Magical Elements and Creatures and their underlying Concepts and Myths in Rowling's Harry Potter Series

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Philosopher's Stone</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alchemists Nicholas Flamel</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animagus (Animagi) - a Shapeshifter</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centaurs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerberus, Chimaera-Fluffy, the three-headed dog</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragons</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Forbidden Forest</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghosts</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goblins</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolls</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owls</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unicorns</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chamber of Secrets</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aragog (Acromantula)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basilisks</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elves</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghosts</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandrakes</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Phoenix</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pixies</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prisoner of Azkaban</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boggarts</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demons</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairies</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grims</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hippogriffs</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werewolves</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Goblet of Fire</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragons</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mermaids/Mermen</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veela</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Order of the Phoenix</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centaurs</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Forbidden Forrest</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giants</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Half-Blood Prince</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hand of Glory</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferi</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Deathly Hallows</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghouls</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goblins</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bits of magic and Conclusion</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography:</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Literature:</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Literature:</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources-Film and TV-series:</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guide to abbreviations of book titles:

*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*: The Sorcerer’s Stone

*Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets*: The Chamber of Secrets

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*: The Prisoner of Azkaban

*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*: The Goblet of Fire

*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: The Order of the Phoenix

*Harry Potter and the Half- Blood Prince*: The Half-Blood Prince

*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: The Deathly Hallows
Introduction

Throughout the last century the literary market and the film industry have been flooded with a remarkable number of books and screenplays in which mythical creatures and magical elements have found their way back onto the big stage. This includes vampires and werewolves in Stephenie Meyer’s The Twilight Saga, witches, centaurs and dragons in The Chronicles of Narnia in which Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s albatross has a cameo appearance, and J.R.R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings trilogy. Last but not least, probably the most influential and successful representative of this genre is J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series which is at the center of my investigation.

The exact reasons for this increase of incredibly successful stories of magic cannot simply be attributed to the genius of new authors and screenwriters. Nor is the demand of audiences the only factor that determines what is successful. It is a combination of different factors that determines the success or failure of something new. For example, the right time and place to introduce audiences to a new screenplay. In these modern times dominated by technology and incredible scientific achievements, fantastic stories might bring some balance to enlightened readers and open the doors for supernatural creatures to find their way back into our world. Once these creatures have made their way back into the minds of worldwide readers and viewers, two questions arise for the audience: If these magical creatures have come back, when were they already here and where had they come from? It is the subject of this paper to investigate the underlying myths and the origins of magical elements but, particularly, of creatures that occur throughout all seven Harry Potter books.

I will consider two parts as the center of my diploma thesis: the main part will be a detailed catalogue of the most important creatures and magical elements in the Harry Potter series. It will contain information about when they first appear in the books and some individual qualities attributed to them, including important historical information. In addition, some comparisons to the movies will be made in order to gain a broader perspective and understanding of the topic. The second part will give a brief overview on other magical devices,
such as spells, names and spiritual concepts that have made their way into Rowling's books.

**The Philosopher’s Stone**

**Alchemist(s) Nicholas Flamel**

In *The Philosopher’s Stone* we learn that an alchemist named Nicholas Flamel managed to fabricate the stone of eternal life and transformation a long time before the events of Harry’s first year at Hogwarts: “‘Nicholas Flamel,’ she whispered dramatically, ‘is the only known maker of the Sorcerer's Stone!’” (*The Philosopher’s Stone*: 219). Not very much is revealed about the life of Mr. Flamel and his wife Perenelle, except that they have reached the age of approximately 700 years and that their lives depended on the existence of the philosopher’s stone. The stone itself is at the core of the central storyline of *The Philosopher’s Stone* as Voldemort’s obsession with eternal life makes the possession of the stone quite dangerous. It is thus brought from Gringotts to Hogwarts as Professor Dumbledore and Nicholas Flamel believe this would be a safer place. By the end of *The Philosopher’s Stone*, it is clear that they were wrong, but the stone can be saved and destroyed once and for all, which unfortunately means that Mr. and Mrs. Flamel are to die soon: “‘But that means he and his wife will die, won’t they?’ ‘They have enough Elixir stored to set their affairs in order and then, yes, they will die.’” (*The Philosopher’s Stone*: 297)

In order to deepen our understanding of the real Nicholas Flamel, one has to get an idea of what the term alchemy means and where is comes from. As David Colbert points out in *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*, the word alchemy, as it is known today, derives from the Arab term ‘*al-kimia*’, which means ‘the transformation of metals’ (cf. Colbert 2008: 19). Going even further back in history, alchemical experiments had already been practiced in ancient Greece and Egypt.

According to Dieter Harmenig’s *Wörterbuch des Aberglaubens*, alchemy had two main aspects in ancient times: one aspect was science-oriented, the
other was philosophical. The science-oriented aspect was concerned with the structure of matter and the transformation and deformation of the same, while the philosophical aspect was concerned with finding a ‘universal-remedy’ for the illness of the human soul and body. It was approximately 100 years Anno Domini, when Egyptian priests combined practical chemistry, mythological beliefs, Aristotelian theories about matter, and astrology to form the more or less scientific field of alchemy. Their main goal was to fabricate gold-like substances, which were, much to the disadvantage of everyone involved, easily identified as forgery by the public. The general basis of alchemy was the belief in the unity of creation, in which all elements could be mixed up randomly in order to form new ones. Around 1200 A.D., most alchemy-books were translated into Latin. These translations aroused the interest of Christians in alchemy, which is why alchemy became part of Christian ideas and beliefs (Harmening 2009: 30-31).

Alchemy is a very popular topic in many novels throughout history and are commonly known as people who try to make gold or other precious metals out of simple substances. They are also often named in the same breath as witches or wizards. Although alchemy is often ridiculed by physicists and other scientists, it is said that the famous physicist and mathematician, Isaac Newton, was involved in alchemical experiments and even secretly wrote about them (cf. Colbert 2008: 20).

Nicholas Flamel was a real life person and was born around 1330 in Paris. As Colbert points out, Flamel was very talented and had great abilities in many different areas. He was a poet, a painter and a public scribe. In his later years he developed a strong interest in astrology, and that was approximately the time when Flamel came across a secret book in which alchemical processes were described (cf. Colbert 2008: 95). These assumptions are also shared by Kronzek/Kronzek in The Scorcerer’s Companion. The authors also mention that many people around Flamel could neither read nor write and thus came to Flamel in order to settle their legal affairs or to simply have letters written for them (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 209). One can therefore argue that Flamel was a well-known scholar in his time, which could be a possible explanation for his wealth and his generosity. The most important point is, however, that all three authors assume that Flamel came across the alchemy-book coincidentally and
went on long travels in order to find people who could possibly help him decoding the formulas within the book. It is said that deciphering the alchemy-book took Flamel years and had he not met a master of alchemy in Spain, he would never have been able to make any sense of the paintings and hieroglyphics within the book. Together with this Spanish teacher, Flamel was supposedly able to create silver and gold from simple metals, which made him and his wife Penerelle even richer in terms of money and health (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 211). Of course, none of his alchemical successes have ever been proven to be definitely real and neither has the existence of the Philosopher’s/Scorcerer’s Stone. The only possible indication of success of the real Nicholas Flamel we have is that he was a wealthy, very generous and caring person, who gained not only popularity by means of his scientific investigations, but through his generous donations to hospitals, schools and other public institutions.

**Animagus (Animagi) - a Shapeshifter**

Animagi (the plural form of Animagus) play an important role in many different ways throughout the Harry Potter series. The first Animagus we encounter is Professor Minerva McGonagall, the transfiguration teacher and deputy headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, as we learn later on in the book. She tails Professor Dumbledore in the shape of a cat when the latter is on his mission to bring Harry Potter to the Dursleys’ house: “But he did seem to realize he was being watched, because he looked up suddenly at the cat, which was still staring at him from the other end of the street. For some reason, the sight of the cat seemed to amuse him.” (The Philosopher’s Stone: 9). Dumbledore is amused because he soon realizes that the cat is Minerva McGonagall. Animagi, when in their animal form, tend to behave very similar to how they would act in their human form. This is also clearly shown in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, when Harry finds out that Ron’s rat, Scabbers, turns out to be Peter Pettigrew in his animal form (The Prisoner of Azkaban: 366). As it is unveiled later, Peter Pettigrew was one of the main wire-
pullers in the conspiracy against Harry’s parents and thus, figuratively, acted like a rat.

The word *Animagus* is the result of a word formation process called blending, as it derives from two already existing words, in this case from the English word animal and the Latin word *magus*, which means ‘magician’. Although the particular term Animagus was invented by Rowling, shape shifting is allegedly a very old form of magic, which also has its roots in Greek mythology, as David Colbert explains. According to Colbert, the first ‘wizard’ to display the ability of shape shifting was Proteus, a servant of Poseidon, god of the oceans. As Proteus was said to have been some kind of fortune teller, people often asked him for his predictions, and in order to escape these people, he supposedly transformed himself into a variety of quite horrifying animals and creatures. Therefore, something that can turn into another object or being is still referred to as ‘protean’. Colbert furthermore points out that in ancient stories shape shifting was a popular way of conducting duels among wizards and witches. The idea behind this particular way of dueling was that the wizard would try to turn into an animal or creature that could easily destroy the form of his or her opponent. The most famous of these duels was surely the one between Merlin and Madame Mim, in T.H. White’s novel *The Sword in the Stone*. The duel lasts for more than an hour and the speed of the transfigurations increases from minute to minute until, finally, Merlin manages to defeat Madame Mim by transforming himself into a microbe which causes fever, mumps and whooping cough to its host (cf. Colbert 2008: 23-27). More famous than T.H. White’s novel is probably the 1963 released Disney movie *The Sword in the Stone*, in which the duel between the two wizards is depicted in a lightly funny way, which is yet faithful to the original spirit of the novel (1963 Disney).

Animagi are not to be confused with werewolves, an entity which will be dealt with in a later chapter of this thesis. As opposed to a werewolf, the animagus is always in control of the shape he or she chooses to be, independent of outer circumstances. The most important difference is certainly that the shape-shifting of the latter is usually voluntarily and not forced upon him by a curse or illness. As opposed to older myths and stories about shape shifters, Animagi are meticulously checked and restricted by the ministry of
magic in Rowling's universe, as shape shifting can be dangerous and devious (cf. Colbert 2008: 28). This is explained in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* by Hermione Granger, when the three students are confronted with Peter Pettigrew's true identity (cf. The Prisoner of Azkaban: 351). Other famous Animagi in the Potter universe are Sirius Black (a dark dog), Peter Pettigrew (a rat), James Potter (a stag) and Rita Skeeter (a beetle). It is important to mention that a wizard in the Potter universe can only have one second form of being in a lifetime, which is also checked by the ministry. The form depends on character traits, skills and likes of the particular wizard or witch.

**Centaurs**

For detailed information see chapter 5, *The Order of the Phoenix*.

**Cerberus, Chimaera-Fluffy, the three-headed dog**

Fluffy, a three-headed dog of room size is introduced in *The Philosopher's Stone* as the guard of the Philosopher's Stone. Its physical appearance is nevertheless very different from a normal dog as it has three big heads, extremely sharp teeth, a serpent tale and approximately the size of an average living room: “As the door creaked, low, rumbling growls met their ears. All three of the dog’s noses sniffed madly in their direction, even though it couldn’t see them.” (The Philosopher’s Stone: 275). Now, when a creature like this is brought to one’s mind, it is likely to be associated with the adventures of Hercules or other Greek mythological heroes or stories, as there exist dozens of movies and comics that show Hercules fighting against three-headed monsters or similar creatures.

People in ancient Greece believed that a monstrous dog called Cerberus guarded the gate to the underworld, so that nobody could escape (or enter) once he or she had passed through. According to Jorge Luis Borges’ *Book of Imaginary Beings*, Cerberus supposedly greeted those who wanted to enter hell with its tail (the tail of a serpent), but devoured those who wanted to leave. Later sources, as Borges explains, state that Cerberus was believed to kill either (cf. Borges 2006: 49-50).
Kronzek/Kronzek give similar, yet more detailed information about how Cerberus was used in Greek mythology. The three-headed dog was said to have been a security guard to the underworld, which was ruled by the god Hades and his wife Persephone, and it was the progeny of two terrible monsters, which is the reason why Cerberus is often to be compared to a Chimaera, an entity which will be explained later. Only a few mythological heroes were said to have overcome the beast: the nymph Psyche, who supposedly fed the monster with a poisoned cake; Heracles, who reportedly fought the beast with his bare hands, and Orpheus, who allegedly passed the dog by playing his lyre so beautifully that Cerberus fell asleep (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 91). The latter of the three heroes is the most important one for the purposes of this paper, as Orpheus provides the connection between the Harry Potter saga and mythology. In The Philosopher’s Stone, Fluffy can also be put to sleep by means of music coming from a flute or other instrument, which clearly proves that Rowling left nothing to chance in her books. When Harry Potter quits playing the whistle for a few seconds, the monster immediately wakes up, but falls back to sleep in an instant when Hermione, this time, starts playing the flute: “Harry handed the flute over. In the few seconds’ silence, the dog growled and twitched, but the moment Hermione began to play, it fell back into its deep sleep.” (The Philosopher’s Stone: 276).

According to Friedhelm Schneidewind’s Das ABC rund um Harry Potter, the Greeks were not the only ones who believed that the ‘threshold’ to the underworld was guarded by a supernatural beast. The belief in a monstrous dog guarding the gate to hell was quite common in ancient times, yet, as Schneidewind explains, not all of these beasts were believed to have three or more heads. The German hellhound commonly known by the name of ‘Garm’, for example, was believed to have only one head. Yet, it was said to be an extremely strong beast, being supposedly able to defeat the war-god ‘Tyr’ at the twilight of gods, although this allegedly would lead to the dog’s own death (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 122).

As mythology tends to have different sources and changes through time, there is one more entity that has to be mentioned when investigating Fluffy’s pedigree. We have just come across the term Chimera or Chimaera, and one
should have a look where it comes from and what it means. Rowling herself writes in *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* that a Chimaera is a rare Greek beast with the head of a lion, the body of a goat and a dragon’s tale (cf. Rowling 2009: 12). Borges states that the first literary account of the Chimaera was given by Homer in the sixth book of *The Iliad*. Homer describes the beast in a quite similar way: it has the head of a lion, the belly of a she-goat and the tail of a serpent (cf. Borges 2007: 51). Rowling also explains that in the Harry Potter universe only one wizard has managed to defeat a Chimaera, but then unluckily fell off his horse and died (cf. Rowling 2009: 12). According to David Colbert’s *The Magic Worlds of Harry Potter*, this is an allusion to the legend of the hero ‘Bellerophon’, who supposedly rode the famous horse Pegasus and survived the battle with the Chimaera, but was later thrown off his horse by Zeus because he arrogantly wanted to conquer Mount Olympus (cf. Colbert 2008: 39).

However, the obvious kinship to Cerberus, the three-headed dog, comes from descriptions of the Chimaera having from three to over 50 heads on the body of a lion or dog, as Kronzek/Kronzek point out (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 90). Nowadays the term Chimaera is commonly used to describe a being that is artificially created of different genetic codes of a variety of species that occur in nature.

**Dragons**

For detailed information see chapter 4, *The Goblet of Fire*.

**The Forbidden Forest**

For detailed information see chapter 5, *The Order of the Phoenix*

**Ghosts**

For detailed information see chapter 2, *The Chamber of Secrets*.

**Goblins**

For detailed information see chapter 7, *The Deathly Hallows*
Trolls

The mountain troll which is let into Hogwarts by Professor Quirrell is actually the first real threat Harry, Ron and Hermione encounter together. It is the first time that one of the three main characters is in a life-threatening situation: “Hermione Granger was shrinking against the wall opposite, looking as if she was about to faint. The troll was advancing on her, knocking the sinks off the walls as it went.” (The Philosopher’s Stone: 175). In fact, it is this experience that binds the three students together and sets the course for their further adventures. So, in terms of plot development, the troll plays a much more important role than one might think at first sight. Clearly, as it is described in the book, the troll is an unpleasant creature and certainly nobody to pick an argument with.

It is indeed a matter of fact that trolls, wherever one might search for information about them, do not come off very well in terms of character traits, habits and outward appearance. Kronzek/Kronzek write about these beings: “Trolls are extremely ugly supernatural creatures that make their homes in the cold, northern European countries of Scandinavia.” (Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 291). They further argue that trolls supposedly have a taste for human flesh and are extremely obsessed with treasures and gold. Early Norwegian and Swedish myths and folktales tell that trolls reportedly lived in Scandinavian woods and mountains since mankind had settled there historically speaking, by the end of the Ice Age. As the outward appearance of trolls is usually described, they are said to be of gigantic size, have long, crooked noses, bushy tales, flat feet and short fingers and toes (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 291).

These assumptions are also shared by Carol Rose in her encyclopedia of folklore, legend and myth Giants, Monsters and Dragons. Rose furthermore points out that trolls were often compared to ogres in mythology, having a wicked character and being hostile towards humans and other creatures (cf. Rose 2001: 366). A rather similar description is given by Rowling in The Philosopher’s Stone, when Harry and Ron catch sight of the troll only seconds before it enters the girls’ room: “It was a horrible sight. Twelve feet tall, its skin was a dull, granite grey, its lumpy body like a boulder with its small bald head
perched on top like a coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with flat, horny feet. The smell coming from it was incredible. It was holding a huge wooden club, which dragged along the floor because its arms were so long.” (The Philosopher’s Stone: 175). In the NLC (New Line Cinema) film adaption of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy a similar depiction of a cave-troll can be seen, when the ‘Fellowship of the Ring’ passes through the mines of Moria (NLC 2001). Rose describes the trolls in *Lord of the Rings* as black-blooded, giant-cannibals, which have their roots in the oldest myths and legends that can be found in the history of folklore (cf. Rose 2001: 366).

Additionally to the information Kronzek/Kronzek give about the heritage of troll myths, David Colbert states that some of these creatures are said to have magical abilities, like becoming invisible or changing their shape. Their negative attitude towards humans comes from a variety of legends; one, for example, claims that they much dislike the noise humans make and hence will snatch women and children. Some very old folklore tales even imply that particularly insidious trolls put their children in the place of human children in order to have them raised as humans. Such children are called ‘changelings’ in Old Western European folktales (cf. Colbert 2008: 230). According to the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, a changeling is usually described as being the offspring of a fairy that has secretly been put in the place of a human child (cf. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 2010: 241).

Rose refers to trolls in general as being malicious, hairy ogres, which have not much in common with humans. Yet, female trolls were believed to be quite beautiful, having long, curled red hair. In Norwegian mythology, these trolls were believed to live in communities in caves or under hills. Their residences supposedly were beautiful places, filled with gold and treasures. In the context of troll-myths and their different sources and origins, Rose names some countries in which trolls were an indispensable part of folklore; on the Faroe Islands, for example, trolls were believed to be invisible tribes, living in the underground, abducting humans and keeping them enslaved beneath the ground for years. The trolls in the folklore of Iceland were also believed to be vicious, one-eyed giants. A special kind of Finnish trolls named ‘Sjötroll’ were said to live in lakes. They were believed to be water-bound by runic stones which were placed at
each end of the lake. Every once in a while, when a storm came up, people believed that the magic of the stones decreased or vanished and without the magical influence of the stones, the trolls would be released for some hours. Hence, people did not leave their houses during storms as they believed that an unleashed troll might be able to drown them or abduct them to their underwater homes in order to keep them as slaves (cf. Rose 2001: 366). Nevertheless, there are folktales that tell about benevolent trolls who reward humans they like with gold and good looks; these trolls are said to be masterful metalworkers and craftsmen, specialized in making swords, knives and bracelets (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 90).

Owls

Delivery Owls belong to those rare creatures that appear in each of the seven Harry Potter books. They tend to exceed their original purpose in most cases as they act as friends, secret messengers and even lifeguards to their masters. Surely the most famous owl, Hedwig, is the embodiment of loyalty and friendship as she sacrifices her own life in order to save Harry’s in Deathly Hallows (The Deathly Hallows: 56). Hedwig first appears in The Philosopher’s Stone, when Hagrid purchases the animal for Harry at the Eeylops Owl Emporium: “Twenty minutes later, they left Eeylops Owl Emporium, which had been dark and full of rustling and flickering, jewel bright eyes. Harry now carried a large cage that held a beautiful snowy owl, fast asleep with her head under her wing.” (The Philosopher’s Stone: 81). So, on the basis of their frequent occurrence and importance, one should take a closer look into the mythic history of these magical creatures.

It might seem arbitrary that Rowling chose owls as the modern magical postmen, but these beings do have a long history in ancient myths. Nevertheless, before going into deeper detail of the underlying myths of owls, it might be interesting to have a short look at the status of these beings in the modern media. Owls do have the reputation of being creepy and mysterious animals, as can often be seen in TV series such as The X Files, Twin Peaks, or more recent ones such as Supernatural or Charmed; especially the famous
The screech of the owl is often cited in horror novels and whodunits. In David Lynch’s mystery TV series *Twin Peaks*, for example, owls play a significant role as they turn out to function as keys to another dimension. Some legends tell that Indians used owls in order to communicate with the dead. The question is, however, where do these traits come from? Again, one has to go back to the ancient Greeks in order to find answers.

The Greeks were convinced that owls were highly intelligent creatures. The goddess of wisdom, Athena, for example, was often portrayed with an owl by her side or on her shoulder. It was also believed that she was able to transform herself into an owl and thus could patrol her realm or observe suspicious subjects or persons. Concerning this, one will automatically draw a connection to shape-shifters and the animagus/animagi, entities we have discussed earlier and which have their roots in Greek mythology as well. Many people in ancient Greece used to carry owls with them, based on the belief that they could communicate with these animals and ask them for advice when difficult decisions had to be made. So, Rowling again shows that she left not one single detail to chance as she also uses owls primarily as a means of communication in her books (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 212).

The Greeks were not the only humans to think highly of these animals. Medieval European sorcerers were said to have relied upon the observational powers and loyalty of these creatures of the night. However, there are cultures which have associated the owl with death and evil rather than with friendship and loyalty. In China, for example, owls were associated with the god of thunder. In Egypt, they were seen as a symbol of death and darkness; maybe because they are nocturnal and such efficient birds of prey. In other cultures, it was believed that carrying the parts of a deceased owl can protect humans from evil forces and death (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 213). As far as the creepy screech of the owl is concerned, David Colbert complements what has been said so far: “In several parts of the world an owl’s screech is considered a bad omen, perhaps even of death.” (Colbert 2008: 193)

Schneidewind says that there are actually two different kinds of owls in the real world: the usual owl, of which 167 different types are known and the barn-owl, of which only 14 different kinds are known. Owls are located around the
globe except for Alaska. Their eyes are located under a bone-capsule, which is the reason for their limited field of view, forcing them to move their head as a whole in order to scan the environment for enemies or prey. They only feed on animals alive and, depending on their size, prefer insects, bugs, mammals the size of rabbits and fish (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 100).

Unicorns

Although the Unicorn only has a minor part in the Harry Potter saga, it is an important figure in The Philosopher’s Stone, as its blood serves as a life-sustaining substance for Lord Voldemort:

Harry had taken one step toward it when a slithering sound made him freeze where he stood. A bush on the edge of the clearing quivered….Then, out of the shadows, a hooded figure came crawling across the ground like some stalking beast. Harry, Malfoy, and Fang stood transfixed. The cloaked figure reached the unicorn, lowered its head over the wound in the animal’s side, and began to drink its blood. (The Philosopher's Stone: 256 )

This is actually one of the key scenes in The Philosopher’s Stone, as Firenze, a centaur, explains to Harry that it is a monstrous thing to slay something pure and innocent like a unicorn and that only “[…] one who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a crime.” (The Philosopher’s Stone: 258) Firence further explains that unicorn blood is able to keep one alive, even if death seems inevitable, and that only one being would be as desperate as to act on such cruel terms. Harry soon realizes that it must be Lord Voldemort and that he is the one who is after the Philosopher’s Stone.

According to Hanns Bechtold-Stäubli’s Handwörterbuch des Aberglaubens, the unicorn is most often depicted as a wild, tremendously strong creature which resembles a horse, but also an antelope with a large, peculiar, spiraling horn on its forehead. Stäubli again states that the ancient Greeks were the first ones to mention this being in their books. He furthermore points out that the unicorn was believed to die in captivity. It was said to avoid any contact with humans, especially with men. Unicorn-hunters
believed that a unicorn could easily be caught by using a virgin as a lure since it would lay its head into the virgin’s lap and could then be captured. This myth was often used as an allegory of Jesus Christ, who supposedly laid his head into Maria Magdalena’s lap shortly before he was arrested and executed (cf. Bechtold-Stäubli 1927-1942: 708-709). In addition to this article, David Colbert says that unicorns could also be found in the ancient arts and myths of China and India, not only of Greece. He further mentions the unicorn as a symbol that occurred throughout *The Old Testament*, where it is described as a being with enormous strength and supernatural powers (cf. Colbert 2008: 239-241). One might therefore argue that the unicorn is a Christian symbol or at least related to parts of the Christian belief. This might also be a possible explanation for the supernatural abilities attributed to unicorns and furthermore explain why unicorn blood, or the unicorn itself, is so often referred to as being sacred and pure.

Rowling herself describes a unicorn as a pure white, horned horse with magical abilities: “The unicorn’s horn, blood and hair all have highly magical properties.” (Rowling 2009: 81) Again, we come across the element of purity in combination with the color white, which is another sign of innocence. Nevertheless, there is a description of the unicorn that counters the image of the pure white, beautiful horse with a golden or silver horn, as Kronzek/Kronzek state; the Greek physician Ctesias believed that the unicorn had approximately the size of a donkey, a dark red head and a white body. Although Ctesias believed in the healing abilities of the unicorn’s horn, he depicted the beast itself as being enormously strong, fast and having a vicious temperament, which made it impossible for humans to capture it. Unicorn hunting was also believed to be a quite dangerous sport, as it was assumed that unicorns could use their horns as swords and would jump off cliffs if they were pursued. In the fairy-tale *Das tapfere Schneiderlein (The valiant little Tailor)*, recorded by the brothers Grimm in 1812, the vicious temperament of the unicorn is shown, when the former attacks the tailor with its deadly horn. As the story goes, the unicorn takes a run-up and approaches the tailor with its head bowed in order to impale the latter with its horn. The tailor quickly jumps behind a tree and the unicorn is trapped with its horn stuck in the trunk.
The belief in the existence of unicorns eventually vanished in the eighteenth century, due to the fact that no one had ever really seen one of these creatures. However, the popularity of these beings did not suffer from the increasing disbelief in their existence. Literature, folklore and imagination offered a 'breeding ground' for the further existence of the unicorn and for its development into the pure, white horse with the golden horn, as it is known in most of today's literature worldwide (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 296).

**The Chamber of Secrets**

**Aragog (Acromantula)**

Spiders are probably most often referred to as being disgusting or scary whenever one speaks about these eight-legged creatures. Not less scary are the spiders that live in the Forbidden Forest around Hogwarts castle. Their 'father', Aragog, is a key figure in providing the solution about the secret monster that inhabits the chamber of secrets. It is Aragog who reveals to Harry and Ron that it was not Hagrid who had opened the chamber years ago, nor was he the master of the monster: “But that was years ago’ said Aragog fretfully. ‘Years and years ago. I remember it well. That’s why they made him leave the school. They believed that I was the monster that dwells in what they call the chamber of secrets. They thought that Hagrid had opened the chamber and set me free.” (The Chamber of Secrets: 277). Aragog is one of the biggest monsters in terms of height and magnitude within the saga, with approximately the size of a cottage and ten meter long legs. Yet he is not fundamentally evil, but acts rather on the demands of his wife and children: “And from the middle of the misty, domed web, the spider the size of a small elephant emerged, very slowly. There was gray in the black of his body and legs, and each of the eyes on his ugly, pincered head was milky white. He was blind.” (The Chamber of secrets: 276). It is shortly after this encounter that Harry and Ron find out Aragog’s attitude towards humans is rather of a leery kind.

Acromantulas, as Aragog’s species is referred to in the Potter universe, were invented by Rowling: no such spider is known in the real world. Still, one
can deduce some interesting things from the name Aragog. First of all, the name refers to Arachne, a mythical woman who was said to have been transformed into a spider by her opponent Athene. Arachne, who was said to be very talented in spinning and weaving, supposedly challenged Athena, the Greek goddess of handicrafts and beat her. According to legend, Athena was so annoyed that she transformed Arachne into a spider, forcing her to reduce her activities to weaving webs only. This is also the reason why the technical or scientific term for spiders is ‘arachnids’. Second, the name Gog first appeared in scripts of The Old Testament, referring to a warlord who was said to have had an important role in the final battle between good and evil, the so called Apocalypse. In a later English folktale, Gog was described as a dreadful giant who was supposed to guard the English royal palace (Schneidewind 2000: 25). Consequently, it seems obvious that Rowling combined the names Arachne and Gog to refer to a ‘giant-spider’ and yet again, Greek mythology serves as the source for her inventions.

Rose mentions the traditional monster-spider with reference to Japanese folklore. There exist several folktales in Japan in which one or more exhausted travelers seek shelter in an old castle or mansion and get trapped in giant spider-webs. In most of these tales, the victims are doomed to be trapped for a long time before they eventually serve as ‘dinner’ for a monstrous spider. Another Japanese myth tells of a gigantic female spider named ‘Spider-Woman’. This monster supposedly inhabited a mountain lair and could allegedly disguise itself as beautiful woman in order to lure young men into her web. However, the myth reports of a young man who is said to have defeated the beast by stabbing it with a sword, while the latter was in its human form (the beautiful woman). After the ‘Spider-Woman’ had died, as it was believed, many little spiders allegedly emerged from the corpse of the dead beast, which were supposedly all killed by the young man and his servant. From this day on, people believed that the land was free from these monsters forever (cf. Rose 2001: 344).

Spiders seem to be a favorite species for many authors to make man-eating monsters out of them. Rowling’s spiders seem to be more human-like, understanding the value of life and friendship and yet, are perfectly happy with eating human flesh. Nevertheless, it seems to be a rule, and surely not only in
Rowling’s world, that most creatures treat others only as badly as they themselves have been treated in fairy-tales and mythology. In Aragog’s case, it is not surprising that he tends to be skeptical towards wizards as he has been treated as a monster before. Yet it can clearly be seen that Aragog is a feeling creature, much different from Shelob, the monstrous spider described by Tolkien in *Lord of the Rings*, as Colbert points out. As opposed to Aragog, Shelob eats every living thing that crosses her way and she hardly thinks about anything else than her next meal (cf. Colbert 2008: 226).

**Basilisks**

The basilisk is surely a unique monster in the Harry Potter universe. It is without exception the only beast that acts as a main villain on the same level as Lord Voldemort does in terms of its textual and literary function. Although it is actually the ‘Dark Lord’ himself who pulls the strings behind the giant serpent, it is the basilisk that threatens the lives of the students at Hogwarts and that tries to kill Harry in the final fight in *The Chamber of Secrets*: “The enormous serpent, bright, poisonous green, thick as an oak trunk, has raised itself high in the air and its great blunt head was weaving drunkenly between the pillars.” (Chamber of Secrets: 318). As opposed to all other beasts Harry Potter encounters throughout the saga, the basilisk provides a direct connection to Lord Voldemort and the house of Slytherin, for one reason, because Voldemort has a special relationship to snakes and is even able to speak their language, and for the other, because the snake is the house-symbol of Slytherin.

According to Schneidewind, the basilisk is known as a dangerous and cruel monster in mythology. Its name means ‘king of the serpents’ as the word basilisk derives from the Greek term *basileus*, which means king. Schneidewind also refers to the *Malleus maleficarum*, the so called ‘witch-persecution bible’; it says that a basilisk is supposed to slip from the egg of a seven or nine year old cock and that the egg must be incubated by a toad. In 1474, a case was reported in Basel, Switzerland, in which an eleven-year-old cock, which had supposedly laid an egg, was pronounced guilty and sentenced to death (cf. Bechtold-Stäubli
1927-1942: I, 935). The gaze of the basilisk is said to be absolutely lethal due to a poisonous substance that allegedly comes out of its eyes. In medieval literature, the basilisk is often described as a hybrid creature, a ‘mixture’ of a cock, a dragon, a lizard, and an eagle, with a crown on its head (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 40).

A similar description of the basilisk is given by Kronzek/Kronzek: “Depending on who tells the tale, it is a venom-spitting serpent, a ferocious lizard, a towering dragon, or an impossible hybrid sporting the head and wings of a rooster attached to the body of a snake:” (Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 21). They furthermore mention Pliny, a Latin writer and encyclopedic who describes the basilisk as a small and lethal snake that is native to North Africa. The crown-like markings on the serpent’s head supposedly caused the animal to be referred to as ‘king of the serpents’ (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 21). However, the existence of the small and lethal snake with crown-like markings on its head, as described by Pliny, has never been scientifically underpinned and is doubtlessly questionable, as is the existence of many other creatures described by ancient authors. This is presumably the case because the possibilities of travelling in ancient times were rather restricted and most scientific accounts describing wild and unknown animals were based on oral reports and descriptions. However, one can assume that the basilisk is based on a real animal as are many other imaginary beings. David Colbert, for example, says that the Egyptian cobra, which has a lethal venom and also crown-like markings on its head, could be a possible ‘ancestor’ of the basilisk (cf. Colbert 2008: 34).

Considering this, one can assume that the depiction of the basilisk as a monstrous beast of gigantic size has evolved within literature and folklore throughout the Middle Ages or even later, as was the case with unicorns. This theory is also supported by Kronzek/Kronzek; they say that popular books about myths and folklore in the middle ages offered descriptions of the basilisk as a giant, bizarre monster (Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 22). Bechtold-Stäubli says that basilisks were generally believed to inhabit basements of castles or other stone-made mansions in order to guard treasures. Their most lethal weapon was said to be their poisonous breath, yet they could allegedly also kill with their gaze if necessary (cf. Bechtold-Stäubli 1927-1942: I, 936).
Graphics of basilisks could often be found in churches on fonts, which might have stimulated the imagination of writers, as Harmening believes. He furthermore argues that the pictorial representation and sculptures of basilisks in ecclesiastical buildings might have contributed to the belief that these beasts inhabited wells and other stone-built buildings. However, as opposed to the other authors I have referred to in this context, Harmening mentions some positive aspects concerning the basilisk-myth: its ashes were believed to be efficient tools against spiders and other poisonous animals, and its blood was said to have healing-powers (cf. Harmening 2009: 61).

According to some legends, a basilisk can supposedly be killed by holding a mirror in front of its head or simply by the crowing of a cock, as Schneidewind points out (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 40). This is also reflected in The Chamber of Secrets, when Tom Riddle orders Ginny Weasley to kill all the roosters at Hogwarts’ castle (cf. Chamber of secrets: 310). In addition, Harmening mentions the weasel as ‘natural’ enemy of the basilisk in mythology; the smell of a weasel might weaken or possibly kill the monster (cf. Harmening 2009: 61).

Elves

Elves, or house-elves, as they are referred to in the Harry Potter series, are introduced in The Chamber of Secrets via the appearance of Dobby, the house-elf of the Malfoy family: “Harry managed not to shout out, but it was a close thing. The little creature on the bed had large, bat-like ears and bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls.” (The Chamber of Secrets: 12). This scene plays out in Harry’s bedroom at the Dursley-house in 4 Privet Drive, a ‘muggle’ estate. It is soon revealed that Dobby is in favor with Harry and that he tries to warn him of possible dangers that might be waiting at Hogwarts. In his attempt to save the Potter boy from these dangers, Dobby does everything in his power to prevent the former from returning to the castle. As it turns out in the following books, most notably in The Deathly Hallows, Dobby will become a key figure in the adventures of Harry and his schoolmates.
In Rowling’s fictional universe, elves are relatively small beings with bat-like ears and protuberant green or brown eyes, inhabiting the Forbidden Forest and being known as cunning and sometimes devious creatures (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 96). However, the Harry Potter universe is by far not the only ‘literary home’ of these beings. Elves appear in myths and folklore of many different nations and regions and thus come in different shapes and sizes, depending on the culture and the traditions of the source-nation. The so called dark elves of Germany, for example, are supposedly quite hideous while Danish elves are said to be known for their beauty. English folklore tales report about male elves that usually appear in the shape of a wizened old man. Yet, their female counterparts are said to be lovely, golden-haired maidens. In medieval England, many cases of deaths were traced back to the intervention of elves. It was a general belief back then that elves could intervene in human lives with either good or bad intentions (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 80-81).

According to Borges, elf-myths are of Germanic and Celtic descent. Very little can be found about how they were believed to look like, except that they were said to be looking quite sinister. Borges also says that most elves known in folklore are described as acting maliciously, even stealing livestock and children. The most interesting point, however, is that he refers to the German word Alp as being derived from ‘elf’, a view which is also supported by many etymologists. In the Middle Ages, people used to believe that elves were able to sit down on the chest of a sleeping person and cause frightful dreams. Hence, people in German speaking countries use the word Alptraum in order to refer to bad dreams (cf. Borges 2006: 74). In German folklore, elves are also referred to as Trud or Schratt. They were believed to be night-demons, which supposedly squeezed sleeping people’s chests. In the fifteenth century, a confession manual was devised in order to forbid the belief in the so called Drutter, a special kind of night-demon which was believed to steal the milk from cows and ‘squeeze’ people to sleep. People who believed in such demons often used a pentagram or Drudenfuß as a kind of protection-charm in order to protect their children or other possessions from these beings. The pentagram was usually attached to doors, beds or directly onto the thing/being that was meant to be protected (cf. Harmening 2009: 32).
Considering what has been said about elves so far, it seems obvious that Dobby is one of a kind among his species. Surely, Rowling has adapted the generally held attitude and behavior of elves to the needs of her work, meaning that so called house-elves seem to exist solely in the Potter universe and that most elves seem to be benevolent when treated with respect. As for the enthusiastic Harry Potter reader, it should be clear that elves are hardly treated with respect in the saga, but are rather enslaved and exploited for their magical abilities which are, for example, moving things without touching them or the power to vanish in an instant and appear somewhere else. This shows that Rowling does not always comply with the traditional interpretations or perceptions of the mythical creatures she uses in her books.

Ghosts

Although ghosts are familiar as of the daily fare of the horror, thriller and crime- ‘menu’ of the average mainstream-media consumer, it seems reasonable to discuss them in detail, considering their frequent appearances in and around Hogwarts castle. Apart from their rather ‘supporting roles’ within the books, there are ghosts that are important in terms of story and plot-development. ‘The Moaning Myrtle’, for example, is the only one who knows where the entrance to the chamber of secrets is located since she was the student killed by the basilisk years ago: “Where exactly did you see the eyes’, said Harry. ‘Somewhere there’, said Myrtle, pointing vaguely toward the sink in front of her toilet.” (The Chamber of Secrets: 299-300). As it turns out, the sink in the girls’ toilet is a secret entrance to the chamber and it is only thanks to Myrtle’s help that Ron and Harry eventually find it. Other recurring ghosts in the Potter universe would be ‘Nearly Headless Nick’, ‘The Bloody Baron’ or the poltergeist Peeves.

As long as stories, fables and tales amuse, teach and frighten people around the globe in all different kinds of cultures, ghosts have made their way into many of these, becoming an indispensable device of literary works of fiction. Ghost-stories seem to have always fascinated people and therefore have hardly suffered a decrease of popularity in hundreds of years.
According to Schneidewind, one has to distinguish between two general kinds of ghosts: those of the deceased, and those who are often referred to as ‘spiritual beings’ among religious people. The latter supposedly come from the spiritual world and are sent to earth in order to help or support the living, while the former are believed to be restless souls of people who have been robbed of their lives by homicide, a lethal accident or even suicide. It is also a common belief that those who have done evil things in life or who have been in league with the devil are unable to find peace and are thus earth-bound until their guilt is forgiven (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 132). One of the most ‘popular’ reasons for ghosts to remain among the living in literature and film is revenge. Shakespeare’s Hamlet, for example, shows this in a highly gloomy way, when the ghost of Hamlet’s father orders his son to take revenge for his devious and cruel assassination. The ghosts in Rowling’s universe seem to be of the first kind (restless souls) as well, though they are not depicted as just as frightening as the Ghost in Hamlet. ‘Nearly Headless Nick’ was presumably beheaded, ‘Moaning Myrtle’ was killed by the basilisk and ‘The Bloody Baron’ was obviously a crime victim too, as were Sirius Black and Harry’s parents, who appear as ghosts in The Deathly Hallows.

Although the ghost phenomenon, or the belief in ghosts, exists in almost every culture, traditionally speaking, there are differences concerning the form and nature of the ghosts being described. In ancient Greece and Rome, for example, spirits of the deceased supposedly appeared as dark shadows or strange black patches. The Egyptians believed that ghosts could return in their reanimated bodies. Many other cultures were convinced that spirits who had not found peace could return as demons or even animals. However, what all ancient societies have in common is the belief in the real existence of ghosts. Considering ghost appearances as a natural phenomenon, many of these old cultures were careful of maintaining good relations with the dead in order to show them respect or simply to not displease them. Therefore, festivals and rituals were held throughout the year. As most of these rituals seemed to be relatively harmless (scattering black beans in the living room, for example), it is generally assumed that ghosts were not as much feared back then as they are in today’s fiction (cf. Kronzek/ Kronzek 2010: 95- 97). It is again obvious that the incorporation of ghosts into literature, and later film, has brought about a change
concerning our perception of these supernatural beings: the typical ghosts in movies today rather make one’s flesh creep than anything else.

Modern ghost-rituals, such as channeling, ghost-photography or table-turning, are often exercised by so-called mediums, in order to receive messages from the ‘other world’ or to predict future events (cf. Harmening 2009: 171). Such rituals have often been attended by scientists in order to ascertain their authenticity, yet no proof of the existence of real ghosts or supernatural interference has ever been found so far. However, the belief in ghosts and the immortality of the soul is not a phenomenon of bygone days, but can still be found in most parts of the world. The rise of esotericism and new-age philosophies has also contributed to the belief in supernatural beings and the possibility to communicate with the dead. As a consequence, not a few people who would call themselves spiritual tend to attribute unexplainable noises such as creaking or clattering-sounds to the interference of ghosts. In scientific language, as far as one can actually call the investigation of ghost-appearances a science, such phenomena would be called PSI-phenomena nowadays.

**Mandrakes**

In the Potter Universe, the mandrake is a plant with a human-like body as its root which tends to scream unbearably loudly when unearthed: “The mandrakes didn’t like coming out of the earth, but didn’t seem to want to go back into it either. They squirmed, kicked, flailed their sharp little fists, and gnashed their teeth;” (The Chamber of Secrets: 94). The scream of a fully grown mandrake can kill people who are exposed to it unshielded, in the Potter saga. The mandrake is not a particularly spectacular being, nor is it of great importance in terms of plot development. Yet it deserves to be mentioned in this catalogue due to the fact that the potion that can be made out of it revives all the students that have been petrified in *Chamber of Secrets*.

As opposed to all other magical creatures we have investigated so far, the mandrake is actually a real plant that is known as belonging to the nightshades family. Different hallucinogenic alkaloids made the plant a popular device in
magic and healing-rituals in ancient times. Furthermore, the often human-shaped roots of the plant strengthened the belief in the supernatural powers of the mandrake. People who used the poisonous substances of the plant for magic or healing rituals, often suffered from dizziness, anxiety or paralysis. If a mandrake was not available, belladonna was sometimes used instead, due to the fact that the substances of the former had a similar effect on the human mind (cf. Bechtold-Stäubli 1927-1942: II, 312-318). This resemblance to the human body may have caused the plant to be believed having a soul and being able to communicate with people, as is described in Chamber of Secrets. According to David Colbert, the assumed communicative abilities of the mandrake made it a useful tool for fortune tellers. The roots of the plant supposedly nodded or shook their heads if they were asked a question. Voodoo priests were also said to have used the roots of the mandrake as voodoo dolls, casting a spell or curse onto them in order to have an effect on a real person (cf. Colbert 2008: 129). However, according to Harmening, no other plant was used in so many different areas of magic and voodoo as the mandrake: it was used as a tool to gain wealth and luck; it was used as a cure for diseases; it was used as a weapon against enemies; it was used as a love-potion and it was even used to protect oneself from being imprisoned after having committed a crime. Of course, most of these rituals were nothing but superstitious practices, except for the hallucinogenic effects of the mandrake on the human mind, which are real (cf. Harmening 2009: 43).

The ancient writer and philosopher Pliny, who has been mentioned before, distinguishes male and female mandrakes: he describes the male plant as white and the female one as black (cf. Borges 2006: 129). Colbert assumes that it is this distinction that made the mandrake a popular plant for making love potions: “As a love potion too it was important to avoid drinking too much. A little bit might work, but a lot would make the lover act like a fool. Yet it must have been effective: Venus, known as the goddess of love, was sometimes called Mandragoritis.” (Colbert 2008: 129). Pliny’s description of the mandrake can be found in his Naturalis historia. He claims that certain rituals had to be carried out before the plant could be unearthed. Pliny says that those, who want to unearth the mandrake, must be careful to have no headwind and should draw three circles on the ground with a sword, before approaching the plant. These rituals
were apparently believed to influence the effect of the mandrake’s substances. Other ancient writers, such as Flavios Josephos, Claudius Ailianos or Theophastrus also believed that a ceremonial unearthing of the plant would have an effect on the way it would work later in planned magical rituals (cf. Harmening 2009: 34).

In the Potter-universe it is shown in *The Chamber of Secrets*, a mandrake can restore people who have been changed by a spell or curse from their original selves. The transformational powers of the mandrake are also demonstrated in Homer’s epic *The Odyssey*; the sorcerer Circe uses the plant to transform Odysseus’ men into pigs, as Colbert explains (cf. Colbert 2008: 129). Schneidewind mentions the mandrake as opposed in the context of ‘classical’ literature; Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, or Goethe’s *Faust* would be examples of this (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 14-15).

**The Phoenix**

The Phoenix is surely one of the most famous of legendary beings within the Harry Potter series. It acts as Harry’s savior in the final confrontation with the basilisk in *The Chamber of Secrets*, willing to sacrifice its own life in order to save the boy’s: “Fawkes was soaring around its head, and the basilisk was snapping furiously at him with fangs long and thin as sabers - Fawkes dived. His long golden beak sank out of sight and a sudden shower of dark blood splattered on the floor.” (The Chamber of Secrets: 318-319). Having eventually defeated the monster, it is only due to Fawkes’s help that Harry is able to survive the outcomes of the fight with the giant snake. Harry lies on the floor wounded and poisoned, when Fawkes appears and yet again saves the boy by dropping its tears into Harry’s wound: “Harry gave his head a little shake and there was Fawkes, still resting his head on Harry’s arm. A pearly patch of tears was shining all around the wound - except that there was no wound -“ (The Chamber of secrets: 321).

The phoenix has its origins in ancient Egypt and was said to be the incarnation of the sun-god Ra, or at least connected to the powers of the latter,
as most sources state. According to Schneidewind, for example, the phoenix was believed to be the embodiment of Ra and later, the ‘soul’ of Osiris. The Greeks and Romans altered the phoenix to a symbol of power and wealth. The Romans’ concept of the magical bird provides that the phoenix is supposed to burn itself to death and rise again out of its own ashes every five-hundred years (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 263). Colbert adds: “[…] the cycle of fiery death was associated with the cycle of the sun, which died every night, plunging the world into darkness, and was born again the following day.” (Colbert 2008: 223). This is probably the reason why the bird is seen as a symbol of resurrection and eternal life in Christian tradition. It is thus often used in art as an allegory of Jesus Christ and the immortality of the soul (cf: Schneidewind 2000: 263).

These assumptions are also shared by Rose. She furthermore argues that it was believed that only one phoenix would exist in the world, meaning that no other of the same species would be alive at the same time. The name ‘phoenix’ supposedly derives from the Greek word for purple-red or crimson, implying that the bird was seen as a colorful creature. Most accounts speak of the colors purple, gold, red and blue, when referring to the looks of the phoenix (cf. Rose 2001: 291). In The Chamber of Secrets the bird is described as follows: “A crimson bird the size of a swan had appeared, piping its weird music to the vaulted ceiling. It had a glittering golden tail as long as a peacock’s and gleaming golden talons, which were gripping a red bundle.” (Chamber of Secrets: 315). Jorge Luis Borges quotes Herodotus, a Greek historian, in his account of describing the phoenix:

Another bird also is sacred; it is called the Phoenix. I myself have never seen it; but only pictures of it; for the bird comes but seldom into Egypt, once in five hundred years, as the people of Heliopolis say. It is said that the Phoenix comes when his father dies. If the picture truly shows his size and appearance, his plumage is partly golden but mostly red. He is most like an eagle in shape and bigness. (Borges 2006: 157)

This shows that most ancient writers had hardly ever seen any of the beings they wrote about, but based their descriptions on pictures and stories.

As far as the magical abilities of the phoenix are concerned, as they are shown in the Potter universe, Rowling presumably invented most of them, as no
source tells about the healing powers of the bird’s tears or the ability to empower wands with its tail feathers. However, Kronzek/Kronzek mention the bird in the context of potion-making; the ashes of the magical bird supposedly could bring the dead back to life. Interestingly, Nicholas Flamel seemed to have been interested in the phoenix as well. It is assumed that he saw a connection between the bird’s transformation from old to new and the transformation from ordinary metals into precious ones, which is a central element of alchemy (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 224). The allegorical meaning of the Phoenix’s resurrection has hardly changed over the centuries; it is still used to refer to people who have made it ‘from rags to riches’ or for people who have fully recovered from physical or mental traumata.

**Pixies**

When Professor Gilderoy Lockhart unleashes a cage full of pixies, he involuntarily reveals too much of his real character and his abilities due to the fact that he is completely unable to cope with these little fairy-like creatures: “He rolled up his sleeves, brandished his wand, and bellowed, ‘Peskipiksi Pesternomi!’ It had absolutely no effect; one of the pixies seized his wand and threw it out of the window, too. Lockhart gulped and dived under his own desk […]” (The Chamber of Secrets: 102). Within a few minutes, the Cornish pixies manage to turn the classroom into a complete mess and Lockhart leaves in embarrassment.

Schneidewind describes these mythological beings as blue creatures with a thin face and sharp features, supposedly having high-pitched voices and enormous powers. Two pixies were said to be able to lift a human from the ground. They are not said to be vicious, but like to behave mischievously (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 409). Rowling says that stories about pixies can mostly be found in Cornwall, England. Her description of the creatures is rather similar to the one given by Schneidewind, yet she reveals slightly more about their mischievous behavior: “Although wingless, it can fly and has been known to seize unwary humans by the ears and deposit them at the tops of tall trees and buildings.” (Rowling 2009: 62).
According to Colbert, Rowling departs from tradition in describing the pixies as ‘electric blue’ while in southwestern English folklore they are usually described as being dressed in green coats and wearing pointed caps. Furthermore, their hair color is often depicted as ‘fiery red’. In folklore, pixies are believed to act like the house-elves in Rowling’s world; depending on the behavior of their ‘masters’, they can either be helpful or mischievous (cf. Colbert 2008: 57). Kronzek/Kronzek point out that it was generally believed that pixies preferred playing tricks on extremely lazy people and helped those who were diligent (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 223). However, both authors say that the favorite trick of the Cornish pixie is supposedly to lead travelers astray. Many people believed that they had been tricked by pixies if they found themselves helplessly lost, unable to find a recognizable landmark. Hence, this experience is even nowadays known as being ‘pixy-led’ or ‘pixilated’ in western England (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 226).

**The Prisoner of Azkaban**

**Boggarts**

The boggart one encounters in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* is actually only important for one reason: namely to teach Harry how to repulse a dementor. Professor Lupin gives Harry private lessons in order to show him how to cast a ‘patronus’ (a protection charm), using a boggart that takes on the form of a dementor: “‘What’s that?’ said Harry. ‘Another boggart,’ said Lupin, stripping off his cloak. ‘I’ve been combing the castle ever since Tuesday, and very luckily, I found this one lurking inside Mr. Filch’s filing cabinet. It’s the nearest we’ll get to a real dementor […]’” (The Prisoner of Azkaban: 236). As is revealed earlier in the book, boggarts transform into the creature/being that is most feared by their observers. Thus, the boggart used for the training of the patronus-spell transforms itself into a dementor when Harry encounters it. However, it is never revealed how a boggart looks in its original form.

The boggart is best known in Northern English folklore as a spirit with shape-shifting abilities; it is said to be able to appear as a human, a skeleton, an
animal or even a demon. It was a general belief that boggarts were relatively harmless, yet able to create great chaos in orderly households. According to folklore, a boggart could easily be mistaken for a poltergeist due to the fact that their mischievous behavior supposedly shows close resemblance: doors would slam for no reason, candles would suddenly go out, tools might disappear and strange noises might echo through the house. These are only some of the assumed abilities of the boggart in folklore (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 27).

Nowadays, the boggart is rather known as ‘bogeyman’, especially in the United States. It is a popular superstition that the ‘bogeyman’ inhabits children’s closets and comes out in the middle of the night in order to frighten people and play tricks on them. It is believed that a ‘bogeyman’ is gaining more and more power the more desperate and depressive the family members become. The only way to get rid of it, according to folklore, is to move. The German word that would be used in order to refer to a boggart or ‘bogeyman’ would be ‘Butzemann’, as Colbert points out (cf. Colbert 2008: 47). However, from an Austrian point of view, one would rather refer to it as ‘Der Schwarze Mann’.

## Demons

Although demons are not explicitly mentioned in the Harry Potter saga, some creatures within Rowling’s work obviously belong to this species, as Kronzek/Kronzek claim; the grindylow that attacks Harry in the Hogwarts lake or the ghoul in the Weasley’s attic could be classified as demons (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 59).

According to Borges, demons were said to have been individuals who chose hell over heaven after their death in ancient times; they were considered having faces like beasts or no faces at all. Living in mutual hatred and violence, they allegedly destroyed one another if they came together (cf. Borges 2006: 59). These beings are traditionally referred to as devils or fallen angels.

Considering the large variety in which demons are depicted in literature and film, it seems rather difficult to determine which creature may be classified as a demon and which not. The incarnated evil in the film adaption of Stephen King’s
horror novel *IT* (Green/Epstein Prod. 1986) is a clown named Pennywise who feeds on children’s souls; this creature is usually referred to as being a demon. The Warner Brothers movie *The Exorcist* (Warner 1973) features a girl who is possessed by a demon. In Peter Jackson’s film adaption of Tolkien’s *Fellowship of the Ring* (NLC 2001), a demon called ‘Balrog’ is depicted as a fiery, giant monster with wings, covered in lava and a dark crust. The commonly known depictions of demons suggest that these beings are closely related to the place known as hell, yet it seems that most demons in literature and film are far from being really dead; to a greater degree, it seems that demons are somewhere positioned between life and death, being mostly associated with evil forces and cruel intentions. Consequently, one could assume that Lord Voldemort is a demon as well, or at least a creature with demonic ‘features’, which is another reason why demons should be mentioned in this catalogue.

Schneidewind points out that in ancient Greece, the word ‘daimon’ was used to refer to god-like beings which were said to have been ‘responsible’ for the fortune of people. While Homer used the term ‘daimon’ to refer to the ancient gods, Hesiod wrote about hybrid creatures, being partly human and partly divine. Nowadays, as Schneidewind explains, demons are generally believed to be superhuman beings that can either benefit, or, as it would rather be the case, harm people. More interesting, however, is the fact that demons occur in almost every natural religion, reaching from Islam to Judaism and Christianity. According to Jewish lore, for example, Lilith, Adam’s first wife, is said to have had sexual intercourse with demonic beings, resulting in the creation of thousands of beastly creatures. Hence, God supposedly sent a ‘better’ wife to Adam, nowadays known as Eve. In medieval times, people believed that demons often came in order to take away the souls of the deceased; only angels were allegedly able to save a human soul from being ‘abducted’ by a demon. As it was believed then, this supposedly resulted in a cruel war between angels and demons quite often. Schneidewind also refers to Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettlesheim, a German scholar, who wrote about a multitude of different kinds of demons and ghosts (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 68-69).

Well-known ancient philosophers and scholars, such as Plato, also wrote about demonic creatures and their position within a possible cosmic
hierarchy. Plato defined demons as mediating creatures that supposedly built a ‘bridge’ between gods and humans. According to the former, these demons allegedly reigned over certain parts of the cosmos, ostensibly protecting different tribes and individuals. A pseudo-platonic manifest called *Epinomis*, which was supposedly written by Philippos van Opus, claims that demons allegedly inhabit the atmosphere or, more precisely, the air. Stoic philosophers believed that demons were mythological gods, which were again subdivided into good and bad ones. As opposed to ancient gods, demons were said to be blinded by passion, which supposedly made them quite dangerous. Yet, these beings played an important part in the cosmic hierarchy, which was believed to be divine and divided as follows: Gods – angels – demons – heroes - humans.

Different accounts of demonic creatures can also be found in ancient cultures of Persia, Egypt or Israel; these evil spirits were believed to be responsible for lethal diseases, plagues and natural disasters. Demons, such as ‘the Croucher’ or ‘the Seizer’ supposedly could lurk anywhere: in forests and deserts, on rooftops and in attics inside homes. Being allegedly capable of shifting their shape whenever needed, these ancient demons were believed to have many different forms: they were often said to appear as flies, dogs, bulls or other horse-like creatures with hooves, which implies a devilish alliance due to the fact that the devil is often described as a creature with horse-like hooves. It is most likely that the European conception of the demon, as it is known today, has evolved from these traditions and from the *daimons* described in ancient Greece (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 59).

**Fairies**

Gilderoy Lockhart’s Cornish pixies, the leprechauns from the Quidditch field and the more important house elves all belong to a larger family generally known as fairies. Although elves and pixies (which belong to the fairy-kind) have already been discussed earlier, it seems important to have a brief look at fairies in general, especially because leprechauns have not been discussed so far. As they only have a small part in the Harry Potter saga, they will shortly be dealt with in this part of the thesis.
The word ‘fairy’ derives from the Latin term *fatum*, which means ‘fate’ or ‘destiny’. Considering what has been said about pixies and elves, this perfectly corresponds with the belief that these creatures have a tendency to intervene in human lives. Fairies are said to be the most numerous and beautiful kind of the minor mythical creatures. Their mythological origin is not limited to one or two nations, but reaches from the ancient Greeks to American Indians, Eskimos and different Asian cultures. Stories of American Indians, for example, speak about men who had love-relationships with fairies. These men supposedly gained the love interest of fairies through heroic actions; yet, having love affairs with these beings was considered a dangerous ‘business’ because fairies allegedly develop a strong need for killing once their lust is satisfied (cf. Borges 2006: 75). However, such legends contradict the assumption that fairies were generally believed to be tiny, benevolent creatures. Modern horror-fiction TV-series, such as HBO’s *True Blood* (2008), also depict fairies as human-like creatures with the tendency to develop a strong love interest in humans.

Nevertheless, the traditional Irish or Scottish fairies are rather said to be of relatively small size; they presumably like singing and music and have a taste for the color green (cf. Borges 2006: 76). Within this context, the color green might bring the leprechaun to one’s mind. A member of the fairy family, the leprechaun is a being from Irish folklore; supposedly endowed with great magical abilities, it can reportedly play all different kinds of tricks on humans. However, the leprechaun is most commonly known in folklore for distributing gold and other precious materials among people. This belief probably caused the leprechaun to be referred to as ‘the lucky Irish leprechaun’ (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 206). Yet it is not clear whether leprechauns are known in folklore solely for their benevolence. As fairies in general were believed to be both, benevolent and hostile, it can be assumed that this applies to leprechauns as well. According to Kronzek/Kronzek, fairies were rather feared until the mid-sixteenth century. They argue that most people nowadays know the term fairy from children’s books and fairy-tales, which, for the greater part, depict these beings as funny little creatures with golden hearts. However, as also mentioned by the other authors, the fairy-myths of past centuries offered a wide range of different depictions of these magical creatures: reaching from small to large, from nice to nasty, from funny to scary, from disgusting to beautiful, and from benevolent to
hostile, the fairy was seen as creature to be treated with caution. During the middle ages, for example, fairies were held responsible for quite a lot of physical diseases such as skin rushes, tuberculosis, bruises, cramps or rheumatism. Highly superstitious people even believed that heart attacks or sudden cases of paralysis were caused by invisible arrows shot by fairies. If a person died from a heart attack, for example, he or she was usually said to have been ‘elf shot’. Mothers were also advised to never leave their newborns out of sight, due to the superstition that fairies were believed to snatch human children and replace them by putting a changeling into their place. However, fairies were only feared approximately until the mid-sixteenth century. By then, the fear of witches and witchcraft had replaced the fear of fairies (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 84).

Nevertheless, it was still believed that fairies are able to intervene in human lives, in one way or other, but, as opposed to earlier beliefs, in no way that would really hurt or even kill people. In Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for example, the fairy king’s ‘jester’ Puck, intervenes in human lives by secretly pulling the strings in the question who loves whom and thus creates a love-drama by completely messing things up. Shakespeare’s play seems to give quite a good insight into what fairies were believed to be, at least in Elizabethan times. Yet, the fairies in Shakespeare’s work are rather difficult to classify or describe in terms of their outward appearance as Oberon seems to be of a different size than his servants. Consequently, it seems to be impossible to precisely trace back Shakespeare’s sources of the fairy-myths; it can only be assumed that he had different sources of myth for his conceptions of fairies, as is often the case in literature.

The most famous fairy known today in the United States and parts of Great Britain is probably the ‘tooth fairy’. She is believed to leave money or other presents in exchange for children’s teeth and has not been mentioned in any folktale or myth until the early 20th century (Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 85).
Grims

In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry believes to be followed by a grim in the form of a big black dog. As it turns out later, the dog Harry was followed by was his godfather Sirius Black in his animal form. Harry's fear of being chased by the deadly creature named grim derives from one of Professor Trelawney's predictions: “The Grim, my dear, the Grim!”’ cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked that Harry hadn’t understood. ‘The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen - the worst omen - of death!’” (The Prisoner of Azkaban: 107).

Schneidewind defines the grim as a symbol of evil, death and even the devil; often used in horror literature, it functions as a sign of an oncoming case of death or the devil. In this context, Schneidewind mentions the popular horror novelist H.P. Lovecraft as a reference (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 144).

Kronzek/Kronzek adopt a different approach to the connotations of the grim in mythology. In Scandinavian and British folklore, ‘grim’ is sometimes used to refer to any kind of household spirit, yet it is more commonly used to refer to a churchyard spirit supposedly guarding the souls of the deceased. In English folklore, the grim was believed to appear as a big, black dog with fiery red eyes in this context, while in Scandinavia it was believed that it could also appear as a horse, pig or lamb. As opposed to Schneidewind’s argument of the grim being a symbol of the devil or being the devil himself, Kronzek and Kronzek argue that in English tradition, the grim was said to be responsible for protecting graveyards from the devil. This belief emerged from burial traditions: the first person buried on a newly built graveyard was made responsible for protecting it against satanic influences. In order to release human souls from this burden, people often buried big black dogs, or other animals, as it was the case in Scandinavia, to do this unpleasant duty. The grim is usually believed to be invisible with only one exception: it can supposedly be seen roaming around churchyards during stormy nights, which is said to be no good sign for the witness, as seeing the spooky animal is still believed to be an omen of death in some regions of Great Britain (cf. Kronzek Kronzek 2010: 107).
In German folklore, the creature which might come close to resemble the English grim, is called ‘Gevatter Tod’. Actually the title of fairy-tale by the well-known Grimm-brothers, ‘Gevatter Tod’ became an inherent part of German folklore. Similar to the grim-symbol that occurs in professor Trelawney’s future-prediction, ‘Gevatter Tod’ can also be found on tarot-cards in Austria and Germany, which are also often used by self-appointed fortune-tellers in order to predict future events.

**Hippogriffs**

The hippogriff ‘Buckbeak’ is an important figure in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, especially in the last third of the book, as the whole time-travel part of Harry, Ron and Hermione evolves from the story around Hagrid’s ‘pet’ and its planned execution. Furthermore, Buckbeak plays an important part in the rescue of Sirius Black, freeing the latter from Professor Flitwick’s office, where he is being kept prisoner. Rowling describes hippogriffs as follows:

Trotting towards them were a dozen of the most bizarre creatures Harry had ever seen. They had the bodies, hind legs, and tails of horses, but the front legs, wings, and heads of what seemed to be giant eagles, with cruel, steel-colored beaks and large, brilliantly orange eyes. The talons of their front legs were half a foot long and deadly looking. Each of the beasts had a thick leather collar around its neck, which was attached to a long chain […] (*The Prisoner of Azkaban*: 113-114).

As one can read in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, the trickiest thing is to approach a hippogriff due to the fact that they are very proud creatures in the Potter universe. This is actually the determining factor why the Malfoy boy is attacked by Buckbeak since the former does not show any sign of respect when he approaches the creature. After this event, Buckbeak is arrested and finally sentenced to death.

Carol Rose describes the hippogriff as a fabulous monster that has its roots in traditional European folklore. The term hippogriff refers to the combination of a horse (hippo) and a griffin, a beast also coming from European folklore, with the body of a lion and the head of an eagle: “It is described as having the front parts of a Griffin with the head of an eagle, lion’s legs, and eagle’s talons, with
the rear part formed of a winged horse. It was said to inhabit the Rhiphaean Mountains in the far frozen north of Europe.” (Rose 2001: 174) Rose furthermore explains that the term hippogriff first appeared in works of the Italian author Ludovico Ariosto, who lived from 1474 to 1573. Ariosto supposedly used a phrase from Virgil ‘to cross griffins with horses’, which meant ‘to do the impossible’, for the creation of the fabulous hippogriff (cf. Rose 2001: 174). Borges confirms Rose’s assumptions about Ariosto and adds that the hippogriff can be seen as a second-degree monster of imagination due to the fact that it is a hybrid creature partly made of another beast, namely the griffin (cf. Borges 2006: 104). The complicated domestication of the hippogriff as shown in The Prisoner of Azkaban derives from Ariosto’s epic poem Orlando Furioso. Being the first literary piece featuring a hippogriff as it is known today, it describes the expeditions of Charlemagne’s knights, as Colbert explains. The hippogriffs mentioned in this poem are supposedly as hard to tame as the hippogriffs in Rowling’s world (cf. Colbert 2008: 132).

As far as Buckbeak’s death-sentence is concerned, Kronzek/Kronzek point out that in medieval Europe animals of all kinds were often charged with crimes and therefore sometimes sentenced to death. According to quite old court records from approximately the ninth century, animals such as snakes, pigs, roosters, dogs, horses and insects had to stand trial either for murder or the destruction of property. Animals large enough to be kept in prison were often treated the same way as humans were; this even included torture and interrogation (cf. Kronzek/ Kronzek 2010: 129).

**Werewolves**

It is Professor Lupin’s greatest fear that his secret life as a werewolf will be discovered by his students one day. However, in The Prisoner of Azkaban he has no other option but to reveal his secret to Harry, Ron and Hermione when they face the true identity of Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black; eventually, Lupin turns into a werewolf in front of the three students as the full moon appears from behind a cloud when the group is on their way back to Hogwarts castle: “There was a terrible snarling noise. Lupin’s head was lengthening. So was his body.
His shoulders were hunching. Hair was sprouting visibly on his face and hands, which were curling into clawed paws.” (The Prisoner of Azkaban: 381)

In chapter one, werewolves were briefly mentioned in the context of the animagus; the most obvious difference between a werewolf and an animagus is that the latter is allegedly able to transform whenever he/she likes to whereas the werewolf is normally forced to change into a wolf, usually by the full moon. The term ‘werewolf’ is derived from the old English word *wer*, which means ‘man’, and the English and Germanic word ‘wolf’, resulting in a combination of these two terms; put simply, a ‘werewolf’ is nothing more than a ‘manwolf’. Carol Rose defines a werewolf as follows: “The werewolf is essentially a human form during the day but transforms, according to different versions, either at the height of the full moon, or by donning a special wolf skin, or permanently by some curse.” (Rose 2001: 391). She further argues that people in ancient times believed that becoming a werewolf could have resulted from different reasons such as: having been cursed, having consumed certain magical herbs, having slept under the full moon on a Friday, having drunk water that had been touched by another werewolf or having eaten the brain of a werewolf. Werewolves were believed to be superhumanly strong and almost indestructible: since they were impervious to all normal weapons including bullets, it was believed that hallowed silver was the only thing that could possibly harm or destroy a werewolf (cf. Rose 2001: 391).

Harmening defines the werewolf-myth in a more philosophical way. He says that from an animistic point of view (animism is a form of natural religion which claims that each natural object has a soul), a werewolf is not supposed to be a soulless beast, but the manifestation of a ‘beastly’ part of the human soul. In other words, a werewolf is allegedly a piece of the human soul that is supposedly able to separate itself from the body and become a bloodthirsty beast (cf. Harmening 2009: 450). According to this approach to the werewolf-myth, one could argue that werewolves emerged from the philosophical statement or belief that humans have an uncontrollable, animalistic side deep beneath their human surface.

The European belief in werewolves can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. According to a traditional Greek folktale, a man named Lycaeon
supposedly sacrificed his own child to Zeus, many say by cannibalism motivated by an overzealous worship of the god. Hence, Lycaeon was reportedly transformed into a wolf by Zeus, resulting in the foundation of many cults of wolf worshippers who tried to solve the secret of how to transform into a wolf. Ever since then, reports of big, hairy monsters, partly humanly shaped, had made their way into books of mythology and natural science in ancient Europe (cf. Rose 2001: 391). According to Kronzek and Kronzek, dozens of books about the transformation of men into wolves were published in that time. Many of these contained detailed descriptions of magicians ‘preparing’ the ‘transformation’ with different herbs, plants and the blood of a variety of animals (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010 308).

In medieval England, the transformation from men into wolves was connected to witchcraft. Consequently, many people who were believed to be werewolves were persecuted and executed. In France, for example, more than 30,000 people were put to death between 1520 and 1630 for being suspected werewolves. A quite well documented German case, published in England, reports the case of a man who had raped, murdered and tortured people under the disguise of a wolf costume, until he was finally caught and executed around 1615 (cf. Rose 2001: 391). But why were so many innocent people accused of being werewolves? One possible explanation would be that some victims actually looked like wolves due to a genetic condition that is nowadays known as hypertrichosis, causing dense hair on body, hands and face (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 309). Another explanation would be that livestock was often drastically reduced by attacks of real wolves and that somebody had to be held responsible for it, which was often done with people who were brought into connection with witchcraft and supernatural powers.

**The Goblet of Fire**

**Dragons**

Dragons occasionally occur throughout the seven Harry Potter books, but are actually given three big parts; the first one is in *The Goblet of Fire* during the
‘Triwizard Tournament’ and the other two are found in *The Deathly Hallows*. The ‘Hungarian Horntail’ Harry encounters as his first task in the tournament is depicted as a quite horrifying creature: “And there was the Horntail, at the other end of the enclosure, crouched low over her clutch of eggs, her wings half-furled, her evil, yellow eyes upon him, a monstrous, scaly, black lizard, trashing her spiked tale, leaving yard-long gouge marks in the hard ground.” (The Goblet of Fire: 353). Yet it is shown that dragons are not fundamentally evil in *The Deathly Hallows*, when Harry, Ron and Hermione release the dragon in the Gringotts dungeon. However, it is clearly revealed that dragons can hardly be tamed in the world of Harry Potter as can be seen during the tournament and in the final battle at Hogwarts in *The Deathly Hallows*, showing the gigantic beasts fighting on both sides.

Dragons have probably been the most popular creatures in mythology throughout history. There is hardly any culture that does not have at least some dragon-like beasts in its tradition and folklore. The word ‘dragon’ is derived from the Greek term *drakon*, which meant ‘to watch’ in ancient times. The name was probably applied to the monster because people believed that the beast’s purpose was to guard treasures and other quite precious objects. The description of ancient dragons was unlike the description of the modern dragons; in ancient Greece, dragons were usually described as serpent-like creatures with wings like those of bats attached to their bodies. Most ancient accounts of dragons describe the beasts as some kind of mixture between a serpent, a lizard, a crocodile and an eagle or other bird of prey (cf. Rose 2001: 104). Yet it seems rather impossible to find ‘the ancient dragon’, as the variety of myths and folktales describe dragons in so many different ways: there is the ‘Western dragon’, the ‘Chinese dragon’, the ‘Persian dragon’ or the ‘Ethiopian dragon’, to give only a brief overview. All these accounts of the dragon-myth offer numerous variations of the beast, depending on the region, time (e.g. century) and also on religious aspects of the source nation. However, one can at least try to assemble all the data from folklore and myth in order to set up a general description of dragons:

The most general description of the Occidental Dragon is very similar to that of the Oriental Dragon, being an enormous, elongated, scale-covered body like that of a crocodile, often with vast wings like those of a bat, and
having huge legs like those of a lizard with long claws. It may have a
toothed dorsal ridge extending to a long serpent tail, usually barbed. Its
head may be like that of a vast lizard or crocodile but with either a crest or
horns on the head, while its gross nostrils and huge fanged mouth breathe
fire and noxious fumes. (Rose 2001: 104)

According to Schneidewind, the 'Western Dragon' is rather tainted with negative
attributes such as being a deadly threat to every other living creature or having a
preference for slaying virgins; many folktales report about tribes that have
supposedly sacrificed virgins quite frequently in order to placate dragons (cf.
Schneidewind 2000: 78). In ancient European mythology, dragons were a
number one hunting-target for so-called heroes such as Hercules or Sigurd.
People believed that it required the virtues of a hero to defeat and kill a mighty
beast like a dragon. The menacing depiction of the dragon-concept lasted for
hundreds of years: Scandinavian pirates, for example, used dragon-paintings on
their ships and shields in order make them seem even more terrifying. The
Germanic kings of England also used dragon-heads on their banners and
weaponry, placing fear and terror into the mind of their enemies. Borges states
that the belief in the existence of dragons lasted at least until the mid-sixteenth
century in Europe. This can be read in a treatise called Historia Animalium,

As opposed to the European dragon, the 'Chinese Dragon' was rather
believed to be a benevolent creature, guarding the skies or bringing rain to
areas where it was needed. In Japan, dragons were even believed to be wise
and helpful creatures. Hence, dragons have served as official symbols or
emblems of the imperial families in China and Japan for a long time (cf.
Kronzek/ Kronzek 2010: 73). The emperor's throne was called the 'Dragon
Throne' and the face of the former was called the 'Dragon Visage'. When the
emperor died, the phrase 'he has ascended into the heavens on a dragon' was
used to announce his death to the public. In Asian traditions, dragons were
generally believed to have a god-like status, reigning over the sky and the sea.
In many regions of ancient China, dragons were worshipped more than any
other deities, probably also due to the fact that people believed to see dragons
in different cloud-constellations. William Shakespeare's quote 'sometimes we
see a cloud that's dragonish' also corresponds with this belief (cf. Borges 2006:
64-67).
According to Wolfgang Bauer’s, Irmtraud Dümotz’ and Sergius Golowin’s *Lexikon der Symbole*, dragons were connected to philosophical growth and the seeking for universal knowledge in ancient times. As they explain, the victory over a dragon by a mythological hero was believed to open a gate through which unlimited wisdom could be gained by the latter. Hence, dragons were also believed to be connected to alchemy and its secrets. According to the three authors, mythological heroes can often be found riding or standing on dragons on alchemical symbols or pictures (Bauer/ Dümotz/ Golowin 2003: 45).

**Mermaids/Mermen**

“We were as surprised as Harry to learn that the gray-skinned, yellow-eyed merpeople at the bottom of the Hogwarts-lake are actually relatives of the beautiful, blonde mermaid whose picture hangs in the prefects’ bathroom.” (Kronzek/ Kronzek 2010: 199). It is obvious that the mermaids Harry encounters in the second task of the ‘Triwizard Tournament’ do not have much in common with the tempting blonde maids so often depicted in folklore and modern fantasy fiction: broken teeth, long green hair and yellow eyes do not fit into this picture.

The mermaids in the Hogwarts lake seem to be indifferent to human lives; it seems as if they simply follow their task of letting each champion rescue only one hostage: “‘You take your own hostage,’ one of them said to him. ‘Leave the others…’” (The Goblet of Fire: 499). Although they threaten Harry with their spears when he tries to rescue Ron and Hermione, it is revealed later that they were only ordered to discourage the champions from taking more than one hostage.

According to Rowling, the myths about mermaids exist throughout the world and their depiction varies in appearance, habits and attitudes towards humans (Rowling 2009: 54). Colbert also mentions the widespread popularity of these mythical creatures and gives a rather simple, but universally applicable description of their outward appearance: “They have human torsos but silver fish tails instead of legs.” (Colbert 2008: 157) Though quite general, this description seems to fit most accounts of mermaids, leaving enough space for further or different approaches.
Rose states that the mermaid-myth can be traced back to ancient times. The most popular depiction of the mermaid shows her sitting on a rock, having a mirror in her hands and singing in a high-pitched voice. It is the singing that connected the mermaid-myth to the myth of the sirens, which supposedly lured sailors to their doom. Though most often depicted as beautiful maidens, Rose points out that mermaids were rather brought in connection with misfortune and disaster in ancient and also more modern accounts. Yet she says that some Scottish and Welsh folktales tell about benevolent mermaids that supposedly gave rich gifts, cures for deadly diseases or storm warnings to the sailors they met. The bad reputation of mermaids arose in the medieval period in Europe due to the fact that sailors believed these beings to be symbols of deceit which were in alliance with the devil (cf. Rose 2001: 244).

Kronzek/Kronzek argue that mermaids allegedly used their beauty and their tempting voices to attract sailors in order to steal their souls and keep them beneath the sea; this superstition emerged from the belief that mermaids had no souls, which had been brought up by the medieval church. These assumptions led to many legends in which mermaids reportedly tried to marry humans in order to obtain a soul or to obtain eternal salvation. It is unclear why a marriage to a human was believed to offer salvation. The authors assume that the mermaid myth derived from ancient Greek civilizations, who believed in different kinds of sea gods who allegedly taught them many things about the universe and science. Although mermaid sightings were often reported by many seamen and sailors, including Christopher Columbus, no such creature has ever been found (cf. Kronzek Kronzek 2010: 199-202).

Veela

Veela are the Bulgarian Quidditch mascots in The Goblet of Fire: “But a hundred veela were now gliding out onto the field, and Harry’s question was answered for him. Veela were woman…the most beautiful woman Harry had ever seen…except that they weren’t – they couldn’t be – human.” (The Goblet of Fire: 103). The crowd and Harry are completely stunned when these beings perform their dance before the start of the Quidditch World Cup. Yet it is
revealed later that the beautiful women are also capable of producing fireballs and shooting them at enemies: “At this, the veela lost control. Instead of dancing, they launched themselves across the field and began throwing what seemed to be handfuls of fire at the leprechauns.” (The Goblet of Fire: 111).

The veela-myth seems to be closely related to the myth of mermaids and sirens due to the fact that all three are said to have the ability to make men totally submissive by their singing, dancing and their stunning beauty. Colbert credits the existence of the veela in mythology to old legends of central Europe. They were said to be beautiful women, or at least were believed to appear as such. In most stories they were eventually discovered as being ghosts of unbaptized women who had been bound to the earth. They were supposedly gifted in the healing arts and natural remedies. As opposed to sirens and mermaids, veela were generally believed to be benevolent with two exceptions: they could allegedly become fiercely angry when their dancing rituals were disturbed or if they were jealous of other women. In both cases, according to myth, the veela would turn her beautiful face into a cock-like grimace and throw fireballs or conjure a storm (cf. Colbert 2008: 245-248). This is also shown during the Quidditch World Cup in The Goblet of Fire: “Watching through his Omniculars, Harry saw that they didn’t look remotely beautiful now. On the contrary, their faces were elongating into sharp, cruel-beaked bird heads, and long, scaly wings were bursting from their shoulders - .” (The Goblet of Fire: 111).

Schneidewind narrows the origin of the veela myth down to the traditional folklore of Slavic tribes. He adds that the veela was often portrayed and painted as having the feet of a goat and exchanging her offspring with human children (cf. Changeling-Wechselbalg, chapter 1). In Slavic folklore, the veela was believed to be the ghost of a bride that had died before the wedding; hence, she was believed to be a malevolent creature which killed men she encountered with her dancing performance (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 381).
The Order of the Phoenix

Centaurs

The centaurs in the Potter universe must be approached with the utmost caution. When Harry and Hermione lead Professor Umbridge, the high inquisitor of Hogwarts, into the ‘Forbidden Forest’, the three of them are attacked by a tribe of centaurs. It is soon revealed that these centaurs have no interest in the coexistence with humans and that they feel highly superior to the former: “We consider that a great insult, human! Our intelligence, thankfully, far outstrips your own - ” (The Order of the Phoenix: 754). The only one to make an exception is Firence, a highly intelligent and educated centaur, who got expelled from his tribe because he allied himself with the humans and became a supply teacher at Hogwarts.

Colbert defines centaurs as mythical beasts with the legs and bodies of horses and the heads, arms and torsos of humans. The depiction of centaurs in the Potter universe seems to fit with the mythological heritage of these creatures: according to Greek legends, centaurs lived in the mountains of Greece, far apart from the rest of the population, due to the fact that their relations with humans were rather of a negative kind. Centaurs supposedly had a preference for red wine and thus allegedly disturbed and plundered human feasts, which, according to myth, often ended in cruel wars between the two species. The most famous of these incidents, according to Colbert, supposedly happened at a wedding where some centaurs were said to have celebrated too much and, as a consequence of their excessive drinking, allegedly tried to abduct the human bride (cf. Colbert 2008: 55). Kronzek/Kronzek state that the wedding was that of king Pirithous and Laipithae: at the feast, the drunken centaurs supposedly assaulted the guests and tried to abduct the bride, which reportedly ended in a bloody massacre (Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 251/252).

According to Greek folktales, there were a few members in the centaur-family that rebelled against the cruel and rude behavior of the other centaurs. One of these exceptions, and probably the most famous centaur that can be found in myth, was Chiron, a wise and surely unique member of his kind. Chiron
was supposedly skilled in hunting, medicine, astrology and celestial navigation (Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 252). Carol Rose points out that Chiron was said to be so wise and educated that he was allegedly chosen by the gods to educate and teach later popular mythic heroes such as Hercules, Achilles or Theseus (cf. Rose 2001: 72). Considering this, parallels to Firence, the benevolent centaur of the Potter universe, can obviously be drawn: he is also chosen by Dumbledore to teach fortune-telling at Hogwarts. Furthermore, Firence himself claims that he and his kind are quite skilled in astrology and celestial navigation, which are exactly the skills attributed to Chiron in the legend: “I know that you have learned the names of the planets and their moons in Astronomy,’ said Firenze’s calm voice, ‘and that you have mapped the stars’ progress through the heavens. Centaurs have unraveled the mysteries of these movements over centuries. Our findings teach us that the future may be glimpsed in the sky above us….’” (The Order of the Phoenix: 603). According to legend, Chiron was so highly appreciated by the gods of the ancient Greece that he was supposedly placed on the firmament by Zeus, the king of all gods, in order to serve humans as a star constellation, which is nowadays known as Sagittarius (cf. Rose 2001: 72). However, other centaurs for example, like Nessus, or Eurutus, were said to have been quarrelsome and untamed; the latter was supposedly responsible for the bloody battle at the human wedding.

Centaurs also have a history in Christian art: they were quite often painted on church furniture, churches or other religious houses as an allegory of the suffering of Jesus Christ. Most of these paintings show a centaur shooting a bow; the arrow was supposed to symbolize the flight of the human soul (cf. Rose 2001: 72). As far as its symbolism is concerned, it could be argued that the centaur serves as a symbol for the divisiveness of the human mind, including both, the man (human) and the beast (horse/centaur). This particular symbolic function can also be attributed to other mythological beasts such as werewolves, for example.
The Forbidden Forrest

Although not technically a ‘creature’, the Forbidden Forest is an ‘integral part’ of the Harry Potter saga and should thus be dealt with in this catalogue. The forest occurs in each of the seven Potter books, probably due to the facts that it borders the Hogwarts school-ground and that many supernatural creatures inhabit it. From monster-spiders to unicorns and centaurs, the forest is the home of many creatures that play a crucial part in the adventures of Harry Potter and his friends. The following list gives a brief overview of the happenings in and around the Forbidden Forest from book number one to seven:

- In *The Philosopher’s Stone*, Harry and some of his fellow students are looking for an injured unicorn within the forest, which they eventually find dead, covered in its own blood. Furthermore, Harry overhears a conversation between Professor Snape and Professor Quirrell, in which Snape asks Quirell were the latter's loyalties actually lie.

- In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Hagrid advises Harry to ‘follow the spiders’. Later in the book, these spiders lead Harry and Ron into the middle of the forest, where they encounter the giant-spider Aragog, who wants his ‘children’ to feed on the Hogwarts students.

- In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry and Hermione hide in the forest together with the hippogriff Buckbeak.

- In *The Goblet of Fire*, the forest is only shortly mentioned when Cornelius Fudge exits the woods, approaching Harry and Victor Krump.

- In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry and Hermione lead Professor Umbridge into the ‘Forbidden Forest’, where they encounter a tribe of centaurs who abduct Umbridge as a consequence of her rude behavior towards them. Furthermore, Hagrid keeps his half-brother Grawp (a rather small-grown giant) hidden in the forest. This is revealed later in the book, when Hagrid introduces his half-brother to Harry and Hermione.
In *The Half-Blood Prince*, Hagrid comes out of the ‘Forbidden Forest’ and overhears a secret conversation between Professor Dumbledore and Professor Snape.

In *The Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort uses the forest as a hiding-place during the battle at Hogwarts castle. Later, Harry enters the ‘Forbidden Forest’ on the way to resign to his fate, which he takes as getting killed by Voldemort. It is in the Forbidden Forest, that Voldemort uses the ‘Avada-Kedavra’ curse against Harry.

Schneidewind points out that Hagrid’s cottage directly borders the ‘Forbidden Forest’ (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 383). This may be an explanation why Hagrid is often treated as a backwoodsman by other Hogwarts teachers, especially by Dolores Umbridge. Woods and forests have always been mysterious places and were usually avoided by ‘civilized people’ in the Middle Ages and even later. In medieval England, for example, the woods were considered to be the home of wild animals, beasts and society-outcasts. People who had no respect for a civilized society or the law often inhabited forests, where they lived on the meat of wild animals, plants and vegetables; they also used to hide their pillage in the woods (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 95). Hence, the reputation of forests and woods as being dangerous places seems to have an authentic historical background.

**Giants**

Although Hagrid’s half-brother Grawp is the first real giant Harry, Ron and Hermione encounter, in the ‘Forbidden Forest’, most information about the giants in the Potter-universe is given by Hagrid when he tells the three students about the expedition he took together with Olympe at Dumbledore’s request: their mission was to persuade some of the giants to fight, together with the ‘Order of the Phoenix’, against Voldemort’s army. When the students visit Hagrid in his cabin after he had returned from the expedition, they virtually interrogate the latter about his encounters with the giants and Hagrid is hardly able to evade their questions although he is officially forbidden to talk about his mission:
“Yep,” said Hagrid sadly, “eighty left, an’ there was loads once, musta bin a hundred diff’rent tribes from all over the world. But they’ve bin dyin’ out fer ages. Wizards killed a few, o’course, but mostly they killed each other, an’ now they’re dyin’ out faster than ever. They’re not made ter live bunched up together like tha’. Dumbledore says it’s our fault, it was the wizards who forced ‘em to go an’ made ‘em live a good long way from us an’ they had no choice but ter stick together fer their own protection.” (The Order of the Phoenix: 426)

In the further conversation between the four wizards, Hagrid reveals that giants are usually between 20 and 25 feet tall, have elephant-like skin, are pretty ugly concerning their outward appearance and are likely to kill each other without sufficient reason. Considering this, the giants in the Potter-universe do not seem to be of a good disposition, which can also be seen in the final battle in *The Deathly Hallows* from the fact that many giants fight on Voldemort’s side.

As many other creatures we have dealt with in this thesis so far, giants also have their roots in the legends and myths of ancient Greece. According to an old Greek legend, the first giants (originally named *Gigantes*) were allegedly ‘born’ when the blood of the Greek god Uranus fell down on the goddess Gaea. This rather ‘odd impregnation’ supposedly resulted in the birth of the so called *Gigantes*, superhumanly tall and strong creatures which hardly resembled humans, except for having human-like arms, legs and heads. These giants allegedly fought against the gods Hera, Apollo and Zeus and, according to legend, could not be defeated until Hercules, a half-god, was sent to destroy them. After supposedly having defeated the *Gigantes*, it is said that Hercules buried their corpses underneath the mountains (cf. Colbert 2008: 105). This might be an explanation why Rowling chose the mountains as the ‘home’ of the giants in the Potter-universe.

Schneidewind takes a similar approach to the origins of the giant-myths, but from a Christian point of view. He refers to the well-known text passages of *The Old Testament* that mention giants in the context of God-human relationships: in medieval times, people, and, especially church-members of a higher social status, believed that giants were the ‘product’ of love-relationships between half-gods (as Hercules was) and human females. This theory was supported by Albertus Magnus and his student Thomas of Aquino, who wrote books and pamphlets on the issue of sexual relationships between supernatural
beings and humans. These writings were later frequently used to justify witchpersecutions and executions (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 302).

Carol Rose’s definition of the term ‘giant’ is a rather technical one in comparison to many others, yet it seems to be a good supplement to what has been said so far.

This is a general term for a being of immense stature that may be applied as a superlative to any being that is of abnormal size. However, within the realms of mythology, legend, folk belief, allegory, and literature this term usually indicates a fabulous being that may or may not have had a basis in reality. The one uniting feature is the immense size, but Giants have their different characteristics according to the culture, the region, and the purpose of their existence; however, they exist in the narrative repertoire of virtually every culture in the world. (Rose 2001: 136)

This definition seems to be quite useful and appropriate within the context of defining mythical creatures. How can one define something that actually never existed in reality? In this case, Rose gives a suitable answer by giving a definition that works for laymen and scholars. Furthermore, this definition, but, especially the last two sentences quoted can be applied to almost every mythological being one might come across in literature or film. Rose states that giant-myths have hundreds of different sources, including The Old Testament and other biblical writings, in which, for example, giant-tribes inhabited the ‘Promised Land’. These giants supposedly survived ‘The Great Flood’ and continued their lives on the flooded land. In the European Middle Ages, some theorists claimed that Noah and his family were giants themselves.

However, giant-myths could be found all over the globe, reaching from Asia to North America, Europe and other parts of the world. Most indigenous European myths about giants originated from Celtic mythology. Most islands of Britain, for example, were believed to be inhabited by giants until the Trojans conquered and colonized the land. In this context, Rose mentions a number of different giant myths such as ‘The Giant of Wales’, ‘The Giant of Smeeth’, ‘The Giant Onion’, ‘The Giantess of Loch Ness’ or ‘The Giant Holdfast’. The myth about ‘The Giant of Wales’, for example, tells the story of a giant who supposedly lived in the county of Shropshire, near the English borders of Wales. According to folklore, the giant supposedly wanted to raise a flood in order to drown everybody he was annoyed by. Therefore, he allegedly took a shovel full
of earth and headed in the direction of the river Severn. Due to the fact that the
giant was not very gifted intellectually, he could not find the river and was said to
have dropped all the earth on the ground, thus involuntarily ‘creating’ the

**The Half-Blood Prince**

The Hand of Glory

Although the ‘Hand of Glory’ is not technically a creature, it has certain
features that make it seem as though it is a living ‘thing’, so it seems at least in
the film adaption of *The Chamber of Secrets*: its fingers move when it is touched
and it seems to have some kind of consciousness. These ‘traits’ are never
described in the books and yet, adding the ‘Hand of Glory’ to this catalogue
seems to be important because it is at least a part of a human body and, especially because it is the ‘counterpart’ to Harry’s invisibility-cloak, as it allows
Draco Malfoy to remain unseen occasionally. First mentioned in *The Chamber of
Secrets*, the hand is used by Draco Malfoy in *The Half-Blood Prince* in order to
leave the ‘Room of Requirements’ undiscovered: “He came out of the room
about an hour after we started keeping watch,’ said Ginny. ‘He was on his own,
clutching that awful shriveled arm - `. ‘His Hand of Glory’, said Ron. ‘Gives light
only to the holder, remember?’” *(The Half-Blood Prince: 727-728)*

A rather popular tool for thieves and burglars in British folklore, the ‘Hand of
Glory’ was believed to prevent sleeping people from waking up and to give an
‘invisible light’ that only the holder of the hand could see. Kronzek/Kronzek cite a
poem about the ‘Hand of Glory’ by an unknown author. The poem was
approximately written in 1700:

Wherever that terrible light shall burn,
Vainly the sleeper may toss and turn;
His leaden eyes shall he ne’r unclose
So long as that magical taper glows,
Life and treasure shall he command
Who knoweth the Charm of the glorious Hand

Disembodied hands and fingers seem to have a history in German folklore as well. According to Kronzek/Kronzek, there exist some German myths in which thieves supposedly carried fingers stolen from the unborn baby of a hanged woman. The fingers allegedly gave light which only the holders could see (just as the ‘Hand of Glory’ gave light to Draco Malfoy). These ‘magical lights’ were said to have the ability to keep their holder invisible, yet letting him or her see everything that happens around him/her.

The ‘Hand of Glory’ can also be found in books that claims to describe real magical formulas and spells. In a French book of magic, written in approximately 1722, detailed instructions describe the procedure that supposedly leads to the completion of the ‘Hand of Glory’. According to these instructions, the hand of a corpse must be separated from the body and wrapped into a piece of paper in order to dry. Then the hand must be put into a jar filled with earth, peppercorns and saltpeter for exactly fifteen days. It should then be completely dried during the ‘dog days’ in summer. The fat coming from the hand is then to be mixed with wax, and from this mass a candle should be formed. This candle should be applied to the hand in order to finish the procedure. Similar descriptions can be found in other books of magic from the eighteenth century.

There are accounts of incidents in which thieves really attempted to use such a hand in order to rob rich families. The most famous case was reported in 1831 in Loughcrew, Ireland. A group of thieves, equipped with a ‘Hand of Glory’, allegedly broke into the house of a landlord, believing that the hand would protect them from the house-owner. However, the hand failed its purpose and was left behind when the thieves fled. The whereabouts of this particular hand are unknown nowadays. Nevertheless, a ‘real’ ‘Hand of Glory’ can be seen in the ‘Whitby Museum’ in Yorkshire, England (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 118-121).
Inferi

An inferus can be compared to what is nowadays generally known as Zombie. In the Potter-universe, inferi are dead bodies that have been reanimated by a wizard or witch in order to have them act at the will of the latter: "They are corpses," said Dumbledore calmly. ‘Dead bodies that have been bewitched to a dark wizard’s bidding. Inferi have not been seen for a long time, however, not since Voldemort was last powerful….He killed enough people to make an army of them, of course. This is the place, Harry, just here…” (The Half-Blood Prince: 79). This is how Dumbledore describes the creatures that attack him and Harry in the cave in which the two wizards are hunting for one of the Horcruxes. It is only due to Dumbledore’s magical powers that Harry is able to escape the army of the undead, which was bred by Voldemort for only one purpose, namely to kill anybody who might try to put his or her hands on the Horcrux: “A slimy white hand had gripped his wrist, and the creature to whom it belonged was pulling him, slowly, backwards across the rock.” (The Half-Blood Prince: 681-682) This is Harry’s first encounter with an inferus, and when he tries to fight it, more of these creatures emerge from under the water: “He scrambled to his feet; but many more Inferi were already climbing on the rock, their bony hands clawing at its slippery surface, their blank, frosted eyes upon him, trailing waterlogged rags, sunken faces leering.” (The Half-Blood Prince: 680)

Harry uses different spells in order to get rid of his attackers, but, similar to most zombies in modern fiction, the inferi seem to be resistant to weapons and spells that would surely kill or severely harm a human being. Zombies and zombie-like creatures have established themselves as indispensable in the horror-genre, especially in motion-pictures: Revolt of the Zombies (USA, 1936), The Night of the Living Dead (USA, 1968), Incubo sulla città contaminata-City of the Walking Dead (Italy/Spain, 1980), Pet Sematary (USA, 1989), 28 Days Later (GB/France, 2002), Dawn of the Dead (USA, 2004) or Zombieland (USA, 2009) are only a few examples to name. In recent years, the zombie-genre has been revived by a TV-series called The Walking Dead (HBO, 2010), in which almost the whole global population has been wiped out by a zombie-virus and the world is left in a post-apocalyptic condition.
The Zombie-phenomenon as such cannot exactly be traced back to its roots. Yet, it is a matter of fact that people always feared the dead, especially in the context of vindictive ghosts, as mentioned in an earlier chapter. Where and when did the Zombie-myth start to become a cultural entity? Taking our calendar into consideration, was the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ one of the first Zombie-myths? Although Jesus Christ was believed to have returned from the dead as a human being, including his consciousness and being in control of his actions, the myth clearly states that he was dead and that he returned. So, if one is willing to put one’s head above the parapet, it could be argued that the zombie-myth can also be found in Christian beliefs and traditions, but this theory seems to be rather far-fetched and highly suggestive.

However, according to Schneidewind, the ‘modern’ Zombie is derived from Haitian Voodoo-practices: In Haiti, people who were involved in voodoo rituals, were sometimes put into a dead-like condition by injecting them a paralyzing poison which caused severe brain-damages. When these people regained their body-functions, they were often in a Zombie-like condition, having their essential somatic functions, but being unable to use them properly (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 437).

Kronzek/Kronzek deliver a rather simple description of how they believe a zombie could be defined. They also connect the zombie-myth to dark magic and voodoo:

A zombie is essentially a walking corpse - a being that looks human but has no mind, soul, or will and acts at the command of its creator. Incapable of feeling pain, fear, or remorse, the zombie is a dangerous weapon for any practitioner of the Dark Arts. Although there is no evidence that zombies really exist, zombie legends abound wherever the voodoo religion is practiced. (Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 329)

Some centuries ago, the fear of being made into a zombie after death was prevalent in Haiti and might still exist in some tribes. Some people supposedly buried their relatives and friends with knives, in case a dark voodoo-priest might try to steal the corpse and make a zombie out of the dead body. The knife was meant to protect the deceased from all kinds of intruders or grave desecrators, either symbolically, in case a voodoo priest might try to acquire the corpse, or, as an actual weapon that could be used against animals or other enemies if
he/she was buried alive. Depending on the kind of magic that was supposedly used to create a zombie, it was believed that the latter could be destroyed by daylight, the interference of a god, or by killing the voodoo-priest or magician who made it (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 330).

The Deathly Hallows

Ghouls

Although the Ghoul one encounters in The Deathly Hallows is only mentioned two or three times, a whole chapter in the book is named ‘The Ghoul in Pajamas’. The reason for this is that the Ghoul is supposed to replace Ron when the latter, Harry and Hermione start hunting Horcruxes. Therefore, the Ghoul in the Weasley’s attic is dressed up in one of Ron’s old pajamas in order to deceive members of the ministry who might come looking for students who did not return to Hogwarts: “‘Once we’ve left, the ghoul’s going to come and live down here in my room’, said Ron. ‘I think he’s really looking forward to it – well, it’s hard to tell, because all he can do is moan and drool – but he nods a lot when you mention it. Anyway, he’s going to be me with spattergroit. Good, eh?’” (The Deathly Hallows: 98)

Rowling describes Ghouls, as they appear in the Potter-universe, as ugly but rather harmless creatures which usually inhabit barns or attics in homes of wizard families. Concerning their outward appearance, they tend to resemble buck-toothed Ogres and are of a rather slimy sort. Furthermore, Rowling points out that these creatures are rather simple-minded, unable to communicate in a proper way and in the worst case behave like a Poltergeist, throwing things or furniture around (cf. Rowling 2009: 33).

According to Rose, Ghoul-myths come from Islamic traditional folklore: “This is the name of a species of Djinn in Islamic traditions and beliefs. In pre-Islamic times they were identified as the male Qutrub and the female Gulah. Other spellings of the name are Ghol, Ghool, Ghowl, and Goul, while Ghula is the female form.” (Rose 2001: 136) Supposedly inhabiting dark forests,
graveyards and other unusual places, Ghouls were believed to be vicious creatures, being lustfully attracted to humans and being able to seduce the latter in just a few seconds. People believed that Ghouls had shape-shifting abilities, which were supposedly used as a tool of seduction by these creatures. However, ghouls were most feared by soldiers and people who had lethal diseases due to the fact that the former were believed to feed on dead bodies and half-dead soldiers. Hence, most ghoul-sightings were reported on graveyards and battlefields (cf. Rose 2001: 136).

Kroncek/Kroncek also state that the ghoul-myths have their roots in the Arabic culture. Yet they assume that the belief in these creatures spread out to parts of Africa and India. Additionally, they say that ghouls were believed to devastate graveyards and to exhume human bodies in order to feed on the rotten flesh of the corpses. There are no precise descriptions of what ghouls were believed to look like. Some sources speak of horse or camel-like creatures while others tell of creatures which resemble humans, having shaggy and matted hair. However, due to the fact that people believed in the shape-shifting abilities of ghouls, it did not matter what the latter originally looked like. Travelers, and especially ones who had gone astray, feared the possibility to encounter a ghoul who might lead them into a trap under false pretenses. The only possible way to recognize a ghoul in disguise, as was believed, was to look at the feet of the perceived enemy which could not be disguised by magic; the hairy and bulky feet of the ghoul would always reveal its true identity. (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 98).

Goblins

Goblins are introduced in The Philosopher’s Stone, when Hagrid shows Harry his vault at Gringotts: “Yeah-so yeh’d be mad ter try an’ rob it, I’ll tell yeh that. Never mess with goblins, […]” (The Philosopher’s Stone: 63). Ever since their first appearance, goblins reappear at regular intervals throughout the saga. The only exception is The Prisoner of Azkaban, in which they are only mentioned. Nevertheless, it is in The Deathly Hallows that these beings reveal their true identity, showing that their priorities lie in personal property. This is
clearly shown when Griphook betrays Harry, Ron and Hermione shortly after they have acquired the diadem at Gringotts. This betrayal is probably due to a long-term conflict between goblins and wizards in the Potter-universe, as Bill Weasley explains:

Dealings between wizards and goblins have been fraught for centuries- but you’ll know all that from History of Magic. There has been fault on both sides, I would never claim that wizards have been innocent. However, there is a belief among some goblins, and those at Gringotts are perhaps most prone to it, that wizards cannot be trusted in matters of gold and treasure, that they have no respect for goblin ownership (The Deathly Hallows: 517)

Furthermore, Bill explains why goblins, in this particular case the goblin named Griphook, are so prone to reclaim goblin-made objects: “[…] To a goblin, the rightful and true master of any object is the maker, not the purchaser. All goblin-made objects are, in goblin eyes, rightfully theirs.” (The Deathly Hallows: 517)

Considering most actions by goblins throughout the saga, it seems to be hard to determine whether they are good or bad. However, one can at least argue that these beings appear to be rather unsympathetic, taking into account Griphook’s lust for blood and violence. In the film-adaption of The Philosopher’s Stone, Hagrid also points out the ‘dubious’ nature of goblins: “‘They’re goblins, Harry. Clever as they come, goblins, but not the most friendly of beasts.’” (Warner Brothers 2001)

According to Colbert, the word ‘goblin’ derives from the Greek term kobalos, meaning ruthless or rogue. He furthermore adds that the German word Kobold also derived from kobalos (cf. Colbert 2008: 113). Schneidewind, on the other hand, states that the German word Kobold is derived from the old German word Koben, which means ‘wooden shed’. He assumes that goblins (Kobolde) were believed to live and spook in wooden sheds and cottages. According to an old German lexicon called Der Neue Brockhaus, written by Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus, the word Kobold was used in old German to refer to house-keepers or house-guardians (cf. Brockhaus 1941: 647). However, all three authors describe goblins as small, ugly and tricky household-spirits that obviously do not have much in common with the goblins from Gringotts. Kronzek/Kronzek point out that the reputation of these creatures in myths has not always been that negative. In medieval English folklore, for example, goblins were rather believed
to be helpful and benevolent spirits, attaching themselves to a single person or family. They were believed to favor old and isolated cottages and farmhouses. Depending on how they were treated by their hosts, as was believed, goblins allegedly varied their behavior towards humans. Benevolent goblins supposedly helped the people they were attached to, keeping the house clean and orderly, while malicious goblins were believed to steal precious metals, such as silver and gold, from the families they lived with. Particularly insidious goblins were even believed to ride horses to exhaustion in the middle of the night, altering sign-posts and leading people astray. In some European fairy tales, goblins were believed to be able to curdle human blood or sour milk simply by their laughter (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 109). However, Colbert also assumes that goblins, despite the meaning of their name, were rather believed to be of a good kind, helping people and being rather industrious, not evil. He also refers to Puck in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in this context, although Puck is generally referred to as being a fairy-like creature (cf. Colbert 2008: 113). The bad reputation of goblins in folklore and myth arose as soon as the sixteenth century and witch persecution arrived. As it was the case with many supernatural beings people believed in, goblins were brought into connection with dark forces and witchcraft in the seventeenth century, especially in England and Scotland (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 110).

As far as the outward appearance of goblins is concerned, Schneidewind describes them as tiny, ugly creatures, most often dressed in fiery red clothes (cf. Schneidewind 2000: 198). Kronzek/Kronzek assume that goblins were believed to vary in size and form, usually having about half the size of a grown-up human. They presumably have gray hair and beards and their faces supposedly show some kind of deformation (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 109). Considering this, the goblin Griphook, with his oversized head, gray hair and distorted face, will surely come to mind.

According to Harmening, the German *Kobold* is believed to be a household spirit which may either appear in a human or animal shape. However, it is usually said to be invisible and might just become visible if it wishes to. These spirits supposedly bring wealth and prosperity to the people they live with, but also allegedly like to behave mischievously, playing tricks and shenanigans to
people (cf. Harmening 2009: 257). Nowadays, the most famous goblin/Kobold in German speaking countries is called ‘Pumuckl’, a thumb-sized, red haired house-spirit, invented in 1961 by a German children’s book author named Ellis Kaut.

**Bits of magic and Conclusion**

Having entered the fabulous world of Harry Potter, one can hardly deny that this world is full of popular myths, magical elements and, if one is willing to take a closer look, also religious allusions and symbols. Now that the most important creatures, monsters and animals that are roaming in and around Hogwarts-Castle have been discussed, the final part and conclusion of this thesis will give a brief overview of other important mythological and magical elements within the saga. This part will embrace some information about the meaning behind names of some of the main characters, the derivation of some famous spells and magical words, and, eventually, a short excursion into spiritual and religious symbolism within the books.

Rowling’s concept of myths and all the quite detailed connections she has established to ancient mythology and spiritual practices have certainly involved a lot of work. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that she appears to have put the same amount of work into the name-giving of her characters. In her book *JK Rowlings ‘Harry Potter’ – Mythen der Namensgebung*, Eva Reimann points out that the name Hermione is directly borrowed from William Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale*. Furthermore, she explains that the name itself has its roots in ancient Greek mythology, in which Hermes was considered a god and the son of Zeus. According to myth, Hermes supposedly had the ability to learn difficult subject matters in a very short period of time, as does Hermione in the books. Albus Dumbledore’s name is also connected to some of his character traits. The name Albus is derived from the Latin adjective *albus*, which means ‘white’. Apart from Dumbledore’s white beard and hair, the color white also refers to some other qualities, such as wisdom, purity, or illumination; all these traits can be attributed to the former. Minerva McGonagall’s first name has a similar symbolic meaning. The name Minerva is borrowed from Roman mythology. It is the name
of a Roman goddess who was said to be connected to wisdom and warfare. As can be seen in *Deathly Hallows*, McGonnagall is quite skilled in warfare when she alone stands between Hogwarts and its students against Voldemort’s army (cf. Reimann 2010: 7-11). These few examples are simply meant to deepen the reader’s comprehension of how complex and elaborated Rowling’s work is in terms of research and investigation; this can also be seen from looking at the spells and charms she uses in the saga.

Many of the spells and charms the students are taught at Hogwarts sound Latin and this is no coincidence: the meanwhile famous disarming-charm ‘expelliarmus’ is indeed a combination of the Latin words *expello* (meaning ‘to force out’) and *arma* (meaning ‘weapons’). People who are attacked with the ‘petrificus totalus’-spell are simply petrified while the ‘ridikkulus’-charm ridicules its victim (cf. Kronzek/Kronzek 2010: 185). Considering that the ‘avada kedavra’-curse is a key factor in the final chapter of Harry’s adventures (Voldemort kills himself accidentally with this curse), it is probably the most interesting one in terms of its meaning and derivation. Rowling borrowed the old Aramaic term *abhadda kedhabhra*, which means ‘disappear like this word’, and altered it into ‘avada kedavra’. According to Colbert, the original term was supposedly used by medicine men and sorcerers in order to cure people from illnesses in ancient times. The Aramaic phrase *abhadda kedhabhra* is presumably also related to the famous phrase and spell *abracadabra*, which was supposedly used by a Roman physicist called Quintus Serenus Sammonicus in order to make fever vanish. Sammonicus is believed to have lived around 200 years after Jesus Christ. Although the ‘avada kedavra’-curse is not directly used to let someone disappear in the books, it kills its victim in an instant and virtually makes ‘life disappear’ (cf. Colbert 2008: 31-32).

Harry’s quest for freedom, friendship and justice is by far more than a simple fantasy-adventure. It is a coming-of-age story which reflects certain aspects of world history, including wars, political crises, power struggles and corruption. Above all these worldly issues, however, it is also a story about religious and spiritual growth. Rowling, herself being a religious person, uses religious allusions in different ways within her books. The number ‘7’, for
example, which is traditionally believed to be a holy and magical number, is used quite often in the saga:

- The story of Harry’s quest is told in 7 books.
- The Weasleys have 7 children.
- There are 7 players in a Quidditch-team.
- Students graduate after 7 years at Hogwarts.
- Voldemort splits his soul into seven parts.

According to Colbert, the number ‘7’ has been considered a holy number for thousands of years. It supposedly began with the observation of the night sky, in which only seven planets were visible without a telescope (Colbert 2008: 270). However, there are even more interesting religious aspects in the Potter-universe, such as Harry himself, for example. As in the story of Jesus Christ, Harry is willing to sacrifice himself in order to save his friends and thousands of others. Furthermore, Voldemort is willing to hunt down every newborn baby the night Harry is born in order to kill the chosen one, who is prophesied to free the wizard-world from Voldemort’s dictatorship: connections to king Herod and his cruel hunt for the newborn Jesus can surely be drawn here. Colbert mentions two other quite interesting religious allusions:

- Harry’s father has a stag as ‘patronus’ (the protection-charm against dementors), which is considered a classic emblem of Jesus Christ.
- Harry’s mother sacrifices herself in order to protect her son, which is a central element of Christianity, namely, to put the needs of others before one’s own.

Colbert furthermore claims that Lily Potter is the only character who really deserves idolatry. He defines her as a Madonna-figure and compares her to the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ. All other characters admired by Harry seem to have their flaws: James Potter’s dark side is shown in his adolescence, Sirius Black does not treat elves very well, and Dumbledore seems to have a penchant for power and secretiveness. Lily Potter is the only really pure character in the
story, which is also supported by the fact that it is her blood that actually protects Harry, and, as a consequence of Voldemort drinking Harry’s blood, also the latter, at least for once (Colbert 2008: 289-295). However, as it turns out in *Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort cannot be saved and is finally defeated by his own lust for power. Considering some of these aspects, it is rather obvious that Harry Potter is a story with many different focus areas, one of which is the quest for spiritual growth and personal salvation.

My personal interest in magical creatures and their ‘mythological pedigree’ in literature, film and other media has been the springboard of this thesis. Rowling’s Harry Potter series seemed to be a quite good source for this kind of fantastic elements: for one part because these elements are numerous in the Potter-books, and for the other, because Rowling combines ancient myths with more modern perceptions of these. From ‘alchemy’ and ‘animagi’ to ‘dragons’ and ‘zombies’, the most important magical and beastly creatures have been described and investigated in this thesis in due consideration of historical, geographical, religious and mythological aspects. Hence, this catalogue might serve as a basis for other students to further investigate this topic, perhaps using different focus areas or different approaches. For others, it will hopefully serve as an entertaining and informative text about fictional characters and creatures which yet exist within literature, film and imagination.
Bibliography:

Primary Literature:


Secondary Literature:


**Other sources-Film and TV-series:**

Columbus, Chris, Director (2001). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures.


