Spiritual Descent: A Study of Semi-Divine Beings and Non-Human Species in European Mythologies

by

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INTRODUCTION

No matter how much religion wants to enjoy a simple relationship between the divine and the human, it has always had to make room for many other creatures or intelligent non-human species. When the so-called “pagan” gods were no longer worshipped, many other creatures affiliated with them remained popular. They have had (and continue to have) many names, classes, and roles. They are imaginary creatures, but still believable in their behaviors and racial cultures. Their presence in literature is known throughout the world. Giants, dwarves, elves, trolls, demons, genies, faeries, mermaids, and countless others have populated and empowered mythology through generations, even in the face of the most repressive regimes and religious influences.

This work focuses on the most well known of these creatures in Western Culture—those that originated in European mythologies and the monotheistic religions.

They stand on a bridge between two important forces in religion. On one side are the gods, and later on, God Himself. The gods represent the human to an extent, and in some traditions are even mortal (such as in Mesopotamia and northern Europe). Most of the time, however, they are above humanity and often immortal. As such, they are the guardians of everything beyond the control of humans. In Norse Mythology especially, they are the guardians of humanity itself. They have enemies, relationships, feelings, and distinct personalities that do not tend to change. They are forces of nature and manipulators of abstract concepts. There is a hierarchy among
them—both in the respect that there is often a king of the gods—as well as the fact that some became more popular in stories than many others (Thor and Athena are noteworthy examples).

On the other side of this bridge is humanity. Humans are mortal and weak (especially in the earliest stories) but still capable of great power with their intellect, cleverness, and reasoning. They have communities, organization, as well as all of the emotions, tensions, and interpersonal dealings that many of the gods have. They have made the gods in their own image. They tell stories about the gods, and what the gods do and have done with (and to) humans. Those are not the only stories they tell, however.

The humans also tell stories about other creatures—ones that possess just enough godliness to be considered eldritch, aloof, and interesting, but just enough humanity to be thought of more casually without fear of blasphemy. Instead of one person-like god, these creatures came in groups, not only allowing for even more stories to be told about them, but also allowing more open invention and re-invention for future storytellers. The gods had rigid-like religious structure, and treating them casually or liberally could provoke their anger. Hence, more human-like creatures with divine qualities more readily populated mythology since its beginning.

There are creatures that I did not include in this work for various reasons. For one, many different types of small creatures that are related to fairies—such as goblins and gnomes—I did not expound about in detail. As will be seen, fairy mythology in its own right is the source of the majority of mythological creatures popular today. The world of fairies can be investigated in fine detail, but the branches
that come from it are too many to be discussed coherently alongside the many other classes of creatures in this work.

Undead beings such as zombies and vampires—those that infect the living, as well as those lacking most measures of intelligence (especially those too similar to animals, such as griffins) were also not included. The hobbits are not discussed, because they are essentially the firm invention of one person (J.R.R. Tolkien). Individual creatures that are the only one of their species—such as the Chimera—do not reflect the human very well because they do not belong to a community within a species.

The types of creatures I have included are those that reflect communities of beings that are humanlike. They can live in townships and can have ranks, occupations, and emotions. These creatures here are considered established collectives that reflect not only that which is not human, but also that which is human. In the last chapter, more godlike creatures are discussed—the “chthonic beings” such as dragons and ifrits. They, too, edge on the mortal, but also edge on the divine more so than many of the other more humanlike creatures. Aspects of divinity, however, are also essential to even the most humanlike of mythological species—such as dwarves. While humans encapsulate a divine presence in all religions, these creatures also share that presence—but different sides of it.

When I first began researching, I expected that the creatures would have simple origins and consistent descriptions based on singular, codified texts. I knew very little about holy texts in polytheism, especially in Northern Europe. As it turned out, very few such texts existed, and those that did were not popular or widespread
enough to unify the mythology. Even in Greco-Roman mythology, which is largely
text-based, there were examples of later works re-inventing the creatures as well as
inconsistencies between ancient sources and authors (Hesiod and Homer, when
compared to each other, present very distinct pictures of the same mythological
landscape).

As a result, it is impossible, even with the help of this work, to create the
*singular* set of characteristics for any one of these creatures, because their
physiologies and psychologies are never unified. Storytellers wanting to be different
can toy with even the most consistent trends.

The most useful source for information about these creatures has been
mythographers, who go to places throughout the world and collect stories that people
tell, usually in isolated communities. There are texts as well, mostly written by
scholars, but their influence is limited when compared to an all-pervading oral
tradition with many branches. This does not hold true, however, for codified religions
or for Greco-Roman mythology—both of which are firmly based on written texts.
Aside from primary sources, authors re-telling the stories in these texts—usually for
younger audiences—have been a noteworthy influence on the evolution of modern
mythology.

This thesis is only an introduction to what could be the work of a lifetime. Too
many unknowns exist regarding these creatures, and many stories about them remain
untold and lost to this very day. In this work, I seek out these creatures, species by
species, and approach them with the following questions: Why are they important?
What was their purpose? What was their relationship with other species, including
humans? What did they look like? How did they treat the gods? And, most importantly, what changed about them over the course of time, and what does that say about us humans as a species?
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Are all humans good?
No.
Are all divine beings good?
Also no.

Just as humans have capabilities for evil, rage, and misdirected passion, so too do many humanlike creatures. Primeval spirits embodied many things—physical concepts such as natural landscapes, as well as abstract conceptions such as lust, imbalance, and malignance. This chapter engages the histories and evolutions of the latter.

The creatures in this chapter have a greater tendency towards human vice, and their existence directly enables evil and chaos in the world. Despite this predilection, there is no species completely driven towards being evil, with the exception of later demons and perhaps fallen angels.

Within the corpuses of European mythology are abominable creatures that reflect despised gods of old—very powerful but also endowed with serious flaws, the least of which is a challenged moral compass. It is impossible to just eliminate antiquated mythological creatures—they have to shift in their existence. The result is creatures such as demons, giants, and others who have great power but not as much as prominent gods.
Sometimes these creatures can come to exhibit the consequences of lust and sexual perversion. The centaurs and the fallen angels are two examples, and their existence—more often than not extremely rife with these continued ills—serve as a warning for anyone who dares distort the holiness of sexual congress.

These creatures are all united by misdirected passion, their affiliation with vices, and their ability to proliferate evil and natural disasters in the world.

GIANTS

Giants are first featured in many spoken traditions across Europe. The most noteworthy and influential giants are from Celtic and Teutonic sources, recorded in writing from oral traditions. Scholars have tried to construct the proto-giant—the creature or being in the unrecorded mythology from the time in which the Celts and Teutons were closer to being one people. A commonly accepted conclusion is the notion that the first giants were actually gods of archaic inception—the mutant, abominable, and disgraced gods of conquered peoples. By the time these mythologies are recorded, giants develop into something distinctly biological and intelligent—strong and intelligent beings with a considerable capacity for anger, and material gods with only a shred of their power left.

Giant are partially elemental creatures because they identify strongly with the mountain. This also holds true not only for the giants in Germanic and British

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mythologies, but also for trolls, which are a direct offshoot of giants in Scandinavian folklore. Among giants, however, it is the Irish variety, known as a “Fomor”, that is so strongly identified as a mountain creature that it becomes an embodiment of the mountain itself. While it could potentially be identified as an elemental creature, other types of giants from other cultures, including Scotland, do not have as pronounced a connection to rocky terrain\(^2\). Fomors are noted by some mythographers to sometimes have one eye or one foot, possessing a strain similar to the Cyclops, and likely indicating a symbol for possessing a one-track mind\(^3\).

Before taking this form, it is conceivable that these Fomors could have been mountain spirits. As shall be seen with the evolution of Demons from Hesiod to Justin the Martyr, many mythological creatures tend to start their existence as either demigods or spirits, and then become more and more human-like over time, sometimes garnering mortality and flesh. Because giants in Scottish and Scandinavian cultures reside in crags, caves, and mountains, as do trolls (which evolved from Scandinavian giants in the 2\(^{nd}\) millennia CE), it is likely that these also have similar origins.

In some traditions, Fomors (and giants in other cultures as well) also exist as incarnations of other landscapes, such as seaside areas and arctic landscapes. Mythographers have sometimes classified Fomors such as these as “sea gods”. Further supporting this conclusion is the existence of the “Frost Giant”, which is classified as a type of ice spirit in addition to a giant. The word for “giant” (Jotun)

\(^2\) Mackenzie, *German Myths and Legends*, xxxiii.

takes its name from the Norse word for “mountain” or “glacier” (Jokul), indicating that the giants have a direct bond with nature⁴.

Scottish giants, while related to Fomors due to similarities within Celtic cultures, are identified with caves rather than mountains. The name “Fomor” is often applied to these giants, but it is a misnomer as it is an Irish and not a Scottish name; these giants are not Fomors, and Fomors are equally distinct from British giants. There is a minimal connection of the Scottish giant to the mountain, but the reason why caves are the hallmark dwelling place of these giants lies in the Scottish oral tradition. Stories told in this tradition involve giants that hoard treasure in caves, more suited to being depositories than mountain peaks are. The focus of these stories is not just the giant but also the human heroes, who hunt and slay the giants in search of their treasures. Unlike the humanoid Fomors, Scottish giants can be significantly more monstrous—as the feature that distinguishes them most is the existence of multiple heads, not shared by Irish or Germanic giants⁵.

Scandinavian giants, however, can also be vicious aberrations, and sometimes possess multiple arms instead of multiple heads. In comparison to other giants, especially ones from other Teutonic sources, they are morally corrupt, although they are capable of doing good deeds. While stories exist which highlight the moral character of some giants, their abominable nature is highlighted in many more such stories. Whereas later depictions of giants are more humanlike, these creatures from

⁵ Mackenzie, *German Myths and Legends*, xxxiii. The human heroes who slay giants in Scottish tales are often escorted by dogs, hence popularizing the saying “Every dog has its day”.

the Norse canon are closer to demons and trolls, with a significantly downsized human aspect⁶.

Given their dark nature, which is further emphasized by the sometimes-enforced notion that they will turn to stone in daylight, the giants in many cultures have an uneasy relationship (at best) with gods and with humans. Scottish tales involve slaying of giants as a focus, a precursor for stories such as “Jack and the Beanstalk”. In Norse mythology, Thor is the giant slayer *par excellence*, a title he bears because he is the protector of a human race in a dangerous, frozen world. The stories told about Thor by mythographers have no explicit motive behind his predilection towards hunting giants, but one such story in which a motive is mentioned is when he handicaps Starkatthr, a giant’s son. The Germanic root “Stark” is in his name, indicating Starkatthr’s otherworldly strength. Thor amputates him, likely viewing him as a rival, by tearing off four of his six arms⁷. Stories like these, in which giants meet all types of cruel fates, lethal and non-lethal, are too common to list all of them. While Thor claims that he is a protector of humanity, it is uncertain whether his desire to help humans motivates all his honor killings of giants, or if it is sheer bloodthirst⁸. However, when humans outwit giants, it is not with sheer strength but with taking advantage of their stupidity that they topple them⁹.

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⁸ Kaufmann, *Northern Mythology*, 57.  
There is a nominal connection to being a mountain spirit in the flesh among these giants—as noted by their cave dwelling. But among the Scandinavian giants there is another possibility of origin—an evil spirit of sorts, but turned mortal. Humans and gods alike kill them in many cultures, and in Norse mythology, giants do not all reside in caves. Especially with Thor, the possibility of them being abominable gods that can be killed seems particularly believable. The notion of gods killing gods occurs in the earliest mythologies—primarily in the *Enuma Elish*, and Thor killing fearsome giants could be an extension of myths of that ilk that were never recorded. Also, much like the Djinn, they can be seen as embodiments of all the calamities and dangers that nature is capable of doing to humankind.

*TROLLS*

In comparison to their mountain-dwelling relatives the giants and the dwarves, the trolls are far younger, likely a “balanced” evolution between the small dwarves and the big giants. They possess more human traits and their predilection towards violence is tempered in comparison to many other mountain creatures. Like humans, they have a strong tendency towards violence as well as a capability for shrewdness. Unlike humans, they do not dwell in cities but maintain natural high-altitude homes identical to those of the giants. As will be seen in the evolution of Greco-Roman and Germanic demons, creatures tend to become more human over time, and the trolls are no exception to this rule—being downsized as well as finding more common ground
with humanity. Despite this, they still maintain a monstrous nature, although not as pronounced as it is in giants.

Trolls have various sub-categories, including night trolls and stone trolls, but scholars of mythology tend to agree that trolls are a mythological species that was derived from giants. It is uncertainly exactly when the trolls entered Scandinavian folklore, but they began to develop separately from giants some time after Christianity had been introduced in the region. The Norse word “Jotun” once meant both “troll” and “giant”, and prior to that it only meant “giant”. Similarly, “giantess” and “night troll” used to be interchangeable\(^\text{10}\).

Since then, the “new trolls” have become creatures in their own right (hereby referred to as “trolls”). Giants are strong and violent, but trolls are more likely to be friendly. Despite this, trolls are untrustworthy and humans are wise to exercise caution when around them, especially about their wits. Unlike Giants, trolls are capable of coming in many different sizes, but similar to them, they are “anti-humans” fully capable of committing harm to humanity\(^\text{11}\).

Trolls hide in crags and other hidden places in the mountains, and this is especially true of she-trolls. They communicate by shouting to each other while hidden, and do not care when humans hear them. Despite being solitary creatures, in


\(^{11}\) Brown, *Nordic Experiences*, 81-82.
Norway, the notion of a “troll king” grew especially prominent, even more so after Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* was produced in the 19th century.\(^\text{12}\)

Like the Cyclopes, a number of stories have popularized trolls. Unlike the Cyclopes, trolls are a fairly recent invention, and undoubtedly one of the youngest creatures to be discussed in this work.

One such opus was in Tolkien’s *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*: a poem called “The Stone Troll”, characterized by Paul Kocher as a “grisly slapstick”\(^\text{13}\). Stone trolls turn to stone during the daylight, and this invention was not unique to Tolkien’s work, but rather in Old Norse tales from which he derived much of his material. Also referred to as “Night Trolls”, this variety cannot bear daylight, for the same reasons that the stone troll cannot. Night trolls are associated with particular rocks, and can be dangerous, although they are not collectively malevolent\(^\text{14}\). Some strains of Germanic mythology also apply these traits to all giants and dwarves in general.

In Tolkien’s “The Stone Troll”, there is a human who encounters a troll that is gnawing on his uncle’s shinbone, and it is told quite enthusiastically with gruesome detail. However, quite a different sentiment is expressed in the poem afterwards, “Perry-the-Winkle”, although the same playful style is used as in “The Stone Troll”. In “Perry-the-Winkle”, a troll shows up and creates panic and fear in a village-like area, causing even the local mayor to take to hiding. As one brave hobbit invites the troll for tea back in his cave, he averts the bedlam created by the community. This


hobbit is none other than the eponymous Perry the Winkle. Then, the troll turns out to be a baker, and shares his “cramsome bread” first with Perry, fattening him, and then shares it with the whole shire, bringing about a happy ending15.

These stories indicate not only the ferocity of which a troll is capable, but also the possibility that it can cooperate with members of other more “civilized” species. (Compare this with the impossibility of Polyphemus cooperating with Odysseus and his sailors.) This will also be recognized in the story of the “She-Troll’s Calendar” (below), in which a troll directly talks to a human and corrects a misunderstanding.

Trolls are different from dwarves and giants in one important aspect: the presence of monarchy. While not all iterations of trolls have a king, a king of the trolls is an important aspect to troll identity when there is one, and this is especially the case in Norwegian tales. One noteworthy example is in Henrik Ibsen’s play Peer Gynt, in which the hero encounters the trolls in the hall of the mountain king. The Troll King tells Peer Gynt that the trolls in his realm have nothing to care about in the outside world, and wants Peer, for some unexplained reason, to renounce a quotidian lifestyle as well as all things associated with daytime. Peer Gynt then has a confrontation with the troll minions of the mountain king, and is very lucky to escape the numerous trolls to begin with. This episode has been immortalized in part by Edvard Grieg’s orchestral rendition of it in the Peer Gynt Suite (“In the Hall of the Mountain King”), which has a ubiquitous presence in popular culture16.

This, too, also serves to humanize the trolls with a figure of leadership, something that dwarves and giants both lack, even in their most modern incarnations.

15 Kocher, Master of Middle-Earth, 215
16 Brown, Nordic Experiences, 83.
The Seven Dwarves of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* and the barbarous giants of Roald Dahl’s *The BFG* have no designated leader among them, but the trolls in *Peer Gynt* have their king. Like the centaurs, the trolls are designed as “anti-human”, thereby taking on human characteristics, but just enough to have them retain their monstrosity.

However, sometimes that monstrosity can be downsized, especially when religion is featured in a tale. One aspect in which stories concerning trolls differ from many earlier monster stories is the possibility for Christian morals and viewpoints to be introduced. Jacqueline Simpson, in a book of Icelandic folktales, records a story about a pass (Blaskogas) infested by trolls. Humans noticed trolls in Blaskogas, and the roads in the area fell out of use, except by travelers in broad daylight and in very large groups. On Christmas, one brave traveler by the name of Olaf encounters a she-troll in the region, and she says to him the following, after giving him an unidentified object known as “the she-troll’s calendar”: “If Christ…had done as much for us trolls as you say he has done for you men, we would not have forgotten the date of his birthday”17.

Giants, especially the type referred to as “Jotuns” are described as enemies of the Aesir, and are forever seen as the antithesis of the divinity. The trolls, on the other hand, are not defined by their hatred of heaven, as noted by this story, but instead embody a greater sense of human animus. To use a well-known modern adage, trolls are the new giants—ones that represent not an opposition to the polytheistic divinities

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of old and an uncompromising hatred for humans—but ones that are capable of good, more so than the demonic “Jotuns” could be.

CYCLOPES

The Cyclops is a creature whose prominent feature is its one eye in the middle of its forehead. Its name is a portmanteau of the Greek words “kuklos” (circle) and “ops” (eye), roughly indicating “thing with a round eye”\(^{18}\). But when talking about the Cyclops, it is important to note that there are two very distinct varieties of Cyclopes, one found in Hesiod’s “Theogony” and the other found in Homeric Epic. These two creatures have their one eye and their name as one of very few connections between them.

The Cyclopes of Hesiod are elemental beings associated with fire, volcanoes, and lightning. Only three of them exist in the “Theogony”, and their names reflect their fiery natures: Brontes (“Thunder”), Stereopes (“Lightener”), and Arges (“Flasher”). The three of them are brothers\(^{19}\). Their home is on Etna, a volcano with notable fiery activity due to the forging of thunderbolts by the three Cyclopes\(^{20}\).

Hesiod’s Cyclopes have a good relationship with humans. The Three Brothers do not make thunderbolts for the humans, but build them monuments instead, and are so large that humans are not capable of making them. There are two landmarks that


have been named “Cyclopean” by the Ancient Greeks, deemed so large that their creation at the hands of humans seemed impossible. One of these is the Lion Gate at Mycenae, and the other is the set of walls surrounding Mycenae and Tiryns—defensive monuments built out of benevolence21.

The Cyclopes were allied with the Olympians against the Titans in the events described in Hesiod’s “Theogony”. They were trapped in Gaia, also known as Mother Earth. When Zeus frees them, they join his alliance, endowing him with the thunderbolt, Poseidon with the trident, and Hades with his cap22.

However, after the revolution, their relations with the gods on Olympus became not as friendly, and have remained that way since. Apollo is the primary focus of their rancor. Why? Because Zeus kills Asklepis, Apollo’s son, with a thunderbolt. Despite the fact that Zeus revived Apollo’s dead son, Apollo still wanted revenge, and he exacted it by killing the Cyclopes, although the text makes unclear exactly which ones. This was a measure-for-measure deed, as they manufactured the thunderbolts that made the murder possible. More importantly, this episode establishes a diminishment of their power, and unarguably affirms their status as mortal, unlike the gods23.

The Homeric Cyclopes are very much different from those in Hesiod’s texts, and some consider them a separate species altogether. These creatures are one-eyed

22 Hansen, Handbook of Classical Mythology, 323.
23 Hansen, Handbook of Classical Mythology, 144. Hansen also notes on p. 121 that later commentators from Ancient Greece on the “Theogony” note that it was the Cyclopes’ sons, not the three brothers, that were killed. Otherwise, the thunderbolts would have been exhausted.
giants who like to live far away from human communities, though areas where they dwell are never specified geographically.\textsuperscript{24}

These Cyclopes live in places that have lots of vegetation, and befitting environments for raising livestock. Despite this, they are portrayed consistently as savages in the Homeric texts. Their one excellence is the raising of sheep, but despite their arable landscapes, they never attempt agriculture. Their proximity to the sea likewise never equates to an ability for seafaring. Their technology is of no consequence, and their only governmental system depends on each individual Cyclops as the ruler of his own family. Neighbors in Cyclopean society never interact with each other.\textsuperscript{25}

There is one Cyclops that has become the model for the Homeric Cyclops, a “token” Cyclops in Odysseus’ journey, and that is Polyphemus, a son of Poseidon. Scholars and interpreters throughout the ages have used him to speculate or affirm details about the race of Cyclopes as a whole. Whether or not Polyphemus is a psychopath cannot be affirmed, but he does have an appetite for human flesh. Because of this, his relationship with humans is a hostile one—although not much can be said about the collective stance of Cyclopes towards mankind. While Polyphemus does beg his father Poseidon to take appropriate measures against Odysseus for

\textsuperscript{24} Hansen, \textit{Handbook of Classical Mythology}, 144.
having blinded him, it cannot be said, concerning the Homeric texts, whether he is vindictive against humans as a whole\textsuperscript{26}.

Further details have been left to those who invent and reinvent the stories of the *Odyssey*, such as the modern German mythographer Gustav Schwab, who portrays Polyphemus as someone who speaks for all Cyclopes. He not only eats humans, but enjoys tearing them up for sport, and cares for neither gods or humans. His depiction of the Polyphemus is based very squarely in his depiction in the *Odyssey*, but he magnifies different aspects of his personality to alter his portrayal into something quite different—more haughty, sadistic, and unapologetic. Schwab’s Polyphemus delivers the following unapologetic address, indicative of the image the Cyclops has acquired since the redaction of the *Odyssey*:

\begin{quote}
Do you think we are concerned with gods and their vengeance? What do the Cyclopes care about the Thunderer and all of the rest of the immortals put together? We are mightier than they!\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

\textit{CENTAURS AND SATYRS}

Yet another noteworthy species seen as savage by the ancient Greeks were the centaurs. Their life began in Ancient Greek artwork without much due


\textsuperscript{27} Gustav Schwab, \textit{Gods and Heroes: Myths and Epics of Ancient Greece: Translated from the German Text and its Greek sources by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz} (New York City, H. Wolff and Company, 1946), p. 646.
characterization, which was an after-the-fact addition. The first centaurs were humans with a horse backside appended to them. Their proportions make the horse component look very much larger than the human one. Therefore, the first centaurs are seen as more animal than human, while their lives as mere physical portrayals leave them with no distinct personality as a species. Whereas creatures such as the Cyclopes and the Fomors began their lives as semi-divine beings (namely, lords of lightning and landscapes), the centaurs did not—in- stead having their origins in artwork as ornaments rather than as characters in a story.

When mythographers and oral poets began to form the centaurs, their character was also formed. They were depicted as the epitome of the wild and uncontrolled. According to myth, they were created when Kentauros, son of Ixion, copulated with mares of Magnesia. He did this on the slopes of Mount Pelion in Thessaly, a wild land in Ancient Greece where strange things happened. Subsequently, his offspring took up residence there. The centaurs have a lot in common with the djinn, despite the fact that they do not have divine origins. Like the djinn, they are capable of having sexual relations with humans as well as having a potential for uncontrolled rage. Centaurs, however, are unlike giants and djinn in the respect that they are capable of wreaking havoc as a swarm. They are closer in this respect to creatures better identified through large groups, such as dwarves, and, to a lesser extent, the fallen angels.

The fallen angels represent many motifs present in the portrayal of the centaurs, including their genesis through sexual misconduct, the inflammation of

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28 Hansen, *Handbook of Classical Mythology* 132
forbidden passions within them, and their ability to create chaos among mankind.

There are some centaurs, however, such as Chiron, that resemble "good" angels, ones that give gifts to worthy heroes and who are not afflicted with excessive lust and rage.

Whole-blooded centaurs were believed to be innately cruel and inhuman, as well as being unable to control sexual appetite. Ixion’s son, according to Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, invites the “cloud-born” centaurs\(^{30}\) to his wedding, which is in a shady cavern under the trees\(^{31}\). They had wine, which inflamed their lust and fiery passions so much that they started to pillage the wedding in a brawl led by Eurythus, described by Ovid as “the wildest of the Centaurs”. Each centaur helps himself to whatever girl he wants at the festival, and the entire scene becomes equivalent to an army’s raid. Theseus stops the rampage when he kills Eurythus by throwing a wine bowl at him. Thus Eurythus dies in a concoction of meat, brains, wine and blood\(^{32}\).

The only way a centaur could potentially be civilized was to possess a human parent. Those with two centaur parents were subject to an unshakable animalistic nature\(^{33}\). Centaurs embody unchecked masculinity—and portray a lust for women that cannot be controlled. They are a belligerent species, unable to control their emotions. They are all blood, and no phlegm. Like many of the other creatures discussed in this chapter, the centaur’s choice dwelling place was the mountain range. This granted them proximity to satyrs and nymphs, which could mate with each other or with

\(^{30}\) The centaurs perhaps possess a smattering of divinity by means of this epithet.
\(^{32}\) Humphries, *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, 292.
centaurs to produce centaurs. Another advantage of the mountains is that they will not need to develop an agricultural focus in their life\textsuperscript{34}.

The way to escape the “curse” of a wild existence was to have one of two parents not be a centaur. There are two examples of centaurs who are seen as paragons of excellence among their kind, precisely because their lineage allows their bestial nature to be contained. One of these is Phares, who is the son of a nymph and Silneos, a satyr. He is seen as someone who emphasizes, enforces, and follows the holy guest code. The other one is Chiron (or “Kheiron”, in Greek). He came into being because Cronos, “Father Time”, had assumed the form of a horse in order to mate with the Oceanid Philyra. Their son went on to become the mentor of Jason and Achilles, and a role model for Greek heroes. Chiron was also able to maintain a legendary knowledge of archery, medicine, hunting, and all arts, but music best of all\textsuperscript{35}. But concerning the overall image of the Centaurs, Ovid himself best sums this up while describing the wedding debacle for which the Centaurs were responsible:

“Centaurs have beauty, maybe\textsuperscript{36}.”

Very similar to the centaurs are the Satyrs, a species that is beyond any doubt related to the centaur in some way. Satyrs are affiliated with Dionysus, and this is consistently shown in all sources that mention them. Like the centaurs, they have the top half of a man, but the bottom half of an animal. That animal, however, can

\textsuperscript{34} Hansen, \textit{Handbook of Classical Mythology}, 132.  
\textsuperscript{35} March, \textit{The Penguin Book of Classical Myths}, 196.  
\textsuperscript{36} Humphries, \textit{Ovid: Metamorphoses}, 297.
sometimes be a goat (although it can be a horse as well). The satyrs are two-legged creatures that stand upright, unlike the Centaurs who are four-legged.

The French scholar Pierre Grimal refers to satyrs as “demons of nature”, perhaps opposed to forces such as Nymphs that are not destructive. Like centaurs, Satyrs are humans with an animal side that becomes inflated on account of actually possessing body parts of an animal. However, satyrs’ appearance in storytelling is negligible in comparison with their physical appearances in artwork.

The fact that satyrs are identified with “demons”, even in a modern work, could potentially reflect a root in the world of spirits, and, according to Grimal, nature spirits in particular. The centaurs, while having no such explicit roots in a spirit creature, have a connection to the Satyrs in the image of the half-horse, half man creature. The two are not exactly the same, but they come to fulfill very similar roles as destroyers tied to nature, as well as human beasts. Unlike centaurs, however, satyrs were not the direct result of a sexually perverse act, but rather missionaries of another divinity. Despite the differences, the images as well as the purposes of these creatures remain very close, and perhaps could have been identical at a point in history.

As for the centaurs, they came to fulfill a role in Greco-Roman mythology that is closest to the Nephilim, the fallen ones, which are identified with the fallen angels and the “watchers” in the Book of Enoch (see below). Whereas the fallen angels represent lustful power conquering a semi-divine being, the centaurs represent a similar lustful power conquering members of humanity, thereby being closer to

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38 Pierre Grimal, Dictionnaire La Mythologie Grecque et Romaine, (Paris, France; Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 416.
“fallen humans” but still close to fallen angels in many respects. The centaurs are not evolutions of spirits or gods, but fulfill the role of a monster in which anger and passion dominate. They therefore possess the fury matched by many races like Cyclopes or giants that did evolve from spirits and gods.

It is never the case that members of a humanoid species are portrayed as completely evil, and centaurs are no exception to this. Therefore, there are “good centaurs”, just as not all giants or trolls are depicted as evil, Chiron being the best-known example.

**DJINN**

The djinn, known in English as “genies”, are beings that belong to the same realm as demons and angels in the Islamic tradition. Together with these two, known in Arabic as “Shayatin”, and “Malaika” respectively, they are classed explicitly as being more powerful and “higher” than humans. The Qu’ran uses “djinn” as a blanket term for all of these, noting at many junctures that Allah is the lord of “Djinn and Men”[^39]. Before Islam, djinn existed in Arab storytelling, although the races to which they are connected were the ghouls and the ifrits, and not angels or demons. As a result, the stories featuring djinn became associated with secular woman poets, and

[^39]: James Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Volume IV*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1935), 615. The singular of “Djinn” is “Djinni”, and “Malaika” becomes “Malak” (angel), and “shayatin”, “shaitan” (demon). The remainder of this section dealing with Djinn will highlight the nature of only the first of these, and not these three as a group.
Islam found the djinn as well as their association with such women difficult to shake off⁴⁰.

Djinn have no arm bones, and only four fingers, leaving out the thumb. Storytellers do not often relate their appearances explicitly, but djinn are consistently described as terrible, monstrous, and dangerous, so much so that people can faint from shock upon seeing them. They tend to be in places not frequented by humans, such as graveyards, deserted houses, or pagan altars. They are inherently destructive, and capable of breaking any edifice they enter by causing a wild tremor that will crack not only a wall but the adjacent ceiling and floor. They are forces of uncontrolled wild nature—facing one is like facing a tempest. Djinn are capable of making the earth shake, an act that is capable of upsetting nature’s balance⁴¹.

However, the djinn are closer to forces of nature than they are to monsters, despite the fact that they possess a similarity to monstrous beasts in terms of their temperament and destructive powers. The same can also be said about giants and many of the other creatures in this chapter.

The djinn embody the dangers in closed places the same way that ghouls embody the dangers of open places. Ghouls are creatures that feed on human flesh and can change form—but unlike Djinn, their primary dwelling place is in plain view, in large expanses of wilderness⁴². Both could have very well been elemental beings in the earliest sense, but while the ghoul represents attrition afflicted by exposed and

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predictable areas, djinn embody the danger present in the uneasy elements in nature such as the fault lines, the unstable buildings, and places where humans should not enter. Like giants, they can represent bygone pagan gods that reside in cemeteries or abandoned altars. Despite this focus of their being, djinn are not committed to being completely evil, although their intellect leaves much to be desired.

Arab polytheism has virtually no presence in surviving tales that involve djinn, and Allah does not explicitly halt the machinations of the djinn nor send them as His agents. The djinn’s primarily relationship exists with humankind alone, and that relationship is troubled at best. Djinn have uncontrolled destructive urges, and humans find this problematic. They can infest entire cities and compel all humans to leave permanently. The vast majority of humans can outwit djinn very easily, however, as is the case with many monsters in Arab folklore, both before and after Islam\(^43\).

There is still a mutual fear that exists between djinn and humans, though. Humans are advised continuously to avoid encounters with the djinn, whose sole purpose in life is to compete with humans for a share of the earth. Encounters with djinn are capable of collectively harming humanity, and beings of both the race of djinn and of the human race want to avoid each other when possible. This is quite a futile task, however, because just as humans have a wide presence on the earth, so do djinn. Everywhere even slightly dangerous has the risk of a djinn being nearby, and

\(^{43}\) Bushmaq, *Arab Folk Tales*, 68-69, El-Shamy, *Folk Traditions of the Arab World II*, 266
provoking a djinni can upset his or her world as well as the human world, thereby causing tremendous destruction.\footnote{Bushmaq,\textit{ Arab Folk Tales}, 67, 69. El-Shamy,\textit{ Folk Traditions of the Arab World}, 266.}

While so many storytellers are inclined to paint the djinn as a monstrous race, later mythographers note that many other stories involve the idea that the djinn have human characteristics to them. They can be good or bad, just as humans can, and also suffer from jealousy, love, and the full spectrum of emotions and life experiences. It is also important to note that humans and djinn have had marriages brokered between them. Needless to say, they cannot last very long.\footnote{Bushmaq,\textit{ Arab Folk Tales}, 69.}

With angels and demons embodying forces of good and evil, djinn are the morally ambiguous heavenly type, and the ones that humans can relate to most easily of the three beings higher than humans. It is no surprise, therefore, that djinn and men are mentioned constantly in conjunction with each other in the Qu’ran, because they represent tandem sides of the same being, both having different forms of great power between heaven and earth.

\textit{DEMONS}

The Classical Greek word “daimon” has a plethora of meanings, including “inner spirit”, “godlet”, “divinity”, and even “soul”. The word is the source for the English word \textit{demon}, which possesses, no doubt, a significantly more negative meaning that also carries connotations of evil. However, the earliest place in which
“daimones” are mentioned is in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, in which the title is afforded to the souls who lived in the golden age, also mentioned in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The word “daimon” is a neutral term, and its negative meaning came about as a result of Christianity’s changes to religious demographics.

According to James Hastings in his *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, spirits and demons comprise one category in the earliest forms of mythology. However, according to Hastings, Hesiodic demons could be good, but not evil—because at the time Hesiod was writing, the word “daimon” was not befitting for an evil entity.

The idea that many creatures were initially spirits and divine beings is not only seen in regard to demons. Giants and djinn both shared roles of nature spirits prior to taking on fleshy forms in later iterations of mythology. The Cyclopes in Hesiod also have an identity change from lightning demigods to more humanlike creatures. It is also commonly believed that the elves, dwarves, giants, and numerous other creatures of Germanic mythology were all originally souls of icebergs, ice mountains, forests, and storms. The difference between the evolution of these Norse creatures and the evolution of demonic creatures in Classical myth lies in the fact that these are creatures of heaven. The “daimones” do not embody entities of nature, unlike the frost giants—they embody intelligences and horrors in a spirit world, which is distinct from the material world.

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The idea that creatures become more “evil” over time is not uncommon. While there are some creatures that evolve to become more kindly (trolls being one example), there are those that evolve into more hostile forms, such as the Centaurs and the Fallen Angels. It happens with demons as well. It is a case in which the transformation to evil is so pronounced that “daimones” is reverted from its positive meaning to one that signifies pure corruption—as noted by the English word “demon”.

“In the Classical Age”, writes Hastings, “the demons passed into gods, (and) the shadowy gods became definitely conceived personalities”. These demons did not comprise a species of creature in their own right, but a category of creatures, in which were included the Hell-Hounds of Hecate, Sphinxes, Harpies, and the demon Eurynomus, who eats the flesh of corpses in the manner of a vulture. However, at this time, the category of demons, while coming to include evil creatures, does not consist entirely of such. This changes when Justin Martyr tells the pagans that all “daimones”—a term coming to include everything they deem holy—are evil, thereby making the metamorphosis complete.

Outside of the classical world, Christianity affects spiritual beings in the same way, leading to a parallel evolution. This can be seen in the case of the Fygljur (sing. “Fylgia”), which is a spirit creature in Teutonic mythology that has changed faces dramatically over the course of its existence.

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The first Fylgia was a soul-like entity that could leave the body and exist as a half-material being. (The word itself means “follower” or “second”.) The Fyglja shared a bond with the body from which it came—either the Fylgja or the body ceasing to exist that would cause the death of the other. It could exhibit the form of an animal, usually one that had a personality connection to the host.\(^{52}\)

However, perhaps because the concept was easily distorted due to its intricate nature, the Fylgja evolved into an independent being. No longer was the Fylgja dependent on another source for existence—it was merely a spirit-like creature that had a connection to a specific human. Despite its classification as a “spirit”, there were Fylgiur that were described as “demons”. They also lost, for the most part, their capacity for taking animal forms. Late Fylgjur had human forms—depicted as armed women with flight capabilities, a type of “godlet”.\(^{53}\)

Christianity-inflected folklore depicts some Fylgjur as evil beings. Black Fylgjur were pagan incarnations, spirit-like beings that wanted to turn good by killing someone as a “sacrifice”. White ones were black ones turned white, converted in whole to an alliance with Christendom. More often than white Fylgjur, black ones rode horses, enabling them to impale victims with swords, a process which they were required to perform once on an innocent for the Fylgja to turn white. Despite the partial transformation with the advent of Black Fylgjur, the white Fylgjur kept a shard of a previous role they possessed: that of a guardian spirit.\(^{54}\)


Unlike what happened to the Greco-Roman demons, the Fylgjur had a dual evolution—some turned good, others turned bad, as opposed to the “demons” that became wholly evil. Fygljur, too, found their roots in a spirit world—anchored to humanity at first, and then more detached from them over time. Fygljur, like some of the Fallen Angels in the texts of Justin Martyr, represent a desire to turn to idolatry and evil. They also have a desire to kill people. This is not overly pronounced in Classical demons, but is in the demons present in Rabbinical Judaism.

The demons in the Talmud, referred to as “shedim”, unsurprisingly share ground with the demons of Greco-Roman tradition. In the portions of the Talmud that deal with demonology, primarily in Tractate Pesachim, there is a difference between spirits and demons. The spirits are good, and demons are evil, which is the same dynamic present in the later Classical traditions. Despite the fact that shedim are mortal and reproduce like humans, they exert powers akin to those of angels, such as being able to circle the globe via flight. They are also non-corporeal and have no flesh, thereby differentiating themselves from Fylgiur as well as some iterations of demons.

The development of “shedim” reflects a difference between Judaism and Islam. Whereas the djinn were allowed to keep some form of physical manifestation, even after the rise of Islam, the shedim, for the most part, evolve from spirits into abstract conceptions—such as sources of harm and disease. This is not only parallel to the development of fallen angels into incarnations of ills, but reflects an opposite

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55 Pronounce the first syllable with a long “a” sound.
dynamic when compared to the development of spirits in other mythological traditions. The Fomors and Cyclops started out as demigod-like creatures and moved towards being more human as the tales evolved. Shedim evolve from spirits into abstractions, as opposed to into flesh, while still retaining the ability to do harm to creatures of flesh.

There are some exceptions to all demons being merely non-corporeal, primarily the most powerful ones—Lilith the demonic queen, and Ashmedai the demonic king. Both of them interacted with humans (Adam and Solomon respectively). In earlier Midrashim, shedim can also possess physical form when disguised as a human—their only difference being the presence of rooster’s feet. Even when shedim lose all physical form, they can still make footprints in the likeness of a rooster’s.

Despite this trend, normal shedim are capable of exerting influence through their voices (not with physical force), as well as through divinations and magical rites. They exercise power by killing people, and Ashmedai as well as his minions have power over all things concerned with even numbers and with the left. This is especially dangerous in the case of a person having drunk an even number of cups, as the demons are reported to say: “for two cups, we kill; for four cups, we do not kill, we only injure the drinker”. The proper cure for this is walking outside, each hand clenched into a fist holding the thumb of the other hand, and saying “You and I are three”. If one hears a voice saying, “You and I are four”, the reply is “You and I are five”. One anecdote gives the example of a person who reached one hundred and one.

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in this fashion, whereupon the demon revealed his own presence and thereby exploded\textsuperscript{58}.

The Talmud is a composite tradition, so it is impossible to apply traits to absolutely all shedim. Some became less corporeal, others slightly more corporeal—leading to the one trait that unites these categories of demons—splitting away into disparate portions from a greater category of spirits. Some retain their spirituality, others switch to a more human being. However, demons are by no means the only creatures to descend into more human forms, nor to turn from divine into evil. As has been seen throughout this chapter, it is a well-trod path along the evolutionary lines of myth.

\textit{FALLEN ANGELS AND NEPHILIM}

In Late Antiquity the book of Enoch was responsible for cultivating an image of Fallen Angels in Judaism and in Christianity, and these were referred to in the text as “Watchers”. The text, detailing Enoch’s journey and findings in heaven after God took him, was popular among Jews for being a mystical text, and among Christians for expressing a harbinger of the coming of Christ. The book is seen now as a compilation of virtually all mysticism known to the Jews living in Middle and Late

\textsuperscript{58} William G. Braude, Hayim Nahman Bialik, and Yehoshua H. Ravnitsky, \textit{The Book of Legends}, 797-798.
Antiquity, and possesses some consistency despite contradictory visions given in the
text\textsuperscript{59}.

Like the offspring of the demon Lilith, the Watchers, or the Fallen Angels, were begat by humans who had intercourse with a semi-divine being. Lilith was a
demon queen who bore demonic offspring with Adam’s seed, and the Watchers are the offspring of angels who did the same with the seed of other humans at later points. Nevertheless, the result of both unions is quite similar, regardless of how virtuous the parents were\textsuperscript{60}.

The Angelologies contemporary with the book of Enoch can be found in places such as the books of Ben Sira and in the Book of Tobit, both of which are considered Apocryphal in Judaism today. While less pronounced in the Talmud, the Angels in the Apocrypha are considered beings capable of undoing evil influences—particularly, the bad influences of shedim, who, like djinn, can kill people as well as betroth them.

Raphael, a primary figure of the book of Tobit, is capable of undoing the ill that Asmodaeus had wrought on the main characters:

Sarah, the Daughter of Raguel…had been given in marriage to seven husbands, and before marriage could be regularly consummated they had all been killed by the wicked demon Asmodaeus…the prayers of


both of them (Tobit and Sarah) were heard in the glorious presence of God. His angel Raphael was sent to cure them both of their troubles: Tobit, by removing the white patch from his eyes so that he could see God’s light again, and Sarah…by Giving her in Marriage to Tobias, son of Tobit, and by setting her free from the wicked demon Asmodeus (Tobit 3:8, 16-17\(^{61}\)).

The name “Fallen Angels” comes about as a result of the Watchers being identified with the Nephilim in Genesis. The Nephilim—sometimes identified as “giants” and at other times as “fallen ones”—possess a shrouded identity that makes their makeup more open to interpretation than any other race to be discussed in this work. One thing is certain from the Book of Enoch, however: the fallen angels seduced human women, and from these unions the Nephilim were begat\(^{62}\). There are scholars and interpreters that use the word “Nephilim” interchangeably with fallen angels, and others that do not. However, “fallen angels” and “watchers” are synonymous.

In the book named after him, Enoch is taken by God, and is given a tour of heaven. In Chapter 19 of *I Enoch*, the angel Uriel shows him the prison of the angels who had intercourse with women. Their spirits, Uriel warns, are capable of taking many forms, and their primary goal is to harm humankind and drive them to make

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\(^{62}\) Ra’anan S. Boustou and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Heavenly Reasons and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, p. 49.
sacrifices to Satan and to the demons, which is directly counter to the worship of God\(^{63}\).

In this section of Enoch, titled “The Book of the Watchers”, the angel Asael, one of the fallen ones, is berated by the narrator, and is responsible for violence and promiscuity, which came into existence as a result of creating weapons, jewelry, and cosmetics. In scholarly interpretations of this story as well as of its greater context, there are those that believe that the flood in the Book of Genesis was ultimately the fault of the Watchers, and that while humanity was cleansed, the fallen angels continued to wreak havoc\(^{64}\).

However, while fallen angels seemed to disappear from Judaism when the Book of Enoch lost its status as canonical, Christianity continued the narrative of the watchers, primarily with the writings of Justin Martyr: the “Argonautica” of Apollonius of Rhodes. While the fallen angels in the book of Enoch begat ills to humankind in the form of violence, the fallen angels of Justin Martyr begat ills in the form of paganism, in addition to all other forms of evil, such as adultery and intemperance. The fallen angels are seen as pagan gods—not gods, but similar to the One God—who specialize in fooling humankind that they are the ones deserving worship. They not only drive humans the way an evil inclination does—they make humans worship them by offering them sacrifices, libation, and by performing acts of magic (2 Apol. 5.4)\(^{65}\).

\(^{63}\) Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 50, 176.
\(^{64}\) Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 51.
\(^{65}\) Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 164-165.
CONCLUSION

Just as there are more melancholy songs in musical traditions across the world than happy songs, there are more morally challenged and dangerous creatures in mythology that there are purely good creatures. More often than not, a Pantheon (or the Monotheistic God) will displace other gods. Because prominent gods tend to be associated with the powers of good and the goods of power (excluding the existence of deliberately evil gods such as Loki), the gods that are replaced remain powerful—but not as powerful, and certainly not as closely associated with benefits to humankind. More often, these abominations are allotted the role of harming humans, which makes it easier for the good gods, the protectors of humanity, to fight and kill them.

Storytellers seeking to bend well-known stereotypes of these creatures create examples of these species that are “good”. This is in response to the prominent characterization of these creatures as morally skewed beings—and those characterizations are still strong when such creatures are described in fantasy today.
CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION

In the first mythologies, all divinities were essentially the same, and all classed under the category of “spirits” or “life force” or the equivalent. There were humans, and then there was everything else in nature. These spirits began to evolve, and started to have labels attached to them—good spirits, evil spirits, and spirits of particular entities in the natural world.

The spirit then moves from being abstract to actually identifying the object in some cases. In earlier mythologies, there exist wood spirits and nymphs. In later mythologies, there are treefolk and ents instead—with the characteristics of actual trees.

Many of the creatures in this chapter identify with nature as a whole—such as faeries, elves, and nymphs. They are not only associated with many aspects of the aboveground world, but also with each other. Elves and nymphs have both been associated with trees, freshwater and caves, and almost certainly have an identical mythological ancestor. Dwarves come to embody rocks and mountains, and were likely nature spirits of the realms below the ground. Faeries tend to embody the abstract and the man-made within the world, and were once a category that included almost everything described within this chapter.

Creatures in this chapter have also represented not only aspects of nature, but also have been fused with the souls of dead humans. There are the sea-dead, selkies
and leprechauns, all of which have connections to the spirits of sailors and warriors who have passed away.

Humans are a part of nature. When nature begins to be identified with spirits, then spirits, nature, and humans all commune to create species, the likes of which are featured here.

**FAERIES**

The influence of faeries on the mythological landscape of Europe is all encompassing. Faeries comprise a broad category of fantasy beings that unites aspects of demonology as well as previously practiced polytheism. As will be seen, the influence of faeries is similar to that of spirit beings throughout European mythology. More so than many other creatures throughout Norse, Baltic, and Celtic myths, the faerie fulfills a role closest to a “demon”, although their sizes and appearances make it very much different from the Greco-Roman demon in almost every way.

The current form of the Faerie known to many Western audiences is of significant British and Irish influence. The word “faerie”, also spelled “fairy”, is of Irish origin. The creature has a direct connection to other beings similar to it in Northern European mythology: In Norwegian, it became a “nisse”, in German, a “kobold”. The Scottish “brownie” is also connected. Just as the “brownie” became synonymous with a “household faerie” and not congruent at all to other types of
faeries, the “nisse” and “kobold” also carved separate paths for themselves\(^{66}\). There is a female predominance among faeries, and this is likely tied to a role of faeries (and similar creatures) to assist with childbirth, as well as with the chores of housewives\(^{67}\).

Peter Beresford Ellis, a mythographer who popularizes Celtic tales for modern audiences, says that Faeries were known as “aes sidhe” before the advent of Christianity, and they have a direct lineal connection to the mother goddess Danu. Christianity has already been established as a myth-changing force in the case of trolls, and in other areas of Northern Europe this dynamic is also common—Ellis also believes that the leprechaun’s existence is enabled only by Christianity’s downsizing of the old gods\(^{68}\). As a result, the faeries have god-like characteristics, but also appear to mock the powers that used to belong to gods in the Pantheon.

Another theory that could be advanced, although not in direct contradiction to Ellis’ idea, is that the Faeries are spirit creatures closer to being flesh. They could be evolved spirits of light and darkness, as noted by the existence of “light” and “dark” faeries, as is the case with elves. It is even possible that faeries are evolved nature spirits, as some accounts have faeries wearing green clothing made of silk\(^{69}\). The

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\(^{68}\) Peter Beresford Ellis, *The Chronicles of the Celts*, (New York, Correl and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1999) 29-30. Some of his work has drawn criticism on account of highlighting too many parallels to Greco-Roman mythology within Irish stories. The leprechaun is discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

possibility that they were once nature spirits can also be strengthened by the
connection of some faeries to water, as is the case in later Welsh folklore.\footnote{Westwood, \textit{Albion}, 248.}

Faeries, like nymphs, can ensure a family’s divine origin without desecrating
other divinities. In other words, human families can descend from faeries, and as a
result have a higher measure of prominence. This is likely a vestigial element from
the polytheistic days in the British Isles. The Courts of Poitou, descended from the
fairy and water spirit “Melusine”, are one example of this phenomenon, but fairy
ancestry was prized even in the Middle Ages.\footnote{Westwood, \textit{Albion}, 247-248.} They are also similar to gods in the
respect that they can see what humans cannot, and some stories involve them
punishing humans who have the gift of faeries’ sight by plucking out their eyes.\footnote{Briggs and Tongue, \textit{Folktales of England}, 38-39.}

In the respect that they can harm people at their whim, faeries also resemble
demons. Elaborate summoning rituals can also be called upon in the case of faeries,
just as with the demons in Talmudic folklore—using material components as well as
precise timing. For example, one story uses a pail of water at the time of a full
moon.\footnote{Briggs and Tongue, \textit{Folktales of England}, 35-36.}

There is very little described about faeries in terms of their appearance.
Different fairy cults had different descriptions that varied widely. Despite this, faeries
were very commonly depicted in written literature until the 19th century, and many
people, despite Christianity’s dominance, believed in faeries as well up until that
time. There are some seminal works that have defined and re-defined the images of
faeries, but unlike creatures such as Cyclopes and centaurs, whose existence is
defined by a few stories, the faeries have an enviably large corpus to shape their image.

Johan Weyer is an occultist who writes the following about faeries:

[Faeries] are gentle, they are active in households, especially at night during the first period of sleep, and by the noises that they make, they seem to be performing the duties of servants—when they are really doing nothing at all.\(^{74}\)

This passage notes a similarity to the brownie, a housekeeping faerie (also identified periodically as an elf). The concept of a housekeeping creature is not entirely Scottish or Irish, however, but exists throughout Europe. “Ladies of the house” have been a subject of tales throughout the continent—female spirits supposed to reward good housewives while assisting them with their work. In an account given in a fairy cult in Sicily, they are known as “ladies from the outside” (note another connection to nature spirits), and were described as brilliantly dressed small, female, creatures that had paws rather than feet.\(^{75}\)

Having established a connection between house-faeries and house-spirits, it is important to note how others saw faeries as closer to demons—if not in fact demons in their own right. One such opinion was Martin Luther, who says the following about

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\(^{74}\) Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 43.

\(^{75}\) Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 42.
faeries, whom he terms “domestic demons”: “People are more afraid to give offense to those demons than to God and the whole world.”

The connection with faeries and demons is one that is commonly made by scholars. Thomas Keightly solidified that notion, even more than Martin Luther did, upon writing *The Fairy Mythology* in 1828. However, readers of the work should be cautious because the “faeries” he describes are closer to accounts of elves given by other, later, mythographers. Keightly believed that fairies were reflections of savage, pagan ideas: residual creatures from an era of magic and demonology. He was of the belief that faeries, ghosts, witches, the gods of classical myth, and ogres were just conjurations of a primitive mind in a primitive era. This belief reflects similar sentiments of Justin Martyr’s beliefs about demons, as mentioned in Chapter One. The usage of the term “Fairy Mythology” is also noteworthy because the author seems to apply the title “faerie” to all such “primitive” creatures.

Contributing even more to the impossibility of accurately defining a faerie as it stands on the mythological landscape, Keightly divides the English faerie into two categories: elves, or nature spirits, and hobgoblins, or domestic faeries, which can also be referred to as “Robin-Goodfellows.”

Aside from accounts of faerie worship, other important aspects contributing to the characterization of faeries are romances and poems. One such important source

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76 Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 42.
77 Briggs and Tongue, *Folktales of England*, x.
78 Briggs and Tongue, *Folktales of England*, x.
is the 13th century British/Celtic faerie romance written by Thomas the Rhymer (also known as Thomas of Erceldoune), a Scotsman.79

Thomas’s story begins when he sees a lady of unearthly beauty, and believes her to be the queen of heaven. He talks to her, and finds out that she is not the queen of heaven, but rather the queen of another country. Thomas begs to sleep with her, and she replies saying that it would ruin her beauty. She accepts, however, and turns into a hag, and this act also gives her power over Thomas. In her new state, she goes underneath the tree by which Thomas met her, the Eildon tree, and brings him to a crossroads: Heaven, Paradise, Hell, Purgatory, and Fairyland. Upon arriving in Fairyland after a long and exhausting journey, Thomas looks again at the woman—her beauty has returned, and her status is revealed as the Fairy Queen. Thomas then celebrates with the fairies for three years—but to him, it feels like three days. The Queen, as either a punishment or a mixed blessing, gives Thomas “the tribute of Hell”—a tongue that cannot lie—and brings him back to the Tree of Eildon at the earth’s surface.

In this romance, Fairyland is inside or on a hill (it is not completely clear which), and a Faerie Queen exists as well as a Fairy King. Scholars believe that such rulers were “canonized” and popularized by this work. The fact that elves frequently have monarchies might also be related to this story, given that faeries and elves are

79 Westwood, Albion, 367.
80 It is likely that Fairyland parallels the real world. The other pairs: Heaven and Paradise, and Purgatory and Hell.
very closely related. Faeries are also characterized by moral ambiguity—and this also occurs in his descriptions of Fairyland\textsuperscript{81}.

The “moral ambiguity”, which was an aspect that almost certainly existed in faeries before Thomas authored the work, seems to be the result of faeries taking human characteristics.

Faeries are an “umbrella” category of creature—if not in the present, then almost certainly so in the past. Goblins, elves, hobgoblins, brownies, kobolds—all of these began as a type of faerie or proto-faerie. The faerie, much like a demon (to which it has been compared countless times throughout its historiography), once was a type of creature to denote all types of minor divinities, and perhaps maybe even major ones. Now, on account of the grand mythological trend of humanizing creatures, as well as the power of Christianity to downsize and ridicule them, the faerie is no longer a divine being, a prestigious title that it no doubt once possessed

\textit{ELVES}

Elves have an identity crisis present on multiple levels. The most noteworthy of these is the identity shift set in place by Tolkien’s writings, which transformed the elves into something almost completely unrelated to the first beings called “elves”. These proto-elves were present in many Northern mythologies, and in some traditions (such as Anglo-Saxon myth), elves are divided into “light” and “dark”\textsuperscript{82}. Since the

\textsuperscript{81} Westwood, \textit{Albion}, 367-369.
\textsuperscript{82} Tony Linsell, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Mythology, Migration, and Magic}, (Middlesex, United Kingdom; Anglo-Saxon Books, 1994) 17.
word is a cognate of the Old Norse “alfr”, meaning “white”83, it is likely that elves, like many of the semi-divine beings in Chapter One, were originally “light” beings from which a dark version evolved.

The existence of a race of two halves—good and evil—is something that is seen in many instances, with elves as well as with Fygliur, demons, and even Tolkien’s ents—and it is likely that elves might also have begun their mythological lives as spirit creatures. Some scholars believe that elves are closely related to dwarves, faeries, and brownies (or household elves), and that all began as different types of spirits. To this day, these categories of creatures overlap and exchange traits across mythological traditions as well as within the same one84. In Dutch lore, dwarves and elves are almost always interchangeable, and in other cultures, elves have been so loosely defined that they become just a broad category of diminutive spirit creatures85.

The older image of an elf is very close to a faerie. They can both cause mischief and are noted for being very small and semi-spiritual beings. This image lasted until the 19th century, and many authors from across Northern Europe record their “elfish lore” or tales of tricks being perpetrated by elves86. A later epithet for elves, prominent in Scandinavia and nearby islands, was “hidden folk”87, which is still used today in many sources. Just as trolls became stealthy renditions of giants in

83 Dr. Goodword (goodword@lexiteria.com) e-mail message to author, December 28, 2010.
85 Tarantul, Elfen, Zwerge, und Riesen, 302-305.
86 Dr. Goodword (goodword@lexiteria.com) e-mail message to author, December 28, 2010. Simpson, Icelandic Folktales and Legends, 7.
87 Tarantul, Elfen, Zwerge, und Riesen, 303.
late mythologies, it is likely that the “hidden folk” also took on a sneaky personality later in its development.

However, in some Norse cultures that placed emphasis on the existence of multiple species within their own worlds in the “World Tree” (Yggdrasil), elves have developed their own culture, and that culture has been impacted by Christianity (as happened with many of the species discussed in this work). Elves still enjoy playing pranks, but older siblings of potential targets can scare them away from performing deeds such as crib swaps (or exchanging an infant human for a changeling). Divine Names and symbols related to the cross can also act to fend them off—which is very common in Christian lore.88

These elves have communities inside mountains and get food by fishing and farming. They have a king and well-defined social structure (unlike Cyclopes) and often represent everything human society wants to be.89 Perhaps it is because of their mountain-dwelling, as well as their industrious nature as reflected by this mythology, that scholars like Evgen Tarantul believe that confusion with dwarves—past and present—was and is all too likely.

A modern image of the elf has been pronounced by the presence of pointy ears, which could be due to Tolkien’s lore, as well as being characterized by green clothing, which resulted directly from confusion with leprechauns. Sometimes they are characterized as causing mischief, and at other times, they resemble Tolkien’s elves, noted by their civilization rather than a desire to cause mischief. Multiple

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adjectives have been applied to them throughout the ages, prominently “elfin”, “elven” and “elvish”, the last of which rose to prominence through Tolkien’s work. Tolkien’s elves were influenced more by his own life and the prior sketchwork of *The Lord of the Rings* than by anything within Northern Mythology corpuses. Despite this, they have a connection to spiritual/divine beings because they are effectively immortal (though they can be killed by wounds).

Tolkien’s elves have a connection to nature, which could or could not have existed in earlier elves—reflected by the epithet “people of the stars”. They devised a calendar and time system based around the celestial bodies (as have humans in the real world), and in *The Hobbit*, they are created from the twilight, which is a balance between sun and moon. Unlike the Light and the Dark elves in older mythology, these elves balance their aspects of good and evil, as opposed to having an entire faction of good or of evil. This, too, is a reflection of the human, which is not wholly good or evil.

Unlike smaller elves, Tolkien’s elves are bearers of knowledge, culture, and speech. They first learned speech in order to learn how to speak to the ents, a type of sentient tree discussed in this work alongside wood spirits. The ent Treebeard, who speaks to the hobbits Merry and Pippin, says that the elves always enjoy talking about everything, as well as having an extroversion that humans do not have. The elves are noted throughout *The Lord of the Rings* as well as in the Appendices of the work.

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90 Goodword, Dr. (goodword@lexiteria.com), e-mail message to author, December 28, 2010. Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*, 16.
to be a dominant cultural power, with influence akin to that of a European colonial power. The elves that have crossed the sea to Valinor are seen as a fountainhead of culture, and the languages of dwarves and orcs have been influenced by elves\textsuperscript{94}.

The three rings given to the race of elves in Tolkien’s writings correspond to understanding, making, and healing/preserving all things unstained. If anything, these elves have been formed by human characteristics, as opposed to aspects that are not human. Tolkien’s elves reflect things more distinctly human than many of the races discussed in earlier mythology. In part, they also reflect Tolkien’s personal development and cultural background. He devised the Elvish Language before writing any of the manuscript of \textit{The Lord of the Rings}\textsuperscript{95}, and as a result, connects the Elvish people to their language and to their culture, which is more fully developed as a result of being formed earlier (as opposed to many of the other cultures of Middle-Earth). Being influenced by British Culture from South Africa, Tolkien reflects in the elves the same cultural dominance exercised by his own culture. Why elves possess more dominance in Middle-Earth than humans cannot be determined with any certainty.

Elves have many, many modes of being throughout the ages, and perhaps their loose definitions and sub-cultures reflect a mythological ancestor so general that it enabled many separate species to develop. Like the primeval spirit world (reflected in part by Hesiod) that possessed a loose formation as well, and many beings that could not accurately be described with blanket terms, the elves have likely sprung forth from spirit beings in Northern mythology, while certainly not being the only such

\textsuperscript{94} Kocher, \textit{Master of Middle-Earth}, 13-16.
\textsuperscript{95} Kocher, \textit{Master of Middle-Earth}, 13-16.
species to develop in this manner. Tolkien’s elves are a 20th-century link in a well-established trend—that godly creatures become human, and furthermore can come to reflect the humans more than they do the gods to whom they were once more close.

NYMPHS AND WOOD SPIRITS (ENTS)

Nymphs can be seen as a type of proto-god that occupies a realm close to a spirit of nature. They survived from their primeval being in the form of lesser divine beings—local deities noticeably detached from the Olympian Pantheon. Where recorded myths are concerned, nymphs stay to one element, area, or being, and stay attached to their “essence”. There are groups of nymphs, all tied to a shared guardianship or embodiment. Some of these groups of nymphs have names—for example, a water nymph would be referred to as a “Naiad”, or “flowing”, Nymph. Unlike Nereids, who are spirits of nature beneath the surface, the Nymphs embody natural beings on land, such as springs, rivers, caves, mountains, forests, and trees. However, the primary shine for worshipping Nymphs is a cave. As far as humans are concerned, Pan is also worshipped in a cave, and the same holds true for nymphs. The worship of both Pan and of nymphs was considered a cult practice, with a cave as its locus.96 Not much is known about their predilections towards good and evil, but they are almost always associated with positive aspects.

The simultaneous attachment to both mountainous as well as verdant landscapes is something that is embodied in elves as well. They have an affinity

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towards forests, but have also been recorded by some mythographers as living in caves and mountains. It is entirely likely that Elves and Nymphs could have some shared ancestry in a type of nature spirit, because they share many of the same natural alliances. While giants and trolls are tied to mountains and icy landscapes, elves and nymphs embody mountains as well, but also forms of lush nature. At the very least, the elves have taken on traits of natural spirits similar to that of nymphs, while simultaneously incorporating much of the fairy mythology that is less tied to nature.

Like elves, nymphs live long lives, and the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite describes them as “deathless.” They associate very closely with the immortals, and like faeries, can serve as progenitors of well-known humans. Just as faeries are separate from gods in a Pantheon but can afford a divine origin to humans without blaspheming what is holy, so too can the nymphs give humans a divine origin in Classical mythology without going against proper order. Some of the many nymph-born heroes in Greek mythology appear in the Iliad, such as the Trojans Aisopes and Pedases. In Oedipus Tyrannos, there are also implications that Oedipus is, in fact, believed by the Chorus to be born of a nymph. Descent from a divine being is one of the cornerstones of mythological prestige, claimed by many rulers and prominent families throughout the world. This tradition—exemplified by fairy wives and nymph-born children—lasts well into the Middle Ages in Europe. It is also believed

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97 See Oedipus Tyrannos, ll. 1105-1109.
by some storytellers that the nymphs might actually be concubines for gods, as well as for humans\textsuperscript{99}.

Furthermore, the nymphs are often afforded the title of “the daughters of Zeus”, something that has its origins in the \textit{Odyssey}. It is likely that being the daughters of Zeus is the reason for their collective beautiful appearances. However, there are mythographers who believe that Odysseus is, in fact, mistaken in addressing the nymphs as “the daughters of Zeus”, because not all of them are descended from him\textsuperscript{100}.

The German scholar Otto Kern believes that nymphs are of the oldest order in classical mythology, as they embody the trees and water sources, essential to human beings\textsuperscript{101}. The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite regards nymphs as “beautiful and flourishing”, and embodies them as all that is good to humanity—a lush goodness combined with a potent aesthetic\textsuperscript{102}.

In addition to these roles, nymphs also occupy a realm of “forest spirits”, a broad category which evolved into the likes of treefolk beings such as the ents in later mythology. A nymph lives in every oak, and the life of a tree-nymph is tied to that of a particular tree—they begin life together, and when the tree dies, so too does the nymph\textsuperscript{103}. It is likely that spirits of trees later became identified with living trees themselves, and we see these primarily popularized in \textit{The Lord of the Rings}.

\textsuperscript{100} Kearns, \textit{Ancient Greek Religion: A Sourcebook}, 24. Vernant, \textit{The Universe, the Gods, and Mortals}, 199.
\textsuperscript{102} Kearns, \textit{Ancient Greek Religion: A Sourcebook}, 25.
There is a species akin to forest spirits in *The Lord of the Rings*, and its members are collectively referred to as “ents”. The ents resemble living trees. It is likely that they also occupy a realm similar to that of mountain beings, such as giants and trolls, because the ent Treebeard, when speaking to Merry and Pippin about “the ways of all races”, says that the ents are “the earthborn, old as mountains”. Like the creatures discussed in the first chapter, the ents have a language and movement that is very slow—their tongue is described by Tolkien as “sonorous”, “agglomerated” and “repetitive”. Furthermore, like the mountain creatures, they tend to have heavy hearts and stubborn personalities. (This is attributed in part by the entwives leaving, which ensures that the all-male race of ents is perpetually sorrowful\textsuperscript{104}).

While the relationship the ents have with elves and humans is by no means rancorous or even uneasy (as is the case between human beings and giants), the ents have learned culture and language through the smaller creatures—namely, the elves\textsuperscript{105}. The fact that the ents are not the originators of culture, but rather learn it from other beings, reflects a dynamic similar to that of giants—in the respect that humans are generally seen as capable of more intelligence overall than the ents are.

However, the ents are not innately stupid, but in a sense just deprived: they suffered the loss of the entwives—who migrated to open fields in order to practice and teach agriculture to men\textsuperscript{106}. Ents are capable of a certain type of wisdom, as noted by Treebeard’s poems, and in some respects that wisdom outclasses many aspects of human and elvish beings. However, due to the loss of the entwives, the race of ents

\textsuperscript{104} Kocher, *Master of Middle-Earth*, 81, 109-111.
\textsuperscript{105} Kocher, *Master of Middle-Earth*, 10.
\textsuperscript{106} Kocher, *Master of Middle-Earth*, 10.
that exists in *The Lord of the Rings* is disadvantaged on countless accounts, especially when it comes to well being. Many questions about their reproduction remain unanswered.

Despite a similarity to mountain beings that is reflected not only by their tremendous size, the ents have an essence that is unmistakably forest-like. Tolkien throughout his life had an affinity for trees, and the Fangorn forest supplies a central role in *The Lord of the Rings*. As Paul Kocher writes in *Master of Middle-Earth*, his extensive book about Tolkien and his work:

> As a very young boy, (Tolkien’s) greatest enthusiasm was for stories about Indians, ‘and above all, the forests in such stories’. When he wrote of fantasy’s power to tell tales of man conversing with birds and beasts, he always added, ‘and trees’.

While ents are not spirit beings, they possess a similarity to spirit beings in having pseudo-immortality—like Tolkien’s elves, they cannot die except by injuries inflicted by others. The ents are also similar to the elves in the respect that they are governed fully by the same binding principles of morality. In addition to this, wicked ents are capable of existing, plagued by the “great darkness in the north”.

Unlike the “light” and the “dark” elves in other Northern mythologies, which are sometimes classed as distinct species and at other times members of the same

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108 The possibility of suicide for ents and elves of Middle-Earth is not addressed at any point.
species, the ents together make up the same race. This is something that increasingly happens with late developments of mythological races—and is supposed to parallel human capabilities for good and for evil.

LEPRECHAUNS

Leprechauns are undoubtedly related to fairies—they are so similar to fairies in fact, that some mythographers never distinguish them as a disparate category. Because of this, one doing research on leprechauns should keep in mind that books that address them at all are extremely rare when compared to the full corpus of Celtic mythology (or even just Irish mythology by itself). They are known under a plethora of names, including “little one”, “little men”, “solitary fairies”, even “pygmies”, but many scholars indicate that the role played by leprechauns is so close to that of fairies that they allot them no attention as a separate species. Even William Butler Yeats himself noted that two Irish writers cannot possibly reach a consensus about the image and role of leprechauns.¹¹⁰

The first known example of a leprechaun in literature is in the 11th century, in a manuscript called The Death of Fergus. Some believe that Jonathan Swift knew a version of this tale, and borrowed elements from the small folk in it to form his own little men in Gulliver’s Travels.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ William Butler Yeats, Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland, (Letchworth, Hertfordshire; Colin Smythe Gerrards Cross, 1973), 75.
There are many theories advanced as to the origin of the word “leprechaun”. One point agreed upon is that it is, in fact, a word adapted into English from another form in Irish. Peter Beresford Ellis, writing Irish fairy tales for a broad audience, advances the notion that it is an English corruption of *Lugh-chromain*, or “little stooping Lugh”\(^{112}\). Lugh is, according to Ellis, a solar deity who is a master craftsman. He acquires the title of “king of the gods” when he kills his grandfather, Balor\(^{113}\), with a slingshot\(^{114}\). However, Christianity’s presence, according to Ellis, downsizes him:

> When the old gods were driven underground, Lugh diminished in people’s minds becoming a fairy-craftsman named *Lugh-chromain*—“little stooping Lugh”\(^{115}\)

Yeats advances the opinion of his friend Douglas Hyde. According to him, the name comes from the Irish *leith bhrog*\(^{116}\)—the one-shoemaker, a name popularized because leprechauns, according to Hyde, are often seen making a single shoe at a

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\(^{112}\) Ellis, *The Chronicles of the Celts*, 62.

\(^{113}\) Balor is a fomor, and he has one eye that kills anyone who gazes upon it.

\(^{114}\) Peter Beresford Ellis, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, (Santa Barbara, California; Oxford University Press, 1992), 37, 146-147. It should also be noted that some believe that Ellis is mistaken in calling Lugh a solar deity—which could be a misappropriation due to projecting the role of Apollo in Greco-Roman mythology onto Lugh. This might also be due to a misdirected connection between the Latin “Lux” (light) and “Lugh”.

\(^{115}\) Ellis, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, p. 147.

\(^{116}\) This is an Anglicized form for ease of pronunciation. Yeats writes out the Irish forms, “leith bhrogan”, or “leith phrogan”.
Alternate spellings of “leprechaun” include “luprecan”, “luchryman”, and “leprachaun".

The leprechauns occupy a place very close to fairies. Author Sean Kelly makes a distinction between the “Sidhe”, who “live in Royal splendor beneath the hills—or beneath the waves”, and the leprechauns, or “solitary fairies”. (According to him, both are considered fairies). Yeats implies, however, that the term “solitary fairies” is dangerous—although leprechauns are a type of solitary fairy, not all solitary fairies are leprechauns. The category of solitary fairies, according to Yeats, encompasses house spirits, water sheeries, known as Jack-o-Lanterns in England, pookas, banshees, and dallahans, or headless phantoms, as well as many others not listed with these types.

Yeats describes three different types of fairies, the leprechaun, the cluricaun, and the far darrig, and he suggests the idea that they comprise “one spirit in different moods and shapes”. The Cluricaun is a fairy that infiltrates cellars, seeking to get drunk with stolen alcohol, and the far darrig is a sadistic practical joker with a red cap and coat—that follows nothing else save his own violent whims. Yeats also describes, separate from these, the “Fear Gorta”, or the “man of hunger”, who is a starved phantom, which not only highlights the connection of the leprechaun to the spirit world, but also to the human spirit world—because “fear” in Irish means “man”.

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117 Yeats, Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland, 75.
119 Kelly, Irish Folk and Fairy Tales, 288. Yeats. Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland, 75.
120 Yeats, Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland, 75. The Irish names for these two creatures are the Clobhair-Ceann and the Fear Dearg.
The fact that Yeats connects leprechauns to these types further highlights the similarity between leprechauns and fairies. These figures are connected in terms of their small sizes, as well as the fact that they do not embody natural entities. They do, however, embody abstract concepts in human life, and the Cluricaun in particular embodies a “household” element that appears commonly in descriptions of fairies. As to shoemaking and crafts, which are noteworthy highlights of being a leprechaun, there is no real evidence of that among these types unless sadism is considered an art form.

Like fairies, leprechauns became a motivator for fear of the unknown, especially when the term “little men” is used for them, as is the case in William Allingham’s poem “The Faeries”. Also shared is the notion that crosses and other holy paraphernalia could ward them off. Apparently, this was a method of ensuring a power hold on Christianity, so that people would be motivated by fear into keeping reminders of their new faith.\textsuperscript{121}

Thomas Keightly also writes about leprechauns in \textit{The Fairy Mythology}, and they are compared to demons and the devil, in the same way that many authors throughout history have done concerning fairies. The riches of a leprechaun, he says, rival that of the devil himself.\textsuperscript{122} Later authors share this sentiment, including Sean Kelly, who compares leprechauns to fallen angels\textsuperscript{123}.

Leprechauns guard treasures and hoards, the same way that giants and dragons do. Unlike giants and most dragons, however, leprechauns have a capacity for being

\textsuperscript{121} Kelly. \textit{Irish Folk and Fairy Tales}, 288, 310.
\textsuperscript{122} Kelly, \textit{Irish Folk and Fairy Tales}, 319.
\textsuperscript{123} Kelly, \textit{Irish Folk and Fairy Tales}, 314.
clever. In a story told by a leprechaun in a folklore volume by Michael Scott, an old leprechaun recounts outsmarting one of the “big folk”. The human threatens him, saying that he will use him as fish bait unless he reveals the location of his gold, and the leprechaun gives in. He reveals a stone among stones that has the gold underneath, and the human marks it with a cross. The human forgot his shovel, and on his way to retrieve it, the leprechaun marks a cross on all the other stones in the vicinity\textsuperscript{124}.

There is an early spirit creature that has a hoard, and giants, leprechauns, and dragons are all related to it. That creature is a soul of a deceased warrior, who guards a treasure that he has captured, been buried with, or both. When awakened or angered, the soul will guard the treasure at any cost. Creatures with treasures or hoards have been this type of spirit at one point in their evolutionary timeline.

Leprechauns make a living by selling shoes, and they add to their treasure by increasing their revenue. Their treasures are often buried and referred to as a “Danish” treasure, so named because these assets were often buried with fallen Viking invaders from the 7\textsuperscript{th} century. They are pictured in 18\textsuperscript{th} century dress, typified by a hat and a belt, both with a large buckle. Despite their appearances as small and charming (something made only more prominent by their image in popular culture), they are not only hardy but also completely capable of vicious deeds, especially through underhanded methods. Like faeries, they have a predilection towards music.

(sometimes because they have been condemned to it), and sometimes are depicted with dark skin.  

Like elves and trolls, leprechauns can have leadership capabilities and civic structure, despite their common label of “solitary fairies”. This is largely due to their characterization in the first known instance of appearance in written literature, The Death of Fergus.  

If the leprechauns are indeed so similar to fairies, then why do they exist as a group separate from them?

The leprechaun is not only a mythological symbol but also a national symbol, one that has graced Ireland’s image and especially in terms of St. Patrick’s Day commercialism. Sean Kelly writes, “A Romantic might hold that the leprechauns represent another…deeper…spirit of Ireland”. What occurs in later mythology is that creatures with separate names, no matter how similar they are to existing creatures in other folklore, will become separate entities and branch off from their original form. Unlike actual life on earth, in which the life dictates taxonomy, in mythology it is the opposite—the names given to a creature will design its evolutionary path, and each name will often have its own. It was mostly by virtue of this principle—as well as William Butler Yeats having popularized this creature—that the leprechaun exists as a recognizable and separate being from the fairy. It is a primeval spirit of Ireland, one that is seasoned and used to being subjugated, but has

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125 Kelly, Irish Folk and Fairy Tales, 288-289, 302. Yeats, Folk and Fairy Tales of Ireland, 75.
126 Kelly, Irish Folk and Fairy Tales, 290-293.
127 Kelly, Irish Folk and Fairy Tales, p. 288. Kelly suggests that they were “conquered” at one point by the Sidhe, and that they were an ancient race of Ireland
all of the aspects of a fairy in addition to being skillful in craftsmanship and guardianship.

**WATER SPIRITS, SELKIES, MERPEOPLE, AND OTHER AQUATIC CREATURES**

Many aquatic creatures in European Mythology, such as water spirits, water nymphs, mermen, selkies, and nixes, likely have a common ancestor in “sea-dead.” Prominent in Icelandic culture, the “sea-dead” are the fallen sailors, those who have drowned at sea, and who have returned as revenants. This marked the first fusion of the human and the aquatic—a human who had taken up a new life in the deep. This “sea-dead” also possesses a spiritual component in being a revenant, as well as having a human component, so it enabled later forms that became spiritual (such as water spirits), as well as creatures in the flesh (such as mermen).

Many stories about water spirits are told not in Norse Mythology but in Baltic mythology, which possesses a similarity in the same way that Greek and Etruscan myths are related. Mythographers have collected tales about water sprites, told by people in Finland, Estonia, and the Faroe Islands. Collectively, the Baltic/Norse iteration of water sprites is known as “nixes”, which is from the Estonian Näkk, that refers to an evil water spirit. Nixes tend to embody the dangerous component of

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128 Patricia Lysaght, Seamus Ó Cathain, and Daithi Ó hÓgáin, editors, *Islands and Water Dwellers: Proceedings of the Celtic-Nordic-Baltic Folklore Symposium Held at the University College Dublin, 16-19 June 1996* (Dublin, Department of Irish Folklore; DBA Publisher, 1999) 1.

129 Lysaght, Cathain, and Ó hÓgáin, *Islands and Water Dwellers*, p. 338.
water, indicating fears of being suddenly drowned, or perhaps victimized by a shark or other dangerous aquatic creature.

The Endtbacken family in Finland is from a Swedish-speaking area of the country\textsuperscript{130}. A story they share is about the sighting of a water-nymph on an island on Finnsjö Lake. She appears in the form of floating black undergarments: “Just take a look”, the narrator says, “the whole island on this side of the lake was full of clothes. A lot of clothes, fluttering there, women’s clothes, just black female undergarments. All of them black”. The second sighting occurred on a second trip shortly afterwards, and there also appeared skirts, scarves, and shawls. “I said”, tells the narrator, “how the water nymph has washed her clothes”. As of 1996, when the conference was given that featured this story, the Endtbacken family was still avoiding the Finnsjö Lake because of these ghostly sightings\textsuperscript{131}.

This story indicates a flavor not like a monster story but rather of a ghost story. When humans encounter giants or other big monsters, a confrontation, usually violent, results. Concerning the types of creatures encountered in this chapter, sighting them causes them either to disappear or, in some cases, to snatch away the victim without any warning. An encounter with a giant, djinni, or troll will mean death to all but the strongest of humans, but an encounter with a nature spirit or something like it does not have to result in victimization (although it can). In fact, viewing creatures such as these (water spirits included) can be a benign gift with no dangerous consequences.

\textsuperscript{130} This is a real-life family, not one invented in a story.
\textsuperscript{131} Lysaght, Cathain, and Ó hÓgáin, \textit{Islands and Water Dwellers}, 82-85.
Another place where stories about nixes are and were commonly told are the Faroe Islands, which are owned by Denmark. The nixes that are featured by the Faroese have a singular goal: drag people into a lake in order to drown them. Luckily, according to the writings of Christian Høj, they can be repelled by a sign of the cross (evil mermen also have this vulnerability). Faroese nixes possess a semblance to the “kelpie” from Celtic mythology. They are comparable in size to a dog, and anyone who touches one is stuck, whereupon the nix will go into the lake and drown anyone unfortunate enough to have made contact with it. Like spirits in many other cultures, it can shape-shift, and it always appears next to bodies of water, whether they be freshwater or saltwater. Young females are usually their preferred targets, and when they change shape, it usually is to that of a horse or other herbivore\textsuperscript{132}.

Similar to the Nix is the Näkk in Estonian culture, which is no doubt related to it. A Näkk is evil by definition. There are other water spirits, however, even good ones—and these “good spirits” are guardians of fish: “Kalayezä” (fish fathers) Kalaima (Fish mothers), “Kalaperemees” (fish masters) and “Kalakuningas” (fish-kings). Together, these spirits are collectively known as “vee-vaïm”, and all have the capability of drowning people. Like Faroese nixes, they can shapeshift, but unlike them, the Estonian spirits prefer human forms. A Näkk will drown someone not by luring him to touch it but by attacking when they are noticed. Sometimes, they will just jump into the water when they see an observer, and at other times, resort to physical violence\textsuperscript{133}.

\textsuperscript{132} Lysaght, Cathain, and Ó hÓgáin, \textit{Islands and Water Dwellers}, 89-92
\textsuperscript{133} Lysaght, Cathain, and Ó hÓgáin, \textit{Islands and Water Dwellers}, 387-389
Like many creatures in the spirit world, these creatures are divided between good and evil. There are some water spirits that are capable of doing good deeds, and of bringing forth the gifts of water. Others will unleash their own harmful power.

As is typical with many of the species discussed in this work, the water spirits evolved into creatures closer to flesh—in this case, mermen and selkies. Both of these creatures retained a touch of their spiritual nature, but by necessity they became more human as a result of this all-too-typical transformation. However, the water spirits lived on, and tales are still told about “nixes”—so while they did change into creatures closer to the animal, they did not die out completely.

Between selkies and mermaids (also known as mermen or merpeople), the selkies (or seal-folk) occupy a more spiritual role, one that suits aspects of the “sea-dead” more than mermaids. While mermaids tend to occupy many of the same elemental status as the water spirits discussed above, selkies do not embody water to the same degree that mermaids do. Despite this, selkies and mermaids often feature many overlaps on the mythological landscape of the British Isles—some even believe selkies to be the guardians of mermaids. Most of the stories about selkies have been collected in the Orkneys and the Shetlands, islands in modern-day Scotland. More often than not, they can assume human form on land, and revert to being a seal in the water.

In British and Celtic mythology, the seal has special importance as an animal close to the human. Some mythographers afford the seal the title of “people of the sea”. Balor, a villainous figure in Celtic mythology, attempts to kill his heir\textsuperscript{134} who is

\textsuperscript{134} This happens when his daughter Eithne becomes seduced by a local champion.
predicted to overthrow him. Trying to protect him, his parents swapped him with many other children—and Balor threw all of them into the sea, in an attempt to ensure his heir’s death. Those that drowned, according to legend, became the ancestors of the seals—and the reason that seals have the faces of baby humans.\footnote{Frank Delaney, \textit{Legends of the Celts}, (Suffolk, United Kingdom; St. Edmundsbury Press, Hodder and Stoughton, 1989) 7.}

There are mythographers, such as David MacRitchie, who believe that the idea of seal-folk originated due to the early contact of Finnish and Celtic peoples. These people from Scandinavia appeared to have boats made of animal hide, as well as garments of animal hides that they could remove. According to MacRitchie, that image created the notion of a seal that could change to human form—similar to a person wearing an animal skin, and then taking it off.\footnote{Louis Spence, \textit{The Minor Traditions of British Mythology}, (New York, Arno Press, 1979) 55.}

However, while there have been theories of this sort concerning other creatures of almost every type, there are also ties that bind the selkie to creatures such as the faerie or the elf. While perhaps they could have been impacted in some way by the imagining of foreigners, the core role of the seal-folk is closer to that of other spirit beings.

Like many other mythological species, selkies can mate with humans and bear human children, although sometimes these children can be born with seal characteristics (such as webbed hands and feet). Similar to faeries and nymphs, selkies can be the esteemed ancestors of families. The clans of O’Sullivan, Coneely, O’Flaherty, and MacNamara all have prided themselves in supposed seal-folk.
lineage. Selkies have a very good relationship with humans, as they are akin to spirit beings with no interest in doing harm.

Selkies possess a role that encompasses both flesh and divinity. There are people, especially in Britain, who believe that the selkies are a form of fallen angel—cursed by being forced to dwell in the ocean, but able to take a human shape on land. However, there are many more stories about selkies being the embodied souls of dead loved ones, especially those that died at sea. Because of this, it is possible that a seal hunter could end up killing his own relative.

The mythographer Louis Spence tells two stories. One is of a seal screaming to his hunters when he is about to be killed: “Och, boys! Spare your ould grandfather, Darby O’Dowd!”. In another such story, a fisherman is guided underwater by a mysterious super-human guide. (Note the connection to Thomas the Rhymer’s journey to Fairyland and Homeric journeys to the Underworld). After the journey, the fisherman finds himself transformed into a seal, in a grotto filled with seals. The mysterious guide shows the fisherman a knife, as well as the seal harmed by it. The seal harmed by the fisherman is, in fact, his own grandfather—and after this fact is revealed, the fisherman becomes human, places his hand on the wound (healing it), and from that point onward abjures seal hunting.

These creatures seem to be less connected to embodying the dangers and blessings of water. Instead, the selkies are the projection of the humans into the water, a role that is also occupied in part by mermen. Selkies possess a divinity akin to that of faeries, but are very close to humans because they are, in many instances, humans

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in their own right. The selkies are close to the aforementioned notion of “sea-dead”, although they have been divorced from the image of a revenant and made something animalistic as well as human, because mythology over time, as has been noted throughout this work, turns spirit creatures into races closer to beings of the flesh.

Mermaids, on the other hand, are closer to nixes and other more dangerous water spirits, despite having their time-crafted humanlike bodies. Like Faeries and Elves, it is impossible for a mermaid to be only good or only evil, but can (according to some traditions) possess different names depending on her moral compass. Unlike selkies and nixes, the mermaid has been popularized in many local mythologies, including those of France, Germany, Britain, and Ireland\textsuperscript{139}.

Ellis, who writes Celtic stories to be told to modern and young audiences, differentiates between “mermaids”, who live in freshwater, and “sea-maids”, who live in saltwater. Mermaids, according to Ellis, are benevolent, whereas sea-maids are “another kettle of fish”—contact with them is almost certainly fatal\textsuperscript{140}.

Ellis’ characterization seems to be flouted by many collected stories in which mermaids are perpetrators of drowning and other killings. Perhaps he could be correct in some branches of mythology, but due to the nature of the merman—not known very widely for being hospitable—the mermaid is similarly grouped with it. Mermaids were likely originally freshwater creatures, as their name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon “meer-maegden” (meaning “Lake Maiden”\textsuperscript{141}).

\textsuperscript{139} Spence, \textit{The Minor Traditions of British Mythology}, 56.
\textsuperscript{140} Ellis, \textit{The Chronicles of the Celts}, p. 299.
\textsuperscript{141} Spence, \textit{The Minor Traditions of British Mythology}, 56.
Despite its semblance to the selkie, a mermaid has a very similar goal in terms of its imaginative process: equip a man with what he needs to live in the sea\textsuperscript{142}. They share a role with the water spirits in both their good and bad deeds: representing the dangers and the gifts of aquatic areas and of water.

In the Faroese canon, “mermen” are talked about—whether this species includes females is doubtful. Mermen of this type resemble human beings, but have long fingers, which enable theft of bait and other tricks to be played on a fisher on the surface. Faroese Mermen, like selkies, can live among humans, but unlike them, they can be repelled with a crucifix\textsuperscript{143}. Just as the faeries are capable of doing “things that go bump in the night”, these mermen are creatures whose existence explains the various mishaps that occur at sea. In addition to this, mermen can pull humans underwater and victimize them in the same way mermaids and nixes do.

Mermaids are sometimes seen as a separate race from mermen and merpeople, and at other times, mythographers conflate the female of the species with the male.

They also share common ground with selkies in the respect that marrying into the human race is a possibility. In fact, the plot of “The Little Mermaid” is based on this premise—one that is further made believable by a mermaid’s humanoid quality. This is a ground very clearly shared with the nymphs of Classical Antiquity\textsuperscript{144}.

Like many types of water spirits, mermaids are equipped with means to grab attention. Because they are human, they can be endowed with human beauty, which makes the attraction all the more inevitable. Not surprisingly, mermaids are renowned

\textsuperscript{142} Spence, \textit{The Minor Traditions of British Mythology}, 56.
\textsuperscript{143} Lysaght, Cathain, and Ó hÓgáin, \textit{Islands and Water Dwellers}, 93-94
\textsuperscript{144} Westwood, \textit{Albion}, 248.
for a beauty that tends to surpass that of human females. In addition to their beauty, they are also endowed with a singing voice that enables them to speak in verse. These traits make them good subjects of ballads and romances, which popularized the mermaid even more than ordinary oral tales had done¹⁴⁵. However, this type of mermaid is capable of being replaced with a more vicious type, closer to a hag than anything a human would want to mate with. A tale recorded from Perthshire involves a “ferocious mermaid”—and oddly enough, her favorite targets, as related by the storyteller, are women¹⁴⁶—not unlike the nixes of Estonian belief.

Malevolent mermaids could have been seen not only as the dangerous aspect of water, but a personified aspect of polluted water as well. There is a pool in Staffordshire that is known as “the Mermaid’s Pool”. This pool is stagnant, and it became the topic of much local folklore—predominantly about a mermaid pulling unsuspecting travelers underwater¹⁴⁷.

Again, the mermaid has a noteworthy tie to sea-dead that is capable of being emphasized in some stories. One tale from Orford Castle features an aquatic wild man being fished out of the sea by humans. He cannot talk, but he will eat anything, especially raw fish. After two months, he breaks the nets used to constrain him. Jennifer Westwood, the redactor of the story, writes that “they [the humans] could not decide if he were a man or fish, or an evil spirit which possessed the body of a drowned sailor¹⁴⁸”.

¹⁴⁵ Westwood, Albion, 54, 389.
¹⁴⁶ Westwood, Albion, 410-411.
¹⁴⁷ Westwood, Albion, 235.
¹⁴⁸ Westwood, Albion, 154.
In Classical mythology, however, the Icelandic notion of “sea-dead” does not exist, in either its direct form or its evolving forms, with as much force as it does in Northern Europe. The Greco-Roman Canon does feature Nymphs (which have a separate portion) as well as Nereids (which will be discussed here), both of which have elemental connections to water. Because the nymphs existed primarily as land creatures prior to taking aquatic forms under the sea, they possess no connection to sea-dead.

The Nereids should be viewed as a sub-category of Nymph. Whereas the nymphs can rule over water sources above land like springs and rivers (such as the ones discussed above), the Nereids have an underwater dominion, and embody ocean territory. Nereids are the fifty daughters of Nereus and Doris, a god of the sun and a daughter of Oceanus respectively (there are some sources that list the Nereids as numbering one hundred, although this list is incomplete). Their home is at the bottom of the sea, in the palace of their father Nereus. They also reflect embodiments of waves and act as companions to sea creatures such as dolphins and tritons. It is not uncommon for them to surface in the world above. In fact, there are some mythographers who describe nereids as kidnapping humans in the same way that mermaids do, especially for the purpose of betrothal.

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150 Grimal, *Dictionnaire La Mythologie Grecque et Romaine*, 314.
151 Vernant, *The Universe, the Gods, and Mortals*, 199. For a full list of the fifty, see Grimal, *Dictionnaire La Mythologie Grecque et Romaine*, 314. This list of Nereids was compiled from four distinct complementary primary resource documents.
They do exactly that in many myths in which they appear as background players. They cry with Thetis over the death of Achilles, which is likely their most well-known appearance—as well as direct Heracles to the road of the Hesparides, where incidentally some fellow nymphs dwell\textsuperscript{153}.

Nereids live on golden thrones afforded to them by their father, and spend their time running, weaving, and singing\textsuperscript{154}. There are many other creatures in this chapter that specialize in crafts—both of physical manifestation (like dwarven crafts) and of singing (such as mermaids and faeries). It is likely that these are vestiges from their divine being—as it is common for many gods to be associated with a craft. It is also possible that such activities mirror human beings and their artistic pursuits, but reflected optimally.

They do not have much direct interaction with humans, either for good or for evil, and tend to act as token characters with modest appearances. It is also likely that this group of nymphs, similar to the centaurs, was popularized separately, primarily by means of visual artwork that afforded them an appearance. However, because they are connected to the greater network of nymphs, they are to be afforded their true origins along with them—as nature spirits.

\textsuperscript{153} Grimal, \textit{Dictionnaire La Mythologie Grecque et Romaine}, 314.
\textsuperscript{154} Grimal, \textit{Dictionnaire La Mythologie Grecque et Romaine}, p. 314.
DWARVES

While humans and gods alike despise the giants, with dwarves\textsuperscript{155} it is quite the opposite: they are favored by both humans and gods, but primarily for their collective work ethic. The image of mining dwarves is a core aspect of their depiction throughout Northern Mythology, and was drawn upon not just by cultural phenomena such as “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves”, but also by poets such as Longfellow:

\begin{quote}
``t was a goodly sight to see
The dwarfs, with their aprons on
a-hammering and smelting busily
Pure gold from the rough brown stone”
\end{quote}

-“The Dwarves”\textsuperscript{156}

But it was not always that way, as far as the world of myth was concerned. Once in the distant past, it became known to the first gods that dwarves existed in Midgard. Shortly after Ymir the Frost Giant died, the dwarves sprang out of his rotted flesh and propagated chaotically like maggots. They were not very well endowed, nor were they intelligent. As to Ymir’s corpse, it soon became the known world, much in the respect that Tiamat’s body did in the “Enuma Elish”, the Babylonian creation

\textsuperscript{155} Throughout the work, the “dwarves” refer exclusively to a mythological species, as opposed to a designation of an abnormally short human.

\textsuperscript{156} Mackenzie, German Myths and Legends, 41.
epic. In a subsequent counsel the gods agreed to give the dwarves a human visage, but to make them dark-skinned as homage to their homeland beneath the earth\textsuperscript{157}.

After the race of dwarves was created, one of their first tasks, which according to the mythographer D.F. Kaufmann had no explicit patron, was to create the human race. They made the forms of men in their subterranean home in many different mediums. Two of these men were made of wood, and they were found nonchalantly on the ground by three gods. One of these gods was Odin, and the rest is history\textsuperscript{158}.

An easy way to earn favor for anyone is to work for him, and the dwarves collectively proved themselves hardy workers when commissioned by the gods. Tyr wanted them to make a fetter from abstract elements: the sound of a cat’s footstep, the beard of a woman, the sinews of a bear, the breath of a fish, and the spit of a bird\textsuperscript{159}. The Grimnismal tells how the dwarven house of Ivaldi built Freyr’s ship, Skithblatthnir. This ship had the ability to carry the entire pantheon and always had a wind following it. The most impressive element, however, was the possibility that it was portable—it could be folded up so as to fit in a purse\textsuperscript{160}. Coupled with fierce loyalty, shared enemies with the gods (namely the giants), and the golden riches that the dwarves were well known for, there was much in them for the gods to admire\textsuperscript{161}.

The dwarves have an uneasy relationship with giants. On one level, this is odd because some scholars believe that giants and dwarves were originally one category of spirit that became humanized and split apart into two sets of beings, one small and

\textsuperscript{157} Mackenzie, \textit{German Myths and Legends}, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{158} Kaufmann, \textit{Northern Mythology}, 92-93.
\textsuperscript{159} O’Donague, \textit{From Asgard to Valhalla}, 78-79.
\textsuperscript{161} Page, \textit{Norse Myths}, 68.
one large. According to this view, dwarves were originally only spirits before they became the hard-working humanoids recognized today. Despite their status as spirits, which could have been shared by the earliest proto-giants as well, they were never actually worshipped but only revered in stories and myths. This is because they were seen as guardians of treasure, rather than givers of treasure.

In the Northern mythology now studied and taught, giants and dwarves have an intense rivalry. One result of this is that the giants build Valhalla, for the sole purpose of receiving the Nibelung treasure as payment from the gods for this task. In that way, the giants can best the dwarves at what they do best—pleasing the gods by means of craftsmanship. But on the dwarven side of things, perhaps the most noteworthy incident concerning this rivalry is the fact that two murderous dwarves kill the giant Kvasir, and from his blood create the brew of poetry and scholarship.

Given the challenges faced by each other and the gods stuck in the middle, dwarves and giants stand as two shaky pillars. In between them stands the ultimate species of all, the one who is bound very little by such petty fights and is motivated significantly less by a desire to please the gods. That specimen is man.

The dwarf in modern culture is best exemplified by the race of dwarves in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, which is in its own right a monumental work that alters modern mythology, and in a respect, even creates it. The “charter” of Middle-Earth’s dwarf culture is found in the seven rings of power given to the dwarves. They dictate the traits possessed by all dwarves, serving “to inflame their hearts with a

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164 O’Donague, *From Asgard to Valhalla*, 134.
greed of gold and precious things” and the possibility to be “filled with wrath and desire for vengeance on all who deprived them.  

Because of this irascible behavior and greed, other races of Middle-Earth, such as men, elves, and hobbits, are very much vexed by dwarves’ presence. In *The Hobbit*, when a band of dwarves appears as a readily violent treasure-hunting bunch, Bilbo finds them acutely annoying. In comparison to other races’ dealings with dwarves, being merely “annoyed” by them is benign. Dwarves have an unmatched capacity for quarreling, and are characterized by “possessiveness,” a trait that Tolkien never views positively. The dwarves in Tolkien are quite isolated, and members of other races are reluctant to engage with them. They are very attuned to the value of money, and endow high importance to all wealth. Furthermore, a dwarf robbed of his possessions will stop at virtually nothing for recovery of his own. The greed of a dwarf can be illustrated by the fact that Thorin, the dwarf leader in *The Hobbit*, was reluctant to share Smaug’s hoard with his comrades. The only thing that saved Thorin from a confrontation with the elves and men of Long Lake was an army of orcs, which pressured the would-be enemies into coalition.

In Northern Mythology, the gods have a very pronounced presence, and the dwarves are often diligent workers who can be pressed into the service of gods. Tolkien’s dwarves have many of the same characteristics of the dwarves of Norse mythology, but there are no gods to serve, and humans are put on a very similar level to dwarves in terms of anthropological function, (as opposed to the Norse mythological dynamic in which dwarves are significantly less human and a lot

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166 Kocher, *Master of Middle-Earth*, 58.
smaller). Without gods or humans to serve, the dwarves of Tolkien keep their obsession with gold and with their work ethic, and become introverted in terms of these goals. The dwarves in Tolkien in many respects are the same as the ones described above, but having a world without gods actively involved in mortal affairs highlights the contrast between the dwarves of Tolkien and the dwarves of older myths.

However, according to Paul Kocher, there is another reason, built into human psychology (or more accurately, mortal psychology) that dwarves behave in this manner. Durin, the first king of the dwarves and the ancestor of the race, was born without a mate. He is the ideal dwarf, a beacon of hope throughout dwarvish history and myth, and Gimli cites a ballad in which the high point of Dwarf civilization will occur when Durin is resurrected.\footnote{Kocher, \textit{Master of Middle-Earth}, 103.}

Because Durin was born without a partner, one third of dwarves are female, and this leads to not only a heightened difficulty in reproduction but also plenty of male dwarves who end up quite frustrated with their lot. There are even many female dwarves who choose not to marry—but those dwarves who acquire wives keep them for life. Kocher says the following, and some readers of Tolkien, including some friends of the author, have questioned this point:

The sexual imbalance is the probable cause…of the intense secretiveness (of the dwarves). They have a language of their own which they guard jealously that ‘few of other race have succeeded in learning it’…each
dwarf...has his own ‘secret and inner’ name, his ‘true’ name, never revealed to anyone of alien race. Not even on their tombs do they inscribe them.\textsuperscript{169}

Kocher goes on to explain that possessiveness and love of beautiful things are both results of dwarven sexual frustration, and that this energy is often channeled into master craftsmanship. Many males choose, on account of the difficulty of acquiring a mate, to devote their lives to crafts instead\textsuperscript{170}.

This view of Tolkien’s dwarves, grounding the lives and dispositions of non-human races in the realm of the human rather than in the realm of the divine, and explaining their behaviors in terms of human emotions, reflects the humanization of creatures that occurs over time. Myths were formed by the human experience, and the human experience—all the more powerful in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century—transforms the myths over again, and Dwarves are particularly affected by this trend.

\textit{CONCLUSION}

The creatures in this chapter became literally fleshed out over the course of their existence. The elves turned from the “hidden folk” of nature to a functional culture of human proportions. The dwarves underwent a similar development. The transformation from water spirits into merfolk is important to note, as is the formation of tree-like creatures such as the ents in comparison to wood spirits. Faeries turned from the unseen creatures into something that many fairy cults attempted to describe

\textsuperscript{169}Kocher, \textit{Master of Middle-Earth}, 104-105.
\textsuperscript{170}Kocher, \textit{Master of Middle-Earth}, 103-105.
outright. The issues addressed by the myths began evolving from the ineffable to the problems and concerns of humanity. Spirits are never very easy to imagine, but humans imagining and re-imagining the human have re-invented these spirits—quite literally—on their own terms.
CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION

Mythological creatures are based on the world around the humans who invent them. If the world around them is brutish and destructive, then brutish and destructive species will enter their stories. The first chapter dealt with some creatures that had capacities for evil because they were fallen or marked for immorality. This chapter also details destructive creatures, but ones that also qualify as forces of nature. The creatures in this chapter represent the most dangerous aspects of nature, such as fire, ice, plague, famine, and darkness.

Furthermore, these creatures also encompass the “enemy of the divine” role that is also shared by many of the creatures in the first chapter, as well as the “natural forces” role shared by many of those in the second chapter.

These creatures with their naturally dangerous aspects also tend to fall into the category of chthonic beings, or creatures of (or from) the underworld. The message from this connection is clear: the souls of the dead can turn into dangerous entities, especially after being wronged, and inflict revenge upon the world of the living in the form of nature’s wrath.
Dragons and Dragonslayers

Dragons are serpentine creatures, and it is likely that there is a connection—direct or indirect—to the serpent Leviathan from the Book of Job. Functionally, the dragon is a scourge. It exists solely not only to kill, but to ravage and to drain. Wherever dragons are, fecundity is also found wanting, and danger is always present when there is a dragon even nearby. Dragons survived very well in the face of Christianity, particularly because they were associated with epithets such as “descendants of Cain”, “God’s adversaries” or “Chthonic Beings”.171 Because dragons occupy an anti-divine role, similar to that of giants in Norse mythology, mythographers believe that their existence and stories about them are focused not on their existence, but rather on their deaths.172

Like centaurs, dragons have also existed prominently in artwork throughout the ages. As to whether they originated from artwork cannot be known for certain, but depictions of dragons were certainly fundamental to their prominence in mythological imagination. Dragons appeared on helmets, armor, and emblems, and these were recognized symbols of destructive potential. It is implied, particularly, that the wearer

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172 Polomé, Old Norse Literature and Mythology, 136.
of a dragon symbol is in fact a dragonslayer, a special class of human upon whom extraordinary favor and strength have been endowed\textsuperscript{173}.

It is virtually impossible to study the lore of dragons in a scholarly manner without also studying dragonslayer stories. Because dragons are very dangerous, almost ineffable beings that are capable of killing entire communities of humans, they can be realized to the fullest degree only in comparison to those who can conquer them\textsuperscript{174}.

The dragonslayer tradition has existed throughout the Indo-European world, but most dragonslayer stories that are popular now are those with Scandinavian origins. Like royal blood, one’s capacity for slaying a dragon is a hereditary trait, and father-son pairs are realized in dragonslayer stories. There are two reasons that could account for this. First, it is common for dragon slayers to drink the blood and eat the heart of a dragon, something which endows godly strength upon anyone who does so. In one Icelandic tale, there is an instance of a dragonslayer who can understand the language of birds as a result of having partaken of dragon blood and heart. Second, dragonslayers, especially in Northern European traditions, often died by being crushed to death by the corpse of the dragons they slay, likely motivating a descendant to avenge a father\textsuperscript{175}.

The Russian scholars Ivanov and Toporov, who studied Indo-European tradition as a whole, say that five elements exist in dragonslayer stories as they have been told in Europe and in Southern Asia:

\textsuperscript{173} Polomé, \textit{Old Norse Literature and Mythology}, 136, 192.
\textsuperscript{174} Sautman, Conchoado, and de Scipio, \textit{Telling Tales}, 128.
\textsuperscript{175} Stefán Einarsson, \textit{A History of Icelandic Literature}, 33, 36. Sautman, Conchoado, and de Scipio, \textit{Telling Tales}, 123, 128.
1. The dragonslayer, or “thundergod”, is associated with heights, such as the sky or a mountain.

2. The dragon, or “serpent”, is associated with depths.

3. The dragon steals symbols of fertility, such as cattle or women, and hides them in a rock or something similar. The dragonslayer breaks the rock and frees them.

4. The dragon hides in living beings or underground, and undergoes a series of transformations before hiding under a tree or a rock. It is at this point that the dragonslayer kills him.

5. After victory, waters are released, usually in the form of rain.

Unlike many other aspects of Northern Mythology that were downsized by Christianity, the dragonslayer tradition remains modestly alive. A reason for this was the popularity of Beowulf, largely seen as a Christianized version of Thor. Beowulf has many of the same interests as Thor—seeking to eliminate forces of entropy, destruction, and death for the sake of saving humanity. Unlike Thor, Beowulf is no god but simply a gifted human—a change that also indicates the general “rise of humanity” trend in mythology that occurs throughout time.

The dragon in Beowulf’s story has also been instrumental in shaping as well as further popularizing the dragon, and the same holds true in the 20th century for

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176 Sautman, Conchado, and de Scipio, *Telling Tales*, 128. This tradition has many branches to it, not all of which can be studied in depth here.

Smaug, the dragon in Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*. It is usually a singular story or set of stories that is capable of embedding an image of a creature in popular culture, as is the case with the Cyclopes and the Centaurs as well as with European dragons. The dragon that Beowulf encounters breathes fire, and also has a “hoard” which it guards ferociously. If it notices that part of the hoard is missing, it reacts violently. In Beowulf’s case, the dragon notes that some of its hoard has disappeared and scourges the local area, even immolating Beowulf’s royal home. Unsurprisingly, the dragon in Beowulf is a nocturnal creature—leaving its home at night to wreak havoc while guarding its hoard during the daylight hours\(^\text{178}\).

The idea of a dragon’s hoard was certainly solidified and made popular by the story of Beowulf and the dragon, but the dragon is certainly not the only creature to possessively guard a treasure. Giants in some mythological traditions also guard a treasure, and leprechauns in Irish folklore also have hoards. There is certainly a link between them, and that is the shared ancestor of the spirit of a warrior buried with a treasure. This spirit will guard his hoard, and do harm to anyone who dares to disturb it. With these three creatures (giants, leprechauns, and dragons), there is a noteworthy connection, particularly to the gold of Norse warriors\(^\text{179}\). The dragon might have a root in the vengeful spirit of a warrior wronged by having his treasure stolen, and this is made even more believable by the notion that there are instances of humans who can change into dragons (and back again) in mythologies of Northern Europe\(^\text{180}\).

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\(^{178}\) Polomé, *Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, 154.

\(^{179}\) Remember that in the second chapter, a leprechaun’s gold is referred to as a “Danish” treasure.

In contrast to the dragon in Beowulf, there is Tolkien’s token dragon, Smaug. Other dragons exist in Tolkien’s Middle-Earth, and their existence is noted in many ballads from that world, but Smaug is the only one that makes a true appearance. There are indications of the dragonslayer myth as typified above in Tolkien, such as the presence of a hoard as well as the tale of Smaug laying waste to an entire town. However, the whole work smacks of comedic routines with light-hearted dialogue and narration, despite the flagrant mass destruction that occurs in the Battle of the Five Armies following Smaug’s death. In fact, many of the characters in that setting refuse to believe in Smaug’s existence, yet alone be frightened by him.\footnote{Kocher, \textit{Master of Middle-Earth}, 26, 30, 33, 127, 222}

In \textit{The Hobbit}, the dragonslayer is not a single figure, but rather a group of protagonists. Smaug’s treasure does consist of riches gathered by Thorin’s ancestors, but also treasures belonging to Bard the Bowman (who ends up killing Smaug in the end.).\footnote{Kocher, \textit{Master of Middle-Earth}, 23. It should also be noted that Smaug possesses the same type of greed that is echoes in Tolkien’s dwarvish race. (See Kocher, p. 231, in which Tolkien describes Smaug’s rage as something that is “only seen when rich folk…suddenly lose something that they have long had but never before used or wanted.”)} The primary change that occurs in the dragonslayer myth is that there is no longer a direct parallelism between the dragon and the dragonslayer. Instead, there is one dragon with \textit{multiple} opponents, despite the fact that they are allied powers. The dragonslayer was a divinely chosen individual, often echoing many aspects of Thor’s being. That dragonslayer, in \textit{The Hobbit}, is replaced with not one hero but many. These many mortals have no divine chosenness or special essence but are instead quite normal, further ushering in the influence and power of the human—and particularly, the ordinary human—into mythological works.
As far as the elemental aspects were concerned, however, there is greater adherence to the Indo-European dragonslayer myth in *The Hobbit*. While Smaug does not explicitly steal anything that represents fecundity, his hiding place is rock-like, and when he dies, the valley is fertile again.\(^{183}\)

In stark contrast to Smaug there is Nidhogg, the dragon of darkness and all things evil in the Norse canon, told of in oral poetry and by subsequent generations of storytellers. Most likely older than many dragonslayer stories, Nidhogg has no designated killer, but instead is far closer to a force of nature than many dragons. Like them, Nidhogg is portrayed as a serpent or, at the very least, a serpentine creature. He is one of three creatures that exists on the exterior of Yggdrasil, or the World Tree. Of those three creatures—the other being a serpent (a symbol of fecundity) and the eagle (a spirit of aspiration, and Nidhogg’s primary provocateur), Nidhogg represents the closest thing to “evil”.\(^{184}\)

Nidhogg is very clearly similar to an animal. He has a vast reptile brood that cannot be counted, and is described by many mythographers as the ugliest being in existence. Nidhogg’s task is to reside underneath the roots of Yggdrasil and gnaw away at them (his children assist him in this task). All the while, the squirrel Ratatosk is the messenger between the eagle and Nidhogg, and enables them to exchange insults (and worse). Nidhogg represents disorder and destruction, all hell waiting to

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\(^{183}\) Kocher, *Master of Middle-Earth*, 127.

\(^{184}\) Lorena Laura Stookey, *Thematic Guide to World Mythology*, (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 2004) 207. It is important to note that, despite the fact that the Nidhogg is sometimes described by some as a serpent, there should be no confusion between him and the “good serpent” described in this sentence.
break loose. Some consider him the incarnation and living threat of Ragnarok, the unspeakable times in which the gods and humans die in flame\textsuperscript{185}.

Dragons have a rich history that fuses many concepts. On one hand, there is the dragon’s hoard that has roots in fallen warrior spirits guarding their treasures. On the other, there is the aspect of the scourge and unspeakable destruction, which is embodied by characters such as Nidhogg, and, to a lesser degree Smaug and Beowulf’s dragon. When these dragons are compared, Nidhogg being the oldest, it is clear that the famous dragons have lost power over time. Nidhogg is the harbinger of the end times, Beowulf’s dragon is a formidable danger, and Smaug is a comic figure that is intimidating but weak when compared to earlier dragons.

As indicated, the serpentine aspect of the dragon probably has its roots in the serpent Leviathan or something similar to it. One thing is certain about the dragon’s existence: it is a godlike being with godlike powers, and these powers are capable of destroying humanity and its sustenance. That is something with which worshipped gods would prefer not to be associated, especially in Norse culture, where the gods are the guardians of humanity.

\textit{IFRITS}

Ifrits are a type of djinn, and not a separate species. They comprise an elite faction within the race of djinn, hence their title “the ifrit of the djinn”. Their role is

usually evil, but not always. Like dragons, ifrits are powerful and rebellious chthonic beings (which not all djinn are). The word “ifrit”, some believe, formerly applied to all harmful beings of the underworld in Arab mythology. As time went on, “ifrit” referred to a species in its own right, rather than a group of distinct species—something that also happened with the evolution of faeries in Northern Europe. In English language works, especially modern works, the ifrit has been described as a “devilish” creature, and often compared to (or classed as) an imp.

Ifrits, like other djinn, have a significantly human aspect to their society. They have a culture that parallels that of Arab tribal life, complete with kings and clans. They can be male (ifrit) or female (ifritah), and can marry and love humans the same way that all djinn can. However, the behavior of an ifrit, when compared to that of a djinni, is significantly more destructive, less humanlike, and less balanced—almost psychopathic.

Ordinary weapons cannot harm an ifrit, but they can be killed or even pressed into the service of humans by magic—and this holds true for all djinn. Ifrits are

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186 Students’ Britannica India: Volumes 1-5 (New Delhi, India, Encyclopaedia Britannica—India; Private Limited, 2000) 5. There are many different ways of spelling “ifrit” in the English language. I will not list the plethora of spellings here.


creatures associated with smoke and they have wings. Depictions of ifrits generally show them colored red or orange, especially in modern culture\textsuperscript{189}.

The Muslim scholar Al-Jahiz offers the following system to classify some sub-categories of jinn, one of which is the ifrit: The shaytan is a renegade jinn. The marid is a jinn of significant strength, one that can handle tasks that the vast majority of djinn cannot. The Ifrit is even stronger than the marid, making him effectively the strongest and most dangerous of his kind\textsuperscript{190}.

In some Arab and Muslim subcultures, however, there is the equation of the ifrit with an abstract aspect of the soul. El-Aswad, a mythographer who transcribes folk beliefs of Egypt, says, “it is worth noting that people metaphorically associate a person’s bad emotional temper with that of the Ifrit”. The ifrit, according to El-Aswad’s view, is not just a creature in its own right, but an angry aspect within the human that is tied to the soul and can be separated from it after death\textsuperscript{191}.

According to El-Aswad, an ifrit exists within all humans. People who die naturally do not have a “dangerous and active” Ifrit, but those who die unnatural deaths—such as being killed by another human—will have ifrits very capable of doing harm. The ifrit will frequent the cemetery where his formerly live counterpart is buried, as well as the areas where his or her possessor used to visit—especially if he or she was murdered. Furthermore, according to El-Aswad, “other perspectives

\textsuperscript{189} Students Britannica India Volumes 1-5, 5
\textsuperscript{190} Vuckovic, \textit{Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns}, 36.
\textsuperscript{191} El-Aswad, \textit{Religion and Folk Cosmology}, 103.
suggest that the Ifrit is the frustrated double (qarin) whose image is identical to the victim at the moment of death.”

From this description, it is clear that the ifrit is a chthonic being, and is interested in harming humans for the sake of revenge. It is a blood avenger, and the most powerful semi-divine fighter in Islamic tradition. The dragon also is a wronged, dangerous chthonic being, and the ifrit is related by some stretch to the dragon—something that becomes more believable when the “vengeful spirit” archetype is seen in both creatures.

As far as the Qu’ran is concerned, the ifrit is mentioned only once, in reference to King Solomon, who dispatches an ifrit to retrieve the throne of the Queen of Sheba. Solomon has supernatural powers, especially in regards to the djinn. As a result, Muhammad’s divine power in later texts needs to match that of Solomon, if not exceed it. While there is only one explicit reference to an ifrit in the Qu’ran, later mystics, as well as the Hadith, have ensured that legends about Muhammad and the ifrits became well publicized.

Various texts give a description of the ifrit alongside all other divine creatures in Islam, with a guide for the human guest (Gabriel and Muhammad respectively)—a plot similar to the Book of Enoch. They indicate Muhammad’s mastery over all elements of the divine, and ensure that even the most dangerous creature can be under his control.

192 El Aswad, Religion and Folk Cosmology, 103. The ifrit mentioned in this quote would probably be akin to a vengeful ghost with the visage of his or her mortal self.
194 Vuckovic, Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns, 36.
195 Vuckovic, Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns, 35.
In such texts, Muhammad has a fairly benevolent and very playful ifrit torchbearer. This ifrit enjoys hiding from view, even from the Prophet. Despite this, the ifrit as a species has retained its malevolent and rebellious status. According to Imam Malik’s *Al-Muwatta*, written in the 7th-8th century, The Angel Gabriel (Jibril) gives Muhammad a formula to ward off the harmful powers of the ifrit, or the “evil djinni”, which seeks him out while holding a fiery torch. The ifrit in such texts is very often depicted with a torch, in keeping with his elemental alignment to fire and smoke.

Ifrits, like djinn, encompass fusion of many abstract and human concepts. They combine elements from chthonic powers, human anger, and elemental creatures of fire. Above all, however, it is clear that the ifrit is a spirit creature with a significantly human aspect as well as originating from a significantly human source.

**NOTE ON FIRE AND FROST GIANTS**

The word “Jotun”, which first appeared in the first chapter to describe a giant, has been used to describe other specific members of the Jotun race that are affiliated with fire and with frost. Oddly enough, some members of one race can be written about in other sources as belonging to another giant caste. For example, Geirrod, who will be described below in the section on fire giants in Northern Mythology, has also been described by some sources as a Frost Giant, on account of translators taking liberty with the word “Jotun”.

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What exactly separates the fire and the frost giants from other types will be demonstrated. However, these giants should not be seen as a separate race from the giants described earlier, but rather a sub-category thereof.

Fire and ice are particularly relevant to Norse culture because the myths are most often told in Iceland, which is a volcanic, cold island. The combination of fire and ice enabled the human invention of creatures that embodied these elements, the fire giants and the frost giants\textsuperscript{197}.

\textit{FIRE GIANTS}

Fire giants are rarely told about or drawn, even in many modern texts. While modern depictions of them in fantasy sourcebooks or video games depict them as flaming humanoid giants, it is unlikely that the fire giants as Norsemen understood them were actually modeled that way. Instead, they were closer to the Jotnarr, or the greater group of giants to which they belonged, as were the frost giants, which will be described below. As a result, they were probably imagined not as flaming humans, but rather humans that had the capacity for creating fire. Fire giants do not only rule over fire, however, but are also associated with earthquakes and optical illusions\textsuperscript{198}.

The fire giants are not often depicted or imagined as a collective, though. As a group, they are associated with evil and believed to live underground\(^{199}\). Instead, there are certain powerful individuals of the species that have come to define a fire giant. There are few of them, and the role of the fire giants is an elite one in the greater scope of the world of giants, a world that is generally defined by collective opposition to the Norse Pantheon. Symbols of fire and the fire giants are the red cock, which represents rage and destruction, as well as the “Skaldic Mead”, the drink of poetry and scholarship, which, according to some sources, was extracted from the blood of a fire giant\(^{200}\).

There is a noticeable similarity between some fire giants and the Cyclopes as they are described in Hesiod, and it is highlighted because of a shared connection to volcanoes. One particularly popular fire giant is Geirrod, who lives underground and is associated with volcanic activity\(^{201}\). His name in Icelandic could mean the equivalent of “talented with a spear”, although there are many arguments as to what the name actually signifies or means. Geirrod, much like the Cyclopes, has a smith-like role in a subterranean dwelling, although not necessarily inside a specific volcano, as the Cyclopes are. Stories about him do exist, and in one of these he seizes a traveler and tortures him by placing him between two fires for eight consecutive nights. In another story, probably more well-known, Gerroid throws a piece of red-hot iron at Thor when he comes to visit him in his divine kingdom. Thor, always

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\(^{199}\) The most noteworthy group appearance of fire giants are in the stories of Ragnarok. See below.

\(^{200}\) Reginald C. Couzens, *The Stories of the Months and Days*, (New York, Frederick A. Stokes C., 1923) 91. Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, 153-154. See Chapter Two’s section on dwarves. This is also known as the “drink of Surtr’s race” (see below).

\(^{201}\) Some sources do identify Geirrod as a frost giant. See introduction above.
having a predilection for killing and torturing giants, rebounds by confining Geirrod to a cavern filled with horrors, taint, and filth. This keeps Geirrod in perpetual torture instead of killing him\textsuperscript{202}.

The Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, who compiled his histories in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, refers to a figure called “Geruthu”, King of the Underworld. Geirrod also became conflated with the Devil in many stories in Northern Europe, and as a result, the word “Gerard” in English came to refer to the Devil. This is not awkward, because the Devil possessed a similarity to Geirrod on account of a supposed underworld dwelling as well as being associated with fiery elements, torture of mortals, and opposition to the local religion\textsuperscript{203}.

However, the most well known individual fire giant is Surtr, popularized through stories told of Ragnarok, or the end-times in Scandinavian Mythology that results in the death of all the gods. The narratives about Ragnarok as well as those who inherited them are inconsistent as to whether it was a supposed future event or a past occurrence. Despite this uncertainty, the ideas and imagery associated with Ragnarok became very seminal and influential throughout Europe.

Surtr is not only the most renowned fire giant in Norse mythology, but also the leader of the fire giants and the most powerful. He has an underground dwelling, and in the chronicles of Ragnarok, he is described as fighting against the gods. For

\textsuperscript{202} Eliakim Littell and Robert S. Littell, \textit{The Living Age}, Series 7, Volume 49, (October, November, December 1910), 228.

\textsuperscript{203} Littell, \textit{The Living Age}, p. 228.
those mythographers who believe that the “skaldic mead” was a drink created from a fire giant, the story tells that it was extracted from Surtr’s son\textsuperscript{204}.

Surtr plays a prominent role in the story of Ragnarok, depicted as falling from the open skies in a flagrant fire along with his minions while in the heat of battle. It is Surtr who kills the goddess Frey, one of the most important in the Pantheon, when she engages him in combat. After the gods are overpowered, Surtr throws his fire all over the world. As a result, the homes of gods and humans alike are scorched completely, and the earth falls into ruin as it sinks into the boiling seas (the earth and life on earth do make recovery long afterward)\textsuperscript{205}.

Like the rest of the giants, the fire giants do possess a role between a god and that of an anti-god. The race is responsible for earthquakes and fires to some degree, and it is clear that the fire giants have power, despite their ongoing war with the gods. However, as exemplified by Surtr, the fire giants are not just ordinary fallen gods like the group of jotnarr as a whole. They represent—by means of Surtr and his legions—the ineffable destruction of everything that is known to man. The fire giant is not just fire. It is a fire in which human life and reason is contained, but that fire also encompasses the godly potential for divine wrath. As with the other creatures in this chapter, the fire giant is a harbinger of utter, complete, and unspeakable ruin, and this is something that emerges from its prior forms that were significantly more benign in comparison.

\textsuperscript{204} Couzens, \textit{The Stories of the Months and Days}, 91. Rydberg, p. 153
**FROST GIANTS**

As far as mythological stories are concerned, frost giants are a primeval force, and some scholars label them as “the very first race”. In some respects, frost giants are classed as the very first gods as well—although Odin and his godly ilk replace them. In fact, Odin descended from the race of frost giants. There are some mythographers and storytellers that class the Jotnarr as entirely frost giants (making room for fire giants). Others differentiate between “mountain giant” and “frost giant”. It is likely that the blurry categories of the Jotnarr occur almost exclusively due to English translations and re-invention of the myths within English language works.

Frost giants are more readily seen as a group. In modern depictions especially, they are seen as giant human beings made of ice that have blue skin. Children’s books about Norse myths are very likely to show them thus, as in illustrated encyclopedias or mythological compilations written for broad audiences such as D’Audelaire’s. It is likely that they are flesh creatures because they have blood, but the popular image of the human made of ice has a prominent appeal nonetheless.

Not all frost giants are entirely evil (something that cannot be said with as much certainty about the fire giants), and there are instances of frost giants becoming the friends and lovers of the gods, and perhaps even of humans. They represent the personified threats of the dangerous landscape. It is easy and accurate to classify them

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206 R.B. Anderson, Norse Mythology, or the Religion of our Forefathers Containing All the Myths of the Eddas Systemized and Interpreted with an Introduction, Vocabulary, and Index, (Chicago, S.C. Griggs and Company, 1879), 174.


as “ice spirits”, but they are also significantly more than that. They personify the powerful forces of nature, such as snowstorms and hail, whereas the elves and dwarves (and other creatures discussed in the second chapter) represent the non-lethal aspects of the natural world. As Tamara Andrews writes in a compendium of myths about nature:

When the first settlers came to Iceland, they found the frozen landscape foreboding and hostile, and they personified nature’s forces in myths of monstrous giants made of frost and ice\(^\text{209}\).

Not only were these giants just ordinary threats to humans, apparently, but they opposed the gods as well, and so much so that the frost giants—along with Loki and the fire giants under Surtr—would cause the death of all humans and gods in Ragnarok. As far as an anti-Christ could come in a polytheistic religion, the frost giants qualified for that role. Not only were they embodiments of a cruel and cold landscape, but some also saw the frost giants as personifications of a collectively remembered ice age\(^\text{210}\).

Frost giant myths, and the larger corpus of Norse myths in general, have two sources, known collectively as the *Edda*. The *Edda* has a prose and a poetry component—the former written by Icelandic scholar Snorri Sturluson, and the poetry being orally transmitted to the point of redaction. A consistent theme throughout the *Edda* is the pairing of fire and ice, either due to the volcanic landscape or because of


shared experiences among warm and cold climates. This duality manifests itself multiple times in the Norse creation story, in which it is important to determine the role of Frost Giants because its primary character, Ymir, is one of them. He is created when sparks from Muspelheim, (a fire world) and ice from Niflheim (an ice world) intermingle, thereby causing Ymir’s creation and continued existence\textsuperscript{211}.

Ymir, much like Tiamat in Mesopotamian mythology, is a singular being from whose body the world is created. Ymir is undoubtedly humanoid, and also is certainly wicked. It is made very clear that Ymir is not a god, and was not considered a god by anyone at any point, especially the Jotnarr. He is the ancestor of all giants, and, according to some versions of the \textit{Edda}, also had a role in making humans as well\textsuperscript{212}:

\begin{quote}
It is said that, when Ymir slept, he fell into a sweat, and from the pit of his left arm was born a man and a woman\textsuperscript{213}, and one of his feet engendered with the other a son, from whom descend the frost-giants, and therefore we call Ymir the old frost-giant\textsuperscript{214}.
\end{quote}

Ymir is distinctly seen as anti-human in what follows. In the equivalent of a flood story myth, the sons of Bor, the first collective of humankind, kill Ymir and his blood drowns all the frost giants, except one—called “Bergelmir” by the giants.

\textsuperscript{212} Benjamin Thorpe and Snorre Sturleson, \textit{The Elder Edda of Saemond Sigfusson}, (Norroena Anglo Saxon Classics, 1905) 261-262.
\textsuperscript{213} It is uncertain whether these are humans or not.
\textsuperscript{214} Thorpe and Sturleson, \textit{The Elder Edda of Saemond Sigfusson}, 262.
Bergelmir goes on to continue the line of frost giants, much to the dismay of humanity\(^{215}\).

Like the fire giants, the frost giants have a prominent role in Ragnarok, and arrive at Ragnarok in a ship made from the uncut fingernails of the dead. However, unlike the fire giants, they do not seek to immolate or destroy the world, but rather make up the bulk of infantry forces in the fight against the gods\(^{216}\).

The frost giant embodies two aspects. One of these is the notion of the defeated god, still powerful, but also a sworn enemy of the established deities. The other aspect is an embodiment of nature. The frost giants are still “giants” in every respect, as are the fire giants. It is clear that frost giants comprise a category of nature spirit, and an elusive and otherworldly one at that. But more importantly, like many of the other creatures in this chapter, the frost giant exists for the sake of destruction, and they are collectively established as an anti-human, anti-god species.

**CONCLUSION**

The creatures in this chapter combine two fears of early humans. First, there is the fear of nature, and second, the fear of the spirit world and/or the divine. When spirits begin to be associated with nature, the two fears intersect in creating chthonic creatures that embody natural aspects.

\(^{215}\) Thorpe and Sturleson, *The Elder Edda of Saemond Sigfusson*. 263

There are two worlds that exist in the earliest minds: the human and the non-human. When a human dies, he leaves the human realm and goes to the non-human one. Especially in earlier myths, the non-human domain is malevolent and cruel to humans, and those that cross the threshold between these worlds keep their humanity intact, but also join forces with the evils of nature, much to the anguish of scared human communities.
OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

With a significant portion of the European mythological creatures described and related to each other over the course of three chapters, my study affirms the following statements that concern all or many of the creatures in mythology—in Europe, as well as beyond it:

(1) *The human aspect of these creatures becomes magnified as time progresses.*

This pattern is followed with absolute consistency as far as European myths are concerned. Even within early Ancient Greece, the Cyclops evolved from a semi-divine being to a humanlike creature.

The Cyclops is far from being the only instance of this trend. Nymphs went from an elemental role to one fulfilling sexual partnerships with humans. Elves and faeries turned from vaguely spiritual creatures into creatures possessing visages and sometimes even flesh. Water spirits became water creatures such as mermen, mermaids, and selkies—all based on humans or other sea creatures.

Centaurs turned from an artistic concept to something representing lust on human terms, and the Satyrs, very similar to them, turned from a nature demon of Dionysus to creatures expressed by their human forms and emotions.
Many of these creatures began existence as spirits in one form or another. These spirits come in many forms—spirits of humans (selkies, leprechauns), spirits of nature (elves, nymphs), spirits of elements (fire giants, frost giants, fomors, ifrit, and dwarves), abstractions (various demons and fallen angels), and harmful spirits (djinn, giants, faeries).

These creatures, when humanity progresses from storytelling to more concrete media (such as painting, sculpting and writing), become realized in a form that possesses significant human characteristics—in its image as well as in its behavior. This happens generally in Norse mythology with creatures such as the dwarves and the jotnar—as it is a culture more defined not by older sources, but by more recent drawings and interpretations. When humanity downsizes religious roles, then the creatures, should they survive with popularity, will take on even more human characteristics.

(2) If a creature has multiple names, even across languages, then these creatures will branch off and become separate species.

This is especially true when dealing with the evolution of faeries. Thomas Keightly writes about faeries as an umbrella category. Since when did faeries become a creature in their own right?
“Faerie” is a name of Irish origin, but other countries had different names for the same concept. While these were originally names that all applied to the same creature (more or less), all of these names branched out to other creatures in their own right. Kobold used to be just a German word for “fairy”, but as German myths evolved differently from Irish ones, the kobold turned into something quite different. The other names for the faeries also followed similar paths—such as the “nisse” and the “brownie”.

Translation was also a catalyst for this trend. A Jotun was commonly translated as “giant”, and as a result, some people imagined the Jotun similar to a giant in each of their respective home cultures. In fact, some imagined the “Jotun” as an entity closer to a demon than to a giant, or as something separate from a giant altogether. Therefore “giants” and “jotnarr” in some circles became two separate things.

Trolls and giants were both classed as “Jotun”, as were mountain giants and frost giants. The categories become blurred because translations not only made separate lines of the same stories and creatures in them but entwine those lines so that they intersect some of the time, but not always.

There is no one absolute truth regarding any of these creatures. If there were only one language on earth, perhaps that imaginary vision could be more accurately realized. But the multiplicity of languages, especially with the fluid variations on
Norse and Northern Myths, ensure that each language develops its own platform for realizing myths and the creatures in them.

As a result, when creatures from one platform are placed on another—such as the concepts of faeries and giants—they become different creatures because they alter themselves to suit the expectations of that platform.

Also noteworthy is the occurrence of a sub-category of existing creature becoming a separate species (or arguably so). The examples of this brought forth in this work include the leprechaun, ifrit, fire/frost giants, and arguably even trolls.

The leprechaun was once a fairy, and the ifrit is clearly mentioned in many sources as a djinni. However, some realize them as a separate species (especially in the modern world), and some do not—instead recognizing them as different classes within an existing race.

(3) Translations of mythological texts and the multiplicity of traditions will ensure that many of these creatures will not have a consistent or unified image.

When authors create members of a species, especially if the species is not very well known or if it is ill-defined, then they can play, anonymously or otherwise, a role in re-inventing the species as a whole. Tolkien essentially remodeled the races he wrote
about in his works, creating them with new personae for a new era. The result was that the elves and dwarves of Middle-Earth became distinct when compared to those of earlier mythologies. Both modern and older myths have played a role in creating a collective image of a species—but rarely, if ever, can it be a unified one.

In Northern Europe, where mythology was not based as much on central texts such as Homer’s and Ovid’s writings, there were more mythological “centers”, which made for more mythological variety. The dwarf, even before Tolkien, had versions in various Germanic mythologies. With the addition of Baltic and Celtic mythologies—both of which have similarities to Teutonic mythologies—the exchanging and the localizing of creatures continues. The various water creatures of Northern Europe make this pattern clear—all similar but all different.

Two things contribute to this trend: one is the decentralization and multiplication of myths, and the other is the ability of very prominent authors to write or tell about myths, and through this process, change not only the stories themselves but the creatures in them.

*(4) Species will trade aspects with each other, and the creation of some creatures fuses distinct spiritual or abstract concepts in the development of new species.*
To be believable, a creature cannot be just one thing. Perhaps the earliest ideas and conceptions of spirits were very simplistic, but they were not creatures with developed mythologies or human characteristics.

A dragon, for example, seems that it should be a pure incarnation of scourge—a being that shows up somewhere and then drains the land of fertility. However, with the possession of a hoard to guard, it is not only that. Taking on characteristics of a fallen warrior spirit, the dragon merges the concepts of a scourge incarnation and a chthonic being.

Likewise, the Ifrit is difficult to imagine as just an unspeakable, indescribable underworld being. To describe it, storytellers needed to attach an image to it—an image involved with something that humans would understand. As a result, it took on the characteristics of a fire being, such as its association with smoke, as well as retaining its prior, more abstract, qualities.

The Ifrit was also a modification of a prior race—the djinn. As such, it is indicative of a trend to depict some creatures that are subcategories of another species, such as the Fire and Frost giants—creatures that were giants with added characteristics due to their elemental connections.

The selkie is undoubtedly one of the many aquatic creatures in the European corpus, like the merman or the nix, but what makes it stand out is its connection to
shapeshifters and its ability to turn into a human. The mere fusion of seal and human did nothing on its own—it was this pivotal difference that made the selkie popular.

When some creatures are introduced into a culture, other pre-existing creatures may have their substances or appearances altered. The Fylgiur, for example, become something closer to angelic (or fallen angelic) humanoid creatures when Christianity is introduced. Prior to that, it was a creature with the appearance of an animal.

One reason that elves differ from nymphs is the connection that elves have to faeries in mythology. While it is clear that elves have a direct connection to benign nature, (whereas faeries do not,) the two have traded aspects with each other to the degree that it is still believed by some that elves are a type of faerie.

An ordinary storyteller—even today—can invent a mythological creature. But the evolution is always out of his or her control, to be decided collectively by communities and generations to come.

(5) Storytellers will often ensure that “good” members of a stereotypically evil race exist.
This does not hold true for all “evil” species, but humans have difficulty imagining any species similar to them without a degree of moral balance. Evil demons and fallen angels are seen as wholly evil creatures, but many species that are seen as “evil”, especially if they are earthbound, have had “good” members in their ranks. This likely comes from a desire on behalf of some storytellers to break with tradition and expectation.

For example, the race of giants (jotnarr) in Norse mythology is largely opposed to divinities, but there are some examples of not only good giants, but ones that actively befriend the gods or even make love to them. This even holds true for the frost giants, who are shown as evil from the very beginning of the creation of the world.

The centaurs, as a group, are wanton destroyers, but this image was toyed with when Chiron becomes formulated as a hero figure. Chiron was almost able to single-handedly “fix” the image of the centaurs from a bestial abomination into something more human.

The djinn, and even the ifrit, their most malevolent contingent, have not only been seen as destroyers, although plenty of stories of destructive djinn exist. They have become friends of humans and even their lovers. Stories such as those helped combat the notion that djinn were ungodly juggernauts, and
established a plane for them where they could be understood as human creatures with human emotions.

The mermaids, as well as many other types of water creatures, have shifted, especially in recent times, from cruel creatures seeking to drown humans to something far less evil. The desire to kill humans was replaced with a desire to marry them—and it was surprisingly effective in creating a new side to a creature established as harmful.

A system of “checks and balances” comes into existence with mythological storytellers. They have a human sympathy for the monsters, and this sympathy makes these creatures less monstrous and more human.

(6) Major religions cause mythological revolutions, changing many creatures into either weaker beings or agents of the new religion.

The power that the gods have (or God has) is inversely proportional to the power of mythological species. In comparison to the Olympians, the nymphs have very little potential. However, in Tolkien’s Deistic world, in which there are no explicit godlike powers, the elves become the most potent cultural force.

Judaism relegated the shedim to something vaguely non-corporeal, while it is evident that they did have a physical manifestation at some point because they are
described as having cocks’ feet. They still were anti-Divine, but were significantly weakened over the course of Judaism’s development, and continued to grow even weaker.

Islam depicted Solomon and Muhammad as reigning over even the most dangerous of the mythological species in Arab folklore. No longer did the creatures become ineffable beings to be feared, but creatures that could be fended off by those righteous enough.

Christianity, the dominant religion in Europe, did not eliminate the old polytheistic mythologies, but did create something entirely new. There was not much room for the old gods, but there was certainly usefulness for many of the creatures known in many of the same myths that featured those old gods.

Dangerous creatures such as mermen and faeries, under the new system, could be rendered impotent if someone bore a cross. This clever method did not involve eliminating the creatures per se, but instead they became a reason to ensure a proliferation of Christian symbols.

In keeping with the law stated above, in which the gods’ power is inverse to that of other, less godly, mythological creatures, these beings became even more popular with the elimination or even outright death of the local polytheisms.
These Creatures are a Necessity in ALL religions

Religion is not and cannot be just an exchange between humans and gods, no matter how many people insist that it is that way or wish it so.

Divinities and non-human mythological creatures both have power beyond humans. One is very clearly superhuman, and the other is very clearly more human while still possessing superhuman tendencies. They both have a similar root: the superhuman.

The superhuman used to be one consistent group of spirits. From these spirits came gods and godlike creatures. Because gods were humanlike creatures, they needed agents as well as their own powers. Even when they became less human, creatures such as the agents remained. This also happened to another category of godlike creatures: the enemies of the gods that lived on as jotnarr and fomors.

With the monotheistic religions, an attempt is made to downsize or demonize (quite literally) these creatures, but then they also become sub-divinities, and true monotheism is not attained. The result is a One God alongside demons or something like them. They ensure that evil things are not ascribed to the all-powerful and all-beneficent God—the alternative to this was to have God more readily associated with malevolent aspects of nature.
Because the original spirits were a group of many entities, and not one singular entity, multiplicities must exist, even in the most monotheistic religions—even on a superhuman level. If gods exists, other things must exist beside them, something that holds true even with an ineffable singular God. Within the original spirits, some were promoted in their ranks, and others became servants to the promoted, or even abominations. As time went on, they became realized in humanoid forms and with human emotions.

Those creatures have enough power to be admired and feared by humans, but enough humanity to be related to and told about lovingly by humans, and their remarkable popularity and durability shows that the imaginary power of semi-divine beings and non-human species in mythology is one of religion’s greatest successes.
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