



# Biography

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Assignment 2

ENG374

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# Process

**Please read this after the story at the bottom.**

I found myself revisiting some old fairy tales and folk tales that I read as a kid recently, tracing their stories back to their roots in various folklores and mythologies in an effort to inform my own worldbuilding. I chanced upon the “Three Billy Goats Gruff” and a preliminary look into its history struck quite a chord with me. When the assignment details were announced I thought that it was a good opportunity to explore the story from an alternative point of view.

Simply put, “Water Under the Bridge” is an autobiographical retelling of the events of “Three Billy Goats Gruff” and what transpired after, from the perspective of the Troll under the Bridge. I wanted to include elements of political strife, mythology, and introspection to really hone in on how the troll himself might have been a victim in the confines of the original story.

To start, I continued my initial dive into the history of the folk tale. I tried to research how it spread, and how many versions of it exist that circulate around the world today, beyond the most common rendition. Certain names, such as Hessen (a state in Germany) and some Norse names (where the tale originates from) kept popping up, so I decided to include them within the story.

Perhaps most significant was my research into the troll himself. There was barely anything I could scrape from simple retellings of the tale as they are today, which wouldn’t do since I needed to be able to put myself in the mind of the troll if I was to write from his point of view. I found a few other attempts at this, but they targeted towards children and so what I gleaned from them was limited at best. Keeping the Norse origins of the story in mind, I decided to give the troll a twist

Norse origin story, explaining how it was that he came to be the troll under the bridge. I hope I've done a good job of it.

As such, the three questions I have for my readers are as follows:

- ❖ Is the identity of the troll and his backstory taking away from the biography? Does it feel like it fits the story?
- ❖ Did I spend too much time explaining the encounter of the three Billy goats and the troll?
- ❖ Does the idea that the troll wants to put his sad past behind him come across strongly? What would you change to make that more apparent?

Thanks for reading my short story,

**Aman Shahid**



# Water Under the Bridge

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*1761 Words*

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I used to *hate* those Billy Goats. You know the ones. Crossed me bridge without paying the toll, “tricked” me into letting them go (what a farce!), and then the biggest of them had the gall to knock me off me own bridge! Despicable, methinks!

But just like the river I fell into, it’s all water under the bridge! (Hah, learned that one from farmer Chester last I saw him for some wheat, that old coot.)

I live, it’s true. Tales of me death they spun more than me body as I plunged into those rushing waters. That third Billy brute gored me good, it’s true. But I didn’t *drown*, else I wouldn’t be writing (took a bit to learn how, but Faldor said it’d be easier if I kept at it).

The Billy’s actually did me a big favor that day. It’s true. But you won’t find the truth in that hogwash they passed around nowadays. With the passing of moons I’ve wanted to tell the true story as it were, but me troll grunts weren’t going to cut it. I picked up reading and writing in the common tongue (thanks to the people of Hessen) for that.

Me bridge and me were known by all in those days. Merchants often took longer routes if they could help it, or pay the toll they would. Mothers told tales of me to put their little ones to sleep. Even bears would steer clear, as would the other beasts, in fear that I would eat them. Though

what none knew was that it was never me own bridge, you know, nor me toll to keep. I was simply the collector, as demanded of me by the Fjord Chieftan of those times, Hrungrir. It is a long tale, that one of Hrungrir and his folk becoming chief of the troll clans, so me does not think it apt to dwell upon overlong (nor does me heart want it).

Ours was a clan allied with the Ymir, the chief clan of the older times, the better times, it's true. But those times remain only in distant memory, when I was a wee troll babe. The Hrungril wrought hell upon the Ymir in the last war for trolldom, pillaging and devastating in their hateful conquest.

The Ymir feared them, their hunger for victory. They conned us, those bastards, running from the Fjord while having us allied clans stand against the brunt of the Hrungril attack. We were as ants against the raging tide. The battle itself I shall not speak of. I was captured by the Hrungril after they killed me family. They dragged me and some of the other kids in chains, back to the Fjord. They had their shamans cast upon me a seidhr, enslaving me to their whims. I do not know what befell the rest. It is better that way.

So began me watch at the infamous bridge. In me curse I would harry any and all that would seek to cross, first against me own will, and then of me own will as the curse began to grow stronger. I became a villain whose misdeeds spread far throughout the land. Every twelvth night they would send the taskmaster to collect the toll, and a shaman to renew the curse. Me rations were tied to the toll I collected, and I would be denied that stale and scarce morsel if I did not collect as much as they asked. Sooner or later me infamy had driven people away from me bridge, and so even the little fee that I collected had vanished. Some nights me hunger left me no choice but to sate it with the unfortunate traveller. Hate me for it, but it was all I could do.

I kept me penance for many a year, forgetting all about me life before the bridge, forgetting even the word “freedom”, until the day the first of the Billy Goats tried to cross the bridge. He was a very young one, that one, and left unattended at that. I snarled at him from me little hole under the bridge (me snarl was enough to scare most). The little goat took no heed of me warning however, and carried on crossing, until I crawled out and threatened to eat the little thing (just a threat, I had me fill of mountain bear the night before). Now here’s where I oust that villanous lie perpetrated by those Billies! They thought me some famished dunce, who’d let the little one run along past the bridge without paying the toll, in hope of a bigger bite? That nonsense – Little Billy ran back where he came from at me mere sight, threatening me with “Brother Billy’s horns” in his fear. I even had half a mind to eat the little blighter for ignoring me warning, but the sight of him hearkened me back to me own young days, so I let him off, not thinking much of his own warning.

A few days later I would meet this “Brother Billy”, along with Little Billy again, much to me chagrin. “Brother Billy has no clue what he is getting himself into”, I thought to meself at the time. Just as before, I snarled at the trespassers for me toll, before hearing a defiant “We aren’t going to pay, baaaah!”. Jumping out of me cave, puzzled at the second instance within a week where me warnings were challenged, I sighted the two goats. By this point Little Billy was (once again) shaking in his hooves, and Brother Billy wasn’t faring much better either. A quick little glare at the older (who was about an apples height taller the little one), and the two went running like before. Once more, me ears heard a warning, this time of one “Baba Billy”, but when I thought about how bigger the third Billy might be compared to the second, I couldn’t help but laugh, thinking nothing of it.

Baba Billy would arrive a few days later to me surprise, but what surprised me even more was hs sheer size. Upon hearing the clattering of familiar hooves upon the round stones, I laughed at the stubbornness of the little goats. Me message was the same: “Baba Billy of the Billy Goat Gruff,

pay the fee or I'll eat you three up". Upon hearing this, Baba Billy responded with a thundering crash of his hooves upon the stone that I had not expected, and a voice that thundered even more:

“From your hole come along  
You troll who does wrong!  
I have with me two spears  
which shall poke your rear!”

I wasn't going to let such a brazen defiance from a *puny* goat go unpunished, so I leapt out of me cave in a fit of rage. Looming over me end of the bridge, I dwarfed both Little and Brother Billy in size, but Baba Billy on the other side seemed to match me not just in height but also in strength. Never had I laid me eyes upon a goat so big, in me many years under the bridge. I never asked why Baba Billy needed to cross the bridge with his little goats, nor did he explain; there was no room for any words, what with his arrogance and me curse. The pride of all goats was on one side, and what little I had left as a villain on the other. The little goats ran behind their father in anticipation of the coming clash, and as both of us charged the other, it was over as quickly as it began.

I let out a howl of pain as I fell into the cascade below. Wind rushed against me hulking figure, and I couldn't make heads or tails of what was going on, doubting whether the two gaping holes in me chest were actually there, or whether the streaks of red flowing from them, that seemingly ascended to the bridge, and the sky above, were real.

I knew that I was not fit to fight, it's true. Me body had grown weak as it seldom saw any use. Most who crossed me were dealt with using a bit of fear, and the only use of me arms was to collect their due pittance, and me legs to return to and from the cave. I knew that Baba Billy would get the better of me, it's true, but whether it was the last vestiges of me pride or me curse that forced

me to stay within the vicinity of the bridge and to collect me toll, they would not let me stand down without a brawl.

I pondered how that pride was broken as I continued me fall that seemingly lasted for ages, but then I realized something: the curse that bound me to the bridge, and would kill me if I strayed too far, it seemingly vanished! Just as I felt a tinge of glee at the hope of me newfound freedom, I plunged into the waters below.

After that, I assume the Billies continued on with whatever it was that they had to cross the bridge for, and later when they spun the tale of how they vanquished the “bridge troll”, they probably thought that I met me at end in the rushing waters of the valley.

But I lived, washing up near the land of Hessen. I was free of the curse, of the clutch of villainy that gripped at me heart. The people there, they found me, but they saw me not as the villanous troll of the bridge, but as a lost wanderer, and they offered me aid.

Here I have lived ever since, tending to farms, playing with the children, and learning how to read and write in the common tongue as time went on. I would like to think that I’ve gotten quite good, considering I am writing this memoir.

I think about the curse again nowadays, and can come to no conclusion other than Baba Billy’s “handiwork” freeing me. I wonder how Baba Billy and his little Billies are doing nowadays (and wherever was Mrs. Billy?). If ever he chances upon this memoir, through some stroke of odd fate, I want to let him know that I ask for his forgiveness (and forgive him for his... *misgivings* regarding the nature of me story) and that he is welcome to me place at any time, and that we could enjoy a nice dinner together some time, reminiscing as old friends, and not enemies. It’s true.

