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Dragons in Literature: From Medieval Hagiography to Ursula K. Le Guin

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Dragons in Literature:

From Medieval Hagiography to Ursula K. Le Guin



MA Thesis Philology

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INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the medieval dragon made a comeback. The discovery of the *Beowulf* manuscript sparked a renewed interest in medieval dragons and medievalists J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis based the dragons of their fantasy novels on medieval models. Their writings inspired many authors, including Ursula K. Le Guin, who used their dragons as a basis for the dragons in her own fictional work: *The Books of Earthsea*. The *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfñir, as well as Tolkien's Smaug, became moulds for the standard dragon in fantasy literature. The aim of this thesis is to look at how Le Guin was inspired by Tolkien and Lewis, and how dragons have been adapted to fit their respective times. In other words, how do the dragons in Le Guin's work relate to the dragons in the works of Tolkien and Lewis, and to the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfñir?

Much research has been carried out on the medieval dragon, including its influence on Tolkien's, Lewis', and Le Guin's works. Christine Rauer compared the *Beowulf*-dragon to dragon-fights found in medieval hagiography.¹ In addition, Dominic Cheetham reviewed dragons in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arguing for the rediscovery of the Scandinavian dragon and a more diverse dragon in literature.² There has also been a study done by Richard Mathews to discover the influence Tolkien's works had on Le Guin. However, the narrative function of the dragons is only briefly touched upon.³ Moreover, Warren G. Rochelle, Yini Huang, and Hongbin Dai consider the dragons specifically found in *The Books of Earthsea*.⁴ Where Rochelle examines how dragons and humans in Earthsea relate to nature, Huang and Dai focus on the influence of Taoist writings on the gender and femininity of Le Guin's dragons. Nonetheless, as of yet no studies have been conducted that link the works of Le Guin to the medieval dragon and the dragons in Tolkien's and Lewis' works.

With this research I hope to contribute to the vast amount of research done on dragons in literature. Whereas scholars such as Rawls already researched Le Guin for the presence of

¹ Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000).

² Dominic Cheetham, "Dragons in English: The Great Change of the Late Nineteenth Century," *Children's Literature in Education* 45, no. 1 (2014).

³ Richard Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴ Warren G. Rochelle, "The Emersonian Choice: Connections between Dragons and Humans in Le Guin's *Earthsea* Cycle (Ursula K. Le Guin)," *Extrapolation* 47, no. 3 (2006).

Yini Huang and Hongbin Dai, "A Taoist Interpretation of Dragons' Feminine Power and Genderless Nature in the *Earthsea* Cycle," *Critique - Bolingbroke Society* 64, no. 2 (2023).

feminism in her books, this thesis aims to look at how Le Guin was influenced by authors that went before her, in particular looking at the phenomenon of the supernatural dragon.⁵ According to Martin Arnold, Le Guin, like many other authors, first had to write Tolkien's standard fantasy dragon out of her system in her first book with Yevaud, before she could give dragons her own spin with Kalessin and Tehanu.⁶ Le Guin also seems to have been inspired by more than just the western dragon, as some influences can be seen from Taoist writings.

In the first chapter, I will be analysing the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfñir: how are they portrayed? And how do they function in their respective narratives? The standard medieval dragon will also be discussed. In the second chapter, I will examine how dragons are represented in the works of Tolkien and Lewis. In particular, attention will be paid to Smaug in *The Hobbit*, Glaurung in *The Silmarillion*, and Chrysophylax Dives in *Farmer Giles of Ham* by Tolkien, Eustace in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and the northern and southern dragon in *The Pilgrims Regress* by Lewis. In the third chapter, I will be discussing how Le Guin has adapted both the standard medieval dragon and the dragons in the narratives of Tolkien and Lewis in her own work, *The Books of Earthsea*.

⁵ Melanie A. Rawls, "Witches, Wives and Dragons: The Evolution of the Women in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea – An Overview," *Mythlore* 26, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2008).

⁶ Martin Arnold, *Dragon: Fear and Power* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).

CHAPTER 1 - ORIGIN STORY: THE STANDARD MEDIEVAL DRAGON

One of the well-known standard medieval dragons that has inspired authors for centuries is the *Beowulf*-dragon found in the *Beowulf* manuscript. Another would be the Scandinavian dragon Fáfnir from *The Poetic Edda*.¹ Dragons found in medieval hagiography have influenced the standard as well. The *Beowulf*-dragon is disturbed by a thief who takes a cup, after which it goes to attack the surrounding country in search for it. This forces King Beowulf to act in order to defend his people. He attacks the dragon with the help of Wiglaf and the dragon is defeated, but Beowulf is fatally wounded in the fight. Fáfnir is found in *The Poetic Edda*. Sigurðr is sent by Regin to kill Fáfnir to claim his hoard. He does so by digging trenches to hide in so that he can stab upwards when Fáfnir moves over them. After being stabbed Fáfnir asks Sigurðr who he is and talks with him to find out if he was acting on his own. After his death, Fáfnir's heart is cooked and eaten. In medieval hagiography, a saint travels to a community that is plagued by a dragon. The saint is generally asked to help get rid of the dragon and proceeds to do so in return for a reward. The dragon was not always killed, instead it would be banished or restrained. This chapter describes the origin and function of the standard medieval dragon by examining at the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfnir, by looking at their role in the story, their appearances, and their character; all in comparison to their counterparts in medieval hagiography.

1 *Role in the Story*

In early mythology, dragons were used in foundation myths as symbols of chaos that needed to be defeated by a new generation in order to come to an ordered 'whole'. In later mythology, dragons appear in stories about more localized events, where they guard a treasure or object and become obstacles to be overcome by the hero of the story, effectively giving the dragons a new function.² Both the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfnir guard their hoards. The *Beowulf*-dragon has to be defeated in order to guarantee the safety of the Geats, which, in addition, gives Beowulf and Wiglaf the opportunity to claim the dragon's hoard. Fáfnir has to be defeated in order for Sigurðr to fulfil his promise to Regin, and for Sigurðr to acquire Fáfnir's hoard. In Christianity

¹ Thomas Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019), 4-6.

² Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon*, 12-3.

the dragon is seen as the ultimate symbol of evil and is linked to Satan.³ In the Bible book Revelation, chapter 12:7-9, Satan is referred to as both a dragon and an old serpent.⁴ This means that in medieval hagiography, the dragon is not simply an obstacle to be overcome for the saint. Instead, it represents evil and the lack of faith the affected community has. Thus the hagiographical story has a moral warning to the reader to be a faithful Christian.

Rauer notes that speeches have an increased importance in the dragon-episode compared to the rest of *Beowulf*. The speeches are held before, during, and after the fight with the dragon, increase in length, and have emphasis on moral instruction.⁵ A surprising characteristic is the hero's motivation for the fight. Beowulf fights to get the dragon's treasure and to stop the dragon from ravaging the land. In Beowulf's reasoning two conflicting traditions of early medieval dragon-fight narratives can be found. The first of these traditions is the Sigurðr-type: a hero seeks to win a treasure hoarded by a peaceful dragon. The second is the Þórr-type: a hero who 'intervenes on behalf of oppressed mankind' suffering under a destructive dragon.⁶ As the name implies, the Sigurðr-type is most clearly found in the *Saga of the Volsungs* and *The Poetic Edda*, where Fáfnir, unlike the *Beowulf*-dragon, keeps to himself, protecting his hoard without attacking his surroundings. Hagiographical tradition has the Þórr-type dragon fight, as will be explained below.

2 Appearance

The Western dragon has changed forms many times and has no single standard shape. Whereas most dragons are seen to have a big body, wings, four legs, and a fire-breathing capability, there are also dragons that have snake-like bodies without legs, possibly no wings, and a poisonous bite or breath.⁷ The appearance of the *Beowulf*-dragon is described to be serpentine⁸, as can be seen by the words used to describe the dragon in table 1. What becomes clear from table 1 is that out of all the descriptors, the ones describing the *Beowulf*-dragon as a serpent is most often used, linking the shape of the dragon to a snake-like form.

³ Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 52.

⁴ Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon*, 37.

⁵ Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 36.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷ Arnold, *Dragon*, 7.

⁸ Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 32.

TABLE 1. Descriptors of the dragon in *Beowulf*.

Word	Meaning	Lines
<i>draca</i>	dragon	891, 2214
<i>dracan</i>	dragon	2091, 2291, 2403, 2550, 3133
<i>ágláécean</i>	monster	2521, 2535, 2558
<i>attor-sceaða</i>	poisonous enemy/criminal	2840
<i>bróga</i>	terror, horror	2325, 2566
<i>ealdor-gewinna</i>	life-enemy, deadly enemy; dire foe	2904
<i>eorð-draca</i>	Earth-Dragon	2713, 2826
<i>fýr-draca</i>	(Fire-Drake), -Dragon	2690
<i>gaést</i>	a Ghost, Spirit, Demon; creature	2312
<i>gryre-giest</i>	dreadful stranger	3043, -e 2561
<i>gúð-sceaða</i>	enemy, destroyer	2319
<i>hring-boga</i>	coiled creature (dragon)	- <i>bogan</i> 2562
<i>inwit-gæst</i>	malicious (stranger or) foe	2671
<i>líg-draca</i>	Fire-Dragon	2334, <i>lég-</i> 3042
<i>lyft-floga</i>	air-flier	2316
<i>mán-sceaða</i>	wicked ravager, wicked criminal	2512
<i>níð-draca</i>	hostile/malicious Dragon	2274
<i>níð-gæst</i>	malicious (stranger or) for	2700
<i>þéod-sceaða</i>	people's foe/scather	2279, 2689
<i>úht-floga</i>	twilight-, dusk-, night-flier	- <i>flogan</i> 2761
<i>úht-sceaða</i>	depredator (scather) at dusk/twilight	2272
<i>wyrm</i>	Serpent	896, 2288, 2344, 2568, 2630, 2670, 2746, 2828, - <i>as</i> 1432, <i>wyrmes</i> 2317, 2349, 2760, 2772, 2903, <i>wyrme</i> 2308, 2401, 2520, <i>wyrm</i> 885, 890, 2706, 3041, 3134
<i>Source:</i> Data from <i>Beowulf on Steorarume</i> , ed. and trans. B. Slade, last modified June 22, 2022, http://www.heorot.dk .		

While the *Beowulf*-dragon has a lot of elements that can be found in modern dragons: it has wings, flies, breathes fire, has a poisonous bite, guards treasure, and can only be killed by hitting

the underbelly; there are many dragons that only show some of these characteristics.⁹ Fáfnir, for example, hoards a treasure: he even turned into a dragon due to his greed. However, he breathes poison instead of fire, nor does he have wings.¹⁰ In *The Poetic Edda* Fáfnir is referred to by name on pp. 140, 141, 149, 150, 153-161. In the Old Norse text of the Edda Fáfnir is either referred to with his name, or as *ormr*, which means serpent or dragon.¹¹ While Fáfnir is mostly referred to using his name, and the other words used are not as extensive as those used to describe the *Beowulf*-dragon, he does get some descriptors in addition to serpent, dragon, and worm. He is called evil, mighty, and huge. Honegger points out that the *Beowulf*-poet uses *wyrm* and *draca* as full synonyms, resulting in the description of the dragon to be vague, since the same terms are used to describe different creatures.¹² The picture here shows different forms of the Western dragon: a) and g) are basilisks, b) and c) lizard dragons, d) and h) wyverns, e) and f) winged dragons. Overall, the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfnir are quite different: while they are both dragons, the *Beowulf*-dragon is more like the later European dragon in that he has legs, wings, and breathes fire. Therefore, he is most like dragons e) and f) as shown in the picture. Fáfnir, on the other hand, is more of a serpent, without wings or legs, and instead of breathing fire he spits poison. In this way he would be more like dragon a).



In medieval bestiaries, such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum* (after 1235), Thomás of Cantimpré's *Liber de natura rerum* (c. 1240), and Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum naturale* (c. 1250-60), dragons are both described as worms and as dragons or drakes.¹³ This demonstrates that in these bestiaries dragons had alternating forms, as in the picture above, and that the authors of the bestiaries were at least in part inspired by *Beowulf* and *The Poetic Edda*. Isidore of Seville wrote in his encyclopaedia *Etymologiae* (c. 625) a chapter about dragons, and influenced later encyclopaedias with his entry. He examined the etymology

⁹ Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon*, 4-5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ Edward Pettit, "Fáfnismál," in *The Poetic Edda: A Dual-Language Edition* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2023), 502-517.

¹² Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon*, 6-7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17-21.

of terms used to describe snakes, noting on their function as guardians of sacred places, and commenting on the relationship between snakes and reptiles. He named dragons as the biggest snakes, thus drawing back on Fáfñir. Isidore additionally drew a connection between snakes and dragons and their use of poison.¹⁴ Unlike those before him, Isidore did not link the dragon to spiritual interpretation and only wrote down what were seen as facts.¹⁵ Other sources, such as the *Physiologus*, make allusions to the Bible and compare snakes and dragons to the Devil. Isidore did not do this and remained in the confines of medieval science.

3 Character

Rauer identifies several characteristics of plot progression in the sequence of events in the dragon-episode in *Beowulf*: the hoarding of treasure, the dragon's violence after theft of some of its treasure, the preparation to fight the dragon, the fight with the dragon, the death of the dragon, and the events following the death of the dragon.¹⁶ The lair of the dragon seems to be an ambiguous characteristic in that it is not clear whether the *Beowulf*-dragon lives in a natural cave or an artificial hill or burial mound. Rauer claims that this means that source material may have been fused for the composition of the poem.¹⁷ This sequence of events can be seen in *The Poetic Edda* as well. The order of events differs as the preparation to the dragon fight, the dragon fight itself, the death, and events following its death occur without the dragon's violence after theft, since no treasure is stolen from Fáfñir. Additionally, it is clear where Fáfñir lives, as it is described that Fáfñir holds his hoard in a cave near water.

Other important characteristics are linked to the dragon's behaviour. Rauer recognises four main attributes in *Beowulf*: 1) imagery of fire, heat, and burning; 2) imagery relating to gold and the hoarding and guarding of treasure; 3) imagery relating to the dragon's nocturnal nature, and 4) imagery relating to an interest in searching and finding, or general inquisitiveness.¹⁸ These characteristics are tightly woven into the narrative with reason. Fire and heat are dangerous factors that both Beowulf and Wiglaf have to deal with during their fight in ll. 2604b-2605 "geseah his mondryhten / under heregríman hát þrówian" [he saw his liege-

¹⁴ Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon*, 26-7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁶ Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 31-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33-4.

lord, under the war-mask suffering heat].¹⁹ It is also seen when the dragon first attacks in ll. 2312-2314a “Ðá se gæst ongan glédum spíwan, / beorht hofu bærnan bryneléoma stód / eldum on andan” [Then the demon began to spew flames, to burn bright houses; the gleam of fire rose].²⁰ The hoarding is linked to the theft of the cup which leads to the dragon’s attack, and the dragon is called a “hordweard” [hoard-ward] in l. 2302.²¹ The nocturnal nature of the dragon is a necessary attribute as well, because it allows for an attack while the dragon is asleep. As for the inquisitiveness: it explains why the dragon found the treasure in the first place and how it realised the cup was stolen.²² In ll. 2300b-2301 the realisation of the cup being stolen is seen: “hé þaét sóna onfand / ðæt hæfde gumena sum goldes gefandod” [he suddenly discovered, that a certain man had disturbed the gold].²³ The behavioural characteristics are different for Fáfnir. There is no imagery of fire since he does not breathe fire. He does, however, spit poison. He hoards gold, as is it said that his hoard is kept in his cave. The nocturnal nature of Fáfnir is not discussed, but Fáfnir slithers to the water for a drink during the day. Fáfnir’s inquisitiveness is shown in the conversation he holds with Sigurðr, in which he attempts to find out who Sigurðr is and why he attacked Fáfnir.

4 *Medieval hagiography*

The tradition of connecting the imagery of the dragon to the figure of Satan is also seen in other Christian works; usually in medieval hagiography. In these works of medieval hagiography, as discussed by Rauer, the focus is on dragons which, like the *Beowulf*-dragon, display serpentine characteristics, monstrous characteristics, and destructive behaviour towards a third party.²⁴ Rauer has made an analysis of common features in the hagiographical passages. These features can be summarised in the following elements: first, the saint arrives from elsewhere and instructs the local community concerning the dragon. Then a catastrophe happens, whether its damage to the land, its population, its animals, or any combination of these (there are cases where damage has been done through some association with fire or poisonous breath or smell, the fire damage being similar to the damage done by the *Beowulf*-dragon, while the poisonous

¹⁹ *Beowulf on Steorarume*, ed. and trans. B. Slade, last modified June 22, 2022, <http://www.heorot.dk>.

²⁰ Slade, *Beowulf on Steorarume*.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 34-5.

²³ Slade, *Beowulf on Steorarume*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

damage is reminiscent of Fáfnir).²⁵ The saint offers help or sets conditions, or rewards are offered by the victims (the rewards offered to the saint or the conditions set by the saint often contains the promise of conversion).²⁶ The dragon's habitat is a cave or mountain, often near water, and during the journey to the dragon, the saint is usually accompanied by the local population or companions. Sometimes the saint has a guide who is prepared to take the saint to the dragon. The people travelling with the saint act as eyewitnesses, and, generally the crowd is nervous or afraid, whereas the saint is not. Due to the fear the crowd typically refuses to go closer to the dragon, or the saint refuses to take them further and continues alone, leaving the crowd at watching distance. Next the dragon is summoned from its habitat by the saint through speech. In this speech the dragon, as a rule, is banished by way of exorcism; the dragon is commanded or invoked to cooperate, to give up its destructive behaviour, to disappear, to die, or any combination of these. The dragon fight is stylized: the command is accompanied by large gestures, and the stole can be used to bind and lead away the dragon. The saint can use prayers, spiritual armour, holy water, the sign of the cross, or his staff. In no example is the dragon able to defend itself, threaten the saint, or retaliate. Instead the dragon sometimes reacts with submissive gestures. As a result of this, the dragon does not always die, but often the dragon is compelled to commit suicide. It can also be banished or restrained. Then messengers report the outcome of the fight to those who could not come. The crowd, who were often described as pagans or doubtful Christians, are converted by the saint, or have their faith restored with the removal of the dragon. The dragon miracle is followed by conversion of the whole community, baptisms, miraculous healings, the creation of springs and wells, or the construction of churches and monasteries, often near the former habitat of the dragon, as the formal conclusion of the dragon miracle is often represented by events which involve the production or distribution of water.²⁷ It is important to note that there was an emphasis on the relationship between the saint and the watching crowd, focusing on the spirituality of the onlookers. The speeches in the texts generally have a moralizing tone too. Unlike *Beowulf*, the saint generally makes it out of the fight alive and there is no physical fight to speak of. As a result the hagiographical dragon fights seem effortless in comparison to the dragon-episode in *Beowulf* or Sigurðr's encounter with Fáfnir. Another striking difference is that the dragons in both *Beowulf* and *The Poetic Edda* are beaten for fame and treasure, while the dragons in the hagiographical passages represent the paganism of the communities that are plagued by the dragons. These dragons also do not hoard

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁷ Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 61-73.

treasure, they simply portray destructive behaviour.

A well-known saint is St. George. He, unlike the saints described above, uses brute force to get rid of his dragons. St. George is a special case, since he was originally a martyr saint who did not fight a dragon, this change only happened around the tenth century.²⁸ He also does not kill the dragon immediately, instead he wounds the dragon and then subdues it using a girdle.²⁹ St. George does lead the dragon into town and makes the people convert before killing the dragon. Here we see the condition set by the saint in full force, because St. George essentially threatens the people to convert in order to be rid of the dragon. By doing so, the death of the dragon directly symbolises the death of paganism in this story. Saints who do not use force to get rid of the dragon are, amongst others, St. Samson of Dol, St. Marcellus of Paris, St. Martha at Aix-en-Provence, and St. Margaret of Antioch. Instead of force, they rely on prayers. St. Margaret of Antioch managed to defeat the dragon by making the sign of the cross after she was swallowed and safely broke free from the dragon.³⁰

Conclusion

The standard medieval dragon is made up from several dragons, namely the *Beowulf*-dragon, Fáfñir, and dragons from medieval hagiography. It functioned as symbol of chaos, before becoming more of a localised guardian of important places and treasure, after which it became an obstacle to be overcome. Moreover, it is possible to divide the hero's motivation into two groups: the Sigurðr-type in which a hero seeks to win a treasure hoarded by a peaceful dragon, and the Þórr-type, where a hero intervenes for the sake of a local community who are attacked by a destructive dragon. The standard medieval dragon either has the appearance of what is known as the Western dragon, with legs, wings, and a fiery breath, or a snake-like body without legs and wings, with a poisonous breath. It often comes with imagery associated with fire, hoards, caves, bodies of water, and being inquisitive to the point of knowing exactly what is in their hoard to the smallest coin. In medieval hagiography the dragons do not immediately die, instead prayer and commands are used to banish them. They also do not seem to hoard treasure, instead they are purely dangerous due to their destructive behaviour. In chapter 2 the influence that the standard medieval dragon had on Tolkien and Lewis will be considered.

²⁸ Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon*, 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

CHAPTER 2 - THE MEDIEVAL DRAGON REFORGED: LITERARY DRAGONS IN THE WORKS OF TOLKIEN AND LEWIS

“And dragons, real dragons, essential both to the machinery and the ideas of a poem or a tale, are actually rare.”¹

J. R. R. Tolkien is well-known for his lecture on *Beowulf*. In it, he explains that a good dragon is hard to find, referring to dragons as essential to the plot and ideas expressed in a poem or story. As examples of good dragons in northern literature, he names Fáfñir and the *Beowulf*-dragon. Tolkien has incorporated various dragons in his own fantasy fiction, which I will compare to the standard medieval dragons discussed in chapter 1. I claim that Tolkien has been influenced by these dragons in his writing, and that he has further developed the standard medieval dragon. Tolkien, along with C. S. Lewis, has reforged the standard medieval dragon into a version that, on its own, has influenced many writers. Tolkien has many dragons in his legendarium, amongst them being Smaug, Glaurung, and Chrysophylax Dives. These dragons will be closely examined to see how they have been formed and what elements, if any, have come from the standard medieval dragon. The same will be done for Lewis' Eustace from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and the northern and southern dragons from *The Pilgrim's Regress*, following the same order of examination as in chapter 1.

Tolkien's dragons

1 Glaurung

One of the first dragons in Tolkien's legendarium is Glaurung. He appears in *The Silmarillion*, where he is the servant of Morgoth and the main opponent of Túrin.

1.1 Role in the story

Glaurung is given the assignment to sack the hidden Elven city Nargothrond. Glaurung freezes Túrin at the gate, making him deaf to the cries of Finduilas, daughter of Orodreth. Glaurung releases Túrin from his spell once the captives have been taken away and gives

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (1983; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2006), 12.

him a choice: follow Finduilas or help his mother and sister. Túrin does not know that his mother and sister are safe so he is tricked by Glaurung into going after them, leaving Finduilas to her fate. Glaurung then hoards all the treasures in Nargothrond and stays there. When Glaurung hears that Túrin's mother and sister are looking for Túrin, he goes out and finds Nienor. He makes her lose her mind and run into the forest like a deer. Túrin finds her at Finduilas' grave and takes her with him, not realising that she is his sister and calls her Níniel. During the time they live together they fall in love. After several years Glaurung comes out of Nargothrond to attack Brethil and Túrin ventures out to defeat him. After Túrin stabbed Glaurung, Glaurung's blood touches him, causing him to faint. Níniel finds Túrin like this and Glaurung, not dead yet, restores her memory. Thinking Túrin is dead, she throws herself in the nearby river out of grief. Túrin wakes up and finds out what has happened in the time he was unconscious and out of misery throws himself onto his sword.

1.2 Appearance

Looking at Glaurung, the similarities to Fáfñir immediately attract attention. Glaurung, like Fáfñir, is a snake-like creature without wings and is capable of talking. Glaurung is capable of breathing fire, which is different from Fáfñir, but his breath and blood are poisonous. Glaurung also has a stench or dragon-reek "that no horses would endure."² The stench proves to be a true obstacle while Túrin and his companions climb to where Glaurung is: "But so foul now was the reek that their heads were dizzy, and they slipped as they clambered, and clung to the tree-stems, and retched, forgetting in their misery all fear save the dread of falling into the teeth of Teiglin."³ An additional important characteristic of Glaurung is that "the glance of his fell eyes was keener than that of eagles, and outreached the far sight of the Elves."⁴ Apart from having keen eyesight, he can also paralyze the people he looks at and put them under a dragon-spell. This dragon-spell can be used to erase the memories of the person he looks at in combination with his

² J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (1980; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2014), 152.

³ Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, 171.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

manipulating dragon speech, like he did to Nienor.⁵ Glaurung has many aliases: Worm of Angband, Father of Dragons, the Great Worm, Worm of Morgoth, First of the Urulóki, gold-worm, and Glaurung the Golden.

1.3 Character

Glaurung revels in making people suffer, as can be seen in an important point Shippey makes about the meeting between Glaurung and Túrin at Nargothrond: “Glaurung the dragon, like Saeros, strikes the hidden fear when he calls Túrin ‘deserter of thy kin’; and so Túrin abandons Finduilas to save Morwen, comes too late to do anything but doom Aerin and then falls into despair, rejecting the obvious solution of following his mother and sister to safety.”⁶ In scaring Túrin, Glaurung manipulates Túrin into lasting doom. Glaurung has thus struck Túrin in a way that would give him the most mental and emotional agony. Petty, too, mentions Glaurung striking for the most anguish possible: “he is very clever and cunning in a truly non-human way; he consistently torments the human characters in a manner that delivers the greatest mental and emotional anguish to his victims.”⁷ As Glaurung is dying, he lies still after thrashing, appearing to be dead. However, as Níniel approaches Glaurung, he moves yet again and reveals that Níniel is Nienor. The revelation proves too much for Nienor as she commits suicide by throwing herself over the edge of the cliff into the river. Thus Glaurung managed to hurt Túrin once more through the revelation of the truth and Nienor’s suicide, driving Túrin to kill himself as well. Glaurung is a typical treasure hoarder: he stays in Nargothrond once he’s driven all of the elves from their home and makes a bed for himself from the treasure. Smaug follows this example, as will be discussed below.

Glaurung is not his own agent, he follows the orders of Morgoth. In this aspect he differs from the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfñir, who were in their own lairs when the thief and Sigurðr came to their respective habitats. Glaurung stays in Morgoth’s abode and follows his will rather than his own. During the first real encounter in *The Silmarillion*, Glaurung is still young and untested, and, in appearing, Glaurung defies the will of

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶ Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 265.

⁷ Anne C. Petty, *Dragons of Fantasy* (New York: Cold Spring Press, 2004), 45.

Morgoth. “But Morgoth was ill-pleased that Glaurung had disclosed himself oversoon.”⁸ This tells us that Glaurung is not his own master, and, that in this he is different from the standard medieval dragon, which was portrayed to be the devil or an incarnation of him.⁹ Another example where Glaurung is forced to follow orders is when he is pleased that “he had accomplished the errand of his Master.”¹⁰ Glaurung also seems to have a connection to Morgoth: when Nienor looks into Glaurung’s eyes they “were terrible, being filled with the fell spirit of Morgoth, his master.”¹¹ On top of that, Glaurung seems to be able to channel his master, as he notices Mablung: “there came from him the laughter of Morgoth, dim but horrible, as an echo of malice out of the black depths far away. And this voice, cold and low, came after.”¹² This shows that unlike the traditional medieval dragon, the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfñir, Glaurung is linked to Morgoth. He is not his own master and has to follow the orders of Morgoth.

1.4 Relation to the medieval tradition

As seen in chapter 1, *Beowulf* and *The Poetic Edda* have been influential examples of the standard medieval dragon. According to Arnold “the Völsung legend, alongside that of the hero Beowulf, was also an inspiration for what have proved to be the most influential fantasy fictions of modern times: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth novels, *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5).”¹³ This inspiration can also be seen in *The Silmarillion* and the *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*. While *The Silmarillion* gives the story of Túrin in which the dragon Glaurung plays an important part, the *Unfinished Tales* gives the story in greater detail. The scene before the fighting and killing of the dragon is similar to the one before the dragon fight in *Beowulf*: where Beowulf only has Wiglaf to support him in the battle against the dragon after the other retainers stayed behind, Túrin has only Hunthor to aid him after Dorlas backs out due to his fear. After the dragon’s death, its body was burned until he was only ashes and dust.

⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (1977; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2006), 103.

⁹ Petty, *Dragons of Fantasy*, 38-39.

¹⁰ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 197.

¹¹ Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, 153.

¹² *Ibid.*, 154.

¹³ Arnold, *Dragon*, 97.

This is reminiscent of how the *Beowulf*-dragon was disposed of since its body was thrown over a cliff into the water.

Like Fáfñir, Glaurung's weak spot is his belly. Therefore, it is not surprising that the death scenes of Fáfñir and Glaurung are very similar. Both come to their end by being stabbed in their belly with a sword. Tolkien has intensified the scene in comparison to the Sigurðr legend, making Túrin hang on a cliff with a very real possibility of dying if he were to fall. Sigurðr on the other hand is lying in a ditch waiting for the worm to pass over, on the advice of Óðinn. Yet both Túrin and Sigurðr wait for their respective worms to cross over either a pit or chasm before attacking. Whereas Fáfñir slithers over the ditches, Glaurung has to actively "spring over the chasm with his great forelegs and then draw his bulk after."¹⁴ Sigurðr is described to just stab upwards in order to kill Fáfñir, Túrin, on the other hand, is almost overcome by the heat and the stench that is given off by Glaurung. He needs his companion Hunthor to grab and support him so he does not fall. The underside of Glaurung is pale and covered in slime. Even though the fight between Glaurung and Túrin is very similar to the fight between Fáfñir and Sigurðr, Túrin is not a Sigurðr-type hero, but rather a Þórr-type.¹⁵ The Sigurðr-type hero seeks a treasure from a dragon who does not terrorise a community at that point in time, while a Þórr-type hero intervenes in a situation where a dragon is destructive towards a community. In this case Glaurung is destructive and Túrin goes out to stop Glaurung, making him the Þórr-type hero. Additionally, Túrin does not seek out Glaurung's treasure, only stepping up to kill the dragon after it threatens the place he lives in. Mathews claims that "Tolkien shows that heroism is defined by the strength of the adversary the hero faces."¹⁶ Glaurung's cunning personality, his use of the dragon-spell, and his dangerous appearance make him a formidable foe. In making Glaurung such an impressive adversary, Tolkien makes the actions of Túrin and Nienor that much more dramatic and heroic. Glaurung is not the only dragon who makes such an imposing opponent, Tolkien's other dragons follow Mathews assertion as well.

¹⁴ Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, 172.

¹⁵ Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 38.

¹⁶ Mathews, *Fantasy*, 64.

Glaurung fits in with the standard medieval dragons in that his appearance is similar to Fáfñir's, and Glaurung uses his cunning to deceive people like Fáfñir tried to do with Sigurðr. Glaurung dies in a similar fashion as Fáfñir: he was also stabbed in the shoulder joint with a sword. Additionally, Glaurung guards a hoard like the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfñir. There are also similarities in the plots of the stories, Glaurung dies in a way that resembles Fáfñir's death and both Beowulf and Túrin have the support of one supporter in the fight against the dragon. Moreover, Glaurung functions as a classic obstacle to be overcome.

Tolkien added the dragon-spell that Glaurung uses, and made Glaurung delight in causing the most torment possible to others. Tolkien also added the fact that Glaurung had to rely on Morgoth, unlike the medieval dragons who have agency over their own actions. In this way, Tolkien has added to the existing mould of the standard medieval dragons.

2 *Smaug*

Smaug is the only dragon in *The Hobbit*. He is very similar to Fáfñir, in that Smaug is also an obstacle to be overcome.

2.1 *Role in the story*

Smaug is the reason why Bilbo is recruited by Gandalf to go on a journey to help Thorin's company of dwarves get the mountain of Erebor back. Smaug has ousted the dwarves and taken residence in the Lonely Mountain, hoarding all the gold and treasures that the dwarves gathered. Before Smaug actively appears in the story, the reader has already heard many things about him, which builds up the anticipation for when he is finally revealed. The song of the dwarves and Gandalf's explanation of Thrór's map have already revealed some information about Smaug, setting up an image that is expanded through small comments on Smaug throughout the story. One of those comments is "Every worm has his weak spot."¹⁷ Bilbo presents this bit of information as a common saying or proverb his father used to say. Another one of these sayings is found in chapter

¹⁷ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1991; repr. London: HarperCollins, 2014), 256.

1 where Gandalf describes Bilbo as “as fierce as a dragon in a pinch.”¹⁸ All of this information makes the reveal of Smaug all the more impressive as Bilbo’s lack of proper knowledge becomes apparent.

2.2 Appearance

Smaug is described as a red dragon of immense size, who has wings and legs, and who is capable of breathing fire. In this way, Smaug is like any dragon in medieval hagiography that goes up against a saint. Smaug also has an unprotected spot on his belly where a scale is missing, through which he is killed in the end.

2.3 Character

A central character trait of Smaug is his greed. When he notices that a cup is missing from his hoard, he goes on to attack Lake Town as revenge for the theft. The theft also makes him dread not covering up the tunnel Bilbo came through. According to Arnold, “Smaug’s criticism of his own poor housekeeping and his consequent worries about his prospective vulnerability effectively humanizes him.”¹⁹ Smaug’s open worry about the passage that he never blocked off shows him in a different light than Glaurung. It makes him, as Arnold puts it, vulnerable and more human. Where Glaurung revels in the anguish he causes, he shows no mental vulnerability as Smaug does in this instance. In Tolkien’s Middle-earth, greed is not only seen in Smaug but it also is a very human and dwarven affliction. Thorin’s obsession with the Arkenstone is one example of this. It is also called gold-sickness or dragon-sickness.

2.4 Relation to the medieval tradition

Smaug is similar to Fáfñir in that he has an unprotected underside, or more specifically, a missing scale which creates an unprotected spot on his underside, and Smaug is capable of speech, trying to find out the identity of Bilbo in a conversation, as well as whether he came alone or not. An element that is not seen in *Beowulf* and that is different from *The Poetic Edda*, is the involvement of the thrush in *The Hobbit*: a bird who gives the

¹⁸ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 22.

¹⁹ Arnold, *Dragon*, 228.

information about the unprotected spot to Bard. In the Sigurðr legend, birds do play a role, informing Sigurðr of the plans Regin has to kill him. Sigurðr has to eat Fáfnir's heart to understand their speech. Bard is already capable of understanding the speech and the thrush gives vital information to defeat Smaug. The difference between the two stories is that in *The Hobbit* the thrush gives vital information in order to bring down Smaug, whereas in *The Poetic Edda* Sigurðr has already defeated Fáfnir.

Like the *Beowulf*-dragon, Smaug hoards treasure and has been in his mountain for a long time before he is disturbed by the theft of a cup. A small, yet significant, difference is that Smaug only attacks Lake Town after Bilbo inadvertently revealed that he came from Lake Town when he calls himself a Barrel-rider. Where the *Beowulf*-dragon mindlessly attacked the surrounding area, Smaug waited in order to find out where the culprit is from to specifically attack that place.

In the end, Smaug is killed by a hero wielding a weapon he inherited, the black arrow. The hero in this instance is Bard. This is surprising because in traditional hagiography the dragon is faced and defeated by a single hero or saint. *The Hobbit* takes more after *Beowulf* in this instance, since in *Beowulf* the dragon is first disturbed by a thief, and then attacked by Beowulf and Wiglaf. In *The Hobbit* Bilbo takes on the role of the burglar as he is sent in to find the Arkenstone, yet his role is expanded through his conversation with Smaug. As Arnold notes this conversation is based on *Fáfnismál* and is a major deviation from the plot of *Beowulf*.²⁰ Shippey notes that “*Fáfnismál* once again did not offer Tolkien enough. It drifted off into mere exchange of information; it contained, as Tolkien said of *Beowulf*, too much ‘*draconitas*’ and not enough ‘*draco*’, not enough of the ‘real worm, with a bestial life and thought of his own.’”²¹ Tolkien solved this problem through Smaug's personality, making Smaug more humanized through his greed and worries.

In short, Smaug both does and does not live up to the standard medieval dragon. Smaug's appearance is consistent with that of the standard medieval dragon in that he has an unprotected spot from a missing scale, making him vulnerable in a spot where Fáfnir was also vulnerable. He is clearly an obstacle to be overcome by the protagonists. He also

²⁰ Arnold, *Dragon*, 227.

²¹ Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 90.

hoards treasure and, akin to the *Beowulf*-dragon, immediately knows when a piece of his hoard is missing. The big difference between Smaug and the typical hagiographical dragon is his humanized personality: Smaug has enough patience to acquire information about who stole from him in order to attack anyone linked to the thief specifically.

3 *Chrysophylax Dives*

Tolkien has a third imposing dragon in his legendarium: Chrysophylax Dives from *Farmer Giles of Ham*. Chrysophylax Dives is different from both Glaurung and Smaug, because, while he is still an obstacle to be overcome, he is used by Giles as a way to scare off those who would want the treasure he has won from Chrysophylax. *Farmer Giles of Ham* is a parody of the St. George type story, since Chrysophylax is tamed instead of killed.

3.1 *Role in the story*

Chrysophylax Dives is a dragon who initially came to Giles looking for food. Giles succeeds in chasing him away using the sword Tailbiter and is celebrated by the townspeople for this accomplishment. However the king hears of this achievement and orders Giles to get rid of the dragon entirely, which Giles wants no part in whatsoever. Nevertheless he is forced to, and travels with knights to Chrysophylax Dives cave. The knights are chased away yet Giles drives Chrysophylax into a corner once more with his sword. He forces Chrysophylax to bring out treasure, and makes Chrysophylax carry the treasure back to Ham. Once again Giles is welcomed back by the town. He does not want to give his treasure to the king, but the king visits the town to demand it be given to him. Giles makes a deal with Chrysophylax to help him chase off the king in return for not killing him and letting him live in peace under Giles. As a result, Giles becomes king.

3.2 *Appearance*

Chrysophylax has an appearance similar to the *Beowulf*-dragon: with wings, legs, and fire-breathing capability. He is a treasure hoarder, quite like all of the dragons discussed so far. However, he does not have an apparent weakness like Fáfñir and Smaug, instead Giles has to fight him with seemingly brute force in the form of his sword Tailbiter.

Chrysophylax “it appeared, was exceptionally large and ferocious.”²² Moreover, he is described as being a hot dragon.²³

3.3 Character

Chrysophylax’s personality is described as “cunning, inquisitive, greedy, well-armoured, but not overly bold.”²⁴ He is also said to have a wicked heart.²⁵ His cunning and wicked heart come to the fore when Giles seeks out Chrysophylax and stumbles upon him unexpectedly. Chrysophylax is suspicious of Giles and asks “Those are your holiday clothes, I suppose. A new fashion, perhaps?”²⁶ in an attempt to pry information from Giles’ reaction. Chrysophylax also closes his eyes after the conversation, pretending to be asleep but hoping to catch Giles unaware so he can have an easy meal. Chrysophylax employs “an ancient trick” as well by asking Giles if he dropped something to create an opening to attack.²⁷ While Chrysophylax is described in a negative light, he is quite cowardly as he had rather not fight. He runs away as soon as Giles waves Tailbiter around.

3.4 Relation to the medieval tradition

The story of Giles and Chrysophylax resembles those found in medieval hagiography. It is clear that this story is a parody of St. George and the Dragon. Giles is not the typical saint and Chrysophylax is a cunning, yet cowardly dragon who talks. There is no true fight between the hero and the dragon, unlike in *Beowulf* and *The Poetic Edda*. Instead, the story follows the general flow that medieval hagiographical stories do, but with a twist. Chrysophylax is showing destructive behaviour towards a third party by eating people and livestock, making him the catastrophe that needs to be solved. But there is no saint to offer help, and no knights are sent to deal with Chrysophylax. The parson from another village, who tried to talk to Chrysophylax, failed and was eaten instead, thus

²² J. R. R. Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, ed. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, ill. Pauline Baynes (1949; repr. London: HarperCollins, 2014), 63.

²³ Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, 65.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

moving the responsibility to Giles. There is no talk of reward, and Giles tries to shirk the responsibility by setting several conditions that the villagers meet, such as providing him with some sort of armour. Giles does not bring any witnesses or guides except his dog Gram. While Giles is forced into the hero position, he mostly takes Chrysophylax on out of self-preservation. Nevertheless, since Giles is made to act on behalf of the oppressed people, he is similar to a Pórr-type hero.

There are other elements that occur in medieval hagiographical stories as well. Giles demands Chrysophylax to leave and go back to his den, which is similar to the banishment of the dragon by a saint through speech. However, Giles went further and chased the dragon back into the village. Here the element of witnesses, again, comes into play, as the villagers come out to see the dragon exhausted in front of their church with Giles standing over him. At this point in hagiographical stories, the dragon would either die or be banished, but Tolkien does not follow through on this custom and instead takes the story further in similar ways to other standard medieval dragon stories with the hero facing the dragon to get the treasure. Even then, he does so in a non-traditional way. For starters, Chrysophylax does not die. He is forced by Giles to carry his own treasure back to Ham and a deal is struck between them to keep the treasure from the king in return for the promise of leaving Chrysophylax alive.

Like some hagiographical dragons, Chrysophylax dwells in a mountain cave, described as a deep house with brazen doors on great pillars of iron. It is explained that dragons do not create their own lairs, but rather house themselves in places made by men.²⁸ In this way he is similar to Glaurung and Smaug, who also have taken residence in places initially made by people.

Tolkien adapted the use and meaning of the curse that is on the treasure. The curse on the treasure is a motif in the story which can also be found in the hagiographical tradition, *Beowulf*, and *The Poetic Edda*. It is explained that the treasure that Chrysophylax hoards would have a curse upon it if Giles insisted to have every penny as a regular knight would have done.²⁹ Chrysophylax would have attacked Giles as well if he had insisted on having absolutely everything. This motif is seen in *The Hobbit* in the

²⁸ Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, 112.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

dragon-sickness that falls on Thorin. In *Beowulf*, it is because the cup was stolen that the dragon attacked. In *The Poetic Edda*, it is the greed of Fáfnir that turns him into a dragon.

Another unusual aspect is the trickery of the king. Giles intends for the treasure to be for his village, and mostly for himself, rather than handing it over to the king to gain honour and fame in the kingdom. Chrysophylax even stays in the village to ensure the king is unable to forcefully take the treasure away. The journey back is also similar to the hagiographical procession towards the dragon's lair, in that Giles turns into a guide for some servants of the deceased knights. Chrysophylax stays with Giles as a tame dragon, similar to how St. George brought a dragon back into town with a girdle, and St. George demands the conversion of everyone before he kills the dragon.³⁰ There was no need for Giles to demand conversion in Ham or the kingdom since Christianity was already followed.

The behaviour of dragons to take over empty caves or treasuries is once again mentioned as Chrysophylax has to evict a young dragon from his lair after he is released by Giles. He even eats the young dragon.

According to Petty, Tolkien has incorporated imagery of bridges in *Farmer Giles of Ham*, the *Unfinished Tales*, and *The Silmarillion* to clearly show that dragons are obstacles to overcome. It is not only Chrysophylax who literally blocks the road and prevents further travel, Glaurung in his turn also sits on the bridge to Nargothrond, cutting off a safe way to escape and sealing the fate of people still inside the city. Furthermore, Tolkien shows another scenario in *The Hobbit*, by having Bard command that the bridge to Lake Town is to be destroyed so that Smaug cannot use it in his attack.³¹ Honegger makes a point of the dragon having the main function of *maximum obstaculum* in medieval literature as well.³² The dragon in this function serves to be a stepping stone for the hero of the story to obtain glory, riches, or, in the case of medieval hagiography, conversion of the local community. Tolkien gives his dragons this function while expanding on their importance by developing their personalities and allowing them to speak.

³⁰ Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon*, 45.

³¹ Petty, *Dragons of Fantasy*, 45-46.

³² Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon*, 93.

Chrysophylax differs from the standard medieval dragon as he was written to be a parody of the St. George dragon. The king is tricked and the farmer eventually becomes king instead. Chrysophylax is a coward, yet, unlike the medieval dragons, does not die. Uniform to the medieval standard, Chrysophylax functions as an obstacle to be overcome. He is cunning and hoards treasure. The plot of the story mostly follows the common features found in hagiographical stories discussed in chapter 1. Themes of the cursed treasure and greed are central in this work, as they are in the medieval tradition.

4 *The Hoard*

Tolkien's poem "The Hoard" in *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* is quite telling regarding Tolkien's view on dragons. It was first published within *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book* in 1962. It is a poem that explores the theme of greed, in which an elven hoard is taken by a dwarf, then by a dragon, and then by a man.

4.1 *Role in the story*

In this poem, Tolkien explores how a dragon comes across its treasure and what this treasure does to its owner, be it dwarf, man, or dragon. According to Shippey there seems to be a curse on the gold itself, as it leads to the isolation and death of both the dwarf, who gathered and hoarded the treasure initially, and the dragon, who was attracted by the riches and killed the dwarf in order to make it its own.³³ The dragon does not use the gold in any matter other than as a bed to sleep on. The dragon clings to the hoard until he is old and does not realise that a young warrior has come for the treasure. The young warrior becomes an old king who is so obsessed with his treasure that he does not rule properly anymore, and the weapons of his thanes start to rust. The king's obsession with the hoard ends in the destruction of the kingdom. The poem ends with the hoard underground, having taken many lives with its curse, the curse being the greed and obsession it invokes in those who find it.

³³ Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 87.

4.2 Appearance

The dragon is not described in great detail, but it is said that the dragon has feet and wings³⁴, therefore it is most likely to be a European-type dragon, similar to Smaug. The dragon is also a fire-breather, again comparable to Smaug, as well as the *Beowulf*-dragon. The habitat of this dragon is a cave, which almost all dragons in this chapter dwell in.

4.3 Character

This dragon is a lot like the *Beowulf*-dragon and Smaug in personality. He knows exactly where each piece of gold is and dreams about slaying thieves and protecting his hoard from them. In this, he portrays the telling greed that all the dragons in this chapter possess.

4.4 Relation to the medieval tradition

‘The Hoard’ is based on line 3052 of *Beowulf* “Íumonna gold galdre bewunden” [Gold of men of yore, encompassed by an incantation].³⁵ This line refers to the hoard being accumulated through time and having a curse on it to prevent it from being disturbed. It is reflected in the poem by the possession and accumulation of wealth first by the elves, then a dwarf, a dragon, and man. Each of the owners of the hoard is defeated and replaced due to the greed the existence of the hoard causes. This is the curse of the hoard that is also seen in *Beowulf*, *The Poetic Edda*, and the stories written by Tolkien mentioned so far.

The underlying message of the hoarded gold, it being the curse itself causing greed and obsession in those who find it, can be applied to almost all dragons in this chapter. Smaug attacks Erebor and stays in the Lonely Mountain as many years go by until Bilbo and the dwarves come to reclaim the mountain. The hoard, and especially the Arkenstone, almost turn Thorin mad, not unlike his father Thráin and grandfather Thrór.

³⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien, “The Hoard,” in *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil, and Other Verses from The Red Book*, ed. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, ill. Pauline Baynes (1962; repr. London: HarperCollins, 2014), 99-101.

³⁵ Slade, *Beowulf on Steorarume*.

Glaurung stays in Nargothrond after he attacks the city and rules as a dragon king.³⁶ Chrysophylax also has treasure in his cave that he is unwilling to part with. The King, upon hearing that Giles has come back with treasure and the dragon, is immediately interested in taking it for himself. Fáfñir kills his father for his inheritance and refuses to share with his brothers, turning into a dragon while guarding his hoard in the cave. The greed that is found in all these works is also present in the works of C. S. Lewis.

Lewis' dragons

5 Eustace

Lewis' treatment of dragons differs from Tolkien's. Tolkien's influence is visible, but where Tolkien's dragons are mostly obstacles to be overcome, Lewis' dragons are there to warn the reader and the protagonists. One of Lewis' dragons is Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

5.1 Role in the story

Eustace is the nephew of the protagonists in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and has snuck onto their ship. In a storm the ship gets damaged and the group of travellers have to stop on an island. Eustace refuses to help repair the ship or do any other work and explores the island instead. He comes across a dragon's cave, where a dragon comes out to drink water from a pond and dies. Eustace goes into the cave and falls asleep after he put a golden bracelet on his arm. When he wakes up, he does so as a dragon. He cannot communicate with his cousins and has to write in the sand to attempt to get across what has happened. They show kindness and aid him, which makes him regret his earlier behaviour. It is through the help of Aslan the lion that he is able to shed his dragon skin and turn back into a boy.

5.2 Appearance

When it comes to his appearance, Eustace is not a dragon like Fáfñir: he fits more into the standard European dragon model, with wings and legs and the ability to breathe fire. His

³⁶ Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, 161.

dragon form looks “like a giant lizard, or a flexible crocodile, or a serpent with legs, huge and horrible and humpy.”³⁷ His appearance makes him similar to the *Beowulf*-dragon. Eustace is also not able to speak, relying instead on his claws to write in the sand. The dragon cave he finds is near a pool of clear water which is relatable to both the *Beowulf*-dragon’s lair near the sea and Fáfnir, who has to slither some distance to get to water. It also coincides with the descriptions of dragon caves in hagiography. The dragon that comes out of the cave to drink at the pool, the original inhabitant of the cave, was a big dragon with legs, wings, and a capability to breathe fire, making this dragon comparable to Smaug and the *Beowulf*-dragon. Eustace eats the dragon that has died by the pool, this behaviour is described as distinctly dragonish and is the reason why it is difficult to find two dragons in one country. Something similar happens in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* discussed below.

5.3 Character

Eustace is turned into a dragon after sleeping in a dragon cave with treasure. One can say that his greed to grab a bracelet and put it around his arm was the deciding factor, as his greed for the gold set off the transformation. Eustace comes to regret his former selfish behaviour as a boy when he receives kindness from the party and sets out to be helpful and change his ways instead.

5.4 Relation to the medieval tradition

Eustace’s transformation is similar to Fáfnir’s, as he, too, was not always a dragon himself. Fáfnir was a dwarf who killed his father and kept his brothers and sisters from getting their inheritance, keeping it all for himself. It was his greed that led him to these actions and that is why he turned into a dragon.

The biggest difference between Eustace and the other dragons in this chapter lies in his behaviour and personality. While being a dragon, he still has his own mind and personality. Unlike Fáfnir, who is distinctly aggressive even before changing into a dragon, or the *Beowulf*-dragon, Glaurung, or Smaug, who jealously hoard their treasure

³⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2013, Kobo) 73.

against those who would take it from them, Eustace prefers to seek the company of his companions and despairs in his fate. If he were more like Fáfnir, he would relish in the change and the power that came with it. Instead, he cries and attempts to make himself clear to Prince Caspian and the other people near the ship. He even goes as far as to help them by flying around hunting for food.

Eustace's change in character takes him out of the usual role of a dragon as the obstacle for the hero to overcome. While there is still a hero figure in Aslan for freeing Eustace from his dragon form, he does not fit into the Sigurðr- or Þórr-type that has been discussed in chapter 1. Eustace's transformation itself is not described in detail, since it happens while he sleeps. However, his transformation back into a human is quite detailed. Eustace explains in his conversation with Edmund that he was told by Aslan to undress before going into a well. Eustace has the realisation that dragons are like snakes, so he attempts to shed his skin. Three times he tries and fails to get all of his skin off, at this point Aslan takes over and takes the dragon skin off with his claws. Eustace's unfortunate transformation is the result of his greed and thus functions as a warning to selfishness and greed. His behaviour differs vastly from that of the other dragons in this chapter, and he is not slain because of it. Arnold argues that "the boy's dragon appearance functions as a frame for him to reflect on and address his shortcomings; in other words, briefly becoming a dragon is Eustace's penance."³⁸ He does not function as an obstacle in the story. On the contrary, he helps the others out a lot and his change in character is for the better. The function of Eustace's transformation, and his being a dragon, is, therefore a moral one. In this, Eustace is comparable to the function of dragons in hagiography, as they functioned as a moral warning against atheism. However, it required the promise of the community converting to Christianity for the hero to go out to defeat the dragon.

In summary, Eustace's appearance is similar to that of the European dragon. The transformation was equal to Fáfnir's, including the motivation of greed. Eustace differs from the hagiographical dragons and Tolkien's dragons in that he was not an obstacle to be overcome, but rather a moral warning for the reader. His character also differs, as Eustace is the only dragon to regret his actions and repent them. The other dragons do not

³⁸ Arnold, *Dragon*, 237.

attempt to change their behaviour for the better, but Eustace does, which is a moral trait that Lewis has added.

6 *The northern and southern dragon*

In Lewis' *The Pilgrim's Regress* there are two dragons: the northern and the southern dragon. The dragons are direct opposites of each other: the northern dragon is a cold, ice-wielding monster and is male. The southern dragon, on the other hand, is hot, breathes fire, and is female. The dragons are even put in the opposite direction so that John and Vertue have to split up in order to pursue their own goals. The northern dragon lives left in the mountains, whereas the southern dragon lives right in the marshes. These dragons are different from the ones discussed so far in that they need to be looked at in comparison to each other.

6.1 *Role in the story*

The northern and southern dragon are obstacles that John and Vertue have to defeat, because the dragons each hold an important element that either John or Vertue is missing. John needs to defeat the northern dragon to become 'hardened', whereas Vertue needs to defeat the southern dragon to become more malleable.

6.2 *Appearance*

The northern dragon is called "the cold dragon, the cold, costive, crustacean dragon who wishes to enfold all that he can get within the curl of his body and then to draw his body tighter round it so as to have it all inside himself."³⁹ Having such a long and snake-like body creates a similarity between the northern dragon and Fáfñir. John has to fight this dragon so that he may be 'hardened'. The northern dragon does not breath fire, but a freezing cold. He is referred to as a dragon, a worm, a creature, and a reptile.

The southern dragon is called the hot dragon, and is described as "the invertebrate dragon whose fiery breath makes all that she touches melt and corrupt."⁴⁰ This

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrims Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism* (London: HarperCollins, 2014, Kobo), 194.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *The Pilgrims Regress*, 195.

description is more reminiscent of the *Beowulf*-dragon. Out of all the dragons discussed so far, the southern dragon is the first female one, all the other dragons are strictly male. Vertue has to go fight this dragon in order to become more malleable. There is not much known about this dragon: we only read about the fight with the southern dragon after it has been done when Vertue tells it to John. The dragon is described to have a golden colour and she breathes fire. This dragon is only described as a dragon and a worm.

6.3 *Character*

In the song the northern dragon sings to himself as John approaches, the northern dragon describes his lair as a cave, where he guards a hoard that he lies on as his bed. He calls the treasure jagged, twisted, and cruel, as if it were cursed, like Fáfñir's hoard. He deplors the fact that he has eaten his wife "though worm grows not to dragon till he eat worm."⁴¹ This comment that the dragon said ties back in with the earlier mention on how dragons eat each other as a characteristic of the species. The dragon's greed is made evident in the last stanza of his song: he prays that men and other dragons will be killed so that he can keep his hoard in peace without having to guard it as zealously as he does now. In contrast to the northern dragon, the southern dragon is only described in appearance and, therefore, nothing can be said about her character.

6.4 *Relation to the medieval tradition*

The dragon fights are reminiscent of the St. George type. As Cheetham puts it: the St. George-type dragons "do little except fight and die. . . . Dragons were evil, powerful monsters whose main narrative role was a something to be killed."⁴² This is the case for the northern and southern dragon. However, as will be further discussed below, they have an additional function. The northern and southern dragon need to be killed in order for John and Vertue to gain what they are missing.

The fight with the northern dragon has been inspired by Fáfñir. The first reference to Fáfñir can be found in the instructions John receives on how to fight the northern dragon: he is to fight with a sword, even though he has no experience, and is told to stab

⁴¹ Lewis, *The Pilgrims Regress*, 215.

⁴² Cheetham, "Dragons in English," 19.

the dragon in the underbelly. In the same conversation, before John sets off, the comment is made that the dragon has eaten all other dragons in his surroundings and that otherwise he would not be a dragon.⁴³ Another element that the northern dragon has in common with Fáfnir is its capability of speech: he sings to himself. John is affected by the dragon's speech, giving him the desire to speak to the dragon for some gold. This is reminiscent of both Glaurung's dragon-speech and the influence that Fáfnir tries to exert over Sigurðr with his speech. On top of that, it creates the expectation that the gold must be cursed, because the dragon is affected by dragon-sickness, comparable to Smaug, and he seems to be giving it to John as he listens to his song. As per the given instructions, John stabs the dragon in the underbelly when the dragon coils himself around John like a snake, similar to Sigurðr killing Fáfnir. However, unlike Sigurðr, John does not dig himself trenches for the purpose, and the stab in the underbelly did not kill the dragon, instead it attracts its attention. The freezing cold breath of the dragon hits John's face and hardens him: "A corselet of ice seemed to be closed about him, seemed to shut in his heart, so that it could never again flutter with panic or with greed. His strength was multiplied. His arms seemed to him iron."⁴⁴ With this newfound strength, John stabs the dragon multiple times in the throat, killing it.

Like John, Vertue kills the dragon with the strength that the breath of the dragon gave him. An element of the Sigurðr legend that was not part of the fight with northern dragon is part of this fight: the cutting out and eating of the dragon's heart. The motivation for John and Vertue is to gain something they need which they can only get from the northern and southern dragons. This makes them follow the Sigurðr hero-type, the difference being that they do not need the hoard that the dragons guard, but qualities from the dragons themselves, that they acquire by fighting them. Arnold talks about the function of the poems about the northern and southern dragon: "The songs of both the dragon and the slayer serve as a warning to the pilgrim about the sins of selfishness and greed."⁴⁵ The dragons have a moral function. It is through the example of how John and Vertue deal with them and the consequences they face after it, that not only John and

⁴³ Lewis, *The Pilgrims Regress*, 214.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁵ Arnold, *The Dragon*, 236.

Vertue are warned, but the reader as well. The northern dragon's song initially invokes pity and sympathy for him, but the final stanza makes clear that it is draconic greed that drives him "But ask not that I should give up the gold, / Nor move, nor die; others would get the gold."⁴⁶ The dragon would rather have everybody else die than give up his gold so that he could rest. This dragon-sickness invoked by the gold and treasure that the dragon guards is something that has Tolkien's dragons in their grasp as well. As for the southern dragon, it is the greediness of Vertue in his need to mend himself that he goes out and seeks the dragon for his gain. The dragon does attack him as soon as she sees his shield, but the dragon is not the only one portraying greed. Like Arnold, Warzecha claims that there is a message against temptation in Lewis' works.⁴⁷ While Warzecha focuses on John's journey as a traveller and his conversation with Mother Kirk, his idea that the parable appears at a critical turning point in the story can be applied to the confrontation with the dragons.⁴⁸ Facing the northern dragon is an important part of the development of John in his journey, for he acquires the strength that he is missing. With the song, the dragon almost manages to get John to show compassion, reveal his location and simply give in. This is similar to the temptation of the snake that Eve faces in the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden that Warzecha alludes to in his article. Despite the temptation, John perseveres, being an example to readers to withstand greed and temptation to not end up like the dragon and be successful like John instead. Wheat explains that Lewis uses allegory in his story to show the path an individual takes to become his whole self. "When John and Vertue fight the Northern and Southern dragon respectively, they each acquire the missing element in their nature and thus become whole *individuals*."⁴⁹ John and Vertue represent opposing extremes who need to learn to find the middle ground in their beliefs, to walk "the narrow seam that *unifies* and corrects the excesses of each."⁵⁰ The dragons John and Vertue face thus represent parts of themselves that they are missing and must acquire to become well-rounded individuals. Wheat's argument does

⁴⁶ Lewis, *The Pilgrims Regress*, 216.

⁴⁷ Daniel Warzecha, "Lewis's Parables as Revisited and Reactivated Biblical Stories," *Miranda* 14, no. 14 (2017): 2.

⁴⁸ Warzecha, "Lewis's Parables", 3.

⁴⁹ Andrew Wheat, "The Road Before Him: Allegory, Reason, and Romanticism in C. S. Lewis' *The Pilgrim's Regress*," *Renascence* 51, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 31. Italics not mine.

⁵⁰ Wheat, "The Road Before Him," 31. Italics not mine.

not warn against greed and self-interest, but it does show that Lewis found it important to develop oneself.

The northern and southern dragons fit mostly in the medieval mould. The northern dragon is reminiscent of Fáfñir, while the southern dragons brings the *Beowulf*-dragon to mind. In *The Pilgrim's Regress* the northern and southern dragon are obstacles to be overcome in that John and Vertue need character traits that the dragons have in order to become wholesome themselves. This is different from the usual stories in that, normally, the dragon would be making trouble before the saint sets out to defeat it, but here John and Vertue seek out the dragons before they attacked the surrounding area. Lewis has also added the moral function as he did with Eustace, since John and Vertue aim to defeat the dragons in order to become better humans themselves.

Conclusion

Tolkien and Lewis have both changed the standard medieval dragon. Tolkien's dragons are inspired by Fáfñir and the *Beowulf*-dragon. On the one hand there is Glaurung who takes after Fáfñir: being like a worm without legs or wings, yet capable of speech. Smaug and Chrysophylax Dives, on the other hand, are comparable to the *Beowulf*-dragon: having legs, wings, and the capability of breathing fire. All of Tolkien's dragons function as an obstacle to be overcome in their stories. And while Tolkien has expanded the dragon into a character in its own right, Lewis has expanded on the moralizing aspect that dragons used to have in medieval hagiography. Eustace and the southern dragon look like the *Beowulf*-dragon, and the northern dragon is similar to Fáfñir. The moralizing aspect these dragons carry is the lesson to be wary of greed. This is similar to hagiography, where the purpose of the dragon in the story is to get the community that is under attack to convert to Christianity. It is in these ways that Tolkien and Lewis have taken the standard medieval dragon and transformed it into the dragon that is nowadays recognised as the universally set standard.

CHAPTER 3 – THE EVOLUTION OF DRAGONS IN URSULA K. LE GUIN’S *THE BOOKS OF EARTHSEA*

Ursula le Guin has written the ‘Earthsea’ fantasy series, containing six books which are combined into *The Books of Earthsea*. Le Guin has multiple dragons in her work: some are similar to the standard medieval dragon or to Tolkien’s and Lewis’ dragons, while others are strikingly different. Some of this distinctiveness comes from the influence of Chinese and Japanese dragons, as well as the influence from Taoist writings. There are also major deviations from these standardisations as there is an intricate balance between man and magic on one side and woman and dragon on the other. Man and dragon used to be one, but man chose to pursue magic for themselves so there was a split causing the races to part: man to the east and dragons to the west. *The Books of Earthsea* is all about finding and regaining the balance that was lost during this split.

The Books of Earthsea contain these six titles: *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Tombs of Atuan*, *the Farthest Shore*, *Tehanu*, *Tales from Earthsea*, and *The Other Wind*. *The Books of Earthsea* also contains *A Description of Earthsea*, which holds reference materials, *Earthsea Revisioned*, and four short stories. The first book, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, is about Ged: a young boy who trains to become a wizard, and summons a shadow that chases him throughout his adventure. It is in chasing the shadow and saying its name that he restores balance. In this book, the first dragons are found, the most notable one being Yevaud, the Dragon of Pendor. *The Tombs of Atuan* is the second book, which follows Tenar. She is chosen as the high priestess of the Nameless Ones and loses her name in the process, becoming Arha, the eaten one, instead. Ged seeks a talisman in the tombs Arha watches over. He helps her find her name and frees her from the Nameless Ones. In *The Tombs of Atuan* only one dragon is named: Orm. *The Farthest Shore* is the third book. Ged is now old and has become the Archmage. He sets out with Arren, the prince of Enlad, to find out why magic is disappearing from the world. To find the answer they must cross the boundary between life and death and face the evil wizard Cob. In this book several dragons appear: Orm, Orm Embar, Kalessin, and Bar Oth. In the fourth book, *Tehanu*, Tenar is an old widow of a farmer, and she adopts a scarred child she names Therru. Ged is brought to them by Kalessin, after Ged sacrificed his magic to seal the tear between the world of the living and the dead. A follower of Cob attempts to kill Tenar and Ged, but Therru calls out for Kalessin, who saves them by burning Cob’s follower and his men. Kalessin reveals Therru’s true nature as part woman, part dragon, and calls her Tehanu. *Tales from Earthsea* is the fifth book and is comprised of five short stories. The first, “The Finder,” recounts how the school of magic is established on the island Roke. In the second story, “Darkrose and

Diamond,” the daughter of a witch and the son of a rich merchant fall in love. “The Bones of the Earth” is a third story about Ogion, Ged’s first teacher, and about how Ogion helps his teacher deal with an earthquake. The fourth, “On the High Marsh,” is about a healer who arrives in a village that deals with an epidemic in their livestock. The last story, “Dragonfly,” is set after the fourth book *Tehanu*. It is about the first woman to be taught by the wizards on Roke. The last, and sixth, book is *The Other Wind*. The wizard Alder has dreams of the wall, which separates the land of the living from the land of the dead being dismantled. He seeks the help of Ged and Arren, who has now become King Lebannen. An emissary of the dragons comes to speak with Lebannen to demand the return of land that was stolen long ago. This land was used by wizards to send people to once they died. Alder sets out with Lebannen, his men, and Tehanu to solve this problem and restore balance to the world. *The Books of Earthsea* also holds four short stories, “The Word of Unbinding,” “The Rule of Names,” “The Daughter of Odren,” and “Firelight”.

While there are many dragons in *The Books of Earthsea*, just three dragons will be closely examined in this chapter. These dragons are Yevaud, Kalessin, and Tehanu. They have been chosen for their importance in the plot. Their role in the story will be explored, their appearance and character discussed, and their relation to the medieval tradition studied.

1 Yevaud, the Dragon of Pendor

The Dragon of Pendor is the first dragon to appear in *The Books of Earthsea*. He is found in the first book: *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Pendor is an island that was inhabited by humans but abandoned once nine dragons settled there. Eight of the nine dragons are young, and it is the old one that is the dragon to be reckoned with. The Dragon of Pendor, also known as Yevaud, is the dragon that is most reminiscent of Tolkien’s dragons.

1.1 Role in the story

Yevaud is an obstacle to be overcome. He destroyed the population of the island of Pendor and keeps his hoard there. People of surrounding islands are afraid that he will travel to their islands to do the same, and Ged has to travel to force Yevaud and his offspring to not attack any of the other islands east of Pendor. Yevaud tries to trick Ged into telling him his true name, so that Yevaud can hold power over him. Instead Ged forces Yevaud to bargain with him, revealing the dragon’s true name to be Yevaud, as up until this point in the story Yevaud has solely been referred to as the Dragon of Pendor.

1.2 Appearance

Yevaud has a huge body: “When he was all afoot his scaled head, spike-crowned and triple-tongued, rose higher than the broken tower’s height, and his taloned forefeet rested on the rubble of the town below. His scales were grey-black, catching the daylight like broken stone. Lean as a hound he was and huge as a hill.”¹ This description is similar to Smaug’s. Yevaud breathes flames similar to Smaug and the medieval hagiographical dragons. Yevaud also has some characteristics from Glaurung: people cannot look into Yevaud’s eyes, they will be caught in them if they do. The dragon’s tail is described to be sharp as a sword but five times the size. Yevaud, like all dragons in Earthsea, is capable of speech. The language they speak is called the Old Speech, or Language of Making, and they are born with the ability to speak it, whereas wizards must learn the language. Dragons can lie in it, but humans are bound to the truth when speaking it.² Dragons have an ancient form of magic, and Ged is wary of the possibility of the old dragon using it against him.

1.3 Character

Yevaud is a cunning and greedy dragon who challenges Ged with his dragon-speech in an attempt to trap him in his dragon-spell. Yevaud’s personality is, perhaps, more clearly seen in the short story “The Rule of Names.” In it, Yevaud carries the human form that is called Mr. Underhill because he lives under a hill. He pretends to be a wizard and never lets any of the villagers into his home, always taking those approaching to a nearby tree or shaded spot. When a wizard who is named Blackbeard comes to the island, he reveals Mr. Underhill’s name to be Yevaud and forces him to change into his true form.³ Yevaud defeats Blackbeard and then in medieval dragon fashion decides to eat the villagers to ease his hunger.

¹ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea: The Complete Illustrated Edition*, ill. Charles Vess (New York: Saga Press, 2018), book 1, chapter 5. There are many editions of the books in this series, therefore to prevent confusion, reference will be made to chapters instead of pages.

² The same phenomenon can be seen in Fáfñir, who speaks the truth, but can twist it to his advantage. Like he does when Sigurðr has cornered him.

³ In Tolkien, a similar thing happens. Frodo uses the name Mr. Underhill in the Prancing Pony and it is Pippin who reveals his actual name, causing Frodo to in a hurry put on the One Ring and disappear from view.

1.4 Relation to the medieval and medievalist fantasy tradition

Yevaud is very much like Glaurung and Smaug, both in character and appearance, to the point where it seems as if Le Guin was writing Tolkien out of her system before turning the remaining dragons into something truly of her own making. In the afterword of *The Farthest Shore*, Le Guin writes that she took Smaug, dragons from Norse lore, the St. George dragon, and the Chinese dragon as inspiration for Yevaud.⁴ Le Guin writes: “But I had a lot of pictures and notions about dragons in my head that I had to work through, get rid of, or borrow from, before I could see my own dragons clearly.”⁵ This is most clearly seen in Yevaud and less in her other dragons. It is through Yevaud that Le Guin shows that she is well aware of the tradition that was present before she goes on to develop her own dragons.

One of the elements in the tradition that Le Guin was writing from is the conversation between dragon and man. The conversation Ged holds with Yevaud is reminiscent of the conversations with Fáfñir, Glaurung, and Smaug. The biggest resemblance is with the conversation between Smaug and Bilbo. Ged and Bilbo both go to the dwelling of the dragon in order to achieve something. Where Bilbo is searching for the Arkenstone, Ged is looking to establish the safety of the people of Earthsea, trying to ensure that Yevaud does not go further east in order to threaten more people. Wit is necessary for them both in order to not give away too much information. While Bilbo has to rely on the One Ring to get away from Smaug, Ged has to reveal Yevaud’s true name to force the dragon into accepting Ged’s proposal. These similarities show how Le Guin used the tradition that had started with Fáfñir and was continued by Tolkien.

Mathews notes that there are more similarities between the works of Tolkien and Le Guin. Le Guin started working on Earthsea by drawing a map of all the islands, and she added a creation myth into her story, similar to how Tolkien began creating his legendarium. Earthsea began with the word ‘Éa’, Tolkien’s world with ‘Eä’. There are allusions to ancient oral traditions. Additionally the restoration of the ring of Erreth-Akbe is important, however this ring needs to be whole in order to function as a symbol of peace and power, whereas the One Ring needs to be destroyed.⁶ One big difference between Tolkien and Le Guin is “Le Guin’s creation is built on a paradox of identity in which the beginning and the end are one, akin to Eastern traditions in which yin and yang, dark and light, death and life, silence and the word,

⁴ Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea*, book 3, afterword.

⁵ *Ibid.*, book 3, afterword.

⁶ Mathews, *Fantasy*, 136-7.

are one.”⁷ Humans and dragons are initially seen as two distinct races, yet as the story unfolds it turns out that humans and dragons were once one, and that a choice was made to separate into the two different races. In Tolkien’s work, the races are distinctly unique and have no such separation. In making the human and dragon race one in origin, Le Guin makes her story unique, separating herself from the established traditions that she followed in creating Yevaud.

2 *Kalessin*

Kalessin is the oldest dragon in *The Books of Earthsea*. Therefore, it is known as the Eldest. It plays an important part in multiple books in the series: *The Farthest Shore*, *Tehanu*, and *The Other Wind*. Kalessin differs from all the dragons mentioned so far in that it is not given a gender. Kalessin is a leading figure to all other dragons.

2.1 *Role in the story*

Kalessin’s role in the story is not that of an obstacle to be overcome, but functions as a guide, a helper in times of need. It is wise and only appears a few times in the story. It carries Ged and Arren home after they have defeated Cob in the Dry Land, arrives to save Ged and Tenar when Cob’s follower tries to kill them after Tehanu calls out to it, and appears to take Tehanu with it after the Dry Land has been restored.

2.2 *Appearance*

Kalessin is described to have an iron coloured body with red rust on some places on its head, as well as all over its wings. It is immense in size and has wings like sails. It becomes clearer just how big Kalessin is when Arren makes to mount Kalessin with Ged, as Kalessin lets them climb up its leg as if it were a stairway of four steps. Whenever it moves, its scales make a sound of metal scraping against metal. It has golden eyes and its talons are like scythes. Like Yevaud, Kalessin is described to be an old dragon. Kalessin has thorns coming out of its spine along its back. Its scales are hot to the touch, similar to the sun’s heat. Unlike all other dragons so far, Kalessin is not described to have any particular gender: “Whether Kalessin was male or female, there was no telling.”⁸ Kalessin is referred to with the pronoun it, or is called the Eldest.

⁷ Mathews, *Fantasy*, 138.

⁸ Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea*, book 3, chapter 13.

2.3 Character

Kalessin wakes Ged in chapter 13 of *The Farthest Shore*, and brings Ged and Arren to their homes. It brings Arren to Roke and flies Ged farther to Gont. Little is known about Kalessin's character. It does not speak much like Yevaud, instead only says a few words when necessary. Where Yevaud is cunning and filled with greed like Smaug and Fáfñir, Kalessin is calm and wise. The good-humoured nature of Kalessin can be seen in the laughter that it is often said to hold in its eyes. Kalessin leaves Therru in the care of Tenar and Ged in *Tehanu* chapter 14 even though it calls her its child.

2.4 Relation to the medieval and medievalist fantasy tradition

Kalessin is not like the standard medieval dragon in that it has a different function in the story. It is not an obstacle to be overcome, nor does it have a moralizing aspect like Lewis' dragons. Instead it provides aid when needed. It is a symbol of freedom. Kalessin is instrumental in the destruction of the wall, and the return of the balance as it takes down the remainder of the wall to ensure that nothing is left. In short, Kalessin functions as a guide to the dragons, as well as to the humans that try to restore the balance.

As explained before, Le Guin's work is atypical in that humans and dragons share an origin, yet split so humans could pursue work and dragons pursue freedom. Kalessin explains the rift between humans and dragons, and how there came to be an imbalance. "But always among us some envy them their wealth, and always among them some envy us our liberty. So it was that evil came into us and will come into us again, until we choose again, and forever, to be free. Soon I am going beyond the west to fly on the other wind. I will lead you there, or wait for you, if you will come."⁹ The imbalance between dragons and humans came from envy and greed to have what the other race had.

Rochelle sees this split between dragons and humans and examines it as an Emersonian choice: "dragons chose to be Nature; humans chose to be part of nature."¹⁰ Rochelle explains that "Nature is the 'objectification of the Universal Spirit'" and that "Emerson is calling the scholar to be connected to and be a part of his world—to life itself, a life of participation in one's action have meaning and purpose."¹¹ Thus, the dragons are representing life in Le Guin's Earthsea. Where dragons are present, humans are inspired by them. In such a way, dragons are

⁹ Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea*, book 6, chapter 3.

¹⁰ Rochelle, "The Emersonian Choice," 417.

¹¹ Rochelle, "The Emersonian Choice," 419.

symbols. Dragons know freedom, humans chose to work and know good from evil, and dragons are above that distinction. In Taoism, dragons are a combination of the two without the need of division. The opposition between dragons and humans is further established through the association with the elements. Throughout the books, dragons are often called creatures of fire and air, while humans, on the other hand, are said to be creatures of earth and water. This goes to the point where dragons do not like to fight over water.¹²

Kalessin bridges an important change with its lack of gender, as in the first three books the dragons are mostly male, such as Yevaud, Orm Embar, and Orm. The people who change into dragons are female. Rawls examines Le Guin's treatment of dragon's gender:

Dragons are of fire and air, the two elements considered masculine or yang. [...] They fear nothing but the ocean, that large body of water – water that, along with earth, is a female or yin element. In making her dragons also women in the last three books, Le Guin upsets the expectations and conventions established in the first three books, wherein mages, who are always male, and male dragons are the most powerful creatures in Earthsea. She is also overturns the well-established fairytale and mythic convention that the dragon is a male monster obsessed with treasure and maidens.¹³

Rawls shows that Le Guin took the tradition of the evil male dragon and overturned it by making women change into dragons. While male dragons were the most powerful creatures, it is through the work of the women who can turn into dragons that the balance is restored in the end. The dragons in the first three books, Yevaud and Orm, fall into the category of male monster. Orm Embar is also male, but aids Ged and Lebannen in their quest to defeat Cob. It is Kalessin who is the first dragon in the book that is not male. Kalessin is not gendered at all, instead it is referred to as Eldest or by the pronoun it. After it come the women who are also dragons, the Woman of Kemay, Orm Irian, and Tehanu. Even Tenar shows some characteristics that are dragon-like. Kalessin is a dragon who aids Ged, Tenar, and Tehanu, rather than a male monster who is an obstacle to be overcome, or a being whom a moral lesson is to be taken from. The actual monsters in Le Guin's Earthsea are men. It is the greed of wizards that led them to steal part of the dragons territory in pursuit of immortality, causing the balance to be disrupted and creating the dry land in the process. It is through the dragons that the problem is made known, and with them that it is solved. With Kalessin Le Guin sets aside both the traditional medieval dragon and the influential changes that Tolkien and Lewis have made, and surpasses them. Only with Tehanu does she go further as will be discussed below.

¹² Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea*, book 1, chapter 5.

¹³ Rawls, "Witches, Wives and Dragons," 138.

As Kalessin is the Eldest and a wise being in a leadership position to the dragons, it would seem that Kalessin is in a similar position as God. However, as Huang and Dai indicate:

[I]t must be noted that however identical the Earthsea dragons and the Christian concept of God may initially appear to be, they are indeed essentially different. Firstly, God makes judgments, but the dragons simply are. Secondly, God represents the absolute good, the Almighty and the omnipotent, but the dragons are neutral, or a harmonious union of the positive and negative forces, and simply the absolute or the eternal. Thirdly, God creates the existence, but the dragons exist in and with the existence. In this sense, the Earthsea dragons are the incarnation of nature, transcending the concept of gender and to be awed with their deity.¹⁴

Kalessin and God are not equal. Kalessin, and the other dragons, are not omnipotent and simply exist as incarnations of nature. Although they transcend gender and the notion of good and evil, they are not deities. As such, dragons are not linked to the Christian concept of God, or the Christian portrayals of dragons, like the St. George dragon or similar dragons in medieval hagiography. Le Guin's dragons are essentially Nature, and, therefore, are different from humans. This puts them apart from Tolkien's and Lewis' dragons as well, since, specifically in Kalessin's case, they provide aid instead.

3 *Tehanu*

Tehanu is one of the main characters of the series. The book *Tehanu* is about her growing as a person, and she plays a vital role in *The Other Wind*. She is one of the few women in *The Books of Earthsea* to transform into a dragon. Orm Irian, Tenar, and Tehanu are the women in the books who represent the changes happening in Earthsea. For the scope of this thesis Tehanu is the only one who will be examined.

3.1 *Role in the story*

Therru's true name is Tehanu, and she will be addressed as such from this point onwards for clarity. Tehanu eventually turns into a dragon. She first appears in *Tehanu*, where she is a small child. She was abused by her family and thrown into a fire to die, but Tenar takes her in and raises her as her own child. From the beginning it is made clear that Tehanu will have a difficult life because she was disfigured in the fire and will always be looked upon as different. Tenar wishes to make her resilient and teach her how to live her life to the fullest. It is Kalessin who reveals Tehanu's true name. She wants to go with Kalessin to where the other dragons are in

¹⁴ Huang and Dai, "A Taoist Interpretation," 7.

the west but is unwilling to leave Ged and Tenar. Kalessin explains that their place is in the east of Earthsea, so Tehanu decides to stay with them. Kalessin promises to come back for Tehanu after she has done the work she needs to do. This alludes to Tehanu being the one needed to restore the balance between dragons and humans. Tenar first gives Tehanu the name Therru, which means fire in Kargish, Tenar's first language, as she was thrown in the fire as a young child, and Kalessin calls her Tehanu, which is the name of the star that reminds Tenar of Tehanu. As Tehanu grows in both *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind*, it becomes clear that she is the key to restoring the balance of the world. She is the symbol of the union of man and dragon. She grows from wounded child to young woman who has to navigate both the worlds of man and dragon in order to bring peace between the two races.

3.2 Appearance

Tehanu is a child who was abused and left alone to die, but she survived with scars on her right side. Her face is disfigured, she is blind in her right eye, and her right hand is stuck in a claw-like shape. Due to her appearance she is often described as the burned child. Early descriptions of her, referring to her freedom, allude to her being a dragon, before it is even known she is a dragon's child. In *Tehanu* chapter 12, Tehanu is described by Tenar: "When Therru was frightened, the burned and darkened side 'closed in,' as Tenar thought, drawing together, hardening. When she was excited or intent, even the blind eye socket seemed to gaze, and the scars reddened and were hot to touch. Now, as she went out, there was a queer look to her, as if her face were not human at all, an animal, some strange horny-skinned wild creature with one bright eye, silent, escaping."¹⁵ The creature described is very much like a dragon, therefore it seems as Tehanu has always had a dragon side, her scarred side, and a human side. When she finally makes the choice to be a dragon, she changes through fire running along her body, becoming a creature of fire. As a dragon she has golden scales and she shines like the star she is named after.

3.3 Character

Tehanu had an understandably shy personality in *Tehanu*, as she had been abused and thrown into a fire. She hardly speaks and is recovering from her injuries, both physically and mentally, in Tenar's care. There is a big difference in Tehanu between *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind*: she

¹⁵ Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea*, book 4, chapter 12.

goes from shy child to young woman who must find her confidence to fulfil her role as counsellor to Lebannen and to parley with the dragons.

Tehanu's abuse makes her angry and gives her a hope to be free, but the care of Tenar and Ged makes her unwilling to leave them behind. Rochelle argues that it is this anger that marks her as Other and makes her recognize herself in Kalessin.¹⁶ As Le Guin puts it: "The dragon is the stranger, the Other, the not-human: a wild spirit, dangerous, winged, which escapes and destroys the artificial order of oppression. The dragon is the familiar also-our own imagining, a speaking spirit, wise, winged which imagines a new order of freedom."¹⁷ While she was born as a dragon child, meaning a human who is also a dragon, her abuse sets her further apart in human society as she is always looked on with suspicion. And yet she becomes a full-fledged, powerful dragon. "For an abuse victim to become a dragon is to transcend victimization and in so doing become an agent for social change, a being powerful enough to stop the victimization of others."¹⁸ It is because she was victimized that she holds the power to help others as long as she takes the chance and speaks up. She does so by going to Lebannen when he asks her to come to give advice regarding the matter of the dragons disturbing the land.

McLean talks about the power of women in her article, focussing on the book *Tehanu*. She argues that men have an unearned power, also described by Le Guin as 'power over'. Men take, for example, men have taken the Language of Making that the dragons speak in order to be able to perform magic themselves. Women have a 'power to', they care and accept.¹⁹ Tenar has the power of caring, as she takes in Tehanu after she was discarded by her family, and nurses Ged back to health. Tehanu is different: "She represents the hope of the future of Earthsea because she can integrate wisdom and power, reason and feeling, action and caring."²⁰ It is because Tehanu is a dragon that her power goes further than Tenar's power, it allows her to bridge the gap between dragons and humans, and be the key figure to the restoration of the balance.

In *Tehanu*, we see the anger that comes from being in a marginalized position. This anger gains its freedom in *The Other Wind* when the balance is restored between dragons and humans with the destruction of the wall separating Earthsea from the dry land. It is in that

¹⁶ Rochelle, "The Emersonian Choice," 423.

¹⁷ Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea*, Earthsea Revisioned.

¹⁸ Sandra J. Lindow, "Becoming Dragon: The Transcendence of the Damaged Child in the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin," *Extrapolation* 44, no. 1 (2003): 35.

¹⁹ Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea*, book 2, afterword.

²⁰ Susan McLean, "The power of women in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Tehanu*," *Extrapolation* 38, no. 2 (1997): 113.

moment that Tehanu becomes the dragon she always was meant to be, and several other women follow her, choosing to become dragons themselves. It is because men no longer have power over the dry land that the balance is restored. Huang and Dai add to this: “Nonetheless, in Tehanu, the dragons redefine the difference between male and female, stating that little as it might seem, the power of female and softness goes down deep to the root, and can consequently get through a raging storm safe and sound.”²¹ Women initially had to accept their position as being less than men, especially when it came to magic. Their position changed through the involvement of the dragons as it came to light that Roke was initially founded by women, and that Ogion, Ged’s first teacher, had a master who was taught by a woman.²² Female magic is always seen as being closer to the earth and the Old Power, while male magic relies on the Language of Making, or the Old Speech, that the dragons use.

3.4 Relation to the medieval and medievalist fantasy tradition

Tehanu, like Kalessin, is different from the traditional medieval dragon. She is one of the dragon-people, people who can change their being from a person into a dragon. It is because she is part dragon that she is invaluable to restoring the balance in Earthsea in the sixth book. When she eventually changes, it is because she has finally attained full freedom as a person after the balance of the world has been restored. The other women who change into dragons, or show characteristics of dragons, do so because they are searching freedom and an escape from the marginalized position that society has put them in. This differs from the conventional shapeshifters in the traditional medieval stories, as those people change into dragons out of greed. Lewis follows this example by making Eustace change into a dragon as a moral lesson against greed. Le Guin, however, takes it a step further by making the shapeshifting into a dragon a choice for freedom.

Another change from the traditional medieval dragon is that Tehanu is female. Le Guin made a big step in making Kalessin genderless, but in making Tehanu, a woman, change into a dragon, she fully upended the standard of the male dragon. Tehanu being essential to the restoration of the world also overthrows the expectation of the evil dragon.

Tehanu has an elevated position because Kalessin refers to her as daughter. Because the dragon calls Tehanu its daughter, it has claimed her as its own, as one who is like it. In this way it marks her as a dragon, even though she is in all ways perceivable, a human. This grants her

²¹ Huang and Dai, “A Taoist Interpretation,” 4.

²² Le Guin, *The Books of Earthsea*, book 5, “The Finder”, “The Bones of The Earth”.

a status as one who is on equal footing to both humans and dragons, a rank which makes the men and wizards in the room nervous. It is a standing they are not used to in their society and therefore it scares them.

Taking everything into consideration, Le Guin made many changes compared to the traditional medieval dragon and, while taking inspiration from Tolkien and Lewis, developed her dragons to be something more. Arnold summarises Le Guin's impact as follows:

Openly indebted to Tolkien's fantasy realism, Le Guin's Earthsea novels are also underpinned by the philosophical mysticism and anarchic politics that informed the counter-culture values of the 1960s and '70s. Notably in Le Guin's Earthsea fantasies, female characters, both human and draconic, figure as strongly as male characters, so setting a gender precedent that influenced many subsequent fantasy authors.²³

Where before Le Guin fantasy was mostly the realm of the white male, she made it so that the good people were bronze or black skinned, the evil were white Kargish men, and, especially in her last three books, women were given a voice, an agency to act on equal footing with men. She gave this power through dragons, and it is through the dragons that change is possible.

Conclusion

Le Guin's dragons are seen as an obstacle to be overcome in the initial three books, as can best be seen in Ged's approach to Yevaud and the other dragons on Pendor. However, from the fourth book onwards, it becomes clear that the dragons are part of a careful balance that has been disturbed and needs to be recovered. Dragons are not simply wild beasts that attack, but wise creatures that have links to humankind, as can be seen in the origin story of how dragons and humans were one before they split, as well as the women in the books who turn into dragons: the Woman of Kemay, Orm Irian, and Tehanu. While Le Guin's dragons are usually associated with air and fire, they have an unwillingness to fight over water, which makes them similar to the Western dragon, and their knowledge and calm nature makes them similar to the Eastern dragons as well. This way Le Guin has masterfully created a fusion between the Western and Eastern dragon, which finds influences in both the standard medieval dragon and Tolkien's Smaug on one side, and Taoist writings and the Eastern dragon of Chinese and Japanese origin on the other. She goes beyond the traditional medieval dragon and Tolkien's and Lewis' dragons by making Kalessin genderless and Tehanu a woman, as well as by making them instrumental in restoring the balance of the world of Earthsea.

²³ Arnold, *Dragon*, 240.

CONCLUSION

The main question this thesis tried to answer was how the dragons in Le Guin's work relate to the dragons in the works of Tolkien and Lewis, and to the *Beowulf*-dragon and Fáfñir. In order to answer this question, first the standard medieval dragon needed to be examined. Second, the dragons in the works of Tolkien and Lewis were looked at. And third, Le Guin's dragons in *The Books of Earthsea* were compared to the standard medieval dragon and the dragons of Tolkien and Lewis.

Initially, the medieval standard dragon consists of the *Beowulf*-dragon, Fáfñir, and the dragons from medieval hagiography. From them, the mould of the Western dragon arises, either with legs, wings, and a capability to breath fire, or with a snake-like body without wings and a poisonous breath. Common traits of the standard medieval dragon are that they have hoards, live in caves, and have their lair near bodies of water. These dragons started with the function of symbols of chaos, which then developed into being guardians of important locations and hoards. From there, they became obstacles to be overcome.

Subsequently, Tolkien and Lewis have both taken inspiration from the standard medieval dragon and developed their dragons to have more and differing traits. Tolkien refined Smaug by giving him a more pronounced personality. Lewis, on the other hand, gave his dragons a different function. Rather than obstacles to be overcome, he made them have a moralizing aspect, a lesson for the reader to not be greedy. This is most clearly seen in Eustace, who transformed into a dragon through his greed, and had to reflect on his behaviour in order to change back.

Finally, Le Guin has taken inspiration from the standard medieval dragon, Tolkien's dragons, Taoist writings, and Eastern dragons. Her first dragon, Yevaud, is most like both the standard medieval dragon and Smaug. He is truly an obstacle to be overcome and the conversation Ged has with him is reminiscent of the conversations Sigurðr has with Fáfñir and Bilbo has with Smaug. With Kalessin, Le Guin has made a big change by not giving it a gender. This causes her to step away from the evil, male, dragon-stereotype and allows her to use it as a guide. Le Guin steps even further away from the stereotype through the Woman of Kemay, Orm Irian, and Tehanu, as they are all women who change into dragons of their own accord. Le Guin has truly taken the standard medieval dragon and overturned it completely. Where the evil, male dragon shows destructive behaviour, the women in Le Guin's *Books of Earthsea* transform into dragons in order to pursue freedom. It is through Kalessin and Tehanu that the restoration of the balance in Earthsea is made possible. Taking everything into consideration,

Le Guin made many changes to the traditional medieval dragon and, while taking inspiration from Tolkien and Lewis, developed her dragons to be something more.

Naturally Le Guin is one of many authors inspired by the standard medieval dragon and the dragons by Tolkien and Lewis. Another author who could be looked at to further examine the influence these dragons have had on his own dragons is Christopher Paolini. As for Paolini, his *Inheritance Cycle* seems to have been influenced by Le Guin, as he follows her principle of true names holding power over individuals. Additionally, the Ancient Language found in the series brings Le Guin's Old Speech to mind. In both languages people are forced to speak the truth while in Paolini's work the elves have mastered the ability to speak half-truths, similar to how dragons can twist the truth. It would be interesting to see to what degree Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* is indeed inspired by Le Guin, and how much is of his own invention. Overall, it is evident that dragons will not leave literature any time soon. Dragons will always remain to be an inspiration, and, as the world changes, so do the roles, appearances, and characters of dragons.

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