

Selkie girl and the secret of roan inish: similarities and differences



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Legends, myths, and folklore have always captured my attention. Whether they are about made-up, mystical creatures or even creatures turning into humans, I always seem to thoroughly enjoy the stories behind them. After reading the novel *Selkie Girl* and watching the movie *Secret of Roan Inish*, I started to draw some similarities and differences between the two. Further research from other selkie folklore stories really began to show me that there are different elements to each myth that continuously relate back to Laurie Brooks' Novel and the film we watched in class.

Each one of these comparisons shows why there are so many believers today in these tales. In the novel, *Selkie Girl*, Brooks' explains that selkie's can only come ashore and transform into humans once a year on Midsummer's Eve. From discussions in class and from my own interpretations, I was under the impression that selkie's could emerge out of their skin whenever they wanted to. This was not the case throughout *Selkie Girl*. When the main character, Elin Jean, learns that her mother is a selkie, the black and the red selkies explain that " every year at Midsummer they return to be with her" mother (Brooks).

The novel differs from the movie, *Secret of Roan Inish*, because in the movie there is a scene where a young man finds a selkie, captures her pelt, and then takes her captive to be his wife on land. It was not stated in the movie that it was Midsummer's Eve when the fisherman discovered the selkie. In fact, the movie made it seem like selkies could shed their pelts and come on land whenever they wanted to. Continuing my research online, I found that many folklore have differences as to how often the selkie-folk were able to carry out the transformation.

<https://assignbuster.com/selkie-girl-and-the-secret-of-roan-inish-similarities-and-differences/>

Some tales say it was once a year, usually on Midsummer's Eve, while others state it could be " every ninth night" or " every seventh stream". Another legend says if a mortal woman wishes to make contact with a selkie-man, there was a specific rite she had to follow. At high tide, she should make her way to the shore, where she had to shed seven tears into the sea. The selkie-man would then come ashore and, after removing his magical sealskin, seek out " unlawful love"(Selkie).

Regardless of how often they were able to transform, the folklore tells us that once in human form, the selkie-folk would dance on lonely stretches of moonlit shore, or bask in the sun on outlying skerries (The Selkie-folk). A common theme in selkie folklore is one in which a fisherman steals the seal skin of a selkie while they are in human form, forcing them to come home with them to become their wife. The couple then has children and sometimes these children have abnormalities such as webbed hands.

Through all this, the selkie continues to search for her skin because she cannot return to the sea without it. Once the pelt is found, usually by one of the selkie's children, the selkie will return to the sea leaving her husband and human life behind. In some accounts, the selkie's children may go with her to the sea, while other stories the children remain with their mortal father. This theme was common in Selkie Girl and the story The Goodman o' Wastness. For instance, in Selkie Girl, Elin Jean's father is a fisherman who steals the pelt of a selkie and forces her to stay on land and marry him.

They eventually have a child, Elin Jean, who is slightly abnormal because she has webbed hands. Elin one day finds her father's pelt and returns it to her.

<https://assignbuster.com/selkie-girl-and-the-secret-of-roan-inish-similarities-and-differences/>

To Elin's amazement her mither is quick to return to the sea and leave her daughter and husband behind. Elin Jean does not understand why her mother would leave her behind so she sets out on a journey to start a new life and find her mother. In the story *The Goodman o' Wastness*, The Goodman came across a number of selkie-folk lying out on a flat rock.

As he neared the place where the selkie-folk played, the Goodman leapt to his feet and ran towards them. To their surprise, the selkie-folk snatched up their seal skins and quickly retreated to the safety of the sea. However, swift as they were, the Goodman was quicker and he managed to seize a skin belonging to one beautiful seal-maiden. Eventually the Goodman managed to make the selkie his wife because she could not return to her kin in the sea without her skin. She then bore the Goodman seven children.

One day, the Goodman and his four sons were out fishing in their boat and as usual, as soon as the house emptied, the selkie-wife set to looking for her long-lost seal-skin. Through all of her searching she could not find the skin. Eventually her youngest daughter told her where the pelt was and the selkie-wife quickly ran to retrieve it. Rushing to the shore she threw on her skin and plunged into the sea. Shifting again into her selkie form she swam out through the waves where a selkie man was waiting for her.

All the while, the Goodman was rowing home and happened to see the two selkies from his little boat. His wife uncovered her beautiful face and cried out to him. " Farewell Goodman of Wastness. Farewell to you. I liked you because you were good to me but I love my husband from the sea more. " That was the last the Goodman ever saw of his sea-wife (*The Goodman o'*

Wastness). An overall common element in the selkie-folk tales is the fact that in order to shapeshift, selkies have to cast off their sealskins. Within these magical skins lay the power to return to seal form, and therefore the sea.

If this sealskin was lost, or stolen, the creature was doomed to remain in human form until it could be recovered. Because of this, if disturbed while on shore, the selkie-folk would hastily snatch up their skins before rushing back to the safety of the sea (The Selkie-folk). Selkie myths from the Orkney Islands, *Selkie Girl and Secret of Roan Inish*, all have comparative elements and themes that play a crucial part in understanding the folklore. Through the numerous similarities and differences, I have gained more insight into why there are still so many believers today.