



The Hidden History of Elves & Dwarfs: Avatars of Invisible Realms

Claude Lecouteux

Jon E. Graham, Translator

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Do they exist? What are they hiding from? Did one of those little suckers take my beloved stuffed teddy bear when I was three? These are the burning elf and dwarf questions keeping wanna-believers up at night, especially in parts of northern Europe where most of the little-people legends originate. *The Hidden History of Elves and Dwarfs* just might move the evidentiary needle a bit further.

A former professor of medieval literature and civilization, Claude Lecouteux's deep dive into the earliest folklore reveals that elves and dwarfs were originally thought of as the same creatures, only to evolve into different beings with unique skills. The subsequent centuries and mythologizers brought us goblins, brownies, sprites, fauns, satyrs, leprechauns, duses, and all manner of little mischief makers.

That said, Lecouteux stresses that in mythology, "the elves have their place next to the gods, whereas the dwarfs do not." And as he attempts to tie up loose ends in his epilogue, *They Existed Because We Believe*, he makes the intriguing claim that "these creatures represent a crystallization of scattered beliefs that all share one point in common: they closely relate to Dumézilian Third Function, to notions of fertility and fecundity, and therefore to figures that are alleged to have the power to bestow them: the dead. Dwarfs and elves have thus become good or evil spirits." Wonderfully written and reasoned, this project will reward the fertile mind.

MATT SUTHERLAND (January/February 2019)

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