

## ‘WE WERE TALKING OF DRAGONS, TOLKIEN AND I.’ THE SYMBOLISM OF THE DRAGON IN J. R. R. TOLKIEN’S AND C. S. LEWIS’S FAIRY STORIES

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**Abstract** Dragons play a prominent role in the fairy stories of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, and while much has been written on their dragons, the symbolic differences between the dragons of the two Inklings have yet to be accordingly considered. This paper explores the symbolism of dragons in their fairy stories. The first section introduces dragons and fairy stories, including their definition, origin, and usage. As their views align, they are treated together. The second section focuses on the dragons and dragon-like characters in the imaginative worlds of both authors. This section highlights the main differences between their dragons while emphasizing that their *dracos* and *draconitas* are still archetypal types. The third section presents a different kind of dragon and hero that still conforms to the original pattern. The article concludes with an analysis of the archetypal duality of the dragon symbol.

**Keywords** J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, dragons, symbolism, fairy stories.

### I. Brief Overview of the Etymological Definition and Origin of Dragons

The idea of the dragon is part of many cultural traditions. This article examines how Tolkien and Lewis saw dragons and their use in fairy stories. Before we look at their views in more detail, we need to briefly examine the definition and origin of dragons.

Scholars take three general attempts to determine the origin of the dragon concept: the etymological approach, the naturalistic approach, and the mythological approach.<sup>1</sup> The term *dragon* comes from the ancient Greek *drakon*, which means ‘serpent, giant seafish.’ It is

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2024.29.2.09>.

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan D. Evans, “The Dragon,” in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures. A Source Book and Research Guide*, edited by Malcolm South (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1987), 27-58.

derived from the *derkesthai*, 'to see clearly,' (PIE *\*derk-*, 'to see,' also the source of Old High German *zoraht*, 'light, clear') and is associated with the ability of dragons to have a deadly or paralyzing gaze.<sup>2</sup>

The naturalistic approach is the theory that links the origins of dragons to prehistoric fossil dinosaurs and hypothetical reconstructions of giant saurians.<sup>3</sup> The mythological approach looks to chthonic serpent-dragons in early cosmogonies.<sup>4</sup> The dragon is seen as the personification of the unknown and uncontrollable aspect of life, which is "*eo ipso* hostile to man."<sup>5</sup> The dragon's eye is associated with the conceit of fountains or sources of water. The primordial dragon or the archetype is the sleepless 'Eye Well' with its *præternatural* vision – this is the water-drac. Since gold and other treasures are buried in the stony bowels of the earth, the jealous Dragon, with its ever-open all-seeing eye, has been assigned their guardianship—hence the plutonic element in its nature – this is the earth or cave-dragon. In volcanic zones, the poisonous emanations exhaling from the fissures in the rocks are the dragon's breath that can kill the dragon slayer – this is the fire-dragon. The sudden floods of water pouring down from the hills and the fountains gushing forth are the unleashed hungry beast searching for its prey – the river-dragon. This fierce dragon rampages through the mountains so swiftly that it seems to have wings and can even split the sky in the form of lightning or descend upon fertile fields as a devastating thunderstorm – this is the cloud-dragon. In all its various forms, the dragon embodies the wrathful and destructive forces of untamed and untameable natural elements.<sup>6</sup> Dragons have also been seen as the embodiment of malignant impulses, a symbol of human, albeit animal, destructive, anarchic, misdirected physical force and unbridled passions. In other words, dragons represent our untameable, violent, and ruthless passions that go against all decency and propriety, leaving desolation in their wake.<sup>7</sup>

The two authors' dragons have no connection with archaeological findings. As a child, Tolkien did not appreciate being told that prehistoric animals were dragons.<sup>8</sup> The beauty of 'Real things' in our world is not to be confused with the wonder of 'Other things' from the land of Faerie, for it is the part of man which is not 'Nature' that finds the Fairy-land desirable. In Tolkien's view, fairies and other fantastic creatures are natural because they are a part of nature, and men are 'supernatural' as in "not bound for ever to the circles of the world."<sup>9</sup> As far as the mythological approach is concerned, nature myths are man's trivialization of and

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<sup>2</sup> "dragon (n.)," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=dragon> (accessed on 24 February 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. and expanded ed. (Baylor University Press, 2005), 74-88.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Douglas, *Old Calabria* (Oxford University Press, 1938), 138-44.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Gould, *Mythical Monsters* (London: Blacken Books, 1989), 163.

<sup>8</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Translating Beowulf," in J. R. R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 55-6.

<sup>9</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings. 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed.* (HarperCollins, ebook, 2005), 1063.

disrespect for fairy tales. Neither fairy tales nor dragons were intended to explain natural events.<sup>10</sup> Dragons are not forces of nature dangerous to man, but spiritual malign forces outside and within man's nature, which he has to fight. Both authors advise against searching for the exact origin of fairy stories and dragons.

Distant and uncharted spaces on the edges of ancient maps were marked with drawings of legendary monsters. Two globes — and no map — have been documented to bear the Latin phrase *HC SVNT DRACONES*: the “Ostrich Egg Globe” (Da Vinci Globe) dated around 1504 and the Hunt-Lenox Globe dated 1510, both depicting the New World. Medieval cartographers would also use the inscription *HC SVNT LEONES* (“here be lions”) or *terra incognita/terra ignota* to mark unknown, unexplored, and dangerous places. Lewis argues that fairy stories take place in an unknown territory,<sup>11</sup> where we can find dragons.

## II. Dragons in Inklings' Fairy Stories

### 1. Fairy Stories: Definition, Origin, and Functions

To understand the role of dragons, it is essential to understand the role of fairy stories. At the time when J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis shared their views on the genre, fairy stories were often overlooked.

In Tolkien's view, fairy stories are about *Faërie*, the Perilous Realm that contains dragons and other mythical creatures, as well as our world and everything in it - including mortal men.<sup>12</sup> Dragons are just one element within the land of Faërie, which is impossible to define—it escapes the constraints of our vocabulary; it is not inaccessible, but indescribable. The magic of Faërie consists in the mythical, unanalysable effect it has on the reader.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Lewis believes that the most important aspect of a good fairy story is its atmosphere or flavour – the idea of otherness that can be created by a plausible and moving ‘other world,’ which can be created “on the only real ‘other world’ we know, that of the spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Dragons, therefore, are not mere characters in a story, but rather they represent certain basic elements in human spiritual experience, like the words of a language that tries to speak the unspeakable.<sup>15</sup> These creatures represent a forgotten ‘reality’, no less great or significant than our primary world.

Both Tolkien and Lewis emphasise the importance of distinguishing fact from fiction. This distinction is fundamental to maintaining a sane human mind and to the genre of fairy

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<sup>10</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 123

<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis, “On Science Fiction,” in C.S. Lewis, Walter Hooper, ed., *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 113.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 114, 128.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 57.

stories.<sup>16</sup> One function of fairy tales is to convey to children and adults that the seemingly limitless evil encountered in real life has a limit that our enemies have enemies who are our allies, and that evil can be restrained and even defeated.<sup>17</sup> Tolkien and Lewis opposed the kind of censorship for children that was prevalent in their day. Children are already exposed to a world of death and violence, and fairy tales present them not only with cruel enemies to which they are already accustomed but also with “immemorial comforters and protectors.” In doing so, fairy stories fulfil another function: to satisfy the basic human need of communion with other living beings<sup>18</sup> with whom Man has severed relations.<sup>19</sup> We want not only to see beauty but to be united with it, and so, Lewis says, we imagine these creatures to “enjoy in themselves that beauty, grace, and power of which Nature is the image.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Tolkien does not support *literary belief* or the ‘willing suspension of disbelief.’ The Secondary World created by a good story-maker or ‘sub-creator’ is ‘true,’ in the sense that it is in accordance “with the laws of that world.” Lewis echoes Tolkien’s opinion in his essay “Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings” where he praises Tolkien’s fairy story for its realisms and lack of arbitrariness despite the presence of the marvellous.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, a genuine fairy story is ‘true’ if it reflects “one of Man’s visions of Truth.”<sup>22</sup> For Lewis, mythopoeia is the least subjective of activities.<sup>23</sup> A fairy story is not the product of an illusionist; “behind the fantasy real wills and powers exist, independent of the minds and purposes of men.”<sup>24</sup> “[L]egends and myths are largely made of ‘truth’.”<sup>25</sup> “[T]he very fairy-tales embody the truth.”<sup>26</sup> In the essay ‘On Stories’, Lewis presents the elements of a story and its connection to real life. The story is an image of the truth. Stories extract from real life relevant patterns and open new ways of seeing reality. “History often resembles ‘Myth’, because they are both ultimately of the same stuff.”<sup>27</sup> A story is a macro-pattern of human experience. Fairyland is “‘eterne in mutabilité’, since the sort of adventures

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>17</sup> The idea of fairy tales keeping us sane is also found in G. K. Chesterton’s *Tremendous Trifles, Book XVII: The Red Angel* (1909), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8092/8092-h/8092-h.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, 116.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>20</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, First HarperCollins Paperback ed. (HarperOne, 2001), 42-3.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 82-8.

<sup>22</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 113.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 116.

<sup>25</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (HarperCollins, 2014), 224.

<sup>26</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Yours Jack: Spiritual Direction from C. S. Lewis*, Paul F. Ford, ed. (HarperCollins, ebook, 2009), 155.

<sup>27</sup> Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf: Mythopoeia; the Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son* (HarperCollins Publishers, ebook, 2001), 24-5.

that go on there are always going on. It is a presentation not of any change but of the enduring nature of man's universe."<sup>28</sup>

In his essay 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children,' Lewis states that for Tolkien, the appeal of the fairy story lies in the possibility it gives to man to exercise one of his proper functions, that of 'sub-creator,' which is not a 'comment upon life' but the creation of a Secondary World based on Truth.<sup>29</sup> For Jung, Lewis adds, fairy tales liberate Archetypes from our collective unconscious, which facilitate self-knowledge—this Jungian voyage of self-discovery reminiscent of the ancient maxim 'Know thyself' would be Tolkien's third face of Fairy stories, 'the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man.'<sup>30</sup> Lewis adds his theory of the presence of non-human beings that behave humanely and thus convey psychologies and types of character more easily than novelistic works.<sup>31</sup> Lewis believes that one of the main things Tolkien wants to say in his fairy stories is that "the real life of men is of that mythical and heroic quality."<sup>32</sup> Thus, the imagined characters are 'visible souls' with 'their insides on the outside.' "And Man as a whole, Man pitted against the universe" can be seen most clearly when we see him as a hero in a fairy story. The dragons appear as an element that helps man in his quest for self-knowledge and in the face of death.

On the origin of fairy stories, Tolkien remarks they are very ancient and universal and that 'the web of Story' was created by independent evolution (or invention), inheritance from a common ancestry, and diffusion at various times from one or more centres. *Invention* is the most important, fundamental, and mysterious, and if we go back in time, we arrive at an ancestral inventor. When man produced words (especially the adjective) he produced simultaneously myths and became a sub-creator. This is how man "put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm."<sup>33</sup> While we could analyse individual elements of a story, we cannot trace the history of the entire picture. Therefore, it is not possible to provide a final answer to the question of the origin of the fairy stories. One can only speak in parables about them.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, with dragons, we can only unravel a single thread and acknowledge that we cannot exhaust the entire subject.

Lewis notes that the fairy tale was originally old and enjoyed in the court of Louis XIV and Tolkien points out that it was confined to children when the grown-ups lost interest in it. But dragons and dragon-like characters are found in fairy stories read by children and grown-ups because good fairy tales delight everyone. Lewis wrote the Narnian stories and also *That*

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, *Spenser's Images of Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), 137.

<sup>29</sup> See also the poem 'The Hope against the Lies of Men'.

<sup>30</sup> For Tolkien, fairy-stories have three faces: the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man. The Magical, the essential face of Faërie, can be used as a *Mirour de l'Omme* or made a vehicle of Mystery. (Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," *The Monsters and the Critics*, 125).

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>33</sup> Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," *The Monsters and the Critics*, 121-2

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

*Hideous Strength*, a modern fairy tale for grown-ups. Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, a monster “quite unfit for children.”<sup>35</sup>

Fairy stories are read and enjoyed by children and play an important role in their development. Reading fairy stories does not encourage children to become Peter Pans. On the contrary, far from losing hope, innocence, and wonder, the natural “callow, lumpish, and selfish youth” learn that “peril, sorrow, and the shadow of death [of which dragons are an apt symbol] can bestow dignity, and even sometimes wisdom.”<sup>36</sup> George Macdonald, who influenced both Lewis and Tolkien, wrote in ‘Alec Forbes of Howglen’ that, “more than once a fairy tale, with its dragons and its heroes, its joys and sorrows, its threats and losses, comforts and hope, make the wild child into a thoughtful little woman or man.”<sup>37</sup>

“He who would enter into the Kingdom of Faërie should have the heart of a little child,” regardless of age.<sup>38</sup> ‘The heart of a little child’ means humility and innocence, not an uncritical wonder or tenderness or a lack of justice – one must be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” “in the midst of wolves”<sup>39</sup> (or dragons). In the face of death, the sole reasonable attitude is humility. In the essay ‘On Three Ways of Writing for Children,’ Lewis said that when he was a child, he would read fairy stories in secret because he was ashamed of being discovered. At fifty, he would read them openly. Making allusion to 1 Corinthians 13:11, he adds, “[w]hen I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.”<sup>40</sup> The Greek verb *ephrōnō* in “I understood [gr. *ephrōnō*] as a child” comes from the Greek cognate *phrēn* which means, literally, the diaphragm which *regulates* breathing, and, figuratively, visceral (personal) opinion, what a person “really has *in mind*,” i.e. inner outlook (mind-set, *insight*) that *regulates* outward behaviour. This idea combines the *visceral* and *cognitive* aspects of thinking.<sup>41</sup> Fairy stories help us align our emotions with reason.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, we need to become as little children. Magnanimity comes from meekness. Also, learning from little children will convict us of our pride and melancholy. A recurring characteristic of dragons is loneliness and deep sadness. Children are never or only briefly disillusioned because they see the world as full of wonder. In a letter, Lewis points out that *liberi* means both ‘freemen’ and ‘children.’<sup>43</sup> The verb *phroneō* also means “not let one’s opinion of himself exceed the bounds of modesty.” For Lewis, the truly humble man is not one who thinks about humility, but one who does not think

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<sup>35</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 209.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>37</sup> George Macdonald, *Delphi Complete Works of George Macdonald (Illustrated)* (Delphi Classics, ebook, 2015), 1011.

<sup>38</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 136.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 10:16 KJV.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, xviii.

<sup>41</sup> “5426. Phroneō”, “Bible Hub”, accessed February 24, 2024, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5426.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> For more on aligning our emotions to reason and reality, see *The Abolition of Man*.

<sup>43</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Walter Hooper, ed. Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, Vol. 3 (HarperCollins, ebook, 2009), 321.

about himself at all.<sup>44</sup> Also, the word for ‘child’ to which Lewis alludes is *nēpios*, which differs from *paidion*, another Greek word for ‘child.’ When a *nēpios* begins to grow and learns humility, he becomes a *paidion*. He becomes more mature and is given more responsibilities. Therefore, I think Lewis wants to say that fairy stories are not childish things one must abandon; on the contrary, fairy stories can make a childish, untaught, simple-minded person become a *paidion* who seeks to grow and find his purpose in life. A *paidion* keeps growing in virtue, being only the first stage of development.

Fairy tales are for adults too. A good fairy tale is enjoyed by all and read multiple times. The taste for fairy stories increases with age if it is innate. Adults will put more in and get more out than children<sup>45</sup> and thus enjoy them better than they did in childhood.<sup>46</sup> If people accuse adults of arrested development because they enjoy reading fairy stories, it is because their conception of growth is false. Arrested development does not mean holding onto old tastes, it means failing to adopt new ones. Growth does not mean abandoning old tastes but supplementing them with new ones. Some confuse growth with the cost of growth (i.e., loss).<sup>47</sup> It is never too late to re-awaken the taste for fairy stories. For Tolkien, it “was wakened by philology on the threshold of manhood, and quickened to full life by war”<sup>48</sup> – that is, by an encounter with a mechanical dragon.

Dragons are an apt element of Fantasy, which is one of the values and functions of fairy stories. Dragons are unreal or unlikely to be found in real world, but credible, strange, and mysterious. The primal desire at the heart of Faërie is the realisation of imagined wonder.<sup>49</sup> This is precisely what contemporary man has lost — ‘the appetite for marvels.’ Recovery represents the regain of a clear view. We are ill—we suffer from spiritual myopia caused by a dragon-heart. Tolkien says that we need to relearn to see “things as we are (or were) meant to see them” without possessiveness or attachment. Appropriating things leads to triteness and familiarity, which clouds our view.<sup>50</sup> Lewis expresses this idea throughout his writings when he

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<sup>44</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition with a New Introduction of the Three Books Broadcast Talks Christian Behaviour and Beyond Personality* (HarperCollins, ebook, 2009), 128.

In the poem ‘Willie’s Question’ by George MacDonald, the boy wants to know if the wish to be great and strong is wrong. It is not wrong, his father answers, but not in the sense of having glory and being above the rest. To be great means to serve others, and we are fit only when we have learned obedience. The great one does not think any duty is small. Doing good is our duty. The greatness lies in knowing that we are small. Obedience and submission is the key. A child does not search to gain renown. Willie wants to fight, but the children do not seek an encounter with dragons. If one does what he must do, he will be, in the end, a great man.

<sup>45</sup> Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 34.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 34-5; C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 71-2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>49</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 116.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

emphasises both the importance of seeing the world in an ‘unscientific’ way and aligning our ‘chest’ to the objective reality. The Primary World and the Secondary World are different, yet, they are the same in some sense. When Eomer contrasts ‘the green earth’ with ‘legends,’ Aragorn replies that the green earth itself is ‘a mighty matter of legend.’<sup>51</sup> The enchanted woods from a fairy story make real woods a little enchanted. The fairy land does not dull or empty the actual world, rather it gives it a new dimension of depth.<sup>52</sup> The dragon helps us look at familiar things such as “sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves” and be startled anew.<sup>53</sup> Mendlesohn believes Tolkien’s and Lewis’s fairy stories are examples of the portal-quest fantasy.<sup>54</sup> One important difference between the two writers is that Tolkien presents us with a secondary world that helps us come back and marvel at our primary world - the forging of Gram reveals cold iron, the making of Pegasus ennobles horses, and the Trees of the Sun and Moon manifests the glory of “root and stock, flower and fruit.”<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Lewis goes the opposite direction, “by dipping [bread, apple, good and evil, our endless perils, our anguish, and our joys] in myth [in order to] see them more clearly.”<sup>56</sup> In the realm of fairy, two worlds, the spiritual and the visible, come together. Our experience teaches us more about the things we experiment on, enlarges our worldview, and helps us “think, and feel, and imagine more accurately, more richly, more attentively, either about the world which is invaded or about that which invades it, or about both.”<sup>57</sup>

Escape is one of the main functions of fairy stories. Tolkien’s view on escape is similar to the prisoner’s escape from the cave in Plato’s *Republic*. Man is imprisoned, and fairy stories give him a way “to get out and go home”, or, at least, to think and talk “about other topics than jailers and prison-walls.”<sup>58</sup> Fairy tales *are* a form of escape in the sense of letting you out of the prison of daily events. Only jailers do not want people to escape. Fairy stories offer the prisoner a view of a real world he cannot see because they talk about permanent and fundamental things. Tolkien ironically refers to the academic world that misuses the expression ‘real life’ to refer especially to the benefits brought by technology. For Tolkien, motor cars are not more ‘alive’ than centaurs or dragons, nor are factory chimneys more real or alive than an elm tree. It is the Promethean dream of mankind that is obsolete and insubstantial, not the realm of Fairy.<sup>59</sup>

Both Tolkien and Lewis desired dragons. If the *spell* of the story-maker—*spell* meaning both a story and a formula to break and induce enchantments<sup>60</sup> — is good, it will awake, whet,

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<sup>51</sup> Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 434.

<sup>52</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 38, 90.

<sup>53</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 146.

<sup>54</sup> Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 23-6, 66.

<sup>58</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 148.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 128; Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 31.



and satisfy *desire*. For fairy stories are concerned not with possibility but with *desirability*. As a child, Tolkien was not inclined to believe that life is like fairy stories; rather, he was interested in a story's Truth.<sup>61</sup> Lewis expresses the same idea in both *An Experiment in Criticism* and the essay 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children,' arguing that children are not deceived by fairy tales but by school stories and realistic novels that create false expectations. All arouse longings, but they are very different. The longing aroused by the school story (for example, popularity) or the realistic novel (money and riches) is the one that teaches children or adults to retreat from the disappointments and humiliations of the real world into a world of wish-fulfilment only to send them back into the real world discontented and unhappy. On the contrary, the longing for fairy land is very different. The reader does not want to meet dragons or experience the dangers from a fairy story. Rather, the fairy story arouses a longing for something he cannot define, which is out of reach, and the reader is happy in the very fact of desiring. The first is a disease, the second is an *askesis*.<sup>62</sup>

Lewis argues that art presents the permanent aspects of human experience often excluded by "the narrow and desperately practical perspectives of real life."<sup>63</sup> *Real life* refers to the non-valuable, material things assigned a massive valuation by materialists, as opposed to the life of thought or study. In *Faust*, the very practical Mephistopheles opposes to 'grey theory' "the practical life of lucrative charlatanism" which is 'the golden tree of life.' Only 'acquisition and social success' is real, and the rest, including fairy stories, is "relegated to the realm of play or day-dream." However, literature "helps to brighten the halo on *life* or *real life*." Literature represents 'life as it really is.'<sup>64</sup> The tides of fashion come and go. While fairy stories deal with "the permanent and inevitable,"<sup>65</sup> with the Archetypes, realistic novels deal with the temporary and the fleeting. In fairy stories, every word seems full of meaning, whereas in realistic novels, we seem to only read black hollow marks on white paper. Dragons and dragonish characters are very practical as well.

Fairy stories offer an escape from more terrible things than the internal combustion engine: hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, and death.<sup>66</sup> One of Tolkien's main themes is Mortality. The oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape, is the Escape from Death.<sup>67</sup> Tolkien's stories speak also about the burden of immortality or endless serial living. Mortality is "[t]he Doom (or the Gift) of Men" and "freedom from the circles of the world."<sup>68</sup> Although Eru Ilúvatar "willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein,"<sup>69</sup> Men, who are called the Guests or the Strangers in this world, through

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>62</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 46-7; Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 55-6.

<sup>63</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (London: Collins, 1965), 10.

<sup>64</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (University Press, 1960), 291-3.

<sup>65</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 100.

<sup>66</sup> Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," *The Monsters and the Critics*, 151.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 222.

<sup>69</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (Allen & Unwin, 1977), 41.

an exacerbated pathological love of the primary world, become possessive and wish to become gods, rebelling “against the laws of the Creator – especially against mortality.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, Tolkien’s other two main themes are the Fall and the Machine. Both the Fall and the desire for immortality lead him to the desire for Power, and so to the Machine (or Magic), i.e., everything man creates and uses to dominate. Only when Men embrace the strange gift of death, mortality, imperfection, and trust and learn to diminish and give up control will they triumph over evil and death. Beauty and victory come from obedience, sorrow and death, not from power and force.

In his essay, ‘Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings,’ Lewis says that the most obvious appeal of Tolkien’s book is also its deepest: “there was sorrow then too, and gathering dark, but great valour, and great deeds that were not wholly vain.”<sup>71</sup> Lewis explains that ‘not wholly vain’ “is the cool middle point between illusion and disillusionment.”<sup>72</sup> Without hope, the heart will become covered with the dragonish scales of bitterness. For Tolkien, man may experience sorrow, but they are not (or should not be) without hope, therefore they are not to despair because they are not “bound for ever to the circles of the world.”<sup>73</sup> Our happiness is but a temporary accident. Terror and anguish are guaranteed, and, just like in fairy stories, the outcome of the battle may come to depend on men, who are the weakest.<sup>74</sup> If men fight and vanquish the dragon and the evil, they must constantly remind themselves that their victory is transitory.

The last virtue of fairy stories is ‘consolation,’ and the most important is the Consolation or the Joy of the Happy Ending, “the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous ‘turn’ (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale)” — what Tolkien calls *euca catastrophe* — a ‘consolation’ for the sorrow and failure of this world, the joy of deliverance and of overcoming the *dyscatastrophe*,<sup>75</sup> a “fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief,”<sup>76</sup> “a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world,”<sup>77</sup> of “good news, good beyond hope.”<sup>78</sup> If, for Tolkien, “the Resurrection was the greatest ‘euca catastrophe’ possible in the greatest Fairy Story,”<sup>79</sup> then laying ourselves down and offering ourselves up is the right way of living and dying.

In the poem ‘The Shores of Faëry’, the shores of fairy stretch on for ever to the dragonheaded door, the gateway of the Moon, beyond Taniquetil in Valinor.<sup>80</sup> To arrive in the Undying Lands, men must enter through death, the dragonheaded door, beyond our sublunary

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<sup>70</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 222.

<sup>71</sup> Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 1063.

<sup>74</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 85.

<sup>75</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 153

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>78</sup> Lewis, *On Stories*, 84.

<sup>79</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 155.

<sup>80</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 79-80.

world. One day, man will inevitably take “the hidden paths that run/West of the Moon, East of the Sun.”<sup>81</sup> In the poem ‘Tha Eadigan Saelidan: The Happy Mariners’, ‘the Islands blest’ are beyond ‘[n]ight’s dragon-headed doors’. What stories do is to open a door on Other Time, even outside Time itself<sup>82</sup> and show us a glimpse of the Other World before we arrive there.

The theme of death is also recurrent in Lewis’s writings. The best short fairy tale for him is Mac Donald’s *The Golden Key*, which is about death and the hope of life after death.<sup>83</sup> Lewis compares the world to a picture with a golden background. The gold is only visible when one leaves “the plane of the picture into the large dimensions of death,” although sometimes the everyday scene gives us a glimpse of it.<sup>84</sup> After “[a] combat with the Old Dragon,” man will gain wisdom and become more apt to serve others. He will know how to live because he does not fear to die. He knows that the world is “a world of shadows (...) the life of wisdom, while we are here, is a practice or exercise of death.”<sup>85</sup> Through his stories, Lewis wants to work backwards the evil spell of worldliness in the same manner as death will start working backward at the end of time. Fairy tales symbolise what will happen in future when death starts to work backward.

## 2. Dragon Symbolism

Both Tolkien and Lewis were fascinated by dragons, creatures evocative of Faërie. While Tolkien provides extensive insights into their origin and nature in his writings, Lewis takes a different approach. Unlike Tolkien’s dragons, Lewis does not feature any *draco fabulosus*, ‘the fabulous dragon, the *old worm*, or *great drake*’, except maybe for the Northern and Southern dragons in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, although they can also be seen as allegories. In this second part, I will briefly present the origin, nature, and history of Tolkienian dragons and continue with the characteristics of both Tolkien’s and Lewis’s dragons.

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<sup>81</sup> Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 1028. Tolkien’s Blessed Realm (Valinor) is in the West, while Lewis places Aslan’s country in the East. But Valinor remains a part of Arda (the world) still tied to The Count of Time, though its access was removed beyond the reach of the Men. Through Eru Ilúvatar’s gift of death, men can go beyond the confines of Arda and time. Although their final destination remains a secret, it might be The Timeless Halls where Ilúvatar dwells. Thus, the West is not the final destination in Tolkien’s legendarium. Symbolically, the setting of the sun signifies death, but while the sun sets in the West, it rises in the East. In Lewis’s first book, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, Christian, the protagonist, who started his journey towards East to the Landlord’s Country, found out that his point of departure and destination coincide - the Country could be reached from both directions. In *The Last Battle*, Aslan’s country is the Real Narnia and the Real Primary World of which our Primary World is only a shadow.

<sup>82</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics*, 129.

<sup>83</sup> Lewis, *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis Vol. 3*, 720.

<sup>84</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (HarperCollins, ebook, 2009), 153.

<sup>85</sup> C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), 386.

## Origin, Nature, and History of Tolkienian Dragons

Morgoth bred the Middle-Earth dragons to enforce his defeating army of Orcs against the Noldor.<sup>86</sup> The drakes made by Melko are “the evillest and most uncouth creatures, and the most powerful, save it be the Balrogs only”; they “love lies and lust after gold and precious things” (which ‘they may not use nor enjoy’) and have “great cunning and wisdom” that “whosoever might taste the heart of a dragon would know all tongues of Gods or Men, of birds or beasts, and his ears would catch whispers of the Valar or of Melko.”<sup>87</sup>

Tolkien’s legendarium has two categories of dragons: cold-drakes and fire-drakes. The cold-drakes are the least mighty, and many have wings.<sup>88</sup> The fire-drakes (“Urulóki” in Quenya) are the mightier, capable of breathing fire, characterised by the greatest lust, greed, and cunning evil.<sup>89</sup> Glaurung,<sup>90</sup> the Father of Dragons, the first of the Urulóki,<sup>91</sup> was wingless, crawled like snakes, had four legs, a cunning intellect and a powerful hypnotic gaze. He destroyed the Elf-realm of Nargothrond, plotted the marriage of Nienor with her brother Túrin, and made them commit suicide. The winged dragons appeared during the War of Wrath,<sup>92</sup> the greatest being the Great Dragon of Morgoth, Ancalagon the Black, slain by Eärendil.<sup>93</sup> The most dire of all the monsters are of iron and flame, of bronze and copper, with ‘hearts and spirits of blazing fire’, the construction of smiths and sorcerers.<sup>94</sup> They are of unclear nature and resemble actual dragons. The dragon-reek, the beast’s foul and noxious breath, resembles poison gas used by man (they invented it, Tolkien says). After the First Age, we find dragons in the wastes beyond the Grey Mountains, in the Withered Heath. In the Third Age we encounter Smaug the Terrible, “Smaug the Golden, greatest of the dragons of his day,” Pryftan the

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<sup>86</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The War of the Jewels: The Later Silmarillion Part Two: The Legends of Beleriand* (HarperCollins, 1995), 46.

<sup>87</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales Part Two* (HarperCollins, 1995), 85. This knowledge acquired by eating a dragon’s heart is a reference to the Norse legend of Sigurd and the dragon Fáfnir.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>90</sup> Also referred to as Glaurung the golden (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 144), the Great Worm (177, 196) (Tolkien, *Narn I Chîn Húrin: The Tale of the Children of Húrin*, 144, 150, 163), the Worm of Morgoth, (152), and the gold-worm of Angband (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-Earth*, 91).

<sup>91</sup> Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 112.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>93</sup> It is worth noting that, according to *The History of Middle Earth Vol. 12*, during Dagor Dagorath, the Final Battle, it is Túrin who will return from the Dead and, before leaving the Circles of the World, he will kill Ancalagon the Black. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-Earth*, (HarperCollins, 1997), 374.

<sup>94</sup> Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales Part Two*, 170.

Terrible, self-proclaimed ‘Chiefest of Sauron’s Servants’<sup>95</sup> who destroyed the dwarven kingdom of Erebor and Dale, as well as Lake-town.

### **My Name Was Legion: Materialism, Greed, Practicality and Uncontrolled Passions. Dragon-Sickness**

Fáfnir and the Beowulfian dragon<sup>96</sup> are sources of inspiration for both Tolkien and Lewis. Once a man, Fáfnir slays his father out of greed, takes the cursed ring Andvaranaut and the treasure of the dwarf Andvari and changes into a dragon. Likewise, Sméagol murders his cousin for the one ring and becomes Gollum; although he does not possess a hoard to guard like Fáfnir, he allows himself to be consumed by the ring and devolves into a wicked creature. Like Beowulf’s dragon, the embodiment of greed, who burns the Geatish countryside when a cup is stolen from him, Smaug is enraged when Bilbo steals a cup from his treasure hoard and consequently burns Lake-town. In all cases, what they coveted most led to their destruction. Tolkien points out the essential difference between Fáfnir, a human turned dragon, and Smaug, a real dragon, a ‘pure intelligent lizard.’<sup>97</sup>

The gold on which a dragon lay can cause dragon-sickness to a man prone to greed. In *The Hobbit*, Thorin Oakenshield came under dragon-sickness. The old Master of Lake-town, who had been bestowed with a significant amount of gold from Bard for the help of the Lake-people, fell under the spell of the dragon’s hoard, fled with the gold and died of starvation in the Waste, alone and abandoned by his companions.<sup>98</sup> Tolkien’s poem ‘The Hoard’ describes the ‘dragon-sickness’, the power and bewilderment of the cursed gold, and the greed and possessiveness which overpowers the characters and leads them to their deaths. The original 1923 title, *Iúmonna Gold Galdre Bewunden*<sup>99</sup>, is taken from a verse from *Beowulf*, which Tolkien translated as “the gold of bygone men was wound about with spells”<sup>100</sup> and as “the gold of men of long ago, enmeshed in enchantment.”<sup>101</sup> We are presented with a paradisiacal young earth that falls into doom when greed seizes the world. We are presented with an old

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<sup>95</sup> Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 1072. Smaug, from the past tense of the primitive Germanic verb *smugan*, to squeeze through a hole (Tolkien, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 44-5). Pryftan, (Welsh compound), “Worm of Fire”.

<sup>96</sup> Phaedrus’s ancient miser dragon (first century AD), “born under evil stars, *dis iratis natus*”, doomed to guard the treasure it cannot use itself, is the ancestor of all the other European dragons, including Beowulf’s dragon and Wagner’s dragon (Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 147-8).

<sup>97</sup> John D. Rateliff, *The History of the Hobbit* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 543.

<sup>98</sup> Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 258.

<sup>99</sup> The original poem is reprinted in Douglas A. Anderson’s *The Annotated Hobbit* (335-6). The 1937 revised version is reprinted as “The Hoard” in *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* (72-5).

<sup>100</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary, together with Sellic Spell* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014), 102.

<sup>101</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 447.

dwarf hoarding gold and precious things who dies alone, burned to ashes by a dragon drawn to his treasure.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, a boy named Eustace Scrubb (“and he almost deserved it”<sup>102</sup>) is portrayed as a very practical boy who does not read fairy stories and could not recognise a dragon when he sees one. He only reads practical books and lacks a real education.<sup>103</sup> Due to his superficial, progressive education, he becomes a boy ‘without a chest.’<sup>104</sup> Eustace is not a prince turned into a dragon by an evil witch. It is his own making and that of his educators—his dragonish inner manifests itself outwardly. However, his metamorphosis into a monster becomes necessary for his self-awareness and redemption. As a dragon, Eustace experiences desperate loneliness and the need for human fellowship. To conquer his dragon, Eustace needs to learn humility and submission and undress his dragon-self, giving up his old self’s desires and will before being baptized into the new self by Aslan who is the only one who can undragon him. However, as Lewis points out elsewhere,<sup>105</sup> it seems that Aslan also works through Eustace’s travelling companions, who play a crucial role in his restoration as well as in his journey of growth and maturity. The antithesis of the sanctuary found in friendship and communion is money — ‘small crowns, small dragons’<sup>106</sup> — the illusion of independence. Self-sacrifice for another holds the universe together, whereas self-worship leads to its destruction. Lewis uses the dragon as a symbol of redeemable sinful human nature. In the allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, the conquest of the inner dragon coincides with the victory over the outer dragon. Like Eustace, John and Vertue need to learn what a worm is made for by conquering both their inner and outer dragon. Both dragons are ‘diseases of the Soul,’ the lonely, sad, cold dragon on the left and the hot dragon on the right.<sup>107</sup> Being driven by emotions and feelings,<sup>108</sup> John must metaphorically journey from the southern point of carelessness and irrationality to the north to conquer the dragon of “tension, hardness, possessiveness, coldness, anaemia.” Similarly, Vertue must metaphorically leave the Northern

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<sup>102</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia* (HarperCollins Children’s Books, 2005), 504.

As an etymological note, in Greek, ‘Eustace’ means (1) “steadfast” (gr. *Ευστάθιος*; Eustathios) and (2) “fruitful”, “fecund” (gr. *Ευσταχης*; Eústachys). In the Narnian book, the name is heard by the hard of hearing Trumpkin like “useless” and “used to it.”

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 504-49.

<sup>104</sup> See *The Abolition of Man* on aligning our ‘chest’ to the objective reality. Dragons are covered with iron scales that make them appear invincible, but they have a vulnerable spot in the chest region, which swords or darts could pierce (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 148). Similarly, ‘men without chests’ have become dragons who only seem invincible.

<sup>105</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 190.

<sup>106</sup> *Taliessin Through Logres*, ‘Bors to Elayne: on the King’s Coins’, 38, 40. See also C. S. Lewis’s review, ‘A sacred poem: Charles Williams, *Taliessin Through Logres* (Oxford University Press, 1938).

<sup>107</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (Samizdat, 2017), 137.

<sup>108</sup> In *The Great Divorce*, we meet only one ghost who is saved—the dragon within him, the passion of lust, manifested outwardly in the form of a lizard, has been conquered, killed, and transformed into a magnificent stallion which the ghost, now a bright new-made man, rides into Heaven.

pride and rigidity and head south to defeat the dragon of passions. Lewis says we must ‘hold the Main Road’ and not “hearken to the over-wise or to the over-foolish giant.’ We were made to be neither cerebral men nor visceral men, but Men. Not beasts nor angels but Men—things at once rational and animal.”<sup>109</sup> This is congruent with Aristotle’s ‘doctrine of the Mean’ which is referenced by Vertue in his discussion with Mr. Sensible.<sup>110</sup> According to Aristotle, too much emotion produces vicious consequences. So does too little emotion. We can err in two ways, by excess or deficiency, the path of virtue being the middle way. Therefore, virtue is the mean between two vices. To slay the dragon is to overcome what one lacks to become virtuous. A dragon is made to be conquered and man must become the master over it. Lewis’s own transformation from a self-centred individual to a devout Christian who reconciled his two halves—his reason and his imagination, is an example of undragoning, which he recounts in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*.

The aspect of loneliness and profound sadness as characteristics of dragon-ness are found throughout Lewis’s and Tolkien’s dragons. Materialism leads to loneliness and a lack of joy. The dragon’s love of treasures or the dragon-sickness is a metaphor for the endemic materialism in a consumerist behaviour. Fairy stories offer a way of escape and recovery.

### **Wicked Cleverness and Hypnotic Speech. Dragon-Talk**

“[D]ragons [are] ready linguists in all ages.”<sup>111</sup> They enjoy riddles and are well-versed in mythological lore. They are vain, proud and charming. All *dracos* try to find their slayer’s name to curse them after the fatal blow: this is the case with Glorund in his final exchange with Turin Turambar and Fáfñir with Sigurd. Killed by Bard with an arrow, Smaug has no dialogue with his slayer, but he tries to find Bilbo’s name. While the fearless but reckless Túrin looks into Glorund’s eyes, the wise<sup>112</sup> Bilbo does not fall into Smaug’s trap.

Dragons have hypnotic, persuasive eyes and voices. Because dragons can hold a man’s gaze until his minds grow dim and can also read and influence minds, Túrin is spellbound by Glorund who makes him powerless to aid Failivrin.

“Túrin was held by the spell of the drake, for that beast had a foul magic in his glance, and he turned the sinews of Túrin to stone, for his eye held Túrin’s eye so that his will died, and he could not stir of his own purpose, yet might he see and hear. (...) Then did Glorund taunt Túrin nigh to madness.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>111</sup> Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-Earth*, 72.

<sup>112</sup> Fairy tales are just windows to a garden where we can grow in soil richer than that of our everyday life. We are each called to an adventure, which becomes more and more wonderful as we grow. Thus, while Bilbo might have got “something a bit queer in his make-up from the Took side” of his family, that something never remained dormant “until Bilbo Baggins was grown up.” Only then could he face Smaug.

<sup>113</sup> Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales Part Two*, 85-6.

With his cunning lies mixed with truth, Glorund succeeds in convincing Túrin to abandon Failivrin. While Túrin does not heed the advice, “Forsake not for anything thy friends—nor believe those who counsel thee to do so,”<sup>114</sup> Digory, tempted by the sweet voice of the witch from Charn to take the silver apple for himself or his dying mother and thus gain immortality, considers the Witch’s words but refuses the offer when she proposes to leave Polly behind. While Túrin brings upon himself and all he loves the greatest evil by forsaking Failivrin, Digory saves himself from eternal damnation and miserable endless days and obtains the apple that restores his mother’s health.

In *The Silver Chair*,<sup>115</sup> the shapeshifter Queen of Underland, the Lady of the Green Kirtle, or the Green Witch is a dragon-related figure, who can metamorphose into a giant green serpent. She tries to enchant Prince Rilian, Jill, Eustace and Puddleglum with her magic that makes one ‘hard to think.’ With her ‘sweet, quiet, soothing voice’ and her ‘kind, soft, musical, soft, silver laugh,’ she tries to make them believe that Aslan and his world do not exist.<sup>116</sup> Her discourse is similar to Tolkien’s and Lewis’s contemporaries, who said fairy tales were make-believe and accused them of day-dreaming:

“look how you can put nothing into your make-believe without copying it from the real world, this world of mine, which is the only world. But even you children are too old for such play. As for you, my lord Prince, that art a man full grown, fie upon you! Are you not ashamed of such toys? Come, all of you. Put away these childish tricks. I have work for you all in the real world.”<sup>117</sup>

The character of the Green Witch embodies practicality. Puddleglum decides to do a brave thing and puts out the fire with his foot, breaking the witch’s spell. Pain is what makes Puddleglum resist the serpent’s enchantment. In a letter, Lewis explains that he put Anselm’s and Descartes’ ‘Ontological Proof’ “in a form suitable for children”<sup>118</sup> to get past their watchful dragons.<sup>119</sup>

Every person who forgets to look at the world with wonder runs the danger of becoming a dragon. Forgetfulness to renew the gaze with delight on an enchanted reality leads to a lust for domination, and the heart automatically becomes a dragon’s heart.

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>115</sup> In a letter to Anne Jenkins, Lewis says that the theme of the book *The Silver Chair* is ‘the continued war against the powers of darkness’ (See *Collected Letters. Volume III, Narnia, Cambridge and Joy 1950-1963*. Ed. Walter Hooper, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., HarperSanFrancisco, ebook, 2004).

<sup>116</sup> Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia*, 743-4.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 747. For a parallel discourse of the materialist man, see the essay ‘Transposition’ in the essay collection *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 104-5.

<sup>118</sup> In the essay ‘The language of religion’, found in the essay collection *Christian Reflections*, Lewis thinks the Ontological Argument is “a partially unsuccessful translation of an experience without concepts or words” as one cannot argue from the *concept* of Perfect Being to its existence. Rather, they argued from the experienced glory within that cannot be subjectively generated. C. S. Lewis, Walter Hooper (ed.) *Christian Reflections* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 141.

<sup>119</sup> Lewis, *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis Vol. 3*, 1286.



The witch's temptations is similar to Weston's in *Perelandra*. Although previously a human, Weston becomes the Un-man when he lets himself be possessed by a higher demonic being. Both Devine's purpose—to mine Malacandra's gold and Weston's motives—to ensure the eternal survival of the human race through cosmic colonisation and the creation of the New Man through biological engineering, are explicitly dragonish. Wither and his team N.I.C.E in *That Hideous Strength* have the same plan. If accomplished, their plan would ultimately lead to human annihilation. Weston tempts The Green Lady using a mirror (which can be a symbol for technology or of the 'Eye Well', the water-drac; or to self-worship, by taking off her view from Maleldil to herself, similar to the myth of Narcissus), and then to disobedience to Maleldil. Their Promethean role brings to mind Hesiod's *Theogony*, where Typhoeus,<sup>120</sup> the primordial serpent and enemy of the gods that "must be defeated before evil and anarchy can be brought into subordination"<sup>121</sup> is defeated and cast into Tartarus by Zeus — or his Roman counterpart Jupiter.<sup>122</sup> The menace of Typhoeus ruling over 'gods<sup>123</sup> and men' is comparable to the menace of Morgoth's or Sauron's ruling. Prometheus, who brought civilisation to men, commiserated "when [he] beheld (...) Typhon" who sought to "overthrow the sovereignty of Jove."

Wither's and Saruman's voices put reason to sleep and those who listen take the risk of being put under a sort of binding dragon-spell. When Théoden refuses his offer of peace and friendship, his spell breaks, his voice changes, and he appears like "a snake coiling itself to strike."<sup>124</sup> Another dragon-like character is Shift the Ape in *That Hideous Strength*, who convinces Puzzle the Donkey to put on an old lion's skin and pretend to be Aslan. The symbol of the ape as the old dragon is in accordance with several Church Fathers (Tertullian, St. Augustine of Hippo) who called Satan the "ape of God" because he counterfeits His work.

In these Lewisian characters we see the dragon-character embodied in both man and other non-human characters, Tolkien's Glorund being the sole real dragon.

### Dragon as Symbol of the Hostile World and Death

The dragon is associated with death and the hostile world in Tolkien's works, rather than Lewis's. Similar to Beowulf's adversaries, Tolkien's dragons are all non-human.

In *Beowulf*, the monsters symbolise the hostile world and temporal death. The poet depicts a pagan era where the heathen days were hopeless yet noble. Both Grendel and the

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<sup>120</sup> Typhoeus's counterpart in Norse mythology is Jormungander, the World Serpent that lies at the root of Yggdrasil, the World Tree. In Ragnarök, the final encounter between gods and monsters, Thor slays the serpent with his hammer *Mjöllnir*, but he succumbs to its venom.

<sup>121</sup> Hesiod. *Theogony; Works and Days; Shield*, transl. by Apostolos N. Athanassakis. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 53-7.

<sup>122</sup> For the significance of Jupiter in Lewis's works, especially in the Narnian books, check Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia* (2008) and *The Narnia Code* (2010).

<sup>123</sup> In Lombardo's translation, "And Thyphoios would have ruled over immortals and men" (844) (Hesiod, *Works and Days; and Theogony*, 84).

<sup>124</sup> Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 581.

dragon are physical enemies. They are the adversaries of gods and the enemies of mankind, the forces of evil, but they remain 'mortal denizens of the material world.'<sup>125</sup> In his fight with them, man's defeat is guaranteed. Within Time, Chaos and Unreason always triumph over gods and men. The poem *Beowulf* presents the rise and fall of the hero, his first achievement to earn fame as a mere *wrecca*, and his final death. The key points in Beowulf's life are his times of trial—the fight with Grendel and the dragon. The theme is the inevitable victory of death. Despite the noble resistance to the enemy, the heathen *hæleð* understands that glory does not last. The dragon is a suitable end for Beowulf, 'made by imagination for just such a purpose', the final foe that cannot be defeated, death, and Grendel is a fitting beginning, a human tyrant in 'real life', though not a pure manifestation of evil.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, Tolkien says that as a mortal in a hostile world, a Christian still faces monstrous enemies, both his own and those of God. However, the Christian's perspective on the war changes. The great temporal defeat is tragic but not final—it can become an eternal victory or an eternal defeat. For the end of the world is part of the plan of Metrod, the Arbiter above the mortal world.<sup>127</sup> The adversaries of the soul are the old monsters or evil spirits, the *þyras* and *sigel-hearwan* (or the less usual form, *sigelwaran*) of heathen imagination. While Beowulf refers to Grendel as a *þyr*, the Beowulf poet identifies the creature as an *eoten*. *þyr* is a cognate for *orcus* [the figure of death, death personified], and for *caci* [Cacus the giant]. The Anglo-Saxon *þyr* is associated with the demonic aspect of the supernatural through its connection with the Old High German *durs*, a word used to describe demons or Dis, god of the underworld. Some scholars propose a relationship between Anglo-Saxon *þyr* (*b*-rune as *thorn*, *giant*), Gothic *thyth* and Old Icelandic *þurs* (used interchangeably with *jötunn*, etymologically related to the Anglo-Saxon *eoten*). It may be that *þyras* and *eotenas* were seen as one. As for *sigelhearwan*, in his essay 'Sigelwara Land', Tolkien delves into the etymology of the Old English word for the ancient Ethiopians, *Sigelhearwan*, and attempts to recover its original meaning. Tolkien suggested that *sigel* meant 'sun/jewel' and *hearwan* was untraceable. Christopher Tolkien notes that the name of the Haradrim, the men of the hot south with red-hot eyes, is derived from the Old English *Sigelwara*.<sup>128</sup> Like the *eotenas*, skilled blacksmiths who made swords that men could use, the Calormenes, a race of men from a hot southern land in Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, supplied the Narnian king with armour and weapons.

The Beowulf poet connects the non-human monsters of northern myths (*eotenas*) with Scripture when he identifies Grendel as a descendant of Cain, the ancestor of *gigantes*. Like the *eotenas*, Tubal-Cain is the great ancestral metalsmith, skilled in working brass and iron. Grendel is also 'a fiend out of hell' and *mancynnes feond*, an epithet reminiscent of Melko's iron dragons.

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<sup>125</sup> Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, 19-20.

<sup>126</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 348-9.

<sup>127</sup> We find a parallel in Eru Ilúvatar's gift of death to Men.

<sup>128</sup> Tolkien, *Treason of Isengard: The History of the Lord of the Rings Part Two* (HarperCollins, 1993), 439.

The negative attributes associated with dragons can be overcome through humility, obedience, sacrifice, mercy, and charity. In Tolkienian and Lewisian worlds, the world history depends on the unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will and deeds of virtue of the seemingly unknown and weak. Sam the hobbit,<sup>129</sup> Tolkien's chief hero is Frodo's gardener, who has never fought a real dragon before, during or after their adventure. But he did fight his fears. A *nolo heroizari*, he knows what obedience is, how to die for those around him, and how to make others grow. He is both a seed and a gardener.<sup>130</sup> He is ennobled because he ennobles others. By investing in others, he invests in himself. Self-sacrifice is true self-fulfilment. However, while Eustace's peers play an important role in his restoration, the speech of Sam the hero, the most selfless character, pushes Gollum, the dragonish-character, over the edge.

### III. A Different Type of Dragon and Hero

If the most renowned deed of the prince of the heroes of the North was the slaying of the prince of legendary worms, in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham*, we meet the unheroic Farmer Giles and Chrysophylax Dives, a comically but still a dangerous, wicked dragon. Of ancient and imperial lineage, Chrysophylax is rich, cunning, inquisitive, greedy, not a very bold hot dragon, yet deadly when his treasure is menaced. The characters who, one would expect, ought to possess knowledge of the dangers posed by a dragon, appear to be devoid of such awareness, including the king and the armourer who do not know the origin or the use of the famous sword Caudimordax, also called 'Tailbiter.' The useless knights concerned with points of precedence and etiquette do not know about dragons and run in the face of his attack. The unenchanted king and his court refuse to see the mythical in the everyday, substitute the real thing with feeble imitations, and thus lose everything in the end. Even the young dragons think knights are mythical, and the older ones think that they are rare and no longer to be feared.

Farmer Giles<sup>131</sup> is not a knight but a simple inhabitant in the village of Ham. The story is a *bildungsroman*: the hesitant Farmer Giles, who when he was a child ('before he had learned sense') wished to have a sword and go dragon-hunting, becomes 'a slow sort of fellow' concerned to keep himself 'fat and comfortable' and with no thought to the world outside the confines of his village, becomes the King "of the Little Kingdom." If, at the beginning, he seems preoccupied only with keeping up his reputation and stalling the encounter with the dragon out of fear, he becomes more and more confident, and those around him observe the change.

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<sup>129</sup> The Hobbits are a branch of the human race.

<sup>130</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 345.

<sup>131</sup> His name also comes from Greek- the word *aegis* refers to a skin cover of a great serpent borne by Athena, either the skin of the slain Gorgon or of the slain Aex, a great goatish fire-breathing chthonic serpent. It symbolises protection or support by a strong force. It relates to the miracle worker Saint Giles, who gave his entire fortune to the poor and was revered by the people. Farmer Giles also becomes esteemed by his village co-citizens after he drives away a giant with an old-fashioned but reliable blunderbuss (also called a *dragon*) and tames Chrysophylax, the dragon.

He succeeds in his quest with the help of the parson, his sword Tailbiter (which, just like Túrin's sword Gurtholfin, seems to have a will of its own) and his wit, that is, he accepts the dragon's proposal not to take the entire hoard—he thus avoids a curse to be laid upon it and even death by the dragon and gains the dragon's protection. Chrysothylax Dives is a dragon who proposes to divide the hoard contrary to all known dragons or those affected by dragon-sickness.<sup>132</sup>

'The Dragon's Visit' is a poem by Tolkien about a green dragon who came from the land of Finis-Terre in Mister Higgins' cherry trees. He seems to be a peaceful monster who only wants to sleep and sing, but the men's attack enraged him, leading to their death and the destruction of the town. Like the king and court in *Farmer Giles of Ham*, the people seem to have no idea what a dragon is. They also have no wisdom on how to handle the situation. Cap'n George is no Saint George, and the other townspeople are not prepared to face a dragon. Instead of using a sword or an arrow, they poke the dragon with poles and attack him with a garden hose. The world has gotten duller, the dragon concludes; people have forgotten both how to admire and how to fight a dragon.

All Tolkien's dragons have a wicked heart and no conscience. Only the nameless dragon from *The Dragon's Visit* seems to have one as he buries some of his victims and sings a funeral song.

Even in *Roverandom*, a story for children, we meet a real *draco*: the Saxon White Dragon who fought with the Welsh Red Dragon in Merlin's time. He lives on the moon—according to Tolkien, the white dragons originally come from the moon, have wings, green eyes and breathe fire. He produces eclipses. We also encounter a great sleeping Sea-serpent who recalls the Midgard Serpent, who will be the death of Thor on the day of Ragnarok.

Tolkien observes that '[i]t was the function of dragons to tax the skill of heroes, and still more to tax other things, especially courage'. 'Dragons can only be defeated by brave men—usually alone. Sometimes a faithful friend may help, but it is rare: friends have a way of deserting you when a dragon comes'. 'Dragons are the final test of heroes', requiring 'luck (or grace) ... a blessing on your hand and heart.'<sup>133</sup>

#### IV. The Duality of the Dragon and the Serpent

Lewis's verse '[w]e were talking of dragons, | Tolkien and | in a Berkshire bar' is from a short poem first printed in *Rehabilitations* (1939) and later in the essay on 'The Alliterative Metre' in *Selected Literary Essays* (1969). The poem ends with the workman in the Berkshire bar declaring, "I seen 'em myself, | he said fiercely." At the request of Walter Hooper, Professor Tolkien, in a letter of 20 February 1968, explains its source as recounted by Lewis. One night, during a discussion on dragons, F. E. Brightman, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, said, "'I

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<sup>132</sup> The hoard as indivisible is recurrent in literature.

<sup>133</sup> Hammond and Scull, *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion and Guide Readers Guide, Part I*, 468.

have seen a dragon.' Silence. 'Where was that?' he was asked. 'On the Mount of Olives,'<sup>134</sup> he said. He relapsed into silence and never before his death explained what he meant."<sup>135</sup>

The fictitious talk takes place in a Berkshire bar. Before 1974, the famous Dragon Hill in Uffington was located in Berkshire.<sup>136</sup> Legend says that Dragon Hill received its name from the great battle between St. George and the Dragon. Another hypothesis is given by John Aubrey, who mentions in his *Monumenta Britannica*, written in 1670, that the hill is a burial mound. Uther Pendragon, King Arthur's father, is thought to have fought the Saxons at Uffington, died in battle, and was laid to rest on the same hill. In Celtic culture and mythology, the dragon is seen as both a destructive force and a protective guardian. *A Book of Dragons* contains the story of 'The Red Dragon of Wales' representing the people of Britain. He fights the White Dragon signifying the Saxons.<sup>137</sup> This is a retelling of the Welsh tale of *Lludd and Llefelys*. When Lludd measured the island to locate its centre and bury the dragons there, he discovered that Oxford was precisely in the centre of Britain—where St. George was said to have slain the dragon. The dragons of Wales and King Arthur represent the strength of a nation. The Red Y Ddraig Goch described in the stories of Merlin, Nennius, and Geoffry is associated with King Arthur who carried a dragon on his helm. In Celtic chivalry, the word *dragon* came to be used for chief, a Pendragon, a leader in times of danger. In Lewis's *Perelandra*, Weston let the old Dragon speak through him and became the Un-man. Ransom let God work through him and became the Pendragon.

*The Dawn Treader* was a *dreki*—a dragon-prowed ship that sailed East to reach Aslan's Country. Morally neutral dragons appear briefly in *The Last Battle*. Aslan calls out "great dragons and giant lizards and featherless birds" to eat away the vegetation of Narnia. These monsters drive out all living creatures, who then run up the hill to the door and look into Aslan's face to meet their final fate.<sup>138</sup>

Lewis portrays in a mythical unfallen world—in *Perelandra* (planet Venus)—an unfallen dragon, which is a guardian, not a hoarder. Ransom, the protagonist, recognised the garden of the Hesperides. He thought it was a dream but what he was seeing was reality.<sup>139</sup>

Dragons (or serpents) can symbolise wisdom. The serpent with its extremities 'combined' [if they have their tails in their mouths] means Eternity.<sup>140</sup> The dragon as guardian, the enemy of the False Cupid, guarding valuable immaterial things (chastity), such as the companion of the virgin goddess Minerva and the dragon of the Hesperides,<sup>141</sup> is contrasted with the materialist guardian of vast hordes of gold that he cannot enjoy.

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<sup>134</sup> The Mount of Olives is replete of signification. The Garden of Gethsemane is located on the Mount of Olives. Also, Christ was betrayed on the Mount of Olives after the old Serpent entered Judah.

<sup>135</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 418.

<sup>136</sup> Uffington was transferred from Berkshire to Oxfordshire in 1974.

<sup>137</sup> Roger Lancelyn Green, Krystyna Turska, *A Book of Dragons* (Puffin Books in Association with Hamish Hamilton, 1973), 68-73.

<sup>138</sup> Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia*, 884-5.

<sup>139</sup> See also joyful "the old, old dragon" in the poem *Hesperus*, in the poem collection *Spirits in Bondage*.

<sup>140</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Spenser's Images of Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), 41.

Lewis offers three opposing images to the false Cupid that embody different aspects of love in its true form. One of the most striking of these is the married couple<sup>142</sup>, united in the relation called one flesh that is the *imago Dei*.<sup>143</sup> Another antitype to the false Cupid is the image in the Temple of Venus, and the third is Venus herself. Whereas only Cupid's left foot was enfolded by the dragon, Venus allows the serpent to enfold her both feet with its head and tail. Lewis says that "[a]ll three are images of the *natura unialis*, the ultimate unity that underlies all being."<sup>144</sup> For Tolkien, the simple 'rustic' love of Sam and Rosie and their marriage plays a crucial role in understanding the story. Similarly, Chesterton's *The Dragon at Hide-and-Seek* features a parallel of love and sacrifice in the face of a dragon. The hero, an outlaw knight swallowed by a dragon-like machine (made by a sorcerer, like the monsters created by Melko against Gondolin), finally finds his hiding-place in the world in the belly of the monster where a wedding also takes place. The dragon symbolises the destructive world, and the moral is that through self-sacrifice (marriage being the largest), the hero within the hostile world, i.e., the beast, can tame it. The image recalls the biblical Jonah, *who came forth from the monster as from a bridal chamber*<sup>145</sup> and the resurrection of Christ, *who descended into the nethermost parts of the earth, shattering the eternal bars that held us captive, and on the third day, like Jonah from the whale, [He] arose from the tomb*.<sup>146</sup> The dual nature of the serpent is seen in the cross, where God becomes the serpent and enters into chaos and death. The serpent is the image of death that resulted from the Fall. The God-Man took the shape of the serpent on the cross and united Himself to death to conquer it. Christ trampled down death by death through absolute self-sacrifice. All three kindred spirits see victory over death and evil through death.

## Conclusions

The works of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis present a profound and focused scholarship that emphasizes the importance of enduring values. The authors establish a connection between the materialistic philosophy and the greediness of dragons. Their fairy stories serve as mirrors of the human soul, revealing aspects that we often overlook. They can undo the faulty images seared into man's imaginations and irrigate the deserts of our lives where dragons reside. Fairy stories also serve as guides, helping us identify dragons and dragon-talk in real life. Their fairy

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<sup>141</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1966), 165-6; C. S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays*, (Cambridge University Press, 1969), 78.

<sup>142</sup> Although one must be careful and marry the right person - in a letter to Daphne Harwood (Laurence Harwood, *C. S. Lewis, My Godfather, Letters Photos and Recollections* (IVP Books, 2007), 65), Lewis cites Jeremy Taylor, "it is better to [stay] up all night than go to bed with a dragon" (Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living; and Holy Dying*, P. G Stanwood (ed.) (Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1989), 155).

<sup>143</sup> Lewis, *Spenser's Images of Life*, 36-44.

<sup>144</sup> *contradictoria coincidunt in natura uniali*. 'Contradictions are reconciled in the nature of the One', *Conclusiones paradoxae*, no. 15, *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1573), 90, in *Spenser's Images of Life*, 42.

<sup>145</sup> See the Paschal Nocturnes Canon.

<sup>146</sup> See the Canon of Pascha.

stories can bypass our watchful dragons, allowing us to avoid becoming like the vigilant dwarfs in *The Last Battle* or the ghosts in *The Great Divorce* that refuse to let themselves 'be taken in.'

None of their dragons befriend humans except Eustace, a human who has turned into a dragon. Dragons are to be killed. No real *draco* is to be tamed. Fairy stories help us see and correct our *hubris*. They also prepare us to face and resist the 'dragons' we encounter in real life. Overcoming evil is not a matter of strength but of becoming like children, in humbling oneself. The dragon emerges as a potential for expanding one's world through conquering one's passions and fears. We must first slay the dragons within - the dragon which lurks at the bottom of our hearts - to be able to kill the dragons outside. The origin and nature of dragons remain a mystery. The question we need to answer is not if we are prepared to face them but when, as they are inevitable. Death, the final dragon, is conquered in death only.

Finally, Tolkien's and Lewis's works transcend mere storytelling and call each of us to be part of a greater story than our own. We are made (in) a story. Whether we like it or not (but we can make it a better story if we do), we, the yet nameless He or She, have been cast into the simmering stew, in the Cauldron of Story, along with the great figures of Myth and History, and we must make the best of it — until the dragon comes.