edge upon envy; and besides, at such times, the spirits of the person envied do come forth most into the outward parts, and so meet the blow.¹³

In the realm of art, an aspect of Evil Eye practice appears in the famous Brera Madonna (the Montefeltro or Brera Altarpiece), by early Renaissance Italian master Piero della Francesca.¹⁴ It depicts a Madonna surrounded by saints and angels. On her lap is the infant Christ child with a necklace of red coral hanging from his neck. Both coral and the color red are traditional media used for warding off the Evil Eye, which targets infants in particular.¹⁵ A painting of the Dutch artist, Gerard Terborch, *The Suitor's Visit* (c. 1658), portrays an elegant suitor bowing before a young lady, who, however, is making a covert gesture of a *mano fica*, presumably in self-defense.¹⁶ From the French artist Jean Louis Géricault has come the portrait of the “Mad Woman with the Mania of Envy” (and an Evil Eye). From the Russian painter Ilya Yefimovich Repin we have the portrait of “A Peasant with an Evil Eye” (1877), depicting the artist’s godfather, Ivan Fyodorovich Radov. In 2009, an art exhibition in Braunschweig, Germany, of the work of German artist Armin Bohem was devoted to the subject of the Evil Eye.¹⁷ A far more mundane trace of painted eyes repelling the Evil Eye are those adorning the prows of innumerable Mediterranean boats, a practice in place for over 2000 years.

13. Quoted in Walcot 1978:77.

14. Painted in 1472–1474, it is now housed in the Pinacoteca di Brera of Milan, Italy. I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Brenda Schildgen for calling this piece of art to my attention.

15. On the Evil Eye in Italian art, see also Callisen 1937.

16. Roodenburg 1991:154–55 and fig. 7.1. The painting is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Andrew W. Mellon Collection.

17. Boehm 2009. For the Evil Eye in contemporary art see also Frisch 1995.

8 Beware the Evil Eye

Characters of William Shakespeare also allude to the Evil Eye and being “overlooked”:

“Beshrew your eyes/They have o’erlooked me and divided me. One half of me is yours, the other half yours.” (Portia to Bassanio in *Merchant of Venice*, Act 3, Scene 2)

“Vile worm, thou wast o’erlook’d even in thy birth.” (Pistol, of Falstaff in *Merry Lives of Windsor*, Act 5, scene 5)

“. . . then lend the eye a terrible aspect” (King Henry before battle, rousing his warriors to frenzy in *Henry V*, Act 3, Scene 1).

“A largess universal, like the sun/His liberal eye doth give to every one/ thawing cold fear.” (The Chorus, regarding King Henry in *Henry V*, Act 4, Prologue)¹⁸

“Hath Romeo slain himself? say thou but ‘I’ And that bare vowel ‘I’ shall poison more than the death-darting eye of cockatrice” (Juliet to the nurse who told her of Romeo’s suicide in *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 3, Scene 2).¹⁹

The Evil Eye makes a brief appearance in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798):

Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.²⁰

The Irish novelist William Carleton, in his short story on “The Evil Eye or The Black Spectre,” gives an extensive description of Evil Eye belief and practice in the Irish culture in his own day,²¹ although his story is cast in an earlier period when the Evil Eye was deemed the most formidable of evils.²² One possessor of the Evil Eye, Harry Woodward, had a “baleful and demoniacal glance,” a “dreadful eye,” an “annihilating glance” that caused withering and death.²³ A female character, hideously ugly, with nearly blood-red

18. Jesus speaks of a generous or “liberal” eye as the antithesis of an Evil Eye (Matt 6:22–23/Luke 11:34. [X-ref])

19. The cockatrice is a legendary creature: a two-legged dragon with a rooster’s head, which, like Medusa, was ascribed the ability to turn people to stone or killing them by either looking at them or touching them or breathing on them.

20. “The Ancient Mariner,” part 1, published in the first edition of Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).

21. Carleton 1882 1:613–775. See also Price 2001.

22. *Ibid.*, 694, 702.

23. *Ibid.*, 696, 702, 769.

hair, knit eyebrows, and wild wiry hair injured a child and killed a cow with her withering glance.²⁴

Edgar Allan Poe's lament "Lenore" (1843–1849) attributes the all too early death of "sweet Lenore" to an Evil Eye and a slanderous tongue:

Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and hated her for her pride,
And when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her—that she died!
How shall the ritual, then, be read? —the requiem how be sung
By you,—by yours, the evil eye,—by yours, the slanderous tongue,
That did to death the innocence that died, and died so young?²⁵

Since antiquity, Evil Eye and Evil tongue have been paired as conveyers of injury and death, as we shall see, but rarely so poetically.

Theophile Gautier, prompted by the Neopolitan belief in the Evil Eye, *jettatura*, wrote a short story at whose center was a *jettatore* whose demonic gift gradually became known to him and his circle.²⁶

Then there are appearances of the sinister Evil Eye in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, which turns on innocent Billy enviously Evil-Eyed by John Claggart, master-at-arms of the HMA Bellepoint.²⁷ It features also in Mark Twain's story, "Life on the Mississippi" (1883). One of the burly characters on the raft leaps into the air and declares:

I'm the man they call Sudden Death and General Desolation!
Sired by a hurricane, dam'd by an earthquake, half-brother to
the cholera, nearly related to the smallpox on my mother's side!
Look at me! I take nineteen alligators and a bar'l of whiskey for
breakfast when I'm in robust health, and a bushel of rattlesnakes
and a dead body when I'm ailing. *I split the everlasting rocks with
my glance* and I squench the thunder when I speak!²⁸

Mariano Azuela's *The Underdogs: A Novel of the Mexican Revolution* (1915/2008) tells of Senora Agapita lamenting that, "They've cast an evil eye on my daughter!"²⁹ reminding us of the *mal de ojo* dreaded by Latin American peasants.³⁰

24. *Ibid.*, 629.

25. Poe 1969:330–39, esp. 337.

26. Gautier 1863.

27. The novella *Billy Budd* by Melville was published posthumously in 1924. On the Evil Eye theme in Melville's work see the analysis of Adamson (1997), esp. chap. 7, "The Evil Eye," 257–93; also 215, 226–27.

28. Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, ch. 3 (italics added).

29. Azuela, *The Underdogs*, 2008[1915]:36.

30. Kearney 1976, 1982:86, 197–202; Cosminsky 1976.

Roger Vailland's novel, *The Law (La Loi)*,³¹ is set in the fictitious town of Porto Manacore, Apulia, Southern Italy, in the aftermath of World War II. The story illustrates several conventional features of Evil Eye practice. Don Cesare, the ailing town padrone, is treated by his wife for suspected injury from the Evil Eye. The ritual is a traditional one using oil and water. Brigante, another character, "hastily brought his hand to his groin; that was how you warded off the evil eye. He was trying to convince himself that the Judge's wife [with whom Francesco was having an affair] had cast a spell on Francesco."³² "Hurriedly Marietta made a pair of horns with her index finger and thumb. Don Cesare realized that she was casting a spell for him . . . she was defending him [as he lay dying]."³³ A short story on "The Evil Eye" (*Jettatura*) appears in Cesare Pavese's collection, *Summer Storm*.³⁴

The Manor, a novel about a Polish family of Hasidic Jews (c. 1863–1900) by the Yiddish novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer (1967) has characters making numerous anti-Evil Eye remarks: "A beautiful girl . . . may she escape the Evil Eye"; "you are—may the Evil Eye spare you—a beautiful girl," etc.

More recently, the historical novel of Umberto Eco, *Baudolino* (2002), concerns political and social upheavals of the city of Constantinople in 1204. Residents of Constantinople encountered Genoese of Italy in their city and took steps to protect themselves against the strangers' Evil Eyes: "some made the sign of the cross, some made the horns sign to ward off the evil eye, and some touched their balls."³⁵

Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* describes Alfred hallucinating about a "big black bastard circling the two of them with her evil eye."³⁶

A short story by Paul Theroux, "The Furies" (2013), describes the mother of one of the main characters, Angie, as sounding "like her mother, Gilda—Emenegilda—sour, mustached, habitually in black, pedantically superstitious, Sicilian, always threatening the evil eye."³⁷

Recent fiction in English with "Evil Eye" in the title includes: *The Evil Eye*, a mystery novel by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac (1959); *Minnie Santangelo and the Evil Eye*, a detective novel by Anthony Mancini (1977); *Evil Eye* by Ehren Ehly (1989); *Evil Eye* by Ann Diamond (1994); *Evil Eye* by Michael Slade (1997); *Evil Eye* by Veronica Di Grigoli (2008); *Malocchio*:

31. Vailland 1958.

32. *Ibid.*, 266.

33. *Ibid.*, 302.

34. Pavese 1966.

35. Eco 2000:37.

36. Franzen 2001:555.

37. Theroux 2005:67.

The Evil Eye Murders by Michael Chiardona and James T. Vance, the first volume of the Evil Eye Murders series (2011); *Stalking the Evil Eye* by Richard Jay (2010); *An Evil Eye: A Novel* by Jason Goodwin (2011); and the new offering of best-selling author Joyce Carol Oates, *Evil Eye: Four Novellas of Love Gone Wrong* (2013).

Then there is the autobiographical account of North American journalist David St. Clair living in Rio de Janeiro. Having fallen ill and landing on bad financial times, he was told by the locals that he had been struck by his housekeeper's envious Evil Eye. When healed by a priestess *curandera*, he turned from adamant skeptic to nonplused questioner.³⁸

Best-selling physician-author, Larry Dossey, writing from his medical practice on the power of prayer to harm as well as heal, devotes an entire chapter to belief in the injurious power of the Evil Eye and its roots in folk medical systems.³⁹

Patricia Storace's account, *Dinner with Persephone*, describes her encounter with Evil Eye belief and practice in Greek society today as she traveled around the country.⁴⁰ A businessman explains that the eye is active and projects energy that can injure and destroy. Association of the Evil Eye with envy was pronounced. Scores of anti-Evil Eye amulets (mostly blue glass eyes) were on view in shops and on vehicles. Descriptions are given of suspected fascinatons (persons with blue eyes, knit eyebrows and fair skin), of victims (children, prized possessions, young woman with flashy clothes) and of calamities caused by the Evil Eye (dead animals, ruined vineyard). Measures taken to counteract the Evil Eye are also recounted (saying the word "spit" thrice when complimenting, avoiding compliments and praise altogether, the rituals of old women, and offering prayers, including those of a priest).

On the political front, Manuel Noriega, former military dictator of Panama (1983–1990), was deposed by the United States, and in April 9, 1992, he was convicted on eight counts of drug smuggling and racketeering.

38. St. Clair 1971:271–304.

39. Dossey 1997:115–24; see also 60, 202. For publications on the Evil Eye by ophthalmologists, psychologists, and representatives of medicine and healthcare systems see, e.g., Seligmann 1910, 1922, 1927; McDaniel 1918; McKenzie 1927:225–62; Gordon 1937; Friedenwald 1939; Pazzini 1948; Gifford 1957, 1958, 1960, 1971; Harfouche 1965; Meerloo 1971; Glenn 1978; Potts 1982; Hand 1992; Oyler 1992; Parsons 1984; Parsons and Wakeley 1991; Coss 1992; Pavesi 1995; Pioreschi 1995:56–59; Bohigian 1997, 1998; Dossey 1997; Salmon and Cabre 1998:53–84; Pilch 2000a, 2000b; Hedarot and Pirzadeh 2001.

40. Storace 1997; see especially "The Blue Glass Eye" (22–27); see also pp. 162, 176, 179, 220, 374–75.

In the course of his public degradation in the U.S. press, he was accused of wearing red underwear for protection against the Evil Eye.⁴¹

On the stage, a play by Charles H. Yale and Sidney R. Ellis was performed in Washington, DC, 1896, and titled, *The Evil Eye and the Many Merry Mishaps of Nid and the Weird, Wonderful Wandering of Nod: A Fantastical Spectacular Trick Comedy in Three Acts*.⁴² A later reference to the Evil Eye occurs in the hit Broadway play, “The Rose Tattoo,” by Tennessee Williams (1951; film adaptation, 1955). Seraphina delle Rose, a Sicilian woman living on the Louisiana Gulf coast and a main character of the story, believes firmly in the Evil Eye. She steers clear of an old woman with rheumatism in her hands and cataracts in her eyes, who is held by her neighbors to be a witch, a *strega*. As Serafina and this witch chase the witch’s goat running about Seraphina’s yard, Serafina warns her daughter Rosa not to make eye contact with the strega’s “evil eye.”

In the one-act play *La Patente*, or *The License* (1919), of Sicilian author Luigi Pirandello, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, the Evil Eye functions as a central feature. A key character, Rosario Chiàrchiaro, is regarded as an outsider by other members of his community and as capable of injuring others with an Evil Eye. A victim of injustice, he fails to win his libel suit and ends up as a tragic figure.⁴³ *Non è vero . . . ma ci credo* (“It’s not true . . . but I believe it”) is the title of a comedy by the Italian actor and playwright, Peppino De Filippo. It was staged for the first time in 1942. The narrated events take place in the early twentieth century and concern Gervasio Savastano, a Neapolitan businessman who is tormented by the fear of *jettatura*.⁴⁴

For fans of the cinema there instances of Evil Eye belief and practice in Clint Eastwood films (“Unforgiven,” “True Crime”) and other movies (“High Sierra,” “Clash of the Titans,” “Matewan,” “The Evil Eye,” “Manhattan Baby,” “Broadway Danny Rose,” “My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” “Ciao Professore,” “Malocchio,” and scenes with characters referring to the Evil Eye. A documentary film, “Kypseli,” of everyday life in a Greek village of the island of Thera/Santorini off the coast of Athens in the Aegean Sea was made by anthropologist Susannah M. Hoffmann of the University of San Francisco’s Department of Sociology in 1972. This highly informative ethnographic study includes the image of an anti-Evil Eye *cornuto* (horn) on one of the

41. BBC News, Latine America and Caribbean, 12/11/2011.

42. Yale and Ellis 1898. For stage plays see also Peake 1831; and Phillips and Jones 1831.

43. Pirandello 1964:119–38.

44. See De Ceglia 2011.

village walls.⁴⁵ A cinematic review magazine bears the title, “The Evil Eye Review.”

A 2012 interview with the Oscar-winning film actress Merle Streeep and actor Tommy Lee Jones⁴⁶ reports that when Streeep was asked “Of all your accomplishments, what is it tht makes you most proud?” she responded, “My kids.” To the follow-up questions, “Is it that they’re happy that makes you proud?” she answered, “Yeah, *kineahora*. You don’t want to say what you’re grateful for. It’s enough to say I’m happy for them. I’m happy.” The published version of the interview mistakenly explains in brackets that *kineahora* is “a Yiddish version of ‘knock on wood.’” It actually means “no Evil Eye (intended)” or, in this case, “may no Evil Eye (strike them).”

The television series “The Sopranos” (HBO, 1999–2007), hailed the greatest TV series of all time, made repeated reference to the Evil Eye. Mafiosi characters repeatedly attribute illness and other harm to “*maluucch*” (one of several Italian expressions for “Evil Eye”—a Neapolitan variation on *malocchio*). Pussy’s bad back was blamed on *maluucch*. Furio, Tony Soprano’s Italian driver, on returning from Italy, brings a gobbo (anti-Evil Eye hunchback amulet) as a present for one of Tony’s kids. A newspaper advertisement for this series shows an ensemble photograph of the cast, with one character, Silvio Dante, Tony Soprano’s *consigliere*, making the protective gesture, the *mano cornuta*.

Television actress Stana Katic is asked in an interview about her name “Stana” and she replies, “I was named for my grandmother. It’s an evil eye name, to protect you from bad things.”⁴⁷

The Evil Eye has also featured in the world of music. Playing at Le Hot Club in France in the 1930s, the legendary Gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt is said once to have been so picqued by members of his own Le Hot band that he cast a *mauvais oeil*, an Evil Eye, on them one evening.⁴⁸

The American poet and singer Bob Dylan makes repeated reference to the Evil Eye in his songs. His song, “Disease of Conceit,” speaks of the aggression of an Evil Eye:

Whole lot of people seeing double tonight /
From the disease of conceit
Give ya delusions of grandeur / and a evil eye /
Give you the idea that / you’re too good to die

45. See Hoffman 1972; also Hoffman 1976, 1988.

46. Grant 2012, esp. 84.

47. *Parade Magazine* (18 March 2012) 2.

48. Dregni 2004:152, 162.

14 Beware the Evil Eye

His song, “My Wife’s Home Town,” contains the lines,

State gone broke, the county’s dry /
Don’t be lookin’ at me with that evil eye.

Still another Dylan song, “Need a Woman,” warns,

Well, believing is all right;
just don’t let the wrong people know what it’s all about.
They might put the evil eye on you,
use their hidden powers to try to turn you out.

The album “Meltdown” by the rock band Ash (2005) has a track titled “Evil Eye.” It contains the backward message “She’s giving me the Evil Eye.”

An article about pop singer Gladys Knight in *MIX* (Professional Audio and Musical Production, 95/2003) reported her appearance at the Flamingo Showroom in Las Vegas. As she tried out a pair of new loudspeakers, she declared, “I haven’t been the recipient of a single Evil Eye from the stage.” “Evil Eye” is the name of a jazz quartet led by drummer Mike Pride and saxophonist Jonathan Mortiz with Nate Wooley on trumpet and Ken Filiano on bass.

Acclaimed Canadian poet, songwriter and singer, Leonard Cohen, in his poem, “I See You on a Greek Mattress,” mentions a common practice for protecting children and others from the Evil Eye: “I see the plastic Evil Eye pinned to your underwear.”⁴⁹

The vocalist Madonna was reported wearing a Hamesh (Hand of Miriam) and a red string on a flight to Israel in the late 1990s—both to repel the Evil Eye. Under her influence, wearing a red string for warding off the Evil Eye became popular with many celebrities in the United States, including many non-Jews.

In an interview on television show “60 Minutes” (CBS 9/9/2007), the world-renown opera singer Luciano Pavarotti made the gesture of the *mano cornuta* in self-defense against his critics.

The Evil Eye also takes a bow in Ingwie Malmsteen’s track “Evil Eye” on his album “Rising Force.”

In the world of sports, Ronnie Lott, former feared linebacker for the San Francisco Forty-Niners football team, was described in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as staring down his opponents with an Evil Eye.

Elsewhere on the cultural scene, *The New York Times* reports in its section on “Style”⁵⁰ on a piece of jewelry created by an Italian-born jewelry

49. Cohen 1994:86.

50. *New York Times*, November 12, 2006, Style, p. 12.

designer Amadeo Scognamiglio for Olivia Chantecaille, director of a beauty line. The piece is intended to protect against the Evil Eye, “that creepy eye of envy.” It looks like a *cornio* [horn] in gold and is called “the cornicello, an Italian charm in the shape of an eland’s [African antelope] twisted horn.” An *Oakland Tribune* article has reported that an Evil Eye is now also aroused in the classroom by cell-phoners: “Yoga teacher gives cell-phonng student the Evil Eye.”⁵¹ In Germany, Franca Magnani reported on the Evil Eye on German radio: “Der böse Blick” in “Römische Skizzen.”⁵²

The Evil Eye also has made its way into the cartoons and comic strips of our daily newspapers. The popular comic strip of mid-twentieth century USA, “Li’l Abner” of Dogpatch, featured a character named Evil-Eye Fleegle and his triple whammy. His destructive eye was said to be so powerful it could challenge the sun. The strip’s creator, Al Capp, included in his comic strip traditions reflecting his Russian Jewish heritage.⁵³ In the popular cartoon strip “Hagar the Horrible” by Dik Browne, one sequence shows a scribe asking the fictional Viking warrior Hagar, “For my records, what illnesses have you had?” Hagar ponders, “Lemme see, Black Plague . . . Evil Eye . . . Demon Possession . . . Spells.” The scribe responds, “I’ll just put down, ‘regular childhood diseases.’”⁵⁴ Another cartoon depicts a man examined by an oculist with the latter declaring, “Evil Eye, Mr. Gruenfeld, Evil Eye.” A humorous treatment of the topic in Jewish folklore by Brenda Rosenbaum has even made its way to the practical “how to” section of the local bookstore. Complete with illustrations, it bears the appropriate title *How to Avoid the Evil Eye*.⁵⁵ In a similar practical vein, the American magician, Henri Gamache, said to be an expert on the Evil Eye, dispensed practical advice on protecting oneself against the Evil Eye.⁵⁶

Finally there are the omnipresent anti-Evil Eye amulets that have made their way around the world. From the wrist bracelet of Madonna and those red or blue ribbons attached to newborns in countless hospitals, Manuel Noriega’s anti-Evil Eye underwear, to the Brazilian *mano figa* amulets, to the miniature protective blue eyes on Greek and Turkish buses and taxis, the glass blue eye amulets of a million Greek and Turkish tourist shops, and the middle-finger “high sign” (the ancient *digitus infamias* against the Evil Eye)

51. *Oakland Tribune*, July 7, 2012, pp. 1, 8.

52. Magnani, “Der böse Blick.”

53. On the Evil Eye and Evil Eye Fleegle see Elliott 1988:42–43. On Al Capp and the comic strip “Li’l Abner,” see Berger 1978.

54. Dik Browne, “Hägar the Horrible,” *The Sun* (9/9/1983) 32.

55. Rosenbaum 1985.

56. Gamache 1946/1969.

of auto drivers everywhere, the lore of the Evil Eye has traveled across the continents and down through the ages.

In myriad ways the Evil Eye continues to haunt our everyday lives and imagination, whether we are aware of it or not. Looks can insult; glances can threaten; Evil Eyes can wreck havoc in families and communities. The serious Evil Eye is no laughing matter. “The evil eye,” folklorist Alan Dundes reminds us, “is not some old-fashion superstitious belief of interest only to antiquarians. The evil eye continues to be a powerful factor affecting the behavior of countless *millions* of people throughout the Indo-European and Semitic world.”⁵⁷ Over the centuries the Evil Eye has haunted our dreams and spooked our imaginations. Our present study will focus on one chapter of the long history of Evil Eye belief and practice, namely the biblical record in its historical, social, and cultural contexts. This will entail a look at Evil Eye belief and practice in the ancient Near East and Circum-Mediterranean world in general—the cultural contexts of biblical Evil Eye belief. Even with this focus will come a sense of the long shadow cast by this belief over the human story.

TERMINOLOGY FOR “EVIL EYE” IN VARIOUS LANGUAGES

The linguistic evidence indicates particular and ongoing aspects of the Evil Eye concept. One major study, the classic by Siegfried Seligmann (*Der böse Blick*, 1910), lists terms for Evil Eye in thirty-nine languages.⁵⁸ Some languages speak of an *eye* that is evil; e.g., *raʿ ayin* (Hebrew); *ophthalmos ponêros* (Greek; also *baskania* etc.; modern Greek, *vaskania*, *matiasma*); *oculus malus* (Latin; also *fascinatio* etc.); *malocchio* (Italian); *mal de ojo* (Spanish); *mauvais oeil* (French); *mau olhado* (Portuguese); *ayn al-ḥasūd* (Arabic); *ʿainat* (Ethiopian); *cheshme nazar* (Persian); *droch shuil* (Celtic, Irish); *cronachadt* (Scottish) *zte oko* (Polish); *ondt ojel* (Danish); *paha simlä* (Finnish); “Evil Eye” (English).⁵⁹ Others speak of a *gaze*, *glance* or *look*: e.g., *böser Blick* (German; also *Scheel*, *Scheelsucht*); *booze blik* (Dutch); *mauvais regard* (French); *onde blik* (Norwegian); *baleful gaze* (English); *nazar* (Turkish); *squardo invidioso* (Italian, also *jettatura*, “casting an Evil Eye”). This is only a selection of terms, which, of course, indicates some of the

57. Dundes (1992) and Maloney (1976) present collections of scholarly case studies of Evil Eye belief and practice from antiquity to the present and from East to West.

58. Seligmann 1910 1:48–63 (nine categories); see also Seligmann 1922:15–93; Budge 1930/1978:363.

59. In antiquity, also Sumerian, Akkadian, Ugaritic, Egyptian, Aramaic, and Syriac.

cultures where the Evil Eye belief is present. Beside Europe and the Americas, the belief has also been found in Thailand, Burma, Tibet, Korea, Malay, Malacca, Sumatra, Tahiti, Samoa, Greenland, Alaska, Nicaragua, Mexico, British Guyana, Brazil, Peru, Bantu peoples, Busmen, Pygmies, and parts of Australia and New Guinea.⁶⁰

SALIENT FEATURES OF EVIL EYE BELIEF AND PRACTICE

Ideas and practices associated with the Evil Eye over five millennia and across the globe of course include features that are culturally and temporally specific. A core of common features, nevertheless, has been found among the Evil Eye cultures of the twelve world regions (or ethnic groups). Clarence Maloney, introducing an anthology of anthropological essays on the Evil Eye that he edited and published in 1976, lists seven features:⁶¹

- (1) power emanates from the eye (or mouth) and strikes some object or person;
- (2) the stricken object is of value, and its destruction or injury is sudden;
- (3) the one casting the evil eye may not know he has the power;
- (4) the one affected may not be able to identify the source of power;
- (5) the evil eye can be deflected or its effects modified or cured by particular devices, rituals, and symbols;
- (6) the belief helps to explain or rationalize sickness, misfortune, or loss of possessions such as animals or crops;
- (7) in at least some functioning of the belief everywhere, envy is a factor.

Our study of the phenomenon in antiquity will present evidence of these and additional common features among the ancient cultures. Heading our list of salient features is a complex of associated beliefs or concepts that over the centuries have lent Evil Eye belief and practice their plausibility and power.

60. See Roberts 1976:230–33, Table 1; and Maloney 1976:xii–xiii (global map of Evil Eye belief distribution).

61. Maloney 1976:vii–viii.