

THE NORTHERN WORDS

Keightley writes for a reader who has Danish, German and a little Norse. This is the card for the reader who has none of them.

Word	What it means
alfar	The elves of the Old Norse texts, singular álfr. Snorri divides them into ljósálfar, light-elves, who live in Álfheim, and dökkálfar, dark-elves, who live in the earth and are black as pitch. Keightley builds the whole northern half of this book on that division. It is worth knowing that it appears in one late source, by a Christian writer, and nowhere else.
duergar	The dwarfs of the Eddas, singular dvergr. In the poem Völuspá they are chiefly a list of names; in the prose they are smiths who make the gods' treasures. Keightley's duergar is an anglicised plural of his own.
elle-folk	Danish elle-folk, the elves of the modern Danish tales as Thiele collected them. The elle-maid is beautiful from the front and hollow behind, like a rotten tree; elle-skud, elf-shot, is the paralysis she can inflict.
bergfolk	Hill-folk: the Danish and Swedish underground people, called by the hill they live in rather than by what they are. Also bjergfolk.
trolld	Danish, plural trolde. Keightley translates it dwarf as often as troll, which is why his long section carries both words in its title. The modern giant-troll is a later narrowing of a word that covered most kinds of uncanny being.
nis	The Danish house-spirit, nisse in the modern spelling, from a pet form of Niels. He does the household work, expects his grod — porridge with butter — at Christmas, and leaves for good if he is given clothes.
groute	Keightley's spelling of Danish grød, the porridge left out for the nis. A butter-well in the middle of it is the point of the best-known nis story.
tomte	The Swedish house-spirit, tomtegubbe, from tomt, a house-plot. The same figure as the nis under a name that means the spirit of the site.
nöck	The Scandinavian water-spirit, Danish nokke, who plays the harp and drowns the listener. Keightley writes neck; the German is Nix.
havfrue	Danish sea-woman: the mermaid. Havmand is the merman.
Kobold	The German house-spirit, and the origin of the English cobalt: miners named the ore after the spirit they blamed for it. Keightley's kobold section is the longest treatment of the figure in nineteenth-century English.
Wichtlein	Little wight: the mine-spirit of southern Germany, who knocks where the ore is and whose knocking also foretells a death.
Heinzelmannchen	The house-dwarfs of Cologne, who did the townspeople's work at night until a tailor's wife scattered peas on the stairs to see them.
wilde Frauen	The wild-women of the German forests and hills, who lend, borrow, bake and vanish. There is no close English equivalent, which is why the section is worth its space.
Nix	German water-spirit, feminine Nixe. The Rhine's, and the ancestor of a great deal of nineteenth-century opera.
Servan	The house-spirit of French-speaking Switzerland, the Alpine kobold. Also Sotré in Lorraine.

Word	What it means
Zwerg	German dwarf. Keightley's German dwarf sections are set deliberately against his Scandinavian ones; the comparison is the argument.
peri	Persian: a beautiful being of the middle air, in the romances often at odds with the malignant div. Keightley's case that the European fairy owes something to the peri rests on resemblance, and he had no Persian.
jinn	Arabic, singular jinnī. Keightley's good observation is that Galland's French Nights turned them into fairies and that the English reader has been reading a translator's fairies ever since.
fata	Italian: a fairy, from Latin fatum, that which is spoken, hence destiny. This is the derivation Keightley argues for and it is the one now accepted.
faërie	Middle English, and originally the enchantment or the country rather than the being. Chaucer's fulfilled of faërie means full of magic, not full of fairies. The shift from the state to the creature is the subject of Keightley's second chapter.
Eddas	Two books: the Poetic or Elder Edda, a manuscript collection of Norse poems, and the Prose or Younger Edda of Snorri Sturluson, about 1220. Keightley cites both simply as the Edda, and the difference matters.
changeling	The child the hill-folk leave in place of the one they take. Keightley prints the Danish, Swedish and German forms together, and the tests for detecting one — brewing in an egg-shell above all — are the same in each.
egg-shell brewing	The test: brew beer in an egg-shell before the changeling, and he will exclaim that he is old but never saw such a thing, and so betray himself. It is the most widely distributed single motif in Volume I.
elf-shot	Danish elleskud: a sudden pain or paralysis attributed to the elves. The English form is applied to cattle and to the neolithic arrowheads blamed for it.
trow	Shetland: the local form of troll, and the strongest evidence in Volume I for Norse belief surviving in a British place.
hogboon	Orkney: the mound-dweller, from Old Norse haugbúi. The barrow-dweller of the sagas, still in the fields in the nineteenth century.

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