

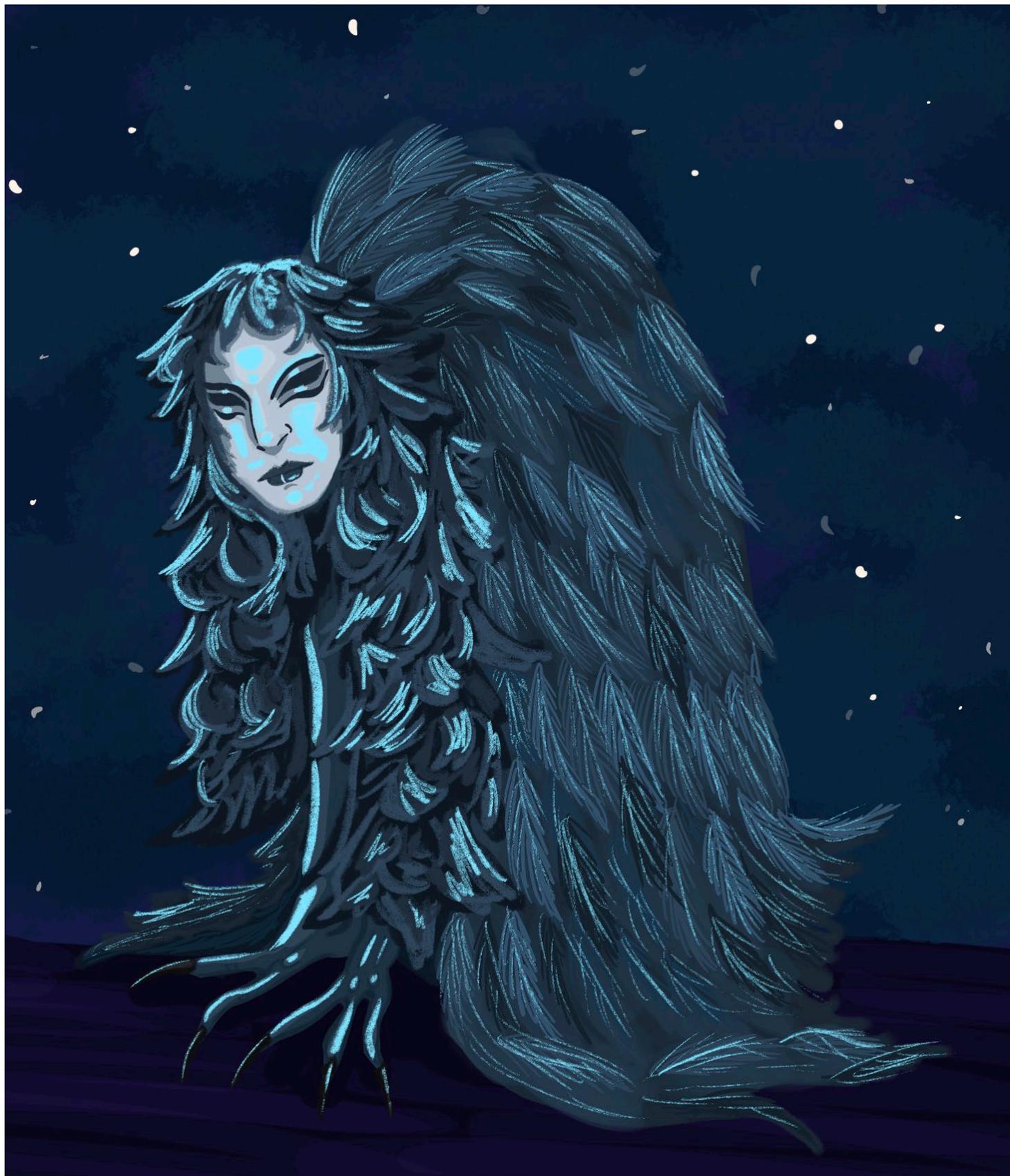
The Hermits

By: Ariana Null

Hermits are large, feathered creatures with faces obscured by masks and four long legs. Word travels that these “monsters” can often disguise themselves as ordinary humans for nefarious purposes. One day, a woman goes missing. Weeks later, there are no signs of several men and women of all ages. The townspeople start to suspect that the culprit are the hermits. A mob forms, hoping to use their combined strength to take down these beasts. With all their resources, they explore the forest in an attempt to locate the hermits’ home. None of the townspeople who left make it back—either dying by dehydration, wolves, or illness. The town slowly dwindles in numbers until the settlement becomes vacant. Meanwhile, a small village hidden behind a curtain of shrubbery thrives. There, all the missing people are gathered amongst the hermits in a modest village that eventually expands into a whole city. The cultural values that my myth represents are open-mindedness, empathy, and autonomy. The hermits, even before the people went missing, are presented as an “other,” which leads to them being misunderstood and falsely accused. This parallels the distanced feeling that minorities are subjected to despite being just like any other person (like how the hermits can shapeshift into ordinary people). The conservative mentality of the town is what pushes those who feel isolated away into the forest to seek shelter with the creatures. The opposing fates of the town vs. the forest village symbolize how success thrives on respect and cooperation. In addition, the autonomy of being able to choose to leave is something that minorities have not had access to with many systemic disadvantages aimed towards them. In this scenario, the “monsters” are the humans that drive both their own people and the hermits to a better life while destroying themselves in the process. Some research I can find is other stories that deal with minorities or minority-coded characters to

analyze any contrasting or similar values. In addition, I can see how minorities may be excluded from many tales or how the ones that do appear are treated in comparison to characters that appeal to hegemonic standards.

Concept drawing



Annotated Bibliography

Brakke, David. "Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 10, no. 3–4, 2001, pp. 501–535. *MLA International Bibliography*, doi:10.1353/sex.2001.0049.

This article discusses the history of stories describing demonic beings disguised as humans using darker complexions—typically Ethiopian—and the implications of such villainization of people of color. Brakke discusses how Ethiopians themselves were the model of such demons, with literature adopting cultural stereotypes to parallel what makes such entities “evil.” (506). Brakke traces this conception of black equating to evil to the separation of light and darkness in the Bible (507). Ethiopians are accepted in society, but only when they adhere to the ideologies of Christianity as “they conform to ‘the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’” (Brakke 529). This concept allows for the dominant group (Romans) to maintain power while simultaneously civilizing the “barbarians” (Brakke 511).

Émon, Ayeshah, and Christine Garlough. “Refiguring the South Asian American Bearer: Performing the “Third Gender” in Yoni Ki Baat.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 128, no. 510, Fall 2015, pp. 412–437. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerfolk.128.510.0412>.

This article discusses representation in South Asian folklore and how Asian American women are subverting the typical “American friendly” stories that are shared (Émon and Garlough 414). Emon and Garlough state that South Asian folktales are only accepted into society when they adhere to the morals of the conservative ideology, leaving out others that don’t fit the description like LGBTQ+ and feminist individuals (413). By spreading the stories of hijras—sexual and gender nonconforming identities—through stories like *Yoni Ki Baat*, what is achieved is an invitation to critically consume and discuss political and social issues (Émon and Garlough 418). “These performances do not simply ‘add in’ voices that are silenced or missing in mainstream discourses. Rather, *Yoni Ki Baat* participants create scenes of public learning—grounded in an ethic of care—in which to explore exigencies (both at home and abroad) and potentially begin the work of acknowledgment” (Émon and Garlough 432).

Inggs, Judith. “Weak or Wily? Girls’ Voices in Tellings and Retellings of African Folktales for Children.” *Children’s Literature in Education: An International Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 3, Sept. 2021, pp. 342–356. *MLA International Bibliography*, doi:10.1007/s10583-020-09421-w.

This article discusses the previous role of girls in African folktales to compare and evaluate the effectiveness of retellings. Inggs addresses the issue that many non-African people have with the folktales being too gruesome by emphasizing that censoring and romanticizing stories disserves real change (354). In order to truly contribute to subverting the status quo, women need to be given power through the context of stories while also acknowledging the ongoing social issues that plague our lives (Inggs 354). “The role of literature in this struggle is not only to provide strong role-models for young girls, but also to raise awareness among young boys and

to encourage contemporary youth to question and reflect on prevailing attitudes and assumptions in a patriarchal society” (Inggs 354).

Johnson, T. “Chapter 6: Evolution: The Bible.” In *Gay Spirituality: The Role of Gay Identity in the Transformation of Human Consciousness* (pp. 49–60). White Crane Institute, 2000. *LGBTQ+ Source*, search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=qth&AN=35404765&site=ehost-live&scope=site

This chapter discusses the ways in which modern perspectives can alter the meaning of older works like the Bible to support unrelated conceptions of anti-homosexuality (Johnson 49). Johnson describes the true origin of sin from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in addition to the condemnation of Onan, to debunk Christian’s typically cited “proof” of God’s contempt towards homosexuals. Through his analysis, Johnson points out the common themes that appear in myths such as the various consequences that arise due to human selfishness. In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the townsfolk are so self-focused that they ignore the innocence and good that appear before them (Johnson 51). Ultimately, the Bible’s translation, no matter how accurate, is still taken out of context and is outdated in many of its beliefs. Johnson advises that the key to keeping religion alive is not to hold on to every tradition but to keep the core concepts and reform the controversial elements (60).

Kononenko, Natalie. “The Politics of Innocence: Soviet and Post-Soviet Animation on Folklore Topics.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 124, no. 494, 2011, pp. 272–294. *MLA International Bibliography*, doi:10.5406/jamerfolk.124.494.0272.

This article talks about the history of folklore and how respect for stories inspired the animation genre to portray them. Kononenko argues that while many people hold the presumption that folklore is innocent from political sway, most actually hold ideological influences disguised under its fun and entertaining exterior (275). “Folklore can also be used in the ‘popular antiquities’ sense, as was done in the nineteenth century, to designate survivals of an outdated mode of life—one no longer practiced in urban centers or by the educated and the elite” (281). The idea that folklore equates to uncivilized carries a history of stereotypical portrayals of Ukrainians to excuse Russian control (288). Stories are much more powerful than people give them credit for, and this article helps establish that there is always some underlying meaning that may shape how audiences view reality in comparison.

Kurnia, Nandy Intan, et al. “The Othering of Majority and Minority Groups in Lessing and Ajidarma’s Literary Works: A Postcolonial Analysis.” *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, Feb. 2021, pp. 76–88. *Communication Source*, doi:10.17576/gema-2021-2101-05.

This article analyzes two pieces of literature in order to shed light on the “othering” of minorities that are expressed through postcolonial perspectives (Kurnia et al. 76). Kurnia et al. talk about how stories operate as a larger function for expression, “thus, the characters, story and various issues related to the practices of othering discussed in literary texts can serve as a medium for its readers to learn deeper about discriminations because of the act of othering” (77). This goes back

to the idea that stories are more than simply entertainment as they can expose the mind to different ideologies. By explicitly paralleling the reality of discrimination towards minority groups into stories, it serves as an acknowledgment of societal issues and assists in dismantling hegemony, especially when the authors are not part of the oppressed.

Menise, Tatjana. "Fairy Tales between Transformation and Repetition: How Audiences Rethink the Big Romantic Myth through Disney Princess Stories." *Sign Systems Studies/Trudy Po Znakovym Sistemam/Töid Märjüsteemide Alalt: Semeiotike*, vol. 47, no. 3–4, 2019, pp. 526–551. *MLA International Bibliography*, search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=202020477572&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

This article talks about the power that myths and folktales hold as their role in society is cemented through repetition. "Through repetition and transformation fairy tales acquired the image of never-ending, repeatable stories that tell us something about the world order and affect people's views on themselves and others" (Menise 529). Menise uses the example of Disney's extensive history on adapting folktales and creating their own myth of the "Disney princess" (535). Disney set certain expectations that young girls strived towards in order to embody the traditional princess—where their life was influenced to center around the values of heteronormativity, kindness, docility, etc. (Menise 535). Disney's stories, as with all myths and folktales, have progressed alongside the role of women in society, displaying how meaning-making is a circular process of stories influencing reality and vice versa (Menise 536).

Wheatley, Catherine. "The New Eve: Faith, Femininity and the Fairy Tale in Catherine Breillat's *Barbe Bleue/Bluebeard* (2009)." *Studies in European Cinema*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2013, pp. 71–80. *MLA International Bibliography*, doi:10.1386/seci.10.1.71_1.

This article touches on the various feminist retellings of the folktale "Bluebeard" with a focus on Catherine Breillat's rendition in her film. Wheatly points out how many of the retellings incorporate narrative elements from fairy tales and (especially in Breillat's case) religious allusions (77). The various interpretations of "Bluebeard" keep the main plot but manipulate certain aspects to create a new meaning or subvert harmful representations in the original piece. Once again, we are brought back to the idea of acknowledgment as myths exist contextually through referencing other works, the environment it was created in, or both. Myths offer meanings in the format of alternative worlds that allows for introspecting contemporary behaviors and reformatting the stories to fit modern ethics (Wheatley 78).