



**Facultade de Filoloxía  
Departamento de Filoloxía Inglesa e Alemá**

**Tracing the Dragon:  
A Study of the Origin and Evolution of the Dragon  
Myth in the History and Literature of the British Isles**

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Tese de doutoramento dirixida polos Doutores  
Fernando Alonso Romero e Cristina Mourón Figueroa

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A doutoranda

Vº e prace dos directores

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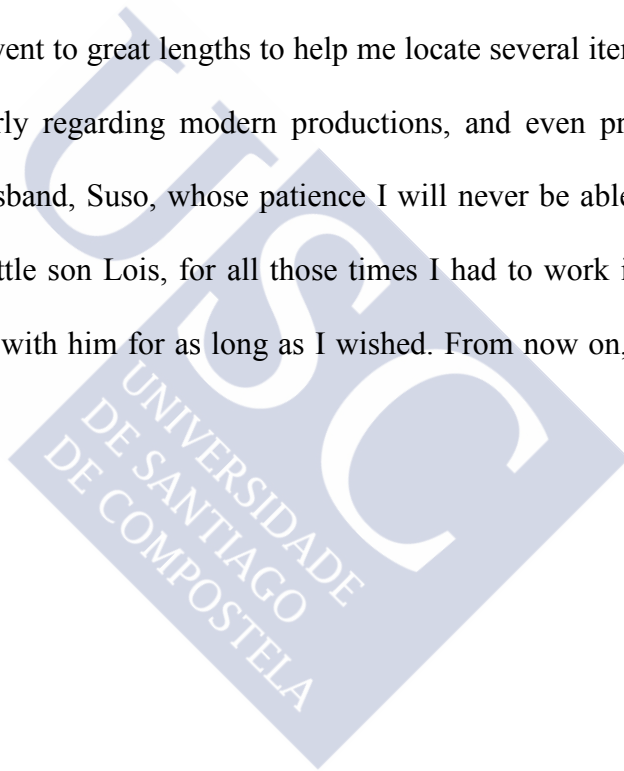
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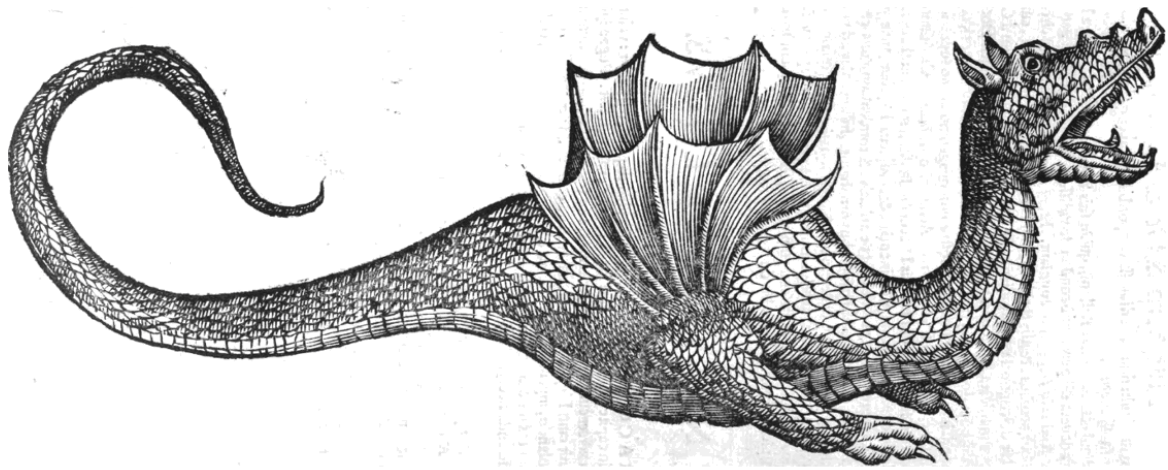
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whose generosity knows no bounds.



Aldrovandi, Ulyssis. 1639. *Serpentum et draconum historiae*.

TELA

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Dürer, Albrecht. 16<sup>th</sup> c. *Dragon*.

## Introduction

The appeal of dragons is such, even nowadays, that I have had people questioning me in earnest about their existence, eyes filled with wonder, before engaging in a debate about the possibility of an extinct species, interspersed with loose allusions to the Loch Ness monster and other modern sightings of the sort. I can all but imagine that, if this happens in our era of modernity and enlightenment, it must have been many times fold in previous, more obscure times. And yet –here is the irony–, all eras have been considered at their time as paragons of modernity and enlightenment, which can not but mean that ours is doomed to be regarded as obscure and backward at some, probably not so distant, point in the future. The reasoning behind this awkward philosophizing is that I firmly believe that we are not so different from our ancestors as we like to think, and that our beliefs, our ideals, our dreams and even a large part of the way we work through a problem is directly connected in not so mysterious ways with the view of the world that our parents, grandparents and many before them had, just as it is connected to people who live in distant lands and with whom we ridiculously believe we have nothing in common. It is a paradox similar to the fallacy of youth, thinking we are doing things no one has ever attempted before, never realising that there is nothing new under the sun.

The human fascination with monsters is not only endless but also truly ancient, so much as to justify the creation of early scientific studies related to the existence of creatures with monstrous features and which were grouped under the heading of Tetarology. Several authors have remarked that we are at the same time repelled and attracted by monsters, that they are “sources of identification and awe as well as of

horror” (Gilmore, 2003: 4), projections of “some repressed part of the Self” (Andriano, 1999: xi) and that the human consciousness needs them to express primal fears and emotions that are thus incarnated and exorcized through the otherness of the monster. In recent years, the analysis of the issue of monstrous creation and symbolism has risen to a well-deserved scholarly status, generally referred to as Deformed Discourse.

This brings me to the object of the present study, which is no other than to trace the evolution of the elusive myth of the dragon. A popular creature, this is. There is nothing like a dragon to spice up a story. Nothing like a dragon combat to justify one’s right to some land. Nothing like a dragon banner to instil fear into the heart of one’s opponent. Nothing like the mention of a dragon to make a whole room look up. They truly call for attention, these creatures, and they have been treated in all the imaginable possible ways: villains, heroes, pests or catastrophes are only a few of the most common ones. It is my firm belief that they may have been in the past godlike figures, worshipped by our ancestors and demonized at some point of history to become the epitome of all monstrosities and evil, or, what is even more fascinating, creatures made to inspire terror, but worthy of worship at the same time. After centuries of disparagement and falling into general discredit, dragons managed to keep some of their prestige and original features, which may still be observed in the many forms in which this animal has been represented in culture and art. I am inordinately happy to have discovered that I am not alone in these observations:

The evidence indicates that monsters are more complicated than being reducible to the uni-dimensional id forces of sex and aggression. However terrible, they are not just metaphors for beastliness: their vast powers inspire veneration as well as repugnance. While we struggle against them, monsters also instill awe and even a grudging respect (Gilmore, 2003: ix).

Nevertheless, it is not the primary aim of this study to either prove or expand on this hypothesis, but, as mentioned above, to examine and analyze the evolution of the treatment of the myth. Pursuing the examination of the permanence or evolution of such traces as are suggested here is, I acknowledge, not an easy task, for much has been lost in the path that we have travelled during the last millennia, and enormous chunks of information are gone forever. As Smith (1904: 487) beautifully puts it,

A nation, a language, or a religion is not regarded as a fixed quantity. They resemble rivers, not rocks; organisms, not crystals. Their significance lies essentially in their movements, coming forth from pre-existing facts, passing on into succeeding events and effects. All that remains today may be the fossil word, yet this was once the living, spiritual thought, which moved and grew in the flowing current of time.

And yet, I am determined. I will endeavour to study those fossils, in search for the traits that may reveal the original myth, or, rather, the myth as it was in ancient times, for it is a fact that in cultural matters there is no origin, no essential Big-Bang, but a gradual development from a previous idea, which, itself, developed from an even previous one. We inherit our culture and beliefs from our parents, and they, from theirs. Dragons were not invented during the Middle Ages, not even by the Greeks. The creature is much more ancient than that, and it inhabited the legends and myths of the oldest sophisticated civilizations, such as those of Babylon and Egypt, as well as the unsophisticated ones. What is more, dragon legends are to be found in practically every corner of the world (in the African hearths, in Native American settlements, in the Pacific Islands...) which proves in itself that the motif is as old as mankind, even though each particular culture infused it with the traces that were needed to provide it with a meaning and a purpose in the community.

This being so, the task at hand seems of monstrous proportions. The study of the dragon, as a concept, is a colossal attempt, not only because of its pervading presence in

all cultures, but also because the manifestations are so varied as to make any attempt to cover them all mind blowing. These are the reasons why, tempting though it may be to follow the trail of this monster all around the globe and up and down history, one must set a reasonable, realistic, and, above all, attainable goal. With this intention in mind, I shall focus on the representations available in the culture related to the British Isles (both created in this geographical context and inspired by its culture and history), in an attempt to circumscribe the topic to a specific territory, a territory which, in fact, is quite fertile in dragon stories and which has influenced the culture of the modern Western society to a great degree. The corpus of study will include a number of literary works, folktales and, in the section devoted to the modern recreation of the myth, filmic productions. All the works that constitute this corpus have been chosen on account of their relevance to this topic.

The hypothesis that I will attempt to explore is that there is a series of common traits to the dragon stories preserved in the folklore and literature of the British Isles. These elements respond to some extent to the peculiarities of the culture in which they are created and embedded, and it will be interesting to see which ones have been preserved to our modern times, and which ones have disappeared or evolved, as consequence of social changes, which demand both new ideas and new interpretations of old ideas.

The study is structured into seven chapters, including an introductory text and conclusion. This Introduction is followed by Chapter 1, with the presentation of the one most popular dragon tale in Britain, that of the fight between St George and the dragon, which is the paradigm of the dragon tale in the British Isles and used here as model story for the study. From this I will move on to Chapter 2, where other manifestations of the myth in religious tales, folktales and literary productions will be presented, to finally

proceed, in Chapter 3, to extract from them a number of elements common to these stories in this particular geographical and cultural context, an identikit sketch of sorts of the dragon, but at the same time a schematic view of their historical development and what they meant for the different societies that shared these tales.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the modern re-emergence of the dragon tale in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries will be addressed, observing which of those elements that were to be found in the traditional stories may have survived to the present and, more importantly, which have evolved, and the reasons behind these choices and developments. This will be, I hope, revealing as to the way in which our present cultural and social situation has influenced the manner in which we view the world and the themes of old. This will prove relevant to interpret the revival of a dragon-centred tradition which has been increasingly magnanimous towards this creature.

Obviously, due to the constant cultural exchanges between the British Isles and neighbouring lands, it will be unavoidable to mention examples beyond the islands on a frequent basis. An objective study must bear in mind the mutual relations and influences that affect a given community. None of us are isolated. Nevertheless, I will try to restrict them to the main area of cultural influence and exchange to which the British Isles have been historically connected, that is, the European Atlantic lands, particularly regarding the traditional models, and the United States, in the analysis of the modern remakes. In any case, occasional mentions of other cultures will be added, whenever they may add something of import to the general discussion.

As regards to the methodology used, paradoxically, the presentation of this study does not match the train of thought that led to it. Whenever possible, facts, legends, myths and literary productions are here presented in a fairly consistent chronological way, when the process of investigation could not have been more different: part of my



intention is here to dwell on the origins of the dragon, and, for that, I have gone backwards in my exploration, starting at the relatively modern myth of Saint George and moving backwards from there in search of its origins. Where does this story come from? And where do the myths preceding it come from? And thus successively, through the Middle Ages, and from there to the Classical Antiquity, and from there to the Middle East myths, and Celtic traditions, and the Iron Age settlements... Where does one stop? Basically, when one reaches a point in history when there is absolutely no factual information regarding this engrossing topic (or any other topic, for that matter). I have been following a trail, but the trail is lost in the mists of time. I shall now attempt to put some order and a good amount of thinking into the findings made.

The procedure used to seize and work on these vague ideas with a modicum of scientific rigour is based on the systematic analysis of a selected number of works, pertaining to literary and filmic manifestations and legends, as has been mentioned above. The study has been limited to fictional works, with the intention of focusing the efforts on a category with easily defined boundaries, even though they may be rather blurry at times, but also because fiction is the genre that better explores the symbolism attached to given episodes and motifs in the different eras. I am aware that there is a large body of scientific work about dragons, both in zoological writings (at least up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century) and even the odd documentary on alternate universes<sup>1</sup>, and these I have referred to on occasion, but they are not the focus of the analysis and so they do not appear explicitly in the corpus of work.

The examination of the corpus has been divided into two stages. In the first one, works belonging to the historical period running from the first written records up to the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Last Dragon* (2004). Channel 4 and Animal Planet. Directed by Charlie Foley (09.22.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0433367>).

20<sup>th</sup> century are presented and compared, and the result of their analysis is displayed and interpreted before turning to more modern manifestations. Following this, works from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are likewise considered and dissected, with a strong aim on observing both how they echo productions of previous centuries or how they differ, and the meaning behind these choices.

The reason for such a seemingly asymmetric time division is that I have observed that the treatment of the dragon myth did not change materially in the long period up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but then a number of dramatic variations started to appear, outwardly all of a sudden. The minute examination of these changes and what they reveal about the society which produced them will go a long way to help us understand the internal workings of a motif that has been present in human society since the dawn of time.

I humbly hope that such a study will be helpful to other researchers, at least in the sense that it provides them with a set of basic elements to look for when analysing the dragon character in a given artistic representation. Hopefully, I will manage to determine what exactly a dragon is, beyond the meagre and often confusing accounts provided by dictionaries and the mayhem of chaotic information regarding this matter that seems to come from all directions, given the general and steady fascination that people have with dragons. I also aspire to bring an updating on the general topic of the dragon stories, as the specific treatment given to them in modern manifestations is included. I have observed that an important number of the studies related to Deformed Discourse tend to tackle comprehensive studies of the monstrous, typically in the context of the European Middle Ages or in contemporary Western productions. This present study is narrower in that it is circumscribed to a single manifestation of the monstrous (dragons) and in a limited geographical context (the British Isles). It is, based

on those two premises, a drop in the ocean of monster studies. On the other hand, its scope is extended in terms of time. One of the aims I wish to pursue here is to bridge those two branches of study: the analysis of the medieval monster and the analysis of the modern one, and see in which ways they are connected and in which ways they differ, and what this portends. I find that it is relevant to attempt this, especially in the case of the dragon, a creature that was central to medieval teratology, but which has a striking permanence in our present-day culture, to the point that it is presently going through a spectacular popularity, as attest the continuous flow of titles available, both in literature and film. But, above all, it is my dearest wish that the reading of these pages will be simply satisfying to the reader.

Finally, regarding the materials used for the section on folktales, it is only fair to acknowledge that most British dragon tales mostly exist nowadays in summaries from recollections, since verbatim recording of storytellers is a very recent method and traditional collectors usually paraphrased the information provided by their informants. I have tried to compile as many of those stories that were collected complete as it has been possible, but in many cases I cannot but defer to summaries and references with variable degrees of obscurity, found in an assortment of works. In any case, I have attempted to include all these varieties of sources in a way that read as smoothly as possible. In this effort, I owe a lot to Jacqueline Simpson, an author whose work has been a constant guide and, even though she plainly says that it is unwise to explore the topic of comparative methodology and its approach that dragons may stem from Creation Myths (Simpson, 2001: 49), I shall brave the odds, for everything suggests that it is well worth some examining, at least.

On a final note, I must warn those who may be hoping for a series of proofs of the existence or non-existence of dragons that they must look for them elsewhere. That

is not my interest, nor the scope of this study. Of course, it does not follow that I do not have an opinion on the matter, but I will leave scientists more prepared than me in those areas to elucidate on that. I am certain the information is out there for those who wish to find it. As for me, I have no qualms in stating that I believe dragons are entirely a happy product of the fertile human imagination, and it is as such that they actually hold an interest for me, as a crucial part of our immaterial heritage. I am not interested in discussing whether they may be an extinct species, psychic entities or just very rare animals. What they truly are is a fascinating piece of the puzzle that is humanity.





A detail from the Altarpiece of St. George. First quarter of the 15th c. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

## Chapter 1. A Saint's Predicament: Saint George

For thou emongst those Saints, whom thou doest see,  
Shalt be a Saint, and thine owne nations frend  
And Patrone: thou Saint George shalt called bee,  
Saint George of mery England, the signe of victoree. (Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1, Canto 10. [www.online-literature.com](http://www.online-literature.com))

Not so very long ago, every English schoolboy used to be familiar with these lines, and, even nowadays, although only the odd student will acknowledge having read them, Saint George is universally recognized as the single most important saint of England, the patron saint of the country, English as clotted cream.

Above all, it is the episode in which Saint George fights the dragon that gets the lion's share of attention, and testament to its popularity are the innumerable versions of the tale with which audiences have been regaled over the centuries. George, and others like him, seems to have fought dragons all over England, too, for many are the villages that claim to be the site of such fighting. If one looks into the countless versions of the story, which I will in due time, one will get the impression that dragons must have been a veritable pest in ancient Britain, for George and his peers were never short of work. And, certainly, one can kill only so many dragons before becoming a national hero of sorts.

The tale of St George and the dragon will be presented in this chapter as an archetype of the stories that have been chosen to shape the matter of study of this research. In George the reader will find that all the elements common to most legends where the hero is antagonized by a dragon are present, as if it were a thematic park of the dragon fighting motif. It is also a choice example with which to illustrate one of the themes that is constant in tales of monsters: the monster is a symbol of the unknown, the

alien. It is an “Other” that coexists with us, but on the margins of human society, constantly threatening it. Hence the need of a hero to thwart it, to “perform the same function the world over, that of clearing the field for humanity” (Gilmore, 2003: 11). And George, the golden boy of heroic dragon killers, triumphing over the dragon that threatened a town, embodies this symbolism to the letter. And where exactly in Britain<sup>1</sup> was this town that was fortunate to have received the aid of the saint?

There are two main places in England vying for the reconnaissance of being *the* site of the notorious fight: Brinsop (Herefordshire) and Uffington (Oxfordshire). Here is what each candidate claims:

The church of St George in Brinsop has an early medieval tympanum showing the scene of the slaying (Simpson, 2001: 53), and the local story provides geographical evidence to our heart’s content: the dragon dwelled in a well in Duck’s Pool Meadow, just to the south of the church, and the fight took place at Stanks Meadow. These places are still recognizable nowadays, and a pride of lions to the community, along with their other, no less attractive, claims to fame<sup>2</sup>.

Uffington’s claim is, if possible, even more impressive, at least archaeologically-wise.

There is here a very popular and extraordinarily suggestive site and one in the care of the National Trust of the United Kingdom too: the White Horse at Dragon Hill<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I am here mentioning British locations only, but the legend of St George is claimed by towns all over Europe, and part of Asia too, as will soon be seen.

<sup>2</sup> Which are, aside from St George and the delightful church consecrated to him, memorabilia related to topics as varied as the poet William Wordsworth, World War II and Sir Ninian Comper and his strawberry plant (09.22.2013. <http://www.brinsopcourt.com>).

<sup>3</sup> Dragon Hill is located on the border of the civil parishes of Uffington and Woolstone. It was part of the county of Berkshire until 1974, when it was transferred to Oxfordshire. There are other white horses in England (the Marlborough White Horse, the Cherhill White Horse and the Westbury White Horse) but not only are they more modern, their appearance is also strikingly dissimilar to that of the Uffington White Horse (09.22.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).

This is a small conical chalk hill, on the northern face of the Berkshire Downs, two miles south of Uffington, which was once artificially flatted and carved. If nothing else, the fact of its lengthy preservation alone must be awe-inspiring. It has been dated to the Late Bronze Age and there are several other prehistoric sites located in its vicinity, notably the Iron Age Uffington Castle (a hill fort), Wayland's Smithy (a long barrow), the Lambourn Seven Barrows and the Blowing Stone (a perforated stone which produces a musical sound when blown through). The Ridgeway (an ancient road) runs beside it. The folklore surrounding this area is nothing short of impressive and it would deserve a detailed comprehensive study.

The carving at Dragon Hill is an enigma. It shows a schematic representation of a four-footed long-necked slender animal, which has traditionally been identified with a horse (at least since the 11<sup>th</sup> century) and is believed to represent George's own steed. Others have argued that it actually represents the dragon itself. It is said that it was on this very summit that George fought and slew the dragon, and some versions even imply that the creature lies buried under the hill.

By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Tom Hughes recorded these lines by a shepherd called Job Cork, which give us an idea of the popularity of this association of St George and Dragon Hill:

If it is true as I hear say  
King Gaarge did here the dragon slay,  
And down below on yonder hill  
They buried him, as I heard tell (Simpson, 2001: 54).

There is, just below the White Horse, a curiously bare patch of chalk, upon which no grass ever grows. This is supposed to be the exact place where the dragon's blood spilled, effectively preventing the growth of any plant, or so the story claims.



In 1738 a new theory about the carving emerged; the White Horse on Dragon Hill had been created to commemorate King Alfred's victory against the Danes in the Battle of Ashdown, which took place precisely in the Vale of the White Horse<sup>1</sup> (Simpson, 2001: 54).

Let us leave this elusive carving in more competent hands and proceed with the matter at hand, as there are many other mysteries that need to be unravelled, starting with what should probably be the first questions to ask:

*What is a dragon?*

Etymologically, the word comes from the Latin *draco*, *-onis*, or the Greek *drakon*, both meaning "large serpent, dragon". The dragon was considered a rightful species until times as recent as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and even nowadays some still support the theory that they are merely extinct.

Its appearance may vary depending on the culture and time in history in which one finds the reference, which answers to certain peculiarities and necessities of the community in which it is embedded. For example, Egyptian dragons are very much like crocodiles, a choice that is fairly reasonable, considering that the most dangerous creature that they were familiar with was the crocodile. However, there is always a reptilian component to these descriptions. Consider this entry in the *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana* (2161-2):

Reptil fabuloso de talla gigantesca, cuerpo cubierto de escamas, mirada terrible aliento venenoso y que lanza fuego por la boca. Se suele representar con alas y en ocasiones con varias cabezas (la hidra de Lerna), y aparece en las leyendas griegas, nórdicas y asiáticas, principalmente como guardián de manantiales curativos o adivinatorios

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<sup>1</sup> King Alfred (849-899) was very likely familiar with the White Horse, as he was born in the village of Wanating (now Wantage), which is a mere 7 miles away from Uffington, and it is recorded that during his reign the carving was already in existence (09.22.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>, <http://www.britannica.com>).

(fuentes-oráculos), o bien de vírgenes o tesoros. En la antigüedad grecorromana, dragón era sinónimo de serpiente y se comprendía con aquel nombre el animal sagrado de Esculapio (porque las serpientes invernan a menudo junto á las fuentes termales), las serpientes de Atenea y de otras divinidades terrestres y los dragones del carro de Ceres (...). Servio designaba en particular, con el nombre de *dragones*, a las serpientes que habitaban o guardaban los templos, y con el de *anguis* los animales venenosos que vivían en el agua. Con frecuencia se representa a los dragones con alas, como los que tiran del carro de Medea, y los que guardan tesoros suelen ser muertos por dioses o héroes, como Apolo, Hércules, Cadmo, Jasón, Sigfrido, etc<sup>1</sup>.

This description is rather comprehensive and it gives the reader some clues on what to look for in a dragon, albeit in a general way. It is one of the aims of this study to elucidate this very question, and I hope it will eventually be achieved, but this definition will give me impetus in the meanwhile.

#### *Who is Saint George?*

This is a question that has been tackled a number of times, from different angles and by different authors over the last hundred years, but as of yet it appears to be not fully settled. Take for example the following anecdote, which fairly illustrates the bemusement of researchers, especially at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

In 1903, Professor Samuel Ives Curtiss, an expert on primitive Semitic religion, went on a summer trip to the territories of ancient Syria. In Beirut (Lebanon), he took a picture of a shrine, one of the three most famous ones in the area. The shrine was

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<sup>1</sup> “Fabulous reptile of gigantic proportions, body covered in scales, terrible gaze, venomous breath and which breathes fire. It is often represented with wings and, occasionally, with several heads (the Laernean hydra), and it figures in Greek, Scandinavian and Asian legends, mainly as either guardian of springs with either healing or prophetic properties (oracle springs), or keeper of virgins, or treasures. In Classical Greece and Rome it was synonymous with serpent and also the name of the sacred animal identified with Asclepius (because serpents often hibernate near hot springs), the serpents associated with Athena and other earthy divinities and the dragons that pulled Ceres’ chariot (...). Servius particularly designated as *dragons* those serpents that dwelled in temples or guarded them, and as *anguis* the poisonous animals that lived in the water. Dragons are frequently represented as winged, as those of Medea’s chariot, and those dragons that keep treasures are usually slain by either gods or heroes, such as Apollo, Hercules, Cadmus, Jason, Sigfried, etc” (translation by the author of this study).

Moslem, but both the Moslem and Christian population visited it. The Moslems called it Chidr, or *hâdir-wa-nâdir*; the Christians called it Mâr Jirjis, that is, Saint George.

Those who are unfamiliar with the exotic background of Saint George might wonder about his presence in Beirut, of all places, but the fact is that St George is venerated not only by the Church of England or Rome, but also by the Orthodox Churches, the Near East and Ethiopia. Many are the sites and relics related to George in the Middle East, and they are venerated by Christians and Muslims alike. They call him Chidr, or Al-Khidr, which means “The Green<sup>1</sup>”, he is reckoned to be possessed of supernatural powers of healing and guidance, and he is considered the guardian of the Waters of Life. As a matter of fact, in the traditional cultures of Eastern Europe St George is regarded as a spirit of the trees or vegetation, and many are the traditions collected that revolve around this particular feature of his<sup>2</sup>. Frazer (1966: II: 347-8) ponders that St George may have displaced an old Aryan god of the spring in Europe, and hence the odd connotations of fertility, protection of the cattle and growth of the vegetation that the saint has kept.

Etymologically, George or Georgios comes from the Greek γεωργος, which means “farmer” or “earth tiller” according to the specialized dictionaries (10.02.2012. <http://www.behindthename.com/name/george>). The name can be traced to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, in Asia Minor (Knight, 1963: 294).

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<sup>1</sup> I cannot but wonder whether this may be somehow related to the European Green Man, a symbol of fertility and rebirth, and also if the Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late 14<sup>th</sup> c.) may hide in its complexity some hidden meaning akin to the themes that will be explored in the present analysis. Hopefully, the pursuit of this clue will be the matter of further studies.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in Carintia (northern Slovenia), on St George’s Day a procession took place, in which the chief figure was the Green George, a young man clad in green birch branches, who was thrown into a river (either the lad or the effigy, once he had extricated himself from it), to ensure that the rain would come and fertilize the fields. The gypsy community of Transilvania (Rumania), also had a festival of Green George in spring, on the eve of which a young willow tree was cut down and adorned with garlands and leaves (Frazer, 1966: II: 75-6).

Ironically, the earliest accounts of St George make no mention whatsoever of a dragon. In the *Acta Sancti Georgii* (5<sup>th</sup> c.), considered as one of the first documents which name him, he is presented as a martyr. This text was branded as heresy by Pope Gelasius in his apocryphal decree *De Libris Recipiendis et Non Recipiendis* (A.D. 496), where one comes across his very intriguing and often quoted “George is one of the saints whose names are rightly revered among us, but whose actions are known only to God”. Regardless, this official dismissal of George as a rightful saint by the Church of Rome did not make the slightest reference to the Saint George story we have come to know, complete with white horse, terrible dragon and fair maiden. So, who was this George Pope Gelasius seemed to brand as *persona non grata*?

According to some scholars (Gardner, 2007: 27-8), the corporeal George may have been George of Laodicea<sup>1</sup>, friend to Eusebius, Bishop of Emesa in Phoenicia and chief spokesman to the Arian party at the Council of Nicaea (nai’sia) in A.D. 325<sup>2</sup>. After his fall into disgrace, Eusebius fled Emesa and went to exile under the protection of George. Eventually, emperor Constantius, Constantine’s son, who supported Arianism, banished Athanasius and raised George as Bishop of Alexandria. From

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<sup>1</sup> George (Georgios), of Laodicea (died c. 361) also called “the Cappadocian”, for he hailed from his father’s province of Cappadocia (some sources refer to his father as a nobleman, others as a mere fuller). He was appointed bishop of Laodicea (previously called Diospolis, located in Lydia, Anatolia, Eastern Turkey) about A.D. 335. From A.D. 356 to A.D. 361 he was Bishop of Alexandria. In early texts he is mentioned as either George of Laodicea, George of Cappadocia or George of Lydia. Some early reports also add that George’s rule as Bishop of Alexandria was tyrannical, although this has sometimes been viewed as propaganda against Arians, a campaign of discredit against their main bishop (Gardner, 2007: 4-6).

<sup>2</sup> In A.D. 313, the *Edict of Milan*, decreed by Emperor Constantine, put an end to the persecution of the Christians and established the Church of Rome. Twelve years later, in A.D. 325, a Council of Bishops was held at Nicaea, Bithynia (currently in Turkey). Two main groups were formed there, according to their position regarding the concept of the Holy Trinity: those in favour of it, led by Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria (the Trinitarians), and those against, led by Arius (the Arians). Eventually, the Trinitarians won the vote and Arianism was declared a heresy. It is said that Athanasius himself travelled to Emesa, where he charged Eusebius, who had been the main spokesman for the Arian party at the Council, with practising astrology, a most serious accusation at the time and one which would have cost him his life, hence, his fleeing and subsequent exile under George’s protection (*Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Euopeo-Americana*, 1934 -: 6: 408-11, “Arrianismo”, (*Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Euopeo-Americana*, 1934 -: 22: 1438, “Eusebio”).

Alexandria, Arianism flourished and reached far and wide, but the ascension of Emperor Julian in A.D. 361 brought it to an early end. Almost immediately, Julian started a campaign of prosecution against the most influential Christians of the Empire, which would culminate in A.D. 362 with the promulgation of an edict to prohibit Christianity in any of its forms<sup>1</sup>. George of Laodicea could hardly escape the consequences. He was arrested, imprisoned and executed by a furious mob. After his death, his mutilated body was cast into the sea<sup>2</sup>. It was December 24<sup>th</sup>, A.D. 361.

Enter the second candidate.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April A.D. 303, a soldier of noble birth was put to death by Emperor Diocletian at Nicomedia. His crime had been tearing down Diocletian's edict of Christian persecution. The story was put to paper in a *Historia Ecclesiastica* in A.D. 322 by Eusebius of Caesarea<sup>3</sup>, Constantine's appointed historian, and it went like this:

Immediately on the publication of the decree against the churches in Nicomedia, a certain man, not obscure but very highly honoured with distinguished temporal dignities, moved with zeal toward God, and incited with ardent faith, seized the edict as it was posted openly and publicly, and tore it to pieces as a profane and impious thing; and this was done while two of the sovereigns were in the same city, the oldest of all, and the one who held the fourth place in the government after him. But this man, first in that place, after distinguishing himself in such a manner suffered those things which were likely to follow such daring, and kept his spirit cheerful and undisturbed till death. (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, Book 8, Chapter 5, in 10.02.2012. [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0265-0339,\\_Eusebius\\_Caesariensis,\\_Church\\_History,\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0265-0339,_Eusebius_Caesariensis,_Church_History,_EN.pdf)).

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<sup>1</sup> As Christianity would eventually be restored, but under the rule of the Trinitarians, it is easy to conceive how, a century later, Pope Gelasius would easily dismiss an Arian's claims to sanctity.

<sup>2</sup> This measure made the preservation of any relics conveniently impossible.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea (c. A.D. 263-339), also called Eusebius Pamphili. He was appointed bishop of Caesarea in Palestine. His *Historia Ecclesiastica* is considered a pioneer work on the history of Christianity (*Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana*, 1934 -: 22: 1437, "Eusebio de Cesárea").



A detail from the Altarpiece of St. George. First quarter of the 15th c. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Eusebius does not provide the reader with the soldier's name, but Jacobus de Voragine seems to have had some inkling as to who exactly this brave young soldier might have been. The *Legenda Aurea*, compiled around 1260, explains is thusly:

Now it happened that in the time of Diocletian and Maximian, which were emperors, was so great persecution of Christian men that within a month were martyred well twenty-two thousand, and therefore they had so great dread that some denied and forsook God and did sacrifice to the idols. When Saint George saw this, he left the habit of a knight and sold all that he had, and gave it to the poor, and took the habit of a Christian man, and went into the middle of the paynims and began to cry: All the gods of the paynims and gentiles be devils, my God made the heavens and is very God. Then said the provost to him: Of what presumption cometh this to thee, that thou sayest that our gods be devils? And say to us what thou art and what is thy name. He answered anon and said: I am named George, I am a gentleman, a knight of Cappadocia, and have left all for to serve the God of heaven. (10.02.2012. <http://saints.sqpn.com/golden184.htm>).

With such provocation one can easily imagine what happened next. Diocletian, vexed beyond words by the boldness of the noble knight, decided to have some unsubtle persuasion techniques practised on him. George went through a variety of tortures<sup>1</sup>, and miraculously survived them all.

This George came to be geographically associated with Lydda, although Eusebius of Caesarea, he of the unnamed soldier-martyr account, had never mentioned any nationality, place of trial or burial place. It seems rather farfetched to make the

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<sup>1</sup> The description of the tortures is truly gruesome and not for the faint of heart, for George is said to have been brutally tortured for up to seven years, during which he was: stretched out on the rack, whipped, beaten, offered poison, boiled in a cauldron of lead, impaled and, eventually, beheaded. The tortures were exceptionally sadistic, and I find the bonus torment of rubbing salt into his wounds to be particularly unnecessary. Three times did he die during his martyrdom and three times was he resurrected, but, alas, he did not survive the beheading. This triple death necessarily reminds one of the equivalent Celtic practice known as the threefold death, a ritual sacrifice that had the victim first hanged, then drowned and finally beheaded. The tradition was recorded by Lucan in the *Pharsalia*, and also by other Roman authors. The practice has been documented in several civilizations, which seems to point to an Indo-European origin (Almagro-Gorbea, 2012: 32).

connection that such a man could be no other than our own George, but it seems that the *Acta Sancti Georgii* writer did not doubt it for a single moment<sup>1</sup>.

Such were the accounts that paved the way for the expansion of the story towards the west of Europe, lusciously detailed and intolerably obscure at the same time. What little is known about St George from the ancient sources comes basically from these two texts mentioned above. Outside their margins, the researcher is doomed to the realm of interpretation and, sometimes, the wildest of hypotheses.

Bishop Gregory of Tours (538-594), in his *Glory of the Martyrs*, states that the relics of Saint George were in an oratory of Limoges, where many miracles were performed thanks to them. Nevertheless, as it is often the case, relics seemingly multiplied and soon there were no less than five heads of Saint George and multiple limbs scattered all over Christendom<sup>2</sup>, something that a sardonic reader might interpret as accounting for the saint's many improbably concurrent feats in distant lands.

Word of Saint George reached England in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, or so one gathers from the existing evidence, for the first written account of him that has been preserved dates from A.D. 635, and it was written by no other than Saint Adomnán of Iona<sup>3</sup>, who details part of George's martyrdom, told to him by Arcuif, a French bishop who had been in Jerusalem during the Crusades (10.02.2012. <http://www.stgeorgesday.com>). Bede is reported to have mentioned George in his *Martyrology* too, but, sadly, there is no surviving copy of this work to confirm it.

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<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in this text, George was raised to the rank of tribune and, his father, to governor of Palestine.  
<sup>2</sup> For example, in the Collegiate Chapel Royal, at Windsor, the worshipper could find all of the following: part of St George's arm, part of his skull and two fingers (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>3</sup> Saint Adomnán, Adamnan or Eunan (Donegal 627/8- Iona 704) was the abbot of Iona (Scotland), although of Irish origin. He is said to be a relative of Saint Columba, whose biography he wrote (09.22.2013. <http://www.britannica.com>).



In any case, the cult to Saint George was rather indifferent in Western Europe during this time and it would remain so until the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

That was the Era of the Crusades.

The First Crusade started in 1095. Some years later, in 1120, Archbishop Baldric of Dol in Brittany wrote that Saint George himself had turned up in battle at Antioch in 1099, turning the tables in favour of the Christians, as well as in later campaigns, “including Barbarossa’s march through Anatolia” (Bachrach, 2003: 178). “He appeared at the head of a heavenly army, riding on white horses and carrying white banners<sup>1</sup>” (Gardner, 2007: 15). This is far from unprecedented. This account follows almost exactly that of the miraculous appearance of Saint James in Spain, during the Battle of Clavijo (A.D. 844), where he appeared to help the Christian troops to score a victory against the Arabs. James, too, rides his signature white horse<sup>2</sup>. This miraculous intervention is etched into stone in a church at Fordington, Dorset, which is considered as the earliest church in England to be dedicated to St. George (10.02.2012. <http://www.stgeorgesday.com>). Nevertheless, aside from the odd reference in wills or church buildings, and epic miracles notwithstanding, the saint would still be largely ignored on English ground until the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204). The surviving knights of this campaign arrived in England and spread an exciting tale they had heard about a Byzantine warrior called Georgios of Lydia, who had killed a dragon that was blocking

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<sup>1</sup> The red cross banners that King Richard is usually depicted with in cinema were actually introduced later in history, during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. By the time of the Crusades, the English knights wore white crosses to tell them apart from the French (who wore the red crosses) and the Fleming (who wore green crosses). The red cross on white field banner associated with Saint George in England dates from the reign of Edward III (1327-77) (Gardner, 2007: 17) and George was already described as wearing such garments in the *Legenda Aurea* (late 13<sup>th</sup> c). The French did not look kindly upon this choice, of course, much less when King Henry V captured Rouen in 1418 and saw it as proof that England’s claim to the red cross was approved by God (09.22.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> The selection of a white charger for these two saints is rather significant, as white horses were considered sacred (for example, the Sun rode a chariot with white horses) (Frazer, 1966: I: 21, 315; II: 174).

the access to a water supply. Such a story could not but excite the crusaders' imagination and inflame them with a thirst for adventure. It proved to be exactly what was needed to reignite the Crusaders' belief, the insurmountable proof that God embraced the idea of the Holy War.

Once George had reached the shores of England, there was no turn back.

In the whirl of the British enthusiasm for the Crusades, many churches were dedicated to St George, and, in 1222, the Council of Oxford declared April 23<sup>rd</sup> to be St. George's Day (10.02.2012. <http://www.stgeorgesday.com>). As soon as 1344, the saint's name had become the official battle cry for the English troops during the siege of Calais. Soon after, in 1348, King Edward III constituted the Most Noble Order of the Garter, the most important knighthood to be honoured with. Saint George, who embodied all the values a knight could aspire to have, was selected as the patron saint of both the Garter and the kingdom of England. The king was inspired by the chivalric ideals that were glorified in the Arthurian romances, which he greatly admired, and the knights of the Order of the Garter were expected to live up to the image of the chivalric knight of the Round Table.

King Henry V was also a powerful ally of the saint. In 1415, after his victory at the Battle of Agincourt, St George's Day (April 23<sup>rd</sup>)<sup>1</sup> was declared a national festivity of equal importance as Christmas. On St George's Day all labour was forbidden.

By this time, the story brought by the crusaders was quite changed. It had merged with the account of the martyrdom and some characters had been modified. The Emperor Constantius in the story (A.D. 337-361) had been switched to his grandfather Constantius I (also known as Constantius Chlorus) (A.D. 250-306). The change came in

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<sup>1</sup> This had been established as the date of his martyrdom in the *Old English Martyrology*, an anonymous work written during the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

handy for the Anglo-Saxons, for Emperor Constantius I had been the Roman Governor of Britain and, George being his friend and a tribune to the boot, he surely must have resided in Britain too. It all made perfect sense.

The passage about the dragon slaying had benefitted from the addition of a damsel in distress that needed to be saved from the dragon and the original Turkish Lydia had become Lydda in Palestine in some versions. Occasionally, the martyrdom was reported to have been suffered not by George, daunting warrior that he was, and therefore unlikely to be captured by any foe, but by his parents.

The *Legenda Aurea* (13<sup>th</sup> c.) has the dragon episode included. It is during this century that the association of the saint with the dragon came to full acceptance in Europe. This is how the text expounds on the famous passage:

On a time he came in to the province of Libya, to a city which is said Silene. And by this city was a stagne or a pond like a sea, wherein was a dragon which envenomed all the country. And on a time the people were assembled for to slay him, and when they saw him they fled. And when he came nigh the city he venomed the people with his breath, and therefore the people of the city gave to him every day two sheep for to feed him, because he should do no harm to the people, and when the sheep failed there was taken a man and a sheep. Then was an ordinance made in the town that there should be taken the children and young people of them of the town by lot, and every each one as it fell, were he gentle or poor, should be delivered when the lot fell on him or her. So it happed that many of them of the town were then delivered, insomuch that the lot fell upon the king's daughter, whereof the king was sorry, and said unto the people: For the love of the gods take gold and silver and all that I have, and let me have my daughter (10.02.2012. <http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/goldenLegend/index.html>).

Of course, the villagers would have none of that. After all, it had been the king himself who had established the dastardly rule and anyways one can easily imagine them far from supportive of his plea when they had lost so many of their own children to the dragon.



St George at the Al-Khidr church in Al-Salt, Jordan (photo: courtesy of Jordan Denary. 05.26.2014. <http://jordandenari.com/>).

So, the king gave in, although he asked for a reprieve of eight days, which he was graciously granted.

And when the eight days were passed they came to him and said: Thou seest that the city perisheth: Then did the king do array his daughter like as she should be wedded, and embraced her, kissed her and gave her his benediction, and after, led her to the place where the dragon was (10.02.2012.

<http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/goldenLegend/index.html>).

But behold! Luckily a great warrior was at hand:

When she was there Saint George passed by, and when he saw the lady he demanded the lady what she made there and she said: Go ye your way fair young man, that ye perish not also. Then said he: Tell to me what have ye and why weep ye, and doubt ye of nothing. When she saw that he would know, she said to him how she was delivered to the dragon. Then said Saint George: Fair daughter, doubt ye no thing hereof for I shall help thee in the name of Jesu Christ. She said: For God's sake, good knight, go your way, and abide not with me, for ye may not deliver me. Thus as they spake together the dragon appeared and came running to them, and Saint George was upon his horse, and drew out his sword and garnished him with the sign of the cross, and rode hardily against the dragon which came towards him, and smote him with his spear and hurt him sore and threw him to the ground. And after said to the maid: Deliver to me your girdle, and bind it about the neck of the dragon and be not afeard. When she had done so the dragon followed her as it had been a meek beast and debonair. Then she led him into the city, and the people fled by mountains and valleys, and said: Alas! alas! we shall be all dead. Then Saint George said to them: Ne doubt ye no thing, without more, believe ye in God, Jesu Christ, and do ye to be baptized and I shall slay the dragon. Then the king was baptized and all his people, and Saint George slew the dragon and smote off his head, and commanded that he should be thrown in the fields, and they took four carts with oxen that drew him out of the city (10.02.2012. <http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/goldenLegend/index.html>).

After witnessing such exceptional events, the good people of Silene converted to Christianity on the spot, naturally.

It is curious that, in this version of the story, the dragon is specifically doomed to “be thrown in the fields”. This behaviour may remind the reader of another dragon of the Classical Antiquity which is also used to some extent to fertilize the soil: in the

foundational story of Thebes, Cadmus, who is searching for his sister, Europe<sup>1</sup>, arrived one day to Delphi to consult with the oracle of Apollo. However, the god had plans for him other than to have him continue his search. He instructed Cadmus to follow a cow, and found a city wherever the animal would kneel.

The hero obviously followed the advice of the god, and decided to found a city which would be known as Thebes. But the tasks the gods appoint are never simple. When Cadmus went to fetch water to a neighbouring spring, he found that it was no other than the sacred spring of Ares, guarded by the dragon Ismenos. Ismenos would not allow Cadmus to go anywhere near the spring and Cadmus would not look for a source of water elsewhere, so there was nothing for them to do but fight. Cadmus emerged victorious, killing the serpent with a deadly cast of a stone. Then, the goddess Athena told him to sow the dragon's teeth<sup>2</sup>, and a crop of armed warriors emerged from the earth and started fighting each other. The five warriors that were left standing after the fight became the ancestors of the Thebans.

One may be inclined to observe in both these stories some rite of fertilization which uses the dragon as a symbol. As will be seen in other sections of this study, there are plenty of other examples that point to this very idea.

However, in spite of this suggestive reference, experts tend to liken this story first and foremost with the Andromeda myth, especially in the recurrent formulaic motif of the threatened woman (Andriano, 1999: xvi). In truth, the whole episode of St George and the dragon savours strongly of this popular Greek story: Andromeda, daughter of the Aethiopian monarchs Cepheus and Cassiopeia, had the misfortune of

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<sup>1</sup> Europe had been abducted by Zeus under the guise of a bull (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org/>).

<sup>2</sup> The motif of having dragon's teeth sowed into a field and an army of soldiers growing out of them is also found in the poem *Argonautica*, composed by Apollonius of Rhodes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C. (09.22.2013. <http://www.britannica.com>).

having a mother who was so foolish as to brag of her daughter's uncommon beauty, claiming that she could be compared to the very Nereids, the sea nymphs that were daughters of Poseidon. As everyone (except Cassiopeia, apparently) knows, such boasting can only bring misfortune. And so it did. Poseidon was enraged by the matron's careless words and retaliated by sending Ceto to destroy Cepheus' kingdom. Only the offering of Andromeda, wretched Andromeda, who had not breathed a word, would sate Ceto. Since there seemed to be no other way out of a very dire situation, the princess was chained to a rock by the sea and instructed to fortify herself for her sad fate. Luckily for her, in stepped Perseus, riding Pegasus. He arrived just in time (fresh from killing the Gorgon Medusa), slew the monster and rescued Andromeda. Afterwards he claimed, and was granted, her hand in marriage. After her death, Athena placed Andromeda among the constellations in the Northern sky, where we can see her, chained for all eternity (10.02.2012. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

This is the best known example in Antiquity that is usually branded about as the basis for St George and the dragon, and certainly it is very easy to spot the perceived parallels between both stories, yet it is far from original itself. Very similar combinations of motifs are found in other myths from Greece (Python and Leto<sup>1</sup>, Herakles and Hesione<sup>2</sup>), Egypt (Ra and Apep<sup>3</sup>, Isis and Seth<sup>4</sup>), Babylon (Marduk and

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<sup>1</sup> Leto, the daughter of the Titans Phoebe and Coeus. Her name came to be used for the moon Selene. Hera was jealous of Leto because Zeus, the husband of Hera, had fallen in love with her. From their union Leto bore the divine twins, Artemis and Apollo. Leto found this to be an arduous task, as Hera had refused Leto to give birth on either terra firma or on an island out at sea. To make things even more difficult, while Leto was still pregnant with the divine twins, the serpent Python was sent to molest her. As punishment, Apollo later killed Python and then took control of the oracle of Delphi (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>2</sup> Hesione was the daughter of Laomedon, king of Troy. To pacify Poseidon, Hesione was to be sacrificed to a sea monster that the god had sent to the lands surrounding Troy. The monster was killed by Heracles and the girl was spared (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>3</sup> Apep or Apophis is an Egyptian snake god, the personification of darkness, evil and chaos, who is in constant battle with Ra (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>4</sup> Seth is the ancient Egyptian god of chaos. The Greeks equated him with their Typhon. He chased Isis to devour her unborn son, Horus (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

Tiamat<sup>1</sup>), Persia (Ahura Mazda and Ahriman<sup>2</sup>), India (Indra and Vritra<sup>3</sup>), and it is even present in the oldest preserved written tale, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*<sup>4</sup>. This evidences that the general structure of the story of St George as found in the *Legenda Aurea* must have been inspired by a tale that was practically universal.

Going back to the *Legenda Aurea* after this brief detour, the reader will find that after this epic narrative of Saint George's fight against the dragon, the author moves on to the martyrdom. George, who is a Christian, confronts Diocletian and Maximinian and, as consequence, is submitted to a number of terrible tortures, none of which sways his faith, despite the fact that he is killed three times, and three times resurrected, before being ultimately beheaded. Needless to say, the main perpetrators did not escape divine justice.

The *Legenda Aurea* then deals with the location of the saint's relics in Ramys, between Jerusalem and Jaffa, as well as with George's miraculous help in the battle

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<sup>1</sup> Marduk means, literally, "bull calf of the sun". He was the son of Ea, leader of the gods, and a fertility god, but originally he was a god of thunderstorms. According to *Enuma Elish*, an ancient epic poem of creation, Marduk defeated Tiamat and Kingu, the dragons of chaos, and thereby gained supreme power. Acknowledged as the creator of the universe and of humankind, the god of light and life, and the ruler of destinies, he rose to such eminence that he claimed 50 titles. Eventually, he was called simply Bel, meaning "Lord" (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>2</sup> Ahura Mazda ("Lord Wisdom") was the supreme god, he who created the heavens and the Earth, and another son of Zurvan. Ahriman, or Angra Mainyu, is the god of darkness, the eternal destroyer of good, personification and creator of evil, bringer of death and disease. His symbol is the snake. Atar, Ahura Mazda's son, battled Azhi Dahaka, the great dragon of the sky, and bound it in chains on a high mountain. The dragon was, however, destined to escape and destroy a third of mankind at the final reckoning, before it was slain (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>3</sup> In Vedic times, Indra was the supreme ruler of the gods. Indra's most notable exploit was his battle with the asura Vritra. Vritra took the form of a mighty dragon, and had stolen all the water in the world for himself. Indra rode forth to meet the terrible Vritra. He smashed through Vritra's ninety-nine fortresses, and then came upon the dragon. The two clashed, and after a long battle Indra was able to destroy his powerful enemy. Vritra had been keeping the earth in a drought, but when Indra split open the demon, the waters again fell from the skies (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>4</sup> The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is one of the earliest surviving works of literature, which dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century BC. Gilgamesh was a Sumerian demigod and the king of Uruk (modern day Iraq), where he reigned for a time much longer than a human life span (126 years, according to tradition). In one of his many adventures with Enkidu, they fought Humbaba, a dragon who was the guardian of a cedar forest (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).



against the Saracens. The text states that the body of the saint is kept in a chapel, but that the head is missing<sup>1</sup>. It also explains that

(...) the body of Saint George lieth in the middle of the quire or choir of the said chapel, and in his tomb is an hole that a man may put in his hand. And when a Saracen, being mad, is brought thither, and if he put his head in the hole he shall anon be made perfectly whole, and have his wit again (10.02.2012. <http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/goldenLegend/index.html>).

This is certainly a kind gesture on Saint George's part, and also seems the least he could do after having been the main cause of their defeat at the hands of the crusaders (10.02.2012. <http://saints.sqpn.com/the-golden-legend-by-blessed-jacobus-de-voragine>).

All these changes added a patina of chivalry to the story which was very palatable to the place and times. Who could resist such a gallant tale of chivalrous deeds?

William Caxton's translation of the *Legenda Aurea* into English (1483) spread the story rapidly enough that it was soon well known all over the country. The motif of the encounter with the dragon became a favourite topic with both artists and laymen, who would portray the dramatic scene in their works (the artists) and re-enact it in processions and mock battles (the laymen). Many are the mummers' plays that present George as their hero, and many the hobby-horses that included the dragon passage, either directly or indirectly (10.02.2012. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hobby\\_horse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hobby_horse)), as will be seen in the section devoted to processional dragons in Chapter 2: "Make-believe Heroes".

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<sup>1</sup> There are several heads of Saint George, but the one which has the greatest claim to authenticity was found by Pope Zachary (741-752) in the Lateran Palace in Rome (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

Saint George became both a secular and clerical favourite by universal acclaim. Many were the churches erected and consecrated to him and many the guilds that adopted him as patron saint<sup>1</sup>. This phenomenon will also be explored in further detail in Chapter 2.

During the Reformation, the cult of St George was suppressed in England (as was that of all other saints), but it was too deeply embedded in the cultural life of the kingdom to ever completely disappear. The courteous George, with his shining armour and astride his white charger was too evocative, too powerful a symbol to be easily erased from the collective imagery. So much so, that many honours would be ascribed to his patronage, even long after Protestantism had been fully established<sup>2</sup>. George had found a home in England.

So ends this section about the life and times of St George. Much has been examined in it, especially regarding the adoption and spreading of the cult in England, but, all in all, the search for his origins has proved to be, at best, elusive. It is time to look into other similar examples in the British Isles, to attempt a more profound immersion into the tales and traditions preserved in the territory that is the object of this study.

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<sup>1</sup> Here is Gardner's (2007: 37) alphabetical list of St George patronage: Amersfoort, Aragon, agricultural workers, archers, armourers, Baden-Württemberg, Beirut, butchers, Canada, Cappadocia, Catalonia, cavalry, chivalry, Constantinople, the Crusaders, England, equestrians, Ethiopia, farmers, Ferrara, field workers, Freiburg, Genoa, Georgia, Germany, Gozo, Greece, Haldem, Heide, husbandmen, Istanbul, lepers, Limburg, Lithuania, Malta, Modica, Moscow, the Order of the Garter, Palestinian Christians, Portugal, Ptuj, saddle makers, the Scout movement, Slovenia, Senj, sheep, shepherds, soldiers, Teutonic Knights, and Venice.

<sup>2</sup> In the year 1728, Maximilian II Emanuel, the Elector of Bavaria, established the Royal Military Order of St George. In 1818, the Prince Regent (later George IV) instituted The Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (both of them military saints), to commemorate the British protectorate of the Ionian Islands and Malta (the fact that both these saints are dragon slayers is probably not serendipitous but a conscious choice). In more recent times, in 1940, King George VI established the George Cross. (09.22.2013. <http://www.royal.gov.uk/MonarchUK/Honours/OrderofStMichaelandStGeorge.aspx>)



Dragon boundary mark in London (photo: Milagros Torrado Cespón).

## **Chapter 2. A Bounty of Dragons: The British Isles**

In this section I will deal with stories similar to that of George, found in Britain and elsewhere, that I hope will help to bring the legend into perspective. The starting point will be George and his British and Irish saintly counterparts, but always keeping an eye on continental parallels and ancient legends, with the odd but necessary reference to distant, but similar, examples. A transversal path will also be taken at some point, to include an analysis of stories that include the dragon fight motif but where the hero is either a secular knight or layman, which are to be found in both folklore and literature. I am positive that a thorough exploration of all these cores and margins to the story of St George will help to shed some light on this study.

In these stories, there will be seen many native saints of the British Isles, but also some who found a home in these lands. Most of the first were historical figures from early Christianity, and belonged to the Celtic Church. Simpson (2001: 55) assumes that most of the dragon-slaying episodes were added much later and that they were “drawn from a common stock of hagiographical lore”. Still, I cannot leave them be, if only because the mere fact that such element was chosen to adorn their lives is, it itself, quite telling.

### **2. 1. Feats of Saints**

It is a well known fact that Britain is not the sole dragon producer in Europe. There is not a single country bereft of dragon legends, although much of the related folklore is nowadays sadly forgotten. Yet, I have made the British Isles my own particular hunting grounds and so I shall endeavour to give them the lion’s share of my attention, although

it may often be necessary to wander across the Channel, and even sail up and down the Atlantic, whenever some instance elsewhere is worth of notice or brings something new to the table.

Of the many European countries where dragon legends once developed, France stands out. The Provence, in particular, was once full of them, so much so that a large number of saints were enlisted to scourge the region. The list is daunting, to say the least: St Victor at Marsailles, St Andrew at Aix, St Voran at Cavaillon, St Armentaire at Ampus, St Donat at Sisteron, St Agricola at Avignon, St Romain at Rouen, St Pol, in Brittany, St Julien at Mans, St Bie, or Bienheureux, at Vendome, St Arnaud, on the banks of the Scarfe, St Clement at Metz, St Radegonde of Poitiers, on the Claiu, St Bertram at Comminge, St Martial, on the Garonne, St Marcel at Paris, St Cyr at Genoa, St Amel at Thiel, St Florent, near Saumur, St Veran at Aries... (Dempster, 1888: 159). France is truly a veritable treat for the dragon hunter.

But so is Britain, where an army of saints once joined the ranks of St George against the deadly foe. Here are some of his fellow dragon slayers, which will now be examined for parallels and differences with the George episode.

How come so many saints found themselves confronting serpents, dragons and the like? The reason for this must be sought in the Bible and in early Christianity, which identified the serpent with the forces of Hell. Serpents and dragons, which figured strongly in neighbouring cultures to the Hebraic one, either in Creation Myths or as pets to gods, became the perfect symbolism to express how wrong those cultures were in their choice of religion. The serpent of the neighbouring myth became the snake tempter of Genesis, the Leviathan and the dragon of the Apocalypse. Even the episode of the war of the gods, so prominent in all ancient civilizations, is present, if only partially, in the *Book of Revelation*, where Michael's fight against the dragon can be found. The

dragon, or Satan, reminds one of the Babylonian she-dragon Tiamat, and Michael's prototype could easily have been the storm-god Marduk (Schmidt, 1900: 27). The confrontation between Tiamat, goddess of chaos, and Marduk, was at the centre of the Babylonian religion, and it stood for its Epic of Creation. The Hebrews, in an attempt to distance themselves from their neighbours, started an obvious and ubiquitous demonization of the dragon and of everything Babylonian, even though, ironically, both cultures had many features in common<sup>1</sup>.

The confrontation between the angelic forces, led by Michael, and the satanic ones, which count on the dragon as a crucial ally, is introduced in the Revelations (12: 7-8): "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angel fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought his angels". Having been defeated in the cosmic fight, the dragon was vanished to the earth, where it will continue to bring terror to mankind.

Another example is found in *Genesis* (Luke 10: 19), where God tells the serpent of Eden that he "will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed", a prophecy which seems to come to fruition when, in the *Book of Revelations*, Satan is explicitly referred to as a "great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns" (Revelations, 12). The prophet Daniel also killed a dragon which was idolized in Babylon, putting an end to the reigning paganism. Jesus himself, once said to his disciples that he gave them "power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy".

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<sup>1</sup> One of them is, paradoxically, that they have a very similar myth of Creation: the Genesis opens with a description of a dark, turbulent and watery abyss named *tehom* (Gen. I: 2), which Yahweh brings under control by dividing this abyss into two parts. The upper one becomes the firmament, and the lower one becomes the oceans and the earth. Here comes now the paradox: *Tehom* is the Hebrew word for the Babylonian Tiamat (Whatham, 1910: 329), and the Babylonian Epic of Creation presents Tiamat, "the shoulderless", a female generative principle, who personifies the sea and the primeval chaos and who is represented as a dragon. Marduk, a storm-god, kills her and tears her in two parts. With a half, he creates the heavens, and with the other, the earth.

Who, having such power, would refrain from exercising it? Over the centuries, countless saints fearlessly confronted the vile idols of paganism, trampling and vanishing the small snakes and slaying the all-powerful serpents and dragons. No reptile could resist the immense power they had been endowed with. But was there anyone else like George in their midst?

San Secondo d'Asti or St Secundus of Asti (Piedmont, Italy), is represented, just as St George is, piercing a dragon with his lance (Colburn, 1826: 506). Both saints also led a parallel life, as San Secondo was a military officer of Rome, who was arrested on the grounds of being inadequately merciful towards the Christians. He suffered martyrdom and was beheaded in year 119, under the Emperor Hadrian, and his relics are kept in the cathedral of Asti. His day is March 29<sup>th</sup>, but his feast is celebrated on the first Tuesday of May (10.02.2012. <http://www.sansecondodasti.org/History.html>). He probably is the closest parallel to St George, but there are others who range close to the top, and among them a few that were born or bred in British grounds.

### **2. 1. 1. British Male Saints**

#### **Saint Leonard (England)**

Like George, St Leonard was venerated by the Crusaders, as the patron saint of safe homecoming. His title came from an episode in which he managed to persuade King Clovis of France to release some prisoners he held captive. Our Leonard was a French nobleman who lived in the court of King Clovis I (c. 466-511) and, since the episode mentioned above, he was granted the right to release those prisoners he might find worthy. He eventually became a hermit in a forest near Limoges, and was later offered a piece of land by the king, where he founded a monastery.

In England, however, there is a major contribution to the life of St Leonard that is not found anywhere else. In St Leonard's Forest near Horsham (Sussex), there was once a chapel dedicated to him<sup>1</sup>, and the saint himself is said to have lived there for some time. It must have been an eventful stay, or so the story suggests: In this forest, Leonard once came across a fearful dragon, and the fight between man and beast was terrible and scathing for both combatants. We are told that, after a long combat, Leonard prevailed, but at the cost of terrible wounds and a great loss of blood. In reward for his feat, wild lilies of the valley have ever since grown on the patches of ground where his blood was spilt<sup>2</sup> and no nightingale sings in the forest, as punishment for having distracted the saint with their song (Simpson, 2001: 54-5).

The story of St Leonard and the dragon appears to be exclusive to this place in England, for the saint is not viewed as a dragon slayer anywhere else. This suggests that there may have already been a similar pagan story in circulation that was Christianized with the inclusion of the saint. "The major formative period in the development of British dragon-lore as we now know it began in the later Middle Ages" (Simpson, 2001: 121). There is indeed in the area a village called Dragon's Green, which seems to have arisen because this state was owned by a family surnamed "Dragons", living at the village of Roffey in 1296 (Simpson, 2001: 55). A study on the origins of the surname in this specific case would greatly add to the clarification of this story.

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<sup>1</sup> The place has been known as St Leonard's Forest since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, at the very least (Simpson 2001: 54, 09.22.2013, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> This reverses the account of the fight between George and the dragon at Dragon Hill (Uffington, Oxfordshire), where the grass does not grow in the patch of land where the *dragon's* blood was spilt (Simpson, 2001: 54).



Quite interestingly, and adding to the general mystery, in 1614, it was suggested in a serious pamphlet that the dragon might still be in existence, or so some eyewitnesses declared:

This serpent (or dragon, as some call it) is reputed to be nine feete, or rather more, in length, and shaped almost in the form of an axletree of a cart: a quantitie of thickness in the middest, and somewhat smaller at both endes. The former part, which he shootes forth as a necke, is supposed to be an elle long; with a white ring, as it were, of scales about it. The scales along his backe seem to be blackish, and so much is discovered under his bellie, appeareth to be red (...) it is also discovered to have large feete, but the eye may be there deceived (...) There are likewise upon either side of him discovered two great bunches so big as a large foot-ball, and (so some thinke) will in time grow to wings (...) He will cast his venom about four rodde from him (...) His food is thought to be, for the most part, in a conie-warren, which he much frequents (Simpson, 2001: 125).

Was this the report of a true sighting of some exotic animal or only a hoax? It is difficult to tell, but the story certainly benefitted from its already popular location and related lore. It is somewhat amusing that it is nowadays considered as part of the folklore of Sussex, and yet at the time of its publishing it was received with mockery, when not open contempt (Simpson, 2001: 125).

### **Saint Samson of Dol (England)**

Samson of Dol somewhat reverses Leonard's career, being by virtue of his birth an insular saint, but who moved to the continent in his adulthood. According to tradition, he was born in Wales, but the centre of Samson's cult is in Brittany (France)<sup>1</sup> The *Vita Samsonis*, a text written in Brittany during the 8<sup>th</sup> century gives us an early account of

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<sup>1</sup> There are many parishes associated with Saint Sampson in Brittany, Normandy and the Channel Islands, but he is also present in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (Koch, 2006: 1558).

his life and exploits<sup>1</sup>. Among these, one of the most popular ones tells of how, while in Cornwall, he led a dragon to its death, sending it over a sea cliff.

His hagiography relates how his conceiving was miraculous. His parents, unable to produce a child, “made an offering of a silver rod the size of Samson’s mother Anna, and she becomes pregnant with Samson”<sup>2</sup> (Koch, 2006: 1558). It is said that, as a young boy, Samson became a disciple of St Illtud, abbot of Llanilltud Fawr in Glamorgan (Wales). This would have him live during the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Some identify him with bishop Samson, who lived during the 6<sup>th</sup> century, or with Samson bishop of York, but little is known of either and there is therefore scant evidence, aside from their name, to support the claims they may have to dragon-slaying status. He is, nevertheless, considered as the earliest Celtic saint of whom there are printed records (Koch, 2006: 426).

### **Saint Armel (Wales)**

With a biography similar to that of Samson, Saint Armel<sup>3</sup> too was born in Wales but is revered mainly in France, where he founded a monastery. It is speculated that, at about the time Samson had been residing in Glamorgan, studying under St Illtud, Armel was born to this land. He, too, was educated in Welsh monasteries but, as he reached manhood, he removed to Brittany in France. There, he performed several miracles and settled into quiet monastic life in his monastery.

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<sup>1</sup> A very popular episode of his life is his encounter with a *theomacha*, a supernatural woman, who was one of nine sisters who lived in a wood. This “sisterhood of nine” is evocative of the nine sorceresses that inhabit the island of Avalon or the nine virgin priestesses that Pomponius Mela describes as living in the island of Sena (Koch, 2006: 146).

<sup>2</sup> This was a very common practice. In the Spanish region of Galicia, still nowadays, offerings of candles are made to ask for the healing of a relative, and the length of the candle must be the same as the height of the person who suffers the disease.

<sup>3</sup> Saint Armel, Arthfael in Welsh. Died c. 570. He founded the abbey of Plouarzel in France (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

His contemplative activity was abruptly interrupted when a fiery dragon appeared in the forest of Teil, near the Roche-aux-Fées<sup>1</sup>. Undaunted by the prospect, thence Armel went, armed with his holiness and with some skill in battle gained during his years as a soldier to the French king<sup>2</sup>. Little could the dragon imagine that he was about to meet an extraordinary rival. Armel proved how put out he had been about the interruption of his meditations by strangling the beast with his own vestments and drowning it in the river Seiche without so much as a by your leave<sup>3</sup>. I can not help but imagine bold Armel, after the deed was done, shaking the dirt off his clothes and strutting back to the monastery to resume his praying.

### **Saint Germanus and Saint Serf (Scotland)**

During the 5<sup>th</sup> century, St Germanus used a similar technique as Armel, although his methods are not as minutely explained. We do know that once, after having been informed of the existence of a perilous dragon that caused great terror, Germanus bravely marched into the beast's cave and, putting his own handkerchief around its neck, he dragged the monster to a deep pit where he cast it for good (10.02.2012. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/etc/ddl/ddl16.htm>).

Without engaging in a fruitless discussion on the comparative sizes of dragon and handkerchief, the ease with which these men handled dragons must have been astonishing to their contemporaries and readers. But of course, they were not regular men, but men of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Which means “the rock of the fairies”. This is very suggestive, especially in light of the accounts telling that it was there that the local druids performed their rites (Colburn, 1926: 506).

<sup>2</sup> Some versions have it that he aided King Iuthahel of Brittany in battle (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>3</sup> This victory naturally was interpreted as the triumph of the Christian Church over paganism.

St Serf, whose days are recorded in the *Vita Sancti Servani (Life of St Serf)*<sup>1</sup> had a way with dragons too, or so one gathers of the story of how he killed one such creature using his pastoral staff. This happened at Dunning, where a solemn medieval church still stands to give proof of the place where this happened, and of the regard of the community for St Serf's intervention.

Serf is believed to be of noble birth, as most other saints here mentioned. Eastern born, he lived during the 6<sup>th</sup> century and after many travels he established himself in Scotland, where he made the acquaintance of Adomnán and settled at Culross and where he would become the protector of St Mungo.

### **Saint Gilbert of Dornoch (Scotland)**

During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, an age ripe for dragon stories, another saint, Gilbert of Dornoch<sup>2</sup>, had his chance to become a slayer.

In Sutherland, a dragon had been born from a fire which had lasted seven years. Born from it, the creature lived in a state of permanent incandescence, and its flaming breath burned everything within reach.

This is how Dempster (1988: 156-7) records the story:

There lived once upon a time, in Sutherland, a great dragon, very fierce and strong. It was this dragon who burnt all the fir-woods in Ross, Sutherland, and the Reay, of which the remains, charred, black, and half decayed, may now be found in every moss. Magnificent forests they must have been, but the dragon set fire to them with his fiery breath, as he rolled over the whole land. Men fled from before his face, and women fainted when his shadow crossed the sky-line. He made the whole land a desert. And it came to pass, that this evil spirit, whom the people called "the Beast," and Dhu guisch (of the black firs), came nigh to Dornoch, as near as to Lochfinn, from whence he could see the town, and the spire of St. Gilbert-his church. "Pity of you, Dornoch!" roared

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<sup>1</sup> The text was found in a manuscript probably written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> Also known as Gilbert de Moravia or Gilbert of Caithness. Died 1245. He was a member of the family of De Moravia, possessed of great states in Sutherland (09.22.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).

the dragon. “Pity of you, Dornoch!” said St. Gilbert; and taking with him five long and sharp arrows, and a little lad to carry them, he went out to meet the “Beast.” When he came over against it he said, “Pity of you!” and drew his bow. The first arrow shot the Beast through the heart. He was buried by the townspeople. Men are alive now who reckoned distance by so or so far from “the stone of the Beast,” on the moor between Skibo and Dornoch. The moor is now planted, and a wood called Caermore waves over the ashes of the fir-destroying dragon (From Alexander the Coppersmith).

Other versions of the story include a passage in which St Gilbert digs a hole and hides himself in it so that he sees the dragon before the dragon has the chance of perceiving him. This trick reminds one of the Scandinavian *Völsunga Saga*<sup>1</sup>, where Sigurd, the hero, hid in a pit and stabbed at the dragon Fafnir when he crawled over it. In the case of St Gilbert, his decision came from a prophecy about the dragon that said that “only a man who should see it before it saw him had power to slay it” (Dempster, 1888: 157).

This story finds its place in history at a relatively late time, compared to most other saintly dragon slaying that has been seen (or will be seen) in this section and which took place no further than the 6<sup>th</sup> century. One may wonder if this fact alone accounts for the striking differences that may be observed in it. For one, the dragon has the power of speech, in a way highly reminiscent of the Scandinavian dragons, which also often converse with their opponents. It is also endowed with a command of fire which had so far been but rarely mentioned. It is curious too that it is stated that the creature was born from a seven-year long fire, and not only because of the symbolism attached to this specific number<sup>2</sup> but because there is a surprising parallel in Spain: in

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<sup>1</sup> The *Völsunga Saga* was written in Iceland in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, although the stories it compiles must be much older, the earliest known rendition being the Rasmund carving, which was made at the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (09.22.2013. <http://www.britannica.com>).

<sup>2</sup> The number seven is present both in natural (the colours of the rainbow) and artificial divisions (the days of the week, the diatonic scale), and it appears in many traditions and tales in Europe. In the Hebraic culture there are plenty of examples that use this numerology, but also in ancient Egypt and Greece. The mysticism

Carnota (A Coruña, Galicia), a legend tells how a dangerous dragon once inhabited Monte Pindo<sup>1</sup>. The fiery monster breathed fire and, on one occasion, he set fire to the mountain. Monte Pindo was aflame for seven years and the fire was so terrible that even the dragon who had caused it perished (Cores Trasmonte, 1999: 144-7)

Gilbert, apart from a dragon slayer, is also regarded as a builder saint. He is said to have miraculously built the cathedral of Dornoch, with the help of an enchanted hammer<sup>2</sup>.

And yet, not all saints were as warlike in their approach to dragons as George and Leonard and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the saints above. Although it is generally acknowledged that saintly ladies are gentler in their dealing with dragons, men are not foreign to a little tenderness. Let us consider these other examples.

### **Saint Petroc<sup>3</sup> (England)**

Excerpts about the life of this sixth-century saint are found in several medieval manuscripts, many of them, such as the *Vita metrica* and *Miracula*, from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. According to his hagiography, he was the son and heir of a Welsh king, but, on his father's demise, he declined the throne and became a monk instead.

It is said that he had not one, but two encounters with dragons. Here is what Simpson (2001: 56) relates about the first one, located in Cornwall:

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of some numbers (famously, number seven and number three) may be derived from the observation of nature (for instance, the number of large stellar objects that are visible to the naked eye is seven), but I have found no incontestable explanation for the eminence of number seven. Yet, it is overwhelmingly present in Western tradition.

<sup>1</sup> Monte Pindo is one of several holy sites in Galicia, where the richness of folklore and archaeological remains has every expert in awe.

<sup>2</sup> Dempster, hearing in Sutherland that Gilbert is also called *the Gobhainn Saor*, an epithet that means *the noble smith*, connects the story with the Scandinavian tale of Thor (Dempster, 1888: 158).

<sup>3</sup> St Petroc of Wales (died 564). His feast is on June 4<sup>th</sup>. After becoming a monk, he travelled from Wales to Ireland with a group of noble followers to study Theology. On his return to Wales, he settled in Cornwall. He and his group established themselves for some time at a monastery near Padstow, but Petroc is said to have been constantly on the move, travelling to many of the holy places of Christendom (09.22.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).

In those days Tandurus reigned [in Western Britain], a man of fierce and cruel ways, who in his savage tyranny had gathered worms and all sorts of noxious serpents into a pit of water, in order to punish and torture thieves there. After he died, his son, who succeeded him, forbade the use of such tortures; thereupon the famished snakes rose to the surface in a tightly packed mass and gnashed one another with their vicious fangs, so that out of all their great number there remained but one alive – a horrible one with a huge body, which tore cattle and men to pieces in its gaping jaws and venomous mouth. The man of God came to this place, and after kneeling to pray in front of everyone he restored to life a man who had died, and ordered the monster to depart to a wilderness beyond the seas, and never to harm anyone again.

Other versions of this story have Petroc place a girdle around the monster's neck (09.22.2013. <http://www.ancientworlds.net>), a common practice among pacific saints (and, more specifically, saintly maidens such as St Martha, whose contribution will be tackled later) when they needed to hold some dragon in check. Some similar instances have already been seen, such as St Germanus' intervention. St Sylvester too used a similar method when in Rome. There was then a dragon that lived in a pit in the city, with a breath so foul that it killed hundreds of people daily. The emperor Constantine sent St Sylvester<sup>1</sup> to solve the situation and the saint, after praying and receiving the necessary instructions of St Peter, descended to the pit, where after speaking to the dragon the animal received him meekly. Then, he bound the mouth of the beast with a thread, effectively sealing it afterwards with the sign of the cross. Thus, he saved the citizens from the venomous stench and they, grateful, were happy to convert to the new faith. Interestingly, Sylvester was coetaneous of George of Laodicea, one of the candidates to St George, although they might not have met, as Sylvester did not attend the Council of Nicaea. Nevertheless, it is curious how both men of God, on opposite sides during the Council, feature prominently in dragon stories.

Speaking of which, here is the second dragon Petroc encountered:

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Sylvester I (Papacy 314-335).

[On another occasion], a certain large dragon which used to come wandering round [Petroc's] cell had a piece of wood lodged in his right eye, so, having voided out all its harmful venom, it hurried to the place where the saint was praying and there it lay for three days with its head bowed, waiting for the saint's favour. By order of the blessed Petroc, the dragon was then drenched with a liquid which was sprinkled over it, mixed with dust from the paving stones; the strength of this medicine at once drew the piece of wood out of its eye, and it went back healed to its solitary lair (Simpson, 2001: 56).

As one can see in these two instances, St Petroc had a gentle way with dragons<sup>1</sup>.

He had a way with the weather, too. In one occasion, having been denied the basic courtesy of a drink of water by an obnoxious hermit at Padstow, he struck the ground three times with his staff and, all of a sudden, a spring appeared there (09.22.2013. <http://www.turnbacktogo.com>). He could also accurately predict the weather, and even control it to some extent (Rees, 1936: 39). In this, he resembles St Julien of Le Mans (France), who lived during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and who was reported to both have slain a dragon and relieved a community which was suffering from a shortage of water. Julien thrust his staff into the ground and water gushed out as he prayed. The dragon he vanquished had his den near a temple of Jupiter, and so Julien's victory has been interpreted as the fall of pagan polytheism (Colburn, 1826: 506).

### **Saint Columba (Scotland)**

The earliest recording of St Columba's<sup>2</sup> encounter with a water monster is Saint Adomnán's seventh-century *Vita Columbae (Life of St Columba)*, where we may read this:

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<sup>1</sup> His charity extended to other animals, too. He is said to have once saved a stag being hunted by hiding it beneath his cloak, and he is also credited with taming a wolf, which is often represented by his side (09.22.2013. <http://www.turnbacktogo.com>).

<sup>2</sup> Columba (Colum Cille or Colmcille in Irish). 7 December 521 – 9 June 597. Born in Ireland, he is credited for having spread Christianity in Scotland, where he founded the abbey of Iona. He is remembered as one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland (*Dhá Aspal Déag na héireann*), the twelve sixth-century Irish saints who studied under St Finian. Practically all our knowledge about him derives from the *Vita Columbae* by



At another time (...) [Columba] found it necessary to cross the River Ness. When he comes to the bank, he sees some of the local people burying an unfortunate fellow whom – so those burying him claimed – some aquatic monster had shortly before snatched while he was swimming. The holy man orders one of his companions to swim out and bring over a cable moored on the other side. Hearing and obeying the command, Lugne Mocunim without delay takes off his clothes except his loincloth, and casts himself into the water. But the monster, perceiving the surface of the water disturbed by the swimmer, suddenly comes up and moves towards him as he was crossing the middle of the stream, and rushed up with a great roar and open mouth. The holy man seeing it (...) commanded the ferocious monster, saying “Go thou no further nor touch the man. Go back at once.” Then on hearing this word of the saint the monster was terrified and fled away again more quickly than if it had been dragged on ropes, though it had approached Lugne as he swam so closely that between man and monster there was no more than the length of one punt pole (Simpson, 2001: 49).

Not surprisingly, this is often considered as the earliest sighting of the Loch Ness monster<sup>1</sup>. Two things are for certain: it was a close call for Lugne Mocunim (who surely would think twice before volunteering another time) and the creature went away undisturbed. This story comes to show that the slaying of the monster was not always required. Another such example may be found in the story of St Carantoc.

### **Saint Carantoc (England)**

A native saint of great fame, Carantoc's<sup>2</sup> pursuit of a quiet life dedicated to God was cut short when a fierce serpent living on a marsh on Ker Moor (Somerset) started a career of terror in the neighbourhood.

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Adomnán, which was written almost a century after Columba's death. Several Latin hymns have been attributed to the saint, for which he is revered as a patron of the poets (Koch, 2006: 468).

<sup>1</sup> Here we must remember that, although it surpasses in fame any other lake creature, the Loch Ness monster is far from an oddity, as there are countless anecdotes and talk of strange creatures lurking in lakes, not least in Ireland, where Lady Gregory reported the sighting of a serpent like animal that was once seen in Lough Graney. As she aptly put it, “There are queer things in lakes” (Simpson 2001: 48-9).

<sup>2</sup> Carantoc, Carannog in Welsh, Cairnech in Irish and Karanteg in Breton. He lived during the 6<sup>th</sup> century. A representative of the early Celtic Church, he is said to have preached in Ireland and Brittany as well as in Wales and many are the stories circulating regarding his life and miracles (09.22.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>, <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

Of this, at the time, Carantoc was happily oblivious, for he was busy setting afloat a miraculous stone altar on the Severn Estuary, so that it might guide him to the place where God wished him to settle in<sup>1</sup>. The remarkable altar had been sent from heaven and it was possessed of such properties as to allow it to float on water with such ease that it actually floated away with alacrity as soon as it was laid on the water, leaving a bewildered Carantoc to follow in hot pursuit. Unfortunately, the saint could not keep pace and he soon lost track of the altar. As he was looking for it, he arrived in Somerset, where he met King Arthur. On asking the king if he had heard whereabouts his missing altar might have been washed ashore, Arthur decided that it would be a good idea to ask the holy man to intervene with a dragon situation he had at the time on Ken Moor, for the deadly monster kept embarrassing his knights. The story, in a version from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, goes as follows:

Then the man of God went and prayed to the Lord; and the serpent came to him straight away with a great roar, like a calf running to its mother, and bowed its head before the servant of God like a slave obedient to his master, humble and gentle-eyed. And he put his stole round its neck, and led it away like a lamb. Its neck was like a bull's neck, and the stole would hardly go round it. In this way they went to the stronghold, and greeted King Catho<sup>2</sup>, who received them kindly. The man of God led the serpent into the middle of the court, and some people tried to kill it, but the saint would not allow it to be killed... And the saint led it out of the gate of the stronghold and released it, ordering it to depart and never to dare harm anyone again (Simpson, 2001: 55).

One can almost picture Arthur and his knights, jaws dropping simultaneously at the sight of such an utterly unexpected sequence of events.

It is said that, in payment for his efforts, Carantoc received not only his altar, which as a matter of fact had been found, but also a patch of land where to found a

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<sup>1</sup> A procedure which was common enough, we can see this same pattern of following an animal or animated object to a given territory in both Christian and pre-Christian stories.

<sup>2</sup> Both Arthur and Catho reigned over that region (Simpson, 2001: 55).

church at his leisure. This building, beside a river mouth at Carhampton, still exists today, but it is no longer dedicated to St Carantoc (Palmer, 1976: 37). Nevertheless, in Somerset his efforts have not been forgotten and all the main settings are still identified: the dragon's lair (Ker Moor), the stronghold (Dunster Castle) and St. Carantoc's church (Carhampton) (Simpson, 2001: 55).

There are many elements in this story that remind us of a similar encounter in Galicia (Spain), where the disciples of Saint James arrived, bearing the saint's body, on board a miraculous boat. They intended to find in this remote territory an adequate burial place for their master, but Lupa, a pagan queen, put them to several tests before allowing them to continue on their quest. One of their tasks involved going to Pico Sacro, a curiously coned mountain which was the dwelling place of a terrible dragon, something the queen was well aware of. As soon as the good men set foot on the mountain, the dragon came roaring, ready to devour them. Little could he know how reckless that behaviour would prove, for, on making the sign of the cross and with a few sprinkles of holy water, the dragon literally burst open (St Margaret used a similar dragon-bursting method, as will be seen in the next section). In his extreme reaction to the mere sight of the cross, the Spanish dragon must be related to the Grand'Goule ("Great Ghoul"), the legendary dragon in Poitiers (France), which St Radegonde faced armed only with her cross and some holy water. Grand'Goule could not resist such deadly holy weapons and died in excruciating pain. The monster daily quitted its cavern, "situated on the banks of the river Clain, to go and devour the virgins of the Lord, the nuns of the convent of St Croix" (Colburn, 1828: 507).

Eventually, Queen Lupa gave up. Then, the disciples of Saint James consigned their master's body to an oxen cart and allowed the animals to roam freely so that God's

providence would show them where to bury him, not unlike Carantoc with his portable altar, although Carantoc's methods of subduing the dragon were far more subtle.

In their pacifist approach, early British saints such as Carantoc and Petroc remind us of some female saints. These will find their place in the coming section.

## **2. 1. 2. Female Saints**

### **Saint Margaret, Saint Martha and Other Worthy Ladies**

Like George, Margaret was not originally a native of the British Isles, but she would become one by sheer force of folklore. The *Legenda Aurea* explains that she was the daughter of Theodosius, patriarch of the city of Antioch and a pagan, but that she had turned to Christianity at a young age, a decision which cost her her father's protection.

At fifteen years of age, she refused to marry Olybrius, a rich provost who was enchanted by her beauty, and he, enraged, commanded that she were put to prison and tortured until she was persuaded to abandon her faith and marry him. While she was in her cell, she had a visit from the devil under several forms, the first of them being that of a dragon.

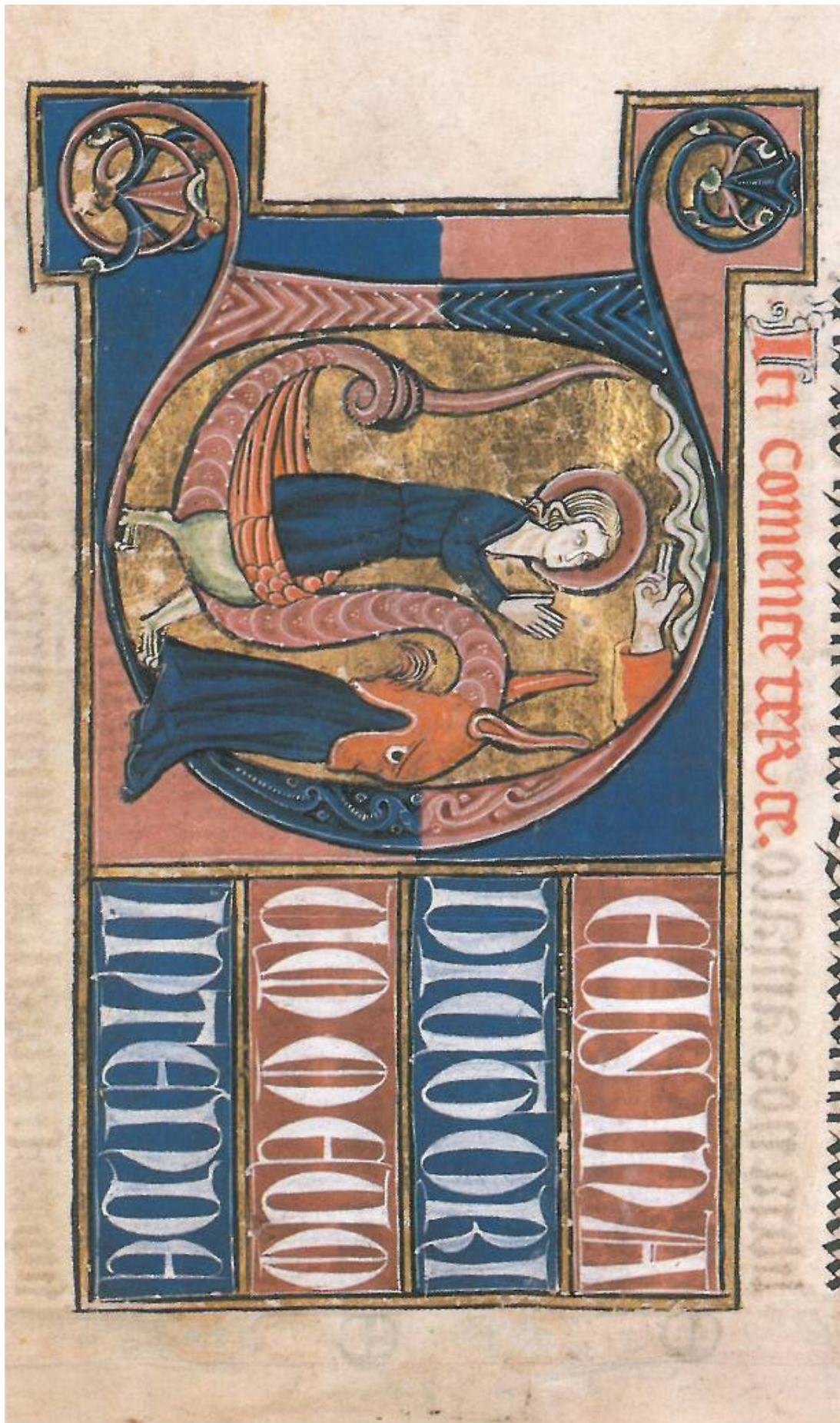
The *Legenda Aurea* tells it thusly:

She prayed our Lord that the fiend that had fought with her, he would visibly show him unto her. And then appeared a horrible dragon and assailed her, and would have devoured her, but she made the sign of the cross, and anon he vanished away. And in another place it is said that he swallowed her into his belly, she making the sign of the cross. And the belly brake asunder, and so she issued out all whole and sound<sup>1</sup> (09.22.2013).

<http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/goldenLegend/index.html>).

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<sup>1</sup> Due to this miraculous exit from the dragon's belly, St Margaret became the patron saint of expectant mothers and safe deliveries: "her experience during torture of being swallowed and spat out by a dragon gave her unrivalled powers of empathy with the processes of birth and women in labour listened to readings from her *Life*" (Leyser, 1995: 128).



St. Margaret getting in and out of the dragon. ca. 1270. Additional MS 48985, f.124v. (Bovey: 2002, 36).

As the reader will have imagined, not only did she resist the other advances of both the provost and the devil, but her calm public resistance to the many torments she was subjected to caused many of the repulsed onlookers to turn to Christianity themselves (for which they were beheaded afterwards). She too was beheaded eventually, when the efforts of her torturers proved fruitless. It was A.D. 304.

The story of Saint Margaret has many points in common with that of George. For one, Pope Gelasius was quick to declare it irrelevant. Also, the arrival of the crusaders to Antioch marked the beginning of a fervent devotion on the part of the English that grew until she was elevated to patroness of the country. As she had lived during the 4<sup>th</sup> century in Antioch, it was only natural that many would link her story to that of St George, who was also a fourth-century saint and one who had been an inestimable help during the Battle of Antioch in 1099. By virtue of all these facts, more often than not, she was identified with the lady in distress George had freed from the dragon. She even made her way into the processions that represented the story. The earliest notice of this is a 1532 text about a Norwich procession which describes her in the role of the maiden, riding a horse next to George and the Snapdragon. Similar processions took place in Wymondham (Norfolk), Wigtoft (Lincolnshire), Heybridge (Essex), Walberswick (Suffolk), and at Leicester (Simpson, 2001: 106-7).

Apart from Margaret, other saintly women can boast a dragon confrontation in their hagiographies, or, rather, a dragon encounter, for in the case of females, the methods adopted to deal with the monster are more spiritual than physical, as pertains the serene nature of saintly maidens, although this was not always the rule. St Keyne<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Also Cine, Keane, Kayane, Keyna, Kenau, Cenedion or Ceinwen. She lived during the late 5<sup>th</sup> century and is reported to be one of the many children of Brychan, king of Breconshire. She is linked with the River

in Cornwall, is their best native British representative (Dempster, 1888: 159). Some accounts have it that she received a piece of land in what nowadays is Keynsham (Somerset), but the place was infested with serpents. Undaunted, she turned them into stone (09.22.2013. <http://www.angelfire.com>).

The honour that maybe ought to have been St Keyne's if only on the grounds of her birth, often fell on Margaret instead, who was much more popular. Nevertheless, both would lose their title to St Martha, especially in France, where she figures extensively in all dragon accounts.

One of the earliest versions of the story of how Martha tamed the dragon is attributed to Rabanus Maurus Magnentius<sup>1</sup>, who allegedly compiled it from earlier records. It tells of how a number of followers of Jesus, among which Mary and her sister Martha<sup>2</sup> were found, sailed from Palestine to Marseille, in France, where they parted with holy instructions to spread the word of God (Gutch, 1952: 193). According to the *Legenda Aurea*, Martha was a fair maiden, of courteous speech and graceful manners, and so she found little difficulty in converting the pagan Gauls to her faith.

On arriving to a certain place between Arles and Avignon, she was told that a large dragon that lived in the river of Rhone was causing great distress in the vicinity. The dragon was "half beast and half fish, greater than an ox, larger than a horse, having teeth sharp as a sword, and horned on either side, head like a lion, tail like a serpent, and defended him with two wings on either side". Such monster, offspring to the Leviathan

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Kenwyn (Truro, Cornwall) and several wells. There are several churches dedicated to her, especially in South Wales, Cornwall and Somerset (09.22.2013. <http://www.catholic.org>).

<sup>1</sup> Rabanus Maurus Magnentius, also known as Hrabanus (c. 780-856). A pupil of Alcuinus, he became Archbishop of Mainz (Germany). He was a respected theologian, and the author of the *De Rerum Naturis*, among other treatises (09.22.2013. <http://www.britannica.com>).

<sup>2</sup> These Martha and Mary are sisters to Lazarus, he who was resurrected by Jesus.

and to a *bonnacon* from Galatie (in Turkey)<sup>1</sup>, was nigh to invincible, and it caused great damage by drowning every ship that passed by his hiding place. The locals, in despair, turned to Martha for help.

Martha came upon the dragon as it was devouring a man in the forest. Far from being daunted by the prospect, she cast holy water on the beast while holding her cross high. The dragon was subdued at once. Tame as a sheep, it approached the maiden, who bound it with her girdle. She then took it to the city, where the dragon was quickly put to death by its inhabitants<sup>2</sup>.

In this practical use of her girdle, Martha seems to be of one accord with a number of other saints. St Bernard<sup>3</sup>, for example, once came upon a dragon and a giant at a mountain of the Alps. Bernard made the sign of the cross, a gesture which gave the two monsters pause. Then, he put his own cloak around the dragon's neck. At once, the cloak turned into chains and thus the dragon was held prisoner, a chance that the nine pilgrims that accompanied Bernard took to kill it. The relics of the silken ends of the chains are kept in the abbey of St Maurice-en-Valais (Valais, Switzerland) (09.22.2013. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/etc/ddl/ddl16.htm>).

St Pol also made use of his stole in one such situation, when he arrived to the island of Batz (Brittany, France) and found that a dragon had made it his lodgings. He commanded the dragon to exit his cave, wrapped his stole around the animal's neck and led it to the cliffs, where he ordered it to commit suicide. A true example of docility. The place has since been called *Trou du Serpent* ("the Serpent's Hole"), and locals say

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<sup>1</sup> Although some translations mean this monster to be some mysterious "bonacho" from "Galicia", the original Latin text says literally this: "Venerat autem per mare de Galatia Asye, generatus a leviathan, qui est serpens aquosus et ferocissimus, et a bonacho animali, quod Galatie regio gignit". Therefore, it is not to be confused with any of the many legendary creatures found in the mythology of Galicia (Spain).

<sup>2</sup> There is at Aix a fossilized head of an extinct Saurian reptile, which for many centuries was considered the true head of the dragon tamed by St Martha (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>3</sup> St Bernard of Menthon (993-1008).



that there is a mark left by the dragon's teeth on a stone and that, if one listens carefully, it is easy to hear the sea making strange noises as it crashes on the rocks, as if the dragon were still roaring in the hole (09.22.2013. <http://batz-decouverte.pagesperso-orange.fr/StPol.htm>).

In Genoa (Italy), San Siro<sup>1</sup> (St Cyr or St Cyrus) defeated a dragon that once used to live in an old well. His breath destroyed flocks and people alike. The saint “conjured the monster and forced him to quit the well and then throw himself into the sea” (Colburn, 1826: 506).

Yet another similar tactic was employed by St Romain, the archbishop of Rouen, in France. It is said that the Gargouille, a serpent dragon, used to terrorize boats in the Seine River. It also caused the odd flood from time to time. Due to these objectionable pursuits, the villagers were none too happy with the creature. St Romain then came into the picture. He lured the dragon to shore with a fake victim and, when the beast arrived, he subdued it making the sign of the cross. After the successful taming, Romain led the dragon into town, where it was killed<sup>2</sup>.

In Paris, A.D. 136, St Marcel had far more mercy. A dragon had appeared “near the tomb of a woman of quality who had led a disorderly life” (Colburn, 1826: 506). Marcel intervened to free the city from the dreadful beast in a fashion similar to that of Romain: he knocked the monster on the head three times with his cross and, this done, he wrapped his cloak around its neck and led it beyond the gates of Paris, where he freed it on the promise of never making itself a nuisance again. The dragon, naturally, complied (09.22.2013. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/etc/ddl/ddl16.htm>). This method

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Syrus of Genoa. Died A.D. 381. He was a priest and later bishop of Genoa. He is reputed to have performed several miracles during the course of his life (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> It has often been pointed out that this may be the basis for the carving of gargoyles, but there is no universally accepted conclusion regarding this hypothesis.

reminds one all too well of St Germanus in Scotland, who also led a monster forth with his handkerchief.

But let us return to Martha.

After helping kill the dragon, she and Mary took their abode in the city, which adopted the name of Tarasconus, in remembrance of the dragon, and she ended her days there, in a basilica she founded in honour of the Holy Virgin (Gutch, 1952: 195).

Martha performed many other miracles<sup>1</sup> in the course of her life, but it is her taming of the Tarasque that gets the most attention in art and folklore. It is somewhat curious that her story parallels that of George in this aspect, for, until the Middle Ages, the main episodes in which she featured were the resurrection of Lazarus and her disgruntled protests (and Jesus' answer) one day that she had to do the housework all by herself while her sister Mary was whiling away her time listening to Jesus. Her early role was that of hostess to Jesus, and those who first put the stress on (or indeed made any reference whatsoever to) the dragon taming in France were the medieval authors, thus effectively displacing her original role as protector of the household, both in texts and iconography. Whatever did happen in the Middle Ages that stern martyrs and gentle saintly maidens suddenly became involved with dragons? Simpson (2001: 120-1) claims that the late Middle Ages (especially the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) were the main formative period in the development of British dragon-lore and that most of the legends that emerged during this time must have derived from a common source. Interestingly, across the Irish Sea things were not so very different as one would expect from a place where snakes and serpents are nowhere to be found.

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<sup>1</sup> Her restoration to life of a drowned youth features prominently among her miracles.

### **2. 1. 3. Irish Saints**

#### **The Irish Case: St. Patrick and Beyond**

Patrick is to Ireland as George is to England: a patron saint<sup>1</sup> and a foe of the serpent. Certainly, he was not the first missionary<sup>2</sup> to be sent to Ireland to convert the locals to the new faith, but his impact on the Irish religion and culture was the greatest of them all, and his presence ever since, indelible. His feast is on March 17<sup>th</sup>, the acknowledged date of his death, which came at some indeterminate moment between A.D. 460 and 490.

If one follows his own text *Confessio* (*Declaration*, in its English version), Patrick was born at *Bannavem Taburniae*, an unknown location in Roman Britain. At sixteen, he was captured in the course of a raid and taken to Ireland as a slave, where he worked as a shepherd for six years, at the end of which he turned to Christianity and returned to Britain (some versions say that to Gaul) to dedicate his life to God. Tradition has it that Patrick first arrived back as missionary in Ireland around the years 431 or 432, by that time already a bishop.

His missionary years in Ireland were not exempt of hardships, and he suffered of cold, hunger, and violence, but, in spite of it all, he managed to establish several churches, and he would remain in the island to the end of his days. His main area of influence seems to have been the north.

There is no mention either in texts written by Patrick or his disciples referring to the miracle of the snake banishing, but the episode certainly stuck with the local population and soon the main representations of the saint were either Patrick, in

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick shares the patronage of Ireland with St Columba and St Brigid (09.22.2013. <http://www.britannica.com>).

<sup>2</sup> That honour goes to Palladius (09.22.2013. <http://www.britannica.com>).

Episcopal costume, holding the shamrock, or Patrick, standing on dragons and snakes while they desperately endeavour to scurry away. The legend probably appeared as a way of explaining the curious absence of snakes in Ireland, which the popular story explained in these terms: in one occasion, Patrick went to the top of a hill to pray and fast and, during the 40 days that his meditations lasted, he was unremittingly attacked by vicious snakes. At the end of his forty-day fast, Patrick chased them all into the sea and they were never seen again in Irish grounds. The reality, as naturalists explain it, is that Ireland has been snake-free territory since the Post-glacial period. However, the tale about St Patrick did not start to be in circulation until the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and for that reason one may be tempted to interpret the legend as Patrick's triumph over Druidism, as the use of the serpent as symbol of pagan practices has always been common.

To summarize, the legend has St Patrick releasing the Irish from all snakes during the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Natural history, on the other hand, explains that there have been no snakes at all in Ireland for at least 18,000 years. It does not seem the most favourable of conditions for the development of dragon lore, as dragons belong to the family of the snakes and one could argue that there is no possibility of developing such a monster without the observable natural reference on which it is so blatantly inspired. And yet, there *is* dragon lore in Ireland. Only, the Irish do not call their monsters *dragons*. They call them *peists*. These are large serpent-like creatures that live in lakes and rivers, and occasionally cause some discomfort to neighbouring human communities (Westropp, 1910). Peist lore it is then, for that is the term under which are listed the many water serpents and monsters of the dragon family that can be found in Irish tradition. In spite of the historical absence of snakes in Ireland, the Irish developed a series of stories and beliefs that speak of huge serpent-like creatures that dwell in lakes, ponds and rivers. Westropp (1910: 476) suggests that:

There can be little doubt that the highly imaginative early Irish personified the more terrifying powers of nature, such as the sea, the storm, and the thunder. The roaring, writhing waves in a sea creek or river swirl may have suggested some great creature, (too great to be natural), wallowing under the waters, and so given rise to the endless peist names and legends, in which a distinction is never drawn between the spectral and the natural.

It occurs to me that it is possible that the Irish did not actually develop these beliefs, as much as inherited them from their continental ancestors. The resemblance with stories found elsewhere is far too uncanny to bear any other explanation. It is also possible that the islanders brought these tales from their trips to other lands, but they are too embedded in traditions far and wide in the island to have been anything other than inherited. In fact, it is very telling that such stories are found with greater intensity in the County of Clare, on the Atlantic shore, which would have been one of the territories less likely to receive contributions from neighbouring folks across the Irish Sea, but instead it may have been influenced by the prehistoric contacts with the South of Europe.

Ireland was first inhabited 8,000 years ago, during the Palaeolithic. This means that the *peists*, those serpent-like aquatic monsters of no obvious wickedness may have arrived by that time too. They could be regarded as fossils of Prehistoric legends, although covered in the many layers of millennia of human history and culture. It will be interesting to see where the points in common are with traditions from other places, where they meet and where they do not, and whether they support the conclusions reached in the previous section.

The first element that jumps up to one's attention is the water component of these traditions. All *peists* live in the water, be it in the form of river, pond or lake, but usually fresh water rather than oceanic. In Co. Clare we may find not only stories but also place-names such as Poulnameasta (translated as "peist-hole" or "water dragon's lair"). Some are hairy and many are big-eyed (the *peist* in a pool near Corofin); others

have large ears and long tusks (the *peist* of the anonymous fifteenth-century poem *The Hunt of Sliabh Truim*). In this poem, there is an allusion to Finn, a hero who slew all sorts of spectres and monsters, and “banished from the raths each peist” (Westropp, 1910: 476). These *raths* are earth-forts, and the reference implies that some *peists* must have chosen such places to dwell, with their connection with the dead and the ancestors, even though they are in a minority. On the other hand, almost all lakes of importance were once tenanted by a *peist*, although almost all *peists* have been banished by the action of heroes or saints. Here is the second similarity to continental stories.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, prince Murchad, son of King Brian, is said to have exterminated all *peists* and monsters in Ireland. It is an interesting notion, for very shortly after Patrick would be firmly established as the one Irish champion against snakes and dragons, even though the snake banishing was a belated addition to his saintly exploits. And yet, he was not even the only saint to have engaged in such activities in the island. For example, other saints worthy of notice in this regard are St Beircheart<sup>1</sup> and St Ciarán, who both drove dragons into lakes (Koch, 2006: 609; Simpson, 2001: 29). Also St Murrough<sup>2</sup>, who is credited with driving out the last of Ireland’s dragons and serpents, those which had somehow escaped Patrick’s notice. A version of this tale has it that it was actually only one dragon, Paiste, which plagued the lands around Lough Foyle. Saint Murrough tricked Paiste (who was a talking dragon) to lay down and put three rods of reeds over his back. Then he prayed until the rods grew over the dragon, trapping him. Finally, he commanded the creature to go into the waters of Lough Foyle and there he is to this day, still imprisoned in his cage, and awaiting the

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Beircheart of Tullylease was a disciple of St Patrick. Probably of Anglo-Saxon origins, he is credited with Christianizing Tullylease, the last place in Ireland in which Druidism was practiced. His feast is on February 18<sup>th</sup>, known as Ben’s Day or The Well Day (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> Also known as St Murrough O’Heaney.

Day of Judgement as the saint commanded (09.22.2013. <http://www.blackdrago.com>).

In fact, there is a tale about St Patrick himself driving away one of the greatest serpents of Ireland, Oilliphéist. The monster, on hearing that the saint intended to confront him, scampered away before Patrick could even begin to look for him.

But, as we have seen, Patrick was not the only sixth-century saint that Irish dragons needed to keep an eye on, and others, like St Senan<sup>1</sup>, must be included in the list on their own merits. The earliest records of Senan's fight with the Cathach (or Cata) are from A.D. 800<sup>2</sup>. This Cathac was a *peist*, that is, a water serpent or dragon, and he picked up a fight against Senan by eating Narach, the saint's smith. Forth marched Senan, and so did the Cathac, "its eyes flashing flame, with fiery breath, spitting venom and opening his terrible jaws", all to no avail, for the saint made the sign of the cross and the monster collapsed at the sight. The peasants that lived at Doolough, near Mount Callan (Co. Clare) during the early 9<sup>th</sup> century told of Senan's chaining of the Cathach, how he had thrown it to the river and how, when there was a storm, the monster made the water boil. He also brought forth alive Narach, his smith, who had been devoured by the monster. All this happened in Iniscatha (nowadays, Scatterry), in the estuary of the Sannon<sup>3</sup>. Senan then went on to build several churches, dedicating Kilmihil Church to St Michael in gratitude for his help in the fight with the serpent<sup>4</sup> (Westropp, 1910: 256,

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Senan (died A.D. 550). Son of Gerrchin of Iniscatha or Scathery, he was born in Moylough and is said to have spoken before his baptism, proof of his exceptionality. Tradition says that he saw his mother eating some wild fruit and said to her, "You have an early appetite, mother!" to which she replied "You have old talk, my child!" and named him Senan (from *sean*, meaning "old") (Westropp 1910: 205-6).

<sup>2</sup> In the Calendar of Oengus there is an allusion to it (Westropp, 1910: 447).

<sup>3</sup> The feat is also attributed to the pagan hero Finn (Westropp, 2010: 477). I can not help but wonder whether this Finn may be Finn MacCool (or Fionn mac Cumhaill, the mythical warrior and hunter from the Fenian Cycle, who gained fantastic wisdom when he was cooking the salmon of knowledge for his master Finn Eces, burned his thumb, put it in his mouth, unknowingly swallowing part of the salmon's skin). It is a motif repeated in other tales (interestingly, that of Sigurd and Fafnir, in the *Völsunga Saga*, for example).

<sup>4</sup> There is a number of churches in the area where the story takes place that sport carvings of dragons: at Scatterry (a large-eyed dragon with crocodile jaws); at Kilrush; and at Kilkee (the "pattern stone", which

477). Later oral traditions (Westropp compiled them in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) added that St Michael had taken Senan to Knockanangel Hill and had helped him to drive out the Cathach and that the dragon was so large that he slept with his body looped round Scatterry, with his tail in his mouth.

Saint Maccreiche<sup>1</sup> (or MacCreehy) confronted and

(...) chained the destructive Demon-Badger or Bruckee (Broc-sidhe) in its cave Poul nabruckee, near Rathblamaic church in Inchiquin, and hurled it into Rath Lake (...). The head of the Bruckee is supposed to be represented in the carvings of large-eared dragons at Rath and Kilmacreehy (Westropp, 1913: 208).

These representations are very similar to the Catha carvings in Scatterry: long pointed ears, large eyes and enormous jaws with long sharp teeth. This could or could not describe a dragon, but by the 15<sup>th</sup> century the local assertion was that the Bruckee was no other thing. As for Maccreiche's intervention, it was deemed rather fortunate, for the creature was a plague on men and cattle and six local saints had already unsuccessfully endeavoured to free the area from the nuisance with their prayers. Another Bruckee, this one, very much alive, is said to dwell in Shandangan Lough near Corofin, and some claimed to have been witness to its rare appearance, even by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Westropp, 1910: 478-9).

## 2. 2. Feats of Heroes

It is a well known fact that dragons have a sweet tooth that makes them prey on young maidens. This is included in practically every fairytale that has the motif of the dragon conflict, from the Grimm's *The Two Brothers*, so rich in imagery and magic devices, to

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used to be at Scatterry, and which showed the Catha as a creature "with spiked back, scales, fish tail, nose curling up spirally, and clawed forefeet" (Westropp, 1910: 478).

<sup>1</sup> Saint Maccreiche was a sixth-century monk, credited, along with his disciple Mainchin, with the building of the churches of Kilmacreehy, Kilmanagheen, and Inagh, where they lie buried (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).



the simpler stories that used to be told by the fire in every household until not so long ago. A number of these stories must have been concocted by the peasants, who, in the absence of written records, wished to make sense of some specific feature of the landscape, a particular crest of a local family or simply to justify a family's claim to certain lands. The dragons, which had long been expelled from the temples but were believed to still dwell in the wilderness, preying on the unwary, gradually became the ultimate monsters for human heroes to vanquish.

The cultural manifestations containing this myth are varied enough as to call for subdivisions. Thus, firstly I will address those stories preserved in folklore through the ages, legends learnt from our elders, which have been transmitted orally, with an active endeavour on the part of the tellers to preserve their structure, themes and even mode of narration, although the inclusion of variations over time is inevitable.

Secondly, a section will be devoted to a number literary texts produced in the British Isles that deal with the topic of the fight with the dragon. A literary text must of necessity be different from a folktale, for in it the writer plays an essential role, either as creator or as recreator of the story. Therefore, even when they are based on oral sources, there is a strong component of creativity involved, as the author contributes with new ideas, perspectives, and even projecting the general social environment in which the work is produced.

Thirdly, a whole section has been put together to introduce a very specific phenomenon related to the myth of the dragon: that of the processional re-enactments that were in vogue for many centuries in England (and Europe) and which can still be enjoyed in some villages.

The selection that is included here is but a representation of those tales that are particularly similar to that of St George, sharing its general structure, motifs or

characters included. Many others will be referred to at given moments, to reinforce some idea or show a deviation of a given theme. In any case, those legends which are not exposed in their entirety in the text of this study will be available in the appendices.

### **2. 2. 1. Folk Heroes**

The tale *The Two Brothers*, collected by the Brothers Grimm can be considered as a standard of the dragon folktale, for it is ripe with themes and motifs that either have already appeared or will appear in the folktales and literary texts below. In this one, the dragon episode is presented in the following terms: in previous stages, the two brothers of the title had been reluctantly abandoned by their father and raised by a hunter and, when they grew up, they became accomplished huntsmen themselves, and left their stepfather to see the world. After several adventures, they parted ways. By and by, the youngest brother arrived to a kingdom and he was told the following:

There is a high hill without the town, whereon dwells a dragon who every year must have a pure virgin, or he lays the whole country waste, and now all the maidens have already been given to him, and there is no longer anyone left but the King's daughter, yet there is no mercy for her; she must be given up to him, and that is to be done to-morrow (09.22.2013. <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/grimm/bl-grimm-2brothers.htm>).

In true Arthurian fashion, the young huntsman wielded a magic sword buried in the dragon's hill and waited for the beast to appear. The first to arrive was the princess, and the huntsman took some time to comfort her and escort her to a safe place. After that, he resumed his vigil:

It was not long before the seven-headed dragon came thither with loud roaring. When he perceived the huntsman, he was astonished and said, "What business hast thou here on the hill?" The huntsman answered, "I want to fight with thee." Said the dragon, "Many knights have left their lives here, I shall soon have made an end of thee too," and he breathed fire out of seven jaws. The fire was to have lighted the dry grass, and the huntsman was to have been suffocated in the heat and smoke, but

the animals came running up and trampled out the fire. Then the dragon rushed upon the huntsman, but he swung his sword until it sang through the air, and struck off three of his heads. Then the dragon grew right furious, and rose up in the air, and spat out flames of fire over the huntsman, and was about to plunge down on him, but the huntsman once more drew out his sword, and again cut off three of his heads. The monster became faint and sank down, nevertheless it was just able to rush upon the huntsman, but he with his last strength smote its tail off, and as he could fight no longer, called up his animals who tore it in pieces (09.22.2013. <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-texts/grimm/bl-grimm-2brothers.htm>).

After killing the dragon, the huntsman cut off the dragon's tongues and the princess happily promised him her hand in marriage, but their joy would be of short duration, for the king's marshal, upon finding them asleep, killed the huntsman and forced the princess to say that he had been the one who had slain the dragon. This section of the story is very similar to one of the best known Celtic myths of the British Isles, that of Tristan and Isolde, which will be seen in detail in the literary section. But first, there is a long queue of folk heroes waiting to be admired.

### **The Mester Stoor Worm (the Orkney Islands)**

There is a story from the Orkney Islands which tells of the Mester Stoor Worm<sup>1</sup>, the worst of the nine curses that plagued mankind. He had a poisonous breath, sank every ship within his reach and he could sweep entire cities into the sea with his forked tongue with little effort. He was so long that he could coil his body around the earth and so large that when he yawned, the earth shook. His breath was so venomous that a single blast of it made the crops wither and every creature within reach die. But, "although he was a venomous beast, he had a dainty taste" and he demanded to be fed seven virgins every week, or he would destroy the whole land. The idea was appalling to the villagers,

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<sup>1</sup> Sigurd Towrie (02.01.2013. <http://www.orkneyjar.com>) remarks that the Mester Stoor Worm must be related to the Scandinavian myth of Jormungandr, as it has been suggested that the term "stoorworm" may be a corruption of "Storðar-gandr" another name for Jormungandr. The term "mester" means "master", for the Mester Stoor Worm was the largest of all the Stoor Worms that inhabited the seas.

but the alternative was even worse, and therefore they complied. Every Saturday, at sunrise, seven wretched girls were bound hand and foot and laid on a rock beside the shore. Sooner than they wished, the monster arrived, seized them in the fork of his tongue and carried them away. The measure was of course insupportable and the villagers kept looking for some way to get rid of the serpent. By and by, they took the advice of an old wizard, who said that the Stoor Worm would only leave if he was offered the most beautiful of all maidens, which happened to be the king's daughter, and only child, the Princess Gem-de-Lovely. Just as like the king in the story of St George, this monarch asked for a reprieve and he was granted ten weeks, which he employed in desperately searching for a hero that would save his daughter. He offered in payment his own kingdom and his sword, *Sikkersnapper*, which he had inherited from the great god Odin, from whom his family descended.

Thirty great warriors answered to his call, but most of them fled with terror when they saw the dragon, and the twelve that remained were in great fear and could not persuade themselves to raise a finger against such a behemoth. The ten weeks came and went and the princess' fate seemed sealed when help came from the least likely of quarters.

Now, while these momentous events were taking place near the royal court, in a farm far away from this place of misery, there lived a boy named Assipattle. He was the youngest of seven sons, and, being the little one of the family, he had grown lazy and spoiled, and he would spend his days daydreaming by the fire, instead of helping his family with their chores. They, in turn, laughed at him when he told them of the many

adventures that he imagined<sup>1</sup>. When Assipattle learned of the princess' plight, he slipped away from the house during the eve of the day that the princess was to be sacrificed. He rode his father's horse, Teetgong, which was a magic horse and could be made to run faster than any other. When he reached the coast, he found a small croft house, which was the dwelling of an old woman. While the woman slept, Assipattle seized a pot and a glowing peat from her hearth and went to the sea shore. There, he cheated a boatman out of his boat and sailed to where the Stoor Worm dwelt, intending to catch him unawares. He did find the dragon asleep. The story does not dwell on the boy's thoughts as he waited for the morrow to put his plan into practice, but one can well imagine brave, but small, Assipattle, watching the enormous creature, with a head like a mountain and a body that covered miles, considering his scheme and maybe contemplating leaving the place undetected while he could. Or maybe that thought never crossed his mind.

He knew that, at dawn, the creature would awake and yawn seven times, and at the end of the seventh yawn, his tongue would dart out and seize the princess. This happened as expected, but, on this occasion, every time the dragon yawned, a tide of water would be swept in and out of his mouth and, with the tide, the little boat that carried Assipattle. It was a risky crossing if there ever was one, but the boy determinedly sailed inside the body of the dragon until he found his liver. Once there, he cut a hole in the monster's liver and stuffed the peat into the wound. Then, he blew on it for all he was worth until it burned so well that soon the whole liver was afire<sup>2</sup>. As fast as he could, Assipattle got on his boat just in time for it to be swept out of the

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<sup>1</sup> Sigurd Towrie remembers that in the Orkney Islands, up to his time, Assipattle was a nickname applied to children "who hung over the hearth on a cold Orkney day" (02.01.2013. <http://www.orkneyjar.com>)

<sup>2</sup> "The liver was thought of as the source of spirit of life" (02.01.2013. <http://www.orkneyjar.com>).

Worm's mouth when the beast retched vigorously, for, understandably, the burning liver had made him very ill.

From the shore, where he had safely arrived, the young hero saw how the dragon coiled and writhed in torment, causing great tremors in the earth as he did. He flung his head up and fell again, and every time he fell the earth was changed. His teeth came off, and where they fell they became the Orkney Islands, the Shetland Islands and the Faroe Islands. In one of his falls, he made a deep rift on the earth, and as water washed into it the Baltic Sea was created. In the end, the Stoor Worm went to die far north, and his coiled body became Iceland, but inside the mass of inert land the monster's liver still burns, which causes the island to be volcanic.

As for Assipattle, he got the sword and, in due time, also married the princess, who was rather happy to have him as husband (Marwick, 1974: 139-44, in Simpson, 2001: 151-5; 02.10.2013. <http://www.orkneyjar.com/folklore/stoor.htm>).

### **Martin and the Dragon (Angus, Scotland)**

There need not always be a princess involved. Average girls who found themselves a dragon's dinner also had their heroes, although they did not always arrive in time to save them from their tragic end. See for example this story which takes place in Tealing (Tayside, Scotland). It tells the sad story of nine sisters who were consecutively sent to fetch water to a nearby well. When they all failed to return, the father himself went to the well, where he discovered, to his horror, that a dragon had eaten all of his fair daughters. Outraged, he gathered his neighbours and together they gave chase to the dragon. The one who was the most eager of all to find and kill the serpent was a youth called Martin, who was the lover of one of the unfortunate nine girls. The dragon was eventually surrounded at a place called Baldragon and there Martin, armed with a club,

engaged in single combat with him. His neighbours surrounded the two fighters and, at the cry of “Strike, Martin!”<sup>1</sup>, the young man struck the dragon with his club. Mortally wounded, the monster tried to make good his escape, but Martin struck again. As he lay dying, the dragon made a last speech, which has been preserved in this rhyme:

I was tempit at Pittempton,  
Draiglet at Baldragon,  
Striken at Strikemartin,  
And killed at Martinstane (Ellis, 1853: 322, in Simpson, 2001: 38).

This may be considered a foundational story, as not only does it provide the names for the main villages of the area, but the well is also known as the Nine Maiden’s Well. On a very interesting archaeological level, one must remark on the fact that there is in the vicinity of the well a stone named Martin’s Stone<sup>2</sup>, on which there is a carving in the shape of a serpent (Lestón Mayo, 2010: 44).

### **The Lambton Worm (Durham, England)**

The prerequisites for being a hero are fairly well known: he is to be brave and fearless and, above all, he must strive to do his heroics merely for the sake of them, because he is brave and fearless and wishes to either prove his worth or relieve the community from a threat. But sometimes one needs to become a hero out of duty, because one is somehow guilty of the situation and so must put a remedy to it.

This is precisely the case in the legend that is told in the folksong of the Lambton Worm. It tells of how the heir of Lambton (identified as Sir John Lambton in

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<sup>1</sup> “Strike, Martin!” is believed to be the local pronunciation “Strathmartine” (Angus, Scotland), and this is what may have originated this section of the story (Simpson, 2001: 38).

<sup>2</sup> Martin’s Stone is a boulder which can be seen in a field at Balkello (Angus, Scotland). It has been identified as a Pictish upright broken cross-slab, which is sculpted in relief on one side, showing a number of outlandish beasts (Westwood, 1994: 510).

some versions) once caught a strange worm while fishing<sup>1</sup>, put it in a well and went on to forget all about it. Later, he went to fight to Palestine (one presumes that he was a crusader) and, while away, the worm grew into a fearful dragon, which would soon be feeding

On calves and lambs and sheep,  
And swallow little bairns alive  
When they lay down to sleep.

The whole country was soon in uproar and word of it reached young Lambton in Palestine. He, understanding that he had unwittingly brought the monster to Lambton, and feeling his responsibility acutely, went back home, confronted the worm and cut in two halves<sup>2</sup>,

And that soon stopped him eating bairns  
And sheep and lambs and calves (Simpson, 2001: 141-2).

This also spared the dozen cows the dragon used to milk when he felt he needed some refreshment.

On a sad note, in the process of killing the dragon, young Sir John Lambton brought a curse upon his own family. It is said that, before confronting the monster, he approached a witch for counsel. She demanded as fee for her services the life of the first creature that Sir John would meet after his victory over the dragon. This happened to be his own father, and as Sir John could not bring himself to fulfil his promise to the witch, she cursed his family: for nine generations no lord of Lambton Castle would die in his bed (Simpson, 2001: 71).

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<sup>1</sup> Some versions of the story explicitly make him responsible for the appearance of the dragon because he was a dissolute youth, who would go fishing on a Sunday and thought nothing of cursing.

<sup>2</sup> This cutting of the dragon in two halves is not an original occurrence, and it takes us to many other stories, not least of which is the Babylonian Myth of Creation, where Marduk, a storm-god, favours this very course of action when confronting Tiamat, the dragon goddess of chaos.



## **The Knucker of Lyminster (West Sussex, England)**

The story of the Knucker Hole dragon, at Lyminster, has versions with heroes for all tastes, including the knight in shining armour and the clever local boy.

The setting of the story is the same in both versions: near Lyminster church there was a deep pool, known as the Knucker Hole, and a fearsome dragon had made it his dwelling. He was called the Knucker and for many years he brought great distress to the area.

Here, the story may wander into one of these directions:

The King of Sussex, wishing to put an end to the situation, offered his daughter in marriage to whoever would rid them of the Knucker. An errant knight who got wind of the situation successfully confronted the dragon and was dutifully rewarded with the princess' hand.

A second version has a local protagonist: Jim Pulk (or Jim Puttock), a farmer's boy from Wick, who baked a huge Sussex pie and put poison inside it. When the Knucker ate the pudding, it weighed so heavy that he could not stand up<sup>1</sup>, a chance Jim took to jump up and kill him with his scythe (in other versions, with an axe).

He then went to the Six Bells Inn, had a drink to celebrate his victory, and fell down dead. Presumably he had got some poison on his hands, which, no doubt, very properly, he drew across his mouth after downing his pint (Simpson, 2001: 51).

A sad end for the brave chap.

In either case, there remains as proof of this tale a gravestone, alternatively identified as Jim's or the knight's. It used to lie in the local graveyard, but was at one point carried inside the church, where the visitor can still decipher a weathered carving

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<sup>1</sup> This trick is a common motif of fairy tales, which we can find in some of the most popular ones, such as *The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids*. Stuffing the dragon with heavy and/or venomous food is a common enough resource in these tales.

representing a cross over a herringbone pattern, or a sword over the Knucker's ribs, depending on which description one favours (Westwood, 1994: 116).

### **The Bisterne Dragon (Hampshire, England)**

This creature used to terrorize Bisterne, and was killed by Sir Macdonie de Berkeley (in some versions, Sir Moris Barkley) in what was afterwards known as the Dragon Field. For this feat, he was knighted by King Edward IV, and the family took the dragon as their badge (Simpson, 2001: 63). The Bisterne dragon is described as a creature that dwelled near a beacon, which is an uncommon location for this sort of tale. Both hero and monster died in the fight. The different versions of the story tell of two dogs that accompanied him and also perished, as well as of a trick with which he attracted the dragon: the knight left some milk lying around and, when the monster was busy lapping it up, he jumped out of his hiding place and killed it. These events happened in a place called Dragon Field (Westwood, 1994: 54).

Having dogs as assistants is rather common in these stories, and we may find such loyal companions in the tale of Wyvill<sup>1</sup> and his dog (Slingsby, North Yorkshire), who both perished in the fight against a dragon (See Appendix A), and similar occurrences at Kellington, Handale (now Cleveland) and Nunnington (Westwood, 1994: 418).

### **Sir Piers Shonks (Hertfordshire, England)**

Tantum fame manet Cadmi sanctique Georgi  
Posthuma; tempus edas ossa sepulchra vorat.  
Hoc tamen in muro tutus, qui perdidit anguem,  
Invite positus Daemone, Shonkus erat<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Wyvills of Osgodby were local landowners, who lived at Slingsby Manor at least from 1215 to the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century (Westwood 1994: 418).

<sup>2</sup> "Nothing of Cadmus or St George, those names of great renown, survives them but their fames; Time was so sharp set as to make no bones of theirs, nor of their monumental stones. But Shonks one serpent kills, t'other defies, and in this wall, as in a fortress, lies". These lines are believed to have been composed by the

O PIERS SHONKS  
WHO DIED ANNO 1086

There is in St Mary's church at Brent Pelham (Hertfordshire) a tomb identified by means of the Latin inscription above, located on the wall behind. The tomb is that of one Piers Shonks, who died in 1086, lord of the manor in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and a local legendary figure. The tombstone depicts the very Shonks, being taken to Heaven, while the staff of a cross is thrust down the throat of a coiled dragon.

There used to be indeed a family bearing the Shank name in this part of Hertfordshire, at least in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which lends believability to the existence of Shonks. Our man was accounted to have fought a giant and sometimes described as a giant himself. But what does one make of the dragon on the stone?

A local tale, which was well known at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, relates that there once was a yew tree standing at the boundary of Great Pepsells and Little Pepsells fields, and under the roots of that yew tree, a dragon had made his lair.

Pier Shonks, the main landowner, was determined to rid his manor of this pest, and one day he set out for the dragon's lair, clad in full armour and taking with him an attendant and three of his best dogs. After a fierce battle, Shonks managed to thrust his spear into the jaws of the monster, and killed it.

The tale goes on to include how the Devil cursed Shonks for daring to destroy his creature, vowing that he would take his soul at all costs, were he buried within a church or not. But Shonks outwitted him, for when he was close to death, he shot an arrow that struck the wall of the church of St Mary, and instructed to have his tomb built

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Revd Raphael Keen, vicar of Brent Pelham during the last half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and until his demise in 1614. The "other" serpent defied is the Devil (Simpson 2001: 94).

inside that wall. Thus, he was buried neither within the church nor outside (Westwood, 1994: 128-31).

As for the the dragon dwelling under the roots of the yew tree, one cannot help but being transported to a number of other stories, including a few myths of other cultures, where serpents are described in relation to trees, Such as the Scandinavian dragon Níðhöggr, who whiles away his days gnawing at the roots of Yggdrasil, the sacred ash tree (02.11.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

### **The Linton Worm (West Linton, Scotland)**

This Scottish story constitutes a charter myth that explains the crest of the Somerville family, and also the existence of some topographical feature of the area where it is set, as well as making sense of several local pieces of art depicting the fight.

In a curious mixture of motifs, this story has a noble hero who uses trickery to dispose of the dragon. He is named either the Laird of Lariston or John Somerville, depending on which version one comes across. A brave young man, and a little mercenary if one heeds what the legend suggests, he went to Linton to kill the Worm of Linton, for “liberal guerdons were offered to any champion who would rid the country of such a scourge” (VV.AA, 1998: 292). This said worm was venomous and a scourge for the country, and none of the applicants had yet managed to find a way to kill it. Our hero first tried with the usual weapons (sword, spear, shield), but having failed, he did not think much of demeaning himself and resorted to trickery. He dipped a peat in scalding pitch, fixed it on his lance and thrust it down the monster’s throat. But we must not begrudge him his glory, as it proved to be an effective method and the nature and power of his dragon more than justified it, for the monster was so strong and terrible

that, while dying, it coiled in pain and with the force of his movements marks were left on the sides of Wormington Hill.

In the old parish church, a sculpture was supposed to commemorate the feat. It was a knight with a falcon on his arm and two monsters near him. There was an accompanying inscription which, according to Sir Walter Scott, read:

The wode laird of Lariestoun  
Slew the wode worm of Wormistoune,  
And wan all Linton paroschine (Scott, 1802, in Westwood, 1994: 470).

Some have argued that the sculpture was actually supposed to depict Michael and the devil, or St George and the dragon, and that the peasantry had concocted the legend basing it on the history of the local gentry. What is true, though, is that the indentations on the hill are certainly there, for everyone to see.

### **Fulk Fitzwarrin (Somerset, England)**

There is an intermediate type of hero, between noble and lowly, where we find those who were born in a high cradle but fell from grace. Such is the case with Fulk Fitzwarrin, historical personage who was outlawed by King John due to his opposition to the king. As an outcast, his life was embellished with different adventures, both in England and in foreign lands. Dragons were not excluded from them:

In Carthage he overcame a monster or dragon that lived upon human flesh in a mountain near the sea, which had carried off the daughter of the Duke of Iberie. The writer seems to have got well confused as to the nature of this beast. When Fulk is fighting with it he describes a huge winged reptile like the traditional dragon of St George. Elsewhere, however, it appears as a half-human monster (...). It lived in a house upon the mountain with a great door, and the Duke's daughter told Fulk how "when his hideous face and beard were smeared with blood, he would come to me and cause me to wash with clear water his face and his beard and his breast." When he had killed the dragon, Fulk took the cool gold upon which alone it could sleep, because of the hot fire in its belly, and having returned the princess to her father, sailed back to England (Keen, 1961: 43, in Simpson, 2001: 57).

Although an account that differs from the usual structure of the dragon slaying story, it still has the same recurrent motifs: the hoard of gold and the maiden kidnapped by the dragon, although there is a sexual undertone present as well, which savours strongly of other fairy tales, such as *Bluebeard* or *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Even though this version takes us to an exotic land, Fulk did also fight a dragon in his homeland, more specifically, in Somerset. There, near Taunton, there is a village called Norton Fitzwarren, where they boast one of the most interesting traditions related to dragons. It was there that this extraordinary event took place:

The dragon is said to have emerged from the camp after a fierce battle. There were piles of dead bodies and, by a process not unlike spontaneous combustion they generated the dragon, which terrorised the neighbourhood, causing great damage and loss of life. It was again a local valiant, Fulk Fitzwarine, who came to the rescue, killing the monster and saving the people from further distress (Palmer, 1976: 77).

Near Norton Fitzwarren, archaeologists have found the remains of an encampment dating from the Iron Age, and reused later, during Roman and Saxon times. Much has been argued as to the possibility that Norton Camp was attacked by the Danes in about A.D. 683, according to an extremely brief and general entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that reads “Centwine drove the Brito-Welsh as far as the sea” (Simpson, 2001:57). It must also be noted that the image of the dragon was quite common on Wessex standards, at least during the 8<sup>th</sup> century, although their relation with this particular story awaits further research<sup>1</sup>.

By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a rood scene commemorating the story and attributed to Ralph Harris was made for the local parish. This implies that the legend must have been at least older than that, although the scene depicted on the screen includes elements which do not appear in the surviving legend, such as several dogs (a

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, some of the branches of the Fitzwarrin family bear a dragon as their crest (Simpson, 2001:57).

greyhound, a yellow hound and a black hound), two men which appear to be busy either trying to entrap or kill the dragon or making good their escape, a three yoke of oxen dragging a plough, a peasant represented in the process of seeding, a naked maiden praying as the monster is about to devour her and three other naked figures. Originally, the dragon was painted black with a golden stripe on his back, which reminds us of the salamanders as seen in old natural history books. This is surely a sequence of scenes that was related to the original story, but the painful lack of evidence that one usually finds in folklore or written records keeps us from knowing exactly in what manner this was so.

Only a few miles away from Norton Fitzwarren there is a small village, Crowcombe, with a parish church containing very ancient benches. One of these benches had its end carved at about the same time as the screen of the church of Norton Fitzwarren, and it shows two men in the act of assaulting a double-headed dragon, with small wings and a short tail. Although there is no surviving tale that accounts for this carving, the zealous researcher may find a dragon story related to Shervage Wood, not far from Crowcombe, at Kingston St. Mary, where the dragon was killed by a local hero who rolled a great stone into the monster's mouth as it roared, thus choking him (Palmer, 1976: 79). Here one would do well to remember that Somerset is also a fertile land as far as dragon stories are concerned, being also the setting of St Carantoc's encounter with the serpent. According to all the evidence present both in legends and artwork, there is no shortage of volunteers in Somerset when a dragon needs to be brought round. Saintly, noble, or plebeian heroes, none will as much as flinch at the prospect, and it is only to be lamented that the tales behind the carved benches and rood-screen have not been preserved for us to enjoy fully, along with the art that was created around them.

### **The Deerhurst Dragon (Gloucestershire, England)**

There goes a story, that a serpent of a prodigious bigness was a great grievance to all the country about Deerhurst, by poisoning the inhabitants, and killing their cattle. The inhabitants petitioned the king, and a proclamation was issued out, that whosoever should kill the serpent, should enjoy an estate on Walton hill in this parish, which then belonged to the crown. One John Smith, a labourer, undertook it, and succeeded; for finding the serpent lying in the sun, with his scales ruffled up, he struck between the scales with his ax, and struck off his head (Atkyns, 1712, in Westwood, 1994: 305).

This John Smith is an example of the lowly or unpromising hero, that is, a common fellow of whom few would have expected to come back unscathed from a fight with a dragon. It is also a charter myth, which explains the ownership of the state on Walton Hill, a manor belonging to the Smith family in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the legend was recorded.

### **Y Carrog (Borough, Wales)**

In Dolgarrog (Wales), there is a nice story where the whole community is involved. There is here no hero singlehandedly ridding the country of a monster, but the joined work of a group of well meaning neighbours (or ill meaning, depending on which side one takes). The dragon in this case did all the usual preying on cattle one can expect, and the neighbours were none too happy about it, understandably. So, one fine day, they all gathered their bows, arrows and spears and set off to hunt down the monster. The one neighbour whose name has been passed on to us, Nico Ifan, was also the only one who refused to join in the hunt. He had dreamt that the Carrog would cause his death and he did not wish to risk the dream to come true by behaving foolishly and putting himself forward on the hunt. Not Nico Ifan. He sat safely at home, waiting for the outcome.



In the meanwhile, the other farmers put their plan into practice. Using a poisoned sheep as bait, they lured the Carrog out of his lair and, when he was engrossed in eating the sheep, they caught him by surprise and killed him.

It was then that Nico Ifan turned up, strutted around and gloated over the dead dragon, bragging that he had not been killed by the monster, as the dream had foreshadowed. But he was not yet safe from fate. When he viciously kicked the corpse of the dragon, the poisoned wing of the monster caught on his leg and pierced it, causing him almost instant death (Westwood, 1994: 355). Dreams and dragons are not to be taken lightly<sup>1</sup>.

### **The Oilliphéist and the Piper (Ireland)**

This is the name of a lake monster in the traditions and legends of Ireland. The name “Oilliphéist” derives from the Irish Gaelic *oll*, meaning “great,” and *péist*, meaning “fabulous beast.” This vast monster, described as looking something like a dragon, was so huge and of such length that as it travelled it gouged the length of the Shannon River. However, the legend relates that when it heard that Saint Patrick was coming to exorcise it, the hitherto benign Oilliphéist became enraged. It swallowed a drunken piper who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, but, undaunted, the man continued to play in the monster’s belly. This made Oilliphéist so irritated that it disgorged the drunkard oblivious to his adventure, who continued his journey playing as before (Rose, 2000: 277).

Some versions of the tale name the piper as O’Rourke, but more often than not, he remains nameless. It is curious that the hero in this episode is not only a layman, but appears as devoid of any of the basic features that characterize the hero: he is not brave, or cunning. He is merely careless.

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<sup>1</sup> This idea of the prophecy that is unexpectedly fulfilled by a dead creature’s bite (normally a viper) is common to several other Welsh legends. Such is the case in the serpent that killed the heir of Penhesgyn when, after taking many pains to kill it, the boy kicked the dead viper in contempt and its fang pierced his foot, poisoning him (Westwood, 1994: 355).

## 2. 2. 2. Literary Heroes

The literary production about dragons is absolutely overwhelming. Should one leave aside naturalistic treatises and other non-fictional works, should one focus on texts produced in the Anglosaxon culture only, still there are over 2,000 titles<sup>1</sup> left for the researchers to peruse. This can be regarded as either an exciting prospect or a truly daunting one, but it certainly gives us an idea of just how popular the topic has grown to be. As far as this particular study is concerned, it has been necessary to narrow down the number of works to examine, and I have decided on that which I hope is the wisest choice: to confine this analysis to such titles as have been particularly popular in the history of literature, that is, those which have not only reached the widest audience, but also influenced other authors, who would perpetuate themes and tropes, thus exponentially increasing the number of people who had access to them. This is the reason of the specific choice of works in this section. These are the pick of dragon tales among the English classics.

### *Beowulf*

William Witherle Lawrence, in an essay on *Beowulf* he published in 1918<sup>2</sup>, announced that he intended to deal with, *of all things*, the topic of the dragon. Not only that, but he would explore the nature of the monster and the source of the treasure hoarded in its lair. One may be bemused by Lawrence's need to defend his choice of topic, but the truth is that it was, at the time, a truly original one. Given that the general appeal of dragons seems to have never abated, one may find this lack of scholarly interest

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<sup>1</sup> These figures come from the New York Public Library (03.01.2013. <http://www.nypl.org>), but the prominence of these works is a fact that anyone can verify in a regular search at any of the available online public libraries.

<sup>2</sup> "The Dragon and His Lair in *Beowulf*".

surprising. But, of course, what tickles broad audiences may not have the same appeal to scholars. The consideration of the monster as an acceptable topic of serious study is fairly recent, as recent, in fact, as to be something of a curiosity when Lawrence raised it, and felt the need to explain that the theme was interesting enough to excite both his curiosity and that of his colleagues.

Yet, aside from this particular consideration, this heroic-elegiac poem had long been established as one of the most important works of English literature. It is also generally regarded as one of the first productions, as it certainly is the oldest one that has been preserved. Written in Old English, it was probably composed during the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, although the events presented seem to date from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it verses upon a Germanic matter, that is, a story that must be well known in the Anglo-Saxon territories and which the people living in those lands easily related to. The copy that has been preserved was probably copied by a monk, and references to the new religion (Christianity) can be traced in it, along with the original, pagan images of the Germanic tradition that were slowly giving way to the new social order. Most authors consider that the surviving copy was written following a much older poem that had been orally preserved. Others defend that the poem must have been originally composed by a Christian, although trying to recreate the pagan northern heroic age that was then coming to a close (Tolkien, 2006: 6-34). The text has been preserved in a composite manuscript where five different works are to be found: *The Passion of St Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, *Beowulf* and *Judith*. Scholars nowadays consider that this manuscript must have been written at some

point during the reign of King Æthelred the Unready<sup>1</sup>, probably between A.D. 997 and 1016 (Orchard, 1995: 2). The action centres on the life of Beowulf, hero of the Geats and accomplished warrior, from his youth to his ascent to the throne and eventual glorious death.

There are several other medieval works featuring some of the characters present in *Beowulf* and which might provide some insight into this poem. One of the most interesting, the *Liber Monstrorum de Diversis Generibus*, anonymously<sup>2</sup> written between c. 650 and c. 750, attests, if nothing else, to the antiquity of the stories presented in *Beowulf*: Hygelac, the king of the Geats (*Higlacus, rex Getarum*), and Beowulf's lord and uncle, is the historical figure who is present in both texts. Of him, the *Liber Monstrorum* says:

Et fiunt monstra mirae magnitudinis, ut rex Higlacus, qui imperavit Getis et a Francis occisus est, quem equus a duodecimo aetatis anno portare non potuit. Cuius ossa in Rheni fluminis insula, ubi in Oceanum prorumpit, reseruata sunt, et de longinquo uenientibus pro miraculo ostenduntur<sup>3</sup>.

Hygelac is the only recognizable Germanic figure mentioned in the *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus*, which has led many scholars to contemplate the possible interconnections between this work and *Beowulf* (Orchard, 1995: 110). As mentioned above, this and other similar texts support the historical existence of, at least,

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<sup>1</sup> Æthelred the Unready (+ 23 April 1016) was King of England (978-1016). His reign is known for the viciousness of the Viking attacks to England, but he also laid the ground for a flowering of art and literature during his lifetime. After his death, Cnut, of Danish origin, ascended to the throne (03.02.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> Although generally attributed to Adelinus (some scholars point to either the Anglo-Saxon author Aldhelm of Malmesbury or some colleague or disciple of his), all we know for certain is that it was composed by either an Irishman or an Anglo-Saxon and that it was influenced by both pagan and Christian texts, such as the Bible, Isidore's *Etymologiae*, and Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, but also by an ample range of classical authors and texts, with a prominent presence of Vergil. The text is no longer considered a *Physiologus*, but neither is it a bestiary. Most of the remaining copies were written during the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period during which it was especially popular (Orchard, 1995: 86-94).

<sup>3</sup> "And there are monsters of an amazing size, like King Hygelac, who ruled the Geats and was killed by the Franks, whom no horse could carry from the age of twelve. His bones are preserved on an island in the river Rhine, where it breaks into the Ocean, and they are shown as a wonder to travellers from afar" (translation by Orchard, 1995: 259).

a part of the characters involved, and help to establish the dates, as all these historical figures lived during the 5<sup>th</sup> century. This is relevant because it provides us with a time frame we can pinpoint the story to and also the different episodes it is composed of. Not that it is extremely reliable, mind you, for additions and modifications may have altered the original tale between the 5<sup>th</sup> century (the historical probable date of the events) and the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when it was put to paper. That is 500 years during which the story was in circulation, be it as a legend or as a song, but in oral form regardless of the genre. On the other hand, this means that the motifs present in the preserved text may be as old as to have been in existence during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, at the very least.

In terms of the fight against the monster, the poem is thematically divided into three well defined parts, each dedicated to Beowulf's fight against some extraordinary creature or other. T. A. Shippey, applying Propp's folktale patterns to *Beowulf*, was the first to point out that the central narrative of the poem conformed to a point to the traditional folktale structure (Gould, 1985: 98): in three occasions, the hero confronts a villain, and each fight is more spectacular, and far more strenuous than the previous one. It is in the third and last occasion that the dragon appears, to fulfil the role of the most sensational villain of all in the final act. Tolkien, on the other hand, sees it as a two-section structure, in which the first one is devoted to the rise of the hero and the achievements of youth, and the second to his downfall and death (Tolkien, 2006: 5-34).

To go over the main facts of this last episode, which is the one that claims our attention in the present study, we may start with the description of the dragon himself: he is fifty feet long, spews out fire (*glédum spiwan* (line 2,312)) as he flies through the air, and he has the capacity (and the will) to burn down whole villages and even Beowulf's hall. He is immune to ordinary swords, although not to fire, and he is nocturnal (*níðdraca* (line 2,273)). In addition to this, he blows up steam and his breath

is poisonous. He is presented as either *draca* (dragon: 14 times), or *wyrm* (worm: 25 times), and he is invulnerable, save for a spot on his throat. This seems to be a common weak spot of the northern dragons, for Fafnir's underside was vulnerable too, as Sigurd cunningly demonstrated in the popular episode of the *Völsunga Saga*, and a trope that would be inherited by many of their descendants, even to contemporary times, as will be seen in Chapter 4.

If we move on to examine his lair, we will see that it was an ancient burial-mound (*stánbeorh stéarcne* (line 2,213)), located in a desolate place, at the edge of a cliff over the sea, and with a burning stream coming out of it. The proper lair of a Scandinavian dragon is, and always has been, a burial-mound, preferably with a treasure inside, as is the case here (*hord beweotode* (line 2,212)). Ancient megalithic barrows were a familiar enough feature of the British and Scandinavian landscape, so the original audience of *Beowulf* would identify this reference with ease. The barrow in this poem, which is described as long and spacious, seems to be a chambered long barrow.

And finally, the treasure: the reader is told that it had been laid on the earth for a thousand years. A section at the end of the poem tells us of some illustrious chiefs, who buried the treasure there and then laid a curse upon anyone who should disturb the place. Yet, this contradicts a passage at the beginning, where it is stated that it was one sole warrior, the last survivor of his people, who concealed the treasure in a burial mound, where he then lived the rest of his life in complete solitude. Lawrence (1918: 560-7) mentions a compelling hypothesis by Axel Olrik, according to which the lamenting warrior had been transformed into the dragon. However, he adds, there is little internal evidence supporting this theory, since there is nothing in the poem that may lead to such an idea and also because the passage about the solitary warrior seems

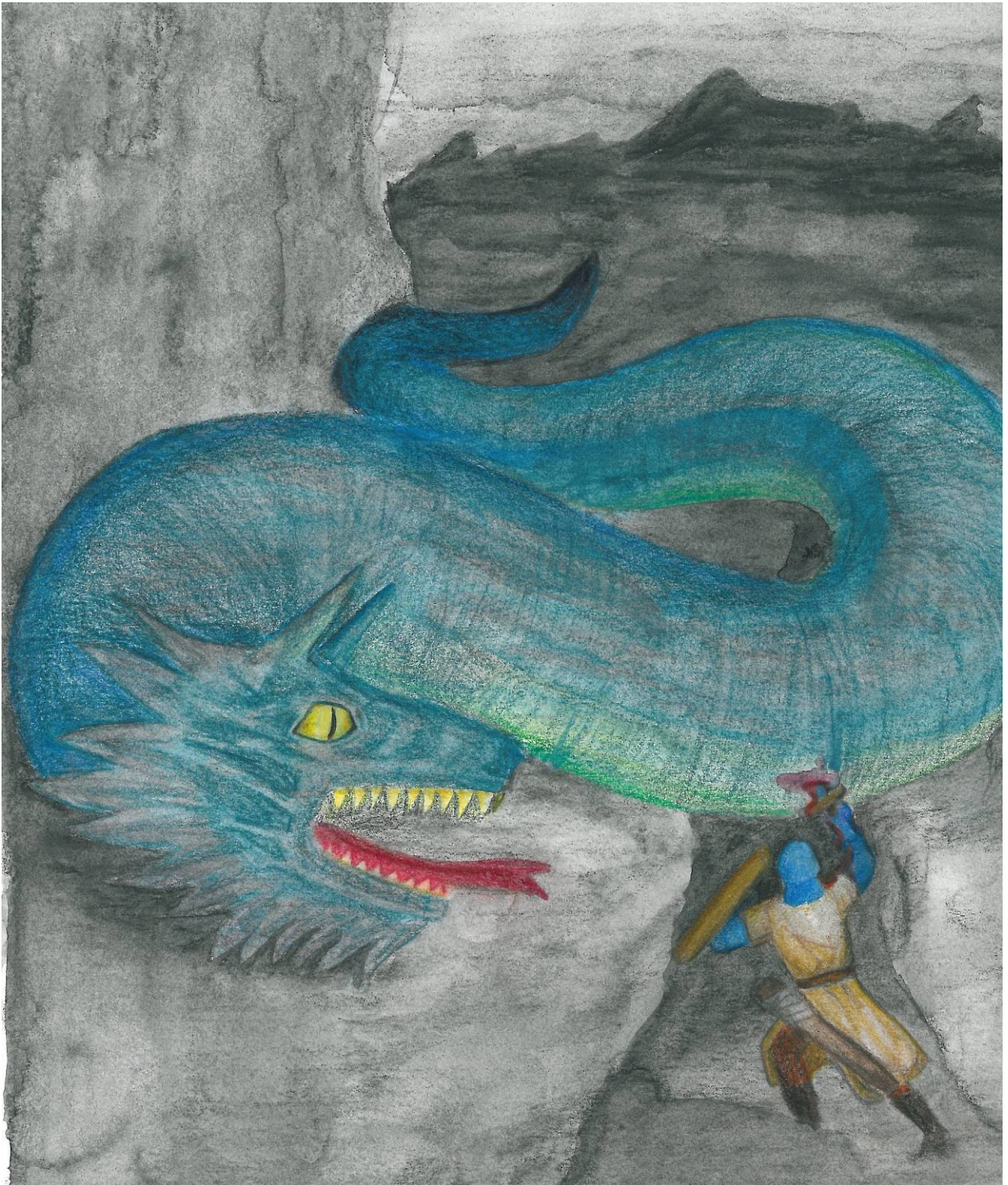
to be, both stylistically and thematically, more modern than the one about the chiefs and the curse.

What we *are* told in the poem is that, at the time of the main events that take place in the story, the dragon had been happily guarding this treasure for three hundred years, never stirring from the place. Truth be told, nothing makes a dragon more joyful than having a good old hoard to brood over. It was so during the times of Beowulf and it continues to be a common dragon pastime in more recent productions.

And nothing infuriates a dragon more than having strangers messing with *his* hoard. This was exactly what happened in *Beowulf*: when a man, after having fled the court on account on some unexplained mishap, unwittingly plundered the dragon's treasure, he provoked the dragon's wrath and the beast started to wreak havoc upon the villages and halls<sup>1</sup>, to the point that Beowulf himself, who at this time had reached a venerable age, had to get his old body in motion and get ready for an unexpected, undeserved and unequal fight against a formidable foe. There is a strong component of doom in this last section of the poem, which crystallizes in the lines about Beowulf's death, when with his last breath he expresses how fate is now claiming him, as it did his ancestors before him. This inescapable fate, which regulates life and death, was central in the beliefs of the Scandinavian people (Cardoso, 2004: 274). He dies, then, abandoned by all his warriors but one, and poisoned by the dragon, a few moments after the dragon himself has perished, just like Thor in the prophecy of his final battle against the Midgard Serpent. It is a fitting end for both warrior and dragon, dying at the hands of the mightiest creature around.

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<sup>1</sup> This is clearly mirrored in a similar episode in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, as will be seen in Chapter 5.



Fafnir, from the *Völsunga Saga*, is the archetype of the hoarding dragon (drawing by the author of this study).



Most readers of the poem will easily remark upon the fact that the level of difficulty experienced by Beowulf increases with each battle, even in spite of the matching increase in the amount of weaponry used: he defeats Grendel in a masterful fight where he uses his bare hands; Grendel's mother presents a much more difficult battle, but Beowulf is armed with not one, but two swords; and, finally, the dragon, whom he confronts armed with two swords and a shield, proves fatal. It is also worthy of consideration that in both the episodes of Grendel's mother and the dragon, it is the monsters that are presented as the aggrieved parties. In the case of the dragon, this sense is reinforced in the text by focusing on the monster's perspective, which is a radical departure from the average dragon story. If one considers the lines 2,287-2,295, for example, it is clear as day that the poet seems to be courting the audience's sympathy for the dragon's plight:

þa se wrym onwoc, wroht wæs geniwad;	When the dragon awoke, new woe was kindled.
stonc ða æfter stane, <b>stearcheort</b> onfand	O'er the stone he snuffed. The <b>stark-heart</b> found
<b>feondes</b> fotlast; he to forð gestop	footprint of <b>foe</b> who so far had gone
dyrnan cræfte dracan heafde neah.	in his hidden craft by the creature's head.
Swa mæg unfæge eaðe gedigan	So may the undoomed easily flee
wean ond wræcsið, se ðe waldendes	evils and exile, if only he gain
hylde gehealdeþ! Hordweard sohte	the grace of The Wielder! That warden of gold
georne æfter grunde, wolde guman findan,	o'er the ground went seeking, greedy to find
þone þe him on sweofote sare geteode,	the man who wrought him such wrong in sleep <sup>1</sup>

Notice how the roles of the characters are here reversed: the dragon is described as "stark-heart" (*stearcheort*), while the human is the foe (*feond*). This might be related

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<sup>1</sup> *Beowulf* text and translation from OE by Francis Gummere (02.01.2013. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/beowulf.asp>).

to another fact, which is that the dragon is never overtly identified with the devil. Even though the Christian set of ideals is present in other parts of the poem (for example, Grendel and his mother are explicitly described as the descendants of Cain), the serpent, although terrible in nature, has no relation whatsoever with the forces of Hell. The idea that the reader can infer from this text and other similar ones is that northern dragons are presented as monstrous creatures, ferocious and magnificent, legendary beasts of great power and splendour, but never God's enemies, but simply animals of the natural world, as well as the choice monsters with which to prove one's worth as a warrior. It must not be forgotten that Beowulf's encounter with the dragon was not a completely unusual occurrence, and that is something which is brought to notice even in the context of the poem itself: in its first section a bard recites the story of Sigemund, who slew a terrible dragon who guarded a treasure. This brave Sigemund is the same who is father to Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied*, although his character there is presented in a much less heroic light (Talbot, 1983). It is interesting to recall, when considering these stories, that the Scandinavian and Germanic dragon tales constitute a group of stories which are slightly out of the Christian influence, or which, at least, were modified to a lesser extent. This phenomenon provides us with a mythology and a set of traditions which preserve ancient themes to a great degree, themes and stories which may have once been known to the inhabitants of the British Isles too.

### ***Tristan and Isolt***

The legend of Tristan (also Tristram) and Isolt (also Isolde, Iseult, Iseut, Ysolde, Yseult or Yseut) is one of the most influential of all medieval romances, proof of which is that it was incorporated to the Arthurian Cycle in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Although the earliest surviving written works dealing with this story date from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Celtic

source for the story is much older, as it usually happens with such texts, but especially so in the case of this specific one, for, as Filippo Olivieri (2005: 46-8) remarks, Ireland never was as influenced by the Roman culture as other European territories, and so it kept to a great extent the most archaic features of the Celtic society, virtually unimpeded by the Classical literature, the Christian ideology and the courtly love that is ever so present in the Arthurian Cycle. Irish mythological accounts offer a vision of the Irish society and culture at a time long before the evangelization of the island, and which may be set in the Iron Age.

As mentioned above, the first written versions of the story of Tristan and Isolt were composed during the 12<sup>th</sup> century by French poets, namely, Thomas of Britain and Béroul, and these are considered as the closest to the root material, that is, the Celtic legend. In Britain, the earliest literary work crafted around this tale was the fourteenth-century romance *Sir Tristrem* (see Appendix B). However, the story soon became best known as part of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Malory drew his passage from the *Prose Tristan* (13<sup>th</sup> century), which was the first adaptation to tie the story to the Arthurian legend by having Tristan become a knight of the Round Table. In the continent, though, it was Gottfried von Strassbourg's thirteenth-century version that became more influential, and the main material Wagner used when writing his opera *Tristan und Isolde*. One of the motifs which is treated differently (quite radically so) is the dragon fight. So radically different, in fact, as to not being present at all in Malory's text. It is Sir Lancelot who fights a dragon there. But, of this, more later.

Now, in the texts by Béroul and Thomas of Britain, however, this beautiful passage is left for the reader to enjoy. Gottfried von Strassbourg (see Appendix B), relying on the material written during the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Thomas of Britain, takes it to its full potential. Given that in the versions by either Béroul or Thomas of Britain the

passage about the dragon is much less elaborated (as a matter of fact, the majority of the text by Thomas of Britain is lost), and that Gottfried von Strasbourg himself claims that his *Tristan and Isolt* is based on Thomas', it seems the best version to go by. I do not pretend to ignore that we do not know to what extent his text does stay true to Thomas', as there is little that has been preserved for us to compare, but, still, it appears that this will be, by far, our best shot. It is this work, then, that I will follow here to introduce and analyze the main events of this beautiful tale:

In the early stages of the tragedy we see how King Marke of Cornwall, uncle to young Tristan, sends his courageous nephew to woo Princess Isolt of Irlant in his stead. King Goram of Ireland had offered the hand of his daughter to whomever would kill the intractable dragon that plagued the kingdom, and Tristan, loyal and intrepid to a fault, braced himself to confront it for the sake of pleading his uncle's case. The dragon, termed "a very dangerous serpent", was a terrifying predator that wrought so much destruction that the king felt compelled to offer his greatest treasure, his daughter, to stop the monster. Here, one should notice, the maiden is not offered to the dragon, as in other tales, but rather to the brave knight who manages to kill it, which, taken in perspective, seems a much less unpleasant fate altogether.

Therefore, thence went Tristan, clad in all his warrior gear and riding his sturdy charger, the best of his spears in his hand. "He sped toward the vale of Anferginan, where the dragon had its lair" (lines 8,940-1), and on arrival he witnessed four men galloping away from the site, one of them, the queen's own seneschal, who also aspired to the hand of the fair Isolt:

On seeing the men's quick retreat, Tristan quickly gathered that the dragon must be lurking nearby, and so it was.

So he explored in that direction and had not ridden very far before a sight smote his vision – the frightfully revolting serpent! Spurting from its gaping jaws a blast of smoke and flames worthy of the devil's kind, it advanced straight at him (lines 8,966-73).

A fierce battle ensued, but in the end Tristan emerged victorious. The writer does not spare the reader any of the crude details that could make the battle more colourful. Let us see these two formidable creatures at work:

Tristan levelled his great spear and took his horse with the spurs. His charge carried with such force that the spear, tearing through its jaws, penetrated down its throat very nearly to the heart. Rider and horse together collided with the beast so hard that the horse was killed by the impact and the rider was lucky to survive.

The dragon ravaged the dead horse with slashing teeth and flames until this monster had consumed the half of it before the saddle.

But now the spear in its gut began to cause it such agony that it left the carcass that remained and fled toward its stony lair.

But Tristan, its real opponent, followed hot on its trail.

The fiend went raging on ahead with such violent impetus while ripping through the underbrush and scorching it to ashes that the entire forest resounded with its frightful roaring. But at the climax of its rampage its painful wound overcame it and it wedged itself for refuge deep beneath a stony cliff.

Tristan, approaching, drew his sword, hoping to find it exhausted. Not at all—the fight grew worse than ever it had been before. Yet never did it get so fearsome as to deter Tristan from attack. The dragon fought back ferociously, putting the man to such great peril he thought it would be his end. Still he diverted its worst assaults, or it quickly would have left him without attack or defences. Nor was this viper a simple foe—it brought as allies into battle not only smoke and vapours but other armaments as well, fire and things to strike with, huge teeth and fearsome claws acute as though honed to a point and cutting edge sharper than a razor.

Brandishing these weapons the dragon chased him around, dodging trees and through the bush—he had to take whatever cover might give him some protection, for now it had him on the run. While doing his best to parry the worst of its onslaughts, his shield had been scorched to cinders almost down to his hand, since trying to repel the flames had left him almost no escape.

But then the tide began to turn—that bloodthirsty serpent began to reach the point where its vigour had to slacken. The embedded spear, working deeper, finally brought the creature down where it lay in twisting agony. Tristan swiftly took his chance, driving straight in for the kill. Next to the spear, he plunged his sword right through the heart, up to his hand. At this the fiendish scourge burst out with one last howl

as awesome and so dire from deep within its dismal gullet as at the collapse of earth and heaven, and this final mortal shriek echoed across hills and fields—Tristan himself was horrified (lines 8,974-9,055).

On recovering from such a tremendous fight, which many would be happy to have on screen, Tristran sliced the dragon's tongue away as proof of his deed and he secured it inside his shirt in a not altogether wise move: afterwards, when he went to rest by the river nearby, the venom from the tongue overcame him and he lost consciousness.

While he was thus incapacitated, the king's seneschal, a cowardly but shrewd man, came again into the picture. He arrived before anyone else to the scene of the fight and, to his horror, happened on the half eaten horse and the carcass of the dragon. At first, he panicked, but soon he collected his wits enough to realize that it was his one chance to win the princess. He seized the opportunity with alacrity, deciding to make believe that he, and not Tristan, was the hero that had killed the dragon. But first, he looked for Tristan, whom he thought dead or at least badly wounded, with the thought of disposing of him so that nobody could dispute his story. When he could find no trace of the man, he left, in only partial security of the success of his imposture, though not before spearing the dead dragon with a vengeance, although if this was done to vent out his frustration, to have the sensation of having performed the act of killing, or because it gave him some sort of twisted pleasure one can only speculate. Once his energies had been spent and his temper appeased, he lost no time in going back to Weisford, to claim the victory (and the princess) for himself. There, he commandeered a team of four horses and a wagon with which to fetch the dragon's head as proof of his deed. He spread the tale far and wide, taking care to impress upon his audience that it had been his devotion to the lady Isolt and his uncommon strength that had made him triumph

where lesser men had failed. He also reminded the king of his solemn oath to give the princess' hand to whoever killed the serpent.

However, when Princess Isolt heard of this event, she could not be reconciled to marriage to the seneschal. Suspecting foul play, the queen proposed to secretly go to the site of the fight, and thence they went, Isolt, her mother the queen, her cousin Brangaene and her page Paranis. Soon, they found Tristan (who they knew as Tantris, the minstrel), lying in the water, close to death. He had in his power the dragon's tongue, proof that he, and not the seneschal, was the true hero of the tale. The queen, who was well versed in the arts of healing, soon had Tristan recover. He was taken back to the palace and there, with their ministrations, he soon regained his strength. When he recovered enough to talk, he gave them an account of the fight with the dragon, but carefully refrained from revealing his identity, or his true intentions.

In the meantime, the seneschal was pressing his suit and offering to meet in combat anyone who would presume on his mendacity. The king summoned a board of advisors to render counsel in the matter of allowing the seneschal to marry the princess. The queen also gave her advice, and very decidedly claimed that the seneschal had usurped for himself the exploit of another and that she could prove it easily. She confronted him on his fabrication and he brought up the head of the dragon he had taken as proof of his victory, adhering to his version of the tale. The queen then agreed to bring her champion for legal combat in three days time, to see which of the two men was telling the truth. During that span of time, Tristan was nursed back to full health and Isolt found out, to her distress, that he was no other than the murderer of his own uncle, Morolt. She quickly told her mother of both her discovery and her intentions of revenge, but the queen talked her out of the idea of killing her champion, at least for the time being, and Morolt was left unavenged. Instead, they both questioned Tristan, who

finally confessed to them his true mission in coming to Irlant to slay the dragon, and King Marke's wishes regarding princess Isolt, and they reached a truce.

The day came of the trial by combat, and there was much speculation as who would take the field on behalf of the lady Isolt. Eventually, Tristan emerged, fully clad in his best clothes and armour, and a clamour of compliments rose from the crowd. Then, both opponents presented their claims to the hand of the princess. The seneschal, once again, produced the head of the dragon. Tristan, calmly anticipating his victory, requested that the head was examined and that, should there be a tongue inside it, he would renounce his rights in full. Of course, "when the head had been cut open, nothing was found in the gullet. Tristan immediately commanded the tongue to be retrieved and shown" (lines 11,240-43). The seneschal's deceit was thus publicly exposed, as Tristan's possession of the tongue was irrefutable proof that he, Tristan, must have been the one who slew the dragon. The usurper could not prove in any way that Tristan's claim was not licit. He was universally deemed as dishonourable and his tale, an outrageous fabrication. The wretch still pressed to have a combat, but his retainers and relatives persuaded him to desist. The usurper was unmasked and the true hero gained the recognition of the court and the fair prize that came with it, and that he had won for King Marke.

The story then goes on to relate in detail the great tragedy of the two young lovers, which has so often been reinterpreted in literature, music, cinema and art. But few versions have managed to be as colourful as this one is. Not even *Sir Tristrem*, the earliest British work that told this story, and which dedicated no less than seven stanzas to the fight with the dragon. In addition, the episode by Gottfried von Strabourg gives us a fantastically detailed account of the ferocity and danger that one may expect from a dragon. His creature is destructive for no apparent reason (there are no wounded



feelings or prior attacks described). It is a fire-breathing, almost invulnerable serpent, whose venom is so potent it affects the hero even after the creature has been killed and its tongue cut off. But the motif which probably is the most appealing of all is not directly related to the fight, but to the theme of the *false hero*, also present in a number of folktales (such as *The Two Brothers*), and the test to spot the true dragon killer. An almost exact parallel is found in one of the most beautiful and complex plays written for children, *La cabeza del dragon* (2009), by the talented Spanish writer Ramón María del Valle-Inclán. Here, the gifted writer displays all of the conventions of the genre: the dragon who demands to be fed a princess, and who is described as a monster that has traces of the serpent and of the horse, with the wings of a bat (4th scene, p. 68); the villain who tries to rob the hero of his triumph by presenting the dragon's head; and the evidence of the tongue that was cut from the dragon's mouth by the true hero, and which is produced in the climatic end. Valle-Inclán proves here to be a true connoisseur of the structure of the folktale, decades before philologist studies turned in that direction, but also an intellectual who knew his Tristran well.

### ***Sir Bevis of Hampton***

Bevis of Hampton is a legendary English hero whose adventures were immortalized in romance. The oldest existing version is an Anglo-Norman text dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but there are versions of this story in French (13<sup>th</sup> c.), Italian, Yiddish, Irish (15<sup>th</sup> c.) and Russian (16<sup>th</sup> c.), among other languages, which is a proof of its popularity. The earliest English romance (14<sup>th</sup> c.) is based on French originals and its enormous appeal to medieval audiences is exemplified in the numerous versions of it that have survived, but also in the great influence it had on other authors, among whom one must

mention Spenser<sup>1</sup> and Richard Johnson, who both used the dragon-fight theme of the *Bevis* in their own productions<sup>2</sup>.

Bevis is your average skilful and fearless knight who, during his travels, finds himself in many dire situations, several of which involve fighting terrible monsters. In Cologne, the foe to defeat is a dragon. The story relates how two Christian kings from southern Italy, after having warred incessantly for years, are turned into battling dragons, as penance for their sins. One of the dragons goes north and establishes himself in Cologne (Germany), while the other flees to Rome. It is the Cologne dragon that Bevis fights in the romance, after a long, strenuous battle which lasts three days and during the course of which his life seems doomed several times. He is saved each time by resorting to a well of extraordinary healing properties, which come from the fact that a virtuous virgin once bathed in it. This may be seen as a rather curious way of introducing the maiden motif, albeit indirectly, as well as the ever present element of water.

The dragon Sir Bevis fights is described as large (forty feet long from the shoulder to the end of the tail, to be precise), serpent-like and fire-breathing, winged, and with a venom so potent that when he attacked Sir Bevis with an onslaught of it his armour burst and the hero very nearly died (until he managed to crawl to the well and the water made him whole and sound once more). Now, on an extremely uncommon reversal of motifs, the dragon cannot profit from the restorative powers of the well, as he is unable to approach it. Its holiness repels the dragon, which is a product of sin. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Spenser, in the episodes concerning the Redcrosse Knight in *The Faerie Queene* (1590), and Johnson, in his version of the story of St George and the dragon in *The Famous Historie of the Seaven Champions of Christendom* (1596).

<sup>2</sup> Many other authors were influenced by this work, not least of which were Chaucer and Shakespeare (03.15.2013. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beves\\_of\\_Hamtoun\\_\(poem\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beves_of_Hamtoun_(poem))).

fairly obvious that the part Christian ideology plays in this production is paramount, and it can explain a good number of the reversals we come across in the plot. However, other pagan motifs are kept. For example, when Sir Bevis finally vanquished the dragon, smiting his heart in the course of his third attack, he channelled Tristan and cut off the monster's tongue.

### ***Sir Guy of Warwick***

The earliest English romance of Guy of Warwick that has been preserved exists in four different versions from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. As was the case with Sir Bevis, the exploits of Sir Guy of Warwick were fairly popular for centuries, especially so between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. On the other hand, Guy differed from Bevis in some basic points: he too would grow to become a legendary British hero, but he actually started his career as a lowly hero, since he was merely the son of the Earl of Warwick's steward and a page in his court. In order to attain glory and thus aspire to win the hand of the lady Felice, the earl's daughter, he travelled far and wide, joined in tournaments and battled an assortment of monsters, including dragons, giants and boars. Eventually, he came back a great knight and married his lady, but, later on, he felt remorse for the violent deeds of his past, and he went to the Holy Land as a pilgrim to atone for them. Once back in England, he chose to live the rest of his life as a hermit and consecrate his days to God (03.15.2013. <http://machias.edu/faculty/necastro/story/warwick.asp>). That is the general layout of the story. As for the dragon episode, it takes place in Northumberland:

The story tells that Guy was freshly arrived in England to visit his father and friends. By then, his fame was already so great that he was summoned to the royal court at York and received by King Athelstan, no less. There, Guy paid his duty and allegiance to the king. Athelstan welcomed him with kind words, rejoicing in the great

fame of his subject, and almost immediately proceeded to ask him for help. A dragon had arrived from Ireland and was terrorizing Northumberland. Guy proudly boasted that he had already successfully confronted a dragon in the Continent: in one occasion, he had rescued a lion from a dragon, and the lion became so loyal to him that from that moment on Guy had the ferocious feline as a permanent companion. Therefore, he thought nothing of going after this one and announced his resolve to do so.

Off he went, then, riding his charger and in the company of a dozen knights, in search of the monstrous creature. When they found it, the dragon was feasting on human flesh, no less. Revolted, Guy dismissed his guides with these words and approached the dragon's lair:

Then going to the cave, the dragon espied him, and forth he starts with lofty speckled breast, of form most dreadful; which when Guy beheld, into its rest he forthwith puts his lance, then spurs his horse, and to the dragon makes, encountering each the other with such fury as shook the very ground under them. Then Guy recoils and turns about his horse, and comes upon him with redoubled might: the dragon meets him with resistless force, and, like a reed, bit his strong lance in two. "Nay, then," said Guy, "if you are good at biting, I have a tool to pick your teeth withal;" and drew his never failing flaming sword, and on him fell, with furious blows so fierce that many wide and bloody wounds he made. At which the dragon yawned, like hell's wide mouth, roaring aloud with a most hideous noise, and with his claws he rent and tore the ground. Impatient of the smart he underwent, he with his wings would raise his body up, but Guy, with a bold stroke, so cooled his courage that to distend his wings he wanted strength; and, with a few strokes more, Guy brought him down upon the ground, all wallowing in his blood, and from his mouth a fiery flake proceeded whilst Guy with all his might was severing his monstrous head from his more monstrous body; which when he had done, "Now, bloody fiend," said he, "thou hast thy deserved recompence for all the human blood which thou hast shed. And now upon this broken piece of spear unto the king I will bear thy monstrous head, which will by him, I am sure, be well accepted."

After such an impressive battle, Guy took the dead dragon's head back to King Athelstan, as proof of his victory. The king was then in Lincoln, impatiently waiting for

the news, and he received the hero with all honours, and had the head hung up on the castle wall, for everyone to look at and remember the admirable deed of Sir Guy.

Here is a story which is quite paradigmatic of all the standardized dragon tales that we modern readers have in our heads and what we expect to encounter in books or films of the genre. Guy's dragon is large and destructive, it preys on humans, it is described in serpent terms (staring eyes, scales, sharp teeth and forked tongue), or, rather, as a winged saurian. The hero starts his career humbly, and gradually becomes the mightiest, worthiest warrior of the realm. All other would-be heroes have woefully failed in their attempt to stop the monster when he propitiously steps in, the kingdom's last chance of being rid of the monster. The encounter with the dragon is as cinematic as may be: the dragon dwells in a cave (no water in sight here), the fight is both terrible and spectacular and, what is more important, there are witnesses to it: twelve brave knights who have accompanied Guy just to show him the way to the dragon's lair, all twelve of them, and who now can attest to his magnificence as a warrior.

Apart from this, three details of the story call our attention:

The first one, the presence of the extraordinary weapon, Guy's "never failing flaming sword", which is a common enough motif in ancient myths but which has been incorporated into the modern ones.

The second one, the not-so-veiled references to Hell in the description of the dragon, who, although never directly identified with the forces of evil, is alluded to in such terms as to leave the reader in no doubt about it ("like hell's wide mouth", "a face that may well outface the devil"). Guy, on the other hand, is the obvious representative of God.

Finally, it is curious that this specific dragon is accounted to hail from Ireland, a snake-free territory. It could be that, in the common imagery of the time, this creature

could be regarded as one of the serpents fleeing St Patrick; or it could simply be that having the monster come from the closest foreign land was a handy plot resource.

### **The Arthurian Cycle**

In the words of Charles Squire (2003: 354), “the mass of foreign literature dealing with the subject of Arthur is in itself a life-study”. The body of literature that receives this name is generally ascribed to a number of texts written mainly during the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, famously by Chrétien de Troyes, although many authors contributed to the bounty of romances that were to see the light, both in prose and verse, during this time and even long after it. They are stories of adventures and daring heroes and gentle maidens, but it is also easy to see in them the evolution of the medieval society and, above all, medieval ideology, as many scholars are happy to point out (see, for instance, Mendes Pereira, 2008). The phenomenon originated in England, where Geoffroy of Monmouth, royal chronicler of the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, composed between 1135 and 1137 the work that would provide the fertile imagination of other authors with the raw materials with which to create their universe of noble deeds and courtly love. This was the *Historia Regnum Britanniae*, written in Latin and the first written reference<sup>1</sup> to Arthur and Merlin. The wizard’s eventful life would also grant him a

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<sup>1</sup> A debatable notion, since some researchers point to St. Gildas as meriting such an honour. Zierer (2002: 48-57) remarks on the following: St Gildas, in his *De Excedio et Conquestu Britanniae* (540 A. D.), tells of the victory of the Britons on Mount Badon, led by Aurelius Ambrosius, whom some take to be no other than Arthur. The Welsh historian Nennius (*Historia Brittonum*, written c. 800 A. D.) is probably the first to make a direct mention of the king, as he describes the twelve battles the British won under the lead of this dux bellorum (the one on Mount Badon among them, by the way). A number of Celtic works also have Arthur in their ranks or mention some of the motifs common to his adventures: *Kulwch e Olwen* (7th c. A. D.), *Gododdin* (7th c. A. D.) and *Preideu Annwyn* (10th c.). Curiously enough, Geoffrey of Monmouth mentions Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (731 A. D.) as his source, but nowhere in this work is Arthur mentioned.

couple of further works by the same author: *Prophetia Merlini*<sup>1</sup> (1134), which would later become a chapter of the *Historia Regnum Britanniae*, and *Vita Merlini* (1148).

Up to Monmouth's intervention, Arthur had been a legendary hero of the Celts, in the historical context of their wars against the Saxon invaders<sup>2</sup>. But with the writer's skill and the lustre conferred by an acknowledged historical work written in Latin, the language of erudition, his presence and influence was now magnified to that of a paragon among kings. He became the ancestor of the Norman monarchs, and an active champion of Christianity.

But Arthur might never have taken the leap from historical treatise to romance were it not for the efforts of one other author, who was ready to take the baton.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's successor in the court of Henry II, Plantagenet, was Wace, an Anglo-Norman cleric who translated the bulk of the *Historia Regnum Britanniae* into Anglo-Norman French. His *Roman de Brut*, finished in 1155, had, in essentials, the same aim as the *Historia Regnum Britanniae*, in that it attempted to establish a connection between the heroes and feats of the ancient kings and the Anglo-Norman monarchy. In doing so, he also managed to confirm Arthur as a character with great potential for fictional development.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Prophetia Merlini* may have been translated from Welsh for Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, and the references to Celtic mythology and beliefs belie their real antiquity.

<sup>2</sup> The myth of Arthur dates back from the 6th century, as a symbol of resistance against the Saxons. The Britons had already been conquered by the Romans in the 1st century A.D., but the invaders did not interfere too much in Celtic society and beliefs, content to have peace in the island. By the fall of the Roman Empire (5th century A. D.), the Britons were succeedingly attacked by the Scots, the Picts and the Saxons. It was then that they started to tell stories about a perfect king, Arthur, who would once return from the Island of Avalon to reclaim his throne and expel the invaders (Zierer, 2002: 46-7).

There is, nonetheless, a second theory postulated by the American anthropologists Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor, which places the origins of King Arthur and the Holy Grail in an ancient culture, the Alammanic Nart sagas, which spread throughout the Eurasian area and blended with Celtic and Greco-Roman heritages during the Middle Ages (Baccega 2007: 19). It is curious that, of the many names these Indo-European tribes were known for, Herodotus gave them that of sauromatas, meaning "folk of lizards", in allusion to their main totem, a serpent. This may be mere coincidence, but it also gives grounds to the impact of the dragon motif on the Arthurian legends (Littleton, 2000: 13, in Baccega, 2007: 19).

One of the first to realize this was Chrétien de Troyes, who is believed to have written no less than five works on Arthurian themes: *Erec et Enide* (1170), *Cligés* (1176), *Yvain* and *Lancelot* (between 1177 and 1181) and the unfinished *Perceval* (between 1180 and 1191). His is a completely new approach to the raw materials provided by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Where Monmouth and Wace sought simply to embellish historical events, Chrétien de Troyes highlights the thirst for adventure of his characters. His truth is not the historical truth, but a reelaboration of it that suits the reigning ideology of this time in history. He uses motifs inherited from both folklore and literature, but also from the culture of the time. He, and many others after him, wrote for a set of nobility that had certain beliefs, and certain requirements, and that is the reason why these works are more than legends or outrageous adventures, they are reflections of an era. A complex era, at that. The 13<sup>th</sup> century, in particular, saw the ultimate prosification and Christianization of the *Matter of Britain*. The diffusion of these works was extraordinary, even in a civilization of such limited means as was Medieval Europe.

And, rather unsurprisingly, the Arthurian legends are ripe with dragons too. The list of texts that may be branded as part of the Arthurian Cycle is so extensive and they are all so fertile in dragon encounters that a detailed examination of them all would give cause to a whole new study. That is the reason why I have decided on a very narrow selection of episodes, grounding my decision on the following aspects: the importance of the story in the general context of the Arthurian cycle and its recurrent presence in the different works; the popularity of the text at the time, which would result in a spreading of the tale far and wide; and the distribution in the British Isles, which would grant knowledge of the work by the population and, therefore, its influence on new productions attempted in the islands.



To this I will add that those works dealing with the very specific breed of the dragon maiden (and very numerous they were too!) will be addressed in a section of their own, where the same requirements that rule this selection will apply.

This leaves us with the basics of the Arthurian stories. Bearing this in mind, it is obvious that the first story that must demand our attention by its own merits is the very one that gives a name to the whole line of literary production: Arthur.

The very origin of this legendary king and warrior is heralded by dragons, as he is engendered by no other than Uther or Uthyr, who had earned himself the name Pendragon<sup>1</sup>, a name that his son bore with pride as well. The most popular rendition of Uther appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regnum Britanniae*<sup>2</sup>. The epithet *pendragon* literally means "chief-dragon", meaning that he is a leader of leaders. If this were not enough, his life is sprinkled with several dragon episodes. The first one, that he once witnessed a dragon-shaped comet, an occurrence that heralded great things and which inspired both his name and his dragon standards, and even his son's helm, which bore a red dragon that would eventually find its way into the Welsh flag.

But, long before that, another central character to the Arthurian Cycle had become involved in a dragon episode too, and it was a very relevant one: when the main character of this story was but a boy, the politics of the time were, if anything, turbulent. Vortigern was the chief adviser of king Constans, and practically a surrogate king. After having Constans killed, a long conflict ensued between the Britons and the Saxons, who were then beginning to settle in Britain. During a meeting between both parties, the Saxons massacred the British nobles. Only Vortigern was spared and he fled to Wales.

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<sup>1</sup> Uther Pendragon (also Uthyr Bendragon), a legendary king of Celtic Britain (04.21.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth (Wales c. 1100 – c. 1155) (09.22.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).



Illumination of a 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of *Historia Regnum Britanniae* (05.26.2014. <http://www.vortigernstudies.org.uk/artlit/image3.htm>).

Here is what happened there:

He tried to build a stronghold in Snowdonia, but three times, in the night, the building materials mysteriously vanished. He consulted his magicians, who told him he would only succeed if he sprinkled the foundations with the blood of a boy born without a father<sup>1</sup>. Such a boy was found and when he was brought to the King, told him that beneath a certain stone was a pool, which was undermining his foundations. In the pool they would find a tent containing two dragons, one red, the other white. Everything turned out as the boy had said, and when the dragons were uncovered they began to fight. First the white one seemed to be winning, but then the red one drove him out of the tent. The boy said the tent was Britain, the white dragon the Saxons, and the red the Welsh, who in the fullness of time would reconquer their lands. Vortigern himself must give up his citadel to the boy, whose name was Emrys<sup>2</sup> or 'Ambrose' and who, it is implied, was that same Ambrosius Aurelianus whom tradition claims launched the counter-attack against the Saxons which King Arthur led (Westwood, 1994: 340).

Geoffrey of Monmouth had this boy named as Merlin, and such he would remain in most future works.

A tradition recorded in 1861 adds that Merlin left there a treasure, which only a youth with blue eyes and yellow hair would find (Westwood, 1994: 341). It has never been ascertained whether such person ever claimed it.

As for the story of the two battling dragons, it is not unique: some legends of combats between two dragons seem to commemorate past battles. So it has been suggested to be the case with the fight described in a fifteenth-century chronicle nowadays kept in Canterbury Cathedral, about a battle between two fire-breathing dragons that took place in a marshy field known as Sharpfight Meadow or Shalford Meadow, on the afternoon of Friday, 25 September 1449, near the village of Little

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<sup>1</sup> This unsavoury method (sprinkling the foundations with the blood of a child) is probably the remnants of some foundation sacrifice. Westwood (1994: 340-1) mentions that, as late as 1717, it is known that Dutch and German workers attempted to sacrifice children under some dykes.

<sup>2</sup> It has been discovered, in the site of this legend, an Iron Age settlement, which was re-occupied in the second part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and goes by the name of Dinas Emrys. Ambrosius is said to have lived in this place in the 5<sup>th</sup> century too (Westwood, 1994: 341).

Cornard (Suffolk). One cannot get much more specific than that. One of the dragons was black and hailed from Kedington Hill; the other, red and spotted, came from Ballingdon Hill, in Essex. After fighting for the better part of an hour, the red dragon won, and both returned to their dwellings, both alive, although one can imagine the black dragon would be a little worse for wear. Now, this very spot where the two dragons battled is accounted to be the place where Boadicea decimated the Ninth Legion from Colchester (Westwood, 1994: 185-6).

But let us return to Arthur, who had an encounter with a dragon, too, although it did not involve much real fighting for the king:

Arthyr and his hosts went to the port of Northhamtwn; and when he got a fair wind he sailed for fraink. And when he had reached the middle of the ocean, a sleep as of the dead held him much of the night, and he saw a dream. He saw flying from the south a sort of monster, with a terrible voice, alighting on the shore of ffraink; and he saw a dragon coming from the west, and by the glare of its eyes the sea was lighted up. And he saw the dragon and the Bear (Arth) engaging; and when they had fought for a long time, he saw the dragon spitting out gleaming flames of fire upon the Bear, and burning him up completely. And perplexing was the dream to Arthyr. And then he awoke and told his comrades of the vision; and thus did they make interpretation: 'Thou, Lord, shalt fight some monster of a giant and conquer him, for the dragon signifies thyself.' But Arthyr put no trust in this, for he believed that it should be between the emperor and himself (translation by Ettlinger, 1948: 100).

Dream interpretation was a common (and serious) pastime in the Middle Ages, and professional dream-readers were frequently summoned to unravel some particularly intricate dream. It seems there was no such figure among Arthur's attendants, since he doubts the interpretation they give him. He appears to be much more confident of what he hears in Sir Thomas Malory's version of this same episode, which will be presented in the section following this one.

It is somewhat curious that, even though Arthur's life is punctuated with dragon episodes, he did not once fight one. They are generally used as elements of prophecy or

in dream sequences, such as the one seen above. They often stand for kings, sometimes for nations, and always for portentous events. This use was hardly surprising for the readers at the time, for all creatures, plants and even stones had allegorical meanings during the Middle Ages. Even the scientific manuals adapted from classical writers from the Antiquity were embellished and modified to charge the descriptions with the new symbolic references.

In any event, these were the chief episodes that would be repeated time and again by European writers during the Medieval era and beyond, relaborating the stories of King Arthur and his knights ad infinitum, blurring some aspects and sharpening others, depending on the aim of the author and the tastes of the time.

The question of whether Arthur was a historical figure or a creature of legend is still under debate. The latest studies seem to point towards the confusion between a military commander at the time of the Roman colonization and some local divinity of war. The impressive amount of medieval fiction that was written around his figure and that of his knights has its roots deep in ancient folklore. But not only in Celtic folklore. Even should one refuse to contemplate Littleton's claims of an eastern origin of the Arthurian myth, one cannot but acquiesce to the fact that medieval literature was greatly influenced by classical sources, which inspired a number of situations and adventures of the *Matter of Britain*. Fantastic adventures, hazardous travels and fabulous monsters were not unheard of in Greece and Rome, and a perusal of the *Odissey* or the *Illiad*, to give but two examples, would give any writer the inspiration needed to put pen to paper.

### **Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur***

Sir Thomas Malory is the acknowledged author of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Several identities have been proposed for this "knight prisoner", Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Rebel in

Warwickshire<sup>1</sup> (c. 1405-1471) being the one that is more generally acknowledged. The little that is known with some certainty is that he must have come from a well-off family and that he was familiar with the dialect spoken in Yorkshire. Obviously, he was also familiar with the literary tradition around the figure of King Arthur, and must have been influenced by works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regnum Britanniae* (12<sup>th</sup> century), Wace's *Roman de Brut* (12<sup>th</sup> century) and *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* (14<sup>th</sup> century), among others (Kordecki, 1984: 67-8).

The oldest surviving copy of *Le Morte d'Arthur* is found in the Winchester manuscript, which was written after the author's death, but the version that became popular was William Caxton's one, which differed slightly, although there is proof that Caxton knew and even was at some point in possession of the Winchester manuscript. It was William Caxton who re-titled the original work (*The hoole booke of kyng Arthur & of his noble knyghtes of the rounde table*) as *Le Morte d'Arthur* in 1485, a title that was uniformly embraced. The manuscript is nowadays kept in the British Library (03.22.2013. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/englit/malory>). The work proved popular and had several reprints over the next two centuries, and had a revival during the Romantic period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The plot is as famous as it can get. Structured in 21 books, it retells the story of King Arthur, his marriage to Guinevere, the noble deeds of the Knights of the Round Table and the Quest for the Holy Grail. It has been argued that the author intended it as a model of an ideal kingdom, as a contrast to the disorderly times of the War of the Roses. Besides, it is written in prose, which gives it an aura of seriousness, as tales were written in verse and prose was used in history. This, as well as other features, marks it

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<sup>1</sup> He is believed to have written the text while he was imprisoned, during the 1450s (03.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

as a very modern work for its time. But, even more importantly, Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* is the main production from which authors after him have drawn their material, first in literature and arts and, more recently, in cinema.

Regarding the occurrence of dragons in this work, Kordecki has noticed the following pattern:

(Dragons) are often found in an episode which proves significant or even determinative to the major themes of Arthurian romance, i.e., Arthur's life, Round Table chivalry, and the quest for the Holy Grail. This in itself is not so remarkable since dragons or otherwise monstrous creatures frequently appear in prophetic sequences, such as dreams, and prophecy would be used to foreshadow the prominent events of the narratives. What struck me was the evidence of premeditation in tales that seem to flaunt sloppy plots the rather surprising attention to overall meaning (Kordecki, 1984: 62).

What the author means is that there is evidence, as we saw above, that the medieval mentality recognized the use of a series of animals or objects as symbols of something else entirely. For instance, Zeldenrust<sup>1</sup> (2011) explores the specific case of the dragon maiden, and observes that it seems to represent a turning point in the development of the knight, and a necessary adventure to establish his identity. In Malory, the dragon motif punctuates some parts of the narrative, and they are used predominantly as omens or signs of something to come.

Serpents make an appearance in Book I, Chapter XIX, in a dream Arthur has after inadvertently sleeping with his own sister:

Thenne the kyng dremed a merueillous dreme wherof he was sore adrad  
/ But al this tyme kyng Arthur knewe not that kyng Lots wyf was his  
syster / Thus was the dreme of Arthur / hym thought ther was come in  
to this land Gryffons and Serpentes / And hym thoughte they brente and  
slough alle the peple in the lād And thenne hym thoughte / he faughte  
with hem / and they dyd hym passynge grete harme / and wounded hym  
ful sore / but at the last he slewe hem (Book I, Capitulum xix)

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<sup>1</sup> Her Research Master Thesis, "When a Knight Meets a Dragon Maiden: Human Identity and the Monstrous Animal Other", found at [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu), deals with this topic extensively.

(03.01.2013.

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:23.3?rgn=div2;view=to>  
c).

This fateful night, Arthur conceives a son, Mordred, who will eventually bring about his death and the end of his kingdom. Arthur awakes in distress, which is perfectly understandable, for, in this specific instance, the presence of monsters is clearly an evil omen. Here, the author makes use of the shift of meaning of the symbol of the serpent, which became associated with the Devil in the Christian imagery. By the end of the book, Arthur dreams again of serpents, the night before the battle against Mordred:

Soo vpon Trynyte sonday at nyghte kyng Arthur dremed a wonderful dreme / & that was this / that hym semed / he satte vpon a chaflet in a chayer / and the chayer was fast to a whele and therupon satte kyng Arthur in the rychest clothe of gold that myghte be made / and the kyng thoughte ther was vnder hym fer from hym an hydous depe blak water / and there in were alle maner of serpentys and wormes and wylde bestes foule and horryble / and sodenly the kyng thoughte the whele turned vp soo doune / and he felle amonge the serpentys / & euery beest took hym by a lymme / and thenne the kyng cryed as he lay in his bedde and slepte / helpe / And thenne knyghtes squyers and yomen awaked the kyng (Book XXI, Capitulum iij) (03.01.2013. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:23.3?rgn=div2;view=to> oc).

Arthur is not one to skirt a good battle, but in this case his knights advise him against military action. Mordred agrees to sign a treaty with his father, but, during the signing, a black snake causes one of his men to draw his sword, and that leads to an impromptu battle, where both Mordred and Arthur find their death. The prediction is thus fulfilled, and with the aid of a snake, no less.

The motif is again used in the Christian sense in Book XIV, Chapter VI, when Sir Percival helps a lion to defeat a serpent, and then he dreams of two women, one astride a lion, one astride a serpent, which are later interpreted as allegories of the



Church, the new law (the woman on the lion) and the Devil, the old law (the one on the dragon).

However, the serpent may be a positive presence when it appears in a dream or vision. In those cases, the creature is identified as a dragon, and it seems to inherit its traits not from the Christian imagery, but from the traditional tales of extraordinarily powerful creatures, not directly linked with the evilness of Hell. There is one such example in Book V, Chapter IV, when Arthur is sailing to northern Europe, directly after declaring war to Rome:

And as the kyng laye in his caban in shyp / he fyll in a slomerynge and dremed a merueyllous dreme / hym semed that a dredeful dragon dyd drowne moche of his peple / and he cam fleyng oute of the west / and his hede was enameled with asure / and his sholders shone as gold / his bely lyke maylles of a merueyllous hewe / his taylle ful of tatters / his feet ful of fyne sable / & his clawes lyke fyne gold And an hydous flamme of fyre flewe oute of his mouthe / lyke as the londe and water had flammed all of fyre / After hym semed there came oute of thoryent / a grymly bore al blak in a clowde / and his pawes as bygge as a post / he was rugged lokyng roughly / he was the foulest beest that euer man sawe / he rored and romed soo hydrously that it were merueill to here / Thenne the dredeful dragon auanced hym and cam in the wynde lyke a fawcon gyuyng grete strokes on the bore / and the bore hytte hym ageyne with his grysly tuskes / that his brest was al bloody / and that the hote blood made alle the see reed of his blood / Thenne the dragon flewe away al on a heyȝte / and come doune with suche a swough and smote the bore on the rydge whiche was x foote large fro the hede to the taylle / and smote the bore all to powdre bothe flesshe and bonys / that it flutteryd al abroad on the see (Book V, Capitulum iij) (03.01.2013. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:23.3?rgn=div2;view=to> c).

On waking up, the king summons a philosopher to have him interpret the dream, and he is told that the dragon represents Arthur himself, and the boar (a bear in the Winchester edition), a tyrant which threatens his people. It is a very convenient interpretation, which presents the king very flatteringly, in the guise of a splendid dragon which flies and breathes fire, and one which foresees his victory over Rome (the

boar). It proves a very effective way of bolstering a king, who, truth be told, does not need much bolstering to begin with.

In these examples, dragon imagery is used to emphasize certain episodes of the life of the king, namely his certain downfall at the hands of his own offspring, but also his status as an extraordinary leader, who therefore must be represented by the most extraordinary of beasts.

Another such vision is found in Book XI, Chapter V, where Sir Bors has a truly uncanny experience:

And thenne syre Bors was ware where came in an hydous lyon / soo sire bors dressid hym vnto the lyon / & anone the lyon berafte hym his sheld & with his suerd syr bors smote of the lyons heed / Page 579 [leaf 290r] Ryght soo syre Bors forth with all sawe a dragon in the courte passynge horryble / and there semed letters of gold wryten in his forhede / and sir Bors thoughte that the letters made a sygnyfycacyon of kynge Arthur / Ryghte soo there came an horryble lybard and an old / and there they foughte longe / & dyd grete batail to gyders / And at the laste the dragon spytte oute of his mouthe as hit had ben an honderd dragons / and lyghtely alle the smal dragons slewe the old dragon and tare hym all to pyeces (Book XI, Capitulum quantum) (03.01.2013. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:23.3?rgn=div2;view=to c>).

Here, the appearance of the dragon precedes that of an old man that sings the story of Joseph of Arimathea, and several other scenes with an imagery that clearly leads the reader to the theme of the Holy Grail.

Finally, a typical dragon encounter can be found in the text too. It happens in Book XI, Chapter I, when Lancelot, who is fresh from rescuing a lady imprisoned in a tub of boiling water, goes with said lady to a chapel to give thanks and they find themselves in this predicament:

Soo whanne they came there and gaf thankynge to god / alle the people both lerned and lewde gaf thankynge vnto god and hym / and sayd sir knyght syn ye haue delyuerd this lady / ye shall delyuer vs from a serpent that is here in a tombe / Thenne syr launcelot tooke his shelde

and said brynge me thyder / and what I may doo vnto the pleasyr of god  
and yow I wille doo /

Soo whanne sir Laūcelot came thydder / he sawe wryten vpon the  
tombe letters of gold that said thus / Here shalle come a lybard of  
kynges blood / and he shalle slee this serpent / and this lybard shalle  
engendre a lyon in this foreyn countrey the whiche lyon shall passe alle  
other knyghtes / Soo thenne sir launcelot lyfte vp the tombe / and there  
came out an horryble & a fyendly dragon spyttynge fyre oute of his  
mouthe / Thenne sir launcelot drewe his swerd and fought with the  
dragon longe / and atte laste with grete payne sir launcelot slewe that  
dragon / There with alle came kynge Pelles the good and noble knyght /  
and salewed syr launcelot and he hym ageyne / Fair knyghte sayd the  
kynge / What is your name / I requyre you of your kny3thode telle me  
(03.01.2013.

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:23.3?rgn=div2;view=to>  
c).

The dragon had his lair in a tomb, which is a common motif in other stories we have seen, so it is probably that Malory is using the common tradition, as found in folktales and in Germanic productions such as *Beowulf*, in any case, a notion that was easily recognizable for his audience. The creature is also regular enough: it spits fire and it is hard to vanquish. The maiden is present, although not in direct danger from the dragon, having already been rescued by the knight.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the typical structure of the episode, this adventure is not so very different from the oneiric experiences of both King Arthur and Sir Bors. The dragon Lancelot confronts has written on his tomb that the one that slays him (Lancelot) will engender another (Galahad), who will find the Holy Grail, that is, the dragon, once again, is part of a prophecy that involves the recovery of the Grail. Thus, Malory's two main themes, the life and death of Arthur and the quest for the Grail, are emphasized by the recurrent appearance of serpents and dragons.

### **The Gentle Way: The Laidley Worm**

There is a type of story unlike any that have been seen so far and where the main elements present (dragon, maiden and hero) merge in a peculiar way and that would

constitute a different group of stories in its own right. It is the legend of the Laidley<sup>1</sup> Worm, which is found in the very popular Scottish ballad *Kemp Owyne* (1882-98), but also in numerous folktales, both in Britain and other countries. A Laidley Worm is basically a dragon maiden, that is, a female that has been transformed into a dragon or serpent, generally against her will. These dragon maidens are actually shape-shifters, appearing sometimes as women and sometimes as serpents. Furthermore, they figure in two types: the woman that metamorphoses into a serpent, although usually keeping some human trace, such as human eyes or lips (these creatures are also traditionally known as *lamias*); and the woman that occasionally becomes a serpent, but only from the waist down, preserving her female upper body (the *melusine*). Initially, such a creature may take the knowledgeable reader straight to a very similar other: the devil<sup>2</sup>. However, the *melusine* has some specific traits of her own that may acquit her of the charge and justify her being placed in a slightly different shelf, as will soon be seen.

The first premise is usually as follows: a girl is enchanted and turned into a serpent and the curse cannot be broken unless a hero steps in and performs a disagreeable task, which is, more often than not, kissing the girl when she is in serpent form. In *Kemp Owyne*, it is the girl's stepmother that casts a spell on her, turning her into a hideous monster. Prior to the spell, she had thrown her over a crag into the sea. The unfortunate maiden will only be released if Kemp Owyne, the king's son, accedes to kiss her three times.

The second premise has the maiden marrying a man at the beginning of the story, but putting a condition on their marriage: he is not to seek her out at specific

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<sup>1</sup> *Laidley* means "loathsome" (Simpson, 2001:58).

<sup>2</sup> Medieval and even Renaissance iconography tended to represent the tempting devil as a serpent with a woman's face, which attests to the general conception of women as treacherous creatures who may easily pervert the minds of the pure-hearted (Beadle & King, 1999: 8, in Mourón Figueroa, 2005: 230)

times (predominantly, on Saturdays). The husband breaks his promise and sees his wife at the bath, with only the upper-half of her body in human form, while the lower-half has the shape of a snake. As a result of the transgression, the lady is permanently turned into a serpent.

This monster, although a serpent herself, must be deemed as different from the majority of the dragons seen heretofore, if only because there is a component of metamorphosis. The fact that she can not be categorized as either human or animal makes this a case where the hero needs to tread lightly. She is unnatural; she crosses the boundaries of order carefully established in the medieval mind, the age during which most of these stories are placed. How can the hero react in such a situation? Is the dragon maiden to be regarded primarily as a maiden or as a dragon?

I have mentioned the Middle Ages as the primary time in which most of these episodes occur, but this is not completely true. There is a huge amount of Laidley Worm stories that are set in medieval times, but most of these belong to the oral tradition, and it is hard for the researcher to gauge with a minimum of veracity whether such and such tale can truly be traced back to the Middle Ages, especially when most of them were first recorded in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Only in literature can we be sure that we are truly dealing with a medieval story. And why should this be relevant? Because it does explain the course of events and, more importantly, the hero's reaction to this plight.

Nevertheless, should our caution, or cynicism, take us to consider that the collectors' claim that the folktales gathered go back to the Middle Ages is but a pretence to make them more appealing, it is important to note that medieval literature *does* provide plenty of episodes featuring laidley worms. Therefore, it is not altogether implausible that these stories made their way into folklore, just as it is completely

logical to suppose that the literary versions of the tale were originally inspired in oral stories.

In literature, the premise of the cursed maiden turned into serpent appears in chivalric romances, the earliest being the thirteenth-century work *Le Bel Inconnu ou Giglain Fils de Messire Gauvain et de la Fee aux Blanches Mains*<sup>1</sup>, a title of the Arthurian cycle. Here, when the Bel Inconnu found the dragon maiden, he hesitated whether to kiss her or kill her, and so the lady took matters into her own claws and kissed him herself. Unfortunately for her, though, once in human form she offered her hand to the hero, but he, being already in love with another, declined it.

Not very long after *Le Bel Inconnu* had been written, a similar version was produced in Britain. *Lybeaus Desconus*<sup>2</sup> was composed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and, just as in its French counterpart, the hero, Lybeaus, frees the Lady of Synadowne from her fate as dragon maiden, although in his case, as he is free from any previous attachment, he decides to marry her.

In *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*<sup>3</sup>, there is a very similar account that the narrator imports from Ancient Greece. In this tale, the daughter of Hippocrates is transformed by the goddess Diana into a dragon on the island of Lango and cursed to remain so until a hero deigns to kiss her. No noble knight can support the idea, and even a champion arrived from Rhodes to the island of Cos with the express purpose of kissing her flees on seeing how hideous the dragon is (see Appendix B).

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<sup>1</sup> This poem is generally attributed to Renaut de Beaujeu (03.29.2013. <http://www.larouse.fr>).

<sup>2</sup> The poem is anonymous, although it is usually ascribed to Thomas Chertre (Zeldenrust, 2011: 36).

<sup>3</sup> This anonymous book of travels was written during the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and it was extremely popular at the time. The English version of this originally French work first appeared about 1375. Sir John Mandeville is the purported author, but his identity remains unknown to this day. The only information that the author provides is that he hails from the town of St Albans, in England. The work was still widely read during the Renaissance, to which attest the hundreds of surviving copies of it (09.22.2013. <http://www.britannica.com>).

Similar stories can be found in other medieval literary traditions, such as the thirteenth-century *Lanzelet*<sup>1</sup>, written in Middle High German; the Valencian *Tirant lo Blanc* (15<sup>th</sup> century), by Joanot Martorell, which provides the story of the dragon maiden on the island of Lango with a happy ending; or the Italian productions *Carduino*<sup>2</sup> (14<sup>th</sup> century), *Ponzela Gaia* (15<sup>th</sup> century), and Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (15<sup>th</sup> century).

As mentioned, the theme is a recurrent one in folklore too. The ballad *Kemp Owyne* has already been introduced, and now a second Scottish work must be added to it: *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Huegh*.

In *Kemp Owyne*, as seen above, the heroine is turned into a monster by her evil stepmother, and only three kisses from the king's son, Kemp Owyne, will release her from her awful fate. As expected, sometime later in the story the very Kemp Owyne steps in. However, having no notion of the curse, he arrives with a nefarious purpose, although in his view it is the noblest and most logical course of action: to slay the monster. Fortunately, the maiden has not been deprived of the power of speech and thus she explains in no uncertain terms what exactly he needs to do. The prince does perform as is expected of the hero, and the girl recovers her true form, to his great delight. He is rewarded with some magical items (a belt, a ring and a sword) and the stepmother is cursed in turn (Simpson, 2001: 59).

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<sup>1</sup> The existing text was translated into Middle High German by the Swiss Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, but the original is supposed to have been an Anglo-Norman manuscript from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century (Zeldenrust, 2011: 38).

<sup>2</sup> Probably written by Antonio Pucci (Zeldenrust, 2011: 36). Medieval authorship is a perpetual challenge for philologists.

In the Victorian ballad *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heugh*<sup>1</sup>, the situation is fairly similar. The girl in this tale, Margaret, has been changed by her stepmother too. As a worm, she has a deadly breath and is fond of milk, and seven cows are milked daily for her benefit and the milk is taken in a trough to Spindlestone Heugh, where she has her lair. The spell can only be broken by her own brother, the Child of Wynd. Although the stepmother goes to great lengths to stop him from acting, he eventually gives her sister the necessary three kisses to disenchant her. The stepmother is turned to a hideous toad, as punishment for her actions. There used to be in Spindleston, where these proceedings take place, a Worm's Cave, which has been quarried, to the dejection of any researcher who might have wished to explore it in search of archaeological traces of this legend (Simpson, 2001: 59-60, Westwood, 1994: 399-400).

Similar stories can be found in ballads such as *Alison Gross* (where it is the boy that is turned into a worm and his sister the one who comes to provide assistance) and *The Laidly Worm and the Mackerel of the Sea* (where both brother and sister are transformed into a worm and a mackerel, respectively, but only he succeeds in breaking the spell) (Simpson, 2001: 59).

Outside of the British Isles, the story is also highly popular. In Iceland, the saga of Áslól and Hjálmtèr deals with it:

Áslól is transformed, along with her brother and sister, by their evil stepmother. Áslól, particularly, has been turned into a hideous monster and she will only be released from the spell if a king's son consents to kiss her. In very much the same structure as in the Scottish ballad of Kemp Owyne, prince Hjálmtèr is accosted by Áslól, who convinces him to kiss her in exchange of a very powerful sword.

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<sup>1</sup> The verses were published by the Rev. Mr Lamb, Vicar of Northam, who claimed he was transcribing from a manuscript from the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Simpson, 2001: 59).





John D. Batten, *The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh*, for Joseph Jacobs' *English Fairy Tales*. 1890  
(05.27.2014).  
[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/English\\_Fairy\\_Tales/The\\_Laidly\\_Worm\\_of\\_Spindleston\\_Heugh](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/English_Fairy_Tales/The_Laidly_Worm_of_Spindleston_Heugh).

In Denmark, we find *Jomfruen i Ormeham*, a ballad preserved in manuscripts of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries tells the story of Sir Jenus. Here, the maid can retain her human form for a portion of the day, but turns into a little snake when the clock strikes midnight. She appears at Sir Jenus's bedside as a maiden and offers him gifts, but he is fast asleep and cannot help her. His page, however, witnesses the episode, and he repeats to his master all that has occurred. Then, Sir Jenus orders his horse and rides in search of the snake. Once he finds it, he kisses it, and the snake turns into the girl again. There is only one thing left for Sir Jenus to do, and that is asking for her hand in marriage.

The motif of the cursed maiden who is released with a kiss is repeated in other Danish tales, although the maiden herself may be transformed into creatures other than a snake or dragon (a tree, a troll, etc), but the snake is, beyond any doubt, the most common one.

In Galicia (Spain) there is a peculiar variation of this story. It says that there is a serpent living in a lake called Lagoa da Serpe<sup>1</sup> ("the serpent's lake") in A Veiga (Ourense). During the full moon, the creature metamorphoses into a beautiful maiden, with long flowing black hair, that she brushes carefully as dawn breaks on the day of St John. She usually sits on a stone, pensive and sad, for she is waiting for some brave soul to help her break her enchantment. It is said that once she beseeched a young chap from the neighbouring village of Xares to help her, explaining that all he had to do was meet her in her serpent form at dawn and spit on her mouth. After many entreaties and promises that she would not hurt him as a serpent, the youth decided to do the deed. She

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<sup>1</sup> Independently of this specific legend, the Lagoa da Serpe is a place ripe with legend and tradition. It is believed that its water causes death to whomever drinks it, and, should one be as foolish as to bathe there, escape from its perilous waters would be impossible (04.01.2013. <http://www.galiciaencantada.com>).

had promised to give him her hand and a great fortune, and he, finding her as pretty as he could wish and himself a fearless fellow, promised to do as told.

The following morning, he appeared at the lake at the appointed time, and there was the serpent, large and terrible, swimming in the lake. When the monster saw the boy, she approached gently, taking great pains so that he would not be scared, but it was in vain. The chap was frightened to death and he scampered away.

A different version has the happy-ever-after resolution. This one relates how a young man from the village of Ponte, being given the same instructions, managed to keep his countenance when the serpent arrived and succeeded in breaking the curse. (04.01.2013.

[http://www.galiciaencantada.com/dentro.asp?c=4&id=1550&n=a\\_lagoa\\_da\\_serpe\\_de\\_pena\\_trevinca](http://www.galiciaencantada.com/dentro.asp?c=4&id=1550&n=a_lagoa_da_serpe_de_pena_trevinca)).

Actually, the North of Spain is ripe with stories such as this one: maidens of the underworld, who live by wells and turn into serpents, or who guard some treasure that can only be acquired by releasing the *moura* (or *xana*, or *anjana*, depending on whether one comes across her in Galicia, Asturias, León or Cantabria), or solving some riddle she presents to the male who approaches her. The procedure to break the curse always involves some deed with sexual undertones: in San Amaro (Ourense, Galicia), the worm carries a flower in her mouth, and the would-be hero has to take it from her with his mouth in order to have her turn back into a woman. In San Vicencio de Vigo (Carral, A Coruña, Galicia), a young local chap serendipitously learnt that to help a beautiful maiden who is under a spell he needed to kiss her three times. The following day, he went to the spot where he had seen the girl and waited for her but, instead of the ravishing beauty he had expected, an enormous and ugly serpent came gliding through the river water. Although terrified, the boy kissed the creature three times and, after the

third one, she recovered her female form and both left for a faraway land, taking with them a great treasure (González Reboledo, 1995: 109-10).

Many of these encounters take place on significant dates, very particularly on the eve of St John's Day. Caro Baroja (1979: 276-7) gives a great many examples of this stirring of the fantastic beings on such a date in many Spanish villages: enchanted maidens and giants, and mysterious beings of all sorts. This includes the lamias of the Lamiñerréka river (Ceberio, Vizcaya, Basque Country), or "the river of the lamias", who once revealed mortals the secret to exterminate them<sup>1</sup> (278). In Jaraiz de la Vera (Cáceres, Extremadura), he uncovers a striking story, much to the liking of this researcher:

En el castillo de Jaraiz sale una infanta mora montada en un dragón y en los nidos de águila de los picachos de la Vera, a los que va, busca un huevo no empollado en el cual pretende encontrar un anillo mágico que contrarreste el efecto de otro que lleva puesto en el dedo del corazón<sup>2</sup> (Caro Baroja, 1979: 277).

The theme and some of the elements of this story, while uncommon in other tales (at least in those that have been preserved), are truly exciting in that they both mirror ancient motifs (the magical ring) and herald others that are nowadays exceptionally popular (the dragon riding), as will be evidenced in Chapter 4.

These are but a small fraction of the many examples of stories all over Europe that contain this theme of the dragon maiden, and they illustrate the enormous popularity that they once had.

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<sup>1</sup> This was an imprudent decision on their part to be sure. For those of you who may ever find yourselves in need of extinguishing the lamia race, you must know that you will need to plough the neighbouring lands using a team of brown bullocks born on the day of St John (Caro Baroja, 1979: 278). That is, provided the lamias spoke truth.

<sup>2</sup> "In the castle of Jaraiz a Moor princess sets off riding a dragon and she travels to the peaks of Vega, where she rummages the eagles' nests in search of an unfertilized egg, where she expects to find a magical ring to neutralize the effect of the one she carries on her middle finger" (translation by the author of this study).



Adam and Eve in the Garden by Michelangelo. Notice how the snake has a female upper body. This imagery is common to many other authors who painted this episode, such as Masolino da Panicale (15<sup>th</sup> century), Girolamo Macchietti and Giulio Romano (16<sup>th</sup> century).

But we must not forget the second set of stories, that one revolving around the myth of Melusine. Although she was not named until the late Middle Ages, the story of the woman who forbids her husband to seek her on Saturdays, because during that day she becomes half serpent, had been in circulation for a long time, both in literature and folklore. She was present in Jean d'Arras' *Mélusine ou La Noble Histoire de Lusignan* (late 14<sup>th</sup> century), which is arguably the most popular of all productions containing this tale, which goes as follows: Remondin, the hero, meets Mélusine, a beautiful princess, near a spring. She has been cursed by her mother to turn in to a half-serpent every Saturday, but Remondin is unaware of this and he marries her. She, fearing his reaction should he find out about her condition, makes him agree that he must never look for her on Saturdays. They have many children and, for most of the text, the text revolves around their lives, Mélusine's particular circumstances laid aside until the end of the story. Then, it tells how Remondin grows curious of the Saturday agreement and, fearing adultery, seeks her out. He finds her in her bath, in all her monstrosity. Although repulsed, he does not mention it to her until later, and when he does, in a moment of rage, she makes a dignified speech and leaves him, turning into a serpent permanently.

The story was recreated in several languages during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and became a popular work in the whole of Europe during that time. Also, variations of the theme are found in *Les Voeux du Paon* (14<sup>th</sup> century), and in Gervais of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* (13<sup>th</sup> century).

Researcher Lydia Zeldenrust (2011), to whom I owe an essential part of the background for this chapter, has observed that these episodes contributed to the formation of medieval identity. They appear on the story for the sake of the hero's

development, in the context of chivalric society, as a necessary step for the hero to establish himself as a worthy character<sup>1</sup> before he can reveal his identity.

Returning to the initial question raised by this particular type of creature, it is not easy to determine whether they are mostly human or mostly monsters. True, the lamia eventually becomes a woman, and is perceived throughout as a woman trapped in a monstrous body; and the melusine eventually becomes a serpent, which would make her fit in the animal world rather than in the human one. They may be the best examples yet of Gilmore's explanation of the monster (2003: 191):

(...) there is always a non-fixed boundary between men and monsters. In the end, there can be no clear division between us and them, between civilization and bestiality. As we peer into the abyss, the abyss stares back.

And yet, it is interesting to note that, in the work by Arras, Mélusine makes a heated defence of her humanity and of how her husband has wronged her, which seems more in tune with our present day sensibilities than with the medieval ideals.

Finally, let us not forget that the dragon maiden is not an exclusive occurrence of the medieval imagery, for she was present in ancient cultures too: Tiamat, in Mesopotamia, was in essentials a dragon maiden; Medusa, in Greece, is even more obvious; and even Pallas could have been a dragon maiden in the origin of the myth. In the first two cases, the hero unhesitatingly killed the maidens. In the third, she was moulded into the new religion and survived as a goddess, with only a few traces left of her ophidian past, all of them accounted for so that there would be no blemish on her.

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding this, she has brought to notice that the stories introducing the lamia character appear in the group of medieval romances known as "The Fair Unknown Romances", where the hero is initially unnamed and he needs to prove his worth before he establishes his identity. Structurally, the dragon maiden episode occurs before the knight reveals his name (Zeldenhurst, 2011: 34).

## **After Malory**

The shadow of Sir Thomas Malory loomed large over the literature and art produced after the publication of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Most authors who wished to deal with some Arthurian matter would mechanically turn to his work as a model to follow. His influence can be traced from Elizabethan Drama (prominently, in George Peele's *The Old Wives' Tale*) to the works of the Romantics (with a nod to Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*). His themes and motifs would be reproduced by every author worth his salt, and every reader could instantly recognize every character and turn of the plot.

Let us consider, for example, Peele's play. *The Old Wives' Tale* was published in 1595. A shockingly short work, compared to the rest of his production, some authors consider that it may have been either shortened or cut for provincial playing, and that much may have gone astray with such a measure (Crow, 1947: 300). This would explain the occasionally contrived flow of the events presented. Plays like this one were all the rage in the 1570s and 1580s. Authors then wrote pieces of medieval heroics, much like the romances that had been written in the previous centuries. "Wild and flamboyant these plays are, like the romances on which they are based; filled with impossible characters, extraordinary adventures, sudden and violent shifts of scene" (Herrington, 1919: 453). Magic and enchantment were always central to the plot and the adventures were as outlandish as the author's imagination allowed.

Serpents and dragons abound too, as is only fitting in stories such as these. In *The Old Wives' Tale* the narrator (Madge) tells how Princess Delia was once stolen away from her father's castle, carried by Sacrapant, a powerful conjurer who could turn into a dragon. Many were the knights sent to recover her, but none returned, and at long last her own two brothers went to seek her. They encountered many different adventures



en route to Sacrapant's house, where their sister lived with the dragon-magician under an enchantment. In fact, they did not manage to rescue their sister, as they too were taken by the conjurer. It was a wandering knight, who had been in love with Delia all along, that eventually solved all the riddles that protected Sacrapant, with the help of a ghostly figure whom he had assisted earlier in the story, and the conjurer's head was severed as soon as he lost his power.

The plot is fantastically convoluted and it involves all sorts of motifs in its continuous crossing of stories, but all of them would be easily followed by an audience that was familiar with the meanings behind the presentation of the different characters (the helpful ghost, the fool, the ugly but kindhearted sister that is rewarded, the beautiful but shrewish one that is punished...) and situations (being kind to a stranger, the unsolvable riddle, the test to the hero's constancy...).

Some ten years later, Edmund Spenser could probably be found scrawling *The Faerie Queene*. In this masterpiece, he reveals a deep knowledge of the classical and biblical themes, but also of lives of saints and medieval romances, all of which he uses and adapts masterfully for his own purposes. His dragons come from a breed that is found mostly in the Bible. They represent evil, and the forces of Hell, and as such they must be vanquished at all costs. They are also symbols of religious conflict, and of the new faith of Britain. Spenser dresses his romance in religious symbolism, to better prove his point to his readers. For example, in his adaptation of Malory's seven-headed dragon that Duesa rides and the serpent Errour, which is defeated by the Redcrosse Knight:

Spenser makes good use of both dragons, but alters their significance to match his allegory. The first dragon becomes a sign of struggle with a corrupted literary and historical tradition; the second becomes a marker of the transition, not from paganism to Christianity, but from Catholicism to Protestantism (Hodges, 2012: 131).

The topic of fight against the dragon went out of fashion in literature soon afterwards, not to be recovered until the emergence of the Romantic period. Until then, authors looked for inspiration elsewhere. However, it must have been usual enough in folklore, of course, and in religious celebrations, especially those revolving around the figure of Saint George and his saintly comrades. Proof that the theme never fell fully into oblivion is that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century an irreverent ballad was published that recovered all the common motifs of the story, which had survived in folklore in all their splendour, to the delight of Bishop Thomas Percy, a dedicated collector who lived in a golden age for those who wished to record the traditions of yore. He collected it and published it in his work *Reliques* (1765)<sup>1</sup>.

However, the ballad had been popular for a century at least. A few decades earlier, in 1737, Henry Carey had turned to the same source as Percy and made it the libretto of a burlesque opera, *The Dragon of Wantley*, which would enjoy great popularity. The farcical turn of the well-known story sets it near Rotherham, in Yorkshire. There, a dragon had his lair, near More Hall, home to a formidable knight.

The locals applied to him for help offering him all of their wealth, but he, in turn, indelicately asked for a reward of “a fair maid of sixteen, that’s brisk and keen, / With smiles about the mouth; Hair black as sloe, skin white as snow, / With blushes her cheeks adorning; To anoint me o’er night, e’er I go to fight, / And to dress me in the morning”. An outrageous petition, especially as it came from a knight, which was supposed to be honourable and chaste. Or, to have a semblance of it. Sir More had no

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<sup>1</sup> Sometime later, a local informant told him that it was a satire on a lawsuit over tithes in the reign of King James I. The dragon was supposed to stand for Sir Francis Wortley of Wortley Hall, and More for the attorney who conducted the lawsuit on behalf of the neighbours. In 1819, Joseph Hunter published *Hallamshire*, where he gave a different account. In this one, the dragon was Sir Thomas Wortley. More might have been one of the Mores of Lancashire (Westwood, 1994: 28-9).

qualms in showing his basest desires. Or maybe he was of one mind with the evil seneschal in Gottfried von Strassborung's *Tristan*, who claimed

That man is a fool indeed  
Who risks his life for a woman  
Without some solid guarantee (lines 9,890-2).

Whichever his motivations, once this had been promised, he clad himself in a suit of armour set with spikes and off he went, looking like “a strange outlandish hedgehog”.

This is an irreverent ballad. Its disrespectful approach is made evident in the reversal of all the common motifs. The knight is not courteous, but coarse, he wears a ridiculous (albeit serviceable) spiked armour that makes him look like a hedgehog, and he kills the dragon by attacking his most vulnerable spot, which is not the throat, but his rear end.

The great popularity that Henry Carey's burlesque opera enjoyed gave wings to other authors, who started to use the dramatic motif of the dragon fight with humorous purposes. One of them was a pantomime that became a favourite at Covent Garden Theatre in 1824, almost one hundred years after Carey's had published his work, and proof that the interest for this subject for theatre had not waned in the least.

By this time, the topic had found its way back to more serious writings too. Lord Tennyson<sup>1</sup>, who often found his themes in mythology and folklore, paid homage to Sir Thomas Malory's work in *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885), written in blank verse, are based largely on Malory's work. Tennyson modernized the story, and he acknowledged himself that he had used the legend as source material but loosely, to fabricate his own

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892). Poems such as *The Lady of Shallott*, *Ulysses* and *In Memoriam A.H.H.* would win him enduring fame. In 1850 he was appointed Poet Laureate of Great Britain and Ireland. In 1884 he was raised to British peerage as Baron Tennyson (04.02.2013. <http://www.britannica.com>).

creation: an ideal of a chivalric and gentlemanlike monarch. As we can read in his epilogue, “To the Queen”,

For one to whom I made it o'er his grave  
Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale,  
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,  
Ideal manhood closed in real man,  
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,  
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,  
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; (lines 35 – 41, 04.02.2013.  
<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/tennyson-epilogue-to-the-queen>)

*Idylls of the King* soon became the most famous Victorian version of the legend of King Arthur. The old stories of knights and maidens, and the eternal fight of good against evil, were back in all their splendour.

### **2. 2. 3. Make-Believe Heroes**

A fascinating tradition has survived to the present in many villages of Europe: that of the ritual dragon killing. Fitting examples may be found in France (e.g. Metz, Tarascon), Spain (e. g. Redondela (Pontevedra), Betanzos (A Coruña), Las Hacinas (Burgos), Toledo, Tortosa (Tarragona), Berga (Barcelona), Granada, and Jaén), or Portugal (e. g. Monção), but also in Britain, as will soon be seen.

Invariably, these traditions commemorate the feat of some saint (prominently, St George, but also St Margaret, especially in France). But sometimes, they seem to point to something else entirely.

In Britain, these wicker dragons used in the processions and re-enactments of the fierce battle between the hero and the monster usually receive the name of hobby-dragons, snap-dragons, or snaps. Some of these traditions are accounted for on the grounds of a local patronage of St George, some dragon legend existing in the area, or the memory of a historical battle. For example, the Burford dragon (Oxfordshire) was alleged to commemorate the victory of Cuthbert or Cuthred of Wessex over Ethelbald of Mercia, whose banner bore a dragon, in A.D. 750 (Simpson, 2001: 109).

However, other instances seem to have been brought about by sheer force of the popularity of these representations, as there is no immediate reason whatsoever, be it in cult, folklore or history that one can turn to as inspiration for this particular sort of celebration<sup>1</sup>. The popularity of St George was such that these processions were not limited to the churches which had the saint as his patron, but common to many other parishes too. The feast was also celebrated not only on the day of St George, but in many other dates, prominently, May day, Ascension Day, Whit Sunday, Corpus Christi and Midsummer Eve<sup>2</sup>.

The tradition probably started during the Middle Ages, when these portable effigies starred in plays and were paraded in processions. The practice was especially popular during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Simpson, 2001: 117). Dragons were then made of wood and wicker and canvas (those that have survived to our days are now made of papier mâché). Some appeared in plays<sup>3</sup>, representing the Devil and the evil powers. Many were present in rogations, especially at Rogation tide, the three days before Ascension Day<sup>4</sup>. Many more were used in processions in the honour of a saint, prominently, St George. Of those appearing in plays, most were in Mummers' Plays.

Mummers' Plays were once practically the equivalent to our cinematic experiences nowadays. Popular and very widespread, attendance to these comic representations was a must of the day, what with their being the most sophisticated form

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. the Chester dragon (Simpson, 2001: 109).

<sup>2</sup> The Reformation must necessarily have brought about the abandonment of many of these feasts, which, although pagan in origin, had been adopted by Christianity and were observed by the Catholic.

<sup>3</sup> The English Mystery Plays about Christ's Harrowing of Hell or the Last Judgement usually presented the "Mouth of Hell" as a huge dragon head with jaws open and ready to devour (Simpson, 2001: 104).

<sup>4</sup> Although not evidence of this has been found in the British Isles, aside from the odd speculation, it has survived to the day in France, and, to a lesser extent, in Spain. A very good example could once be seen in Santiago de Compostela, where George fought two giants who had names conspicuously like those of serpents (*Coco* and *Coca*). The oldest reference dates from 1570 (González Pérez, 2003: 134). Sadly, the tradition was lost long before our time, and no description remains to sustain our hopes that the giants, which are still part of the procession nowadays, were once dragons.

of entertainment available in many communities. They still are nowadays, although the interest originates from nostalgia rather than from a lack of forms of entertainment, surely.

They were usually performed during Christmas or Easter and the use of the story of St George was pronounced in the selections presented. The basic plot introduced a hero, usually named George, who found he had to fight a series of combats against either evil or exotic foes. The dragon was not always directly on stage, but it certainly was mentioned at some point of the play, notably whenever George had the urge to boast of his having slain it. Scholars regard these plays as a secularization of St George, who here becomes King George, and the rare inclusion of the dragon character, as a sign of literary influence on an otherwise folk tradition (Simpson, 2001: 111).

Even more notable were the snaps present in processions, typically, processions around the figure of St George.

We have already seen how the cult of St George grew in importance in Britain during the Middle Ages, triggered by the universal acclaim of the crusaders and bolstered by the fondness of a few of the English rulers. He was received in the island with great enthusiasm, and during his feast day, on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, he was celebrated with all due pomp. The festivities included the re-enactment of his most popular feat of arms (that of the dragon slaying) and an ingenuous effigy of a dragon was possibly its most distinctive (as well as fondly regarded<sup>1</sup>) feature.

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<sup>1</sup> The amusement and pleasure that villagers derived from these activities led to the development, in most cases, of a paradoxically warm affection for the evil monster. The moment when the snap would appear was highly anticipated, and his skirmishing received with peals of laughter and cries of delight. In many places, he came to be regarded as the true protagonist of the event. For example, in Redondela (Galicia, Spain), the festivities of Corpus Christi include a snap, and they came to be regarded as *a festa da Coca* (the day of the Snap). In the village, it was once popular to recount how an old lady had missed mass when enjoying the parade and was heard to exclaim, “¡Ai, que por mor da santa Coca perdín o demo da misa!” (Alas, for the

The oldest of the surviving British processional snaps is considered to be the Norwich<sup>1</sup> one, as it is easily the best documented one, and can be traced back to 1408. That very year, the St George's Guild resolved that "the George shall go in procession and make conflict with the dragon" (Simpson, 2001: 105). This was possibly the first time that there was a public reenactment of the legend in Norwich. On Guild Day (April 23) there would be a procession with both religious and secular participants: monks, the Mayor and Guild members, all of them clad for the occasion. A man would impersonate George, and fight a dragon. There are several historical accounts of the ritual fight, which Lane summarizes thus:

St George rode on horseback and wore armour of beaten silver, beneath which was a colourful toga made of expensive material and trimmed with fur. He carried a silver shield painted with the arms of the saint. His mount too wore armour, but in later processions the armour of both steed and saint was carried by attendants. The same costume was not worn every year – sometimes it was borrowed, or at other times new material was purchased. Account rolls for 1492 show that his gown was made from twelve yards of green satin costing £4. Another example comes from the 1537 roll when material of tawny and crimson velvet was bought from London. The horse was decorated in ribbons and laces with red velvet for the cheeks of the bridle.

In the legend St George rescued a maiden, and she was eventually introduced into the procession under the name of St Margaret. The first mention of her is in 1532. Her horse was decorated like that of St George, and she wore a colourful costume adorned with a chain and jewels.

With them was the Snapdragon, smoke and sparks belching from his fearsome mouth, his bat-like wings beating against his barrel-shaped body. He rushed from side to side, threatening the crowd, which reveled in his cosmic malevolence. The man who operated the dragon was paid less than the saint. In 1420 it was 4d; 1429 2s 4d; and in 1500 it was 12d (...). The procession ended at the Cathedral, where there was Mass in honour of St George. Snap, symbol of evil, was not allowed to

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sake of the holy *Coca* I missed the damned mass!) (Risco, 1994: 3: 636). It is hardly proof of a cult to the dragon, but it certainly is an anecdote worthy of retelling.

<sup>1</sup> The oldest preserved Snap held office between about 1795 and 1850, and can be still admired nowadays in his retirement home, in Norwich Castle Deep. Since his well deserved retirement, younger, more energetic Snaps have followed the school of master Snap and to the day delight the population with their antics in those ceremonies where they are needed (Simpson, 2001: 105).

enter the holy precincts, and had to remain outside seated on the “dragon stone” (Lane, 1976: 21-2, in Simpson, 2001: 106).

The processions and general celebration were of a highly festive quality. The Snap was released and wreaked havoc among the populace, and people laughingly fled from it or teased it, as in a children game. In fact, the locals usually grew as fond of the dragon as to make the celebrations slightly heretic, to the eyes of some, and outrageously so, to others. Phillip Stubbes, a fifteenth-century author, counted himself among the last. His work *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) denounced religious practices that he considered unacceptable, and among them there were some that leaned dangerously towards paganism. In the case of snap-dragons, he was most vocal, and used so much energy in explaining why precisely these practices were nothing but blasphemy that he inadvertently provided his readers with an account that is as scornful as it is delightfully detailed:

They bedecke themselves with scarfes, ribons and laces, hanged all over with golde rynges, precious stones, and other jewelles; this doen, they tye about either legge twentie or fourtie belles, which rich handkerchefes in their hands, and sometimes layed across over their shoulders and neckes, borrowed for the most parte of their prettie Mopsies and loving Bessies for bussynge them in the darke. Thus all thinges set in order, then have they their hobbie-horses, dragons, and other antiques [i.e. grotesque figures], together with their baudie pipers and thundering drommers, to strike up the Deville’s daunce withal: then marche these heathen companie towards the church and churcheyarde, their pipers piping, drommers thondering, their stumpes dauncyng, their belles jnynglyng, their hand-kerchefes swyngyng about their heades like madmen, their hobbie-horses and other monsters skyrmyshyng amongs the throng: and in this sorte they goe to the church (though the minister bee at praier or preaching), dauncyng and swyngyng their hand-kerchefes over their heades in church, like devilles incarnate, with such a confused noise, that no man can heare his owne voice. Then the foolishe people, they looke, they stare, they laughe, they fleere, they mount upon formes and pewes, to see these goodly pageauntes solemnized in this sort. Then after this, aboute the church they goe againe and againe, and so forthe into the churcheyarde, where they have commonly their sommer halles, their bowers, arbours and banqueting houses set up, wherein they feaste, banquet and daunce all that daie, and (peradventure) all that night too.





A fearless young boy challenges the *Coca de Redondela* (photo by the author of this study, 2010).

What a charming tableau Stubbes paints here! One can easily perceive his indignation over the whole scene, and how very much more outraged he would be were he to know that the denounce he penned is a joy for the folklorist. Here, he is describing the festivities of Midsummer, where a Lord of Misrule presided and was assisted by Morris dancers and hobby-horses and hobby-dragons. This was probably a description that fitted many a village in Britain at the time.

The association between hobby-dragons and Morris dancers has been but rarely studied, and when it has, it has been quite insufficiently. It is not surprising, though, given the lack of information regarding these customs. What is known is that the bond already existed in the late Middle Ages, as attest several reports about village festivities (one such example is Stubbes' comments above) and that by the 18<sup>th</sup> century these public manifestations had become increasingly rare.

In Sussex, the Chanctonbury Morris Men are also accompanied by a hobby-horse, and, as the creature parades and mingles with the people, the children feed him coins (Simpson, 2001: 103-4). The Norwich Snap also used to open his jaws to receive coins that were tossed to him and, in more recent times, he became emboldened and stole the caps from the heads of boys, which he would only give back when paid ransom (Simpson, 2001: 113). In Metz (France) the monster *Graouilly* used to find itself in a similar situation, when the villagers treated it to cake and bread, as offerings for a good harvest. In Redondela (Spain), the *Coca* also "ate" in the procession, at least until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (González Perez, 2003: 9). Vicente Risco (1994: 3: 635) describes it as a hollow figure, with a mouth that opened and closed, and three children operating it from inside who, whenever it suited them, would take an arm out of the mouth and grab anything that took their fancy: pieces of bread, handfuls of cherries, sweets or muffins, while the assaulted laughed heartily. When I had the chance to

witness this festivity in Redondela, in 2010, the *Coca* had evolved into a plump creature made of wood and papier-mâché, bereft of occupants and paraded by a *maiordomo* (“butler”) by a rope. Feeding the monster seemed to have fallen into oblivion, but I could observe how most villagers strived to put their hands into the dragon’s mouth and parents eagerly encouraged their young charges to follow the example. Whether this particular behaviour is in some way inherited from the old tradition of nourishing the dragon or if it merely answers to the human impulse to put ourselves at risk and laugh in the face of danger (even though in a mock situation such as this one is), I cannot decide.

The snap-dragon (or hobby-dragon) is a close relative of the hobby-horse. They probably are the best examples of the ritual animal disguise in Britain<sup>1</sup>. Their appearances and roles are also strikingly similar: unruly behaviour, reversal of roles and general merrymaking run rampant whenever a snap-dragon or hobby-horse is on the loose. The effigies, man-operated and usually articulated, exercise a mock aggressiveness that has them run and swing and twirl, to the sheer delight of the onlookers. Another point in common between hobby-dragons and hobby-horses is the collecting of money or gifts.

As for the differences, Simpson (2001: 113-4), points out the following:

- Hobby-dragons tend to appear in a Christian context, under the patronage of a church, a guild or a civic authority. Hobby-horses were inherited from ancient folk traditions and survived best in rural areas.

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<sup>1</sup> There are also some examples of hobby-sheep, hobby-bulls and hobby-stags, but the hobby-horses are overwhelmingly numerous in comparison. There is evidence of the use of hobby-horses in England and Wales at least from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Simpson, 2001: 113).

- Hobby-dragons were used in feasts that take place during the spring or summertime, whereas hobby-horses belong to midwinter (the latest manifestations occur at Easter time), and were probably part of a ritual of renewal of fertility.

It is possible to suggest that the hobby-dragon is the offspring of the hobby-horse, designed to imitate its appearance and behaviour for public entertainments. Yet, how does one explain cases such as the Padstow hobby-horse (in Cornwall) and the Minehead Sailors' Horse (in Somerset), which show striking variations that sets them apart from others? Maybe because influences usually go in both directions.

These two hobby-horses are different in that they appear on May Day, rather than in winter. Their design is also unusual if we compare them with instances from other parts of England. The dragon influences come from bits and pieces of legends and anecdotes and traditions that, put together, seem to spring from a dragon legend. Padstow, for example, takes its name from St Petroc<sup>1</sup> (see Chapter 2), a saint with a dragon story attached. It is also said that St George himself once visited Padstow and that a spring gushed out from the spot where his horse stepped. When the Oss (the nickname by which the Padstow hobby-horse is locally known) dies, this verse is sung:

O where is St George? O where is he-o?  
He's out in his long-boat all on the salt sea-o (Simpson, 2001: 115).

The obscurity of the verse leaves much to the imagination, but a reference to St George almost immediately brings to mind an image of the dragon.

As for Minehead, it is in close proximity (only four miles) to Carhampton, where St Caractoc's<sup>2</sup> monastery was founded (see Chapter 2). The Minehead Horse has an obligatory stop in its parade at Dunster Castle, which is regarded as the stronghold

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<sup>1</sup> St Petroc's feast-day is on May 16<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> St Carantoc's feast-day is on June 4<sup>th</sup>.

where St Caranctoc led the dragon, and also at the spot called Dragon's Cross (Simpson, 2001: 115). It can not get much more evocative than that.

At Minehead, a local anecdote tells how the place was once threatened by Viking raiders, but a group of local sailors chased them away by disguising a boat to look as a sea serpent, and that the Horse commemorates that story (Simpson, 2001: 115).

After regarding these and other features, Simpson (2001: 115) speculates that maybe these two specific hobby-horses were the remnants of a medieval pageant in which the two saints figured, along with their respective dragons.

One can hardly resist the temptation of giving some consideration to the idea that these hobby-horses may be the descendants of some forgotten hobby-dragon. But nourishing such ideas without the support of evidence is futile. In fact, if hobby-horses *are* dragons, what is the point of having *both* in the same procession? Such a situation marks them as distinctly different representations. Can it be that the origin for both is the same but the process of acculturation has been such as to have them coexist as different entities? Much as I would like to think it so, one would have to consider this in detail to reach a satisfying conclusion.

As it happens, Simpson (2001: 116) has reached a satisfying conclusion already. It is that hobby-horses, bulls, sheep and stags are more ancient and more widespread in England than hobby-dragons. They are also related to a specific time of the year and have obvious fertility properties. And yet, there are exceptions to this rule:

A dragon is said to come up out of the River Stour, between Wormingford and Dedham, in May-time every year, to take a young maiden. There is no killing in this tale, which asserts that the dragon is

still alive and active. Apart from this modern<sup>1</sup> instance, however, the legends show no seasonal aspects (Simpson, 2001: 116).

As seen above, in a number of these reenactments, St Margaret came to be identified with the maiden in distress so common of dragon stories, and crucial to the legend of St George. She too had been a dragon slayer, albeit her methods were a little more spiritual than George's (but effective all the same), and in the popular imagery she probably blended with the lady that George rescued from the dragon, helpless though this nameless lady usually was in the story. The identification between Margaret-lady-George was so strong that in some particular cases, the story of St George came to be performed to celebrate St Margaret's Day<sup>2</sup> (which falls on July 20<sup>th</sup>).

According to González Pérez (2003: 10), the origin for the processions including dragons must be sought in the pre-Christian civilizations. Among those which are closer in time and space, and our most direct ancestors in terms of culture (and therefore cannot be ignored on the grounds of implausibility), one must mention the Roman civilization.

Every spring, the young Romans walked to the caves where the snakes of the goddess Juno were believed to dwell. They carried gifts for the reptiles, which were left in the caves to favour a good harvest (González Pérez, 2003: 9). We cannot fail to be reminded here of the dragons at Chanctonbury (Sussex, England), Metz (France) and Redondela (Galicia, Spain), who also received generous offerings from the villagers. It is an element odd enough to provoke one to look into it more closely, for, if the dragon is a representative of evil, what purpose can the villagers have in "feeding" it? It is a

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<sup>1</sup> Her reference to the modernity of the legend is that it is of as recent collection as 1976 (Simpson, 2001: 116).

<sup>2</sup> This odd reversal happened, for example, at Bassingbourn (Cambridgeshire), where a staged production of a play called "The Holy Martyr St George" was performed on St Margaret's Day, in 1511 (Simpson, 2001: 107).

side-effect of the many instances of syncretism that took place long ago, when adapting the old traditions to the new order (Christianity), that some elements could not be efficiently suppressed or adequately changed and ended up being incorporated to the new ceremonies, even though they did not completely fit into them, as a knot in a piece of wood that cannot be totally smoothed away.

Gradually, George and his dragon moved out of the public scene and processions and plays disappeared from most British towns and villages<sup>1</sup>. The few surviving processions including the Snap lost their religious tinge and became a civil entertainment, mostly due to the restrictions of the Reformation regarding the cult to the saints. Dates of celebration were changed, characters disappeared and guilds dissolved or evolved into something different. In Norwich, for example, the St George's Guild reconstituted it as "the feast of the Mayor, Sheriff, Aldermen and Council", to be held, after some changes, on Midsummer Day. The feast itself disposed of the religious elements, of Margaret and even of George! Only the Snap prevailed, but with a new role, as the Mayor's Dragon<sup>2</sup>, which truly was a leap forward in his career.

Even with the changes, the tradition had its share of prosecution, and was in turns lauded and banned, depending on the tide<sup>3</sup>. Predictably, many Snaps could not take such come and go and eventually disappeared, finally vanquished by one of the most destructive weapons that ever existed: narrow-mindedness.

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<sup>1</sup> In York, for example, there are accounts of a play about St George that, sadly, has not been preserved (McRee, 1994: 198-202 in Mourón Figueroa, 2005: 207).

<sup>2</sup> A career that was mirrored in that of many of his fellow Snap-Dragons all over the country (Simpson, 2001: 108).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in 1835, Parliament passed a Municipal Reform Act forbidding all pageants and processions (Simpson, 2001: 112).

Draco bipes apteros captus in  
Agro Bononiensi .



Draco alatus Apes  
ex Greuino Aldro .



figura ex Pareo .



Draco Æthiopicus





## **Chapter 3. A Study of Dragons: Summary of Traits of the British Dragon**

### **3. 1. How to Recognize a Hero**

Most of the examples presented above show an evolution in the concept of dragon fighting that stretch from the Early Middle Ages to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a strong stress on the medieval times. Even folktales, which were compiled mostly during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, usually claim to have been in circulation since the Middle Ages. Difficult as it obviously is to prove such claims, it is nonetheless true that many of them present traces that echo those times and even beyond. As for the literary texts, most of them, even the most recent ones used in this selection, rely heavily on the medieval heritage. The analysis of medieval texts is always strenuous, if only because we are dealing with a social context so wholly different from our own, and one of which so little written evidence has been preserved. In addition to that, the researcher cannot forget that up to the 11<sup>th</sup> century the development of written tradition was slow and onerous, and up to the time the work of creation and compilation was very much an oral process. As such, it leaned heavily on folklore, and the set of beliefs of the era. For example, in British medieval literature one can trace references to the primitive Germanic society of the early Middle Ages, and also to the Christian society that was established over it. Thus, many medieval works superpose both worlds, occasionally blending them, stretching and twisting the motifs to adapt them to the tastes of the time and the needs of the status quo. Old ideals are varnished with the new, characters develop new traits to accommodate them to what is now expected from them, and

basically everyone behaves as is needed to provide the reader or listener with proper entertainment, without straying from the established comfort zone.

Therefore, in the Middle Ages, dragons become evil. Not simple evil, but the most refined sort of it: evil from Hell. They are minions of Satan, devils in their own right. Alongside them, the heroes are not only most capable warriors (which they certainly are), but also pious and god-fearing, as is only fitting in the representatives of the forces of good.

However, one cannot say that dragon slayers conform to one single stereotype, even though they can be grouped together in certain categories. In the previous section we have encountered all of the following: saints (both male and female); wandering knights in search of adventure; ancestors of families of the nobility and gentry; ordinary men; co-operating groups of villagers; and even one criminal. Their fates are as diverse as are their personalities. Some obtain a precisely defined reward in social status, ownership of land, and privileges of a legal sort; others get a vague, romantic reward reminiscent of fairytales (marriage to a princess); others are offered a money reward; several die dramatically in the hour of victory; many, especially among the working-class heroes, slay their dragon in an unadorned way, because it simply needs to be done. In any case, one may summarize most of these examples in various ways. Here, they will fall into one of these two broad categories: saintly heroes, and secular heroes.

### **3. 1. 1. Saintly Heroes**

Most of these stories have in common that the dragons normally stand for the forces of Hell, with the representative of the Christian church keeping them from prevailing. However, this is not so in all cases, and saints such as Carantoc, Petroc and Columba

(all of whom are linked to the Celtic Church) do not regard their respective dragons as particularly devilish, and even treat them with piety.

Of the ways in which these stories deviate from the usual dragon-slaying theme, I must highlight the following two, which are specific (synonym) of saintly heroes:

**The saint uses religious symbols as weapons:** St Serf (a pastoral staff), St Columba (he commands the dragon in the name of God), St Carantoc (prayer), St Margaret (the sign of the cross), St Martha (holy water and a cross), St Murrough (prayer), and St Senan (the sign of the cross). As these stories had a strong moralizing component, the instruments of the dragons' destruction could hardly be any different, as it was necessary that the audience could easily relate them to the Christian religion. The extraordinary weapons of the gods and heroes of yore, such as hammers, lightning or magical swords were discarded in favour of these holy instruments, which every god-fearing person had access to should he or she need to emulate the saint of the tale.

**The dragon is tamed instead of slain or the saint helps the dragon:** In a surprising turn of events, some of these tales illustrate the saint's piety, rather than their power against devilish foes. St Petroc extracts a piece of wood of a dragon's eye, and St Carantoc releases a dragon after forbidding Arthur's men to harm it. I find it peculiar how many of the British saints who confronted dragons before the arrival of St George, that is, the saints of the Celtic Church often had a pacific approach to the conflict. Not only did they tend to use gentleness to bring the dragons about, they even offered them help in some occasions. To explain these two particular instances, it might be claimed that this shows that dragons might not be then considered as repulsive and devilish as they would be in the Middle Ages, but merely a source of discomfort (to put it very mildly) that needed to be dealt with from time to time, but one which came from an ordinary, albeit very dangerous, beast, and not a direct representation of the forces of

Hell, as the traditional interpretation says. In short, they would be relics of some pre-Christian story in which the dragon was not killed because it was not imperative to do so, something which could not be conceived in a Christian context, if the dragon is regarded as devilish.

In light of the stories here presented, it appears that the introduction of a saint as hero in the fight against the dragon may answer to one of the following reasons:

- A saint may substitute a secular hero in the popular imagery. That would be an effective way of making the new religion attractive to the eyes of the would-be converted, as they identified with the tale and, more importantly, the tale's hero. This also imbued the saints with an aura of power which previously had only been granted to legendary heroes and deities.

- A saint may be introduced to kill a creature that was already in existence in folklore, which was part of some ritual or even an object of worship for the community. Westropp (1910: 476) claims that in Co. Clare (Ireland), "there are many examples in tradition of the "dweller in the waters", "the serpent-god of this hallowed stream"" but, alas, he does not provide any specific example to back his assertion.

- A saint may be introduced to kill a creature that stands for the previous status quo, thus symbolizing the triumph of Christianity over another religion.

It would be enormously useful to examine which of these three theories applies in each particular case. However, such an endeavour is far from easy, as there is often little else than mere intuition to guide the researcher. Or, one could resort to other sources and apply one's efforts to a comparative study, in search of parallels which might give further evidence to either support or dismiss these theories. I have here examined the hagiographical origins of St George and I have compared his dragon fighting episode to other similar stories starred by saints in the British Isles and in other

European regions. But, as we have seen, there is also a wealth of folklore and literature for us to plunder in search of clues that will help us understand the workings of such stories.

### **3. 1. 2. Secular Heroes**

The image that most present-day readers have of the fight with the dragon is that of a gallant knight in shining armour atop his white stallion, wielding his sword against an impressive dragon (preferably winged) while a fair maiden looks on torn between fear and admiration. This stereotypical image rose from the popularity of stories such as, precisely, that of St George, but also Perseus and Andromeda, Sigurd and Fafnir, Beowulf and the dragon and a host of knights from the age of chivalry and beyond.

In folktales, many of these stories constitute what has been named “charter myths”, that is, tales which explain the establishment of a given situation, as, for example, justifying how some prominent family in the community came into their land and rank (see, for example, *Sir John Conyers and the Sockburn Dragon*, in Appendix A). In some cases, different versions of one same story survive, in which the hero is, alternatively, a knight or a villager (see *The Mordiford Dragon* or *John Aller and the Dragon*, Appendix A). But not all heroes are noble. There is a long list of lowly or unpromising heroes who find themselves facing dragons too. The unpromising hero is a stock character of folktales, an unlikely hero who triumphs over adversity against all odds. A hero may be unpromising because of deficiencies in size, strength, or other factors such as age, birth order or socioeconomic status. The success of this type of hero appeals to the audience deeply, because it satisfies wish fulfilment (Brown & Rosenberg, 1998: 675-6). His methods of slaying are also different from those of the

nobleman. His are often not chivalrous, albeit indisputably efficient. Without fanfare, the unpromising hero gets the job done.

They are usually village chaps and, with some notable exceptions (see *The Mester Stoor Worm*, Appendix A), known to be sturdy and hardworking. *If* they are given a name, it is suitably commonplace (John Smith is a prime example of this), but more often than not they remain nameless. Sometimes it is even plausible to have a whole village descend upon the dragon, instead of having a lonely hero do the task singlehandedly. That certainly seems more to the purpose and an eminently more practical method. There is also a version of the Mordiford dragon where the hero is reported to be a criminal sentenced to death, who volunteered to kill the dragon as an alternative to execution (Simpson, 2001: 68). A dire choice, but he succeeded. But he is a bit of an exception. Generally, our heroes, though lowly, are not lacking in respectability. A few of them, however, are neither cunning nor brave, but mere lucky fools. Such is the case of Billy Biter, one henpecked tailor of Yorkshire, abused and neglected by his shrewish wife on a daily basis and who was delivered from both wife and dragon in one single stroke of luck (see *The Dragon of Filey*, Appendix A), to the cheer of the district and, one imagines, of the kindly witch who set the whole thing in motion. He and his parkin<sup>1</sup> are in direct contrast with Jim Puttock and his Sussex pudding<sup>2</sup>, for Jim knew exactly what he was doing when he had that vast and indigestible thing baked for the Knucker of Lyminster (see *The Knucker of Lyminster*, Appendix A).

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<sup>1</sup> A parkin is a kind of sticky treacle-flavoured square gingerbread which is common in Yorkshire.

<sup>2</sup> A Sussex pudding is described by Simpson (2001: 86) as a “crude concoction of flour and water which was the staple food of farm labourers in the days of rural poverty when even bread and cheese, let alone meat, was far too expensive for daily use. This “pudden” was notoriously heavy and indigestible, especially if eaten cold”.

## Nas festas d'a Coca 1965

Como recuerdo o noso glorioso Xan Carallás que foi fundador de Redondela, e iniciador de estas festas da Coca no ano 1495

Vay facer quinientos anos  
que naceu en «San Martiño»  
entre «estarrapados panos»  
un «xeitoso» rapaciño.

Sua nai ¡¡mui boa moza!!  
forá novia de un tal «Merlo»  
falaban os dous ná «choza»  
y o rapas veu de «extraperlo».

Na Iglesia de San Martiño  
boutizaron o tal rapas  
e por vontade do seu padriño  
puxolle «XÁN CARALLÁS».

E «o Merlo» que seu pai era  
tan pronto o rapaz naceu  
voou muy lonxe a outras terras  
e xamais apareceu.

E n'aquela humilde choza  
foi ali crescendo o neno  
mais listo que unha «raposa»  
d'in que era de pequeno.

Creceu mais que un Eucalipto,  
foi mais duro que unha roca  
como un Sol foi de bonito  
tan bonito como a «Coca».

Comeu muito xa de home  
pois en toda a nosa ria  
chamabanlle «O Labisome»  
polo muito o que el comia.

Por unha aposta el comeu  
con patatas un carneiro  
e de viño el sé bebeu  
un cabazo do Ribeiro.

Certo día el apostou  
que comia cen «Xirelos»  
e dispois de que os «pappou»  
comeu un Lacaón con grelos.

A camida que zampou  
por sua «gloriosa» boca  
en pouco «sobrepaxou»  
o que ten comido a «Coca».

Foi valiente e decidido  
pois en unha aventura loca  
foise o Monte do Soido  
e p'ra Vila truxo a Coca.

Domou a este vicho fiero  
de boca e dentes voraces  
e volbeuno en manso «becerro»  
p'ra alegría dos rapaces.

E ese foi tal rapaz  
que según nos conta a historia  
o grande «XÁN CARALLÁS»  
que a Redondela deu gloria.

O morrer foise entre panos  
pero pedimolle a Dios  
que oteña a lá muitos anos  
e si pode ser ¡¡sin nós!!

This 1965 ballad about the snap in Redondela (Galicia, Spain) offers an excellent example of a local hero: Xan Carallás is brave and strong and he has a matching appetite (courtesy of Fernando Alonso Romero).

### **3. 2. How to Recognize a Dragon**

After the myriad of examples provided in Chapter 2, I would like to consider myself quite apt in the art of recognizing a dragon if I ever come across one. With this suggestive fantasy in mind, this section will be devoted to analysing the features of dragons, especially those which can be traced back to their earliest representations. With this exercise, I hope to be able to reveal what this creature may have looked like in the origins of the legend. And, to be able to recognize a creature, any creature, we need first to establish its basic features, that is, those elements which are inherent to the animal in such a way that we would always recognize it because of them. No matter how different one specimen may be from another one of the same species, the basic features that identify it as belonging to that species will not vary. For example, the average European will identify the elephant by its trunk, the zebra by its striped skin, the shark by its fin. Would we identify a shark if it had lost its fin? We surely would, for we would notice its mouth, the shape of its tail, its head, its voracity... but still, the fin would have been first and foremost in our mind, the first feature to look for, and we would only have started to look for the other elements after noticing its absence. The fin is the element which will identify a shark on its own, without the help of any further details. Any rendition of a shark, however imperfect or schematic, will feature the trademark fin.

I hope to determine here which features would determine that we are dealing with a dragon in a given piece of art and literature, that is, what remains of the original creature that haunted the imagination of our ancestors and posed a threat to so many.



### **3. 2. 1. Birth of a Dragon**

Traditional stories of dragons are quite conspicuously unconcerned with the subject of the origin of the monsters, preferring to dwell on the woes of the community and the heroics performed to put an end to them. It is also uncommon to have them appear in the stories as dragonets. In one version of the folktale of *John Aller and the Dragon* it is stated how, after Allen kills the beast, he finds in the den two or three baby dragons (see Appendix A), and in a version of the killing of *The Ben Vair Dragon* (Argyllshire, Scotland), a farmer kills the dragon's brood, and afterwards the mother kills herself in despair (see Appendix A, version 3). However, aside from these rare (and gruesome) tales, more often than not, there is no explanation whatsoever about how a particular dragon came to live and haunt in some area. However, if we examine the folklore, it is possible to fill in some of the gaps.

Our ancestors had a number of clues that helped them to get rid of a potential dragon, or to identify a dragon in the making. For example, parishioners of the Mordiford church (Herefordshire) firmly believed that when a newt was found inside the font, it had to be put to death as soon as possible, for otherwise they would grow up to become dangerous dragons (Daniels, 1960: 161-2). This is related to two examples that happen far from Herefordshire and that may seem a trifle far-fetched, but please bear with me, for I cannot refrain from sharing them, as they are truly fascinating and I honestly believe that they may illustrate this particular belief:

The first one takes us to Japan, where Daniels himself makes the parallel with two stories in which a small snake, put into a sacred cup, soon outgrows it, and, every time it is transferred to a larger vessel, it quickly fills it, thus proving to be an extraordinary animal (in one of those stories, the snake is the child of a deity, in another,

it ends up getting a bride<sup>1</sup>). In the Japanese lore, warden-serpents are also believed to grow too large for their pond. The author wonders here whether the Mordiford belief could be a remnant from some “pre-Christian ceremony in which a small reptile was placed in a sacred vessel and might be expected to increase greatly in size” (Daniels, 1960: 162).

The second example brings us back to Europe. In the town of Muros (A Coruña, Spain), we find the Collegiate of Santa María, I had the chance of observing a most singular architecture element. In the year 2009, in the context of an archaeological excursion, and as we were entering the church, Professor Alonso Romero pointed to the font next to the door. There I could see a stone snake, coiled inside the font, immersed in the holy water. It was, I can say, a distinctly disconcerting experience, and that snake has haunted me ever since. When I read Daniels’ account of the Mordiford belief, I automatically remembered my Galician font. But, are these two examples related in any way? Lacking the necessary evidence to support it, I cannot in all honesty say that they are. The reason for this surprising piece of work must be different, for, who would wish to breed a dragon in a font? On the other hand, the church, and the whole town of Muros, is very rich in dragon imagery, which is present in practically every church of the area.

Finally, the reader will have been reminded of another example of apparently harmless adders that grow into awful dragons: the worm that the heir of Lambton recklessly put in a well, where it grew to become so enormous in size and so intractable in character that the young man had to be summoned back from Palestine to kill it.

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<sup>1</sup> This particular story is highly reminiscent of *Beauty and the Beast*, as it follows a pattern which is common enough in fairy tales.

It is also common to believe that dragons were once mere snakes, but grew enough and became awful monsters. The number of years necessary for this metamorphosis is not generally stated, however. In Galicia (Spain), people used to believe that when snakes become old enough, they grow wings and fly to Babylon, where they become dragons (González Pérez, 2003: 19).

Another common belief, in this case held by Classical authors (and which was inherited by the medieval scholars) was that certain animals could grow from decayed bodies, especially when left exposed in the heat. In Plutarch's *Life of Cleomenes of Sparta*, there is one such instance: after the death of Cleomenes, a large *drakon* was found coiled around his body, protecting it from birds of prey. It is claimed that "human carcasses when some of the juices about the marrow congeal and thicken give rise to serpents" (Simpson, 2001: 44). This belief may have influenced the story of the Norton Fitzwarren dragon which is directly generated from the horror of a battlefield.

In Iceland, however, they were believed to be hatched from eagles' eggs, provided one had placed a little gold in the nest. With this simple method, any person could genetically modify a covey. Not that the usual intention was to breed a dragon, of course. General belief was that if this ritual was made, a stone of wonderful virtue would come from one of the eggs, with the power to deliver a woman easily of child, or even to make the possessor of the stone invisible. The counterpart was that a dragon would also be made in another egg. There is a tale that explains how this belief was put to test in relatively modern times:

Once a man named John determined to place a bit of gold in the nest to test the stories. Many warned him against this, but without effect, and the gold piece was placed with the two eggs. The people of the neighborhood were fearful of the consequences, but John boastfully declared that he would take care of the dragon if it appeared, for he was a great hunter and an excellent shot. After some weeks the people were one day horrified to see a great dragon come flying from the mountains,

seize a two-year-old colt in its claws, and fly back again in among the crags. John was told about this, and he at once set out to destroy the monster. Some days afterwards he returned and reported the dragon slain, but only after difficult and persistent pursuit. Ordinary missiles had been unable to wound the monster; finally he had cut the silver buttons off his jacket and loaded the gun with them, made the sign of the cross over the muzzle, and with this charge the beast had been killed (Stefánsson, 1906: 305-6).

Finally, the dragon can simply be a person metamorphosed. There are several examples, both in literature and in folklore, where the origin of some dragon is explained thusly. In *Sir Bevis of Hampton* (14<sup>th</sup> c.) two Italian kings battle for years and are eventually turned into fighting dragons as penance, and in George Peele's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1595), the villain turns into a dragon at will. So does Fafnir, in the Icelandic *Völsunga Saga*, to better guard his hoard. From other cultures, we may highlight Zeus' penchant for metamorphosis. Twice he turned into a dragon, the first, to ravish Persephone (*Enciclopedia Universal*, 1934-: 18: 2162), and the second, to seek Olympias out. Alexander the Great was born of this last union<sup>1</sup>.

Women, too, could turn into dragons. These dragon maidens generally are prey to some cruel enchantment that needs to be broken by the intervention of a fellow intrepid enough to brave the serpent and kiss it (the laidley worm), or are subject to such transformations on certain days of the week (Mélusine).

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<sup>1</sup> To complete the aura of divinity of his birth, orchestrated around the very symbol of the dragon, another episode exists in which an oracle announces Alexander's birth and glory to his human father, Philip: an egg was laid by a bird in his lap, and, on breaking open, a dragon crept out of it (in other versions, a serpent), encircled the egg and finally died before it could find its way back into it. This was interpreted as the birth of a glorious hero, who would conquer the world but die before he could get back to his native country: "You therefore have in you a descent from the serpent, and from Herakles, and from Dionysus, and from Ammon. And from the serpent, you will go over the earth like a dragon" (Perkins and Woolsey, 1854: 389). The choice of a serpent, or dragon, as representative of this unborn hero is anything but random. At the bottom of this tale is the primitive notion that the Greeks held, according to which the chthonic gods and heroes represented themselves in the form of the serpent. Plutarch, among others, made reference to this notion, when he stated that "the ancients associate the serpent above all other animals with their heroes" (Buttenwieser, 1917: 243).

### **3. 2. 2. Appearance**

Let me present here, as a case study, the Mordiford dragon. It is an interesting example, which proves how varied the ideas of what a dragon must look like are. Simpson (2001: 95) relates how, outside the Mordiford church, on the west wall, there used to be a picture of a dragon. The first recorded mention that can be found about it is by the antiquary John Aubrey, while gathering notes for his *Naturall Historie of Wiltshire* (1691), between 1656 and 1685, who describes it as a serpent with four pairs of wings, which was regarded as a very reliable representation at the time. In 1802, George Lipscombe described a large green dragon with a red mouth and a forked tongue in his *Journey into South Wales*. Surely, these two images are not exclusive, especially given the scarcity of detail provided by either author, but the matter is that, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the dragon was repainted several times. Usually, in green, but on occasion it became red. Most painters gave it two legs and a tail which curled up, but in about 1800 it became a green-and-gold four-legged creature, with two wings, and a straight tail. Whether this was caused by the particular artistic preferences of the painters or by a general view of what a dragon would archetypically look like during these periods in history is a topic which I leave for future studies. It would also be interesting to observe how the restorations would have evolved into the present day, had the dragon not been erased in 1810-12, leaving the church (and my imaginary research on dragon art) bereft of an object of attention.

The main difficulty in the study of the image of the dragon in artistic media is its very elusiveness. Dragons have been represented in all ways: as simple snakes, as massive reptiles with bat wings, as creatures with crocodile heads and lion bodies... The reason for such variation is no other than the imaginary nature of the very animal. If no

one has ever seen a dragon and dragons are paragons of evilness, they may have virtually any form, provided it is sufficiently frightful and covers some minimum features which will make it recognizable. Leonardo Da Vinci, cognizant of the difficulties in finding living specimens (of any kind, not only of dragons), and in an effort to make the work of the artist a little easier, advised:

Si queremos hacer que uno de los animales imaginarios<sup>1</sup> aparezca natural, por ejemplo, un dragón, tomemos por cabeza la de un mastín; por ojos, los de un gato; por orejas, las de un puerco espín; por nariz, la de un galgo; por orejas, las de un león; por sienes, las de un gallo viejo, y por cuello, el de una tortuga de agua (Barbero Richart, 1999: 114).

I can imagine his fellow artists saluting, hailing this advice. Or I hope they did, for, as for us, poor researchers, he had just made our work a little more complicated.

Dreadful jokes aside, with this piece of advice Da Vinci is actually hinting at a universal truth: art stems from art. The first, the very first drawings made in a Prehistoric cave may have been imitating the natural world, but the second drawings imitated both the natural world *and* the first drawings, either following *or* defying their technique. All artists in history, consciously or not, do this when they tackle their work. We have a cultural history and we plunder it when we create, choosing the elements that we see fit and discarding those which will not be of use in our work. We may be aware or unaware of the process, but it happens nonetheless.

The typical representation of a dragon we have grown used to in the present day in the western civilization comes from an elaboration that has much to do with the revival of the dragon stories in literature and popular culture during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although grounded in much older traditions, the appearance of the dragon as it

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<sup>1</sup> Notice the adjective he uses: *imaginary*. It is a curious choice of adjective if we take into account that manuals of natural sciences presented dragons as real creatures until as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Barbero Richart, 1999).

is viewed nowadays is very much a recurrent one, the image that has prevailed at this time of history. This dragon is usually large and dinosaur like, covered in scales, with a long tail and a ridge that covers his back from head to tail, with wings like those of a bat, large teeth and snake eyes and a breath of fire. The image has become so popular that there are few that will not claim to be surprised at the sight of Paolo Uccello's Renaissance picture featuring a smallish, two legged dragon, and even less other works of art where a legless, wingless one is presented. And yet, once they were all universally and unequivocally identified as dragons.

Regarding the number of legs that a dragon must have, for example, it is interesting to note that the dragons in Scotland and the northern cultures are normally legless. Many are referred to as "worms" and they are depicted as huge serpents with extreme power of destruction. However, in heraldry, dragons are invariably depicted with legs. In this context, only four-legged beasts were termed dragons, while two-legged ones were technically *wyverns*<sup>1</sup>.

However, more often than not, there is no allusion in the folk stories to this characteristic of the dragons, as the legs do not normally play such an important part in the development of the plot that they need to be particularly mentioned<sup>2</sup>.

There are also many variables regarding the expected size of a dragon. Some are as large as to coil themselves around the whole world (e.g. the Mester Stoor Worm), others have the size of a dog. Not many stories include a detailed description of the size of the creature, mostly trusting their audience to do what they would with such vague

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<sup>1</sup> In the different representations of dragons we may find specimens with two legs, four legs or none. Artists sometimes unwittingly drew mutilated animals and this resulted in very inaccurate renderings. Many two-legged dragons that we find in books published during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were nothing more than mutilated specimens of the *draco volans*. (Barbero Richart, 1999: 137).

<sup>2</sup> In fact, some dragons have a surfeit of legs, and even of wings. A dragon effigy in Mordiford was described by the editor of C. Dingley's *History from Marble* (1867-8) as having four pairs of wings and four pairs of feet (Simpson, 2001: 95-6)

terms as “huge” or “enormous”, so that, as Simpson (2001: 42) remarks, “each hearer may visualise for himself whatever seems the appropriate size – large enough to be a fearsome foe, but not so large as to make combat quite impossible”.

However, in other instances, the description is satisfyingly specific. We know that the Linton Worm was, in length, “three Scots yards, and somewhat bigger than an ordinary man’s leg” (see Appendix A), the two dragons on Loch Merkland were “in girth about twice that of a man” (see Appendix A), and the Lambton Worm could “lap his tail ten times round Lambton Hill” (Simpson, 2001: 142), which makes him a behemoth. The Knucker of Lyminster (Sussex) was smaller, but still an impressive creature, for “his neck and body-parts lay all along up the hill, past the station”. This information, coupled with some knowledge of local geography, gives us a longitude of about half a mile (Joiner, 1929: 845-6, in Simpson, 2001: 144). Beowulf’s dragon is said to be fifty feet long (lines 3,042-3), which is also a very decent size. Gigantism is a common feature of monsters in general, not only dragons. As Gilmore (2003: 174) remarks, “no matter how monsters differ otherwise, no matter where they appear, monsters are vastly, grotesquely oversized (...) large size means superior strength, which translates into the power advantage in confrontations”.

But large or not, dragons are consistently ferocious. It goes without saying that one should stay well away from a dragon. With a few honourable exceptions, there is nothing kind or cute about them, whatever the latest interpretations of popular culture may lead us to believe. They are large, foul and voracious creatures. They are, more often than not, beasts of prey, with enormous appetites and impressive means of destruction, a threat that was not wanted around the cattle, much less near the community. They are known to prey on livestock and humans alike, although they tend to have predilection for children and maidens, and no amount of coaxing or bribery will



stop them from their destructive propensities, unless the coaxing is done by some saint or the bribery includes a princess, but since not all dragon-threatened communities have access to any of those two, they must resort to the usual methods, that is, hunting down the dragon.

In any case, independently of their size, ferocity or number of legs involved, there are a number of features that truly identify a dragon beyond any reasonable doubt:

### **The Dragon is Reptilian**

If there is one feature that must be always present in dragons, it is that they remind us, some way or other, of reptiles. Be them winged or not, two footed, or four footed, or slithery creatures, there is always something inescapably reptilian about them. The very etymology of the word alludes to this association, since *draco* actually means “snake” or “serpent”. And yet, they appear in such varied forms as there are cultures with dragon legends: the Egyptian dragon (the main representative being Apep) is mostly crocodile, although with parts of snake and turtle too. The Sumerian dragon (Mušhuššu) has a serpent-like body, lion forelegs, legs like an eagle’s talons and horns on its head. The Babylonian Tiamat was represented either as a serpent or as beast with a tiger or griffin head, wings, four clawed feet and the tail of a serpent. Assyrian dragons always were depicted with a forked tongue which likens them to reptiles even if they share features with other animals as well. If we take a leap to the East and take a look at their dragons, we will find that the Chinese ones are composites of no less than nine other creatures: the average Chinese dragon has a camel head with demon eyes, a couple of deer antlers and cow ears, on top of a snake like body covered in carp scales, standing on tiger legs with eagle talons, and the belly of a clam. The European dragon borrows from different animals too: from the crocodiles, our dragons may take the fangs, the claws and the

almost impregnable skin, but also their partiality for dwelling in the liquid element; from the snakes, their slithery nature and the coiling. Some dragons have a tendency to kill their prey by wrapping them in their coils and constricting them to death. The stench that is so often mentioned when an encounter with a dragon is reported is also a common trait of some snakes, such as the boa constrictor. Crocodiles, too, have a distinct smell of musk. Dragons are also normally endowed with snake eyes, large, yellow, bright... and deeply uncanny.

Although one may initially interpret this inevitable feature of dragons as a result of their demonization, nothing is further than the truth. The animal that best represents the forces of evil in the Hebraic and the Christian religion is, of course, the serpent, but dragons were described as reptilian long before they acquired this specific connotation, and in cultures completely out of the influence of the Christian expansion. One must look for the reasons for this choice elsewhere and I am inclined to believe that this inescapable representation of the dragon as a serpent has much to do with the symbolism attached to snakes and their connection with the underworld.

The serpent and the dragon are chthonic creatures, linked to both death and immortality (due to their ability to shed their skin) and therefore in close association with the ancestral dead. In Sumer, some 5,000 years ago, Gilgamesh, following Utnapishtim's<sup>1</sup> instructions, dove to the bottom of a lake to retrieve the plant of life, which would make him immortal. As we know, that endeavour went awry, for, as the king was resting from his effort, a snake came and ate the plant. Gilgamesh was thus doomed to mortality. In Greece, serpents "symbolised renewed life, healing, prophecy,

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<sup>1</sup> Utnapishtim was the only human survivor of the great deluge in the Sumerian culture, and he had been gifted with immortality. Distraught by the death of his great friend Enkidu, and fearing his own demise, Gilgamesh went to him to find the secret of eternal life. Utnapishtim lives at the mouth of rivers, as guardian of the waters of life (05.03.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

secret wisdom, and the beneficent aspects of the Underworld, including its gifts of fertility and prosperity” (Simpson, 2001: 27). But that this was so in Greece does not mean that it was at all exclusive to this culture, and such symbolism applies to serpents in the folklore of practically the whole of Europe. This will be observed in more detail later.

### **The Dragon Breathes Fire**

**Examples:** St Gilbert of Dornoch (Scotland); St Senan (Ireland); *The Two Brothers*; *The Bisterne Dragon* (Hampshire, England); *Fulk Fitzwarrin* (Somerset, England); *The Dragon of Kingston St Mary* (Somerset, England); *The Dragon at Castle Carlton* (Lincolnshire, England); *Beowulf*; *Tristan and Isolt*; *Sir Bevis of Hampton*; *Le Morte d'Arthur*; *The Dragon of Wantley*.

Both St Gilbert of Dornoch and St Senan confronted serpents that had this perilous ability. In the case of St Gilbert, the dragon had been born from a fire that had lasted seven years and he had an accordingly flaming breath. Many dragons appear to be related to fire in some way or other. Although a typical deportment of the Norse dragon, fire-breathing can be found in other cultures too, always in association with the less attractive features of the creature, such as its being venomous, in an attempt to make it appear even more terrifying to the human mind. Some authors have also implied that the dragon, being closely associated with death, is an entity that will necessarily be associated with fire too, especially with the all-devouring consuming power of fire (Davidson, 2004: 137).

Some of them also seem to be fireproof. In this, the dragon is similar to the salamander, another reptile which traditionally was believed to have an unhealthy

dependence to fire. Many believed the animal to be born from the element, and even those who criticised such notion could not dispute that salamanders certainly were quite amenable to fire. Both Claudius Aelianus and Aristotle wrote that salamanders were generally deemed responsible for the extinguishing of fires in smithies (Barbero Richart, 1999: 84). In response to this, most representations of the animal, from Pedacio Dioscorides (*De Materia Medica*, A.D. 512) to Lambsprinck (*De Lapice Philosophico*, 1625) show the salamander either amongst the flames or with a line of stars along its back symbolizing their status as burning celestial bodies. Sometimes, artwork even depicts an angry blacksmith chasing the reptile. Barbero Richart (1999: 85-7) attributes this misrepresentation to some erroneous or exaggerated interpretation of some feature of the real animal. The skin of salamanders secretes a mucous substance which dissuades some of their predators, but which is also fireproof (though only for a few seconds, which would not keep the poor animal from suffering from the effects of fire just as any other creature would). The identification of the salamander with fire was such that it eventually became the symbol of sulphur in Alchemy.

Barbero Richart (1997: 143) also wonders whether the element of the fire may have been inspired by the bifid tongue of the snakes, which moves at such speed that it may remind of a flame, or whether it may be a reference to snake bites and the burn that results from many of them. Finally, he concludes that it must be a reference to the fire in Hell, since dragons are identified as demonic creatures.

However, this does not need to be so. It is easily observable that there are dragons present in ancient cultures of whom it is clearly stated that they breathe fire. Among them, one must highlight Leviathan (Hebraic culture), Fafnir (Scandinavian culture), and Typhon (Classical culture). For example, here is Job's Biblical description of the monster Leviathan:



A fight between an elephant and a fire-breathing dragon. C. 1255-1265. Harley MS 3244, f.39v. (Bovey, 2002: 23).

I will not fail to speak of his limbs, his strength and his graceful form. Who can strip off his outer coat? Who would approach him with a bridle? Who dares open the doors of his mouth, ringed about with his fearsome teeth? His back has rows of shields tightly sealed together; each is so close to the next that no air can pass between. They are joined fast to one another; they cling together and cannot be parted. His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn. Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds. His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth. Strength resides in his neck; dismay goes before him. The folds of his flesh are tightly joined; they are firm and immovable. His chest is hard as rock, hard as a lower millstone. When he rises up, the mighty are terrified; they retreat before his thrashing. The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin. Iron he treats like straw and bronze like rotten wood. Arrows do not make him flee, sling stones are like chaff to him. A club seems to him but a piece of straw, he laughs at the rattling of the lance. His undersides are jagged potsherds, leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing-sledge. He makes the depths churn like a boiling cauldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment. Behind him he leaves a glistening wake; one would think the deep had white hair. Nothing on earth is his equal—a creature without fear. He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud (Job, 41: 14).

In this description, Leviathan is described in the same terms as a crocodile, although with some mythological features mingled with the natural ones for good effect. In other instances, Leviathan is sometimes represented as a whale, sometimes as a dragon, but always as a sea monster. From the dragon it takes the large size, fire breathing and apparent indestructibility, but also its serpent-like quality: “In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea” (Isaiah 27:1). As we see here, among his many daunting qualities, this monster possesses that of spitting fire and breathing smoke. But Leviathan is clearly a creature from Hell, and as such a touch of fire breathing is not out of place.

On this basis, neither Fafnir nor Typhon should be expected to have this ability, and yet they do.

Fafnir is the dragon character in the single most represented dragon story in artistic creations in the North of Europe between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century, appearing in Norse rune stones<sup>1</sup> and British crosses alike, but also in many churches across Europe (Langer, 2006: 22). The characters of this story appeared, with varied degrees of prominence, in a number of literary works<sup>2</sup> in the North of Europe, and as central in the *Völsunga Saga*<sup>3</sup> (where they receive the names of Sigurd and Fafnir) and the *Nibelungenlied*<sup>4</sup> (where the hero is known as Siegfried).

The outline of the underlying myth that provides the plot for these works is as follows: In one occasion, Odin, Loki and Hónir followed a stream and they came across an otter which had caught a salmon. Loki unwittingly killed the otter, not knowing that it was actually Ótr, one of the three sons of the mage Hréidmar. He, on seeing his son dead, commanded his other sons, Fafnir and Regin, to exact revenge from the three gods. After some display of violence, Odin, Loki and Hónir agreed to give the two brothers the quantity of gold that would fit into the otter's skin, to atone for their crime, but the treasure included a cursed gold ring, which would bring death to whomever would possess it<sup>5</sup>.

Of course, after a short time, the curse first affected the family of Hréidmar. Fáfñir and Regin killed their father and Fáfñir seized the treasure and hid it in a cave,

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, the Sigurd Stones, of which the most popular is the Ramsund carving in Sweden (06.05.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>)

<sup>2</sup> Such as the Austrian *Nibelungenlied*, the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, the *Völsunga Saga*, the 10<sup>th</sup> century skaldic poem *Eiriksmál*, the *Prose Edda*, the *Poetic Edda* or the 13<sup>th</sup> century works *Saga of Thidrik of Bern* and the prose section of the *Codex Regius* (Talbot, 1983: 161).

<sup>3</sup> The *Völsunga Saga* was written in Iceland in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, although the stories it compiles must be much older, the earliest known rendition being the Rasmund carving, which was made at the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. According to Fabbro (2004: 37-8), it is clearly pagan, in spite of its having been written after the Christianization of Iceland.

<sup>4</sup> The *Nibelungenlied* is a medieval epic poem (the earliest surviving records are from the 13<sup>th</sup> century), written in Middle High German (06.15.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>5</sup> An obvious parallel of this turn of events is found in J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5).

metamorphosing into a serpent<sup>1</sup> to watch over it. However, Regin would not remain idle for long. He convinced young Sigurd to kill the serpent and take the treasure, which he did after a combat that took both skill in battle and wit (he hid in a pit and stabbed Fafnir when he crawled over it), plus the use of a fabulous sword forged by Regin. Once Fafnir was dead, Regin asked Sigurd to roast the monster's heart for him. But, as he was following his instructions, Sigurd happened to put his finger on the roasting meat and burned it and, on putting it to his mouth, he acquired the power of understanding the language of birds. From them he learnt that Regin ambioned to keep the whole treasure to himself and that he was planning to betray his young fool of a friend. The youth soon put this new information to good use, killing Regin and taking the treasure.

Needless to say, the curse of the ring would soon reach him too, but that is a story for another time.

Finally, Typhon was the last child of Gaia and Tartarus and he is considered as the most deadly monster of Greek mythology. He is described as a fire breathing serpent of dragon, half man, half serpent, with serpents in place of legs and fingers, pointed ears and wings. Typhon's offspring are the most dangerous and monstrous of all known creatures and include a breed of dragons: Hydra, Khimaira, Ladon, the Kholkian Drakon, and Kerberos.

Typhon is a primitive monster, belonging to the world that existed before Zeus and the Olympians established the present order. He is a creature that belongs to the earth, but that, at the same, is said to cause the hurricanes, or be himself a destructive hurricane. He is so powerful that he once besieged Mount Olympus, the home of the gods, making many of them turn on their heels and flee to Egypt. Only Athena stayed,

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<sup>1</sup> Fafnir is described with the term *ormr*, that is, "worm" or "serpent". The Norse did consider all *ormrs* as dragons (Lerate, 1986: 245). In fact, Fafnir is said to crawl, rather than walk.



granted, mostly to harangue Zeus for his cowardice, but her insistence paid off and the god decided to confront Typhon. Armed with his thunderbolts, he struck and wounded the dragon and chased him to Mount Casion (Syria), where they engaged in a hand-to-hand combat. The fight was long and even and, for some dramatic moments, Typhon had Zeus completely in his power, wrapped in his coils. The dragon cut the tendons from Zeus' hands and feet, thus effectively rendering the god helpless, and left him under the watch of his sister Delphyne, half maiden, half serpent. Eventually though, and with the help of Hermes, Zeus recovered his strength and the fight restarted. On reaching Sicily, Zeus threw Mount Etna at Typhon and pinned him under the mountain. There has Python been ever since, and there goes Zeus every so often, to check on the dragon and to hurl a few thunderbolts inside Mount Aetna for good measure (06.21.2013. <http://www.theoi.com>).

None of these creatures can be considered to have been influenced by the Hebraic or the Christian religion and, therefore, their fire-breathing ability must come from somewhere else. I wonder whether this have originated as a mere hyperbole, taking the burning sensation of a viper's bite to an extreme and making it physically visible in the shape of real fire; or whether, on the other hand, it may lead us down a path of symbolism still unraveled.

### **The Dragon Occasionally Flies**

**Examples:** *John Aller and the Dragon* (Aller, Somerset, England); *The Walmsgate Dragons* (Lincolnshire, England); *The Ludham Dragon* (Norfolk, England); *The Dragon at Castle Carlton* (Lincolnshire, England); *The Dragon of Loch CorrieMohr* (Scotland); *The Dragon of Llandeilo Graban* (Radnorshire, Wales); one of the two dragons on

Loch Merkland (Scotland); *Beowulf*; *Sir Bevis of Hampton*; *Sir Guy of Warwick*.

The stress on *occasionally* comes from a curious phenomenon: Even though many of the dragons in legends and literature are described as winged, or, at least, as flying creatures, yet, it is but rarely that they use their ability when they engage in singular combat with the appointed hero of their story. As Simpson (2001: 76) points out:

It is not that local storytellers lack the imagination to devise ways of destroying or outwitting even the most redoubtable monster; (...) they had a formidable armoury of tricks in their repertoire, and could certainly have thought up ways of disposing of a flying beast – arrows, spears, nets, catapults, traps and birdlime are all possibilities, yet none has been made use of.

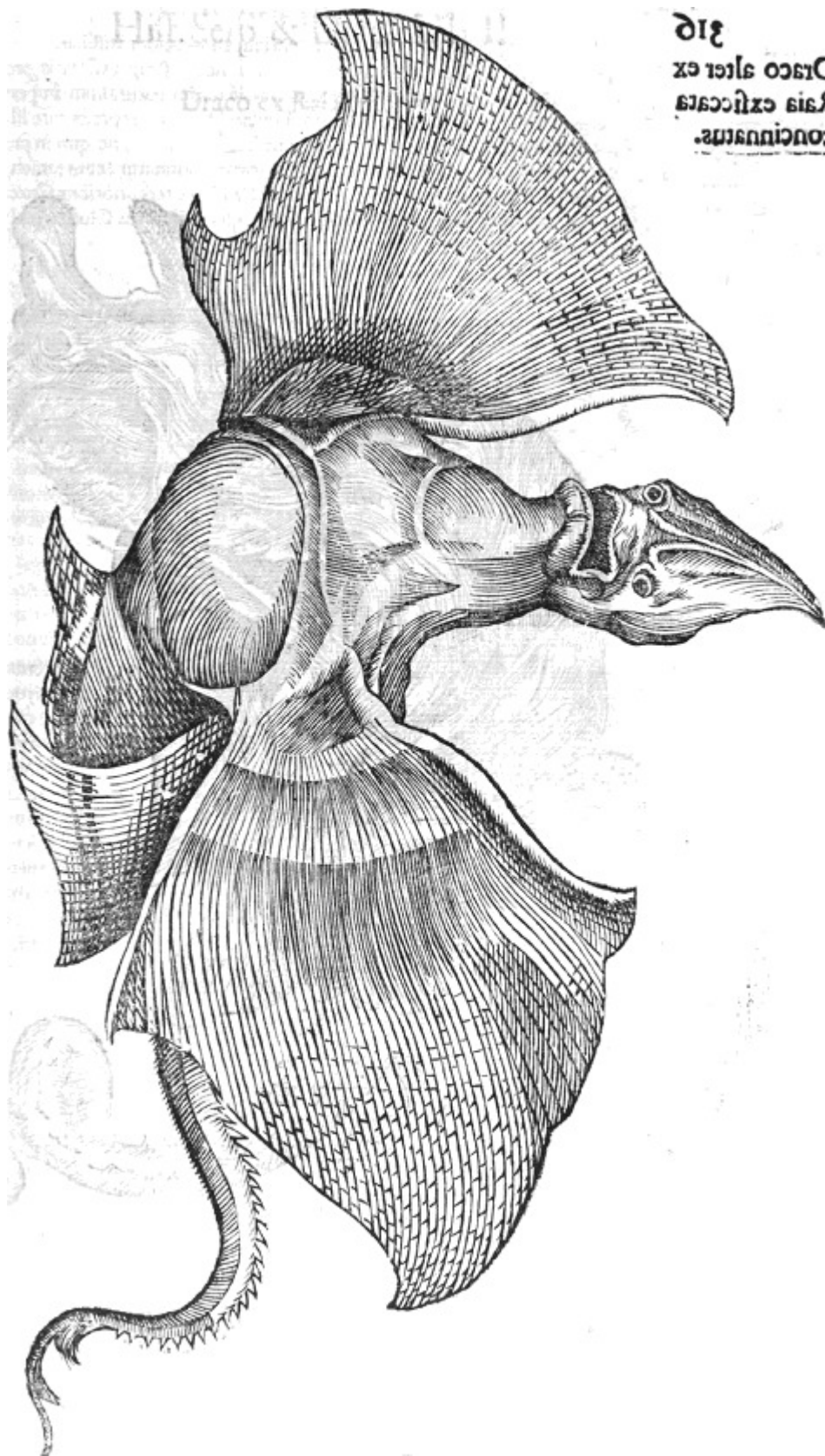
She assumes that the only possible explanation is that the traditional storytellers stuck to a narrative that they were familiar with, one that preserved the idea of a fight on earth.

Therefore, even though dragons may be equipped with wings, they may decide not to use them, even in crucial moments. The dragon in *Beowulf*, for example, does not use his wings in combat, although that does not mean that he is incapable of flying.

The flying dragon maybe stems from the beliefs about flying serpents (Simpson, 2001: 40), which were until recently very popular in certain communities (Wales, in Britain, and Galicia, in Spain, are two good examples of these beliefs). This idea may be supported by the fact that Wales is a true breeding area of flying dragons and serpents.

Consider this report:

The woods round Penllyne Castle, Glamorgan, had the reputation of being frequented by winged serpents, and these were the terror of old and young alike. An aged inhabitant of Penllyne, who died a few years ago [i.e. about 1900], said that in his boyhood the winged serpents were described as very beautiful (...). (They) “looked as if they were covered with jewels of all sorts. Some of them had crests sparkling with all the colours of the rainbow”(Trevelyan, 1909: 168-9, in Simpson, 2001: 40).



This specimen in Aldrovandi's *Serpentum et draconum historiae* (1639) is probably a *jenny haniver*, that is, an animal artificially manipulated to resemble a mythological creature. This practice fed the imagination of many and a good number of them even made their way into natural treatises. This particular drawing is very likely based on a mutilated guitarfish.

Mark that the informant does not claim to have seen the serpents himself, but merely describes what others told him in his youth, more specifically, by his father and uncle, who would have contributed to the extinction of this species, which were quite detested as they were considered vermin. Nevertheless, it is obvious that he puts much faith in the truthfulness of these stories. Mark too the striking references to elements that have been seen over and over again: the crests, the rainbow... In the same work, a woman adds that she heard in Glamorgan that “there was a “king and queen” of winged serpents” and that wherever winged serpents were to be seen “there was sure to be buried money or something of value near at hand” (Trevelyan, 1909: 168-9, in Simpson, 2001: 40). This is another familiar reference: the treasure, to which we will come again later.

In Devonshire, we also come across some accounts of flying dragons and serpent sightings:

Two seventeenth century historians mentioned “dragons” at Winkleigh. Westcote (1630) said that “divers hillocks of earth” at Challacombe on Exmoor were supposed to have fiery dragons flying and alighting on them. Polwhele, in 1798, spoke sarcastically of a giant snake killed near a tin-mine at Manaton, credited with wings and legs and the size of a human body – and a hiss which could be heard for miles around – which had been seen to fly to and from. This all seems derived from an antique period when

The gaunt wolf and winged serpent held  
Dominion o’er the vale (Brown, 1964: 145-60, in  
Simpson, 2001: 41)

In Galicia (Spain) it was believed that common serpents, when they reached a certain age, would grow a pair of wings and fly away to Babylon. In Asturias (Spain) they also grow wings, but these migrate to Armenia instead<sup>1</sup> (Álvarez Peña, 2004: 9).

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<sup>1</sup> Whichever the destination, both sets of serpents will spare a thought for those who had the chance to kill them and did not. In Galicia, they will chant “Pra Babilonia vou, / malaia quen me viu de nova / e non me

In Galicia there is a striking stone cross, located in the fields near Ponteceso (A Coruña). This is the Cruceiro de Gondomil, which was erected on a stone upon which one may still see a beautiful relief of a winged serpent. According to legend, serpents used to be thick on the ground in this country, until St Adrian<sup>1</sup> forced them under this stone for good. Many historians have claimed that it is highly possible that the serpent on the stone is much older than the cross, which would be Christianizing an ancient cult, with the story of St Adrian backing it up (Cuevillas & Bouza Brey, 1929: 132).

But of course, the belief in flying serpents was not at all circumscribed to these two regions. Back in Britain, a flying serpent sighting was reported in a pamphlet published in Clerkenwell (Essex) in 1669<sup>2</sup>. Although the story lacks the support of local folklore, it became popular enough during its day that it came to be yearly commemorated (Simpson, 2001: 41).

The flying dragon may well be a medieval development inspired in these folktales about flying snakes, but we cannot forget that it is not uncommon to find winged dragons among the ancient civilizations that influenced the European culture, even though little stress is made in their flying abilities in the related myths. For example, the Sumerian and Babylonian dragons depicted in cylinders and manuscripts, routinely sported wings.

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matou”. In Asturias, “Al monte d’Armenia / me vou, mal haya le vaya / a quien me viou ya num me matou”. (I’m leaving for Babylon/Armenia. Curse those who saw me and did not kill me) (Álvarez Peña, 2004: 35).

<sup>1</sup> Saint Adrian (died 306, Nicomedia) was a soldier to the Roman Emperor Galerius Maximian who converted to Christianity and suffered martyrdom either under Diocletian or Licinius, depending on the source consulted. He, as St George, is a military saint (06.23.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> The pamphlet is generally thought to have been written by Robert Winstanley of Saffron Walden, and it is titled *A True Relation of a Monstrous Serpent seen at Henham on the Mount in Saffron Walden*. It describes the serpent as having “eight or nine feet long, as thick as a man’s leg, with large eyes, fierce teeth and ridiculously small wings; it was supposedly sighted several times on 27 and 28 May 1669, doing no harm to anyone, and then it disappeared into nearby woods” (Simpson, 2001: 41).

## **The Dragon is Poisonous**

**Examples:** St George; St Petroc; *The Mester Stoor Worm* (the Orkney Islands); *The Knucker of Lyminster* (West Sussex, England); *John Aller and the Dragon* (Aller, Somerset, England); *The Sockburn Dragon* (Durham, England); *The Deerhurst Dragon* (Gloucestershire, England); *Y Carrog* (Borough, Wales); *The Mordiford Dragon* (Herefordshire, England); *Cnoc Na Cnoimh* (Sutherland, Scotland); *Beowulf*; *Sir Bevis of Hampton*.

Sometimes, this feature of the dragon is used to bring about an ironic turn of events in the story. For example, in the version of *The Knucker of Lyminster* where Jim Puttock kills the dragon, he then dies tragically when he accidentally gets some of the dragon's poison in his mouth when having a celebrating pint. Likewise, Nico Ifan, the only one to cowardly stay behind while all his neighbours set forth to kill the Y Carrog, stupidly kicks the dead dragon and gets poisoned.

Not only are dragons generally described as poisonous, their blood tends to be highly abrasive too. At least in three stories there are examples of patches of land where the grass does not grow on account of it being the place where the dragon's blood (or, in one instance, the hero's) was spilled. Two such examples are the dragon John Aller kills (See Appendix A, Version 2), and the dragon slain by St George on top of Dragon Hill, in Uffington. This curious effect of spilt blood also takes place in the fight between St Leonard and the dragon, although here it is the saint's blood that causes barrenness and not the dragon's, which is taken as evidence of his holiness. This is quite peculiar, for, in folktales, this is reversed and it is usually the dragon's blood that is spilt and usually the dragon's blood that causes large patches of soil to become unfertile, evidence, in

those stories, of the evilness of the creature. In Classical culture, for example, we are told how Herakles, after defeating the Hydra, dipped the point of his arrows in the poisonous blood of the monster, to make them more deadly (Williams, 1996: 128).

The allusion to a venomous nature in dragons is probably an extension of its reptilian nature, as well as an added dangerous feature. In fact, many stories allude to the dragon's deadly breath or his ability to produce fire with which he roasts fields, cattle and people alike. Many of them are also said to have a distinctive hiss. This idea of the destructive power of their breath also applies to some snakes, of which it was believed that their breath could have a paralysing effect on their prey (Simpson, 2001: 43).

### **3. 2. 3. Dwelling**

Every dragon hunter (or dragon flier) ought to be familiar with the places that are usually a dragon's haunt. One wants to be wary and tread lightly around such places.

In the manuals and maps of older times, one would often find a mysterious warning on the edges of the known territories: *Hic Sunt Dracones*, or *Here There Be Dragons*, which placed all sorts of monstrous races at the edges of the world (Williams, 1996: 206). It is very telling that in practically all the dragon stories the creature is described as living outside of the human world. Such choice emphasizes their "otherness". This idea of opposition to human civilization is present in works of art too, which more often than not show the fight of the hero against the dragon on an open field, but with the walls of a city standing out on the background. The maidens in the story of St George are sent beyond the walls of the city to be offered to the dragon and the dragon, once subdued, is brought inside the city walls to be killed. According to Williams (1996: 206),

The dragon is the monstrous version of the concept of place because it destabilizes boundaries. Relentless in its opposition to the city, with its walls, moats, gates, and other structures of exclusion, the dragon is both the affirmation of the city – for the city exists to keep the dragon out – and its negation – as he devours its inhabitants one by one. His own habitation is the cavern, the tunnel, or the tomb, out of which holes he emerges to attack civilization. In Germanic culture, he lives in the ruins of the great cities “built by giants,” and it is his blood that fortifies the weapons of war. He is the chaos and destruction that lies outside the walls of ordered society; he is wilderness, lawlessness, disorder, and, as such, he creates the need and thus the possibility for civilization, law, and order.

The modern reader, when thinking of the typical characteristics generally ascribed to a dragon, will usually assign the creature a cave as dwelling. Preferably, deep, dark and hiding a fabulous treasure. As seen in the description above, dragons must certainly like a good cave, being as it is a symbol of the underground and of the dead, as opposed to a thriving human community. Nevertheless, they do not coil back in disgust if they are accommodated differently. In these stories, we have come across a good variety of lairs. It is also to be noted that there is a strong sense of localisation in almost all dragon stories and many offer a wealth of detail regarding the dragon’s routines:

One finds a series of vivid and minutely particularised links between the story and its setting – where the dragon had his lair, where he hunted, where he came to drink, what paths he followed, where the hero lay in wait for him and killed him, and even, in one case, which pub the hero went to celebrate afterwards (Simpson, 2001: 51).

In this last instance she is referring to the story of *The Knucker of Lyminster* (see Appendix A).

The variety of habitats ascribed to dragons is quite wide, and they include woods, hills, caves and the occasional prehistoric temple or burial-mound, but the stories almost always contrive to have a reference to water, either in the form of a river where the dragon goes to drink, or having the hero kill it by the water. Some stories are



set in rather different locations to those mentioned, but in those few exceptions it may be easily argued that the story may have been built around some local element, as is the case of the dragon at the church tower at Llandeilo Graban in the Wye valley (Radnorshire), which may be explained by the fact that the church had at one time had a weathervane in the shape of a dragon (Simpson, 2001: 50). Aside from these exceptions, one may say that dragons tend to be found in three different types of location:

### **The Dragon Dwells in a Subterranean Realm**

**Examples:** St Germanus; St Maccreiche; *The Linton Worm* (West Linton, Scotland); *Wyvill and the dragon* (North Yorkshire, England); *The Walmsgate Dragons* (Lincolnshire, England); *The Ludham Dragon* (Norfolk, England); *Cnoc Na Cnoimh* (Sutherland, Scotland); *Sir Guy of Warwick*; *Fulk Fitzwarrin* (Somerset, England); *Beowulf*; *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

This is a quite frequent location in the tales examined, although the subterranean element can be accomplished in different ways:

The Bruckee was living in a cave when St Maccreiche turned up and forcibly had him move to Rath Lake, and one of the several dragons that Sir Guy of Warwick had to fight in his knightly career (namely, the one in Northumberland) also had chosen a cave to rest after a hard day of terrorizing. The worm that made the valley of Cassley in Sutherland desolate, retired every day to the hole called Toll na Cnoimh (Worm's Hole), on the side of the hill Cnoc na Cnoimh (Worm's Hill). In Classical Greece, Python is said to have had his lair in a cave too, more specifically, a cave near a spring, on mount Parnassus. And in Normandy there is a very interesting tale about the dragon of Le Trou Baligan (Flamanville). Le Trou Baligan is the name of the cavern where this

enormous serpent had its lair, and from which it set to catch and devour children. The community tried to stop these random outings by adopting the questionable measure of making a weekly offering of a child chosen by lot, but soon they realised that it was a terrible idea and opted for getting professional help. St George could not assist, but St Germain-la-Rouelle<sup>1</sup> turned up, gliding along the waves on a cartwheel, walked straight into the Trou Baligan, struck the dragon with his cross and killed it. Then, he proceeded to baptise the awed onlookers and left again on his cartwheel, towards the setting sun. Bois (2010: 47) sees in this story a reference to the Celtic Otherworld, which was located on a mythical island of the west.

Many are the dragons that favour a burial-mound over a simple cave. The one Lancelot slays is described as dwelling in a tomb, and so is the fearsome winged dragon that attacked the village of Lulham every night (*The Ludham Dragon*, Appendix A). The three dragons that used to devastate Walmsgate, in Lincolnshire, also lived in a long barrow (*The Walmsgate Dragons*, Appendix A). The dragon in *Fulk Fitzwarrin* did not live in a barrow, but the story can be read that way, as the monster rose from a camp of dead warriors after a battle, and so the element of the grave is present nevertheless. Beowulf's dragon is probably the clearest example of this tendency, as he lived in a burial-mound. His was certainly a prime choice: a mound in a rocky headland by the sea, off the beating track, with a nice stream of boiling waters adding to the picturesque. There, the dragon had been living happily for three hundred years until he was disturbed by a reckless fellow, with the tragic result we all know.

Ancient megalithic barrows are common in the Atlantic coasts of Europe, from Spain to Scandinavia, and, as Lawrence (1918: 571) reminds us,

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Germaine-la-Rouelle or Saint Germaine à la Rouelle is a fifth-century Catholic saint, the son of an Irish prince, mostly venerated in Normandy (France) (09.22.2013. <http://www.le-petit-manchot.fr>).

It is no wonder that the men of this age [he is referring here to the Early Middle Ages] marvelled at these ancient mounds, cunningly constructed of heavy blocks of stone, and filled with strange treasures of olden time, as well as with dead men's bones. They might well fancy that these barrows were the works of the giants (...), habited by dragons, and protected by spells.

Over the course of time, dolmens, standing stones and all such ancient structures developed a sinister reputation, and different stories appeared in relation to them, all of them sharing a motif of danger and general unpleasantness. Megalithic monuments have been generally considered troublesome ever since: devils appear and disappear in their whereabouts, careless people get transformed into standing stones, the stones themselves get alive at specific times and perform human activities (such as going to the riverside to drink water or bleeding when pricked), and the occasional dragon lives in the area and makes life interesting to passers-by. All English counties have their share of megalithic monuments and, hence, of dragon folklore.

But, why is this? As it has been seen, it is the dragon's nature to have a preference towards ancient burial-mounds, for it has always been common knowledge that there is a very good chance that these places hide some ancient treasure, and also that all dragons are fond of a treasure. But they were not alone in this pursuit: "even in Anglo-Saxon days, plundering of the hoards in these mounds were common; indeed, legal restrictions upon searching for objects of value in barrows may be studied from the time of Theodoric to that of Henry VIII" (Lawrence, 1918: 571). So, robbers also frequented these places, although always with some reserves, for there was always a possibility that a dragon had got ahead of them. In England, associations between dragons and prehistoric monuments are also present. For example, a dragon is said to have been killed at Martinstane, in the site of a standing stone with Pictish carvings on it, another one beat itself to death against a standing stone in Denbighshire (Simpson,

2001: 50) and a third guarded a hoard in the barrow of Wormelow near Ludlow until a Saracen physician magically expelled it in 1344 (Lawrence, 1918: 567).

Being elements of significant standing in their communities, even long after their original use had been forgotten, burial mounds were promptly Christianized. Either some saint chose them as suitable places for praying and contemplative life, or demons of different nature were fought and vanquished on them, or, sometimes both. St Guðlac<sup>1</sup>, for example, after having resolved to settle on a mound in an island, had to defend himself against the (Welsh-speaking) accursed spirits already in residence there (Davidson, 1950: 176-7). It is interesting that burial mounds such as this one where St Guðlac found such troublesome neighbours have often been referred to as “the hill of the dragon”, especially those where a treasure-hoard was found (Davidson, 1950: 178).

This subterranean world, related to the gods and the dead, can be found in a great many cultures around the world<sup>2</sup>. In this context, the presence of the serpent, be it in the form of a humble snake or a very powerful dragon, has a strong underlying chthonic symbolism that cannot be ignored. The connection of these creatures with the earth (for they crawl) and with immortality (for they are renewed every time they shed their skin) makes them perfect candidates for such beneficent associations. In Greece, for example, Cadmus and his wife Harmonia were transformed into serpents by Ares. Some may say that it was a belated revenge for the death of Ismesnos<sup>3</sup>, but others will

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<sup>1</sup> St Guðlac (or Guthlac) or Crowland (673-714). After having served in the army, he became a monk and later sought to live as a hermit in Crowland Island (<http://www.wikipedia.org>. 09.22.2013). It was here that the demon-expelling episode took place.

<sup>2</sup> Some examples of belligerent dragons from ancient cultures which lived in subterranean realms are the following ones: Water-Serpent (from a tribal myth in Congo), Mušhuššu (Sumer), Aži Dahāka (Persia), Malik Mohammad (Persia), Typhon (Greece), Styx (Greece), Níðhöggr (Scandinavian culture), and Fafnir (Scandinavian culture).

<sup>3</sup> Some classical sources even mention that Ares was Ismenos' father (<http://www.pantheon.org>. 09.22.2013). Not that this would have changed the outcome, probably. A god has a right to be angry when his dragon is killed.

sensibly point out that a god of Ares' temper would not have served his revenge cold, and that Cadmus had already atoned for his crime by being Ares servant for eight years, at the end of which he was given a respite and Ares' daughter Harmonia's hand in marriage. In view of these facts, the metamorphosis was most certainly not a curse, but probably compensation offered by the god for the death of their children, a gift that gave the couple the possibility to live in peace for the rest of eternity. Also in Greece, the chthonic gods and heroes could represent themselves in the form of serpents. Plutarch, among others, made reference to this notion, when he stated that "the ancients associate the serpent above all other animals with their heroes" (Buttenwieser, 1917: 243). It was also frequent to keep live serpents in oracular sites, as representatives of the ancestral dead, renewed life, healing and prophecy (Simpson, 2001: 26).

In line with this, it is possible to see in the cave a symbol of a womb, and thus a reference to a Mother Goddess. The cult to the earth is the cult to the Mother Goddess, for the earth is both womb and grave and so both elements partake of the same symbolism. Caves figure in myths of fertility and renewal all across the globe. This telluric religiosity was present in the prehistoric societies, but prevailed for millennia.

Often, this divinity would be represented as an animal. The snake again is in predominance, and so is the dragon, but also the cave, the moon, the fish, the spiral and the labyrinth, the bull, the deer, the goat... According to Davidson (2004: 137-8), caves may have been the selected places to practice some rituals of passage to the other world. It is possible that some of these rites once included the use of snakes and that gradually snakes were incorporated into the general imagery of death, becoming the symbolic guardians of the grave and, therefore, of the treasure that had been buried with the dead. This can be seen in stories such as that of the dragon in *Beowulf*.

Norman megalithic folklore also regards mounds and caves as symbols of the womb of Mother Nature and the entrances to the underworld. In such a context, the dragon is the guardian of the door to this realm and supervisor of the rites of passage, in much the way as the Minotaur in the labyrinth (Dempster, 1888: 243). One could argue that up to the Bronze Age the reigning deity was this Mother Goddess, who was then gradually supplanted by the warrior god of the new era of technology and weaponry. The myth of the hero maybe appears at this point, father of a breed of great warriors in the tribe.

### **The Dragon Controls or Dwells in Water Sources**

**Examples:** St George; St Petroc; St Columba; St Carantoc; St Martha; St Patrick; St Beirheart and St Ciarán; St Murrough; St Senan; St Maccreiche; every single Irish peist; *The Mester Stoor Worm* (the Orkney Islands); *Martin and the Dragon* (Angus, Scotland); *The Lambton Worm* (Durham, England); *The Knucker of Lyminster* (West Sussex, England); *The Bures Dragon* (Essex/Suffolk, England); *The Longwitton Dragon* (Northumberland, England); *The Oilliphéist and the Piper* (Ireland); *The Dragon of Loch CorrieMohr* (Scotland); *The Two Dragons on Loch Merkland* (Scotland); *The Three Munster Heroes and the Piest* (Ireland); *Beowulf*; *Tristan and Isolt*; *Sir Bevis of Hampton*; *The Dragon of Wantley*; *Kemp Owyne*; every dragon maiden.

If there is a dwelling that a dragon favours above all others, that is water. Although there are dragon stories practically in every geographical context, they seem to thrive in coastal areas or river valleys. Even in those stories where the dragon does not initially dwell in water, it can be doomed to it: St Patrick drives the snakes of Ireland into the

sea, St Beirheart and St Ciarán both drive dragons into lakes, and St Maccreiche hurls the Bruckee into Rath Lake), or affected by its proximity (the dragon in *Tristan and Isolt* lives near a river, Sir Bevis of Hampton, each time he is about to perish, resorts to a well to extraordinary healing properties (which come from a virtuous virgin once having bathed in it), and even Beowulf's dragon lives in a barrow, but a barrow by the sea.

Sometimes, dragons are also deemed responsible for (or related in some way to) floods. For instance, there is a variant to the story of the Mordiford dragon that includes a flood in the River Lugg. Simpson (2001: 50) argues that this inclusion was made for the sake of practicality, as a way of moving the tale forward towards its satisfying end, the tellers needed to come up with some way of getting the dragon to a position of defencelessness so that the villagers could kill it: "This is typical of how folktale imagination works; the keynote is practicality, not archaic myths and a consciousness of destructive forces in Nature" (Simpson, 2001: 50). That would make perfect sense, if it were not for the fact that there is a large number of parallels in the rest of Europe. Saint Romain, for example, got rid of a pernicious dragon that lived in the river Seine and caused terrible floods at Rouen; Bouza Brey (1982: 223) claims that the dragon of the river Miño (Galicia, Spain), the coca from Monçao (Portugal), the Tarasque (Tarascon, France), or the Grouille (Metz, France) are examples of the symbolism of destructive river floods represented as dragons, which are controlled by saints. In the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, there is a similar example. In chapter 12, a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns appears and chases a pregnant woman, in order to devour her child as soon as it is born. She manages to escape, but only temporarily and, at one point,

The serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth (Revelation, 12:13-17).

There are many things to consider in this passage of the Apocalypse, and many do remind us of other, apparently unrelated stories, not least of which is the dragon being bent on destroying a woman. In this case, though, the modus operandi of the dragon is very telling: “the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood”, we can read, and this is no random procedure. The mouths of rivers are traditionally likened to the mouths of dragons, as the rivers themselves have an obvious serpentine quality in their meandering stream. This stress of the connection between serpents and water can be easily perceived in an old belief of the people in Galicia (Spain), according to which, if one puts nine hairs pulled from a woman’s head into a jar of water and it is kept closed for nine days, they turn into snakes (Risco, 1994: 3: 35-6). In this superstition three of the elements involved, water, snake and woman, suggest some connection to most of the legends that are being explored here. But rivers also connect the world of the living to the underworld, and the point of connection is the mouth, through which the subterranean river bursts into the upper world. This belief is found in different ancient civilizations: in Egypt, with regards to the Nile, where the two sources of which the Nile are compound are hieroglyphically denoted by two serpents pouring water from their mouths, or in Greece, where we find representations of the river-god Achelous<sup>1</sup> pouring the water of the river from his mouth (Albright, 1919: 166-8). It is also evident that there is a fertility symbolism in these images of snakes and abundance of water. A prime example is the River Nile, the main source of irrigation in an otherwise dry territory, but the cult to the water is one of the most extended of all, and it has been

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<sup>1</sup> Achelous had three forms: a bull, an ox-headed man and a serpent (<http://www.pantheon.org>, 06.29.2013).



documented from the Roman period, even though it is very likely much more ancient than that (Risco, 1994: 3: 379).

Dragons are to be found in ponds and lakes too. In Sussex, there used to be a number of ponds which were considered to be both bottomless and inhabited by nasty creatures. The Knucker of Lyminster was one such dweller. The reputedly bottomless hole in which he lived has the singular characteristic that it is fed by a strong underground source, in such way that the water level never varies, nor does it ever freeze. In Sussex there used to be several of these ponds, all of them sharing this particularity. They were all known as “Knucker Holes” or “Nickery Holes”. Now, *knucker* and *nickery* are derived from the Anglo-Saxon term *nicor*, meaning “water-monster”. Simpson (2001: 52) ponders that “the fact that this word is applied to the Lyminster pool must mean that the pool was believed to contain a monster of some sort centuries ago, and indeed very likely in pre-Conquest times” and “the versions of the story recently current are only comparatively modern variations on a theme which must have persisted in this village for over a thousand years”. A fascinating piece of information uncovered by linguists.

Creatures similar to the Knucker of Lyminster were once connected to the respective Nickerpoll<sup>1</sup> ponds of Pershore, Hereford and Worcester, or the ponds on the boundaries of Ham (Wiltshire) and Crediton (Devon). Westwood (1994: 116) has commented on the similarity between this idea of a bottomless waterhole which connects with the abyss of hell and the desolate mere that was home to Grendel and his mother in *Beowulf*, of which there is “no man so wise that knows its bottom”. In Irish folklore, the Carrabuncle is considered by some authors as another form of the *piast*. It

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<sup>1</sup> *Nikerpoll*, also comes from OE *nicor*, meaning “water monster” (Simpson, 2001: 52).

is also an aquatic sort of animal that lives at the bottom of lakes. It was said that there was one in Lough Veagh, although some reports place it in the depths of Lough Beal. Chet Raymo (2005: 155) likens it to the monster of Loch Ness, in Scotland, although sightings of the Carrabuncle were far more coveted and with good reason. It was described as some sort of serpent which is seen every seven years. It makes the water shine, and throws off water mussels with pearls in them, which the locals gathered.

Bogs and marshes are also favoured. In Sedgemoor (Somerset) there was a dragon that lived in the bogs and every so often would emerge from them and cause devastation in the villages nearby, until a brave villager speared and killed it (Palmer, 1976: 79).

Finally, many springs have a dragon associated to them. Normally, the dragon has been linked to the place for as long as the locals remember, but some stories have the spring already in existence before the dragon arrives to make it his private haunt. This is what happens in Longwitton (Northumberland, England), where the following tale was collected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

In a wood not far from the village of Longwitton there are three wells which have been famous for many years. Long ago, people used to travel from far and near to drink water from the wells, for it was as sweet as wine, and had great healing powers (...). One day, however, a ploughman, going to quench his thirst, was alarmed to find a huge dragon there. It had coiled its tail round one of the trees, and pushed its long black tongue into the well, and was lapping the water like a dog (...). From that day, no pilgrim dared visit the magic wells, for the dragon haunted them. It was a fearsome monster, with a skin as warty as a toad's, and a long tail like a big lizard's. It tore up the ground with its claws, and scraped the bark from the trees as it brushed past them (...). It seemed to have claimed the wells and would not give them up to anyone (Grice, 1944: 95, and Balfour, 1904: 5, in Simpson, 2001: 39).

It is interesting that the dragon chose specifically wells with curative powers. These were so strong that the dragon managed to heal himself several times during the fight, à la Sir Bevis of Hampton. These creatures seem to have a penchant for holy

springs. In Greece, it was common that oracular sites were connected to a spring, often with healing properties and, rather usually too, guarded by a serpent. This might actually be a choice based on actual natural observation, since snakes are usually found to hibernate near hot springs (*Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana*, 1934 -: 18: 2162).

The association of dragons and water is not only customary, but also very archaic. It figures in the Creation Myths of early civilizations and in folktales all around the world<sup>1</sup>. Water is a symbol of fertility and the fact that it is so overwhelmingly present in dragon stories cannot but mean that the serpent must play a part in ancient fertility beliefs. More often than not, these myths are but the elaboration of the process of fertilization of the world, by the release of the waters or the end of a long deluge. “It is but natural that the mind of the people, from constant dwelling on the forces of Nature that give and sustain life, should attribute godlike powers to natural phenomena” (Monsen, 1907: 269). Not only the serpents, but the gods that fight them too are connected to this. Indra, for example, is a giver of rain, and Marduk, Zeus and Thor are all storm-gods. In a more humble, but also closer example, one must mention St Petroc, who seems to have inherited some of these attributes in his ability to predict and control the weather.

### **The Dragon Guards or Threatens a Holy Tree**

**Examples:** *Sir Piers Shonks* (Hertfordshire, England)

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<sup>1</sup> A few examples would be the stories of Water-Serpent (Congo), Azi Dahāka (Persia), Malik Mohammad (Persia), Rahab (Hebraic culture), the seven-headed dragon (Hebraic culture), Leviathan (Hebraic culture), Ismenos (Greece), Python (Greece), Achelous (Greece), the Hydra Lernaea (Greece), Ladon (Greece), Herakles and Hesione (Greece), Styx (Greece), Medusa (Greece), Jörmungandr (Scandinavian culture), and Tiamat (Babylon).

There are a number of serpents in ancient history that appear in relation with trees, more often than not, holy trees. The motif has become increasingly rare, but can still be found occasionally in stories such as that of Sir Piers Shonks, who fought a dragon who dwelled under the roots of a yew tree. However, it was common enough in the myths of different cultures.

Undoubtedly, not all dragons from Antiquity passed their days harassing their heroes and being harassed in return. Some led a quieter, albeit just as harmful, life. For example, there was in Chaldea an old legend about the tree Gaokerena, a tree of immortality that grew in the midst of the sea Vourukasha, which contained the seeds of all plants and which was attacked by a water-lizard of Ahriman (Carnoy, 1916: 303-4). This story presents a tree of life and a dragon of the deep. The astute reader will be remembered of *at least* one other story, from a different culture, where a serpent threatens a tree. A similar motif is found in the Scandinavian culture, where the *wyrm*<sup>1</sup> Níðhöggr spends his days gnawing at one of the roots of Yggdrasill, the World Tree. Yggdrasill<sup>2</sup>, the enormous and sacred ash tree which shapes the nine worlds of Norse cosmology is the single most important element that receives worship by all the gods. Its branches reach up to the sky and its roots extend to three holy wells: Urðarbrunnr, Hvergelmir and Mímisbrunnr<sup>3</sup>. But the cosmic tree is in constant danger due to the activities Níðhöggr and others of his kind like to engage in. It is difficult not to connect

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<sup>1</sup> A *wyrm* is a legless dragon.

<sup>2</sup> Yggdrasill is translated as “Odin’s horse” or “Odin’s gallows”, and it is sometimes interpreted following the poem *Hávamál* (ca. 800), which tells of how Odin sacrificed himself by hanging from a tree. Referring to trees as “horses of the hanged” seems to have been not uncommon in medieval Scandinavia (06.30.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>, <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>3</sup> Urðarbrunnr is the home of the three Norns, the three goddesses that shape the fates of humans, much in the way of the Roman Parcae, or Fates. Hvergelmir is a spring from which many rivers flow. It is here that the dragon Níðhöggr dwells, as well as a great many other serpents. Mímisbrunnr is a source of wisdom, guarded by Mímir, and Odin himself sacrificed his eye in exchange for a drink from its waters. The human world is located beneath this third root of the ever-green Yggdrasill (07.01.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

this story with others the average European is familiar with, such as the serpent that was found at the Tree of Science in the Garden of Eden of the Old Testament or the Greek myth of Ladon, the dragon that guarded Hera's tree. Ladon was a hundred-headed dragon who, as he never slept, had been appointed to guard the tree of the golden apples that had been presented to Hera by Gaia and which was under the care of the Hesperides. He too was one of the many monsters begat by Typhon and Echidna. According to Hesiod, Ladon's family was related to the dangers of the sea. The very term *ladon* means "strong flow" ([www.theoi.com/Ther/DrakonHesperios.html](http://www.theoi.com/Ther/DrakonHesperios.html), 06.30.2013). After Herakles killed him, he found a place in heaven as the constellation Draco. There is also an interesting Persian folktale that shares these (and other) features with the European dragons. It is the story of the Prince Mohammad, a tale with innumerable versions, but with a solid framework:

(...) Malik Mohammad is the youngest of three brothers, whose father (...) has a wondrous, life-giving tree of golden apples in his garden. Night after night, a monstrous demon enters the garden and steals the fruit (...) [Malik Mohammad] succeeds in cutting off the monster's arm. The next day, the brothers track the monster to a well (...). Once in the well, [Malik Mohammad] successively attacks and slays three dragons, each of which lives with a captive maiden in his own underground room, house or castle. He frees the maidens and the elder brothers pull them up to safety, but when the youngest brother starts climbing the rope, they cut it and he is plunged into the abyss.

(...) [Malik Mohammad] finds his way to a city which has been laid waste by a dragon which has cut off the water supply by damming the stream. In order to get water, each year the citizens sacrifice a maiden to the dragon; (...) the hero slays the dragon and releases the waters. (...) [Back at home], he punishes his two brothers and marries the most beautiful of the three maidens (Bagheri, 2001: 199).

It is easy to perceive in this tale that several of the motifs so far introduced are present: the underground realm, the water dwelling and the dragon that holds back water are all there. And so is the sacred (in this case, magical) tree that the dragon claims.

The idea of the snake has always been ambivalent: it is despised as a crawling vermin and at the same time admired for its capacity of regeneration. Its presence in the grass causes fear but it is also considered to bring luck. This complex, conflicting imagery can be translated to the myth of the holy tree. In some stories, the serpent guards the tree (Ladon), in others, it threatens its very existence (Níðhöggr), but, whichever the intentions of the serpent, it certainly seems to be in close association with these trees of life and trees of science. The crux of the matter probably is the chthonic nature of the reptile and its connection with the underworld. It may be that the serpent is a guard of the passage to the other world, as well as the agent that links it and its beneficent properties, to the cosmic tree.

### **3. 2. 4. Disposition**

Should the hero be in any doubt about the identity of the hideous beast with enormous teeth and serpent tail lurking about the village fountain, he could look for further evidence in the deportment of the monster, for there are some quirks that will immediately give away a dragon. Here are the most usual ones:

#### **The Dragon is Inordinately Fond of Milk**

**Examples:** *The Dragon of Bisterne* (Hampshire, England); *John Aller and the Dragon* (Aller, Somerset, England); *The Lambton Worm* (Durham, England); *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Huegh*; *The Sexhow Worm* (Cleveland, England).

This may seem an irrelevant note on the dragon's diet, but the fact is that this particular inclination of the monster for dairy products is determining to the outcome of the conflict in several of the stories seen above and present, even if as an afterthought, in many others. For example, in a description of the Lambton Worm we learn that:

Now t'worm got fat an' growed an' growed,  
And growed an awful size,  
He'd great big teeth, a great big gob,  
And great big goggly eyes.  
And when at night he'd crawled around  
To pick up bits of news  
If he felt dry upon the road,  
He milked a dozen cows (Simpson, 2001: 39).

In another version, the steward of Lambton Hall proposes that a large trough be filled with milk and offered to the worm, an idea that proves effective when “the monster approached, and eagerly drinking the milk, returned without inflicting further injury, to repose around his favourite hill” (see Appendix A, Version 1). The procedure was repeated daily, until the measure became insufficient for preventing the monster from doing harm and more aggressive methods were required.

The Sexhow Worm, which had taken its abode near the small hamlet of Sexhow (Rudby, Cleveland, England), was so voracious that it was necessary to milk nine cows daily to stop the creature from turning to other types of food (Appendix A).

The dragon killed by John Aller also was described as the bane of cows and other milk producing cattle: “Milkmaids flew at the first hiss of its wing-beat; and a score of pails had their contents drunk in a few minutes”. Dragons taste for milk went far enough that, in one of the versions of the Bisterne dragon, the monster does not claim either children or virgins, but milk, which seems a much more reasonable demand:

Every day the creature descended from its lair on Burley Beacon to demand a pail of milk as its sustenance. But to the consternation of the neighbourhood, the dragon's diet was not restricted to milk – it also craved the flesh of both cattle and men. Eventually the villagers hired a famous knight, Sir Maurice Berkeley, to destroy the dragon (Simpson, 2001: 70).

In a slightly different version, the hero takes advantage of this preference of the dragon and uses milk to trick the creature into lowering its guard:

[He] went out against his dragon armed only with his sword and a jug of milk, and a glass case in attendance. Arrived in the dragon's neighbourhood, he put the milk into cans, and stepped into the glass case. He waited till the creature came and tasted the milk, and killed him as he lapped (Simpson, 2001: 79).

This love of milk was also the undoing of the Deerhurst serpent, as John Smith, the hero, in one of the versions of the tale uses a similar trick, one which goes a long way to prove the popular properties of the beverage: he offers the dragon some milk, which puts the creature to sleep, and then John Smith takes his chance and kills it (Westwood, 1994: 306).

That serpents and dragons seem to have developed an unconventional taste for milk is a belief that is widely extended and it has been recorded in places so far apart as Sweden, Greece and India, to the point that some communities developed the notion that a supply of fresh milk should be left out for them (Simpson, 2001: 39).

Was milk maybe originally offered to a dragon god? It would make perfect sense if it were so, for one of the most striking features attributed to snakes is how much they like milk, and how they will go to great lengths to get a taste of it<sup>1</sup>. There is a multitude of stories dealing with uncanny encounters in barns, where some snake had sneaked in and was found suckling from the udders of an either oblivious or startled cow, depending on the tale. Many have heard such stories from their grandparents and many are out there in print for those who wish to read them, but they are generally considered as tales of a superstitious nature, with little chance to be proved. And yet, I happened to be told just one such story a very little time ago, as Mr. José Antonio Vázquez Vázquez, from Sobrado dos Monxes (Lugo, Galicia, Spain), related how, as a boy, he considered

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<sup>1</sup> In Galicia, it is believed that a snake will suckle from a cow's udders, or from a young mother's breasts if it has the chance, and that it will give the calf, or the infant, the end of its tail to suckle. Sometimes the foul play is only discovered when the mother realises that her child is not taking any nourishment at all and keeps an eye open for the impostor (Risco, 1994: 3: 51).



such stories nonsense, until one morning he found himself walking on the very scene his elders had so often described to him.

In Wales it was believed that snakes that happened to drink woman's milk would inevitably turn into winged serpents. In relation to this, it was taboo for women who were breastfeeding to let their milk be spilt on the ground, for it was believed that if a snake ever happened to either drink milk from a woman's breast or eat consecrated bread, it would turn into a flying snake or into a *gwiber*, that is, a monstrous winged serpent (Owen, 1976: 349, in Simpson, 2001: 44). As seen above, this does not happen in Spain, where the snakes grow wings when they reach a certain age, independently of their having ingested woman's milk or not. In Hampton Bishop (Herefordshire), there is another related story: a little girl called Maud once found a baby dragon in the woods, of a bright green colour and the size of a cucumber. She took it home and raised it in secret, feeding it on milk. When the dragon grew to its full size, milk did not satisfy its hunger and it took to eating poultry, then cattle, and then people. Only Maud was spared (Simpson, 2001: 45).

### **The Dragon Hoards a Treasure**

**Examples:** *Fulk Fitzwarrin* (Somerset, England); *Beowulf*.

This is a motif that is conspicuously absent from the stories about saints and dragons. But, of course, that the dragon might guard a treasure must be irrelevant in such tales, as they pursue to provide the audience with a sense of the holiness of the heroes, and such worldly aspirations as a treasure of gold are completely out of character for them. But, out of that genre, many are the dragons that keep a hoard and their kind is not circumscribed to the Northern sagas or the luscious descriptions of J.R.R. Tolkien. The British dragon is fond of a good treasure too. The best known example is that of

*Beowulf*, where the dragon is said to have come upon a treasure in the distant past and has since been quietly hoarding it, until a reckless traveller finds it by chance and sparks the conflict.

As is stated on the text, this particular dragon had his lair in a long barrow, which is a very likely place where to find a treasure. “Hoards of valuable objects appear in Europe’s archaeological record from the Bronze Age through the medieval period” (Tarzia, 1989: 99).

Our ancestors knew to look for a treasure in ancient barrows and hill forts, but also that these places were packed with restrictions and bad omens. These treasures were meant to be lost. A treasure of gold was said to lie in the hill forts of Cadbury Castle<sup>1</sup> and Dolbury Hill (Cadbury, Devon), and the fortune there buried was so great that “if Cadbury-castle and Dolbury-hill dolven were, all England might ploughe with a golden sheere”, or so the rhyme claimed. But of course, a fiery dragon was its trusty treasurer and no one ever deigned to prove the rhyme true (Westwood, 1994: 5). Dragons guarding treasures are thick on the ground on other European countries, too. For example, in serpent lore of the North of Spain (particularly in Galicia and Asturias), many of the giant serpents guard treasures, generally hidden in megalithic monuments (Álvarez Peña, 2004: 10). But it is often considered that the British hoarding dragons were inherited from the Scandinavian culture. This may or may not be so, but the parallels are certainly indisputable.

The treasure-hoarding dragon certainly found a home in the North of Europe. Where did this creature come from? Some authors have pointed out that the dragon stories may have appeared as a way of keeping treasure hunters away from burial-

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<sup>1</sup> Cadbury Castle is a hill fort and one of the reputed sites of King Arthur’s Camelot, probably the most famous of them all (07.16.2013. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>).

mounds (Faraday, 1906: 412). Further evidence to support this idea is that, even when there was no monster to impede the access to the treasure, a curse usually attended the violation of the tomb. Others have viewed the existence of the dragon in such a context as stemming from the chthonic features of the serpents, which, since the very origin of humanity, have symbolised renewal and immortality, but also fertility and prosperity. In Classical Greece, “their association with prosperity was so close that there were even some little money-boxes made in the shape of a coiled snake with a coin-slot in its body” (Simpson, 2001: 27), and they were viewed as the protectors of literal and metaphorical riches. The most obvious examples that may be found in the Classical Age are Ladon, who guarded the tree of the golden apples, and the ever-wakeful Colchian Dragon, who guarded the Golden Fleece and was tricked by Jason<sup>1</sup>.

Whichever the reason, lore and literature show many instances of treasure hunting, often involving breaking into an ancient grave and confronting the monster who guarded the treasure. In this respect, Odin, head of the Norse gods, was believed to be in possession of greatly coveted information, for, as Snorri Sturluson claims in the *Yrtinga* saga, “Odin knew all about treasure in the ground, where it was hidden, and he knew the charms that would open the earth and boulders and stones and mounds” (Lindow, 1982: 258). For the regular treasure-hunter, though, the primary aid was an object with extraordinary properties, usually a divining rod, but also special types of plants, stones and animals. White snakes were particularly sought, as they were believed to be closely associated with buried treasure, being creatures of the ground. Also, the treasure-hunter knew to look for certain signs, as was for example the glow that was

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of the many adventures of the Greek hero Jason, whose exploits are explored by various Classical authors, although the most prominent version is that of Apollonius of Rhodes (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.), in his epic poem *Argonautica* (07.13.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

said to emanate from treasure sites on some nights (especially in Midsummer<sup>1</sup>) (Lindow, 1982: 261-2).

Aside from this, the heroes in these stories always need to show a due amount of cleverness and courage to be deserving of the hidden treasure. In folktales, sometimes, there is some outlandish condition before one is granted access to the hoard (like, for example, harrowing with a hen and ploughing with a rooster), or a tremendous sacrifice needs to be made, commonly involving the death of a number of brothers, which the smart hero eventually manages to avoid. Take, for example, this Swedish tale:

An extremely wealthy farmer put his money in a copper kettle and buried it beneath the floor of his barn. The burial ceremony was such that no one could take up the goods until three brothers had been beheaded on the spot, and flame and fire and plow and harrow have gone over the ashes. But the farmhand lay nearby, listening. And when the farmer had died, the farmhand went there and slaughtered three pigs from the same litter; then he made a fire and plowed and harrowed in the ashes. In this way he was able to retrieve the entire treasure, and the dragon could do nothing about it (Lindow, 1982: 259).

Notice that, although not an active agent in this story, the dragon is present, practically taken for granted, given the nature of the treasure. However, the aim of the tale is not to show a grim encounter with a monster so much as to present a battle of wits.

But dragons are generally not this passive. In Stovhoej (Denmark), this little story illustrates just how averse they could be to being importuned:

In Stovhoej (...) there was a dragon lying on some money. They dug for it. [Then one of them said]: "Hold on, now we've got it." Then the dragon flew up saying: "If I may not in Stovhoej stay then you shall never from Sjoerup lake drive me away." A woman from Sjoerup saw the dragon flying. He was as long as a haypole and quite red and he landed in the lake with the treasure so that on touching the water it hissed (Johansenn, 1991: 223).

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<sup>1</sup> A date which, in European traditions, is highly propitious for all sorts of magic.

However, they are not always this protective of their hoards. Some even have it in them to share the treasure on demand:

A farmer named Daniel was once walking over Butarsgarde, when he noticed a strange clearness in the sky and heard a powerful rushing noise in the air, from which he observed that a dragon was probably moving his possessions. Therefore he called out "Give me a bit of that, in God's name." And something called "Take take take!" Then something really did fall down; and when he went to investigate, it was two large bundles of "bloody and white intestines." Although he was sick on arrival home, he soon found that it was all gold – namely the bloody intestines – and that the white ones were changed into silver. From this the farmer grew to be a rich man (Lindow, 1982: 260).

It must be noted that, in some cases, the quantity these generous dragons are ready to part with is risible, although, to be fair, perfectly proportionate to the risks incurred in by the hero. In these little tales where the protagonist is an unknown quantity of a man, the recovered treasure is never a fabulous amount which would give its possessor a lifetime of untold wealth and have him leap upward on the social scale, but rather symbolic pieces of good fortune, in the form of silver cups, spoons, and gold chains:

In Ofvershult in Thoras parish the farmer was out in the springtime plowing. After plowing for a while he sat on a pipe while his team was resting a bit. On the pipe there lay a heap of wood shavings, and he wondered where they might have come from. While he sat there dangling his whip, one of the shavings drifted up onto the shaft of his boot. But he paid no attention to it. A while later, when the farmer had begun to plow again, he felt something pinch his leg. He pulled off his boot to have a look, and lo! There lay a lovely gold chain. Then you can imagine that he came to and ran immediately to the pipe. When he got there the whole pipe was full of silver and gold, chains and white coins and everything nice. But right on top of it all lay a dragon breathing poison, so that the farmer couldn't get at it. The dragon was mottled with green; it might have been ten feet long or so and was as thick as a man's arm. The farmer ran home to gather people. But when they came back there, nothing was to be seen but matches and straw and everything else had vanished. But the farmer still had the gold chain and that he kept (Lindow, 1982: 263-4).

These are little tales about strokes of luck, but where the standing of the hero does not change after his adventure and so, the social conditions are not challenged. Such an outcome would probably be undesirable for these rural, conservative communities.

But, if the realm of dragons and heroes and cursed heaps of gold was heavily populated, the story of Sigurd and Fafnir was king. The cursed treasure that Fafnir kept and Sigurd's downfall because of it perfectly mirrors the idea that these riches were better left alone. In *Beowulf*, after the death of the king, Wiglaf makes arrangements for his funeral, but also for the hoard to be reburied, a decision that would be universally regarded as very prudent.

### **A Maiden is Either Courted or Threatened by the Dragon**

**Examples:** St George; St Martha; St Keyne; St Margaret; *The Mester Stoor Worm* (the Orkney Islands); *Martin and the Dragon* (Angus, Scotland); *The Knucker of Lyminster* (West Sussex, England); *Fulk Fitzwarrin* (Somerset, England); *Tristan and Isolde*; *Sir Bevis of Hampton*; *le Morte d'Arthur*; *Kemp Owyne*; *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Huegh*; *The Old Wives' Tale*; *The Dragon of Wantley*.

No traditional fight against a dragon is complete without a lady anxiously and unobtrusively looking upon the scene, preferably shrieking every so often to punctuate the crucial strikes of both opponents. Still, several variations may apply. For example, in the stories of saints and dragons, only the princess St George saves and St Margaret appear in the role of the maiden in distress, threatened by the dragon (even though St Margaret saves herself). Other saintly ladies, such as St Keyne and St Martha, are not at all passive victims of the dragon, but active agents in the confrontation, even

conscientiously seeking it. In other stories, even though the lady is not in immediate danger, she is nevertheless intrinsically linked with the dragon conflict. That would be the case in the dragon episode of *Tristan and Isolde*, where Isolde is not particularly threatened by the dragon, but she becomes a necessary part of the situation nonetheless, as the prize awarded the hero that slays the monster. In *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, every time Sir Bevis is about to perish from the many wounds inflicted by the dragon, he goes to a well of extraordinary healing properties and soon is up and fighting again. Soon, it is explained that the well acquired these properties when a virtuous virgin bathed in it. The episode of *Le Morte d'Arthur* where Sir Lancelot slays a dragon starts immediately after he has rescued a maiden cursed to be boiled in a cauldron of water, which some may see as a distortion of the story of Mélusine. Speaking of which, every dragon maiden is, by definition, associated with the dragon figure.

The motif is reversed in some cases, prominently in *The Dragon of Wantley* and *The Dragon of Filey*. It is to be noted that the ballad of the dragon of Wantley, being a parody, reverses many of the main tropes and so makes a conscious effort of it, in that the maiden is not sacrificed to the dragon, but to the hero. *The Dragon of Filey*, on the other hand, is a folktale, and one in which the presence of a dragon that needs to be disposed of is mingled with many other tropes of the usual world of folktales, many of them of a humorous nature: the abusing and lazy wife, who the hero dreads as much as he does the dragon, if not even more, and who is eventually eaten up by the dragon, to everybody's rejoice; and the witch who is somehow in control of the beast, not being afraid of living near its lair. Mark that both women are related to the dragon in the story, but none conforms to the common patterns known to all.

In ancient cultures, the motif is found in stories all over the globe. The most common version is that of the dragon who has a maiden in its power and threatens to

devour her. The most obvious source for this motif in ancient cultures is that of Perseus and Andromeda, which has already been mentioned, but it is by no means unique. A story that is less frequently referred but still keeps the basic structure is that of Herakles and Hesione. Diodorus Siculus<sup>1</sup> tells how Poseidon had sent a sea monster, a *ketos*, to the Trojan coast, where the beast engaged in killing the locals and spewing salt water over the lands, which impoverished the soil and ruined the crops. The situation had grown so unbearable that the king had been forced to chain his own daughter, Hesione, to a rock by the sea, for the monster to devour. This extreme measure, he gathered, must appease the monster.

Then, Herakles arrived to the neighbourhood. With his usual boldness, he unchained the maiden and plotted a way of killing the monster. Soon enough, he had a wall built by the sea and he hid behind it and, when the monster came near, he leaped into his mouth and down his throat. For three full days, Herakles fought the monster from within, until he finally emerged victorious. As bald as a coot, but victorious. Due to this exceptional intervention, the king declared that he was entitled to Hesione's hand, as well as to a pair of immortal horses the king had in his possession. Ultimately, though, he received neither (Simpson, 2001: 27).

Sometimes, the intentions of the dragon towards the lady are not as much to devour her as to have her captive, and some even seem to hint of a slightly amorous nature. This can be observed in tales such as the Persian story of the dragon of Aži Dahāka, who had two beautiful ladies with him in his stronghold in the depths of the earth; or the three dragons that Malik Mohammad consecutively killed, freeing the maiden that each of them held captive. Even much more obvious is Achelous, the

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<sup>1</sup> Diodorus Siculus (Agira, Sicily. 1<sup>st</sup> century BC). A Greek historian, known for the *Bibliotheca Historica*, a universal history (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).



serpent shaped river god of Anatolia (central Greece), god of all fresh water, who contested with Herakles for the love of the fair Deianira, the princess both ambitioned to marry. Zeus was much more successful than Achelous when, following his usual agenda of metamorphosis and seduction, he raped Olympias under the form of a dragon, and begat Alexander the Great<sup>1</sup>. The motif is obliquely treated also in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in the episode where he and Enkidu set out in search of adventures and decide to fight Humbaba, the terrible monster of immemorial age that had been appointed by Utu, the sun-god, as guardian of the Cedar Forest, the dwelling of the gods. Humbaba is described as a horned beast with a lion's face, a deadly gaze, and a fire-breathing mouth. His feet have claws like a vulture's, his body is covered in scales and his tail and phallus both end in a snake's head. Gilgamesh tricked him by offering his own sisters as paramours and, when the monster was contemplating the possibility, he let his guard down and Gilgamesh captured him. Even some versions of the story of George and the dragon hint at something of this sort. In the *Legenda Aurea*, it is explicitly stated that, when the king came to terms with offering his own daughter to the monster, he did "array his daughter like as she should be wedded" (12.05.2012. <http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/goldenLegend/index.html>). This could be a remembrance of some pre-Christian custom of a ritual wedding of woman and serpent, with fertility purposes.

There is yet another version of this story, that of the dragon that seeks to devour an unborn child. This situation is mirrored in the stories of Seth and Isis (Egypt), the seven-headed dragon and the woman (Hebraic culture), and Python and Leto (Greece).

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<sup>1</sup> With such illustrious parentage, Alexander had a certain claim to divinity which would come in handy when he was deep in his conquering of the world. South of the Mediterranean, his father was Amon-Ra, the Egyptian sun-god, and Zeus' equivalent on those shores (08.03.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

It appears to be a development of the fertility symbolism and, at the same time, the Creation Myth: the dragon is chaos and tries to devour a child who will become the bringer of light and order to the world.

This is a deliciously complex motif that could be the groundwork for a lifetime of study. There is something about the presence of the woman in these tales that is strangely elusive. One of their most common interventions is that of the human sacrifice. Frazer (1966: I: 155) points out that the dragon has been used in myth to show the god or goddess sanctioning human sacrifice, and he adds that the custom of sacrificing human beings to water-spirits which assume reptile form has been found in most studies of ritual in primitive tribes all over the world. Can it follow that legends such as that of St George may be remembrances of ancient human rituals?

In a recent study, Bois (2010) examines a number of legends and traditions of Jersey. One of the most striking ones is related to a cave system, where young maidens offered the first-fruits of the harvest and the purest milk to the dragon that was believed to live there. There was no heroic intervention here until a noble woman was devoured (quite accidentally, as there is no indication that she was in any way offered in sacrifice to the monster). The author sees in the cave system a labyrinth; in the maidens, priestesses of an agricultural and pastoral fertility rite, a “divine marriage between the primary male and female divinities or human substitutes” (Bois, 2010: 50) and in the usual devouring (or, typically, near devouring) of maidens, the remnant of a rite of passage, in which the girl could have originally been a priestess or officiating at fertility rites, the initiate in a rite of passage that is derived from a “supplication to a devastating power” (Bois, 2010: 244).

Sometimes, dragons and maidens simply blend and the woman becomes the dragon. There is a prime example of this in Ireland, which, despite its peculiar snake-

free condition (for which the legend of Saint Patrick accounts), also has its share of dragon stories. O’Kearney (1850: 148) says that

(...) dragon or serpent-worship must unquestionably have been once prevalent in this country, since we find so many traditions and notices in our romances relative to (...) [*Piasts*] or serpents, one of which is said to have once resided in every lake and creek of any note.

This makes one wonder where these legends may have stemmed from: if snakes are absent of the landscape, how does one develop a myth about a terrifying, snake-like creature? My take is that these legends must be anterior to the human colonization of the island, or brought by foreign invaders. Many of them seem to be breathtakingly ancient as well. Take, for example this passage of the story of the three sons of Toraliv, a nephew to the king of Denmark, and Fionabhartagh, daughter of a Tuatha De Danann<sup>1</sup> nobleman. The three sons are reared by a *gruagach*<sup>2</sup> in Kerry and, when they grow up, they go in search of adventure:

The three sons heard of another nuisance which infested the country. This was a frightful dragon, whose den was on an islet in the lake called Doo-Lough, south of Bhuaille-na-Greine. They also destroyed this frightful monster, an ollaphiast<sup>3</sup>, with sixty legs at each side of her body. Her name was Farbagh: she was one of the three sister dragons, whose names were Dabran, Farbagh, and Cathach, the offspring of the all-devouring sow<sup>4</sup>; their father having been gate-keeper of the infernal regions. The red demon of the west of Ireland was their nurse. This Farbagh had been placed at Doo-Lough, by a Fir Volgan druid, to guard an enchanted palace in the bottom of the lake, then inhabited by a king, his family, and a large concourse of courtiers. (...) The elder sister dragon was a guardian round Leim Cuncullion, now Loop Head, of whom hereafter. The youngest sister, Cathach, had her abode on an island in the Shannon, named from the dragon Inis Cathig, now Scatterry Island (Hackett, 1853: 307).

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<sup>1</sup> The Tuatha Dé Danann are a race of gods in Irish mythology. They were driven to the underworld by the Milesians (08.03.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>2</sup> A *gruagach* is a solitary type of fairy, typical of the Irish and Scottish folklore, easily recognizable because of his signature long hair (08.06.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>3</sup> *Ollaphiast* (also *ollphiast* or *ollipeist*) means “serpent” or “monster” in Irish (Rose, 2000: 277).

<sup>4</sup> The sow makes reference to a voracious boar that the brothers had to help kill in a previous episode.

These two sisters seem to have been spared, since the three champions suddenly turned their attention towards another foe. They probably owed their good fortune to the inconstancy of youth.

There are several elements of interest in this passage: the triple motif (three champions, three dragons), the unusual appearance of the dragon Farbagh (sixty legs at each side of her body), the establishment of the three dragons as female (and sisters too) and their choice of dwelling: one on a headland, two on islands. Yet, to those wondering about the anomalies in this story that presents she-dragons and islands, let me say straight away that these apparently mind blowing novelties in the dragon story structure are not anomalous at all, nor novelties.

There is in Galicia (Spain) at least one tale of old which has survived to our times and where these two features are found. According to this story, by the sea in western Galicia, there was a community of *mouros*<sup>1</sup> who had erected a temple. The Christians attacked them, killing them all, with the exception of a princess, who fled to the seashore. There, she pronounced an enchantment and the earth on which she stood broke from the mainland, becoming a small island where her foes could not get. She then metamorphosed into a dragon and, with the help of other monsters, brought great misery to those who sailed near her island (Risco, 1994: 131). The island of the story, Illa da Creba, in the frontier between the villages of Esteiro and O Freixo (A Coruña), has so far never been properly studied or excavated for archaeological evidence of this story, which seems to refer to some pagan temple (later Christianized), located upon it.

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<sup>1</sup> Although they seem to be confused with the moors in this story, the *mouros* are a race of gentlefolk, well versed in the arts of magic, which are very common in the folklore of Galicia and generally identified with the fairy-folk of other European territories.

Many of the old myths also have the hero fight a she-dragon. See, for example, the Greek monsters Styx, Nike, Echidna and Medusa, all of them females with serpent qualities. However, the most obvious example is the Babylonian Epic of Creation, the *Enuma Elish*<sup>1</sup>, which had a wide dispersion, as has been found in Sumerian, Assyrian and Hitite versions, to name but a few. In Sumer, Ninazu, god of the Underworld and of healing, and tutelary deity of the Sumerian city of Eshnunna since three millennia prior to the birth of Christ, was always depicted with the dragon Mušhuššu next to him. This was the dragon that the Book of Daniel would describe as being worshipped by the citizens of Babylon in the fragment *Bel and the Dragon*. Poor Mušhuššu would find his untimely death at the hands of the cunning prophet.

Ninazu later became Tishpak, but kept his dragon and then, when Babylon became the main political centre of the Euphrates Valley, the titular deity of the city, Marduk or Merodach, rose to the highest positions of the pantheon, adopting some features of other gods in the process. Thus, Marduk became the main deity, displacing Tishpak, and took the dragon in. It was at this point that the dragon fight motif was introduced.

Marduk is a sun god inherited from the Mesopotamian civilization and the champion of the Babylonian gods, as he dares to confront the dragon of the primordial sea, Tiamat<sup>2</sup>. Tiamat, “the shoulderless”, is a goddess. She personifies the sea and is also a female sea-monster, but, ultimately, she is the power that rules over the primeval chaos and darkness, The myth of Marduk and Tiamat is an example of dualism in religion, but also a very common cosmogony myth, according to which the deity needs

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<sup>1</sup> The *Enuma Elish*, in which the god Marduk destroys the goddess Tiamat, was first recorded around 1700 BC (09.22.2013. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk>).

<sup>2</sup> Most translators and scholars give her the shape of a monstrous serpent and identify her with the dragon that appears in some Babylonian cylinder seals (Simpson, 2001: 23).

to slay the dragon before proceeding to the work of creation. As is the case with all of his peers in other religions, Marduk succeeded in this task. Not surprisingly, for he was well armed with a thunderbolt, a mace, a net, bow, arrows and seven winds. Marduk attacked Tiamat with the winds, which she swallowed and, while occupied with the quantity of hurricanes in her body, he took the chance to slay her. Afterwards, he took a part of her to create the heavens (Lyon, 1895: 134-5), and her skin became the constellation of the dragon. With the other half of her body, Marduk created the earth.

On the topic of the female dragon, it is easy to perceive that in Creation Myths such as this one the male god represents the Sun Spirit, or the creative power of nature, while the dragon is the earth, the female element, the one with the potential for fertility. In this case, the female does not have a passive role (as is the case in the stories of maidens sacrificed to the dragon, but she needs to be overcome by the male principle so that the world may come into existence. Very significantly too, these female dragons are very strongly associated with earth and the Underworld.

Finally, with Pallas Athena this study enters a new level in the motif of the maiden and the dragon.

The very imagery that surrounds the birth of the goddess takes us back to one of the most recurrent of the symbols explored heretofore, namely, the relation with water. According to Hesiod, Athena is the offspring of Poseidon (sometimes Zeus) and Triton, and she was born on the banks of the river Triton, when Hephaestus split open the head of Zeus with an axe, and there was Athena in all her glory, full-grown and fully armed. Aristokles, on his part, claims that she sprang from a cloud which Zeus split (Suhr, 1969: 1-2). Whichever the version, the references to water in the origins of the goddess are always there, which, considering the goddess is usually represented with a dragon, testifies to a relation which I can hardly refrain from pointing out. “We know, too, that

the terms water, cloud, shadow or darkness are used to denote a common denominator in the realm of the fabulous beast, namely the dragon” (Suhr, 1969: 2). So, where does the myth of Athena really stem from? Suhr sees in the different accounts of her birth and in her emblems the reminiscence of an ancient dragon story. She *is* the dragon, born from it and sporting the dragon’s assets: an invulnerable defence, the ability to heal and provide and the gift of prophecy (Suhr, 1969:4). Even her aegis is of draconian origin<sup>1</sup>. Suhr claims that she must be the daughter of Poseidon, at a time when he was the chief god of the pantheon and lord of the fertilizing winds, and of a she-dragon of ancient lore, either long forgotten or surviving in the story of the Gorgon Medusa, for

in addition to her identity with the shadow-dragon of the eclipse and the role she plays on the aegis and shield, both she and Athena are shrouded in semi-darkness (for Athena this is expressed by the owl), both share something of the reticulated pattern and both are fierce (Suhr, 1969: 8).

It is a compelling theory, even more so when he goes on to explain that Athena probably turned against her early parents because of “a change of emphasis from the religious hegemony of the earth with its dragon features to the lordship of the sky” (Suhr, 1969: 11). There must have been at some point a change in the pantheon, which robbed Poseidon and Medusa from their prior glory, giving it to Zeus, the sky god, but kept some elements, such as Pallas Athena (although turned into a daughter of Zeus and enemy to Medusa).

That she was saved and incorporated to the new cult may seem extraordinary, but Athena was by no means alone in this process: the story of Styx, daughter of Oceanus<sup>2</sup> and Tethis, points to this phenomenon too. Styx is the goddess of the

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<sup>1</sup> The aegis Athena wears when she is in fearsome mode has a surface of gold like the scales of a snake and the Gorgon head upon it (08.12.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>2</sup> Son of Uranus and Gaea, Oceanus was often depicted as having the upper body of a man and the lower body of a serpent (08.12.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

underworld river Styx, a titan and daughter of titans, who sided with Zeus during the war and was therefore granted a prominent place among the gods. Her children, too, found a place in Olympus. Styx<sup>1</sup>, in her origin, was probably a dragon, and so was her daughter Nike (Suhr, 1969: 4), although both were stripped of their original traces with the passing of time.

Let us not forget Medusa. She had once been a beautiful maiden, craved by Poseidon, and turned into a hideous monster by Athena for lying with him in her shrine. This is the best-known version of her story. But in the earliest descriptions, she was merely the daughter of monsters. She and her sisters, the Gorgons<sup>2</sup>, are implied by Hesiod to represent the offspring of some sort of dangerous sea-gods, probably related to the dangers of the reefs and the sea storms. In other motifs they are related to drought and famine (www.theoi.com/Pontios/Gorgones. 08.12.2013). Could the story of Perseus be reminiscent of an agrarian myth in which the drought ends and the waters are released? It is difficult to tell<sup>3</sup>.

They are described as serpent monsters that live in the reefs, by the ocean<sup>4</sup>. Of the three, only Medusa was mortal, but her head was so hideous and her glance so terrible that anyone who gazed upon her turned into stone. Perseus managed to kill her by sheer cunning, keeping his eyes at all times on his shield, using its polished surface as a mirror. He then cut her throat, and from her beheaded neck sprang Pegasus. From

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<sup>1</sup> Mark that bathing in the waters of the Styx made Achilles invulnerable, which is clearly paralleled in Sigurd bathing in the blood of the dragon Fafnir.

<sup>2</sup> The three Gorgons were Sthenno, Euryale and Medusa (08.12.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

<sup>3</sup> Elworthy (1903: 212-42) contends that both the two great exploits attributed to Perseus, that is, the slaying of the dragon and the slaying of the Gorgon, may have their origin in the same story, which must have described the enmity between the lobster (Perseus) and the octopus (Medusa). Little as I agree with this theory, I must concede that he has a point, and he explains it very artfully too.

<sup>4</sup> Another dragon we know that shares this liking for reefs by the ocean appears in *Beowulf*.



there he set off to rescue Andromeda from the dragon Ceto, taking with him the deadly head of Medusa in a sack<sup>1</sup>.

The imagery is certainly complex enough, and not few questions are raised when contemplating stories such as these.

### **3. 3. How to Defeat a Dragon**

The maxim of dragon slaying difficulty, if there were one, would go along these terms: the defencelessness of the hero is inversely proportional to the amount of effort needed to kill the dragon. Following this, unarmed saints will invariably slay their dragons with the utmost calmness of spirit and the most unlikely of weapons: stoles, crosses, or a few drops of holy water is all that is required to have huge violent monsters fall on their knees and bend their necks or, in the most dramatic of cases, explode.

Of course, this did not come as a surprise to the original audience of such stories. No one could doubt for a moment that the saint would emerge victorious. The holiness of these men and women was catalyst enough for the dragon's downfall. It was expected that they would win and the primary object of such stories was not to entertain with a lengthy and extraordinary combat, but to awe and inspire. The unmoveable faith of the saints and their phlegmatic unconcern about the danger in which they found themselves made them objects of admiration.

Ironically, the alarm of the hero at his task, the time necessary to kill the dragon (or control it), the danger incurred in, the destructive potential of the weapons used and the very risk of perishing in battle grows as the heroes grow in nobility and war savviness. Of course, the main reason for such an unfair prospect is that these noble

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<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, one is tempted to link this story with Gilgamesh and Enkidu's slaying of Humbaba.

heroes have one very important thing against them: their sense of honour. They *will* observe the forms of ceremony and etiquette in their fight. They *will* engage in courteous battle, using the customary weapons (sword, spear and shield) and respecting the fair play at all times. There is no alternative to the noble hero but to be honourable. Although some heroes of noble birth do resort to undignified methods (*The Lambton Worm*, Appendix A, version 1; *The Dragon of Bisterne*, versions 1 and 2; *The Linton Worm*, versions 1 and 2, and *The Dragon of Wantley*), it is quite exceptional to go to such measures as those. A noble hero abhors trickery of every sort, and the lowest he will resort to is the odd ambush (e. g. Sigurd).

Surprisingly, although these are the heroes that labour the hardest to kill their dragons, the descriptions of the fight itself are generally brief. The only details usually supplied are that the battle was lengthy and arduous, and that the knight made use of all his skill. One may suppose the audience sufficiently familiar with the procedure of chivalrous combat so as to leave the details to their imagination, but still it seems unfair to devote so little of the story to its climax, especially when the dragon's appearance and odious behaviour are often minutely described. This rather cursory attention to the combat is common to the earliest tales about dragons. In literary works, authors have paid significantly more attention to this section of the story (Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, *The Dragon of Carlton* and *The Longwitton Dragon* are fine examples of this).

Plebeian heroes are usually not so much concerned about the moral implications of deception, and, although some do observe the rules of honourable battle (eg. *John Aller and the Dragon* and *Martin and the Dragon*), more often than not they will not hesitate to use every possible advantage, even the dishonourable ones. But it is generally the lowly heroes that are tolerated to do this. The malefactor that kills the Mordiford dragon, for example, in one version of the story, takes the monster by

surprise while it sleeps (Simpson, 2001: 68). That must be the apex of insidiousness, but he *is* a criminal, it is expected of him that he will be infamous and, in any case, the villagers did not complain.

In these variations of the dragon slaying story, the focus is on the hero's cunning, so, it does not come as a surprise that a good amount of story time is devoted to explaining the precise description and extension of the ploy, complete with the dragon's reaction to it and the popular cheer and celebrations.

The tricks used may seem as varied as there are stories, but if one pays close attention it is easy to see that there are some recurrent methods and that, overall, most are marked by their down-to-earth common practicality. Let us examine some examples:

### **3. 3. 1. The Dragon is Defeated with Ingenuity**

**Examples:** *St Gilbert of Dornoch*; *The Mester Stoor Worm* (the Orkney Islands); *The Knucker of Lyminster* (West Sussex, England); *The Linton Worm* (West Linton, Scotland); *The Dragon of Bisterne* (Hampshire, England); *Y Carrog* (Borough, Wales); *The Ludham Dragon* (Norfolk, England); *The Dragon of Kingston St Mary* (Somerset, England); *The Ben Vair Dragon* (Argyllshire, Scotland); *The Deerhurst Dragon* (Gloucestershire, England); *The Dragon of Filey* (Yorkshire, England); *Cnoc Na Cnoimh* (Sutherland, Scotland); *The Mordiford Dragon* (Herefordshire, England); *The Dragon of Llandeilo Graban* (Radnorshire, Wales); *The Lambton Worm* (Durham, England); *Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon* (Yorkshire, England); *The Dragon of Wantley*.

As most saints prefer to trust in their holy abilities, the use of tricks is rather infrequent in their interventions. The only example found in these stories is that of St Gilbert of Dornoch, who, channelling Sigurd, hid in a hole and ambushed the dragon. But generally, the use of tricks is the realm of the lowly hero, even though some of the knights are not above using some cunning either. In fact, many tricks are often more usual than the hero's cheerers know. Let us see some of the most common ones:

**- Offering the dragon poisoned or indigestible food**

This is one of the most recurrent ideas that heroes have to dispose of the dragon. Taking advantage of the creature's voracity and indiscriminate eating, they force him to ingest some outrageously unhealthy food, which either kills him on the spot, or slows him down enough that the slaying is much easier. In one version of the tale *The Knucker of Lyminster*, Jim Puttock made a huge pudding and gave it to the dragon, who was indigested by it (see *The Knucker of Lyminster*, Appendix A, version 2), as was the dragon of Filey when Billy gave him the parkin (*The Dragon of Filey*). In Dolgarrog (Wales), the neighbours gave the Carrog a poisoned sheep to eat and killed him while he was busy devouring it.

Sometimes, heroes do not even bother disguising the pernicious element as food. The dragon of Kingston St Mary was choked with a large rock (*The Dragon of Kingston St Mary*), and the monsters of Linton and Cnoc Na Cnoimh both had burning peats forced down their throats. In what could be an exaggeration of the method, Assipattle sailed into the Mester Stoor Worm's entrails to set its liver on fire. Similar to his feat was that of one of the three Munster heroes, who got into a sack of charcoal and had it offered to the piast that dwelled in the pool near Thuar. When the creature came upon the sack, he swallowed it whole. Once the young man found he was inside the dragon, he attacked it from within (*The Three Munster Heroes and the Piast*).

One may wonder whether this Munster man was familiar with the classical myths, for this is almost the exact trick that Herakles used to kill the *ketos* that threatened princess Hesione. However, most of the previous examples are reminiscent not of this story, but of the one described in the *Book of Daniel*, in the Bible. It came to pass when the prophet Daniel paid a visit to the city of Babylon, and ridiculed the local worship of pagan gods such as Bel. In a side episode to this, he killed a dragon worshipped by the Babylonians by feeding it a mixture of pitch, fat and hair, which caused the poor creature to burst open.

#### **- Distracting the dragon**

This is a side method to the previous one, as the distraction provided is usually food. The Ben Vair dragon was lured to death by the smell of some roasted meat (*The Ben Vair Dragon*). The Bisterne dragon was likewise distracted with a jug of milk, and the hero struck while it was lapping it up (*The Bisterne Dragon*, Appendix A, version 3). In a similar spirit Gilgamesh baited Humbaba with his own sisters, a notion which distracted the monster enough for the king to capture him.

#### **- Ambushing the dragon**

In more than one occasion, the hero resorts to a hiding place in the hopes of gaining advantage over the monster. One version about the Bisterne dragon has Sir Macdonie hide into a glass case, where he waited for the dragon to appear (*The Bisterne Dragon*, Appendix A, version 3). Likewise, the convict that offered his services to dispose of the dragon at Mordiford hid in a cider barrel at the junction of the rivers Lugg and Wye, and shot the dragon when it approached to drink. Some variations tell that the barrel was protected with knife blades and steel hooks and that the serpent was terribly wounded when it lashed himself against it in his rage.

In the northern myth of Sigurd and Fafnir, Sigurd too resorts to hiding and ambushes the worm Fafnir, attacking him when he crawls over the hole where the hero has been waiting.

#### **- Attacking the dragon with some spiked object**

The use of spikes is not restricted to hiding places, and cunning heroes put them in all sorts of objects with the intention of making them as deadly as possible. In the story of *The Dragon of Llandeilo Graban*, the hero ploughboy makes a dummy and arms it with “numerous iron hooks, powerful, keen and barbed” and leaves it as bait for the dragon. When the beast attacks, he gets badly injured: “infuriated by the pain, he attacked the dummy with tooth, claw, wing and tail, and finally coiled himself round his wooden foe and bled to death” (Simpson, 2001: 83-4). In *The Ben Vair Dragon*, Captain Charles the Skipper had a bridge built, made of barrels lashed together and studded with metal spikes, which pierced the dragon’s hide when she was trying to get to the vessel (*The Ben Vair Dragon*, Appendix A, versions 1 and 2).

#### **- Wearing special armour**

The trick of the spikes proved so effective that some heroes have special spiky outfits made for the occasion. Sir Maurice Berkely “plastered his body with bird-lime sprinkled with broken glass” (*The Bisterne Dragon*, Appendix A, version 2); young Lambton ordered to stud his best suit of mail with spear blades (*The Lambton Worm*, Appendix A, version 1); Sir Peter Loschy “had the blacksmith fashion a suit of armour that was covered with razor sharp edges, all facing outwards against his foe” (*Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon*); and Sir More donned an armour “with spikes all about, not within but without, of steel so sharp and strong” that he resembled “some strange, outlandish hedgehog” (*The Dragon of Wantley*. Appendix B). Ridiculous these heroes may have

looked, but the truth is that all these outfits proved highly useful in the fight with the monster.

#### **- Killing the dragon in its sleep**

Sometimes, milk was used to lull the dragons to sleep. This happened to the Deerhurst dragon in one version of the story (Westwood, 1994: 306). In another one, John Smith merely arrived with his axe when the serpent was dozing away in the sun, and chopped off his head. One version of *The Mordiford Dragon* also tells of how the hero tracked the serpent to its den, waited until it went to sleep and then killed it at leisure.

#### **- Blocking or destroying the dragon's lair**

The first method was used in the story of *The Ludham Dragon*, which was trapped inside his lair when a courageous fellow placed a large stone in the entrance to its lair, while the dragon was out sunning itself. On seeing the undesired renovations to its dwelling, the dragon got into such a tizzy that it threw itself against the walls of St Benet's Abbey, and was never seen again.

There are some other, less frequently used, methods. One could mention that of tricking dragons into fighting their own reflection to exhaustion<sup>1</sup>, or provoking them with something red, as dragons seem to be susceptible to that colour<sup>2</sup>. This is done by the young hero of Llandeilo Graban, who made his spiked dummy red to enrage the dragon and have him attack it, and also by the soldier that killed the *wyvern* living in the ruins of the castle at Newcastle Emlyn (Carmarthenshire, Wales). He flung a piece of

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<sup>1</sup> This use of mirrors may be borrowed from the lore on cockatrices, but it also reminds one of the Greek myth of Perseus and Medusa, where Perseus uses his polished shield as a mirror to defeat the Gorgon.

<sup>2</sup> This might be because of the symbolism of the colour red, which is usually associated with blood and extreme ferocity. This is probably the reason why the bullfighting capes are red too, because bulls are actually colour-blind and do not particularly go after red things as much as after things in movement.

red flannel into the river and, when the *wyvern* hurled itself at it, he shot it (Simpson, 2001: 83-4).

As seen above, the use of tricks and ruses is generally ascribed to lowly heroes who do not have access to a sword (nor know how to wield it), especially in folktales. However, some of the noble heroes find at times that such measures are not at all beneath them. Even Gilgamesh, semi-god that he was, thought nothing of baiting Humbaba with his own sisters. Although in all honesty, these methods are quite rare among the most powerful, who understandably prefer to be shown to their best advantage, with all their weaponry of thunder and lightning about them.

### 3. 3. 2. The Hero Owns a Weapon of Extraordinary Properties

**Examples:** *The Mester Stoor Worm* (the Orkney Islands); *The Lambton Worm* (Durham, England); *The Longwitton Dragon* (Northumberland, England); *The Dragon of Loch CorrieMohr* (Scotland); *Beowulf*; *Sir Guy of Warwick*.

Subduing or killing a dragon takes not only an exceptional kind of person but an exceptional kind of weapon too, as these creatures tend to be immune to the ordinary ones. Saints appear to have access to the most powerful of all weapons: staffs, crosses, holy water and, more importantly, faith. These will carry them through any conflict with barely a scratch on them. As for other types of heroes, as has been seen, some knights resort to armours especially made for the occasion but, more often than not, it takes a very singular sword, or some other element, to give the hero the upper hand in the fight against the monster. In the tale *The Two Brothers*, the young hero wields a sword that he has extracted from the dragon's hill, which savours strongly of the legend of King Arthur and Excalibur. In *The Mester Stoor Worm*, there is a reference to an exceptional



sword, Sikkersnapper, inherited from the god Odin. Sir Guy of Warwick resorted to a flaming sword and, when Beowulf attacked the dragon in the barrow, even his sword, Nægling broke, and only Wiglaf managed to give a mortal thrust with his own very old and famous sword. Only once the dragon had received this mortal wound, Beowulf was able to finish him off with his short sword.

The exceptional element need not always be a sword. In *The Longwitton Dragon*, the monster had the power of making itself invisible at will, but the knight had a magic ointment which he had been given on his travels, and he anointed his eyes with it to be able to see it. In *The Dragon of Loch CorrieMohr*, the father shoots arrows to the serpent to no avail, before finally resorting to the last one:

The last arrow had an iron head and two barbs, and was of the kind which men call *saidth baiseh*, or *the death arrow*, which they do not part with till the last struggle. Just as the serpent reached him, and opened her jaws to seize his feet, he shot at her open jaws with the two-barbed dart.

With this deadly arrow, the dragon was finally killed.

### **3. 3. 3. The Dragon is Tamed**

**Examples:** St George; St Martha; St Germanus; St Petroc; St Columba; St Carantoc.

This is an approach that is traditionally only observed in tales about saints. Occasionally, once tamed, the dragon is led by a girdle or stole. The girdle has usually been regarded as a symbol of the purity of the saintly maiden (as, for example, St Martha). This is evidenced in the version of the story of St George presented in the *Legenda Aurea*, where the saintly warrior, after having defeated the dragon, says to the lady: “Deliver to me your girdle, and bind it about the neck of the dragon and be not afraid”. She does as she is bidden, and the dragon follows her meekly to the city.

Williams (2006: 204) explains this in psychoanalytical terms, noting “the sexual symbolism in the warrior’s lance and the maiden’s girdle”. These two objects transform the dragon “from conqueror to conquered, from an exile to an inhabitant, from deadly menace to passive captive” (Williams, 2006: 204). A number of male saints make use of it too (namely, St Germanus, St Petroc, St Columba and St Carantoc). Belts and girdles are not to be taken lightly, as Gawain discovered when he was saved by the use of a girdle that had been given to him by Lady Bertilak and which proved to be a magical protection against the axe of the Green Knight (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 14<sup>th</sup> c.). We can not forget either that St Thomas Aquinas “was saved from lechery by a girdle miraculously furnished him in his sleep” (Williams, 2006: 280), nor that during the Middle Ages it was common to make use of blessed girdles in childbearing. Those associated with the Virgin, and even St Ailred, were particularly sought after (Mourón Figueroa, 2005: 242).

One is also inevitably reminded of the Babylonian seal cylinders where the victorious god leads the dragon by a cord. According to Ward (1898: 94-5), the oldest known representation of Marduk and Tiamat is on a shell seal cylinder dated 3,500 to 4,000 B. C., where the dragon

(...) is harnessed to a four-wheeled chariot in which is seated the god<sup>1</sup> (...), holding the reins with one hand and brandishing a whip in the other. Between the wings of the dragon stands a naked goddess, whom we may perhaps recognize as Aruru, probably a form of Ishtar, who, according to one form of the creation story, was associated with Bel in the creation of the human race, holding a sheaf of thunderbolts in each hand. A worshipper stands before a peculiarly archaic form of altar, and pours a libation through the spout of a vase. Out of the open mouth of the dragon there emerges what might be a stream, but probably is meant to suggest the forked tongue of a serpent. The lightings held by

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<sup>1</sup> There are two traditions about the fight of Marduk and Tiamat, which are often woven together in the Babylonian Creation Tablets that have been preserved: one in which Marduk cuts Tiamat in two and one in which he merely tames her, and she then follows him (Barton, 1893: 12).

the goddess correspond to the double trident held by Merodach (...) and the single trident so often held by one of the gods.

This representation instantly conjures up an image of the Greek myths of Demeter and Medea, also maids who rode their respective flying chariot drawn by dragons (*dracones*, as a matter of fact), as well as Charles Perrault's fairy tale *The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods*, where the good fairy rushed to the aid of the princess in her dragon chariot. Zeus too had a dragon chariot and a thunderbolt, just as the goddess riding Marduk's dragon does.

Other Babylonian seal cylinders have this motive as well, complete with tamed dragon and underdressed lady. Later cylinders show the god holding a dragon by a cord, just as we find many virgins do in Christian Europe. Ishtar, as we see, is also usually represented with a dragon, either standing on top of it or with one foot resting on it (Ward, 1898: 96-7). It could be possible that these representations of a goddess and a dragon foretell the images of saintly ladies and dragons in Medieval Europe.

As for tamed dragons, some representations seen in Medieval art seem to point to this circumstance too. In the Collegiate of Santa María de Sar (Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain), two carvings, on each side of the apse of the building, show dragons. Sadly, one of them is badly damaged, but from the parts that are still visible it seems to have been a twin to the one on the other side. The one which has been preserved is quite plump and one could even term it cute, as it looks particularly young, and it has a rope or chain around its neck. The location of the carvings suggests an anthropomorphic symbolism, and, lacking the legend behind this piece of art, one can easily make up for it and imagine the monks of the convent symbolically raising a dragon for



Jacques de Voragine, *Légende doree*. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Français 242, fol. 154r. (05.26.2014. <http://www.gallica.bnf.fr>).

### 3.3.4. The Dragon Has One Vulnerable Spot

**Examples:** *The Bures Dragon* (Essex/Suffolk, England); *The Ben Vair Dragon* (Argyllshire, Scotland); *The Dragon at Castle Carlton* (Lincolnshire, England); *The Dragon of Wantley*; *The Deerhurst Dragon* (Gloucestershire, England); *Beowulf*, *Sir Bevis of Hampton*.

Leviathan, one of the mightiest dragons in fiction, is described in the following terms:

His back has rows of shields tightly sealed together; each is so close to the next that no air can pass between. They are joined fast to one another; they cling together and cannot be parted. (...) The folds of his flesh are tightly joined; they are firm and immovable. His chest is hard as rock, hard as a lower millstone. When he rises up, the mighty are terrified; they retreat before his thrashing. The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin. Iron he treats like straw and bronze like rotten wood. Arrows do not make him flee, sling stones are like chaff to him. A club seems to him but a piece of straw, he laughs at the rattling of the lance (Job 41:14).

According to this description, Leviathan is invincible. The average dragon, although described in very similar terms, is generally not so intractable. In fact, it is often stated that a dragon's hide is completely invulnerable, save for a particular spot. This is a common and expected motif, for a hero cannot have an indestructible foe, it ought to be *almost* indestructible. Should there be absolutely no chance of triumphing, there would be no point in the fight. An archetypical fight against a formidable enemy implies that the hero's chances must be very small, but they must exist nonetheless.

It is quite common that the vulnerable part of a dragon will be its mouth or belly, although the navel is sometimes mentioned too. Other stories mention some quite small section of the dragon's anatomy that the hero needs to attack in order to slay the monster. This happens in *The Dragon at Castle Carlton*, where, after Sir Hugh pierces a wart, he knows that the dragon is fatally wounded. In *The Dragon of Wantley*, the anus

is selected as the dragon's undoing, obviously for the sake of comedy. In *Beowulf*, the hero must run the serpent through a much more dignified spot on its throat.

The vulnerable underside of dragons is a common feature of Scandinavian lore and, as such, it can be found not only in *Beowulf* but also in the *Völsunga Saga*, where Sigurd hides in a pit because he knows that he must attack Fafnir from underneath if he wishes to stand a chance against him.

### **3. 4. Consequences of the Conflict**

It is interesting to take a look at the usual results of a fight against a dragon, beyond the obvious one, which is the triumph of man over beast. What happens next shows the use of a number of motifs that are not only very common, but that can also be interpreted in the context of creation of the tale. These are the most usual outcomes:

#### **3. 4. 1. The Defeat of the Dragon May Grant Knowledge or Physical Invulnerability**

This is a motif that is commonly found in a number of the ancient civilizations. In the Scandinavian culture, for example, the blood of the dragon, and especially his heart, possesses unparalleled magical properties. Whoever consumes it will acquire prodigious wisdom, or whichever faculty the dragon might have had. When Sigurd bathes in Fafnir's blood, he becomes invulnerable and, when he accidentally tastes his heart, when he put to his mouth the finger burnt on the roasting heart, he acquires the power of understanding the language of birds.

This is the most popular of all stories containing this motif, but in the Babylonian civilization there was yet another example, which I have so far eluded because it did not seem to be about a dragon in the strict sense of the term, but which is

brought to relevance when compared with one of the most obvious examples of serpent-worship in the Bible: the Garden of Eden. This may seem a ludicrous statement, so allow me to explain my meaning:

Gen. 3: 1-7 regales the reader with the well-known scene of the serpent of Eden persuading Eve to eat from the Tree of Science and in the apocryphal book of Enoch, 10: 64: 2, we read that “these are the angels who have descended from heaven to earth, and have revealed secrets to the sons of men”, to which follows an enumeration of the ten fallen angels, the ten serpents, and what skill each one of them taught mankind, from warfare to writing. In Enoch, the serpent of Eden is but one of this brood of ten, “the offspring of a serpent the name of which is Tabaet”, and they will only be destroyed by the great deluge of the end of times, when chaos is restored.

Coincidentally, in Assyrian Babylon there was a very similar story, according to which in the past, at a time when people lived savagely, a strange beast by the name of Oannes, somewhat similar to a fish, came out of the sea and introduced them into all sorts of knowledge: sciences, arts, architecture, geometry and law. Oannes also taught them how to work the fields and generally how to improve their existence. His voice was articulate and human, and, everyday, after the sunset, he would retire again into the sea (Barton, 1893: 16).

Both stories share the introduction of a serpent or a dragon-like figure. Barton (1893: 20) describes Oannes as “a fish-like dragon”, endowed with articulate speech and unparalleled subtlety, who lead mankind to knowledge. It has been argued that both are also ultimately related to Tiamat, as Oannes comes from the sea, and the Hebrew serpent is said to be the offspring of a being named Tabaet, which is suspected to be no other than Tiamat. I must confess that I find this evidence flimsy at most, nevertheless,

be them directly related or not, these two stories give us an insight into a time in which these creatures were seen as the providers of knowledge, as benefactors.

Ordinary serpents were thought to be able to impart knowledge to humans too. A Greek story tells of a sage who understood the language of birds, “having learned it through some serpents whose life he had saved and who, out of gratitude, had cleansed his ears as he slept” (Frazer, 1966: I: 158). In Greece and Rome there was once a cult to the serpent, which was considered as protective and luck-bringing. It was regarded similarly in Britain, whether from the influence of the Roman colonization or because the cult was already in existence prior to it is a matter that requires further research. In Wales, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed that snakes and children tended to strike the most unusual friendships, and these were not frowned upon by the community, but rather encouraged. Also, a Welsh tale had it that a King Snake and his courtiers once frequented a certain farmhouse in the Vale of Taff. The presence of the serpents brought prosperity to the farmer, but his eldest son apparently missed the connection, for “when the farmer died, his eldest son immediately killed the King Snake, whereupon the others took their departure. With them went the health, happiness and prosperity of the farm for ever” (Trevelyan, 1909: 173-4, in Simpson, 2001: 36). There is a wealth of knowledge in these brief paragraphs from Trevelyan, from the tradition that there was in each farmhouse a male and a female snake, which appeared to announce the death of the master or mistress of the house, to the beautiful tale of the maid near Penmark who received daily visits from a large snake with a crown on its head. The girl fed the snake milk from her cows and, in payment for her kindness, she received a gold ring, which one day she would use as her wedding ring. Her actions were the means of her eventually becoming very wealthy. Such beliefs in snake monarchs who grant gold to those who are kind to them are linked to the Classical ideas of the luck-bringing snakes



and their connection to prosperity, and, from there, to the treasure-hoarding dragon (Simpson, 2001: 37).

Another example can be found in a work from 1888, which was the year in which Miss Dempster published a beautiful collection of legends from Sutherland. Among them, the reader will find the following account on the magical properties of serpents, which savours strongly of the story of Fafnir and Sigurd:

Now Farquhar was one time a drover in the Reay country, and he went from Glen Gollich to England to sell a drove of black cattle, and the staff that he had in his hand as he walked was hazel<sup>1</sup>. One day a doctor met him. "What's that," he said, "you have in your hand?" "It is a staff of hazel." "And where did you cut that?" "In Glengollig north, in Lord Reay's country." "Do you mind the place and the tree?" "That I do." "Could you get the tree?" "Easy." "Well, I will give you gold more than ye can lift if ye will go back there and bring me a wand of that hazel-tree; and take this bottle, and bring me something more, and I will give ye gold as much again. Watch at the hole at the foot, and put the bottle to it. Let the six serpents go that come out first, but put the seventh into the bottle, and tell no man, but come back straight with it here." So Farquhar went back to the hazel glen alone, and when he had cut some boughs off the tree he looked about for the hole that the doctor spoke of. A hole there was, and Farquhar sat to watch it; and what should come out but six serpents, brown and barred like adders. These he let go, and clapped the bottle to the hole's mouth to see would anything more come out. By-and-by a white snake<sup>2</sup> came rolling through. Farquhar had him in the bottle in a minute, tied him down, and hurried back to England with him. The doctor gave him siller enough to buy the Reay country, but asked him to stay and help him with the white snake. They lit a fire with the hazel-sticks, and put the snake into a pot to boil; the doctor then bid Farquhar watch it, and not let any one touch it, and not to let the steam escape (for fear, he said, folk might know what they were at). He wrapped paper round the pot-lid; but he had not made all straight, for when the water began to boil the steam began to come out at one place. Well, Farquhar saw this, and thought he would push the paper down round the thing; so he put his finger to the bit that was wet, and then his finger into his mouth, for it was wet with the bree. Lo! he

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<sup>1</sup> Miss Dempster (1888: 248) remarks at one point that Pliny speaks of a mysterious affinity between serpents and the hazel tree, but I have not managed to locate the original text from Pliny.

<sup>2</sup> A white snake is considered a quite extraordinary creature in Sutherland: "It never rests by day or by night" and it has a "revolving motion peculiar to itself, turning over and over through an ivory ring, which is loose in its body. This is formed from its own slime, and sometimes drops off, in which case the snake makes another, and the finder of the ring is safe against all disasters and enchantments" (Dempster, 1888: 249).

knew everything, and the eyes of his mind were opened. "I will keep it quiet though" he said to himself. Presently the doctor came back, and took the pot from the fire. He lifted the lid, and, dipping his finger in the steam drops, sucked it. But the virtue had gone out of it, and it was no more than water to him. "Who has done this?" he cried, and saw in Farquhar's face that it was he. "Since you have taken the bree of it, take the flesh too," he said in a rage, and threw the pot at him (ma dohl us a sugh ith n' fheol). Now Farquhar had become all wise, and he set up as a doctor, and there was no secret hid from him, and nothing that he could not cure. He went from place to place and healed them, so that they called him Farquhar the physician. Now he heard that the king was sick, so he went to the city of the king to know what would ail him. It was his knee, said all the folk, and he has many doctors, and pays them all greatly, and whiles they can give him relief, but not for long, and then it is worse than ever with him, and you can hear him roar and cry with the pain that is in his knee, and in the bone of it. One day Farquhar walked up and down before king's house (N'daol dubh, vis a' chnaumh gheal). "The black beetle to the white bone," he cried out. The people looked at him, and said that the strange man of the Reay country was through other (mad). The next day Farquhar stood at the gate, and cried, "The black beetle to the white bone." And the king sent to know who it was that cried outside, and what was his business. "The man," they said, "was a stranger, and men called him the physician." So the king, who was wild with pain, said to call him in, and Farquhar stood before the king and aye. "The black beetle to the white bone," said he. And so it was proved. The doctors, to keep the king ill and get their money, put at whiles a black beetle into the wound which the king had in his knee; and the beast was eating his bone and his flesh, and made him to cry day and night. Then the doctors took it out again for fear he should die; and when he was better they put it back again that it might eat him more. This Farquhar knew by the serpent's wisdom that he had whenever he laid his finger under his teeth. And the king was cured, and had all the doctors hung. Then he said to Farquhar that he would give him lands or gold or whatever he asked. Then Farquhar asked him the king's daughter, and all the isles that the sea runs round from Point of Storr to Stromness in the Orkneys. So the king gave him a grant of all the isles. But Farquhar the physician never came to be Farquhar the king, for he had an ill-wisher that poisoned him, and he died. (J. MacLeod, Laxford.) [I have taken the story as it was told me, bad grammar and all, and got the chief sentences in Gaelic. It was by serpents' tree that Michael Scott got his knowledge, and the wisdom of the mouth is said, in county Clare, to have belonged to Fingal, who began life as a herd-boy on the Shin. Some giants came to him one day, and bade him roast a fish for them, threatening to kill him if he burnt it. He did so on one small spot. On this spot he quickly put his finger, and as quickly transferred the hot finger to his mouth (putting it under his teeth). A gift of omniscience was the result, and this quality became the foundation of his future greatness. Cassandra had been licked by a serpent before she became a prophetess.] (Dempster, 1888: 229-31).

Here we may glimpse again the magical properties of the serpent, and its role as bringer of wisdom in a scene which has been used repeatedly in tales all over the world.

### **3. 4. 2. The Hero Perishes in the Fight**

**Examples:** *The Knucker of Lyminster* (West Sussex, England); *The Bisterne Dragon* (Hampshire, England); *Sir Piers Shonks* (Hertfordshire, England); *John Aller and the Dragon* (Aller, Somerset, England); *Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon* (Yorkshire, England); *The Mordiford Dragon* (Herefordshire, England); *Beowulf*.

Some dragons die killing. *Beowulf* is a choice example of the cruel fate of the victorious hero that is slain, but there are others in the same league: Jim Puttock, who dies, ironically, when having his celebratory drink after killing the Knucker of Lyminster, is an example of the inescapable curse. The inevitability of fate has always fascinated storytellers and these twists are not uncommon in tales. Consider too the heir of Penmynedd, in Anglesey, who was sent abroad on account of a prophecy that said that a dragon attacking the neighbourhood would be the cause of his death. As it happened, the dragon was killed by a local boy and, once the threat was out of the picture, the heir was summoned back. Ignorant of the fate of Jim Puttock in Lyminster, upon arrival, the youth disrespectfully kicked the skeleton of the dragon and one of its fangs gashed his foot. Of course, he died shortly after (Simpson, 2001: 71). Other examples are Sir Peter Loschy, whose dog was immune to the dragon's poisonous blood whereas he was not (*Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon*), John Aller, in one of the versions of the story (*John Aller and the Dragon*, Appendix A, version 2), and Sir Maurice Berkeley in a funereal version of his fight against the Bisterne dragon, in which the strain of the fight is such

that the knight, although he survives the combat, dies soon afterwards (*The Bisterne Dragon*, version 2). It is also said that Piers Shonks died of his wounds from the fight (Simpson, 2001: 70). Sad was also the end of Seigneur the Hambye who, after having killed the dragon, was betrayed by his servant, who killed his master and claimed that *he* had been the victorious one and should therefore be rewarded with his master's position and wife. It is a *Beowulf* story with a *The Two Brothers* twist and with a little *Macbeth* weaved into it (*Le Dragon d'la Hougue Bie*):

Hambye is in Normandy, but the Paisnel family, whose seat it was, in the thirteen century owned the estate of Jersey where the dragon is said to have been slain; a mound called La Hougue Bie, allegedly marking the knight's grave, is in fact prehistoric (Simpson, 2001: 165).

Bois (2010: 43) explains that the term "Bie", which is found in "La Hougue Bie" and in "Hambye" or "Hambie", comes in fact from the Old Norse *bær* or *býr* (house, settlement), which suggests the traditional identification of ancient burial mounds as the dwelling of fairies and other supernatural beings. In support of this theory, it may be added that "hougue" comes from the Old Norse *haugr*, meaning "barrow, burial mound".

In the story of *Le Dragon d'la Hougue Bie* there is a dragon living in a marsh, and also a mound, where the hero is buried in the end. Bois (2010: 44) suggests that originally there may have been two separate dragon stories, which eventually blended into the one that has survived to our days. One of them would feature a dragon living in a marsh, devastating the district and claiming victims, and the other, a dragon in a burial mound, guarding a treasure. As seen above, there is every chance that a dragon would choose any of these places for his den.



All Saints Norton Church, where there is a screen depicting Fulk Fitzwarrin's fight against the dragon. (photo: Robert Cutts).

### 3. 4. 3. The Fight with the Dragon Justifies a Situation

**Examples:** St George; *Cnoc Na Cnoimh* (Sutherland, Scotland); *The Ben Vair Dragon* (Argyllshire, Scotland); *The Mester Stoor Worm* (the Orkney Islands); *Martin and the Dragon* (Angus, Scotland); *The Linton Worm* (West Linton, Scotland); *The Lambton Worm* (Durham, England); *Sir Piers Shonks* (Hertfordshire, England); *The Dragon of Bisterne* (Hampshire, England); *The Deerhurst Dragon* (Gloucestershire, England); *Sir John Conyers and the Sockburn Dragon* (Durham, England); *The Knucker of Lyminster* (West Sussex, England); *John Aller and the Dragon* (Aller, Somerset, England).

Sometimes, a combat between a hero and a dragon is just the thing that is needed to explain some geographical feature, a particular choice of name or the relevance of some family or other in the local community. Even the existence of a piece of art or object may be regarded as a memento of a fantastic fight. For instance, the church of St George in Brinsop has an early medieval tympanum showing the scene of the dragon slaying (Simpson, 2001: 53), which was taken as proof that the site of the event must have been close to the place. In Uffington, the White Horse at Dragon Hill provides a geographical setting for the fight that cannot be more spectacular.

The motifs presented can be grouped together, according to the elements involved and their purpose in their respective stories:

#### **- The tale explains some geographical feature**

Many folk stories about dragons end with references to a certain geographical element that is still visible as proof of the veracity of the tale. In the valley of the Cassley, in Sutherland, there is a hill named *Cnoc na Cnoimh* (Worm's Hill), where a terrible worm

used to hunt until brave Hector Gunn delivered the area from the monster. “And – to this day, men may go to “Cnoc na Cnoimh” and see traces of this old story in the spiral indentations said to have been made on the hillside by the worm as its coils tightened in its death throes” (*Cnoc na Cnoimh*). Likewise, the marks on the sides of Worminton Hill, in West Linton, Scotland, are said to have been produced by the death struggles of the Linton Worm. The Lambton Worm, which could lap his tail around Lambton Hill (also known as Worm Hill), is believed to have left marks on the side of it in the process. So have similar dragons done at Bignor (Sussex) and Linton (West Linton, Scotland), where ridges on certain hills are explained by virtue of some dragon coiling around them (Simpson, 2001: 42). On Stapley Farm (Churchstanton, Somerset), there is a field known locally as Wormstall, where there is an example of a dragon story that explains some peculiar topography: “The place where the monster died then became “Wormstall” and the ground was furrowed by the lashing of its tail as it fought for its life. A hollow is still visible as a reminder of the incident” (Palmer, 1976: 77). And, on a much grander scale, one may mention the Mester Stoor Worm, who is responsible for the existence of no less than the Orkneys, the Shetlands, the Faroe Islands, the Baltic Sea and the whole of Iceland.

References such as these fulfil an important function in the stories, for they ground them to a specific location, a mark on the landscape, a well-known building or monument. This way, they make the story close and familiar to the community in which it is told, and credible for the audience. Such concrete evidence is the direct opposite function to the “in a far far away country” which has a place in so many stories. Here, what is sought is the identification of the audience with the story and its protagonists, who become members of the community, worthy of respect and of honour. It is also a source of pride. In the footnotes of Bishop Percy’s *Reliques of English Poesy* (1775), he

includes a verbatim extract from this letter, sent to him in 1769 regarding the tale of the dragon of Wantley:

In Yorkshire, six miles above Rotherham, is a village called Wortley, the seat of the late Wortley Montague Esq. About a mile from this village is a lodge, named Warncliffe Lodge, but vulgarly called Wantley: here lies the scene of that song. I was there above forty years ago; and it being a wooded rocky place, my friend made me clamber over rocks and stones, not telling me to what end, until I came to a sort of cave; then asked my opinion of the place, and pointing to one end says, Here lay the dragon killed by More of More Hall; here lay his head; here lay his tail; and the stones we came over on the hill, are those he could not crack; and yon white house you see half a mile off, is More Hall. I had dined at the lodge, and knew the man's [i.e. the lodge-keeper's] name was Matthew, who was a keeper to Mr Wortley, and, as he endeavoured to persuade me, was the same Matthew mentioned in the song; in the house is the picture of the dragon and More of More Hall; and near it a well, which, he says, is the well described in the ballad (Percy, 1906: 376-7, in Simpson, 2001: 91).

The hearer cannot doubt that the tale is true when he can see before him all the necessary evidence as to its existence.

Place-names are also closely related to legends. Sometimes, a given name is a reminiscence of a forgotten legend or tradition that has not been kept, and which gives the daydreamers inspiration. It would be the case with all of those place-names containing terms such as “dragon”, “worm”, “drake” and so on. In other cases, the legend is still well-known and those names are invoked as evidence of its veracity. Whyever would they be named that way if not to commemorate those events? In some cases, a specific name may even bring about changes in the story, which is tailored to fit with some curious name in the surroundings (e.g., Strathmartin). The mere existence of a place-name of these characteristics raises a number of questions:

Did the names cause the legend, or did the legend cause them? And consequently, is the date at which they are first recorded the latest or the earliest date at which the legend can be said to have begun? Is the place-name a corruption of something else, and if so how long would it have taken for the original meaning to be forgotten? (Simpson, 2001: 100).



The inherent problematic of philological studies has researchers wrack their brains and delve into long forgotten volumes in search of the answer to these questions<sup>1</sup>. It is fortunate that they do enjoy the task.

### **- The tale is a charter myth**

There are numerous locations in Britain which boast a local hero who once disposed of a dragon. This hero is frequently a member of a prominent family in the area whose tombstone is still to be seen in the local graveyard. This is an important trait of the story: the bond with the community. The hero has a well-known name and the dragon's haunts are minutely identified in the area. It usually even establishes the origin of local landowners, as land-tenure is attested by the feat of dragon killing, which ennobles the hero and his family<sup>2</sup>. Once there were in England various tenures that had curious ceremonies attached to them: "Manors might be held by the annual presentation of a sword, a horn, an axe, a pair of tongs, or by "flower rents" of a garland or a single red rose" (Westwood, 1994: 419). When the origins of such ceremonies were lost, they tended to be accounted for on the grounds of some legend. There is a beautiful example of this association between the dragon story and the acquisition of land and name in a ceremony that was held until 1826 in the Manor of Sockburn, near Darlington (Durham), which was held by the Conyers family (Appendix A: *Sir John Conyers and the Socburn Dragon*). When a new bishop was installed at Durham, it was the duty of

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<sup>1</sup> Simpson (2001: 100) offers a fantastic example of such variations: there is near Bures a village called Wormingford, and it is locally believed that this Wormingford is the true site of the Bures legend. "The fact that the village name contains the syllable "Worm" must obviously have favoured it in this takeover of the Bures story and in the growth of a further tradition. However, the oldest recorded form of the name is "Whithermundeford" (...). It is thus a very open question whether the dragon legend of the Sotur Valley influenced the simplification of the place-name or vice-versa".

<sup>2</sup> Here are some examples of heroes of this kind, as provided by Simpson (2001: 60-1): the Seigneur de Hambye (Jersey); Sir Thomas Venables (Moston, Cheshire); Sir John Lambton (Durham), Sir John Conyers of Sockburn (Durham), the founder of the Pollards of Bishop Auckland (Durham); Sir Maurice Berkeley (Bisterne, Hampshire); one of the Garston(e)s of Mordiford (Herefordshire) one of the Wyvills of Slingsby (Yorkshire), one of the Latimers of Well (Yorkshire); Sir Piers Shonks of Brent Pelham (Hertfordshire); Sir Hugh Barde or Bardolph of Castle Carlton (Lincolnshire); one of the Somervilles of Linton (Roxburg), etc.

the lord of Sockburn to meet him either at the ford at Neasham or at Croft Bridge over the River Tees when the bishop first arrived in his diocese. There, the lord would show him a heirloom (a falchion<sup>1</sup>) and say these words:

My Lord Bishop – I here present you with the falchion wherewith the champion Conyers<sup>2</sup> slew the worm, dragon or fiery flying serpent, which destroyed man, woman and child; in memory whereof the King then reigning gave him the Manor of Sockburn to hold by this tenure, that upon the first entrance of every Bishop into the country this falchion should be presented<sup>3</sup> (Henderson, 1879: 245-6, in Simpson, 2001: 61).

Other examples of tenures that are similarly explained may be found, as in the case of the Pollard family of Bishop Auckland, also in Durham<sup>4</sup>. In other cases, there is no ceremony remembering the feat, but still the fact that the leading family of the community came into their position by means of having an ancestor kill a dragon is ever present. One could here mention cases such as that of *The Dragon at Castle Carlton* (Lincolnshire), where the dragon fell under the sword of Sir Hugh Bardolfe, who earned both his title and his *dolfe*<sup>5</sup> in this manner. The story is usually set during the reign of Henry I, and the foe is the average venom-breathing dragon, which lived in Wormesgay and caused great distress, to the point that Sir Hugh Barde disrupted the celebrations of his very own wedding day to amend the situation. After slaying the beast, he took his

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<sup>1</sup> A falchion is a short sword.

<sup>2</sup> The champion Conyers is usually identified as Sir John Conyers and the date of his epic slaying of the Sockburn Worm is 1063, even though the falchion that has been preserved seems to have been made during the 13th century. Since the family is believed to be originally from France, and came to England at around the time of the Norman Conquest (1066), this tale is generally regarded as a charter myth that justifies their tenure of the land since the 12th century (09.15.2013. <http://www.foxtail.nu>). The family became particularly influential during the War of the Roses (1455-1487), especially during the first years, when Sir Warwick Conyers was one of the main supporters of the House of York (09.15.2013. <http://www.luminarium.org>).

<sup>3</sup> This ceremony is supposed to date from the time of Bishop Hugh Pudsey, during the reign of Richard I. The family crest is a dragon pierced by a falchion and the ceremonial falchion can currently be seen in Durham Cathedral Treasury (Simpson, 2001: 61-2).

<sup>4</sup> The Pollard monster is generally said to be a boar, the Pollard Brawn, but the words used at the tenure ceremony held in 1771 describe it as a “great and venomous serpent” (Westwood, 1994: 420).

<sup>5</sup> Meaning “wolf”.

head and presented it to the king. The king was happy to grant him several or all of the following (depending on the version): a dragon badge, the addition of *dolfe* to his name, to take a horn of salt from every salt cart passing through his domain, and to give or refuse permission to agents of the law to arrest persons within his parish (Simpson, 2001: 63-4).

Other examples where the tale justifies a tenure can be easily located in many of the stories presented in the section on folktales. Going over the rewards the different champions get after slaying their respective dragons, one will find that Sir Macdonie de Berkeley was knighted by Edward IV (*The Bisterne Dragon*), the Laird of Lariston received lands in Linton (*The Linton Worm*), the Smiths had the ownership of the state on Walton Hill in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (*The Deerhurst Dragon*), and so on.

#### **- Gravestones or mementos remain as proof**

Tombstones with effigies or heraldic elements are a recurrent device of truthfulness in dragon stories. They are generally accounted to be the tombs of the heroes who slew their respective dragons, thus giving their occupants great notoriety. In other occasions, it is some mysterious tomb of unknown origin, which is explained on these terms.

In the church at Lyminster there is a weathered anonymous medieval tombstone (formerly in the churchyard, but removed inside to keep it from further effect of the elements). There is on it a cross carved over a background of oblique lines. This stone is invariable signalled as proof of the existence of the Knucker, and the story of his devastation and death. Those who tell the tale of the knight killing the dragon say that this is a knight's tomb, with a sword on it, laid over the ribs of the dragon. Those who defend the version with Jim Puttock and his scythe do not argue with the cross being a sword, but the tomb *must* be Jim Puttock's, knight or not. Simpson (2001: 92) argues that in this case the tombstone cannot have been the origin of the legend, since, old as it

is, the place-name “Knucker Hole” is likely older, although “it has certainly helped to maintain it in memory through the ages”.

At the church of Brent Pelham in Hertfordshire (where the legend of Pier Shonks is found) there is a thirteenth-century tomb, set in the north wall of the nave, in this case elaborately carved and very well preserved, where its marble cover “shows the symbols of the four evangelists, an angel bearing a soul to heaven, and a large foliated cross, the foot of which is thrust into the jaws of a two-legged dragon” (Simpson, 2001: 93). Simpson (2001: 94-5) argues that, taking into account the probable date of erection of the tomb, the references on the inscription on the wall behind it and the family history, the legend of Piers Shonks as dragon slayer must have developed during the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

At Mordiford, a painting on the exterior west wall of the church could be seen until fairly recently (it was sadly erased in 1810-12, when some repairs were done), illustrating the local dragon story. It is possible that the original painting was somewhat influenced by the wyvern crest of the Garston family or of the Priory of St Guthlac in Hereford and, from thence, it became a part of the community by its own right, in the form of the legend seen above:

Someone, sometime, had killed a dragon in Mordiford, and there to prove it was the picture, endorsed by the authority of the Church, and visibly present as a daily reminder through at least six generations, to be proudly explained to every child and every passing traveller (Simpson, 2001: 96).

Other examples in which a funerary monument is associated with the legend can be found in the stories of John Aller, whose effigy is reported to be in Aller church (*John Aller and the Dragon*, version 2), Pier Shonks (*Sir Piers Shonks*), Sir Peter Loschy, whose tomb is said to be one in Nunnington church representing a knight with a dog (*Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon*). Often an element of the tombstone is

misinterpreted and becomes a feature in the story. Thus, the lion carved at the feet of the knight at the tombstone of Nunnington becomes a dog that helped the hero in his fight against the dragon. The cross on the stone at Kellington becomes a shepherd's crook, etc.

Besides the usual tomb, effigy or stained glass window, sometimes other objects were carefully kept, as mementos and proof of the historical combat against the monster. Simpson (2001: 96-7) compiles a long list of curios that could once be seen in the parishes, such as chests, weapons, pieces of armour, flags, old alm dishes, flagpoles, maypoles, wreaths, gloves, and even an iron cauldron, but most of them were discarded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the Age of Enlightenment gave way to scepticism. Such zeal as is described in purging the churches of seemingly useless and superstitious objects has robbed us of the delight of observing them and speculating about their origin. We have, nonetheless, the descriptions made by locals and travellers, but they are poor substitutes, even though we relish every single one of them.

Of the items that *did* survive and can still be seen in all their splendour, the following ones could be mentioned: John Aller's spear, the dragon bench-end at Crowcombe (Somerset), the dragon decorations of Deerhurst church (Gloucestershire), several ferocious stone heads of Anglo-Saxon creation, the Conyers falchion, the Pollard falchion, the Deerhurst axe (kept until the 18<sup>th</sup> century), and the stone trough at Lambton (from which the Worm lapped its milk).

It is unclear whether local legend inspired the creation of these items or whether it happened the other way around. The existence of a St George and the dragon motif in a given church is also taken as inspiration of a dragon legend in the vicinity in many cases, and so are crests of arms. Each case should obviously be studied separately to

elucidate (if possible at all) what came first. The dragon or the object? The storyteller or the crafter? It would certainly make for an interesting study.

If this idea of the dragon fight is taken as explanation of a given situation or geographical feature to a grand scale (even grander than the tale of the Mester Stoor Worm), it is fairly obvious that this motif is connected with the Creation Myths of the Antiquity, where the creation of the world was believed to have come about after a spectacular combat between a god and a dragon of chaos. These myths tell us of the ordering of the world and, obliquely, of the creation of man, as the result of the ritual slaying of a serpent god<sup>1</sup>.

### **3. 4. 4. A Prophecy about the Dragon Breaking Loose Will Herald the End of the World**

In relation with the idea of the original chaos and ordering of the world by a god of the Creation Myths, it must be mentioned that very often ancient religions relate the end of the world with the actions of a dormant dragon. A number of the Creation Myths have a cyclic component: at the beginning of time, before the world is created, the serpent is defeated and taken captive, but only temporarily, for there is a threat looming on the horizon, that of the monster breaking loose and precipitating the end of Creation and of mankind. Few of these prophecies include the intervention of another god or hero to defeat the new menace, which gives the myth an air of finality.

The Bible, for example, reintroduces Leviathan in the Apocalypse, explaining how the dragon is defeated and bound, but only for a thousand years, at the end of

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<sup>1</sup> This can be found in all of the following myths: Ra and Apep (Egypt), Marduk and Tiamat (Babylon), Ahura-mazda and Ahriman (Persia), Indra and Vrtra (India), Michael and the dragon (Hebraic culture), Leviathan (Hebraic culture), Zeus and Typhon (Greece), Thor and Jörmungandr (Scandinavian culture), and Níðhöggr (Scandinavian culture).

which it will break loose and proceed to break havoc with the help of Gog and Magog<sup>1</sup>, and with all the followers that will come from the four corners of the earth:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season (Revelation, 20: 1-3).

Nonetheless, the author reassures its readers about such terrifying fate: the dragon's war will not last long, for the monster will be cast into hell, where it will receive torment. Surprisingly, the reader is not told who does all this, for it is described in the passive form. What we are told, however, is that, after this dark episode, a new chapter will begin, one with a new heaven and a new earth, with no more death or pain, and a promise of eternal happiness for the faithful and general bliss for all people involved. In spite of all the apparently insurmountable situations, a happy end is guaranteed. It is hardly surprising that the Christian world was turned upside down with the proximity of year 1000, as the Book of Revelation clearly announces that at the end of a thousand-year span Leviathan will roam the earth again, causing great destruction. Even though it is also prophesized that the monster will eventually be defeated again, and this time for good, it is evident that none of the Christians living by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century could be anticipating going through the ghastly experiences that inexorably preceded the ultimate victory of the forces of God. Happy ending notwithstanding, it must have seemed a bleak fate at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Gog and Magog are two creatures or hostile powers (although sometimes Magog is described as a land rather than as an individual) of Hebraic tradition, who will oppose the forces of God just before the end of the world. They are sometimes regarded not as any sort of particular monsters, but as symbols of the nations of the earth (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).

In the Scandinavian culture, even more menacing than Níðhöggr, who threatened the Tree of Life, was Jörmungandr, the World Serpent or the Midgard Serpent (*Midgarðsormr*). The story of Jörmungandr starts with the serpent's parents: the god Loki and the giantess Angrboða. Their monstrous offspring were Fenrir, Hel, and Jörmungandr. Odin tossed Jörmungandr, the serpent, into the ocean, and the great monster kept growing under the sea. There, it has grown so large that it now encircles the whole earth, and there he still is, with his tail in his mouth, and the day he lets go of his tail, the world will end.

In a few occasions, Jörmungandr has been confronted by Thor<sup>1</sup>, but their final battle has been foretold to take place at the end of times, when the serpent will come out of the ocean. According to prophecy, Thor shall manage to overcome Jörmungandr, but at a very high price, for he will be poisoned and will perish right after the combat is over.

This myth must inevitably remind us of the many Cosmic Combats between a storm-god and a dragon of chaos that have already been mentioned, although in other very distant cultures. In fact, it must be noticed that Thor's symbol and weapon is the hammer Mjöltnir, which is one of the images associated with thunder. In Persia there is a parallel in the myth of Fereydūn and Aži Dahāka. Fereydūn was the son of Thrīta Athwya, a demi-god, and he had to fight the three-headed, three-mouthed, six-eyed dragon, Aži Dahāka (also Dahāg or Zahhāk). Aži Dahāka was the offspring of Ahriman, in turn fought by Ahura-mazda. Although his dwelling was in a cave or stronghold in the depths of the earth, he was a water dragon who had (and exercised) the power of

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<sup>1</sup> In one of these occasions, Thor is challenged to lift the colossal serpent (magically disguised as an equally colossal cat). In another, Thor and the giant Hymir go fishing in the sea and the serpent bites Thor's bait (an ox head). Just as Thor and Jörmungandr are about to engage in mighty battle, Hymir cuts the line, and the monster sinks under water (09.22.2013. <http://www.pantheon.org>).



controlling the water of rivers and sea. Fereydūn's goal was to recover the *hvarenah*<sup>1</sup>. Incidentally, he had the chance to free two very beautiful ladies that Aži Dahāka had in his power and who were surely not affronted for being his second best reason for fighting the dragon. Ever since Fereydūn defeated him, Aži Dahāka has been chained in the Alborz Mountains, from where, according to prophecy, he will escape at the end of the world, ravaging a third of it before being killed by Kirsāsp (also Garshap, or, in Avestan, Kərəsāspa), who is no other than Fereydūn's brother.

If one moves back to the more humble realms of folktales and literature, the story that comes closer to this theme is that of St Murrrough. There, the serpent is imprisoned by the saint in a cage under the waters of Lough Foyle, and there he will remain until the Day of Judgement. Nothing is mentioned of the role the monster will have then, though.

Finally, in literary productions, a reference to this imagery may be glimpsed in *Le Morte d'Arthur* (15<sup>th</sup> c.), where serpents and dragons may symbolize foreboding and appear as indicators of Arthur's downfall, as can be seen in Book I, Chapter XIX, when the king dreams of slaying griffins and serpents on the ill-fated night when he begets Mordred.

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<sup>1</sup> The *hvarenah*, or "glory" is what enables kings to rule according to order and justice, and it must not fall into evil hands, for then the world would be in great danger. This happened when the dragon Aži Dahāka stole it, thus bringing the world into confusion and distress until Fereydūn decided to take action (Carnoy, 1916: 308).

### **3. 5. A Few Considerations about What Has Been Examined So Far**

As it has been repeatedly mentioned, the classical tale of St George and the dragon is one of the many stories of the Perseus and Andromeda type. Frazer (1966: I: 155) describes them as

a well-known type of folk-tale, of which versions have been found from Japan and Annam in the East to Senegambia, Scandinavia and Scotland in the West. The story varies in details from people to people, but as commonly told it runs thus. A certain country is infested by a many-headed serpent, dragon, or other monster, which would destroy the whole people if a human victim, generally a virgin, were not delivered up to him periodically. Many victims have perished, and at last it has fallen to the lot of the king's own daughter to be sacrificed. She is exposed to the monster, but the hero of the tale, generally a young man of humble birth, interposes in her behalf, slays the monster, and receives the hand of the princess as his reward. In many of the tales the monster, who is sometimes described as a serpent, inhabits the water of a sea, a lake, or a fountain. In other versions he is a serpent or dragon who takes possession of the springs of water, and only allows the water to flow or the people to make use of it on condition of receiving a human victim.

This is a structure that basically displays all of the motifs that were explored separately above. But, if taken all together, it is possible and plausible to interpret them as fossilized mementos of very ancient beliefs and practices, long forgotten even by those who told the tales. Mementos of a time when water spirits were conceived as serpents or dragons, presented as beneficent beings who provided fertility to fields and women alike and to whom ritual sacrifices of human beings were periodically offered. The idea that many of our beliefs may date back to Prehistory has been discussed before (Knight, 1963: 292-3). The notion may not remain as credible as this author claims, especially as there is little in terms of evidence to support such an idea, but still one can not doubt that these beliefs are extraordinarily ancient. Folklore is a bounty of

information about these long lost beliefs and practices, but, admittedly, also wretchedly obscure at times. And yet, these tales and traditions must once have been so common that they can be traced in practically every culture of the world, even though the motifs are diluted or modified to some extent. Thus, the identification of water sources with a serpent god can be found among the Oyampi Indians of French Guinea:

The Oyampi Indians of French Guinea imagine that each waterfall has a guardian in the shape of a monstrous snake, who lies hidden under the eddy of the cascade, but has sometimes been seen to lift up its huge head. To see it is fatal. Canoe and Indians are then dragged down to the bottom, where the monster swallows all the men, and sometimes the canoe also (Frazer, 1966: 1: 156).

Similar examples are found some thousand miles away, among the Japanese of Nara<sup>1</sup> and the Warramunga of Central Australia<sup>2</sup>, where human sacrifices to dragon gods are recorded; in addition to this, traces of related fertility rituals are embedded in dragon slaying tales all over the globe.

For the agricultural communities, a constant and sufficient supply of water is paramount not only to the well-being of the tribe, but even to its survival. In places where a prolonged drought may mean the starvation of man and beast alike, the spirits that reside in the waters are constantly applied to, to dispense life and fertility to the fields. As deities of fertility, it is only natural that they extended their blessing to cattle, and, from them, to women<sup>3</sup>. Hence, perhaps, the ritual sacrifice of a woman to the

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<sup>1</sup> There is in Nara a famous serpent worship, directed towards the snake god Ōmononushi, the deity of Mount Niwa. Although it does not seem the case with Ōmononushi, snake-deity shrines in Japan normally indicate a weather ritual, with the snake god as rain-giver and frequently referred to as warden of a pond or mere or river (Daniels, 1960: 157).

<sup>2</sup> This tribe is believed to perform elaborate ceremonies to appease a mythical water-snake (Frazer, 1966: I: 156).

<sup>3</sup> The references to water spirits with the power of bestowing offspring on barren women are so general and numerous that they would deserve a single study. Frazer (1966: I: 159-61) tells how women in Syria get in a particular water channel, where they wait for the embrace of the water-spirit that comes in the rush of stream. In some Indian villages, the mother is taken to worship the village well after childbirth. In the British Isles, wives could resort to the well of St Fillan at Comrie (Scotland), to the wells of St Mary at Whitekirk (Isle of May), to St Eany's Well (Aran Islands), to Child's Well (Oxford, England), or to the

serpent, as deity of the river or well. It can be inferred from many stories that this sacrifice was not as much the offering of palatable nourishment as the offering of a wife, either to pacify the temper of the god or to bring about his generative powers. The Ethiopian princess Andromeda was offered to Ceto, the Greek princess Deianira was properly wooed by the river god Achelous and, in Troy, the maidens that were close to marriage would bathe in the Scamander river, uttering a ritual “Scamander, take my virginity”, a practice that was observed in other places (Frazer, 1966: II: 162), and in Lanuvio (Rome, Italy), serpents were regarded as the guardians of virginity (Espasa-Calpe, 1934-: 18: 2163, “dragón”). In another twist to this conundrum, Persephone, goddess of fertility, and who had vowed perpetual virginity, was raped by Zeus. Myths and rituals such as these survived in the form of tales.

At the same time, the dragon is associated with the earth and the underworld. It is presented as a chthonic creature, able to connect the world of the living and the world of the dead, and a guardian that separates both worlds. As such, it represents the ancestral dead, the oracular power and the capacity of renewal. Very often, the symbolism of the water-spirit and that of the chthonic spirit blended. Vicente Risco (1994: 49), in his ethnographical analysis of the region of Galicia (Spain) finds that the many examples in which serpents are found in both archaeology and ethnography point to an ancient cult to these creatures:

As crenzas, lendas e ritos relacionados coa serpe son tan abondosas en Galicia, que xa nos permite supor unha antiga mitoloxía. O culto da serpe aparece documentado en monumentos históricos (...) e aínda en fontes literarias da Antigüidade<sup>1</sup>”.

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Borewell (Bingfield, Northumberland), among countless other possibilities, both in the Isles and in the rest of Europe.

<sup>1</sup> “Beliefs, legends and myths related to the serpent are so abundant in Galicia, that we can infer some ancient mythology. The cult to the serpent is documented in megalithic monuments (...) and even in the literary sources of Ancient History” (translation by the author of this study).

This may explain some of the astonishing acts of worship that some of the official representatives of evil receive in some places of Christian Europe, and that cannot be ascribed to an innocent fondness for an effigy that brings pleasure to the community, as is the case with snap-dragons. In 1826, the editors of the London Literary Gazette seemed quite sure of this, and they attributed the surviving cults to dragons and snakes to a generalized ignorance of the workings of allegories, as the Church attempted to explain the victory of Christ over the Devil with images of dragons and the parishioners misinterpreted them:

But allegories are not intelligible to the multitude, ignorant and brought up to believe blindly. The serpent which was paraded on the rogation days, was generally considered as the representation of a real serpent, to the existence of which no one ventured to assign a certain date. (...) Every parish having its dragon, the history of the monster varied still more than its shape: imagination and credulity attributed to it supernatural works; *from alarm, the people passed to respect; and further still* (Colburn, 1826: 506) (italics mine).

On account of this wilful misunderstanding, they proceed to give us some valuable insight of some practices that were still out and about during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Poitiers, for example, which was the site where St Radegonde had vanquished the dragon Grand'Goule, the defeated beast “was piously surnamed “the good *Saint Vermin*<sup>1</sup>”, fervent prayers were addressed to him, chaplets were eagerly brought to him to touch” (Colburn, 1826: 506). In Galicia (Spain), and also in Portugal, there are several instances of chapels in which the Devil was venerated: The *Romaría*<sup>2</sup> *da Mota*, held every 21<sup>st</sup> of September in Santo Estevo do Campo (Arzúa, A Coruña, Galicia) officially celebrates the life and exploits of St Matthew, but it is the devil that is taken

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<sup>1</sup> “The good saintly worm” (translation by the author of this study).

<sup>2</sup> A *romaría* or *romería* is a religious festive gathering in the vicinity of a sanctuary. In Galicia it almost always involves lavish picnics and cheerful music and dancing, and it is often preceded by a hike to the sanctuary.

out in the procession. According to my informant, Fernando Mujico Caneda, who is a devoted aficionado of Celtic Studies, the setting has the unearthly feel of ancient forgotten cults. He is probably right, for, archeological study pending, the ethnographical details that he has gathered are nothing short of impressive. The little chapel consecrated to St. Stephen is located in the middle of a centenary oakwood, planted oak by oak by the local young men who, when they were called up to join the army, went to the oakwood around the chapel and planted a new oak sprout. The custom was lost once obligatory military service was abolished in Spain (in 2001), but the lush and beautiful forest bears witness to the very many men who followed this tradition over the centuries.

On the day prior to the *Romaría da Mota*, Mujico tells me, the oakwood becomes abuzz with stall holders, canopy installers and workers of the appointed music band (always a fashionable one) that will play during the festivities. The *romaría* is wildly popular in the local area, but its fame wanes as we move away. When the procession leaves the church, the appointed men carry not the image of St. Matthew, as one would expect, but one of the devil. The one that is used nowadays is a small figure, which substitutes a much larger one, long lost. The whole tradition is shrouded in mystery and it would necessitate a profound study of the surviving elements, and those that the community may remember from older times.

There are other singular devotions such as this one in the area of Galicia: The devil of Armeses (Maside, Ourense, Galicia) lost in combat against St Michael, but is far more popular than the Archangel all the same (Fernández de la Cigña Núñez, 2012: 11). In the church of Salvador in Coiro (Cangas, Pontevedra, Galicia), an unusual wooden altarpiece depicting a large breasted she-devil was the object of blatant worship

until a succession of rectors had her first mutilated and afterwards taken out to rot in a damp basement (Fernández de la Cigoña Núñez, 2012: 19).

Now, of course, all this raises an obvious question: if the serpent was a god: why kill it in the first place? Is it the ritual death of the god as seen in many religions of the past or merely an imposition brought about with the arrival of a new social and religious order that needs to dispose of the old pantheon to accommodate its own new one? Knight (1963: 293) concurs that the origin of Saint George is remote, maybe as remote as Prehistory. “St George may well exist, and actually be our own powerful Patron Saint. But as far as folklore is concerned, he grows and he enters by devious ways indeed”.

The ritual slaying of a god is a feature common to many cultures and echoes the heavenly combats between storm-gods and dragons chaos in the Creation Myths, where the purpose of the god generally was to release the waters that the dragon was holding. Mittman & Dendle (2012: 113) see in this a “re-enactment of the battle for order in the cosmos – the younger, male generation trying to overcome the elder female order”.

Frazer (1966: II: 163-4) recalls a very telling tradition that used to be practiced at Furth (Bavaria, Germany) in Midsummer, on the Sunday after Corpus Christi. It was a drama called *The Slaying of the Dragon*. It starred a princess, a dragon and a knight that arrived in the nick of time to save her:

(...) he charged the dragon, thrusting his spear into its maw and taking care to sat a bladder of bullock’s blood which was there concealed. (...) The men-at-arms then escorted the knight and the princess to the tavern, there to end the day with dance and revelry. Bohemians and Bavarians came from many miles to witness this play of the slaying of the dragon, and when the monster’s blood streamed forth they eagerly mopped it up, along with the blood-soaked earth, in white cloths, which they afterwards laid on the flax-fields, in order that the lax might thrive and grow tall. For the “dragon’s blood” was thought to be a sure protection against witchcraft.

This play was probably the evolution of some magical rite designed to fertilise the fields from the remote past and, although it was here presented as some sort of public entertainment, still some original elements can be perceived, such as the ritual keeping of the blood to use as both protection and fertiliser of the fields. In the story of Cadmus, some versions say that Harmonia, Cadmus' wife, was in fact daughter to Ismesnos, both dragon and king of Thebes, and that Cadmus needed to slay him and marry his daughter in order to succeed him to the throne (Frazer, 1966: IV: 84).

In keeping with this ritual slaying, it was not uncommon that the slayer absorbed part of the faculties of the deceased serpent-god. Cadmus got himself a wife and a throne, Sigurd learned the language of birds, and St George became, in many places, a spirit of vegetation and fertility. In the Middle East, St George is Al-Khdir, the Green, and also Mâr Jirjis<sup>1</sup>, and sites related to him are frequented by barren women who wish to be with child. In 1903, Prof. Curtiss witnessed a fertility ritual at Jûne, very near Beirut, where the shrine of Al-Khdir is found. There was by the sea an artificial cave, called el-Bâtîyeh, dominating the church of Mâr Jirjis (Saint George), some distance away. That cave belongs to the saint and there are two annual festivals: one on the day when St. George slew the dragon and another on the day St. George was killed. On those days, "barren couples bathe in the cave, into which the water washes from the sea. St. George makes the marriage fruitful, and all children born after such a bath in the salt water, which has procreative powers, are called George, after their actual sire" (Curtiss, 1904: 336). In times past, animals were sacrificed in this cave as well, in fulfilment of vows, but by the time Curtiss took his holiday there, the custom seemed not to be in vogue anymore. However, sheep were still sacrificed before the launching of ships, in a

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<sup>1</sup> The Moslem population call St George Al-Khdir, Chidr, or *hâdir-wa-nâdir*. The Christians call him Mâr Jirjis (Curtiss, 1994: 334).



ceremony where the neck of the animal was laid on prow of the new ship and cut so that the blood ran into the sea. Then, the sheep was thrown into the water as an offering to St. George (Curtiss, 1904: 336).

In Europe, St George is the protector of cattle and, in some places, the giver of rain and the helper of childless women. Frazer (1966: II: 347-8) suggests that the European St George may have displaced some old god of the spring, and as such he is sometimes blended with Jack in the Green, or the Green Man, himself a symbol both of fertility and rebirth.





Church and oakwood of Santo Estevo do Campo (Arzúa, A Coruña, Galicia), where the *Romaría da Mota* is held every September (photo: Turismo de Santiago. 04.06.2014. <http://www.santiagoturismo.com>)



Artwork for the film *Reign of Fire* (Rob Bowman, 2002)

## **Chapter 4. A Revamping of Dragons: The Legend Goes Forth**

The age of dragons has not really ended yet. The old tales are done over and over, and adapted to the needs of each new era. Heroes have been fighting dragons well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and not even this very flashy, overwhelmingly technological twenty-first century has strayed that much from the topics explored in those stories of yore. In spite of the ultimate dismissal of dragons as zoological creatures of any substance, they still have figured extensively in all sorts of artistic productions in the last 150 years. They feature in Richard Wagner's operatic *Ring* cycle (*The Ring of the Nibelung*, 1876), a breathtaking number of modern fantasy books and, more recently, in cinema and the new media. One of the reasons for their permanence in fiction and arts is that they are phenomenal as entertainment tropes, certain to draw attention to the work in which they appear, if only for aesthetic purposes.

This transition from the traditional treatment of the motif to the modern interpretation in which dragons are regarded as purely mythological creatures (and therefore only zoologically possible in parallel worlds of fantasy) has not been a bumpless road. The old familiar elements have been mixed, kneaded, stretched, and shaped to engender a whole new set of themes and functions in some instances, and yet never losing sight of their original referent. Thus, damsels are no longer in distress, dragons are no longer villains, and heroes are no longer impossibly brave. Or they are, depending on the will of the author, but the variations do exist. Above all, it is important to note that these alterations do not answer to a whim on the part of the artist, bent on devising a creation different to everything the world has seen so far. Or, they do not

answer solely to that. In order to explain this notion, we need to travel back again to the time of the great heroes:

It is common knowledge that medieval literary productions and works of art, whichever the topic they deal with, carry a baggage of meanings and interpretations of the world in which they are produced, most of which lean strongly towards symbolism and didacticism (Benedetti & Bovo, 2002: 4). Such an outtake will necessarily affect every aspect of the production: structure, themes, motifs, and virtually everything else is permeated by the social strictures of the time in such a way that the work cannot be completely understood if considered independently of the social context in which it was created. Thus, the inclusion of a fight against a dragon (or any other motif, for that matter) always fulfils some particular role in the story, and its presence is heavily charged with symbolic meaning, even though its inclusion may not be an altogether conscious choice on the part of the author. Yet, this is not at all exclusive of medieval productions. We tend to believe that we live in an era of wondrous freedom of thought, and that we are free of any sort of restriction, mentally at least. But nothing is further than the truth. If carefully examined, the artistic productions of our time reflect as much the general mentality of our days as the thirteenth-century romances did of the folks living then. The difference is that the motifs have evolved to suit what authors today wish to emphasize. Some have been kept, many others have been altered, a few even reversed, but we cannot forget that every change made in society answers to a need that has to be fulfilled, for that art mirrors the society in which it is produced. Below are some of the most popular and influential examples of fictional works, both in literature and cinema, that revolve around the dragon conflict. In this chapter I will examine them and analyse which motifs have been preserved, which have changed, and which purposes they answer in our society.

For this, I will explore productions created both in literature and cinema. To a certain extent, cinema can be compared to folklore, in the sense that it is constructed similarly, that is, using the images and sets of symbols that the community is familiar with, and answering to a longing on the part of that community to experience (at least in tale-form) situations that would normally fall into the realm of either the improbable or the impossible. Comics have been left outside of this particular study, but only because although dragons occasionally become some kind of second nature of some supervillain or superhero, this is often in name alone (for example, as in Erik Larsen's *Savage Dragon*<sup>1</sup> (1982)). The particular motif of the dragon slaying is largely absent from this visual medium and those works that include it either appear only as incidental to the main story or have not achieved the general release and popularity that I find are basic to justify their inclusion here.

Whenever necessary for the illustration of some theme or motif, I will allude to some books or films other than those that are the object of direct study here. Those will be either lesser known works or not directly ascribed to the theme of the study, but which nonetheless may contribute to the general discussion.

Finally, I must add that these chapters must necessarily be shorter than the previous ones. The main reason for this is that I will be covering a much shorter span of time (about a century), as opposed to the ten centuries of British and Irish history and literature examined in the previous chapters, as well as the several millennia of general history. Nevertheless, in spite of the fewer examples of productions related to the subject matter available in the present chapter, I hope that the interest of the issues raised during their analysis will be on a par with the older ones.

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<sup>1</sup> *Savage Dragon* is a mutant who occasionally becomes a green monster with a fin on his head, but who is not particularly dragon-like.

## 4. 1. Literature

One would think that the reading of dragon tales is nowadays the province of children, and to a great extent it is. If we were to judge only from the amount of titles available in children literature that deal with the subject of the dragon (many of them, with a pseudo-zoological bent), this would be more than apparent. And yet, adults to this day still enjoy works of a similar bent unabashedly. There is something about dragons that is truly compelling to readers of all ages. Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*, the first of the works to be examined in this section, is a prime example of how a work primarily written for children may be appealing to the public at large, as are the works written by J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis in the fantastic genre. These three authors revised and revived the traditional conventions of both the British and Northern mythologies in their superb works and, after them, several generations of writers followed their lead, contributing to the genre, but at the same time striving to take a different approach to this particular motif, as well as others. The result is a body of books that stray in multiple directions from the story of reference, but which seldom do completely disregard it.

The selection presented below contains a few of the most relevant titles that were either published by authors of the British Isles or strongly referenced the culture and history of those territories, even though the authors might not be British born. These works have been divided into two categories, according to their time of publication. Although initially this may seem an entirely whimsical choice, it actually responds to the necessity to differentiate two perceived great periods in the artistic evolution of the fantastic genre, both in terms of the themes and adherence to conventions that can be detected in the books written during each interval.

#### 4. 1. 1. Literary Productions Before 1960

##### **Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon* (1898)**

The Scottish author<sup>1</sup> is mostly famous for *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), an all time classic of children's literature, but his short story *The Reluctant Dragon* comes easily as a close second<sup>2</sup>. This short story was published in his collection *Dream Days* (1898). It is a merry and lighthearted tale, but it was also instrumental in bringing the focus back to dragon stories and it helped set the basis for a new line of literary productions that redid the usual conventions of a well known genre. *The Reluctant Dragon* is a gentle satire of the dragon-slaying stories, presented through the perspective of a child who finds that he has to take charge of matters which generally are the province of the adults, even though he is but a boy and needs to be home before dinner time:

"KNEW I had forgotten something," he said. "There ought to be a Princess. Terror-stricken and chained to a rock, and all that sort of thing. Boy, can't you arrange a Princess?"

The Boy was in the middle of a tremendous yawn. "I'm tired to death," he wailed, "and I CAN'T arrange a Princess, or anything more, at this time of night. And my mother's sitting up, and DO stop asking me to arrange more things till tomorrow!" (Grahame, 1988<sup>3</sup>: 22).

Adults in this story, and dragons too, for that matter, do not behave as is expected of them. In *The Reluctant Dragon*, appearances are deceiving: the boy is the only sensible person around; the dragon is huge and endowed with large teeth and claws, but he is as gentle a creature as ever there was one, more interested in composing sonnets and discussing the merits of poetry than in engaging in the usual dragon

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Grahame (Edinburgh 1859 – Pangbourne, Berkshire 1932). A gifted writer, his short stories were hugely acclaimed when first published and they have since delighted generations of children.

<sup>2</sup> Both these works were made into animated features by Walt Disney: *The Wind in the Willows* (1949) and *The Reluctant Dragon* (1951).

<sup>3</sup> I have chosen this particular edition due to its adherence to the original text, but I will not deny that the gorgeous illustrations by Inga Moore also weighed in the decision.



activities of rampaging and skirmishing; St George arrives to slay him because that is what he is supposed to do, but even he is weary of this strenuous task of killing dragons and would much rather leave them be. However, that is not possible, for there are rules to be followed in these situations, as the boy tries to (unsuccessfully) instill in the dragon:

“(…) You see there's no getting over the hard fact that you're a dragon, is there? And when you talk of settling down, and the neighbours, and so on, I can't help feeling that you don't quite realize your position. You're an enemy of the human race, you see!”

"Haven't got an enemy in the world," said the dragon, cheerfully. "Too lazy to make 'em, to begin with. And if I DO read other fellows my poetry, I'm always ready to listen to theirs!"

"Oh, dear!" cried the boy, "I wish you'd try and grasp the situation properly. When the other people find you out, they'll come after you with spears and swords and all sorts of things. You'll have to be exterminated, according to their way of looking at it! You're a scourge, and a pest, and a baneful monster!"

"Not a word of truth in it," said the dragon, wagging his head solemnly. "Character'll bear the strictest investigation. And now, there's a little sonnet-thing I was working on when you appeared on the scene--"

"Oh, if you WON'T be sensible," cried the Boy, getting up, "I'm going off home. No, I can't stop for sonnets; my mother's sitting up. I'll look you up to-morrow, sometime or other, and do for goodness' sake try and realize that you're a pestilential scourge, or you'll find yourself in a most awful fix. Good-night!" (Grahame, 1988: 9-10).

Of course, the dragon does not pay any mind to the boy's ominous words, and soon he finds himself in a quandary when word of his existence gets round to St George and he travels to the village to do his heroic duty. The villagers, eager for a good fight and proud that such a momentous event will take place in their community, exaggerate the situation to St George and complain of the dragon having indulged in all sorts of mischief. Even after the boy has managed to talk some sense into St George, there seems to be no way of eluding the fight. Finally, in a hilarious scene, George and the dragon agree on putting up a sham so that the neighbours will be satisfied. The rules of

proper dragon fighting cannot be broken, after all, and they see that the dragon can even get some good out of it:

"St George," said the dragon, "Just tell him, please,--what will happen after I'm vanquished in the deadly combat?"

"Well, according to the rules I suppose I shall lead you in triumph down to the market-place or whatever answers to it," said St George.

"Precisely," said the dragon. "And then--"

"And then there'll be shoutings and speeches and things," continued St. George. "And I shall explain that you're converted, and see the error of your ways, and so on."

"Quite so," said the dragon. "And then--?"

"Oh, and then--" said St George, "why, and then there will be the usual banquet, I suppose."

"Exactly," said the dragon; "and that's where *I* come in. Look here," he continued, addressing the Boy, "I'm bored to death up here, and no one really appreciates me. I'm going into Society, I am, through the kindly aid of our friend here, who's taking such a lot of trouble on my account; and you'll find I've got all the qualities to endear me to people who entertain! So now that's all settled, and if you don't mind--I'm an old-fashioned fellow--don't want to turn you out, but--"

"Remember, you'll have to do your proper share of the fighting, dragon!" said St George, as he took the hint and rose to go; "I mean ramping, and breathing fire, and so on!" (Grahame, 1988: 22).

Eventually, it is the dragon's ability to play his part in the battle that endears him to the villagers, whose thirst for blood is completely satisfied in the fantastic show the dragon puts up for them, and they happily agree to George's terms of peace after the fight is over. Afterwards, a lavish meal is set, where the dragon shines with his poetry and wit. It is a happy ending all around.

St George was happy because there had been a fight and he hadn't had to kill anybody; for he didn't really like killing, though he generally had to do it. The dragon was happy because there had been a fight, and so far from being hurt in it he had won popularity and a sure footing in society. The Boy was happy because there had been a fight, and in spite of it all his two friends were on the best of terms. And all the others were happy because there had been a fight, and--well, they didn't require any other reasons for their happiness (Grahame, 1988: 45-6).

Kenneth Grahame's little tale of imagination, friendship and the overcoming of prejudices boasts one of the most endearing dragons around literature, an intelligent

creature, but completely free of malice, unlike many of his predecessors and a few of his heirs. After the publication of this text, dragons would undergo all sorts of transformations, even though dragon stories would not find a new rise until a few decades later, when J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, two extraordinarily gifted authors set their hearts on writing fantasy and heralded the most important revival of the genre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As a final note, it must be mentioned that the tale was adapted to film by Walt Disney in 1941, in a delicious experiment that includes live-action footage and a cartoon shot. The cartoon is only 20 minutes long and it follows Grahame's story rather closely, save for a few interesting changes. The first noticeable one is the inclusion of certain elements common enough in folklore stories of dragons, which are however absent from the original tale. For example, Disney's dragon does live in a cave of sorts, but it is more an artificial mound, a prehistoric burial place, than a natural cave. This is something that echoes the dragon in *Beowulf*, but also Lancelot's dragon in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and, to some extent, the folktale *Fulk Fitzwarren*, where the dragon is said to have emerged from the dead of a battlefield.

Another change is that, when the boy finds the dragon for the first time, he is taking a bath (a situation hilariously paralleled in the scene when he meets the knight, who is also taking a bath). Water, which is completely absent from the tale, is however prominent in this part of the short film, as is in most of the traditional dragon stories. However, whether the writers intended these changes as a homage to the common tropes of dragon stories or they came to be used randomly is open to speculation.

Another curious change is that the hero is not St George here, but one Sir Giles, a famous knight well past his prime who is more of a humorous element than the original George of Grahame's tale had been. I wonder whether such a significant change

may have been caused by a wish on the part of the writers to distance the character from the religious persona, given that the tone of the cartoon tends to dwell on the absurd even more than the original tale does, and therefore some viewers might have been offended to see the saint treated with such disrespect. Sir Giles, very much a comic relief in his tandem with the dragon, does not need to be treated with such ceremony.

### **J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham* and Middle Earth Legendarium**

If one were hard pressed to give only one name among the enormous amount of writers that have dealt with dragons in their works, one name that had an impact on the world of literary fantasy as no other has as of yet, I would not wonder that the unanimous answer would be J. R. R. Tolkien<sup>1</sup>. *The Hobbit* (1937) and, even more so, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5) still rank as two of the most popular works of fiction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the epitome of the subgenre of high fantasy.

Professor Tolkien had everything on his side to write a true masterpiece of the genre: as a respected philologist he had the necessary knowledge to conceive a world that was as exciting as it was rigorous in its sources; as the possessor of a tremendous imagination, he had been smart enough to have never let it rust away; and he had something even more important to bring his work into fruition: he was a natural storyteller and, to this day, his writing resonates with his readers.

But, before proceeding to the analysis of his fictional dragons, we might do well to remember the plight of Professor William Witherle Lawrence when in 1918 he decided to write an essay on the figure of the dragon in *Beowulf*. Back then, the study of

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<sup>1</sup> John Ronald Remuel Tolkien (Bloemfontein, South Africa, 1892 – Bournemouth, UK, 1973). Since his childhood, he was fascinated with the internal working of languages, and, from a young age, he was very adept at unravelling and inventing them, an ability that he would use extensively in the creation of the world of Middle Earth and that would eventually lead him to a philological career. He was a Professor in the University of Leeds and, later on, Oxford, where he served as a Professor of English Language and Literature. In addition to his hugely popular works of fiction, he was an acclaimed author of academic literary criticism and a writer of children's books (10.02.2013. <http://www.tolkiensociety.org>).

the monster was not regarded as a worthwhile topic for the serious researcher, and a few decades later, by the time Tolkien was actively writing and giving lectures, the amount of research in this field was still painfully scant. The general indifference regarding the topic was so ludicrous to Tolkien that he found the need to make a plea against the insupportable silence of scholars on the obvious relevance of the monsters in *Beowulf* in his prestigious essay “Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics” (1936), where he claims that the monsters present in the poem are essential to the narrative and that the then common approach to this work as merely a historical document rather than a poetic work was flawed (Tolkien, 2006: 5-34). In many respects, with this essay and his subsequent works on Middle Earth legendarium, he opened the doors to a whole new generation of authors. Writers of fictional works, who found inspiration in his production; and philologists, who found in him an ally and mentor and who developed a whole new area of study that had theretofore been treasured only by folklorists.

His own writings are populated by an assortment of monsters, some borrowed from popular traditions and some rather original in their conception. As to his dragons, even though they are rarely presented as central characters, their magnetism is such that any reader will instantly recognize their names and the episodes where they take part: Ancalagon, who fought by the Eagles during the War of Wrath at the end of the First Age; Glaurung and his despicable part in the fates of Túrin Turambar and Nienor in *The Silmarillion* (1977); Scatha, who plundered the gold of the dwarves in the Grey Mountains during the Third Age; Chrysophylax Dive striking a friendship of sorts with the hero in *Farmer Giles of Ham* (1949), and, above all, Smaug and his hoard of gold in the Lonely Mountain, a treasure craved by the dwarf Thorin Oakenshield and unwanted task of Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* (1937). It is a typical trace of his dragons that they are highly individualized, while never straying far from the models on which they seem

to have been molded. And what models would these be? Tolkien himself, a diligent correspondent, addressed in his letters many of the points that were being discussed about his books during his lifetime, accepting some, dismissing others, and harshly disapproving of an unfortunate few. However, he had a playful streak too, that often comes out in his writing, and a fondness for irony that comes across very often. In a letter to the editor of the *Observer*, in which he made reference to the enquiries made by a reader, he wrote: “I am as susceptible as a dragon to flattery, and would gladly show off my diamond waistcoat, and even discuss its sources” and then cheekily added “But would not that be rather unfair to the research students? To save them trouble is to rob them of any excuse for existing” (Letter 25. February 20<sup>th</sup> 1938). Therefore, we must endeavour to honour his wishes.

Much has been discussed about Tolkien’s inspiration in the Northern mythology and culture, on which he was an expert and that he directly acknowledged, even though he admitted to influences that ranged from the Classics to modern English literature. Indirectly, he was responsible for the renewal of popular interest in Scandinavian themes, but in the private letters that have been preserved he clearly states that the debt he owes to his studies does not go beyond inspiration:

I am afraid my professional knowledge is not directly used. The magic and mythology and assumed 'history' and most of the names (e.g. the epic of the Fall of Gondolin) are, alas!, drawn from unpublished inventions, known only to my family, Miss Griffiths and Mr Lewis. I believe they give the narrative an air of 'reality' and have a northern atmosphere. But I wonder whether one should lead the unsuspecting to imagine it all comes out of the 'old books', or tempt the knowing to point out that it does not? (Letter 15, to Allen and Unwin, about *The Hobbit*. August 31<sup>st</sup> 1937)

Still, many of the conventions present in the Scandinavian folklore and literature are easily traced in the several dragons that crawled their way into the main fictional works by J. R. R. Tolkien. So did his extensive knowledge on folklore, which permeates

his writing and is a key element in the composition of *Farmer Giles of Ham*, a light-hearted fantasy which is witty, learned and laidback at the same time, and I find I am profoundly jealous of the author's extraordinary talent to cleverly weave practically all the conventions analyzed in Chapter 3 to compose a brilliant piece. Much like Kenneth Grahame in *The Reluctant Dragon*, Tolkien turns the conventions of the genre topsy-turvy. In *Giles*, the king is an obnoxious greedy fellow, the knights are cowardly and full of self-importance and the true hero is a simple farmer with more than the share fare of common sense, who grudgingly accepts the task of slaying a dragon when he would much rather be going about his business. He, like Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*, is a very reluctant hero. He has a canine companion, but his dog, Garm, is as loud as he is cowardly, and proves to be a poor assistant to his master, unlike the loyal companion of the folk hero of Nunnington (*Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon*). As for the dragon, he flies and breathes fire, and keeps a fabulous hoard of gold in a cave in the North, which has gained him the name of Chrysophylax the Rich. Regarding the methods used in the fight, after a parody of the saintly taming of the dragon, incarnated on the parson that approaches Chrysophylax with the intention of dissuading him from his evil ways and ends up the dragon's supper, Giles dons a rather ridiculous set of armour and takes his sword. Luckily for him, he has received from the king (quite unwittingly, as is soon discovered) an exceptional sword, Caudimordax, or Tailbiter, an animated object that springs out of its scabbard whenever a dragon is nearby and needs only a very little prompting to start slaying on its own:

That was quite enough for Tailbiter. It circled flashing in the air; then down it came, smiting the dragon on the joint of the right wing, a

ringing blow that shocked him exceedingly. (...) Tailbiter did the best it could in inexperienced hands” (Tolkien, 1988<sup>1</sup>: 43).

Giles of Ham may be an unlikely hero, and one not at all adept at wielding the weapons used by gentility, but he has street smarts and he repeatedly outwits the dragon and bargains with him, which earns him his neighbours’ unending respect, enormous wealth and ultimately, a kingdom. In a final nod to tradition, his adventures become the matter of song and the tale a charter myth that explains much of the toponymy of this mythical country of the tale, as well as the origin of the nobility of the kingdom<sup>2</sup>. Dragon inspired ceremonies do not escape the author’s notice either, and they find a comic place in the lost custom of having Dragon’s Tail served up at the King’s Christmas Feast, which due to the growing scarcity of dragons, at the beginning of the tale had developed into a Mock Dragon’s Tail made of cake and almond-paste.

Many of these motifs find their way into Tolkien’s legendarium too. His texts on Middle Earth are full of references to dragons and descriptive passages about them abound. Of all the conventions studied, one which seems to be common to them all is the hoarding of a treasure, a central theme to *The Hobbit*, but not absent from other stories too. In *The Silmarillion*, Scatha is accounted to have a hoard, and Glaurung, who is as busy as a worm may be fighting wars and casting spells on young ladies, still finds the time to get (and lose) a hoard:

Here it must be told that after the departure of Glaurung Mim the Petty-Dwarf had found his way to Nargothrond, and crept within the ruined halls; and he took possession of them, and sat there fingering the gold

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<sup>1</sup> This edition was chosen on account of its having been published by the original publishers of the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, Allen & Unwin, reputed to be respectful of Tolkien’s work. It is also beautifully illustrated by Pauline Baynes, appointed by Tolkien himself as illustrator of several of his works (10.12.2013. <http://www.paulinebaynes.com>).

<sup>2</sup> This is paralleled in *The Silmarillion*, on a mythical scale, when the death of Ancalagon the Black, the mightiest of all dragons causes the destruction of the huge mountain of Thangorodrim: “Before the rising of the sun Earendil slew Ancalagon the Black, the mightiest of the dragon-host, and cast him from the sky; and he fell upon the towers of Thangorodrim, and they were broken in his ruin” (Tolkien, 2013: 302-3).



and the gems, letting them run ever through his hands (Tolkien, 2013<sup>1</sup>: 276).

Another common convention is the impenetrability of these monsters' hides, with the exception of some spot on their throats or bellies. During his inspection of the cave, Bilbo notices that Smaug has fashioned an odd set of armour with precious stones, save for a tiny spot over his breast, right over his heart:

"My armour is like tenfold shields, my teeth are swords, my claws spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!"

"I have always understood," said Bilbo in a frightened squeak, "that dragons were softer underneath, especially in the region of the-er-chest; but doubtless one so fortified has thought of that."

The dragon stopped short in his boasting. "Your information is antiquated," he snapped. "I am armoured above and below with iron scales and hard gems. No blade can pierce me."

"I might have guessed it," said Bilbo. "Truly there can; nowhere be found the equal of Lord Smaug the Impenetrable. What magnificence to possess a waistcoat of fine diamonds!"

"Yes, it is rare and wonderful, indeed," said Smaug absurdly pleased. He did not know that the hobbit had already caught a glimpse of his peculiar under-covering on his previous visit, and was itching for a closer view for reasons of his own. The dragon rolled over. "Look!" he said. "What do you say to that?"

"Dazzlingly marvellous! Perfect! Flawless! Staggering!" exclaimed Bilbo aloud, but what he thought inside was: "Old fool! Why there is a large patch in the hollow of his left breast as bare as a snail out of its shell!" (Tolkien, 2012: II, 52).

Glaurung, too, had a vulnerable underside, where he was stabbed in two occasions, as stated in *The Silmarillion*: the first, by Azaghal, the dwarf king of Belegost, but he survived the fight (Tolkien, 2013: 229). On the second time he perished by the hand of Túrin Turambar:

Then he drew Gurthang, and with all the might of his arm, and of his hate, he thrust it into the soft belly of the Worm, even up to the hilts. But when Glaurung felt his death-pang, he screamed, and in his dreadful

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<sup>1</sup> The choice of this edition of *The Silmarillion* (2013), as well as that of *The Hobbit* (2012), was decided on the basis of their being not only the latest available editions but also editions of reputed quality, according to the specialized websites (10.13.2013. <http://www.amazon.co.uk>, <http://www.goodreads.com>).

thro he heaved up his bulk and hurled himself across the chasm, and there lay lashing and coiling in his agony. And he set all in a blaze about him, and beat all to ruin, until at last his fires died, and he lay still (Tolkien, 2013: 265-6).

Another common feature, possibly inspired in the Northern myths is that of the different natural characteristics of dragons. Scanning Tolkien's texts, one may come across flying dragons, such as Smaug and Beowulf's dragon; the powerful Urulóki, sired by Glaurung and which, like him, are wingless fire-breathing worms, as Fafnir was; and even a particular breed of cold drakes such as Scatha the Worm, which, one assumes, are termed so because they do not breath fire, although this is never explicitly stated in the texts.

The motif of the maiden is quite rare, and it appears only in the story of Turin and Nienor, and here it is used in conjunction with another, much more common in Tolkien's writings: that of the malice of dragons and the danger of their gaze and their speech. This characteristic is found in some folktales, and is also present in the Bible where we can read:

And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he *spake as a dragon*. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed (Revelation, 13:14-15) (italics mine).

That this beast speaks as a dragon means that it has a silver tongue and can persuade others easily. Tolkien's dragons are also accounted by most characters to be extremely dangerous in their speech. In *The Silmarillion*, Glaurung often makes use of this power, along with the binding spell of his gaze (he is, after all, called The Deceiver). In *Farmer Giles of Ham* both Giles and Chrysophylax choose their words carefully, and in *The Hobbit*, Bilbo and Smaug engage in a dangerous battle of wits:

"I suppose you got a fair price for that cup last night?" he went on.  
"Come now, did you? Nothing at all! Well, that's just like them. And I

suppose they are skulking outside, and your job is to do all the dangerous work and get what you can when I'm not looking-for them? And you will get a fair share? Don't you believe it! If you get off alive, you will be lucky."

Bilbo was now beginning to feel really uncomfortable. Whenever Smaug's roving eye, seeking for him in the shadows, flashed across him, he trembled, and an unaccountable desire seized hold of him to rush out and reveal himself and tell all the truth to Smaug. In fact he was in grievous danger of coming under the dragon-spell (Tolkien, 2012: II, 49-50).

Tolkien admits to be rather fonder of Fafnir than of the Beowulf dragon, even though he was a great admirer of the poem and acknowledged it as one of his primary sources, but he admitted to have borrowed the impetus for this conversation from the Norse versions of the Sigurd story (Letter 122. December 18<sup>th</sup> 1949).

The use of extraordinary weapons to defeat the dragon is also common: Turin wields the sword Anglachel, which he renamed Gurthang, Iron of Death, against Glaurung the Golden in *The Silmarillion*. Giles of Ham was fortunate enough to have Tailbiter in his possession when he went to the encounter of Chrysophylax Dive, and the very grim and very brave Bard the Bowman uses the black arrow to bring Smaug down in *The Hobbit*. This particular feat of Bard is replicated by several folk heroes, such as St Gilbert of Dornoch (whose dragon was a speaking beast too) or the father in *The Dragon of Loch CorrieMohr*<sup>1</sup>. In fact, one would say this man and Bard might have been somewhat related, or at least that they share some common beliefs:

"Wait! Wait!" it said to him. "The moon is rising. Look for the hollow of the left breast as he flies and turns above you!" And while Bard paused in wonder it told him of tidings up in the Mountain and of all that it had heard. Then Bard drew his bow-string to his ear. The dragon was circling back, flying low, and as he came the moon rose above the eastern shore and silvered his great wings.

"Arrow!" said the bowman. "Black arrow! I have saved you to the last. You have never failed me and always I have recovered you. I had you

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<sup>1</sup> Both these legends come from Scotland.

from my father and he from of old. If ever you came from the forges of the true king under the Mountain, go now and speed well!"

The dragon swooped once more lower than ever, and as he turned and dived down his belly glittered white with sparkling fires of gems in the moon-but not in one place. The great bow twanged. The black arrow sped straight from the string, straight for the hollow by the left breast where the foreleg was flung wide. In it smote and vanished, barb, shaft and feather, so fierce was its flight. With a shriek that deafened men, felled trees and split stone, Smaug shot spouting into the air, turned over and crashed down from on high in ruin (Tolkien, 2012: II, 78-9).

Finally, regarding the consequences of the slaying, it is to be noted that a number of Tolkien's heroes perish tragically, Beowulf-like, in their fight against monsters. In early drafts of *The Hobbit* Bard was supposed to find his death in battle against Smaug, although the final text had him survive. The best incarnation of this tragic figure in Tolkien's fiction is Turin Turambar, son of Hurin. In his fierce battle against Glaurung he is victorious, but the depth of the dragon's malice reaches him and he kills himself to escape despair once he learns of the fate of Niniel. As Tolkien well knew, death by a dragon is a fitting end to a tale about the achievements of a promising young warrior, his elevation in life and his downfall by the machinations of fate.

Lately, Tolkien's texts have been subject to recreation in cinema. Following the widely acclaimed trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-3), directed by Peter Jackson, the filmmaker has embarked in another trilogy with which to cover the universe of *The Hobbit*, and of which two of the three parts have so far been released, in 2012 and 2013. Another attempt, rather more discreet, was made in the 1970s. *The Silmarillion* has never been adapted to the screen, and given its tremendous complexity, it is unlikely that it will soon be, if ever. *Farmer Giles of Ham* also remains undiscovered by the industry. As for the one film that has been released that includes the dragon conflict (or part of it), that is, *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (2013), it must be noticed that the director, Peter Jackson, has taken a few liberties with the original text. Whether they

are understandable or outrageously uncalled for, the fans of the book do not seem to decide, or at least one so gathers from the myriad of threads on the topic that are to be found on the Internet. Regarding this present study, I must say that in spite of this film's manifold attractions and undisputable aesthetic presence, it falls short on the account of the treatment of the hero: in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, the hero is, undeniably, Bilbo Baggins, the hobbit who is dragged into an unexpected and unwanted adventure with a company of dwarves. Among the many situations in which he finds himself, much to his chagrin, the encounter with the dragon stands out. Twice does Bilbo sneak into Smaug's lair. The first time, he steals a cup, much like the wanderer in *Beowulf* does, and Smaug, also mirroring his Old English relative, is enraged and feels wronged by it:

Thieves! Fire! Murder! Such a thing had not happened since first he came to the Mountain! His rage passes description (Tolkien, 2012: II, 41).

On the second occasion, Bilbo and Smaug strike a dangerous conversation, after which the hobbit barely escapes alive. Soon afterwards, the dragon leaves to attack the city of Lake.

These two scenes are blended into one in Peter Jackson's movie, with one important change: whereas in the book Bilbo is left alone in his quest, the filmic dwarves are much more mindful of his wellbeing and they enter the mountain to help him in his confrontation with the dragon. This is something that the book Bilbo would never have anticipated, for he muses:

The most that can be said for the dwarves is this: they intended to pay Bilbo really handsomely for his services; they had brought him to do a nasty job for them, and they did not mind the poor little fellow doing it if he would; but they would all have done their best to get him out of trouble, if he got into it, as they did in the case of the trolls at the beginning of their adventures before they had any particular reasons for being grateful to him. There it is: dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money; some are tricky

and treacherous and pretty bad lots; some are not, but are decent enough people like Thorin and Company, if you don't expect too much (Tolkien, 2012: II, 36-7).

So, where Tolkien's dwarves harangue Bilbo for stealing the cup and stirring up the wrath of the dragon earlier than is needed, Peter Jackson's dwarves are extremely courageous and rush into to help their little friend. Once inside the mountain, Thorin Oakenshield confronts Smaug in true heroic fashion and, in a highly cinematic scene, the dragon is covered in molten gold. This, far from killing him, enrages him even further, and he flies away to Lake.

A change of these proportions is nothing short of bizarre, and I can not account for it, other than it being a device to make Thorin Oakenshield appear as more epic than he is in the book. However, by introducing a traditional aristocratic hero, the movie robs the story of its original hero, Bilbo, who becomes a necessary companion to Thorin's greatness, when part of the charm of the original story was the central position of this very humble, and very reluctant, hero, who was often as cowardly and practical as the next hobbit, but who eventually did what was needed to fulfil his part of the bargain, or out of the need to survive.

Now, it only remains to be seen how the scenes with Bard will play out, but for that we will have to wait a little longer.

### **C. S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952)**

Even though C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>' work was not particularly dragon centred, he did create some unperishable dragon characters in his popular series *The Chronicles of Narnia*<sup>1</sup> (1949-

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis (Belfast, Ireland, 1898 – Oxford, UK 1963). He developed his academic career in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where he held the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature. A friend of J. R. R. Tolkien, who famously convinced him out of his atheism, his vast production includes both academic research and fiction (10.14.2013. <https://www.cslewis.com/uk>).

54). It is in the third volume of the series, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952) that he deals more extensively with them. In this adventure, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie, the youngest of the Pevensie siblings, and their obnoxious cousin Eustace Scrubb travel to Narnia by means of a painting of a ship they find in the Scrubbs' home. There, they enrol in a new adventure with Caspian, now King Caspian X, on board the *Dawn Treader*.

In Chapter 5, the focus of the adventure turns to Eustace Scrubbs. The reader sees him enter a cave and witness the arrival of the most formidable of monsters. The creature is, as expected, a lizard-like animal, winged and covered in scales, and it is suggested that it can breathe fire (in later passages the reader also discovers that dragons have cannibalistic tendencies). But this dragon Eustace encounters is an old specimen, and it dies a natural death even as Eustace is digesting the very fact of its existence.

Exhilarated, Eustace

almost laughed out loud. He began to feel as if he had fought and killed the dragon instead of merely seeing it die (Lewis, 1998<sup>2</sup>: 94).

Then, he took shelter from the heavy rain in the dragon's cave, completely unsuspecting of what he might find there, for

Eustace had read only the wrong books. They had a lot to say about exports and imports and governments and drains, but they were weak on dragons (Lewis, 1998: 94).

As the reader does not have that impediment in common with Eustace, it is not difficult to foresee that what he found was no other thing than a fabulous hoard of gold.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a series of seven books dealing with the fantasy world of Narnia, where four siblings of the real world travel magically in several occasions.

<sup>2</sup> I am using this edition of the book because of the avowed intention of the publishers to present a revised edition that follows the original text scrupulously, to the point that it alters presentation of the volumes to suit the order Professor Lewis preferred.



Eustace as a deeply distressed dragon (illustration: Pauline Baynes).



Almost at once, practical, down-to-earth Eustace saw the possibilities of having access to such riches in a world free of taxes, and started to evaluate how to best carry it with him. However, after a while, exhausted from the events of the day, he fell asleep. On waking up he was dismayed to discover he had turned into a dragon:

But just as he reached the edge of the pool two things happened. First of all it came over him like a thunder-clap that he had been running on all fours - and why on earth had he been doing that? And secondly, as he bent towards the water, he thought for a second that yet another dragon was staring up at him out of the pool. But in an instant he realized the truth. The dragon face in the pool was his own reflection. There was no doubt of it. It moved as he moved: it opened and shut its mouth as he opened and shut his.

He had turned into a dragon while he was asleep. Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself (Lewis, 1998: 99).

This passage is fitting, for, after all, this volume deals strongly with the theme of temptation, and how those who do not resist it may find themselves facing greater dangers than the fulfilment of their wishes can ever compensate. But a central theme is also redemption. One of the best examples of both these themes is Eustace Scrubb, who, in his greed, is metamorphosed into a dragon, but who, as soon as he discovers his power, realises that he does not really wish for it:

He was a terror himself and nothing in the world but a knight (and not all of those) would dare to attack him. He could get even with Caspian and Edmund now.

But the moment he thought this he realized that he didn't want to. He wanted to be friends. He wanted to get back among humans and talk and laugh and share things. He realized that he was a monster cut off from the whole human race. An appalling loneliness came over him. He began to see that the others had not really been friends at all. He began to wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always supposed (Lewis, 1998: 100).

The second part of the conflict as presented on the book is that of approaching his friends in his new dragon form without being slain by them, but this is also achieved with relative ease. Almost as soon as she turns up before them, Lucy recognizes this

creature for their lost cousin, Eustace, and she gives him all of her support in his plight. This compassionate approach easily reminds the reader of St Petroc, who discerned that a dragon coming towards him did not have any nefarious intentions, but instead was looking for help to draw a piece of wood out of his eye.

Soon, Eustace the dragon is up and about and anxious to prove helpful to his friends as best he can. Gradually, he becomes more pleasant to them and finds “the pleasure (quite new to him) of being liked and, still more, of liking other people” (Lewis, 1998: 110). Eventually, the realization of the error of his ways brings about the much desired recovery of his human form.

There are three immediate parallels to this story. The first one, as advanced above, is the episode in the *Völsunga Saga* where Fafnir turns into a dragon to better guard his treasure, which he has gotten through evil ways. Like Fafnir, Eustace is blinded by avarice and metamorphoses into a dragon, even though not deliberately in his case. The second parallel is the benign dragon looking for a friendly hand in the story of St Petroc. The third one is the New Testament, and the power of redemption, exemplified in the imagery of the baptism when Aslan, the lion, helps Eustace to remove his dragon skin and plunges him into a well, from which he emerges fully restored to his human form. The adventure proves to be a life changing experience for Eustace, who returns home a completely different sort of boy, to (almost) everyone’s delight<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Almost at the same time as Peter Jackson was releasing his take on *The Lord of the Rings*, director Andrew Adamson had the daunting task of doing likewise with C. S. Lewis extensive universe of Narnia. *The Chronicles of Narnia* was divided into five films, of which three have already been released (in 2005, 2008 and 2010) to great success (10.14.2013. <http://www.imdb.com>). Nevertheless, since the dragon episode in the corresponding film does not bring any novelties to be topics analysed in this study, I find that it is not necessary to dwell on it excessively.

#### 4. 1. 2. Literary Productions After 1960.

##### J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series (1997 – 2007)

The fantastic genre would soon be take a leap across the Atlantic Ocean, where writers such as Ursula Le Guin<sup>1</sup> and Anne MacCaffrey<sup>2</sup> took the baton of high fantasy, steering the old motifs into all sorts of new directions. In the British Isles, the author who uncontestedly brought back the rage for these worlds of magic and dragons was J. K. Rowling<sup>3</sup>, already at the turn of the century.

It is not an easy task to explain, or even to grasp, the extent to which the Harry Potter universe has succeeded in the last seventeen years, expanding in such a manner that it has reached practically all the fields of the entertainment industry. Audiobooks, films, video games and even theme parks have sprung out of the books written by J. K. Rowling.

The seven books of the *Harry Potter* series<sup>4</sup> were written in seven years, closely followed by the film adaptations. During that short span of time they became immensely

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<sup>1</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin (Berkeley, California 1929). She started to write at a very young age and she is a prolific writer, with more than 70 titles of miscellaneous themes and genres and dozens of literary awards. The six books that deal with her most popular subject, the realm of Earthsea are *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970), *The Farthest Shore* (1972), *Tehanu* (1990), *Tales from Earthsea* (2001) and *The Other Wind* (2001) (10.19.2013. <http://www.ursulakleuin.com>).

<sup>2</sup> Anne McCaffrey (Massachusetts 1926 – Wicklow Co., Ireland 2011). An active person, and prolific writer, she is considered a pioneer of female writing, as she was the first woman to receive a Hugo Award (1968) and a Nebula Award (1969) for her work in the genre of fantasy. She started her series on the Dragonriders of Pern in 1966. Since then, no fewer than 25 titles of the saga have been released, to the delight of her many readers. Since 2003, her middle child, Todd McCaffrey worked with her in the writing of several books, as well as writing some on his own. Nowadays, he proudly continues her legacy (10.19.2013. <http://pernhome.com/aim>).

<sup>3</sup> Joanne Rowling (Gwent, Wales, UK, 1965) met unexpected success with the Harry Potter series during 10 years, after which she turned to other genres. Recently, she published the thriller *The Cuckoo's Calling* (2013) under the nom-de-plume Robert Galbraith. She has received numerous awards, amongst which one may find the Prince of Asturias Award for Concord and France's Légion d'Honneur (10.19.2013. <http://www.jkrowling.com>).

<sup>4</sup> *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). J. K. Rowling also published three side volumes to the official books: *Fantastic*

popular (they have been translated into 67 languages, including Latin and Ancient Greek) and widely acclaimed by critics in general. The *Harry Potter* books broke record after record<sup>1</sup>. The marketing campaigns used for their promotion have always been outstanding, and hugely successful, although not exempt of controversies.

Harry Potter detractors maintain that the books borrow heavily from Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea saga, but it is possible to trace other familiar influences too. The first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) introduces Harry, a neglected eleven year old orphan who lives with his aunt and uncle (the Dursleys), and his spoiled cousin Dudley (very much like Edmund and Lucy in C. S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, although this Cinderella motif is far from being new, and it is found in a great number of other works). Soon, the reader learns that Harry is the only child of a couple of mighty wizards and that he has been summoned to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a prestigious boarding school for young wizards (here is one of the parallels with Ursula Le Guin's world of Earthsea which is often pointed out).

The books follow Harry as he grows up, starting with his first arriving in Hogwarts, where he has to deal with a number of threats in the course of his seven-year training, always with the help of his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, and with the shadow of his nemesis, Lord Voldemort, looming.

Dragons are rather incidental to the plot of the different books. They are mentioned occasionally or appear in short episodes to help advance the story, but rarely

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*Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001), *Quidditch Through the Ages* (2001) and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2007) (10.19.2013. <http://www.jkrowling.com>).

<sup>1</sup> Greatest number of books sold on the first day of publication in the UK (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*) and fastest selling book in history (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*) are but two of the most impressive examples (10.19.2013. <http://www.jkrowling.com>).

with any centrality to it. It is not until the fourth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) that a conflict of any kind with a real dragon is introduced<sup>1</sup>, and even then, the confrontation is handled in a rather dragon-friendly way.

*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* presents an exciting event for the students of Hogwarts: the Triwizard Tournament, which Harry is magically summoned to join. Against his will, he prepares for the different tasks of the prestigious tournament, all the while trying to cope with a number of problematic issues derived from it (such as his best friend's lack of support or an annoying journalist who keeps following him around). The first of the three tasks is to confront a dragon, albeit not with the intention of killing it: the dragons selected are all nesting mothers and the students need to sort out how to get past them and get hold of a golden egg. The dragons are appointed to the contestants by lot, and Harry, not completely unexpectedly, gets the most dangerous breed of all, a Hungarian Horntail<sup>2</sup>. This is a gigantic lizard-like creature that shoots fire at a range of twenty feet (although Harry's particular one does forty, of course), and the most vicious of all the breeds invented by J. K. Rowling.

Harry is a reluctant a hero as he may be, but he is also brave and determined, and he works hard to find a way to complete his task. In truth, he appears to be rather more concerned about having to perform (and possibly fail) in public than he is about the dragon itself:

He didn't know whether he was glad he'd seen what was coming or not. Perhaps this way was better. The first shock was over now. Maybe if he'd seen the dragons for the first time on Tuesday, he would have passed out cold in front of the whole school... but maybe he

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<sup>1</sup> One could anyway suggest that the dragon fight has been indirectly preserved in the constant conflict between Harry Potter and his antagonist, Draco Malfoy, whose striking name points to a symbolic dragon conflict.

<sup>2</sup> The other possible opponents are a Chinese Fireball, a Welsh Green and a Swedish Short-snout. All four of them were invented by Rowling for the world of Harry Potter.

would anyway... He was going to be armed with his wand - which, just now, felt like nothing more than a narrow strip of wood - against a fifty-foot-high, scaly, spike-ridden, fire-breathing dragon. And he had to get past it. With everyone watching (Rowling, 2000<sup>1</sup>: 288-9).

Soon enough, the appointed day arrives, and he puts into practice the plan he has devised with his friend Hermione:

He saw everything in front of him as though it was a very highly coloured dream. There were hundreds and hundreds of faces staring down at him from stands that had been magicked there since he'd last stood on this spot. And there was the Horntail, at the other end of the enclosure, crouched low over her clutch of eggs, her wings half-furled, her evil, yellow eyes upon him, a monstrous, scaly, black lizard, thrashing her spiked tail, heaving yard-long gouge marks in the hard ground. The crowd was making a great deal of noise, but whether friendly or not, Harry didn't know or care. It was time to do what he had to do... to focus his mind, entirely and absolutely, upon the thing that was his only chance.

He raised his wand.

"Accio Firebolt!" he shouted (Rowling, 2000: 309).

Harry summons his broom and uses his expertise in flying and Quidditch<sup>2</sup> playing to trick the dragon away from her nest and manages to get the egg and end his intervention practically unscathed. Soon enough he learns that his fellow contestants have all resorted to different tricks to get their eggs too:

"You were the best, you know, no competition. Cedric did this weird thing where he Transfigured a rock on the ground... turned it into a dog... he was trying to make the dragon go for the dog instead of him. Well, it was a pretty cool bit of Transfiguration, and it sort of worked, because he did get the egg, but he got burned as well - the dragon changed its mind halfway through and decided it would rather have him than the Labrador; he only just got away. And that Fleur girl tried this sort of charm, I think she was trying to put it into a trance - well, that kind of worked too, it went all sleepy, but then it snored, and this great jet of flame shot out, and her skirt caught fire - she put it out with a bit of water out of her wand. And Krum - you won't believe this, but he didn't even think of flying! He was probably the best after

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<sup>1</sup> In this particular case, I am using a first edition of the book, which I deem as preferable, whenever possible.

<sup>2</sup> Quidditch is a game at which Harry Potter excels, invented by J. K. Rowling as a pastime and sport for young wizards.

you, though. Hit it with some sort of spell right in the eye. Only thing is, it went trampling around in agony and squashed half the real eggs - they took marks off for that, he wasn't supposed to do any damage to them" (Rowling, 2000: 314).

None of the young wizards are lacking in imagination, to say the least. Neither is their author. The breeds introduced by J. K. Rowling tend to be as varied as she can manage. Thus, one may come across a Norwegian Ridgeback, which looks slightly like a dog, a rather small Peruvian Vipertooth or a huge Ukrainian Ironbelly. Another interesting feature is that they are all given different abilities and natures: some would never attack a human, others (like the Hungarian Horntail, by the way) are terribly violent. She also enjoys adding some notes of zoological interest (the Romanian Longhorn is on the brink of extinction, the Norwegian Ridgeback's rate of growth is very fast, the Swedish Short-snout breathes blue fire, etc). It is interesting to notice too that there is some sensibility expressed towards these dragons, however dangerous, as the contestants are forbidden to harm either the creatures or their eggs. This marks a considerable change in their fictional treatment, and one that will prove to be a constant tendency in other works of the same period, as will soon be seen.

As regards the possible influence of works of related literature or folklore in Rowling's work, it is evident that she uses many of the common conventions of the genre: fire breathing, flying creatures, and of great ferocity, these serpents might feature in most of the stories that were presented in chapters 2 and 3. The motif of the golden egg may also remind the reader of the Icelandic belief that if one places some gold in an eagle's nest, dragons will hatch from those eggs. Nevertheless, Rowling's attention to conventional dragon lore is focused on reversing it, rather than on reproducing it. This is the reason why, even though they retain their most recognizable traits, her dragons are constructed in such a way as to be physically differentiated from the usual dragon in the

fairy tales. It is also the reason why she takes pains to have all four contestants use methods to approach their respective dragons that are as outlandish as to make them unrecognizable to the usual dragon-story reader.

Critics usually point out that one of the keys of the success of Rowling's series is that her books are not rigidly targeted, and therefore are enjoyed by children and young adults equally. The universality of the themes treated in the different story arcs is also a clue to their appeal (the coming of age, the overcoming of prejudice, and, very centrally, death). Its cultural impact has also been enormous, and the Harry Potter fandom is very active, even years after the release of the last novel and film adaptation<sup>1</sup>.

### **Naomi Novik's *Temeraire* Series (2006 - )**

The American author Naomi Novik<sup>2</sup> stepped into the fantasy genre in 2006 with a surprising remake of the dragon conventions. Of her work, the American author Terry Brooks said that "just when you think you've seen every variation possible on the dragon story, along comes Naomi Novik to prove you wrong" ([www.temeraire.org](http://www.temeraire.org), 10.21.2013). How exactly does she succeed in this daunting task? For one, she takes the action to uncharted territory in the fantasy world: the Napoleonic Wars.

The first book of series<sup>3</sup> (she is currently working on the ninth) is *His Majesty's Dragon* (2006), where the reader is introduced into an alternative world in which

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<sup>1</sup> Warner Bros. released one film per each of the Harry Potter books between 2001 and 2011 (10.19.2013. <http://www.imdb.com>). The *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* filmic version was released in 2005, and it was, as all of them usually were, rather faithful to the original. The scene with the Hungarian Horntail dragon is fantastically executed, thanks to the contemporary seemingly all powerful special effects. The creature presented in the film is a large *wyvern* with a spiky head, delightfully ferocious and with a long range for fire spitting, and it puts Harry into considerable more trouble in their aerial combat than its written counterpart, probably for the sake of visual entertainment.

<sup>2</sup> Naomi Novik (New York, 1973). Her *Temeraire* Series have made her a bestselling novelist and the winner of the 2007 Compton Crook Award in the science fiction and fantasy category (10.21.2013. <http://naominovik.livejournal.com>, <http://www.temeraire.org>).

<sup>3</sup> The novels published so far are *His Majesty's Dragon* (2006), *Throne of Jade* (2006), *Black Powder War* (2006), *Empire of Ivory* (2007), *Victory of Eagles* (2008), *Tongues of Serpents* (2010), *Crucible of Gold*



dragons are a real species and have been tamed in Europe since the times of the Roman Empire (and much prior to that in the countries of the far East). Europe is in the middle of a cruent war, and dragons are indispensable to the Aerial Corps of all countries, England and France among them.

A great part of the appeal of this work is how the author manages to seamlessly introduce an element so foreign to the usual stories of Regency England, and how it is presented as something that has always been in existence, but which still clashes against the well ordered world of the English gentry (dragon riders are practically social castaways, in spite of the service they render the nation, because, due to the particular nature of their duties, they function on the fringes of polite society and cannot hope to keep acquaintances other than those formed within the Aerial Corps). Novik starts the story masterfully, with the introduction of a moral conflict: after a naval battle, the English ship *HMS Reliant* captures the French frigate *Amitié*, and a dragon egg is found on board. Given that the egg is about to hatch and dragons form an immediate bond with their riders as soon as they are born and harnessed, the main human character, Captain William Laurence, finds himself morally forced to accept an unwanted position as rider when the dragon dismisses the sailor elected by lot to be his rider and turns to him instead. As an outsider to the Aerial Corps, the reader gradually learns about his new position alongside him, while at the same time he shares his impressions on Temeraire's (the dragon) growth and development.

Naomi Novik's dragons vary inasmuch as there are different breeds, artificially manipulated along the centuries to come up with the most adequate dragons for each task. Thus, some are huge and can carry dozens of men, while others have the size of a

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(2012) and *Blood of Tyrants* (2013). Her ninth book will be published with the title *League of Dragons* (10.21.2013. <http://naominovik.livejournal.com>).

cow. Very few of them breathe fire and all of them fly. In England, the most valued breed is the Longwings, who spit fire and are only ridden by women. As for Temeraire, it is explained early in the first book that he is an oriental breed (a Celestial), and therefore he has some features different from those favoured in the European breeding grounds:

The Chinese had been breeding dragons for thousands of years before the Romans had ever domesticated the wild breeds of Europe (...).  
“(...) The Chinese breed first for intelligence and grace; they have such overwhelming air superiority they do not need to seek such abilities in their lines. Japanese dragons are far more likely among the Oriental breeds to have any special offensive capabilities” (Novik, 2006<sup>1</sup>: 62)

Here, Novik shows that she is aware of the opposed views of dragons in European and Oriental folklore. European dragons are almost always feral predators, whereas the Oriental ones tend to be benign creatures. Along with this general knowledge, she also proves that she is familiar with the usual conventions of European and, more particularly, British lore. This can be observed in the following examples:

All dragons in Novik’s world are talking dragons. This is a feature that, as has been seen, is fairly common, and found in some stories of saints, such as those of St Gilbert of Dornoth and St Murrough, as well as in folktales, as is seen, for instance, in *Martin and the Dragon*. What is probably their most suggestive and original characteristic in this respect is that they have a human sort of intelligence, with some breeds being more clever or simple or more prone to philosophizing (Temeraire) than others.

Another coincidence with the traditional dragon is that the specimens in the *Temeraire* series are inordinately fond of gold and other forms of shiny metals and

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<sup>1</sup> I am using here a first edition of the book.

stones. Very early in their relationship, Laurence finds that Temeraire shares this fondness too, when the dragon spots a peculiar stone and asks him about it excitedly:

“No, it is just pyrite, but it is very pretty, is it not? I suppose you are one of those hoarding creatures,” Laurence said, looking affectionately up at Temeraire; many dragons had an inborn fascination with jewels or precious metals. “I am afraid I am not rich enough a partner for you; I will not be able to give you a heap of gold to sleep on” (Novik, 2006: 54).

Laurence may be reminiscing here about the *Beowulf* poem, which is the best example of this sort of behaviour in dragons. Not long after this episode, he buys Temeraire a golden chain, which makes him extremely happy.

Finally, Temeraire is described as being fond of the water, which soon is discovered to be a common trait among dragons, albeit a generally ignored one. I am reluctant to consider this as something other than a trope included for the sake of adding some lighthearted episodes to the story, but at the same time I can not but remember all the numerous instances of dragons, both in legends and literary works, that are found living in the water, or near some water sources, and ponder whether the author may have been influenced by this common notion to some extent.

On the whole, it must be said that Novik's work makes for a very enjoyable reading, punctuated with interesting elements that suggest some well grounded investigation of the classical sources and folklore accounts, as seen above, but at the same time varying some of the basic elements of the traditional stories. The most obvious one is that the author took the general convention of evil dragons and turned it to have them become the most important of allies to the humans, a sort of extremely powerful air force, extremely loyal to their riders, and a fantastic help in their fights against a variety of foes, so much so that the conflict in this work is not between dragons and humans, but rather between nations with access to a dragon force. In any

sort of battle, manageable dragons that one may ride are deemed exceptionally valuable, and with good reason. Even when riding them is out of the question, having a tamed dragon on one's side is a powerful inducement to their capture, and this is a motif explored by some of the authors towards whom we will be turning next<sup>1</sup>.

### **Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon* Series (2003 - )**

In the past few years, Cressida Cowell<sup>2</sup> has managed to write nine books out of the twelve titles planned for the *How to Train Your Dragon* series, and she has been involved in the production of three Pixar films loosely based on them, of which the first one, released in 2010, was a brilliant success.

Cowell's books have a great appeal for children, because of a set of characters any child will easily identify with or recognise (the boy who does not fit in, the bully, the clueless but supporting father, etc); their silly, slightly on the gross side, humour; and the universality of their themes (the struggle of a boy to reach manhood and fill in his expected role in society). That there are dragons galore in them does not hurt either.

Hiccup, Cressida Cowell's main character, is the best example of an unlikely hero taken to the extreme. He is the son of a Viking chief, and it is expected of him that he will one day become the leader of the tribe, but he is, in truth, the laughingstock of the island of Berk, and his comrades do not hesitate to humiliate him, even when in the presence of adults (who are actually of the same mind, with the exception of Hiccup's father and grandfather, who have great faith in him):

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<sup>1</sup> The rights of Novik's books have recently been bought and a high budget film is expected to be released in the immediate future, directed by Peter Jackson (10.26.2013. <http://www.imdb.com>).

<sup>2</sup> Cressida Cowell (London, 1966) is a successful illustrator and writer of children's books. Her fond memories of childhood holidays spent on a small, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland, where she indulged in exploration, dragon hunting and writing are acknowledged by the author as her chief inspiration for the saga of the Berk Vikings (10.26.2013. <http://www.cressidacowell.co.uk>).

You have probably guessed by now that Hiccup was not your natural Viking Hero.

For a start, he didn't LOOK like a Hero. Somebody like Snotlout, for instance, was tall, muscley, covered in skeleton tattoos, and already had the beginnings of a small moustache (...).

Hiccup was on the small side and had the kind of face that was almost entirely unmemorable. He DID have Heroic Hair, which was a very bright red and stood up vertically however much you tried to wet it down with seawater. But nobody ever saw that because it was hidden under his helmet most of the time.

You would NEVER have picked Hiccup out of those ten boys to be the Hero of this story (Cowell, 2010<sup>1</sup>: 24-5)

(...)

"Anyway," said Old Wrinkly, "it might be just what this Tribe needs, a change in leadership style. Because the thing is, times are changing. We can't get away with being bigger and more violent than everybody else any more. IMAGINATION. That's what they need and what you've got. A Hero of the Future is going to have to be clever and cunning, not just a big lump with overdeveloped muscles (Cowell, 2010: 73-4)

Hiccup, an intelligent boy, is acutely aware that he is not up to the general standards of the tribe, much less to become a proper leader. The first book of the series deals with his struggle to overcome his shortcomings, and be accepted as an equal. Unfortunately for him, he will have to achieve this "the hard way".

Very much like the boy in Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon* and the Pevensie children of C. S. Lewis' *The Narnia Chronicles*, Hiccup has spent quite some time studying the creatures, and as a result he knows more about dragon lore than the average Viking boy. This knowledge will come in handy in the many difficult situations he will have to face in the course of his adventures and most of all to help him bond with his own dragon, Toothless.

Cowell imagines a whole zoological study of dragons. Basing her creations on real animals of the natural world, and adding a sprinkle of the basics of the Theory of

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<sup>1</sup> The reason of my selecting this 2010 edition is merely because at the time it was not possible to locate an earlier one.

the Evolution, she comes up with a number of different creatures, all of them adapted to the medium where they are supposed to breed and with varying degrees of ferocity, intelligence and adaptability to the Vikings' needs:

Although I really enjoyed books about dragons as a child, such as Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, I always wondered why they always seemed to look the same, like a big green lizard with wings. Surely dragons would have developed along the same lines as dinosaurs, into all sorts of different species, especially adapted to their environments in different ways? I have great fun creating all these species. I mix up different real-life creatures to make a new fantastical animal. For instance, in *How to Break a Dragon's Heart*, I had a giant Bee-eating dragon that was a mixture of a Basking shark and a giant ray. It glided through the treetops with its mouth permanently open, to catch bees rather than plankton. And then there are chameleon dragons, and see through dragons, and dragons with horns on the ends of their noses like narwhals...great big Seadragons many, many times larger than a Tyrannasaurus Rex, and teeny little nanodragons no bigger than your fingernail (10.26.2013. <http://www.howtotrainyourdragonbooks.com>).

But even with all these possible variations, all dragons fall into similar patterns: they are all reptilian, they have the ability of flying and breathing fire, their gaze is hypnotic and their intelligence is higher than the average animal, due to which they have developed the power of speech (they even have a language in common, Dragonese, which is within the range of human studies). They are also malicious, fond of jokes and riddles, and some of them have a cannibalistic streak.

These are features that are far from new. Aside from the very common traits of being reptilian, flying and breathing fire, the hypnotic gaze is found in such specimens as those present in the universal stories of Perseus and Medusa and Gilgamesh and Humbaba, and the motif may have reached Cowell through the use that J. R. R. Tolkien makes of it in *The Hobbit*, which she acknowledges as an influence to her work (10.26.2013. <http://www.howtotrainyourdragonbooks.com>). The same can be said of the dragon's malice and fondness of riddles with which to entrap its prey. As for the power of speech, this is a feature that is present in several folktales. For instance, the

Sutherland dragon engaged in conversation with St Gilbert of Dornoth before being pierced through the heart with a deadly arrow. And, in Ireland, St Murrough outwitted Paiste, another talking dragon, and tricked him into lying on the ground to be bound. Others, such as the serpents found by St Columba or St Petroc, understood human speech.

The main dragon character, Toothless, belongs to one of the most common breeds created by Cowell (Common or Garden). He is smaller than average, and, although clever, he is quite contrary, and very selfish, as all dragons are supposed to be, which gives Hiccup some hard times when he is trying to tame and train him<sup>1</sup>. However, in the end Toothless reveals a fondness for Hiccup that is essential in the resolution of the final battle. The Green Death and the Purple Death, the two huge sea serpents that threaten the Viking island in those last scenes seem to have been borrowed from the Mester Stoor Worm, or the Norse myth of Jörmungandr. Like Jörmungandr, they have been inactive in a lengthy slumber for a very long time, but when they wake up, they are a threat of such magnitude that every living creature, down to limpets, flees the area. Like the Mester Stoor Worm, they are so large that there is no creature that poses a threat to them. Also in a twist that reminds the reader of this folktale of the Orkney Islands, the hero needs to be swallowed by the dragon (The Green Death) to have any possibility of triumphing over it. In *The Mester Stoor Worm*, young Assipattle sails into the worm's body and, once inside, he cuts a hole in his liver and stuffs a peat into the wound. The monster's liver burns and he dies in great torment. In *How to Train Your Dragon*, Hiccup is devoured by The Green Death, but he survives hanging from a spear stuck on the dragon's throat. There, he sees the holes through which the fire of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cressida Cowell has acknowledged that Toothless is based mostly on a cat, although he also has some dog-like characteristics (10.26.2013. <http://www.howtotrainyourdragonbooks.com>).

dragon comes out and finds that the horns of his Viking helmet fit exactly in the two holes, which causes the monster to first coil in distress and then explode, a little in the way of St Margaret's dragon, but on a much larger scale, naturally.

Finally, of the motifs established and explored in Chapter 3, I must remark on the fact that there is no maiden in *How to Train Your Dragon*, at least not in the books. However, a girl does play an important part in the film version of the series, as will be seen in the section on cinema, for the changes incurred in in the film are as great as to make possible to consider it as a standalone work.

### **George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996 - )**

This incredibly popular modern saga by the American author George R. R. Martin<sup>1</sup> has successfully updated the genre of Medieval fantasy, and the recent HBO series<sup>2</sup> based on the books are making the story wildly popular, even though it has long had a considerable fandom.

The story is structured into a series of seven books<sup>3</sup>, five of which have been published so far. There are also several novellas that spring from the same story (these include a cookbook and a Tyrion Lannister quotation volume).

The author has a reputation for writing science fiction and horror stories for Hollywood and TV shows, but *A Song of Ice and Fire* was, reportedly, his first attempt at epic fantasy. With this work, he intended to put the general conventions of the genre to the test, infusing some realism into it, in the form of explicit sexuality, extreme

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<sup>1</sup> George R. R. Martin (New Jersey, 1948). He started writing at a young age and has been professionally writing since 1979, both for publishing and for the entertainment industry, and he has an impressive number of fantasy awards on his shelves (10.27.2013. <http://www.georgerrmartin.com>).

<sup>2</sup> *A Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011). Four seasons have been filmed so far (10.27.2013 <http://www.hbo.com/game-of-thrones#>, <http://www.imdb.com>)

<sup>3</sup> *A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1998), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast for Crows* (2005), and *A Dance with Dragons* (2011). Two more are planned but not yet written: *The Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring*. In this study I am using the first editions of the published works.



violence and an ample variety of gritty references and layered characters. The result is a story that seems to be grounded on realism, in which the author does not squirm from the most ruthless aspects of the war nor of the base or psychopathic impulses of many of his characters. The resulting hyperrealism and mature themes makes it certainly not apt for everyone.

It has been noted that the story bears remarkable similarities to many episodes of the British history, significantly, the Wars of the Roses, and this has already given rise to interest on the part of scholars, such as Dr. Cristina Mourón Figueroa. Martin himself has declared to have been inspired by the Wars of the Roses, the Crusades and several other events of medieval Europe. He has also acknowledged to have been greatly influenced by Tolkien's work, specially as regards the structure of the story and the treatment of story arcs (10.27.2013. <http://www.georgerrmartin.com>), and it is rather noticeable that at times he seems to be particularly mindful of the British author's work, either as inspiration or with the intent of straying as far from it as he possibly can. In either case, it seems it has become quite impossible to escape Tolkien.

He also proves that he is familiar with the usual dragon traditions. Evidence of this influence is found in the names applied to various objects, where their power is validated by their reference to dragons. For example, *dragonbone* is a material highly sought after by artisans for the making of bows (for it is flexible and fireproof), and the only weapon with which to kill a White Walker (a sort of zombie-like all-powerful humanoids) must be made of *dragonglass*, a common name for obsidian, a form of volcanic glass which, in Martin's universe, is found mainly on Dragonstone island. Dragonstone is the ancestral seat of House Targaryen in the books, who are closely associated with dragons and fire. Everything Valyrian-related is also of great value in the books. According to the backstory of the narration, the Valyrian community

discovered dragons at some point of the distant past. The Valyrians eventually tamed the dragons and, at the same time, became skilled at sorcery and metallurgy. This made them invincible conquerors and, using the dragons as both steeds and weapons, they soon expanded west and took the whole of Westeros (the fictional island where most of the action of the novels take place, and which appears to be based on, or at least likened to, Britain). During nearly 5,000 years, the Valyrian freehold was the most advanced civilization of the world (it is still presented as such even at the time of the narration, when all traces of their civilization have either been lost or diluted). Still, those elements which survive are either extremely powerful (Valyrian steel, Valyrian fire) or remarkably prestigious (the Valyrian language).

The first novel of the series, *A Game of Thrones* (1996) presents the main dragon-related character of Martin's universe. It is a woman, Daenerys Targaryen, last of her house (or at least, last of her house once her brother is ruthlessly executed by her husband and for a long time, until other survivors of her family are revealed). From the very first chapters, she is described as having an exceptional resistance to high temperatures, which marks her as true "dragon blood". She receives an expensive wedding gift of three fossilized dragon eggs (dragons are, at this particular time in the story, believed to have been extinct for several generations). Eventually, she manages to have the three eggs hatch and three dragonets<sup>1</sup> come out of their shells, instantly taking Daeneris as some sort of mother figure. The manner in which these three dragons are born reminds one instantly of the Scottish legend of St Gilbert of Dornoch, that tells

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<sup>1</sup> She names her three dragons after deceased people who have been close to her: Drogon is named after Khal Drogo, her late husband; Rhaegal and Viserion, after Rhaegar Targaryen and Viserys Targaryen, her brothers.

how, in Sutherland, a seven-year fire produced a dragon, who almost at once started to ravage the country.

Daenerys' dragons are very close to the usual archetypes. They feed on milk when they are little, have a dinosaur-looking appearance and bat wings, fly and spit fire at will (or rather, at Daenerys' command). They are pure animal strength, wild powerful beings. There is no wisdom, or even apparent conscience in them, although they seem to understand basic vocal commands, like dogs. They are also intrinsically related to magic and seasons, and thus their disappearance from Westeros is believed to have caused winters to grow colder. Of all these features, the one that appears to be a whimsical invention on the part of the writer is Daenerys' breastfeeding of the creatures, and yet the folklore connoisseur will know at once that Martin was not quite giving wings to some morbid fantasies, but rather absorbing a characteristic that is common in folktales. The Bisterne dragon was fond of milk (see Appendix A: *The Bisterne Dragon*), and so were the John Aller dragon, the Lambton Worm, the Laidley Worm of Spindleston Huegh and the Sexhow Worm (See Appendix A: *John Aller and the Dragon, The Lambton Worm and The Sexhow Worm*).

As for their appearance, they also follow the usual conventions: they are scaled reptilians with long tails and necks. The filmic dragons could technically be called *wyverns*, since they have only two legs (they use their wings as forelegs). In the books they are described as having two legs and two foreclaws. They also have black teeth and bones, which is explained as a consequence of the high content of iron in their systems. They are horned and have different colour patterns (the three dragons in the books are black and red, green and bronze, and cream and gold). Fire is an intrinsic part of their nature, to the point that heat emanates from them at all times and they spit it at a considerable distance, with a fine aim. Their fire is also hotter than regular fire, but,

ironically, they are known to have succumbed to sustained arrow fire and poison, although, aside from this, they have very few vulnerabilities. They grow at a slow rate, but they are believed to live several centuries.

The dragon species in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is said to be native to the fictional continent of Essos, where they were discovered by the Valyrians. After the extinction of the dragons, many attempted to hatch the existing petrified eggs, with little to no success. Even when Daenerys Targaryen managed to hatch her three dragon eggs in her husband's funeral pyre, it was something of a side effect, as that was not her original intention.

In *A Feast for Crows*, the fourth book of the series, another creature is mentioned, the *firewyrms*. Not much is said of them, only that they are also creatures of fire, as dragons are, but having no wings or legs at all, much like the wyrms found in folklore and literature (such as Fafnir, for example). But they do not play much of a role in the series (not, at least, in what has been published so far), and appear only as creatures of old tales.

The story as published finishes the dragon section with the three dragons being large and rather intractable, Daenerys being completely unable to tame them and with few people knowing how to approach their training<sup>1</sup>. The conflicts so far arise from Daenerys' command, using them as weapons against her enemies, but given that she is growingly insecure as to their evolution, it is to be expected that in the coming titles they will cause a great deal of trouble. Targaryen history also suggests that at some point they will become mounts for some human character or other. In the context of this

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<sup>1</sup> Tyrion Lannister is the only character that has been revealed so far to have some knowledge on dragon training, which leads the reader to speculate that he is to have some related role in future episodes of the saga.

work, they appear to receive the same treatment as in the universes of Anne McCaffrey, Christopher Paolini and Naomi Novik, that is, in the historical context as explained in the text they were used as steeds, a powerful air force with which the Targaryens dominated Westeros.

Finally, the present time frame of the novels introduces an interesting turn, that of the dragons controlled by a woman, which probably stems from the traditional motif of the dragon and the maiden. The plot structure may remind us of the story of St Margaret, in which the maiden starts the story as a victimized figure, where the villains are human, and achieves freedom and power by her command of dragons, or even those of St George and St Martha, where it is the maiden that has the power to subdue the dragon that was threatening the neighbourhood. It will also remind some of the very similar tale of Maud, the little girl from Hamton Bishop (Herefordshire) who raised a baby dragon on milk and the creature grew to become a threat to the community, sparing only Maud, much like it happens with Daenerys at this point of the story. The enigma now is where her story arc is heading<sup>1</sup>, and whether the ruthlessness she shows in some of her decisions point to a character development which increasingly proves her as morally ambiguous or as having inherited the madness that runs in her family or whether, on the other hand, she is to become a leader of armies and saviour of Westeros against the threat of the White Walkers. However, in view of how fond Martin is of throwing his readers off balance, any other result is also plausible.

The titles explored above are a few of the most influential works produced by English-speaking authors in the last century, who seem to have had their hands full with dragons of all sorts. But this phenomenon is not exclusive of the English-speaking

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding this, speculation on the Internet runs rampant.

world, and it can be traced in productions from other countries. The German author Michael Ende introduced dragon riding as a practical way of transport in *The Neverending Story* (1979); the Spanish writer Laura Gallego explored the communion of the hero and the dragon in her very successful series of *The Idhún's Memories* (2004-6); and, also in Spain, Gema Bonnín's *La dama y el dragon* (2012) is a decent attempt at fantasy with some interesting role reversals. From their examination it is easy to glean how the motif of the dragon conflict has developed. It appears to me that most of the authors or the genre, while keeping to a certain extent a part of the traditional features, also try hard to make their creations somewhat unique. Naturally, authors like to write their productions in a way that they are as exceptional as possible, to have them stand the test of time. After all, historically, it is exceptionality that marks genius. However, these changes often operate at a more subconscious level, in the sense that they often mirror social changes. This is even more apparent in cinema productions, which, as will soon be seen, are as keen on achieving the mark of originality as their written counterparts.

## **4. 2. Cinema and Media**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the happy era that witnessed the development of a number of new technological achievements. One of these would become central to how we plan our leisure time, but also to the way in which we view the world around us. The introduction of cinema and the rapid creation of a film industry opened a whole new world of possibilities to viewers, who suddenly had access to places and creatures that had theretofore only been possible in art and imagination.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, cinema resembles folklore in that it absorbs the tendencies of the social environment and translates them into stories that,

using a recognizable set of tropes and motifs, explain the source material and shed light on the viewers' fears and desires. And, of course, there must be room for the creativity of both the scriptwriter and the director. Maybe the main difference with the traditional folktales is that, while in the past literary authors used folkore as a source for materials, nowadays this influence seems to go both ways, and therefore we have literary productions that inspire films as well as authors who are enriched by their cinematic experiences. However, interestingly, both refer ultimately to a common cultural background that was once shaped and transmitted through folktales. Thus, it can not come as a surprise that many of the filmed productions tend to recreate themes that have been covered by literature since the Classical Age, at the very least, or that the same storylines are used over and over. There is nothing new under the sun in this respect, and yet, these conventional plots and motifs are occasionally explored with the intention of conveying different meanings. Thus, old poems and books are used as inspiration, and modern productions come alive on the screen, but it is often done in a tangential way, and the reasons behind the choices that come into play are simply fascinating.

Alongside cinema, a whole range of new channels of narration have emerged at a vertiginous rate. Many of them based on visual recreations, for example, comic and television and, by the turn of the century, videogames and the Internet. The invention of cinema preceded the phenomenon of mass culture, in which a majority of the population had access to virtually the same information and the same tales and images. The 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to have been a succession of giant leaps in the conception of art and culture.

All the usual genres, as well as a few new ones, found their place in the emerging media. The genre of fantasy was, from the start, a winner, and a plethora of

stories, both old and new, elbowed their way into the fashionable narrative novelties, eager to exhibit themselves.

Regarding the present topic, there is a fair amount of films that boast dragon characters. Not all of them can be said to possess the same filmic quality, but since it is not the object of this study to elucidate on that, for this specific analysis I will concentrate on those productions that meet the following conditions:

- They must be original works, or, if based on a literary work, they ought to be as different from the source material as to deserve attention as a different production.
- They must either be set on the territory of the British Isles, or be culturally based on their history and folklore.
- They must be relevant in the context of filmic productions, to exert some level of influence in the development of the genre and the general view of the topic explored.
- Naturally, the dragon character must be central to the plot.

With these requirements in mind, the quantity of titles to examine thins down considerably. However, it must be noted that, even though they explore British subjects, almost the entirety of these productions were made in the United States and, as such, they must reflect to some extent the values of that country that are exported to the rest of the Western world.

The titles have also been organized according to whether the stories were based on literary or legendary tales or whether, on the contrary, they came from original scriptwriters. However, in this last group, only those filmic productions that stray from the source material enough to be regarded as new creations will be considered. The occasion for this differentiation is that it will be interesting to observe how well-known



stories are modified on the screen, and what these changes suggest about the aim of the filmmakers and the response of the audience.

#### **4. 2. 1. Original Productions**

As mentioned above, the genre of fantasy and, more specifically, the subgenre of “sword and sorcery” has produced innumerable examples of films, many of them branded as B movies, and a lucky few handsomely budgeted. The three instances examined here belong to this last category, having been lavishly provided for by the studios, a fact that was instrumental in their having much more ample release and improved their potential exposition to the audience. As a consequence, they are not only popular worldwide, but also considered as some of the most important dragon-themed movies by both users and critics.

##### ***Dragonslayer* (Matthew Robbins, 1981)**

*Dragonslayer*<sup>1</sup> is one of the many films released during the eighties that may be grouped under the heading “sword and sorcery”. These productions were set in a pseudo-medieval realm, where the elements of ancient myths and folklore generally dominate the plot. Partly inspired by J. R. R. Tolkien’s books, the plots presented profited from the fact that the Dark Middle Ages are regarded as a historical mist by the audience at large, and therefore every narrative choice about this era, however outrageous, seems easy to justify. In these productions, magic and monsters are the order of the day, as are the bold and skilled warriors and impossibly evil villains that oppose them. The genre is exploited by the mediums of videogames and comics, usually

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<sup>1</sup> *Dragonslayer* (1981): “A King has made a pact with a dragon where he sacrifices virgins to it, and the dragon leaves his kingdom alone. An old wizard, and his keen young apprentice volunteer to kill the dragon and attempt to save the next virgin in line - the King’s own daughter” (10.28.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082288>).

to great success. Another film in this category, this one featuring a dragon fight, and which will be briefly mentioned in the next sections, is *Willow*<sup>1</sup>, which explores a number of similar themes to *Dragonslayer*, such as the importance of magic in these alternate medieval worlds or the young wizard who comes into his powers as the adventure progresses.

The film *Dragonslayer* was directed by Matthew Robbins and it holds the dubious honour of being rather controversial during its time. This was mainly due to its dark and gritty tone, graphic portrayal of violence and adult themes. Naturally, this would not be noteworthy if this were not a family-friendly rated Walt Disney film, but even if it were not so, few viewers have forgotten the crude scene where the princess gets devoured by the little dragons. This being said, it also boasts one of the most iconic dragons ever brought to the screen, Vermithrax Pejorative, a formidable fire-breathing villain who, even at the end of her days, can bring terror to a whole kingdom.

The action is set in the fictional medieval kingdom of Urland, which seems to have been created in imitation of England. At the beginning of the movie, the area has been terrorized by a dragon, the very daunting Vermithrax Pejorative, for a span of time that nears 400 years. Twice a year, a virgin girl is selected by lot and offered as a sacrifice to the monster to appease her appetite.

The film starts when Galen Bradwarden, a young wizard-in-training, finds himself forced by a series of events to travel to Urland to try to rid the country of the threat of the dragon by sealing the entrance to her lair, but he fails. Soon after, Princess

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<sup>1</sup> *Willow* (1988): "In the dungeons of the castle of the evil Queen-sorceress Bavmorda, a prisoner gives birth to a child who, according to an ancient prophecy, will put an end to the reign of the Queen. A midwife saves the child from the wrath of Bavmorda, but is forced to throw her cradle in a river when reached by the Hounds of the Queen. The river brings the child near a village of *nelwyns* (a race of small people), and little Willow finds and adopts her. When the Hounds reach the village, Willow begins a difficult journey to bring the baby back to her people and to fulfill the prophecy" (10.28.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096446/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096446/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

Elsbeth, outraged that her name has always been kept out of the lot since she became of age and therefore sacrificing material, arranges it so that she is indisputably chosen as the next maiden to be offered to Vermithrax. Her father, the king, entreats Galen to save her, and, in order to do so, the young wizard and his new friend Valerian work together to create a set of particularly powerful weapons with which to fight the dragon: an enchanted spear and a shield made of dragon scales. However, there is little they can do to save the princess for, as they arrive to the dragon's lair, she is already being eaten by the dragon's brood. Galen kills the dragonets, but fails to do more than wound Vermithrax. Only his deceased master will be able to help him dispose of the dragon, in a completely bewildering scene in which he is resurrected, transports himself to the dragon's lair and, on Galen's destruction of his amulet, explodes, killing Vermithrax.

In a twist that takes us all the way back to *Tristram and Isolde*, the king arrives, runs the dead dragon through with his sword and claims the glory for himself, but, unlike in the poem, here the true hero does not raise a finger to prove otherwise. He is content to leave the kingdom behind with his lover, Valerian (who happens to be a maiden in disguise). The last scenes of the film serve to state the end of an age and the beginning of another, as the people of Urland embrace Christianity.

The film was considered a commercial failure, but it gradually achieved the status of cult classic. The creation of Vermithrax is even nowadays regarded as one of the best dragons ever seen on a screen. However, critics generally found that it borrowed too heavily from the same themes found in *Star Wars*, as well as the modern psychology that seemed to rule the decisions of the main characters (10.28.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082288>).

*Dragonslayer* borrows a number of motifs from well known stories of the genre that deals with dragon fantasies, not least of which is the very obvious reference to

*Tristram and Isolde* that may be observed in the appearance of the *false hero* that claims the victory over the dragon. In *Dragonslayer* it is the king of Umland. In *Tristram and Isolde* it was the king's seneschal. In the folktale *The Two Brothers*, it was the king's marshal. Another very common motif is the offering of virgins to the dragon as a proved way of appeasing it. This is found in stories as popular as that of St George, but also in the more local folktale *The Mester Stoor Worm*. It must also be pointed out that the dragon, Vermithrax Pejorative, has kept some of the usual features ascribed to her race, not only in her ferocity and propensity to spit fire, but also in the fact that she keeps to a lair in an underground lake, which combines two of the preferred dwellings of dragons in tradition. As for the hero, it is interesting that, despite his power, Galen finds it necessary to arm himself with an extraordinary set of weapons: a magical spear and a shield assembled with the scales shed by Vermithrax. Other heroes of tradition that considered this a suitable option in their encounters with dragons were Beowulf, who ordered his smiths to forge a shield that was stronger than usual before he went in search of the offended dragon, and Sir Guy of Warwick, who had a flaming sword. Magic is not unheard of in traditional tales either, the most obvious example being that of *The Longwiton Dragon* (Appendix A), where the knight had a magic ointment that he could anoint his eyes with to be able to see the invisible dragon. It is also curious that the slaying of the dragon involves a dramatic aerial fight and final explosion, something that might be accounted for by the general tendency to explode all sorts of things in films made during the 1980s. Yet, however much this may have influenced the creators of *Dragonslayer*, death by explosion was not unheard of in traditional dragon tales. In St Margaret's hagiography, we can read that the dragon swallowed her, and then burst open. The same fate awaited the dragon of Babylon, when Daniel fed him a vile mixture of pitch, fat and hair. And, although it was not a story that was probably known to many

of the inhabitants of the British Isles, I can not ignore a very interesting example found in the vicinity of Santiago de Compostela. There, the disciples of St James, on seeing a huge dragon coming towards them, made the sign of the cross and sprinkled some holy water, and the monster exploded on the spot. This is significant too in that it takes us directly to another element that is inherited from the old tales, and that is the presence of the man of god. *Dragonslayer* presents a world where the ways of old, that is, magic, are coming to an end, and a new religion is making its way into the heart of human society. The priest in *Dragonslayer* is the representative of this new religion, and there is a scene in the film where he inflames the villages into going in search of the dragon, assuring them that the power of God is so strong that the monster will be defeated at once. This is a parallel of all the tales of saints who, armed only with their faith and, occasionally, with some cross or holy water, have vanquished dragons all over Europe. But here ends the parallel, for, when the determined mob gets near Vermithrax, she, unperturbed by the cross, proceeds to swallow the priest. It is an ironic turn of events that I think shows to what extent the general consideration of the Church has changed in the last few decades.

### ***Dragonheart* (Rob Cohen, 1996)**

This fantasy epic is among the first titles to come up in any list of films featuring dragons, and not just because of its explicit title. Although it has several awards on its shelves, it remains a lighthearted production which does not take itself seriously, and that probably is one of its main strengths. On watching it, one has the impression that the viewer is only expected to find enjoyment in it.



Draco and Bowen (*George and the Dragon*. Tom Reeve. 2004).

*Dragonheart*<sup>1</sup> portrays the unlikely friendship of a disillusioned knight and the last remaining dragon, which he names Draco<sup>2</sup>. The premise presented in this film is surprisingly original for the genre: when prince Einon is mortally wounded, the queen implores Draco to save his life. The generous dragon accedes to share his own heart with the young prince, on the condition that he will grow to be an honourable and fair king. However, Einon becomes the polar opposite, a ruler so tyrannical that his former mentor, Bowen, disgusted by the way in which his protégé has developed and blaming it not on the nature of the boy, but on the corrupting effect of the dragon's heart, swears vengeance on all dragons. Soon, he starts a crusade to kill all of them, in a poor attempt to undo the evil that afflicts Einon.

As mentioned above, Draco is the last of his kind, and, in a twist similar to the one used by Kenneth Grahame in *The Reluctant Dragon*, he persuades Bowen to enter into a partnership and perform mock dragon slayings to defraud peasants and villagers and stay in work. But these humorous episodes are soon brought to an end when Kara, the young woman who years before had accidentally wounded Einon, enlists both Bowen and Draco (as well as Brother Gilbert, Bowen's self-appointed cronist) to fight the young tyrant. Together, they organize the villagers into an improvised army and they fight Einon's troops. During the battle, it is discovered that any wound inflicted

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<sup>1</sup> *Dragonheart* (1996): "The young, sickly King Einon was wounded in a battle. In order for him to survive, he is healed by Draco, a dragon. Some years later, Bowen, a dragon slayer, encounters Draco. The two team up to form a travelling duo that perform an act, but the act is only known by themselves. Bowen supposedly "slays" Draco and then collects a reward from the town or village that he protects by killing the dragon who had been "terrorizing" them. From there, Bowen and Draco must save the entire kingdom from the rule of the now evil King Einon, who is part of Draco and Draco a part of him" (10.29.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116136>).

<sup>2</sup> As the dragon mockingly explains, "Draco" is nothing else than the word "dragon" in a different language. However, this apparently silly choice connects this story with a large number of others where dragons are given equally obvious names, derived from the terms used to say "dragon", "snake" or "worm" in different languages. Take, for example, all the dragons who are named "worm" (*The Mester Stoor Worm*, *The Lambton Worm*, *The Linton Worm*, *The Laidley Worm* or *The Sexhow Worm*), "knucker" (*The Knucker of Lyminster*), "carrog" (*Y Carrog*) or "peist" (*The Oilliphéist and the Piper*). In the film *Dragonslayer*, the name Vermithrax Pejorative was also a obvious derivation of the Latin term for "worm" ("vermis").

upon either Draco or Einon will be felt by the other and that, conversely, if Draco is kept from harm, Einon will be immortal. In a final (and long expected) twist, Draco sacrifices himself to rid the kingdom of the great harm of a vicious king.

Although on its release the film received mixed reviews, it was a solid commercial success and, as mentioned above, it is generally regarded as one of the main dragon-themed movies of all time. This is partly due to its visual effects, but also to the characterization of the dragon (Draco is a graceful creature) and his easy and clever banter with the knight. It was awarded Best Fantasy Film by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, and nominated by the Academy Awards in the category of Best Visual Effects (10.29.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116136/>, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dragonheart>).

As for how it relates to the topic of this dissertation, it is clear, even from the mere summary of the plot, that there are a number of elements that are directly inherited from tradition.

The first one that immediately calls one's attention is the very one mentioned last in the previous section. There is a man of god in *Dragonheart*, as there used to be one in many of the dragon stories that have been preserved both in Britain and Ireland, and all over the European continent. But, in a vein similar to that started in *Dragonslayer*, Brother Gilbert is not a heroic figure in this story, but more of a sidekick to Bowen, a source for comic relief during most of the story, although treated with far more sympathy than the priest in *Dragonslayer*.

Apart from the priest, there is a token maiden. Here, Cara is not a princess, but a fiery young woman with revolutionary ideas. Both she and the queen have a special connection with Draco. The queen treats him with the respect deserved by a godlike race, admired and possibly worshipped by her ancestors. As for Cara, she soon



discovers that Draco is essentially harmless, and treats him with the familiarity of a friend.

If we turn to the characterization of the dragon, Draco has three features that stand out among the conventional ones found in traditional tales. The first one is that he has a vulnerable spot, although here it is not his throat or underbelly, but his heart. This was an uncommon choice in folktales and classical literature, but not completely unheard of. Tristan and Sir Bevis of Hampton, for instance, were two of the heroes that killed a dragon by spearing his heart. The choice of this particular organ in *Dragonheart* was probably due to cinematic reasons (the scenes of the dragon tearing his chest open to expose his heart are nothing short of impressive, albeit a little gruesome), as well as it gave the story impetus in the theme of the bestowing of a very precious gift on an undeserving recipient.

The second feature is that he is presented as a speaking creature. This is paralleled in a great many legends (e.g. *St Gilbert of Dornoth*, *St Murrough*, *Martin and the Dragon*) and literary texts (the most obvious influence here is the *Völsunga Saga*, possibly via Tolkien's texts).

Finally, there is a reversal of a very common motif in dragon characterization in the fact that Draco is averse to eating human flesh. Where the conventional dragon of the traditional stories would feast happily on maidens and children, Draco is appalled at the very idea. Reversals such as this one, and others that are discernible in these works, will be examined in detail in Chapter 5.

### ***Reign of Fire* (Rob Bowman, 2002)**

Almost two decades after the release of *Dragonslayer*, *Reign of Fire*<sup>1</sup> turned back to the premise of the threatening dragon as was explored in that film. In spite of their PG rating, these two are probably the films that more clearly target the adult audience of all the examples examined here. *Reign of Fire* was written and produced in the middle of the post-apocalyptic rage of the 2000s, and it presents yet another scenario about the hypothetical destruction of the world as we know it, this time with a mythological twist to it.

Set in contemporary London, in the first stages of the film the audience sees how in 2008 a dragon nest is discovered during some construction works on the London Underground. A brood of dragons has seemingly been hibernating in a cave underneath the underground, and when awakened they incinerate their way out of it. During the next years, humans fight the dragons using all military devices at hand, including nuclear weapons. This, combined with the dragons' actions, soon lays the whole planet waste.

In 2020, in England, a group of survivors hiding in a Northumberland castle strive only to survive, in hopes that the dragons will eventually go into hibernation again. They are led by Quinn and Creedy, and aided by a group of American soldiers under the command of Denton Van Zan, who are tracking and hunting down the dragons.

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<sup>1</sup> *Reign of Fire* (2002): "In present-day London, twelve-year-old Quinn watches as his mother, a construction engineer, inadvertently wakes an enormous fire-breathing beast from its century-long slumber. Twenty years later, much of the world has been scarred by the beast and its offspring. As a fire chief, Quinn is responsible for warding off the beasts and keeping a community alive as they eke out a meager existence. Into their midst come a hotshot American, Van Zan, who says he has a way to kill the beasts and save mankind" (11.01.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0253556/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0253556/?ref_=nv_sr_1)).

In the course of the film, the heroes discover several features of the dragons that they use to their advantage: they have poor eyesight at sunset and they all appear to be female. Working on the assumption that there is only one male dragon, Van Zan concentrates his efforts in finding and destroying that one creature, hoping that by killing him the species will be unable to reproduce and they will eventually die out. Quinn is against the scheme, believing the male too dangerous and clever to destroy with their limited resources, but Van Zan carries on with his plan. When the dragon kills most of the soldiers and backtracks to the castle, destroying most of it, Quinn is proved right. After the battle, he agrees to help Van Zan and the helicopter pilot Alex Jensen to hunt the male dragon in London, where dragons have their nesting grounds. There, they discover that the dragons are resorting to cannibalism, a trait that is taken as proof that they are beginning to starve. Quinn, Van Zan and Alex need to work together and use all of their courage, skill and cunning to shoot an explosive crossbow arrow into the dragon's mouth. Van Zan dies in the fight, but Quinn and Alex survive. Hope in the survival of mankind is renewed when, some months later, it is revealed that dragons have not been seen for several weeks.

Similarly to *Dragonheart*, the film was a commercial success, due to its visual effects and the appeal of some of the actors involved. However, critics almost unanimously branded it as an underachiever, proclaiming it as deserving of a B-movie labelling, due to the simplicity of the writing and the weak use of some potentially stunning visual effects (11.01.2013. [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/reign\\_of\\_fire](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/reign_of_fire)).

There are several elements that connect this production with the traditional take of the dragon myth, but two of them are particularly worthy of comment: the first one is the selection of lair for the dragons. They are explicitly shown to have been hibernating in an underground nest, a most common choice if one examines the surviving legends

and literary texts. Of the ones presented in Chapter 2, no fewer than eleven of these creatures are described as dwelling in a subterranean realm, something that, as was explained, probably comes from the association of the serpent with the spiritual underworld.

The second element is that of the dragon slaying. As it happened in *Dragonslayer*, but also in the story of St Margaret (who received worship in many places in England, along with St George), as well as in others, the chief dragon in *Reign of Fire* can only be killed by means of an explosive device that makes him burst open.

#### **4. 2. 2. Adapted Productions**

Literature and myths are extraordinary sources for plots and themes that filmmakers have never had any compunction in using. Not that they should, as their attention to these creations has garnered us with a collection of terrific productions and a load of not so terrific ones on which to feast our eyes. Here I have chosen to analyse in detail those adaptations that stand out as having been inspired by literary works or legends, but with a creative approach that, using the root material, modifies it to the point that they become singular works, with few things in common with those on which they are inspired, other than a bunch of names and a general plot outline.

Apart from these three films, many others could be mentioned as belonging to this same topic of study, such as the Arthurian-related *Merlin and the War of the Dragons*<sup>1</sup> (2008), *Beyond Sherwood Forest*<sup>1</sup> (2009), where the character of Robin Hood

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<sup>1</sup> *Merlin and the War of the Dragons* (2008): “In fifth-century Britian, a young Merlin struggles for his place in his known land under the tutelage of The Mage, a local wizard who sees the young man's potential for magic, as well as face off against his evil former friend, Vendiger, who plots with a feudal warlord king to conquer all of Britian using an army of flying dragons, and only Merlin with the alliance of the local Prince Uther and Igraine and a pair of mystical goddesses can have the power to stop the evil from taking over the land” (11.02.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1294699/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1294699/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

is explored, or even, to some extent, *Age of the Dragons*<sup>2</sup> (2011), a quaint remake of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. However, none of them had such a successful release as to be considered as works of importance in the genre. All the same, they shall be mentioned whenever they may bring something of relevance to the topic.

### ***George and the Dragon* (Tom Reeve, 2004)**

As the title indicates, *George and the Dragon*<sup>3</sup> is based on the legend of Saint George, albeit loosely, and it presents itself as a lighthearted speculation as to the origins of the popular story.

The first scenes establish George as a seasoned English crusader coming back from battle, with his heart set on becoming a farmer and living the rest of his days in peace. This is not to be though, for he is enrolled in the search of a princess who has been kidnapped by a dragon. George has in his power a Dragon Horn, a gift from his father, and this is described as an instrument which sounds a note only a dragon can hear. Soon enough, he finds Princess Luna, only to discover that the dragon has left and the princess is now happily taking care of the dragon's egg, which she claims holds the last dragon on earth. George agrees to help her take the dragon back to the castle.

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<sup>1</sup> *Beyond Sherwood Forest* (2009): "England 1174: King Richard is away fighting the Crusade, his brother Prince John has been left in charge. (...) A cursed girl who can change into a ferocious dragon is used to find and pacify Robin Hood" (11.02.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1331323/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1331323/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

<sup>2</sup> *Age of the Dragons* (2011): "Age of the Dragons is a re-imagining of Herman Melville's classic novel *Moby Dick*. Set in a mythical realm where Captain Ahab and crew hunt dragons for the *vitriol* that powers their world, Ishmael, a charismatic harpooner, joins their quest. Ahab's adopted daughter Rachel, beautiful and tough, runs the hunting vessel. Ahab's obsession is to seek revenge on a great "White Dragon" that slaughtered his family when he was young and left his body scarred and mauled, and he drives the crew deeper into the heart of darkness. In the White Dragon's lair Ahab's secrets are revealed and Rachel must choose between following him on his dark quest or escaping to a new life with Ishmael" (11.02.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1594917/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1594917/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

<sup>3</sup> *George and the Dragon* (2004): "George, a handsome English knight, unsettled by the horrendous bloodletting he witnessed in Palestine, desires to hang up his sword and settle down to a quiet, peaceful life. On returning to England, George heads north where he's heard the land is good and the population sparse and of a kindly King named Edgaar. He finds King Edgaar in a terrible state. His beautiful daughter, Lunna has recently disappeared. In return for a small plot of land, George agrees to search for Princess Lunna" (11.02.2013. <http://www.georgeandthedragonmovie.com>).

Conflict ensues as Lunna is kidnapped again, this time by her own betrothed, Garth, who is revealed as the villain of the tale. A group of mercenaries join in and some chaotic fighting ensues, only to be interrupted by the hatching of the egg and the return of the mother dragon to retrieve it. As all the combatants hastily flee, only George is left behind (to his dismay), but he, instead of killing the dragon, in turn decides to help her, extracting a lance that has been lodged in her flesh ever since his own father tried to slay her. His selfless act of kindness will be repaid him when the dragon comes back in the midst of his fight with Garth and eats up his opponent, to Princess Lunna's manifest delight.

The film did rather well in commercial terms, and critics generally regarded it as a simple cute story, full of anachronisms, especially as regards characterization, which seems to expect the viewer to simply enjoy it, without reading too much into it. (11.02.2013. [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/george\\_and\\_the\\_dragon](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/george_and_the_dragon)). Yet, some readings can be taken, especially in the context of the present study. For example, it is fairly obvious that the creators had some of the traditional motifs of the dragon story in mind when they planned this film, other than the usual combination George-dragon-maiden. The first of these elements is the use of a special weapon with which to confront the dragon, something that was also present in *Dragonslayer* (1981), but which viewers can relate to such traditional stories as *Beowulf* and *Sir Guy of Warwick*, among others.

However, maybe the most striking use of these features of old is the transgression of the rules usually applied to them. Nowhere is this as evident as in the introduction of a maiden who is believed to have been taken by the dragon but who actually is with the creature of her own accord, babysitting for her egg. Even more surprising is the actual confrontation between George and the dragon. Here, the

expected development of events is reversed when the hero does not use a spear to slay the dragon, but instead ingratiates himself with the monster by *extracting* a spear from her body. The knowledgeable viewers will easily perceive the irony in such a decision.

### ***Beowulf* (Robert Zemeckis, 2007)**

There have been several adaptations of the Old English epic poem over the last decades, with varying degrees of accuracy and commercial success. Of them all, one of the most intriguing ones is Robert Zemeckis' computer-animated version, although John McTiernan's *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* (1999) deserves a mention too<sup>1</sup>.

Zemeckis' visually stunning *Beowulf*<sup>2</sup> deviates from the source material enough to deserve some attention on its own merits, especially as regards the treatment of the monsters. Zemeckis' interpretation works under the assumption that, if Grendel is described in the poem as the son of Cain, then his father must surely be a man. And, if so, the identity of this parent can not but inspire curiosity (11.06.2013. <http://www.beowulf-movie.com>).

The action starts when Beowulf and his men travel to King Hrothgar's kingdom. The king is in need of a hero to dispose of an awful creature called Grendel. Grendel is a hideous and disturbing creation, unlike anything the viewers may have encountered in

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<sup>1</sup> If only because of the realistic turn of the dragon episode, that becomes an allegory inspired by the sight of enemy army marching at night along a serpentine path, with their torches lit. *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* (1999): "In A.D. 922, an important emissary is banished from his homeland. The nomadic outcast comes across a band of Norse warriors who coerce him into joining them when they are summoned to fight mysterious creatures legendary for consuming every living thing in their path. Eventually surrounded by the frightening and ferocious foe, Ibn must conquer his personal fears and help battle the invaders--who emerge out of the shroud of fog in the black of the night" (11.06.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120657>).

<sup>2</sup> *Beowulf* (2007): "In Denmark, A.D. 507, the realm of King Hrothgar is threatened by the tormented demon Grendel that attacks the locals in their celebrations. The Danish king offers a reward for the death of the creature, attracting to Herot the brave Geat warrior Beowulf that seeks for glory. After a fierce battle, Beowulf defeats the demon and after receiving an old relic as reward, he finds his men slaughtered in the (...) castle. King Hrothgar advises that Grendel's mother was responsible for the bloodshed and Beowulf chases her in the lake where she lives. The creature takes the form of a seductive woman and seduces Beowulf with a promise of becoming an invincible and wealthy king if he makes love to her and gives his golden relic to her. Years later, King Beowulf feels the aftermath of this sin" (11.06.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0442933/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0442933/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

films or books before. At times vicious and at times pitiful, he is revealed to be no other than Hrothgar's demonic offspring. As in the poem, Beowulf manages to rip his arm off, and when Grendel returns to his cave and tells his mother, a water demon, about the fight, she swears revenge on Beowulf. Meanwhile, in the hall of Herot, Hrothgar gives Beowulf a golden horn which commemorates his victory over the dragon Fafnir in his youth.

Grendel's mother in the film is probably even more striking to the *Beowulf* connoisseur that her son, if only because she is physically inspired by the actress Angelina Jolie and wears bizarre anachronic high heels. Her character is presented as a shape-shifter, who chooses to appear before Beowulf as a voluptuous and attractive female, albeit with a peculiar kind of braid that is a serpent tail at the same time, and with a general appearance that is as alluring as it is oddly threatening. When Beowulf goes to her cave to kill her, she seduces him, offering herself to him and promising to make him the greatest king who ever lived if he agrees to give her the golden horn, and to lay with her and give her a son to atone for his slaying Grendel. Eventually, Beowulf can not resist her advances and yields to both of her requests, but he cannot bring himself to confess it to Wiglaf afterwards and his deed becomes a heavy burden on his conscience, even though, as promised, he does become a king soon enough.

Thus, the viewer arrives to the third fight of the poem, which takes place when Beowulf is in his old age and a slave finds the golden horn in a swamp and unwittingly takes it, thus breaking the pact Beowulf made with Grendel's mother. Soon, Beowulf's son retaliates, and he appears in the form of a dragon and with the intention of destroying the kingdom. The now old king fights the dragon alone in a dramatic aerial fight and eventually rips his heart out in a truly gruesome scene. After that, they both perish, but not before Beowulf has confessed his sins to Wiglaf. The film ends on an



ambiguous note, with Wiglaf holding the stare of Grendel's mother, who seems to be attempting to seduce him as well.

At the time of its release, the movie received high praise for its uncontested technical quality and the originality it brought to a well known story. At the same time, some critics found that the depth that could have been achieved in the plot had been sacrificed in the maelstrom of the awe-inspiring visual effects. Either way, the general consensus, both of critics and audience, is that this production has an entrancing and every quality, and that it haunts the viewer for a long time after it has ended (10.06.2013. <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/beowulf>).

In designing the dragon, it is apparent that the creators exerted themselves to come up with something unique, and they certainly did succeed. In Robert Zemeckis' film, the dragon is a double creature. Sometimes a dragon, sometimes a golden humanoid, he is presented as a well formed young man and a splendid creature, as opposed to Grendel's deformities.

And yet, here end all claims to originality, for Beowulf's son and Grendel's mother, both shape-shifters, are very probably based on the traditional tales of men turned into dragons (*Völsunga Saga*) and Laidley Worms, although the creators have not explained to what extent this was a conscious choice.

The creators seem to have also turned to the classical motifs in other aspects of the film too. For example, the subterranean lake, a watery realm where Grendel's mother lives, is an interesting combination of two settings that have always been related to dragons, and its choice for this production can not come as much of a surprise, not only because of this, but also because it was present in the original poem. On the other hand, the choice of the heart as the dragon's vulnerable spot, while at variance with the poem, is not terribly original, being present in other medieval productions, such as *Sir*

*Bevis of Hampton* or *Tristan and Isolde*. As seen in the section about the film *Dragonheart* (1996), in recent creations it has become more usual to use the heart of the dragon as the weak point, than the belly or mouth, as it was more often the case in other periods of tale production.

### ***How to Train Your Dragon* (Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois, 2010)**

One of the latest film productions that deal with dragons, *How to Train Your Dragon*<sup>1</sup>, is based on the homonymous work by Cressida Cowell, but, even though the author supervised and approved of the film, it is so different from her books that it can stand as an autonomous work.

On first view, one would expect this Dreamworks film to tackle the umpteenth version of the dragon-slaying theme of the Viking tradition, but the directors manage to endow the old stories with a whole new perspective. Thus, what the viewers are presented with here is a complete reversal of the usual Viking role and tone, as the protagonist, Hiccup, is a weak and clumsy excuse for a Viking (that is the way in which he is depicted in Cowell's books as well), and he would be a total social outcast if not because he happens to be the son of the chief. The main difference of the premise in the film as opposed to Cowell's books is that young Vikings in the film are not trained to raise dragonets as pets, but to kill them in a rite of passage to adulthood. Hiccup, our smart but diffident hero, finds himself in an awkward position, for he needs to prove his worth unequivocally so as not to disgrace his father. Hence his dilemma when he has

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<sup>1</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010): "Long ago up North on the Island of Berk, the young Viking, Hiccup, wants to join his town's fight against the dragons that continually raid their town. However, his macho father and village leader, Stoik the Vast, will not allow his small, clumsy, but inventive son to do so. Regardless, Hiccup ventures out into battle and downs a mysterious Night Fury dragon with his invention, but can't bring himself to kill it. Instead, Hiccup and the dragon, whom he dubs Toothless, begin a friendship that would open up both their worlds as the observant boy learns that his people have misjudged the species. But even as the two each take flight in their own way, they find that they must fight the destructive ignorance plaguing their world" (11.26.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0892769>).

the chance of killing a dragon but he does not wish to and, instead, he decides to befriend him.

Thematically, *How to Train Your Dragon* appeals to emotional connections between characters (father-son, friends...) and presents the challenge of rising over the circumstances and conquering all odds, both the psychological and physical (the integration-of-handicapped theme is a constant of the film). The theme of coming of age, and those of prejudice and acceptance are also very present at different levels, but mostly in the need to understand a different species and their motivation for fighting the humans. Paradoxically (in a film that presents dragons positively), the true villain is another dragon, the Red Death, a huge sea serpent who lives trapped in a mountain and is fed by the smaller breeds. Dragons and humans eventually learn to cooperate to fight and vanquish this monstrous threat.

Visually, the film explores the usual fire-breathing, flying dragons, but these have an intelligence and conscience to match their destructiveness. Keeping up with the latest tendencies in animation, the dragons are formidable, but they are also given an odd Pokemon-like quality which is quite unforeseen and turns them into very lovable characters, which is, of course, the intention of the creators. There are many different breeds where one may find dragons of all sorts, depending on the animal, or mixture of animals, on which they are inspired. This is a novelty in dragon characterization as compared to the traditional stories, where dragons were merely ferocious, without the tales making any reference whatsoever to any other feature that might make them appear relatable to the audience. Toothless, the dragon protagonist of the film, is as dissimilar to a conventional dragon as one may imagine, as both the author and the film creators found inspiration for him in cats, rather than the usual reptiles. Unlike his namesake in print, this Toothless is no diminutive Common nor Garden dragon, as he

was in Cowell's original book, but the rare, very deadly and never seen, let alone captured, Night Fury, a true nightmare for any Viking. Another difference from the books is that in the film none of the dragons are capable of articulate speech<sup>1</sup>, although they manage to develop some basic communication with their human friends (and, in the case of Toothless, not so basic).

In *How to Train Your Dragon* there is a maiden too, but she is not at all the traditional sort. The group dynamics of the bunch of teenagers where Hiccup finds himself to his dismay are completely dominated by a girl, Astrid, who is beyond any doubt the best warrior of the tribe. Not easily scared and possessed of physical abilities above those of her male comrades, she can hold her own against any dragon, but she is as prejudiced about them as the rest of her neighbours, and she will necessarily go a long way before she is convinced that the dragon issue can be approached in a different way to the one to which she has been trained. In this indomitable spirit, she is similar to other females present in recent productions, as has been seen in this chapter, but in direct opposition to the maidens in the legends and literary works of past centuries, who tended to be much more passive in their dealings with dragons. One clear exception to this tendency were the saintly maidens (St Martha, St Margaret and, particularly, St Keyne), but even they tended to be much less aggressive than their male counterparts. This was not an issue in Astrid's case.

Apart from this updating of the maiden, the best example of the creators having been influenced by the conventions of the genre is found in the big battle against the Red Death at the end of the film. There, it is possible to perceive several of the most popular motifs of the traditional dragon tale:

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<sup>1</sup> As the reader will remember, the Toothless in the books speaks Dragonese, although with a stammer, and all the other dragons speak Dragonese as well.

The first one is that of the dragons living in a cave under a mountain. As explained in Chapter 3, a subterranean realm was a very common choice of dwelling for dragons, and it figures in stories that range from *Beowulf* to the hagiographies of St Germanus and St Maccreiche, and popular legends such as *The Ludham Dragon*. In addition to this, the Red Death is shown to be trapped inside the mountain, due to its enormous size, in a way that reminds one of Zeus trapping the serpent Typhon under the Etna, but also of the more domestic stories of *The Ludham Dragon*, whis is trapped in his lair by the hero, or that of St Maccreiche, who chained and confined the Bruckee.

If we move on to the scene of the final battle, two other conventions are discernible. Firstly, the method of slaying, with a blast to the Red Death's mouth, is something that will take the viewer not only to the many artistic representations of knights thrusting their spears into the dragons' mouths, but also the much more similar technique of forcing a burning peat down the monsters' throats. This last option is observed in both *The Linton Worm* and *Cnoc Na Cnoimh*.

Secondly, the very common trope of the hero sacrificing himself for the greater good is here present too, as it was in *Beowulf*, *Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon*, and *The Bisterne Dragon*. All three of the heroes in these stories manage to slay their respective dragons, but at a very great cost for themselves, just as Hiccup in *How To Train Your Dragon*, who is saved in extremis by the writers.



“Daenerys Targaryen, the Unburnt”, by Michael Komarck (05.22.2014. <http://www.komarckart.com>).

## **Chapter 5. A New Breed: A Reflection on Modern Tendencies**

This chapter will be devoted to exploring how the old motifs of the dragon tales presented in chapters 2 and 3 are still traceable to some extent in these new productions. As Gilmore (2003: 23) explains, “monster lore in the West shows change and flux from the earliest times, as one would expect, but there is also continuity under the surface”. It will be interesting to see in what manner this continuity is evidenced, what patterns have been kept and which have not and what may have produced the discernible changes. To make the analysis more clear, I have kept the structure used in Chapter 3.

### **5. 1. How to Recognize the Modern Hero**

Telling apart which of the characters presented in a story is going to be the one that successfully confronts the dragon menace has never been so easy as in the productions made in the 20th and 21st centuries. But for some respectable exceptions, most heroes seem to have inherited the traits of the unlikely hero, although to different degrees. Only St George in Grahame’s *The Reluctant Dragon*, Túrin Turambar in Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*, and, to some extent, Bard the Bower in *The Hobbit* retain the spirit of the ancient noble heroes and even then, St George is remarkably receptive to the plan to role-play the fight instead of actually slaying his dragon. In cinema, the nobility of the heroes is kept in titles such as *Beowulf*, *Dragonheart* and *George and the Dragon*, as well as in minor productions such as *Jabberwock*<sup>1</sup> but, similarly as in *The Reluctant*

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<sup>1</sup> *Jabberwock* (2011): “The brave knight Francis returns to his homeland to call his older brother. Soon he resumes friendship with his former love. The romantic idyll, however, interferes with the emergence of a powerful beast - half dragon, half-insect, which begins to terrorize his family around the village. After

*Dragon*, there is a strong component of parody in some of these films, whereas in others (notably, *Beowulf*), the hero is severely flawed. Martín (2002: 38-9) explains this phenomenon as the consequence of a questioning of the patriarchal role, embodied by the white male hero. Although a huge number of productions still revel in the prehistoric premise of the great hunter and warrior who saves the community from a great evil, the growing intolerance of the community towards this sort of portrayals has led to the emergence of a new hero, one who is closer to the monster, either physically (see, for example *Robocop*<sup>1</sup> or *Waterworld*<sup>2</sup>) or morally (for example, Anakin Skywalker in the *Star Wars*<sup>3</sup> franchise or, in this study, Robert Zemeckis' *Beowulf*). This way, he is partly victimized and he may join in the same group as those who played the roles of victims in the traditional portrayals. At the same time, the audience is provided with a potential villain to identify with, something that the politically correct person in the audience can only satisfy through this medium. The path of the hero is reconsidered to fit in the new roles for which he has been called, and nowhere can one experiment these new roles with impunity as in fiction. As Gilmore explains (2003: 12),

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unsuccessful attempts to defeat the monster, the knight, as predicted, makes a sword, which has extraordinary properties. Equipped with a magic weapon he decides to get rid of the terrible predators" (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1734203>).

<sup>1</sup> *Robocop* (1987): "Detroit - in the future - is crime-ridden, and run by a massive company. The company has developed a huge crime-fighting robot, which unfortunately develops a rather dangerous glitch. The company sees a way to get back in favor with the public when a cop called Alex Murphy is killed by a street gang. Murphy's body is reconstructed within a steel shell and named RoboCop. The RoboCop is very successful against criminals, and becomes a target of supervillain Boddicker" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093870/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_2](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093870/?ref_=fn_al_tt_2)).

<sup>2</sup> *Waterworld* (1995): "The world is flooded. Civilization is lost under the sea. The Mariner sails his trimoran over the seas (...) and visits a floating atoll of "Drifters". When they find the Mariner to be a mutant they sentence him to death. Meanwhile, a girl with supposedly a map to get to dry land tattooed on her back, is the objective for an attack by a gang of smokers who attack the atoll" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114898/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114898/?ref_=nv_sr_1)).

<sup>3</sup> *Star Wars* (1977, 1980, 1983, 1999, 2002, 2005). In *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*, the audience witnesses how the main hero of the first third of the saga, "a maturing Anakin Skywalker goes to the Dark Side of the Force and becomes Sith Lord Darth Vader. We experience the transformation in a dark, scary yet thrilling climax. The story here logically sets up the events of Episode IV, the original 1977 Star Wars movie in which Darth Vader goes to war against his own children, Luke and Leia" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0121766/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_4](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0121766/?ref_=fn_al_tt_4)).



(...) for most Western observers the monster is a metaphor for all that must be repudiated by the human spirit. It embodies the existential threat to social life, the chaos, atavism, and negativism that symbolize destructiveness and all other obstacles to order and progress (...) terrible monsters are impressive exactly because they break the rules and do what humans can only imagine and dream of.(...) There is, obviously, a certain ambivalence here.

With this in mind, it can not be forgotten that the characterization of the hero is in direct relation to the characterization of the monster. This is replicated in Andriano's idea that "most of us already know that monstrous beasts embody our animal natures" (1999: 2), and "I began to realize that fabulous beasts have become reflections of our attempt to come to terms with human evolution, human animality" (1999, ix). According to this concept, the monster, the "Other" is an extension of our own humanity, at the same time that it negates it.

Bearing this in mind, it is still possible to approach an analysis of modern heroes using a similar pattern as was used in Chapter 3, although with some variations:

### **5. 1. 1. Lowly or Anonymous heroes**

*Examples:* Giles (*Farmer Giles of Ham*); Bilbo Baggins (*The Hobbit*) and Galen Bradwarden (*Dragonslayer*).

All three of these characters are of modest origins, and they tend to consider that they are inadequate to fill in the role to which they are summoned, with the exception of Galen (*Dragonslayer*) who is extremely cocky about his newly gained condition as chief wizard, but who is soon humbled when he experiences his first great failure. The second time he attempts to slay the dragon, he is much more cautious and mindful of his master's instructions.

One could also argue that the genuine hero in Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon* is in fact the boy, who is the one that actually goes through all the work to bring about the satisfying end. The type is explored in many other similar productions dealing with matters not directly related to the British Isles, among which one could point out films such as *Willow*, where the hero belongs to a non-combatant race and seems to be woefully inadequate to handle his imposed hero status, or *Dragon Hunter*<sup>1</sup>, which presents an orphaned hero.

The lowly hero is one of the most common characters in legends and folktales, although not so usually presented in literary productions, where the predominant choice was that of the noble hero. In traditional tales, one could mention, for example, Assipattle (*The Mester Stoor Worm*) and Hector Gunn (*Cnoc Na Cnoimh*), who may be likened to Galen Bradwarden (*Dragonslayer*) in their blind determination; but also a bunch of nameless peasants and villagers, as obscure as Bilbo Baggins (*The Hobbit*) and Giles (*Farmer Giles of Ham*) were outside of their own communities. The list would include the anonymous heroes of *The Dragon of Kingston St. Mary*, *The Dragon of Llandeilo Graban*, *The Dragon of Loch CorrieMohr*, *The Dragon of Shervage Wood*, *The Ludham Dragon*, and *The Mordiford Dragon*.

In short, the heroes presented are either types who generally would not be expected to take on such burden or unadventurous fellows who try to avoid direct confrontation by all possible means, as will be explored in the coming section.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dragon Hunter* (2009): "In times of orcs and dragons, the orphan Kendrick was raised by his overprotective brother Darius. When their village is attacked by dragons, they have to move through the woods seeking the land of Ocard where a dragon hunter should be trained. They team-up with a group of warriors wandering in the forest and the walk together to Ocard, in a dangerous journey under the attack of orcs and dragons" (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1290472>).



Drawing by Pauline Baynes for J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham*.

### 5. 1. 2. Reluctant Heroes

*Examples:* Giles (*Farmer Giles of Ham*); Bilbo Baggins (*The Hobbit*); Harry Potter (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*); Captain William Lawrence (*His Majesty's Dragon*); Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third (*How to Train Your Dragon*, both the book and the film) and Quinn (*Reign of Fire*).

None of these characters wishes to take on his hero status, only aspiring to continue to live in the relative comfort of their homes (Giles of Ham, Bilbo Baggins) or positions. Even Captain William Lawrence, who is a hardened captain of the English fleet during the war with France, finds that becoming a dragon rider does not sit well with him, more so when he is aware that he will have to forego the ordinary pleasures of society for the almost exclusive company of a dragon and the uncertainty of his new position. Similarly, when Harry Potter's name is drawn and he finds he will have to be in the Triwizard Tournament, he is none too happy about it. Hiccup, in *How to Train Your Dragon*, would rather be anything else than a Viking, and Quinn does his best to persuade his community against the folly of dragon fighting, but ends up becoming one of the main leaders in the very task in the film *Reign of Fire*. Many other related productions come to mind, among which *Willow* again stands out, as its eponymous lead character really does all he can to get rid of the baby girl the villainous queen is looking for, but when he finds that he can not trust any of the big folk to be responsible enough to take care of the baby, he ends up taking the unwanted task himself.

Yet, unwilling heroes are thin on the ground in conventional dragon stories. It is true that, for example, Beowulf is dismayed to find that he has to fight a dragon in his old age, knowing that he has practically no possibility to win, but he gathers up his

courage and marches forth to the dragon's cave, and his knights are none the wiser about his gloomy thoughts. Exhibiting fear or reluctance to face some daunting danger was unacceptable in those tales, where heroes were impossibly brave and never wavered in their determination. It is my opinion that modern heroes are heirs of these courageous characters, but also of the more self-examining ones that appeared in more recent literary productions, predominantly in the tendencies of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>. These are more flawed characters, more human too, and therefore closer to the reader, who can identify with them. The key of this shift is identification. While in the Middle Ages (and culturally similar periods), the knights of the stories and poems were mainly objects of admiration and the element that brought about the identification of the laymen was the inclusion of a character from the community, even this character, be him a shepherd, a blacksmith or a hunter, was bold and audacious. Many of the main characters in productions of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century are neither, for what the reader, or the audience, craves is not an unattainable model, an impossibly perfect character, but a hero that can be emulated, someone who, despite being as flawed as the next person, can be capable of great deeds, when determined or pushed to it.

### **5. 1. 3. Monstrous or Unworthy Heroes**

There is a new, quite surprising, breed of hero that can be found in some of the works made in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and that may remind the reader of the old legend of the Mordiford dragon in which the beast was slain by a convicted criminal, and therefore a moral monster (see Appendix A: *The Mordiford Dragon*). He forestalls characters such as Eustace Scrubb (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*), who is an obnoxious character, not at all worthy of (or ready for) a heroic status. Yet, he is the

protagonist of an episode in which he witnesses the death of an old dragon, only to be transformed into a dragon himself shortly after, in a way that can not but remind one of Fafnir's (voluntary) metamorphosis into a serpent in the *Völsunga Saga*, a text that Lewis was amply familiar with. The whole episode experienced by Eustace Scrubb is presented as an allegory of his redemption and, after he learns to be a better friend, he recovers his human form. A similar type of character may be observed in the production *Shrek*, meaning both the book by William Steig<sup>1</sup> and the extremely popular DreamWorks film<sup>2</sup>. The film *Shrek* is not the usual prince charming or gallant knight, not even a courageous fellow with a keen mind, but a horrible, mean and selfish ogre, and he becomes a hero against his will when he is forced to accept the task of rescuing a princess locked away in the highest room of the tallest tower in a castle guarded by a terrible fire-breathing dragon. Although the book *Shrek* is not at all averse to finding the princess, he nonetheless beats the filmic version in all other departments, especially in those of physical ugliness and disgusting manners, and even more so in character, as he has no redeeming features at all. Regarding the dragon fighting, both *Shreks* vanquish a dragon in their respective stories, although using different methods: DreamWorks' *Shrek* manages to reduce his dragon, keeping her captive in a shortened chain (which may remind one of St Maccreiche chaining the Bruckee), and Steig's *Shrek*, after being knocked down by the dragon, spits a ray of fire that leaves the monster (here I mean the

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<sup>1</sup> William Steig (1907-2003) was better known as a cartoonist for *The New York Times*, but his career was very prolific, and it included several works as sculptor and, later in life, as an illustrator and writer of children's books. *Shrek!* (1990) is a picture book about a young ogre whose parents kick him (literally) away from home and travels the world, living different adventures, until he finds the ogre of his dreams. It received several awards and was the inspiration for the popular franchise.

<sup>2</sup> *Shrek* (2001): "When a green ogre called Shrek discovers his swamp has been "swamped" with all sorts of fairytale creatures by the scheming Lord Farquaad, Shrek sets out, with a very loud donkey by his side, to 'persuade' Farquaad to give his swamp back. Instead, a deal is made. Farquaad, who wants to become the King, sends Shrek to rescue Princess Fiona, who is waiting for her one true love. But once they head back with Fiona, it starts to become apparent that not only does Shrek like Fiona, but Fiona is keeping something secret" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0126029/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0126029/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

dragon, not Shrek) out of combat. In this encounter, the usual fighting techniques are reversed.

The reasons behind the success of this sort of characters are varied. They may point to the universal wish to see the underdog triumph. Shrek in the film may be grumpy, it is soon made evident that he has a heart of gold too. In the case of Eustace Scrubb, the key to understanding how the reader relates to such an obnoxious character is redemption: it is always satisfying to see a villain become good, and this is a motif that is clearly related to the religious values of Christianity, which are deeply embedded in the Western society. Finally, Steig's *Shrek!* presents a hero that is as vicious as he is irredeemable. This character can only be accounted for on the grounds of the psychological analysis: Shrek's behaviour would be unacceptable in our society, and that is precisely the reason why we are drawn to him: he is the conductor of our basest (and obviously impracticable) desires.

#### **5. 1. 4. Female Heroes**

These constitute another innovation on the traditional structure of the dragon story, but it must be noticed that, even though females in these adventures have grown steadily active in the last six decades or so, more often than not, women can only aspire to become the hero's companion in his exploits, but it is rare that they can actually be considered *the* heroes (see, for example, Valerian's role in *Dragonslayer*, Kara's in *Dragonheart*, Princess Lunna's in *George and the Dragon*, Alex's in *Reign of Fire* or Astrid's in the filmic version of *How to Train Your Dragon*). This tendency is challenged only occasionally. The only clear example of this in the productions examined above is that of Daenerys Targaryen in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. She is indisputably the one and only hero as far as dragons are concerned, as

the only human alive who can be around them and control their actions to some extent. One could also argue that Naomi Novik creates a world in *His Majesty's Dragon* in which males and females are regarded as equals in the context of the dragon air force (in fact, it is the women that control the superior dragons). Yet, the reader follows the male perspective of William Laurence, and he is the hero of the story to all effects and purposes, along with his dragon Temeraire<sup>1</sup>.

However, female heroes are present in many of the old dragon tales, although only in the restricted subgenre of the hagiography of the saintly maiden. St Margaret, St Martha and St Keyne boast one such episode in their respective lives, and none needs the aid of another character to tame, kill or paralyze their dragons.

The subject is complex enough for a more detailed analysis, but, for the sake of keeping with the formal structure of the study, the present section only glosses over the fact that females are chosen as heroes in certain modern productions. Nevertheless, this and other related matters will receive further attention in section 6.2.4.

### **5. 1. 5. Children Heroes**

Partly derived from the fact that many of these productions are targeted to children, a number of them introduce very young heroes. In truth, it is highly uncommon that any work will feature a child actually fighting a dragon, much less slaying it, although it does happen in some of them, such as in *How to Train Your Dragon* (both the book and

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<sup>1</sup> Clearer examples of role reversal can be observed in Anne MacCaffrey's series on the Dragonriders of Pern, more specifically in *Dragonflight* (1968) and *Dragonsong* (1976). *Dragonflight* explores this premise through the perspective of the character of Lessa, who becomes the rider of a dragon queen, Ramoth. Likewise, *Dragonsong* follows the female character of Menolly as she becomes the keeper of a brood of young dragons.



the film) and the unexamined film *Adventures of a Teenage Dragonslayer*<sup>1</sup>. However, it is rather more common to keep the violence at a minimum, and thus it is much more frequent that these young heroes find themselves meeting harmless, good-natured creatures, as is the case in Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*, as well as in filmic creations for very young children, as are Disney's film *Pete's Dragon*<sup>2</sup> and the TV animated series for pre-schoolers *Mike the Knight*<sup>3</sup>.

In the traditional works presented in chapters 2 and 3, none of the heroes are described as children; still, some of them are very young indeed: Assipattle (*The Mester Stoor Worm*), for one, who may be likened to Hiccup (*How to Train Your Dragon*) both in his youth and his methods. Other youngsters facing dragons in traditional stories are Martin (*Martin and the Dragon*) and Jim Pulk or Jim Puttock (*The Knucker of Lyminster*, version 2).

It is quite evident that the majority of these productions pursue an easy identification of the audience with their heroes, as opposed to the awe inspired by the knights and gods of yore. Identification comes through similarity: the hero is an

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<sup>1</sup> Unexamined because it strays too far from the subject matter of this study. *Adventures of a Teenage Dragonslayer* (2010): "Branded as a "nerd" and harassed by the school bully, 12-year-old Arthur is rescued by a magical alchemist/troll but is soon able to return the favor. Arthur's loving mom, who struggles to keep her devious ex-husband from gaining custody of Arthur, dismisses her son's "fantasies" until she realizes their all-too-real immediate danger and joins forces with Arthur, the troll, the Knights of the Square Table (Arthur's pals Natalie and Tim), and a dashing but washed up video-game master named Shane. Together, they hope to conquer an unleashed dragon and the wicked vice-principal who threaten civilization" (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1373149>).

<sup>2</sup> *Pete's Dragon* (1977): "In New England in the early 20th century, Pete is a nine-year-old orphan escaping from his brutal adoptive parents, the Gogans, with his only friend, a cartoon dragon named Elliott. Pete and Elliott successfully escape to Passamaquoddy, Maine, and live with Nora, a lighthouse keeper, and her father, Lampie. Elliott is sought for medicinal purposes by the corrupt Doctor Terminus" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076538/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076538/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

<sup>3</sup> *Mike the Knight* (2011): "Mike is an energetic, cheeky yet bountiful young knight-in-training, driven by his passion to help others and, along the way, be the best knight he can be. With his father, the King away exploring faraway lands Queen Martha has put Mike in charge of helping her protect the Kingdom of Glendragon. (...)With a little help from his Big Book for little Knights in training, the would-be-hero rises to each episode's mission with the help of his closest friends: Sparkie and Squirt, a pair of friendly, quirky dragons, and his trusty steed Galahad. Never far from the action and always willing to help out is Mike's fun and free-spirited sister Evie, a wizard in training" (11.27.2013. <http://www.miketheknight.com/en-us/index.html>).

everyman, with circumstances similar to those of the audience, and the same fears that any person might have if involved in situations as the ones described. The trope of the rags-to-riches is also explored<sup>1</sup>, and it is an easy way to have the audience root for the character. On a side note, it is noteworthy that saintly heroes are completely absent from these productions, save as humorous sidekicks (*Dragonheart*) or elements of satire (*Dragonslayer*). One might argue that their power as fighters of unworldly foes is severely diluted in the present day, possibly a consequence of the tendency towards laicism, or that dragons are not any longer presented as minions of the devil and so there is no need to summon the counterpart armies of God to fight them.

Nevertheless, there is one thing all these heroes have in common: they are courageous, and smart, and ready to do what it needs to be done to save their friends or their community. Most of them are also of an observant, thoughtful nature, rather than recklessly brave (as opposed to many of their female companions, by the way, but of this, more in section 6.2.4), and a good number of them are aware of their shortcomings and feel them keenly. Not surprisingly, Cressida Cowell tells that, following the publication of *How to Train Your Dragon*, she received many letters from children who thanked her for the books, explaining that they felt exactly like Hiccup and that her stories had helped them to cope with the similar problems they faced in real life (11.26.2013. <http://www.cressidacowell.co.uk>), which illustrates this tendency to the hilt.

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<sup>1</sup> A topic which is deeply embedded in the American Dream and, therefore, a constant in American productions of all genres.

## **5. 2. How to Recognize the Modern Dragon**

In the literary works and films produced in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries the figure of the dragon seemed to evolve fantastically in several different directions. However, while creators made use of their inventiveness to explore these new possibilities, other features were left to crystallize, to a point where the presentation of other circumstances different from those regarded as universal started to be regarded as utterly outrageous, even though they were common enough in the traditional stories up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The following sections will be devoted to show what constitutes a dragon nowadays, which traits have been preserved and which have been added. In some aspects, as it will be seen, the genre has experienced a true revolution.

### **5. 2. 1. Birth of a dragon**

One of the elements that has gone through a major evolution is the uncertainty about the origin of the dragon. Compared to the old folktales and classic literature, tremendous efforts are now devoted to determine and explain the mating, gestation, egg-laying, egg-hatching and growth of dragons. Naturally, this being a matter that was not indulged in by either scientists or poets of the past, there is a perfect tabula rasa for new authors, which explains the quantity of theories put forth in modern productions.

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that this is a question that only seems to have caused suspense to authors after the 1960s, for those who published their works up to that decade were perfectly happy to let their dragons simply turn up in the story, with no thought as to their breeding grounds, the size and colour of their eggs or any other matter that was not directly related to the specific purpose with which they had been introduced in the narration. As for the films, a good example may be the very terrifying

dragon that featured in Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*<sup>1</sup>, who was merely the also very terrifying evil fairy Malefica using her powers to transform herself into a monster. Here it must be added that the possibility of metamorphosis as the origin of the monster was not an altogether new motif either (in fact, Eustace Scrubb's predicament in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is directly taken from the *Völsunga Saga*), nor would it be completely dropped in later times, and it can be observed in productions as recent as *Willow* and *Enchanted*<sup>2</sup> and also in Zemeckis' *Beowulf*.

The systematic attention to the birth of dragons in other works seems to respond to the growing abandonment of the notion of mythological origins in favour of a more scientific approach, as the values of the era demand. But, not being of one accord regarding how to best offer a zoological account for this matter, the conjectures proposed end up being wildly dissimilar. Consequently, the reader or viewer may be treated to universes with all sorts of dragon eggs and dragonets, which sometimes are instrumental for the advancement of the plot (as seen in *George and the Dragon* and *Dragonslayer*, but also in other, less known films, such as the suggestively named *Wyvern*<sup>3</sup>). Or, one may witness how dragonets develop an instant connection to the humans around them on hatching (*His Majesty's Dragon*, *How to Train Your Dragon*

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<sup>1</sup> *Sleeping Beauty* (1959): "Adaptation of the fairy tale of the same name. Princess Aurora is cursed by the evil witch Maleficent - who declares that before Aurora reaches her 16th birthday she will die by pricking her finger on the spindle of a spinning-wheel. To try to prevent this, the king places her into hiding, in the care of three good-natured (...) fairies" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053285/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053285/?ref_=nv_sr_1)).

<sup>2</sup> *Enchanted* (2007): "In an animated fairy tale world, a young girl meets and falls in love with the handsome prince of her dreams. News of this romance upsets the prince's mother, the evil queen, who uses her black magic to send the girl hurtling out of the animated world into the one place in the universe where there is no true love: modern day Manhattan. The now-real girl has to survive in New York City and find her way home again to her true love" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0461770/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0461770/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

<sup>3</sup> *Wyvern* (2009): "The residents of a small Alaskan town find themselves under attack by a flying reptile known in medieval mythology as a Wyvern. It has thawed from its ancient slumber by melting icecaps caused by global warming" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1331335/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1331335/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)). The reader will remember that a *wyvern* is a particular sort of dragon, namely a two-legged winged creature. It may seem that the creators of this film used the term both to bring some exoticism to the story and to introduce a clear mythological element in a modern setting.

(books), *A Song of Ice and Fire*) This motif is used in works where dragons are presented as creatures that may become allies of humans, and as such can be observed in other productions, not examined here in depth, as are Anne MacCaffrey's and Christopher Paolini's books. Sometimes the mating process is mentioned (*His Majesty's Dragon*) and sometimes it is at the core of the whole dragon issue (*Reign of Fire*, Robert Zemeckis' *Beowulf*). Conversely, the whole mating and hatching may be eschewed in favour of some lavishly extravagant theory, such as the one presented in the film *Dragon Storm*<sup>1</sup>, where dragons come from other planets and travel to the Earth in meteors. But of course, since the scientific community stays silent regarding these creatures and there is no official zoological law, in principle, every single postulate is possible.

### 5. 2. 2. Appearance

In line with the last reflection of the previous section, creators of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have proposed all sorts of forms and features for their dragons. Taking this characterization into account, they might be divided into three groups: those that base their creatures on some specific mythology and follow its dictates to the letter (the dragons in the books *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* are all derived from the Northern mythology, which both J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis were amply familiar with); those that are aware of the traditional conventions and strive to stay true to them (the literary productions *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and the films *Dragonslayer*, *Dragonheart*, *Reign of Fire* and *George and the Dragon* are

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<sup>1</sup> *Dragon Storm* (2004): "Rival kings in the dark ages attempt to unite and defeat an alien dragon menace" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377808/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377808/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)).

good examples of this tendency); and those that throw all awareness of conventions to the wind in favour of a creative and original approach (blatantly, the books and films *How to Train Your Dragon*, but also Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and Novik's *His Majesty's Dragon*, where the authors invent a number of breeds, although they try not to lose sight of some of the usual features ascribed to dragons in folk traditions).

It is clearly noticeable that the group more densely populated is the second one. These are the sort of creators that have contributed to the shaping of the image of the dragon in our times. On the one hand, most of the productions that follow this premise tend to take great pains to incorporate the latest discoveries regarding general zoological evolution, while at the same time they try to provide their dragons with some feature unlike anything seen before on film or literature, to make them stand apart and be remembered by the audience. On the other hand, they strive to make their creatures recognizable as a whole, reflecting the usual features with which the dragons of the old tales and poems were endowed. It is peculiar that, as if of one accord, they all seem to agree on three main features that can never be missing: dragons are reptilian, dragons breath fire, and dragons have wings. These were common enough, to be sure, but it is singular that other traits that were quite omnipresent in folktales are now practically vanished. For example, no reference is ever made to the poisonous nature of the dragon, which seems to have become a second rate attribute as opposed to fire-breathing and, therefore, not worthy of mention. Zoologically improbable morphologies such as the several-headed dragon are usually discarded too (only one managed to make his way into the film productions *How to Train Your Dragon* and *Willow*), even though other abominations are happily approved, especially in cinema, such as the many flying breeds that are too large to be held on the air by the woefully inappropriate set of wings

they are provided with, or with centres of gravity that would make some of the manoeuvres in which they indulge physically challenging, to say the least. But that is what suspension of disbelief is for.

### **5. 2. 3. Dwelling**

The general thinning down of the options offered by mythology, folklore and classic literature as seen in the section above applies to the housing choices for the monsters too. Subterranean lairs are the overwhelming choice of these dragons, and the odd volcano (notably, in the movie *Shrek*), probably because of the association of the dragon with fire. With the exception of Robert Zemeckis' film *Beowulf*, where Grendel's mother and her son by Beowulf live in an underwater cave, and Cressida Cowell's book *How to Train Your Dragon*, where both The Green Death and The Purple Death are described as slumbering in the bottom of the ocean, water sourcers are distinctly shunned. The same goes for holy trees, which are altogether absent from these productions.

Such a limited choice of dwelling will naturally restrict the interpretation of these works, as all the symbolism traditionally attached to water and trees is necessarily lost to the reader and the audience. This has favoured the general tendency of deterioration of the capacity of analysis on the part of the recipient, in a phenomenon that can be likened to that of the reading of art or architecture, where the modern untrained individual cannot elucidate the meaning of a work of art a few centuries old, having lost the symbolic tools to interpret it. However, we appear to have developed a new system of symbols, while keeping the old referents, to the point that, even when the idea of the subterranean realm has been kept, the complex set of meanings that was attached to it has practically faded to nothing.



Grendel's mother emerging from the water (*Beowulf*. Robert Zemeckis. 2007).



On the other hand, the choice of a watery lair is still significant in terms of the characterization of the monster. Gilmore (2003: 188-9) believes that “the monster is a metaphor for retrogression to a previous age and time” and that this explains “the consistent watery imagery in monster lore”, on the grounds of its representative function: “The water that surrounds and shelters the monster symbolizes not only the amniotic fluids of the womb, but also the primal element from which all life emerged”. This is made even more evident in examples such as that of Robert Zemeckis’ *Beowulf*, where water pervades the realm of the monsters, very particularly that of Grendel’s mother, who is never shown out of the water.

#### **5. 2. 4. Disposition**

Similarly as in the previous two sections, it can be observed that the nature of the dragons in the last century has tended to keep some features, fixed by tradition and habit, while losing others. Of the traits lost, the most obvious one is the dragons’ previous fondness of milk, something that is all but lost, but for the honourable exception of George R. R. Martin’s Daenerys Targaryen (*A Song of Ice and Fire*), who feeds her dragons milk. Of the traits kept, one must mention the existence of a treasure that the dragon hoards, although it must be noted that it is mostly mythological renditions that tend to include this (J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion* and C. S. Lewis’ *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*). Nevertheless, Naomi Novik makes a commendable effort in her *Temeraire* series, where dragons are described as being inordinately fond of shiny trinkets.

Furthermore, there are some elements that deserve some deeper attention; they are those that, being inspired by the old conventions, turn about their axis to present a completely different reality, one that seems to convey the evolution of society. The most

prominent of these variations will be presented in this section, along with some considerations on the psychological implications of these choices, which are much more complex than one may imagine at first sight.

### **The Rebellious Maiden**

The motif of the maiden is central in one of the most dramatic changes that were applied to this well known episode, especially since the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. J. R. R. Tolkien tends to keep the traditional notion of the superior lady who becomes a victim of the dragon (Nienor Niniel in *The Silmarillion*), and even Kenneth Grahame's satire *The Reluctant Dragon* points in that direction in the knight's request of the boy for the battle: "There ought to be a Princess. Terror-stricken and chained to a rock, and all that sort of thing" (Grahame, 1988: 22). However, most filmic and literary productions after the 1950s turned the cliché around. Already in the 50s, the Walt Disney production *Sleeping Beauty*, however conventional in general, inched towards a more active sort of female in its representation of the fairies (a formula revised in *Enchanted*) and, after the sixties, all women involved in dragon episodes started to behave in a radically different way from what they would have been expected to in previous times. Of the examples more minutely examined, only the film *Dragonslayer* keeps the traditional character to some extent: Princess Elspeth not only arranges the lottery so that she will be chosen as the next victim to be offered to Vermithrax Pejorative, but she even walks to the dragon lair in the true spirit of self sacrifice. One may be wont to ponder that she was a learned young lady, and therefore cognizant that princesses are *always* rescued, and hence her assertiveness in the matter, but, if so, the episode is even more poignant, because here the hero does *not* arrive in time. Instead, she is the unfortunate protagonist of the one story where these expectations are not met.

At the same time, there is another woman in the story who takes the exact opposite course: Valerian has posed as a boy all her life to avoid being considered for the lottery, and she has become a warrior of the first order. She is a member of a new class of maidens, those that tend to be much more active in their dealings with both dragons and heroes, and they shed aside their sacrificing robes to adopt other, only slightly safer, roles:

- **Slayers**

**Examples:** Ingrid (from the film *How to Train Your Dragon*), and Alex

(*Reign of Fire*).

Both these characters are voluntarily involved in the dragon slaying affair (in Ingrid's case, most eagerly so), but other examples of female warrior helpers may be observed in lesser known productions such as *Dragon Hunter* and *Age of the Dragons*, where Raya and Rachel, respectively, are valuable members of the dragon-slaying gang. As mentioned above, it is rather uncommon to find women going solo, but every so often some worthy lady embarks on the business. The characters of Fiona in *Shrek: Forever After*<sup>1</sup> (2010) and Alora in the film *Dragon*<sup>2</sup> are two edifying examples as to how a princess may stray from the traditional female role, fend for herself and become the leader of her community. They join the ranks of the tough, battle-hardened females that have been increasingly present in fiction in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is, to some extent, an obvious reaction to the portrayal of the passive woman that

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<sup>1</sup> *Shrek: Forever After* (2010): "A bored and domesticated Shrek pacts with deal-maker Rumpelstiltskin to get back to feeling like a real ogre again, but when he's duped and sent to a twisted version of Far Far Away -- where Rumpelstiltskin is king, ogres are hunted, and he and Fiona have never met -- he sets out to restore his world and reclaim his true love" (11.27.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0892791/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_4](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0892791/?ref_=nv_sr_4)).

<sup>2</sup> *Dragon* (2006): "In a desperate attempt to save her kingdom from an advancing army of dark elves, Princess Vanir must traverse the haunted forest of Sidhe. With the help of loyal adventurers Cadour and Artemir, they encounter the army of elves, a mysterious sorceress, and the powerful dragon that stands in their way" (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0858436>).

dominated the scene until then, but it is slightly worrying that this new strong woman generally comes hand in hand with a highly sexualized image, unrelentingly presented as improbably thin (especially given her training) and curvy, and clad on the most unlikely of garments for the battle.

And yet, some of the old stories boast some particularly strong, capable ladies too. St Margaret, when in prison, prays to ask not to be saved, but to have her enemy appear so that she can face it. Soon enough, the devil comes to her in the form of a dragon, and then of a handsome youth, but he is defeated in both cases. Williams (1996, 318), remarks on this, and also on her unnatural physical strength and her androgyny, which likens her to St Wilgeforte, a bearded female saint who was iconographically depicted with her legs bound, thus symbolizing, like Margaret, the release from constriction, an image that would aid in the elevation of both saints to the patronage of childbearing.

- **Protectors**

*Examples:* Lucy (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*), Daenerys Targaryen (*A Song of Ice and Fire*), Kara (*Dragonheart*), Princess Lunna (*George and the Dragon*), and Grendel's mother (*Beowulf*).

Having the female characters turn for the dragons instead of running away from them has become a very common device too, as can be gathered from the examples above. In these works, the woman becomes either a sort of mother figure (Lucy, Daenerys) or a friend of sorts to the dragon, generally evidencing an understanding nature that contrasts with the beliefs and actions of her fellow males, who are usually bent on slaying. In this, they may be likened to women such as St Martha, who did not harm the dragon, but instead tamed it and tied her girdle around its neck, after which the monster meekly followed her.

In these modern portrayals, the female generally adopts a motherly behaviour towards the dragon. They appear as either extremely compassionate (Lucy, Kara) or as directly involved in their raising (Daenerys Targaryen, Princess Lunna, Grendel's mother). Two traits of femininity that are present in the literature of all time, but here are applied to creatures that generally are regarded as undeserving of receiving these attentions. In the depiction of motherly behaviour, the portrayals range from the conventional asexual way in which Princess Lunna cares about the outcome of an innocent to the much more disturbing images presented by both Daenerys Targaryen and Grendel's mother. Both are mothers of dragons, Daenerys, virtually, and Grendel's mother, literally, and in both cases there is a strong reference to female sexuality. However, this is presented in a deliberately disturbing way. Daenerys's dragons are born of a burning pyre where also she attempts to burn, along with the body of her deceased husband. After she survives and the eggs hatch, she breastfeeds her dragons, a behaviour that the author probably uses here to consternate (or, at least, startle), his readers, as is usually his wont. Grendel's mother's approach to motherhood is equally, if not more so, disquieting. Martín (2002: 177-9) considers that these portrayals evidence a masculine fear of female fertility, regarded as a potential threat by the stifling patriarchal societies. These fears are translated into literature and cinema in negative depictions of female's sexuality, with a stress on pregnancy and birth. The abnormal sexuality of characters such as Daenerys Targaryen and Grendel's mother are but another aspect of the monstrous.

- **Riders**

**Examples:** Captain Catherine Harcourt, Emily Roland and Captain Jane

Roland (*His Majesty's Dragon*)

This is a novel activity that became the vogue after the sixties. The thrill of riding a dragon is evident to all those who have read Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* (1979), and it became a common practice in many of the titles of the fantastic genre. It is interesting that, in the English speaking world, this motif was mostly explored by American authors, such as Anne MacCafrey, Christopher Paolini and Naomi Novik. In the context of the present study, George R. R. Martin has mentioned that at some point he will have Daenerys riding her dragons too, an activity that is described in the books as having been common in the past, when the Targaryen family dominated Westeros. Of the three original *dragonlords* who conquered Westeros, two were women (Rhaenyra Targaryen and Visenya Targaryen) (10.29.2013. <http://www.georgerrmartin.com>).

The dragon riding premise probably evolved from the new tendencies to examine, and eventually, accept, the "Other", instead of routinely kill it. And, once the figure of the dragon had been examined and discovered to be not altogether evil, it is only natural that one would crave for the excitement of having such a creature as an ally. If riding a horse is exhilarating, how much so can it be riding the all-powerful and flying dragon? It was, simply, a chance not to be missed for the world.

All characters, male and female, jumped to the occasion. Generally, only the positive characters are allowed to ride a dragon and, whenever the villain has access to such extraordinary steed, their dragons either receive a similar treatment (and are evil too) or suffer from the neglect or abuse of their masters. There is an example of the first in Christopher Paolini's *Eragon*<sup>1</sup> (2002), from the author's series *The Inheritance Cycle* (2002-2011), and of the second in Novik's *Temeraire*. It is interesting that whenever the

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<sup>1</sup> "Fifteen-year-old Eragon believes that he is merely a poor farm boy- until his destiny as a Dragon Rider is revealed. Gifted with only an ancient sword, a loyal dragon, and sage advice from an old storyteller, Eragon is soon swept into a dangerous tapestry of magic, glory, and power. Now his choices could save - or destroy- the Empire" (11.27.2013. <http://www.alagaesia.com>).

villain is a dragon rider, the relationship presented is invariably that of master and subject, and dragons are invariably regarded as inferior, as possessions. However, positive characters offer a completely kind view. Their relationship with the dragons is of the sort that is regarded nowadays as healthy: dragons are equals (when not superior) and their friendship with the rider has a positive, fulfilling effect on them both. When the rider is a woman, the tendency seems to be to show a connection between the dragon and the female that runs deeper than that of their male counterparts. This approach is highly present in Anne MacCafrey's works, where dragons and women are intrinsically connected, but also in Novik's, who has her female captains be the sole riders of the most valuable dragons in Britain, the acid-spitter longwings, who will by no means take a male rider. It is perhaps natural that two characters whose roles have been re-evaluated and heavily modified would tend to stick together in these new adventures. Also, although the reason for this identification between female and dragon is generally unexplained, sometimes it seems to mirror some sort of mother-child connection. This is particularly evident in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, where not only the symbolism of the hatching points to this idea (after losing her unborn child, Daenerys goes through a ritual of rebirth and attempts to incinerate herself along with her dead husband and her three petrified dragon eggs, but not only does she survive, the eggs hatch and three dragonets are born of them, thus providing a substitution for the dead baby), but she is literally called "the Mother of Dragons" by other characters.

#### - **Evil**

If there is a role that women have successfully explored in fantasy productions that is the villain. Usually spiced up with some other feature (stepmother, mother-in-law, or witch are three of the most common choices), female characters seem to have had a

knack for evil behaviour for a long time. This extends to dragon-centred works and, even if only one example can be garnered from the titles examined (Grendel's mother in Robert Zemeckis' film *Beowulf*, who is also one of the rare examples that can be likened to the dragon maidens of the past<sup>1</sup>), numerous others may be gleaned from popular films where, even if their plot does not revolve chiefly around the dragon issue, dragons are present, and deeply related to the wicked antagonist. One may here mention Maleficent (*Sleeping Beauty*) and Queen Narissa (*Enchanted*) who both metamorphose into dragons to keep the heroes and heroines from achieving their happy ending. Queen Bavmorda (*Willow*) is no shape-shifter, but she too has a deadly two-headed dragon under her command. The Empress Savina (*Dungeons & Dragons*<sup>2</sup>) is also one of the few ladies who can control dragons, but her plans for them are a little less destructive than Bavmorda's.

The case of Grendel's mother in Zemeckis' *Beowulf* is extremely interesting. Not only is she presented in ambiguous terms, but she is also instrumental in portraying one of the longest-standing taboos in fantasy and science-fiction: hybridation. We ought not to forget that in the traditional concept of a monster, anything that defies the natural order is regarded as monstrous. And, although not overtly present in the tales that are being examined here, the mating of a human and a monster is viewed as the ultimate

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<sup>1</sup> Another one would be Alina, a half human who turns into a dragon on occasion. She is a character of the TV movie about Robin Hood *Beyond Sherwood Forest* (2009): "England 1174: King Richard is away fighting the Crusade, his brother Prince John has been left in charge. In order to further international diplomatic relations with Austria, the beautiful young Maid Marian is to be married off to a prince. A cursed girl who can change into a ferocious dragon is used to find and pacify Robin Hood" (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1331323>).

<sup>2</sup> *Dungeons & Dragons* (2000): "Emperess Savina rules over the magical empire Izmer. The young thieves Ridley and Snails get involved with her quest to find the legendary Scepter of Savrille. With this most desirable magical wand she could have the power to rule over the Red Dragons and she would then be able to provide freedom and equality amongst all people. Ridley and Snails are closely followed by Damodar, the cruel assistant of Profion who is longing for the power of the Scepter. Profion wants to get into battle with the Emperess. Whenever Profion would get his hands on the Scepter, the whole empire would then forever live in darkness. The future depends on the braveness of Ridley and Snails" (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0190374>).



transgression. The coupling is usually pursued by the monster, and the human counterpart tends to be victimized (interestingly, it is typically a white female). The offspring of such a union will generally be intolerably threatening to the human race, as the worst kind of monster (Martín, 2002: 55-6). Although the gender of the participants is reversed in Zemeckis' production, the motif of the monstrous offspring is met to the point and the persistence of the prejudice against interracial coupling is guaranteed. This is but another facet of the fear of female sexuality and fertility mentioned above: the female as monstrous seductress, with an exaggerated sensuality, going after the unsuspecting male who becomes a mere tool used for begetting some probably atrocious offspring. It is a type of female that is far from new. The *femme fatale*, or seductress has been present in literature and mythology for a long time, and never in positive terms, which evidences the ever complicated point of view of the authors regarding female sexuality and fertility, two aspects of the nature of women that often cross the boundaries into monstrosity. Anything that deviates from the roles of wives, mothers and nuns is immediately seen as a transgression of the social (and natural) order. In the Classical works, creatures such as Circe, Calypso, Schylla and the sirens “demonstrate the alluring but perilous nature of feminine charms” (Mittman & Dendle, 2012: 317), which shows just how ancient these fears are. Several millennia later, these concepts, far from getting old, are being translated into the new media.

Such are the ladies that one can encounter as of late in these inhospitable environments. Surely, their increasingly active roles in these adventures mirror their equally growing involvement in a number of domains that were out of the female sphere until very recently. It is interesting that, in trying to have female characters take over active roles in these fantastic productions (and many other genres as well) the creators tend to take them to the opposite extreme, and they become not only brave, but

temerarious; not only smart, but unsurpassingly clever; and not only good warriors, but the most efficient and skilled of the group. I am inclined to think that the industry needs now to steer towards the middle ground, and let them be realistic human beings, without that reckless streak that seems to be their main attribute nowadays. Maybe then we will see that the role of heroes comes to them as effortlessly as it does their male counterparts.

### **Feral Predators or Benign Creatures**

Far from there being one accord regarding the most basic features of dragons, it seems that during the twentieth-century authors explored routes as different as possible, until they ended up with completely polarized versions, such as the two suggested by the title above.

If we take, for instance, the books *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and the films *Dragonslayer*, and *Reign of Fire*, it is clear that these four productions are populated by creatures that are completely devoid of rational intelligence. They are presented as either dangerous carnivores or downright voracious. They feature likewise in a great many lesser known films, such as *Age of the Dragons*, *Wyvern*, *Dragon Hunter*, *Dragon Storm*, *Q: The Winged Serpent*<sup>1</sup>, *Merlin and the War of the Dragons*, or *Dragon Fighter*<sup>2</sup>. Many of these productions present situations in which the dragon attack threatens to destroy the whole human community for no

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<sup>1</sup> *Q: The Winged Serpent* (1982): “New York police are bemused by a spate of reports of a giant flying lizard that has been spotted around the rooftops of New York, which they assume to be bogus until the lizard starts to eat people. An out-of-work, ex-con piano player is the only person who knows the location of the monster’s nest and is determined to turn the knowledge to his advantage” (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084556>).

<sup>2</sup> *Dragon Fighter* (2003): “A group of scientists, working in a deep underground lab, clones and hatches a 1,000-year-old dragon, after finding its remains in a cavern in southern England. After the critter goes from one cell to full grown in 3 hours, it goes on a rampage, killing most of the scientists and escaping to the surface. Naturally, bullets don’t faze it at all. Our Intrepid Hero helps kill it before it can menace all mankind” (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0312640>).

particular reason other than they are hungry or merely destructive (this is especially apparent in *Reign of Fire*). These stories in which “the Other” is extremely belligerent is sometimes explained in terms of the fear of the loss of power of the white race before other ethnicities, or the necessity of atonement for the destruction of the planet, or, in other terms, the failure of the model of the predator, first established in Prehistory by the hunting warriors. On the other hand, these images may also fulfill the primitive fear of great predators and, at the same time the fascination of the hunting, generally frowned upon in our days, which is satisfied through the introduction of an imaginary and dreadful foe that has to be destroyed by all means (Martín, 2002: 43-4). Gilmore (2003: 187) agrees with this notion, pondering over the possibility that “some of the power of this man eating terror derives not as a product of the individual’s experience, but as a collective memory from our own infancy as a species”. He also points out that the emphasis on the dragon’s mouth, both as a colossal feature and a terrible weapon with which to spit fire and venom betrays a universal “obsession with oral aggression” (178).

Many of these stories also dwell on an issue that has become of particular interest during the last decades. This is the unpredictable consequences of human irresponsible behaviour, especially regarding new technologies or the environment. Environmental issues have been given a lot of attention since the 1960s, with a peak in and after 1985, when the hole in the ozone layer was discovered. Many films work on the premise of some monster of the past that is unleashed by the effects of the greenhouse effects or by more direct actions by humans. In *Reign of Fire*, the dragon nest is uncovered because of the excesses of industrial construction, while in *Wyvern* (2009) global warming causes the ice in which the monster had been trapped for eons to melt.

That reckless and unnatural choices in science may lead to catastrophes has also been the subject of many literary works, not least of which Mary Shelley's masterpiece *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). The modern Frankensteins also work in labs and, albeit generally good intentioned, they are instrumental in the release of terrible threats to humanity. These scientists unwittingly change the course of evolution and unbalance the organic equilibrium of the planet with their reckless experiments. Lab aberrations range from destructive virus to dinosaurs, with the occasional dragon, as can be seen in the movie *Dragon Fighter*, where a group of scientists succeed in cloning a dragon and then lose all control over it.

Whichever the origin of the threat, these destructive dragons are the heirs of the old breeds that are found in legends and literature, as seen in chapters 2 and 3. Practically all of them would fit in this description, but one can not help but remember some honourable mentions, such as St Martha's dragon, and those present in the stories *Martin and the Dragon*, *The Lambton Worm*, *Fulk Fitzwarrin*, *The Deerhurst Dragon*, *Tristan and Isolt*, and *Sir Guy of Warwick*. All dragons were fiery, to be sure, but these were not only unimpressed by the usual offerings but even went out of their way to cause as much damage as possible.

The opposite route is taken in the literary works *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *The Silmarillion*, *His Majesty's Dragon*, and *How to Train Your Dragon*, as well as in the films *Dragonheart*, *How to Train Your Dragon* and, one suspects, *Beowulf*, where all dragons are extremely intelligent creatures capable of reasoning and speech. Such skills are not unheard of in the traditional renditions of the genre, where it was fairly usual to find the hero chatting with a dragon before the unavoidable confrontation. The difference was, all of those dragons had malicious intent. This was reproduced in Tolkien's texts, but apart from him and Cressida Cowell (*The Green*

Death in *How to Train Your Dragon*), almost all authors seem to have favoured a more favourable approach, either by presenting the dragon as an intelligent and amiable sort (*The Reluctant Dragon*), or by endowing the creatures with a clear-sightedness that occasionally goes beyond human intelligence, in which case dragons are almost god-like creatures, otherworldly spirits that connect with humans in a sensorial way. In cases as these, the dragons are almost messianic, and they function as mentors of the humans. This last tendency is most apparent in Christopher Paolini's *Eragon*, but other authors hint at it too, and one can easily perceive it in Naomi Novik's description of Temeraire (*His Majesty's Dragon*) and in Draco (*Dragonheart*).

In fact, *Dragonheart* brings some airs of innovation to the dragon-themed story, in that it portrays the dragon not only as not villainous, but as a victim of the true monster of the film, Einon, who is not a physical monster, but a moral one. Persuaded to share his heart with an undeserving boy, Draco soon learns that his generous action has probably doomed him to eternal damnation, and lives his life in the continuous agony of knowing that Einon is practically invincible and that only a very extreme action on his part will stop the misery that the ruthless young ruler is bringing to his people.

This tendency towards the portrayal of positive monsters seems to have started in the 1960s. This change of vision is probably the result of this momentous decade. The magazine *Global Sociology* quotes the American sociologist Mayer Zald to explain how the 1930s and the 1960s were considered the main periods of social changes in both Western Europe and the United States:

In the 1930s, the Great Depression caused poverty for large numbers of workers. Dreadful economic conditions launched numerous social movements to promote legislation (such as regulations of the stock market and labor laws) and changes in the social structure. In contrast, the 1960s were a period of economic affluence for the United States, yet conflicts were pervasive and promoted the rise of social movements such as the anti-war movement, the women's rights movement, the Civil

Rights movement or the emerging gay rights movement to name the most important. Economic prosperity freed people from basic survival issues, and they concerned themselves more with issues of social justice. Such movements were at least partially successful but also sparked the counter-movement called the “conservative revolution” that culminated with the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1981. More recently, waves of protest have emerged on issues regarding the economic, social and political consequences of globalization (Zald, 1992, 02.23.2014. <https://globalsociology.pbworks.com/w/page/14711254/Social%20Movements>).

These changes permeated every aspect of society. They also influenced the general way of looking at both new and old situations. New ideals were set and people felt the need of questioning the old roles and beliefs. In the new spirit of tolerance, “the Other” started to be observed, instead of annihilated, in an effort to understand its nature (Martín, 2002: 48).

Benign dragons may also be based, albeit loosely, on the intelligent dragons that occasionally reared their heads in the old stories. Talking dragons, such as those featuring in the hagiographies of St Gilbert of Dornoch or St Murrough, or in the story *Martin and the Dragon*; and sentient dragons, such as the one in *Beowulf*, who is aggrieved by a thief. Although not outright benign, these creatures are described in such terms as to have the audience believe them to be of higher intelligence than average among monsters of their kind, and they may have laid the ground for the modern breeds.

### **5. 2. 5. How to Defeat a Dragon**

The path of the hero is nowhere as clear as it used to be. Where their more conventional fellow champions had a clear-cut path before them, characters composed by modern authors often find themselves in a conundrum, and they have to struggle through the uncertainty of never knowing for certain what to expect from their antagonists. This happens, partially, because of the phenomenon of the friendly dragon, as seen above,

but even when the creature is a true monster of evil ways that truly needs to be disposed of, traditional rules only apply partially, if at all, and it is more often than not that they need to find new solutions for old problems. For example, bravery alone is no longer sufficient and even ingenuity has its shortcomings (only in two instances the characters use cunning to skirt the dragon menace: Bilbo Baggins (*The Hobbit*) and Harry Potter (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*). On the other hand, magic becomes increasingly popular as a standard procedure when in battle, and is used in *The Hobbit*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *Dragonslayer*, but also in other books such as Ursula le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and the films *Sleeping Beauty*, *Willow*, *Dragon* and *Merlin and the War of the Dragons*. However, unless we apply the term in a broad sense to include the extraordinary weapons, there is only one clear instance among the traditional works studied where magic is used. It is in *The Longwitton Dragon*, where the hero had a magic ointment that he applied on his eyes to be able to see the invisible dragon. Aside from this particular instance, where it is blatantly mentioned, magic is rarely used in these encounters.

In contrast to this, there are two particular conventional motifs that have stood the test of time and are present in the majority of the productions created during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, so much so that they deserve to be examined separately:

### **The Vulnerable Spot**

Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion*, *Dragonheart*, *Reign of Fire*, and Robert Zemeckis's *Beowulf*.

In all these examples, one of the hero's assignments is to find out where exactly to aim so as to efficiently kill the dragon. Tolkien, for example, opts for the traditional

underside weak spot, as was usual in the poems that were the object of his examining, such as *Beowulf* or the episode between Fafnir and Sigurd in the *Völsunga Saga*. In both the films *Dragonheart* and *Beowulf*, the part that the slayers focus on to bring about the creature's demise is his heart (this is repeated in *Sleeping Beauty*), and in *Reign of Fire* the heroes aim for the mouth, which actually is rather conventional. On his part, Kenneth Grahame includes a hilarious scene in which St George tries to determine where to spear the dragon when they enact the slaying, and, naturally, the dragon must be in agreement. After some ticklish attempts, they decide on the traditional spot:

"Under your neck, for instance,--all these folds of thick skin,--if I speared you here you'd never even know I'd done it!"

"Yes, but are you sure you can hit off the right place?" asked the dragon, anxiously.

"Of course I am," said St. George, with confidence. "You leave that to me!" (Grahame, 1988: 21).

Be it the mouth, the underside, or the heart, it is clear that these choices are anything but novel. For instance, in *Sir Piers Shonks*, the hero thrust his spear into the dragon's jaws, and most paintings portraying St George show him killing the dragon in just this manner. It is difficult to know whether the creators of the post-apocalyptic film *Reign of Fire* were aware of this and decided to honour the convention in their last scene, having the heroes shot their explosive arrows into the dragon's mouth, but it may appear that, at least at a subconscious level, the idea was present. As for the throat and belly of the creature, in both *The Linton Worm* and *Beowulf*, the vulnerable spot of the dragons was on their throats, something that is mirrored in both Grahame's and Tolkien's works. Finally, the two long-suffering dragons in *Dragonheart* and Zemeckis' *Beowulf*, who are finally slain when pierced through their hearts, surely are of the lineage of the creature in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, also killed by brave Sir Bevis in such a



way, or of the dragon that St Gilbert of Dornoch disposed of by aiming to its heart with his arrow, much like Bard the Bower in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

### **The Extraordinary Weapons**

J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Silmarillion*; *Dragonslayer* and *Reign of Fire*.

This is something that has never ceased to be a feature of dragon stories. Whether magically imbued or merely of a nature that makes them stand apart, those heroes who are not possessed of magic skills but still need to slay some monster or other are invariably presented with some sword, or shield, or ring, or explosive crossbow arrow with which to go about the slaying with a lighter heart. In Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham*, Giles had an animated sword, Caudimordax, or Tailbiter, which infuses dragons with terror. Bilbo Baggins (*The Hobbit*) can indulge in a banter with Smaug because he is invisible, thanks to the ring he acquired in Gollum's cave. Bard the Bower uses the most deadly arrow in his quiver, the black arrow, to shoot Smaug down. Turin Turanbar wields the sword Anglachel, forged of the iron of a blazing star, and renamed Gurthang (*The Silmarillion*). Galen Bradwarden enchants a spear and is given a shield made of dragon scales (*Dragonslayer*), and Quinn, Van Zan and Alex fly to London with a homemade crossbow that shoots explosive arrows, and with a masterplan to kill the only male of the dragon community. Even Prince Phillip from *Sleeping Beauty* is armed with the Sword of Truth and the Shield of Virtue, and little Mike (*Mike the Knight*) has a magical sword that transforms into whatever object will be necessary to solve the issue at hand in each episode.

It seems the old motif is far from getting old, for, as it happened in the section prior to this one, none of these examples are terribly creative. The magic swords, such

as the ones used by Giles and Turin Turanbar in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham* and *The Silmarillion*, respectively, are perfect recreations of the world of *The Mester Stoor Worm*, where the king offers as prize his sword *Sikkesnapper*, an heirloom that once belonged to the god Odin. Even more obvious is Sir Guy of Warwick, in the eponymous romance, who had a flaming sword. In *Beowulf*, there is no mention of either heirloom or flaming sword, but the old king certainly had a new sword forged for the occasion of his encounter with the dragon, something that is paralleled in Galen forging and magicking his spear and Valerian making a shield for him out of the dragon's scales in the 1980s film *Dragonslayer*. Likewise, the special arrows that both Bard the Bower (*The Hobbit*) and Quinn (*Reign of Fire*) make use of are somewhat related to the *saidth baiseh*, or *the death arrow*, that the father uses against the dragon in the Scottish folktale *The Dragon of Loch CorrieMohr*.

### **5. 2. 6. Consequences of the Slaying**

It is this aspect of the tales that suffers the most from the modernization of the genre. Whereas in tradition the presence of a dragon could constitute the origin of a charter myth, the fulfilment of a prophecy about the end of the world, the bane of a hero or his passport to glory, the present polarization of the dragon type as either good or beastly has divested the new stories from the symbolic meanings with which the older audiences were familiar. Only authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien and Kenneth Grahame keep to the old ways in a strict way. In them we can encounter the establishment of a kingdom as the result of a conflict with a dragon (literally in Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham*) or the essence of it, which is the source of satisfaction that such going-ons may be to a community (Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*). In *Farmer Giles of Ham*, a whole royal family is established in the kingdom as a result of the interaction with the dragon,

but in the old charter myths the aim was slightly humbler. Local land tenures were justified in this manner in Sockburn (*Sir John Conyers and the Dragon*), Lincolnshire (*The Dragon at Castle Carlton*), or Linton (*The Linton Worm*), to name but a few of the best known properties that were accounted for on the grounds of some ancestor of the family having slain a dragon in the community, and thus earned the right to its leadership.

Slightly more common is the adherence to the fateful destiny of the hero who perishes in the fight. This is presented in a traditional manner in the death of Turin Turanbar in Tolkien's *Silmarillion*, and also evoked in Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon*, and even more earnestly in the homonymous film. Robert Zemeckis' *Beowulf* includes this episode from the poem, imbuing it with a whole new significance through the inclusion of the new motif of the hero's connection with the dragon. One could add the lesser known production *Age of the Dragons*, which experiments with the plot of Hermann Melville's *Moby Dick*, but has Ahab killed not by the white whale but by the white *dragon*.

Dragon-facing heroes of the past, no matter how brave and strong, sometimes also found that such a momentous battle was to be their last one. *Beowulf* is the most obvious and well known example, but others were equally unfortunate in their dealings with the monster. Sir Peter Loschy (*Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon*), John Aller (*John Aller and the Dragon*, Appendix A, version 2), Piers Shonks (*Sir Piers Shonks*), and the Mordiford convict (*The Mordiford Dragon*) all suffered this fate.

Yet, in spite of these few honourable exceptions, most creations tend to ignore them in favour of exploring one of these two major options: either the dragon is of a benign sort, and thus is not killed, but rather becomes an ally of the heroes (*The Reluctant Dragon*, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *His*

*Majesty's Dragon*, *How to Train Your Dragon*, *Dragonheart*, and, partly, *George and the Dragon*), or it is presented as an animal species of unparalleled ferocity (*The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, *Dragonslayer*, *Reign of Fire*, and the film *Beowulf*). In this last case, the dragon poses a threat to either the community or civilization at large, and, as such, it must be destroyed, but there are no philosophical readings of the matter, and the only conclusion to the triumph of humans is their survival. The second type is amply represented in the old tales and literary works. The first one, although less frequent, can still be easily traced, especially in the stories about saints and dragons. In those tales, they figure in two types: the first one is that of the originally ferocious dragons that are tamed first and killed sometime later. St George, St Martha and St Germanus are good examples of this. The dragons in both the stories of St George and St Martha were tamed and led by a girdle, only to be killed by the villagers. St Germanus tamed a dragon for long enough to be able to send it over a sea cliff. The second type has much less belligerent participants, and it is exemplified in such stories as those of St Petroc, St Carantoc and St Columba, who merely ordered the dragon away (St Carantoc and St Columba) or even aided the creature (St Petroc).

### **5. 2. 7. A Few Considerations: Before and After 1950**

The set of conventions that were brought to us through legends and books enjoyed for centuries suffered a complete upheaval during the second half of the 20th century. One could argue that, aside from the odd incursion in satire (namely, with Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham*), most of the literary and filmic productions of the first decades of the century never strayed far from the root material provided by millenia of European culture. And yet, it must be added, dragon-centred productions were rather thin on the ground during this period.

Come the 1960s, and the tendency would be reversed in all possible ways. The writers and film producers who turned to these topics were suddenly legion, both in the Western and Eastern<sup>1</sup> cultures. Although not every single thing can be ascribed to the revolutionary social changes of the 60s, it is fairly obvious that they must have played a part to some extent. The influence of feminism, for example, is undeniable, as are the values inspired by a new sort of class conscience. Everything was under the general scrutiny, everything was open to criticism and change, and, indubitably, this ended up overflowing into art. Authors and filmmakers were permeated by the whirling pace and the changes of the era, and would continue to be so during the following decades. As consequence, female characters became growingly assertive, male heroes were as flawed as any other random character, and they did not seek glory but rather were caught in it, the values of cooperation, fairness and intelligence triumphed over violence and egotism, and the character of the dragon was questioned, imbued with an ancient honourability, influenced by the airs of the East that were the vogue, and, in brief, moulded into the creature needed to carry the authors' point in their work.

A couple of decades later, many of the social changes initiated in the 60s were still going through a process of assimilation, and they still had their place in artistic productions. However, new tropes started to emerge as well, and the most noticeable one is probably the “our dragons are different”, which seems to be pursued by every single creator, be it in the filmic or the literary arena. One of the reasons for this creative whirlwind in cinema is perhaps the result of the groundbreaking advances in the field of

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is not the theme of this study, Japanese, Chinese and Korean studios and writers have long been attracted to dragons, central symbols to their culture. In these productions, two main types of dragons are explored: the spiritual forms (found in productions that range from the *Dragon Ball* manga series (Akira Toriyama, 1984-1995) to the film *Spirited Away* (Miyazaki Hayao, 2011) and the aggressive creations that inspire monster films (from *Ghidorah, the Three-Headed Monster* (Ishiro Honda, 1964) to *Dragon Wars* (Hyung-rae Shim, 2007)).

special effects, which had the creators rather excited about trying new ideas and pushing the possibilities of the medium. While, as seen in Chapter 2, traditional stories were recurrent in their motifs, a lot of effort went into making these contemporary dragons noticeably different from what the viewers or readers had been used to. Dragons were larger or smaller, deadlier or kinder than usual, were given personality traits never explored before, and were, in general, strikingly singular to the eye of the audience, trained in many other stories of the genre.

Tradition neglected, many features that once were common enough became practically forgotten. And, it must be added, all these tendencies are still very much in vogue. For instance, regarding the loss of conventional motifs and features, many of the contemporary viewers or readers will be shocked at the idea of a legless dragon and numerous pages on Internet boards are devoted to heated discussions about whether *wyverns* should fall in the same category as dragons or not. On the other hand, the new perspectives and features brought to the genre are instantly recognized and often regarded as fixed. Internet bloggers and users will wax literature on the spirituality of dragons and their connection to the four elements with no apparent reservations. At the same time, one may find that the public tends to be more accepting of some changes than others: ice dragons may be introduced in films without there being much of an uproar (*Fire & Ice: The Dragon Chronicles*<sup>1</sup>), but, ironically, the discussion on the Internet Movie Data Base message boards about Peter Jackson's film *The Hobbit* (11.29.2013. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1170358/board/?ref\\_=tt\\_bd\\_sm](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1170358/board/?ref_=tt_bd_sm)) will feature endless arguments in favour and against the portrayal of a two-legged Smaug, a notion

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<sup>1</sup> *Fire & Ice: The Dragon Chronicles* (2008): "Ruled by King Augustin, Carpia is a peaceful kingdom in a world inhabited by dragons and knights. The land's serenity is unexpectedly shattered by a Fire Dragon that spreads almighty fear and death amongst the kingdom's innocent people" (11.27.2013. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1135493>).

which, if one were to judge from these boards, some viewers find nothing short of sacrilegous.



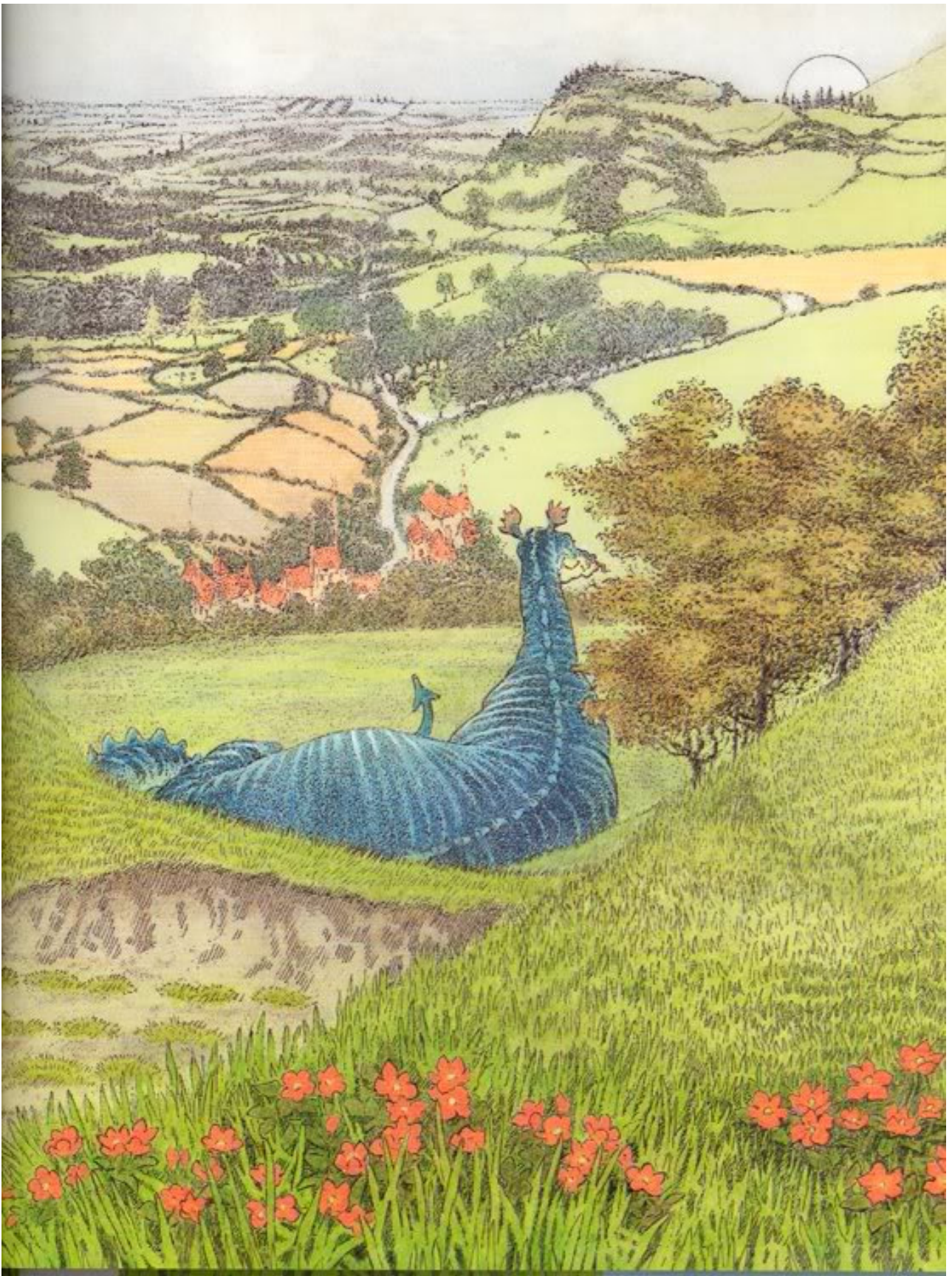


Illustration by Inga Moore for Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*.



## Conclusion

When I started this study, I was primarily concerned about the origin of the dragon and its fascinating effect on all and sundry. However could such a creature have been created? And how could it be so universal and yet interpreted in such opposite ways by the different cultures? Soon it was apparent that such aspirations were altogether unreasonable, both in terms of time and feasibility, and, what was even clearer, far too ambitious for my skills.

So it was that I settled for a course of study that I could realistically undertake, and accordingly I plunged into a sea of tales, myths, poems, and films that were heavily populated by a myriad of dragons, from worms to *wyverns*, most of them doomed to being duly slain by some heroic figure or other who brought peace and order to the world, and occasionally saved some unfortunate maiden in the process. I found it singular that the structure of this adventure was practically never altered and even more singular that a number of elements tended to feature in all of the variations, quite independently of the culture in which each particular story was embedded. And it was embedded in a great number of them. The myth of the dragon and, more particularly, the fight between the hero and the dragon is one of the most ancient motifs found in the world, both in legend and pictorial representation. It is the the eternal struggle between good and evil that lays in the cradle of all civilizations. Needless to say, this almost always indicates a Cosmic Myth, or an Epic of Creation, where the dragon is the epitome of power, a power which, more often than not, is linked with evil, and, as such, may only be defeated by those who possess supernatural powers: gods, heroes and, later in history, also saints. All ancient civilizations boast, at least, one dragon fight: in

Egypt, it is Ra and Apep; in Babylon, Marduk and Tiamat; in Persia, Ahura-mazda and Ahriman; in India, Indra and Vritra; in Greece, Zeus and Typhon. These are only a few of the myths that were central to these cultures, and not even the remotest communities, or the civilizations of the Far East, where dragons are universally benign, can escape this episode, which somehow seems to be uncannily present in every single culture in the world<sup>1</sup>. It was truly fascinating. It all seemed to point, in an eerie way, to some original, wholly untraceable original story or myth, from which all others evolved, and, as civilizations appeared and developed, their myths, although possibly close in origin, went separate ways. This could account for the existence of traditions as diametrically different as, famously, those of the Western and Eastern cultures, but also, in a smaller geographical context, those of the Mediterranean and the Scandinavian communities. As stated, a few elements did not vary from one to the next, although they were arranged differently. It was so that a new horizon started to take shape. Changes do not come about haphazardly. On the contrary, they are the result of fluctuations in the social

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<sup>1</sup> This particular motif of the dragon fight can be traced in places so distant and apparently unconnected as Japan, where the myth of Susano and the water dragon Yamata shows many of the usual requirements of the western conventions, as, for instance, water, a maiden and a magical sword (Buckley, 1905: 173-6). In Burma (Myanmar) there is a dragon shrine at Tāgaung, north of Mandalay (Burma), which is regarded by the Burmese as their most ancient capital, and, inside that shrine, a wooden dragon. It is the effigy of the dragon that seduced the queen of Tāgaung and was later killed by her son, Pauk Tyaing (Brown, 1921: 92-3). The Taniwha of New Zealand, guardian gods who may take the shape of winged lizards, serpents, sharks or whales, often star in tales where they kidnap young women and are slain by heroic fellows (01.12.2014. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/taniwha>). In North America, there are plenty of tales involving serpent-like monsters and their slayers. The tribes of the Siouan family have a beautiful one about Unktehi, a female serpent that inhabited the Nebraska River (Dakota), ruler of the waters and monster of the deep. According to the Lakota Creation Myth, when the world was still young, Unktehi caused a great flood which brought destruction to the whole world. The only survivor was a beautiful girl, who was rescued by Wanblee Galeshka, the eagle. They later on became husband and wife and from them descends all humanity. As for Unktehi, eventually she was punished for the flood, turned into stone and so becoming a badlands (01.12.2014. <http://www.indianlegend.com>). The tribes of the Illini, the Miami and the Tamoroa (Mississippi) have different versions of a legend involving a dragon, where we may find several combinations of heroes, maidens sacrificed by lot and chained to rocks, memories of past wars and extraordinary weapons (Henson, 1957: 406-7). In Africa, the Fula people of Mali tell the story of Silamaka, a hero who is challenged to give proof of his bravery, and so he sets out to capturing alive the sacred serpent of the *galamani* woods. Silamaka, riding his white horse, Soperkagne, succeeds, and he makes the serpent into a belt which makes him invulnerable (Biebuyck, 1976: 10-11). The pervasiveness of this story is astounding, and it deserves a thorough comprehensive study, which I hope is forthcoming.

context, which direct the course of history towards one direction or another. This can be easily observed at the level of macrogeography, if we examine large-scale patterns as, for instance, those of the Eastern and Western cultures, but it can also be perceived in restricted geographical contexts, if we take a historical approach to them.

For the last 350 odd pages I have been travelling up and down the history of the British Isles, trying to elucidate exactly how this thesis applies to their particular culture. I have “travelled by fiction”, using the artistic productions that originated from this geographical context (legends and fairytales, literature and cinema) as a channel to gain access to a world that belongs largely to the distant past.

The results of such an unconventional passage have been, to say the least, stimulating.

Firstly, it has been observed that the most substantial evolution in the treatment of the dragon myth took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hesitantly at first, and more decisively since the second half of the century.

Secondly, this evolution was the result of a parallel alteration in society, a transition from a long period of history in which changes had occurred at a slower pace to an era of dizzying technological and social advancement in this part of the world.

Thirdly, these seemingly fundamental changes in the treatment of the motif denote equally fundamental changes in the society that caused them. Therefore, it may be declared with some confidence that by examining the evolution of the treatment of a given motif in fictional productions, one may learn about the social environment in which such production was created, and vice versa, by observing the social evolution of a given community, one may develop a way of foretelling to some extent the direction that authors are going to take.

It is the first of these two possible methods of study that has been attempted here. By selecting a very particular fictional motif (the myth of the dragon), and a restricted geographical area (the British Isles), I have explored the connotations offered by stories pertaining to these two contextual targets. I have compared them and reflected on the social implications behind some choice or other. This has been done to a selection of works produced along a given period of time (from the Middle Ages to the present day). I may now conclude the following:

One of the myths which is shared by most cultures is that of the dragon, predominantly in an episode of interaction with human beings, which, more often than not, leads to a deadly combat. In fact, this is one of the most ancient motifs in the pictorial representation of the dragon: the fight with the god, the primary struggle between good and evil. It is a combat between the storm-god and the serpent of chaos, a monster that needs to be slain to bring order to the world and to release the waters that are so needed for the fertilization of the earth. Often, there is a woman, or a newborn, who is chased by the dragon and needs to be saved by the hero or god.

This tableau suggests heavily that all these myths are, in essentials, myths of fertility. Taking one step further, one might argue that they could refer back to a deep religious change, that which substituted the mother goddess of fertility, associated to the subterranean (earth), the symbolism of birth (water) and a series of creatures that can easily be linked to these environments (for example, the serpent) with the male god of the sky and the storm, the warrior god who defeats the old goddess in battle and becomes the active principle of creation. One might even add that these myths connote a historical change: the transition from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal model, a shift of power that extolled the male warrior. The temptation to do so is strong, but, in my opinion, there is not enough evidence to support this idea yet, compelling as it may be.

This state of affairs went unchallenged until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of the story that is the object of this study, it became gradually trivialised. The hero was no longer a god, nor was the dragon an all-powerful evil entity. In the British Isles, dragons became the commonplace monsters that dwelled in caves and lakes, always abnormally large, and ferocious serpents, armed with all the most deadly of the biological features of the natural world, and, although some of the heroes were quite extraordinary humans (such as, for instance, saints and knights), they were also made of flesh and, occasionally, even related to the community in which the stories were preserved, as opposed to gods in the ancient Creation Myths. Many were the young maidens that needed saving, especially when the mass phenomenon of courtly love reached every noble household in Europe. The ideals of the gallant knight and the virginal maiden were praised to high heavens. Dragons were the purest representation of all things evil, were treated accordingly, everyone rejoiced, and all was well in the world again. In other occasions, the dragon was the keeper of some ancient and fabulous treasure, always a symbol of the dead and the afterlife, which the hero gained (sometimes dooming himself) after a long combat.

How many of these images were influenced by the observation and exaggeration of the animal kingdom, and how many were products of their time? Given that monsters are but the projections of our fears, created to embody them so that they can be conquered by us, these medieval dragons, who survived until very recently, were the symbols of everything evil and aberrant, at a time where virtue took the form of a perfect and beautiful human being and every physical deformation signalled a propensity for evil.

Curiously, there is a feature in these stories that is but rarely shared in modern productions and that is the possibility of hybridation, as explored in the legend of

Mélusine. There, the woman is animalized in her double nature (as partly female and partly serpent), and yet, she marries a human man and has children with him. This may remind one of the many foundational legends of coats of arms that explain how the hero married a mermaid and all his lineage comes from her (for instance, this is the case of the family Mariño in Galicia). It is a situation that is commonly frowned upon in posterior times, and especially evident in the cinematic contributions created in the United States, and yet, it seems that our medieval ancestors did not see the conflict as irredeemable, as we do, nor the offspring of such unions as damned. But then, maybe it was that they were closer in mentality to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who had myths of all sorts about the connubial felicity of humans, gods and monsters.

Then, come the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of these ideas began to change. First, the dragon was humanized, even turned into a comic relief. This happened at the same time as the influence of Christian religion in the Western society waned or evolved into other expressions of spirituality, due, to some extent, to the increasing detachment from the Church among some sectors of society. It is likely that this evolution played some part in the notion that the dragon did not necessarily represent the powers of satanic evil. Free from such a restraining duty, dragons could now become something entirely new. At a time when society was questioning its own set of values, dragons started to take all sorts of colourful hues: the benign dragon, the demigod, the friendly partner, but also the ferocious predator. It became the symbol of alternative religions, or that of the fight against the growing industrialization and dehumanization of society. The benign dragon was a cry for tolerance, or the need to accept those that are different. The ferocious one stood for the opposite, the fear of all that is different and emerges to change our established set of values and our way of living. At the same time, maidens got up and started to actually do things, instead of sitting quietly waiting for a hero to save them,

just as the fight for equal rights for men and women prospered in the real world. The modern warrior women are a result of a reaction against the traditional roles that females filled: the virginal maiden, but also the *femme fatale*, the seductress that attempts to destroy the male. However, the maiden and the seductress are still there, as reminders that the change has not completely applied as of yet and that there is a long way to go in terms of gender equality. Along these new views of old themes, one can also observe that the dragon episode is used to embody the modern fear of the ill use of scientific discoveries or new technologies, as well as the loss of control over nature and the possibility to lose our dominant position in it.

Modern these ideas they may seem, but in reality they are as old as mankind. It is my belief that there is a truth that matters most: be in the past or in the present, near or far, in spite of our differences, we are, fundamentally, the same. We see the world through the same eyes, we have the same fears. Love, death, hunger... these are universal concepts, which anyone and everyone can understand, and the experiences of others, be them far in space or time, may be relevant to us. Every culture has invented monsters, but the most enigmatic feature about them is their very existence.

Dragons, and monsters in general, were invented because there was a need for them. Monsters are, if nothing else, answers to the unknown. If we took our modern, seemingly knowledgeable selves to the times when everything in the world was still waiting to be unravelled and explained, we would find an unsettling world: the sea was immense and full of dangers. Ships wrecked during storms and strange creatures inhabited its depths. Some of them were deemed responsible for wreck and death. The mountains roared and spit fire and fire destroyed all known life. The night was dark and full of noises difficult to identify, and those who ventured outside could find themselves in great danger, for strange creatures lurked without, waiting for a victim. There were

also other elements that, although they did not inspire the same level of terror as a physical threat, were not easily interpreted and therefore deeply disturbing. These were the rotation of day and night, the evolution of the moon, the movement of the stars, but, on a closer level, the changes in climate, the process of giving birth, hunger and sickness, life and death. Often, they were interpreted by means of mythical recreation. Fossils were also probably found, and bones as well, and one could not but wonder which creature they could possibly have belonged to. Strange footsteps appeared on river banks, or etched into stone, and one imagined what extraordinary animal could have been responsible for them.

And, finally, alongside these sources of perplexity and terror, there were the more familiar ones, those that came from within: greed, rage, destructive instincts that could affect the community and that needed to be repressed.

Hence, the monster. At some point, our imagination supplied the answer that our reason could not. A monster embodies everything we do not understand, all of our ungraspable terrors. A monster gives shape to fear and thus, in being able to identify it, giving it a material body, we are better prepared to confront it. At the same time, our own flaws are externalized in this “Other” who can be physically fought. A monster is both adequate and handy. As it happened in the past, we still tend to project our fears (and our own flaws) on a symbolic image, “the Other”, the monster, and that action frees us from feeling the guilt that otherwise we might be forced to face in its absence. By fighting our dragon, we fight the most aberrant aspects, the true monstrosities of our own nature.

Ultimately, that is the reason why I have pursued this line of research. In examining the construction of the dragon in different moments of history, the stress was never on the design of a classification chart where they could be systematically



arranged, labelled and described, but on how the recurring features reveal an underlying set of ideas and beliefs. In other words, how the study of the monster may reveal as much about its conception as it does about the nature of its maker, in short, our own nature, our identity.





St. George, the dragon and the maiden. ca. 1370-1390. Additional MS 23145, f.36r (Bovey, 2002: 25).

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**Tracing the Dragon:** A Study of the Origin and Evolution of the Dragon Myth in the History and Literature of the British Isles.

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## **Filmography**

*Beowulf*. 2007. USA. Paramount Pictures. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Screenplay by Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary. Starring Ray Winstone, Anthony Hopkins, Angelina Jolie, Robin Wright, Brendan Gleeson and John Malkovich (voices).

*Dragonheart*. 1996. USA. Universal Pictures. Directed by Rob Cohen. Written by Patrick Read Johnson and Charles Edward Pogue. Starring Dennis Quaid, Sean Connery (voice) and Pete Postlethwaite.

*Dragonslayer*. 1981. USA. Walt Disney Productions & Paramount Pictures. Directed by Matthew Robbins. Written by Hal Barwood and Matthew Robbins. Starring Peter Mac Nicol, Caitlin Clarke, and Chloe Salaman.

*George and the Dragon*. 2004. USA / Germany / UK. American World Pictures. Directed by Tom Reeve. Written by Tom Reeve and Michael Burks. Starring James Purefoy, Patrick Swayze and Piper Perabo.

*How to Train Your Dragon*. 2010. USA. DreamWorks Animation. Directed by Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois. Screenplay by William Davies, Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders. Starring Jay Baruchel and Gerard Butler (voices).

*Reign of Fire*. 2002. UK / Ireland / USA. Directed by Rob Bowman. Written by Gregg Chabot and Kevin Peterka. Starring Christian Bale, Matthew McConaughey, Gerard Butler and Izabella Scorupco.

## **Internet resources**

<http://auchinleck.nls.uk/contents.html> (*Sir Bevis of Hampton*)

<http://www.angelfire.com> (St Keyne)

<http://www.beowulf-movie.com>

<http://www.cressidacowell.co.uk>

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/beowulf.asp> (*Beowulf*)

<http://www.georgeandthedragonmovie.com>

<http://www.howtostrainyourdragon.com>

<http://www.howtostrainyourdragonbooks.com>

<http://www.imdb.com>

<http://www.jkrowling.com>

<http://www.kennethgrahamesociety.net/index.htm>

<http://www.mostly-medieval.com/explore/kemp.htm> (*Kemp Owyne*)

<http://naominovik.livejournal.com>

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:23.3?rgn=div2;view=toc>

(Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*)

<http://www.rottentomatoes.com>

<http://stavenhagen.net/GvS/Tris.html> (Gottfried von Strassbourg's *Tristram*)

<http://www.temeraire.org>

<http://www.tolkienociety.org>

[http://www.warnerbros.co.uk/beowulf/\\_teaser\\_site](http://www.warnerbros.co.uk/beowulf/_teaser_site)

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## **Filmography**

*The 13th Warrior*. 1999. USA. Touchstone Pictures. Directed by John McTiernan. Written by Michael Crichton. Starring Antonio Banderas and Vladimir Kulich.

*Adventures of a Teenage Dragonslayer*. 2010. USA. Razor Sharp Productions. Directed by Andrew Lauer. Written by Jamie Nash. Starring Lea Thompson and Hunter Allan.

*Age of the Dragons*. 2011. USA. Koan, Cinedome, Dragon Quest Productions. Directed by Ryan Little. Written by Gil Aglaure and Anne K. Black. Starring Danny Glover, Vinnie Jones, Corey Sevier and Sofia Pernas.

*Beyond Sherwood Forest*. 2009. Canada. TV Movie. Syfy, Front Street Pictures & Forest Road Productions. Directed by Peter DeLuise. Written by Chase Parker. Starring Robin Dunne and Erica Durance.

*The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. 2005. UK / USA. Walt Disney Pictures. Directed by Andrew Adamson. Screenplay by Anne Peacock, Andrew Adamson, Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely. Starring Tilda Swinton, Georgie Henley and William Moseley.

*The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*. 2008. UK / USA. Walt Disney Pictures. Directed by Andrew Adamson. Screenplay by Andrew Adamson, Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely. Starring Georgie Henley, Ben Barnes and Skandar Keynes.

*The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. 2010. UK / USA. Fox 2000 Pictures. Directed by Michael Apted. Screenplay by Christopher Markus, Stephen McFeely and Michael Petroni. Starring Georgie Henley, Ben Barnes and Skandar Keynes.

*Dragon*. 2006. USA. The Asylum. Directed by Leigh Scott. Written by Leigh Scott and Eliza Swenson. Starring Amelia Jackson-Gray, Matthew Wolf and Jon-Paul Gates.

*Dragon Fighter.* 2003. USA. Video Film. Angry Dragon Entertainment. Directed by Phillip J. Roth. Written by Michael Baldwin and Phillip J. Roth. Starring Dean Cain, Kristine Byers and Robert Zacher.

*Dragon Hunter.* 2009. USA. Ground Glass Entertainment & Dragon Hunter Films. Directed by Stephen Shimek. Written by Stephen Shimek. Starring Kelly Stables and Brad Johnson.

*Dragon Storm.* 2004. USA. TV Movie. Equity Pictures Medienfonds GmbH & Co. KG. Directed by Stephen Furst. Written by Patrick Phillips and Sam Wells. Starring Maxwell Caulfield, Angel Boris Reed and Woon Young Park.

*Dungeons & Dragons.* 2000. USA / Czech Republic. Behaviour Worldwide. Directed by Courtney Solomon. Written by Topper Lilien and Carroll Cartwright. Starring Justin Whalin, Jeremy Irons and Zoe McLellan.

*Enchanted.* 2007. USA. Walt Disney Pictures. Kevin Lima. Written by Bill Kelly. Starring Amy Adams, Susan Sarandon and Patrick Dempsey.

*Fire & Ice: The Dragon Chronicles.* 2008. Romania. TV Movie. MediaPro Pictures & Sci Fi Channel. Directed by Pitof. Written by Michael Konyves and Angela Mancuso. Starring Amy Acker, Tom Wisdom and John Rhys-Davies.

*A Game of Thrones.* 2011 -. UK / USA. Home Box Office (HBO). TV Series created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss. Starring Peter Dinklage, Lena Headey and Emilia Clarke.

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**Tracing the Dragon:** A Study of the Origin and Evolution of the Dragon Myth in the History and Literature of the British Isles.

M<sup>a</sup> Aurora Lestón Mayo

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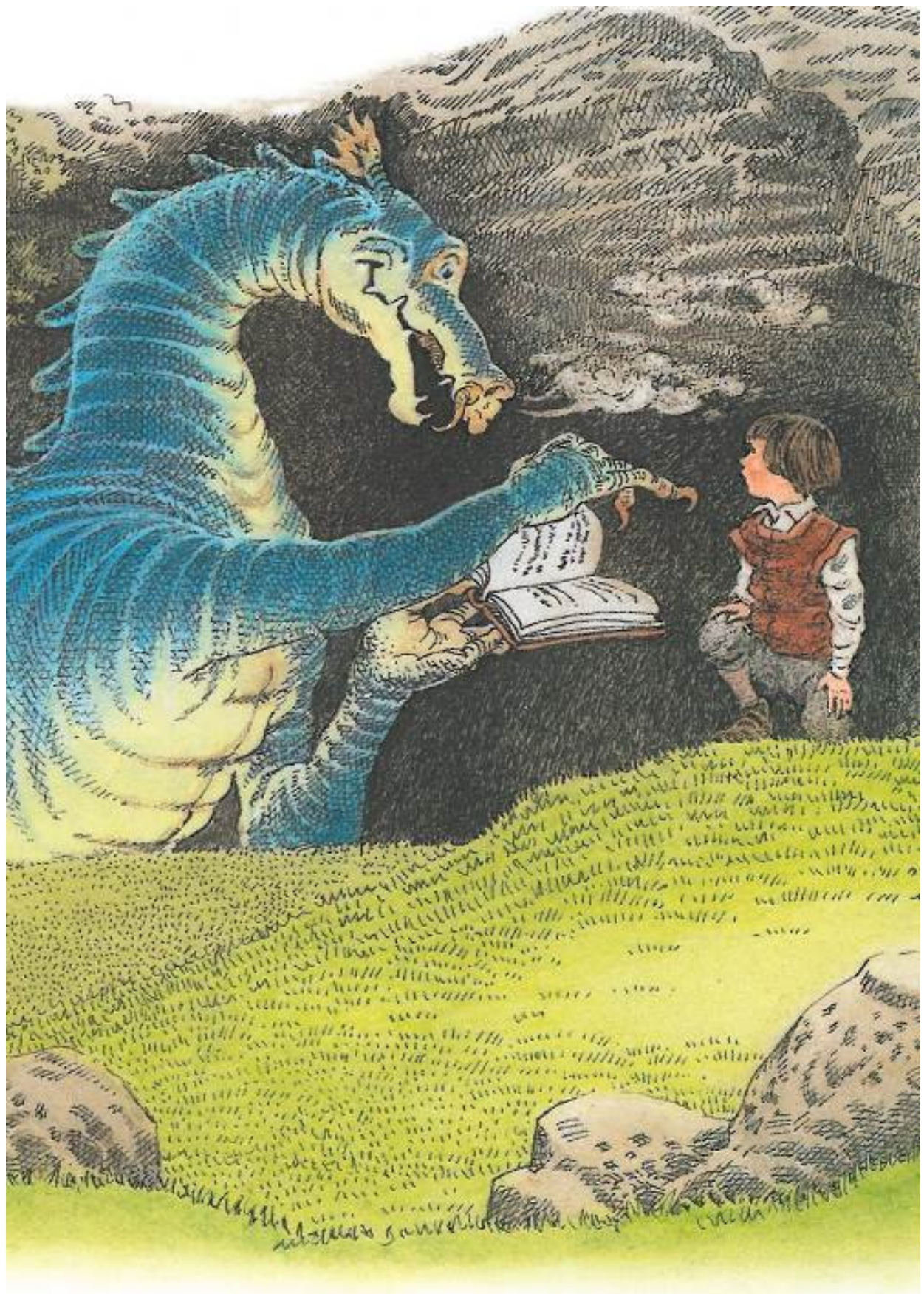
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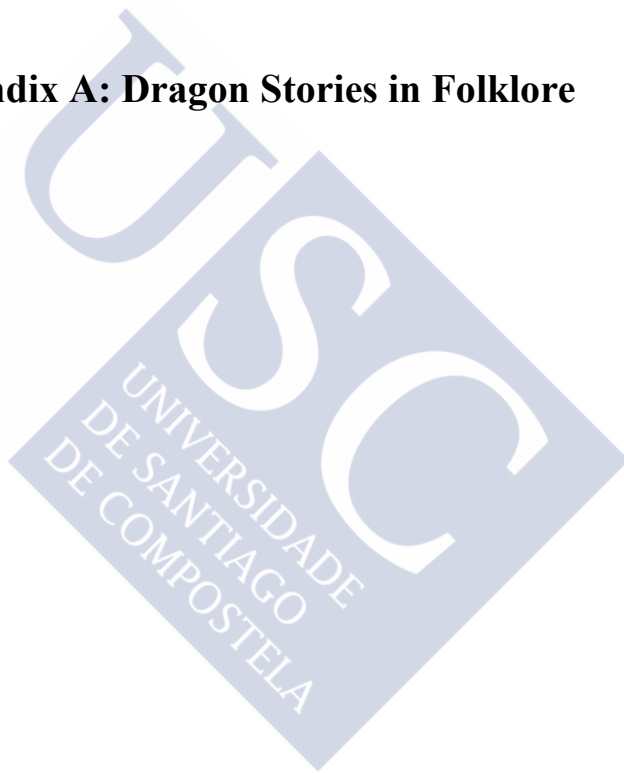


The dragon reads sonnets to the boy in Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon* (illustration: Inga Moore).

# APPENDICES



## **Appendix A: Dragon Stories in Folklore**





In these appendices the reader will find the complete texts of the legends used in the corpus of the study, whenever an official text was available. Unfortunately, not all the legends have been located other than in reelaborations or summaries in the work of authors who made mention of them. Whenever this was the case, the summary was included in the main text, but not here.

### ***The Ben Vair Dragon (Scotland)***

#### **Version 1**

In Argyllshire, Scotland - The hero of this story was a sea captain, Charles the Skipper. He came up with a trap to rid the area of a dragon that was the bane of all. He anchored his ship a little way offshore, and built a bridge from the vessel to the beach. The bridge was made of barrels lashed together and studded with metal spikes. The sea captain began to roast some meat on his ship. The smell wafted to the dragon's lair and it came swooping down to the beach. As it began to crawl across the bridge of barrels, the spikes pierced its hide and one struck the dragon's vulnerable spot. The massive beast expired on the bridge long before it got to the ship.

(01.22.2012. <http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Post/1261390>)

#### **Version 2**

No one dared to attack the dragon, and no one could think of a plan for her destruction, till Tearlach Sgiobair (Charles the Skipper) came to Ben Vair. He anchored his boat some distance out from the site of the present pier, and built a bridge of empty barrels between the vessel and the shore. The casks were lashed together with ropes, and bristled with spikes, when the bridge was made, he lit a fire on board the boat and placed pieces of meat on the embers.

When the odour of burning flesh reached Corrie Lia [the dragon's lair], the dragon jumped down in a series of mighty leaps to the shore, and from there tried to make her way out over the barrels to the boat. The spikes, however, pierced her scaly hide and tore her flesh so badly that she was nearly dead before she reached the other end of the bridge.

Charles the Skipper had meanwhile rowed his boat further out, so that a gap was left between it and the last barrel of the bridge. The dragon had not sufficient strength to leap to the deck of the boat, nor to return the way she had come; so she died of her wounds where she was, at the end of the bridge.

(Simpson, 2001: 83)

### **Version 3**

When the farmer discovered them in his stack, he at once set fire to it, hoping to destroy the brood. The shrieking of the young dragons was borne on the wind up to Corrie Lia, and the mother leapt down to their assistance. In spite of her efforts, however, they were burned to death, and when she saw this she lay down in her grief on a flat rock near the shore, and lashed at the rock with her tail until she killed herself. The rock upon which Ben Vair House now stands is still known as Leac-na-Beithreach (The Dragon Rock).

(Robertson, 1977: 141, in Simpson, 2001: 77)

### ***The Bisterne Dragon (Hampshire, England)***

#### **Version 1**

Sr Moris Barkley the sonne of Sr John Barkley, of Beverston, beinge a man of great strength and courage, in his tyme there was bread in Hampshire neere Bisterne a devouring Dragon, who doing much mischief upon men and cattell and could not be destroyed but spoiled many in attempting it, making his den neere unto a Beacon. This Sr Moris Barkley armed himself and encountered with it and at length overcam it and killed it but died himself soone after. This is the common saying even to this day in those parts of Hampshire, and the better to approve the same his children and posterity even to this present do beare for their Creast a Dragon standing before a burning beacon.

(Westwood, 1994: 53)

#### **Version 2**

A tale concerning a dragon (...) is told in Hampshire. Covered in scales and belching fire, this dragon terrorized the village of Bisterne. Every day the creature descended from its lair on Burley Beacon to demand a pail of milk as its sustenance. But to the consternation of the neighbourhood, the dragon's diet was not restricted to milk – it also craved the flesh of both cattle and men. Eventually the villagers hired a famous knight, Sir Maurice Berkeley, to destroy the dragon. To protect himself against its fiery breath the champion plastered his body with bird-lime sprinkled with broken glass. Sir Maurice then took his dogs and confronted the formidable creature in Dragon Fields. In the fierce battle that followed the dogs perished, and though the knight succeeded in killing the dragon, he came from the field a broken man, and died soon afterwards without ever speaking of the struggle.

(Simpson, 2001: 70)

### **Version 3**

Sir Macdonie (de Berkeley) combined courage with craft, like so many old-time heroes, and went out against his dragon armed only with his sword and a jug of milk, and a glass case in attendance. Arrived in the dragon's neighbourhood, he put the milk into cans, and stepped into the glass case. He waited till the creature came and tasted the milk, and killed him as he lapped. A singularly tame end, once would think, for such a dreadful dragon.

(Simpson, 2001: 79)

### ***The Bures Dragon (Essex/Suffolk, England)***

Close to the town of Bures, near Sudbury, there has lately appeared, to the great hurt of the countryside, a dragon, vast in body, with a crested head, teeth like a saw, and a tail extending to an enormous length. Having slaughtered the shepherd of a flock, it devoured many sheep. There came forth in order to shoot at him with arrows the workmen of the lord on whose state he had concealed himself, being Sir Richard de Waldegrave, Knight; but the dragon's body, although struck by the archers, remained unhurt, for the arrows bounced off his back as if it were iron or hard rock. Those arrows that fell upon the spine of his back gave out as they struck it a ringing or tinkling sound, just as if they had hit a brazen plate, and then flew away off by reason of the hide of this great best being impenetrable. Thereupon, in order to destroy him, all the country people around were summoned. But when the dragon saw that he was again about to be assailed with arrows, he fled into a marsh or mere and there hid himself among the long reeds, and was no more seen.

(Beaumont, 1957: 12, in Westwood, 2001: 67)

### ***Cnoc na Cnoimh (Sutherland, Scotland)***

Near eight hundred years ago, a terrible scourge fell upon the fertile valley of the Cassley, in Sutherland. A fierce monster had taken up his abode in a hole on the east side of a hill in the vicinity, and no living thing was safe from its fury. In shape, the monster was like a huge worm, and if it had ventured out into the open, people might have learned how to avoid it, for worms are not as a rule noted for their speed of movement (...). The valley soon became desolate, and the people of the district fled from their houses.

At intervals, the worm left its lair and crawled slowly to the summit of the hill, winding its sinuous length round and round; and on these occasions, it used to lie as if surveying the scene of desolation round about with the greatest satisfaction. The hole in which the monster lived came to be called "Toll na Cnoimh" (Worm's Hole), and the hill round which it coiled itself "Cnoc na Cnoimh" (Worm's Hill).

William the Lion, King of Scotland, heard of the misfortune which had befallen this part of his realm, and offered a large reward to anyone who would slay the monster. But

none of his knights was brave enough to attempt such a perilous task, and when no one came to their rescue the country folk lost heart, for it seemed as though they would have to go on living in fear all their lives. At last a rough-and-ready farmer from the Kyle of Sutherland – Hector Gunn by name – came forward and said that although he was a plain man he would try to slay the beast and rid the countryside of it for good and all. He mounted his horse and rode till he came to within a few miles of “Cnoc na Cnoimh.” He asked the people where the Worm’s Hole was; but they answered that the monster was not in the hole that day, but had crawled up the side of the hill and lay sunning itself on the top as if like “an Diabhull“ (the Evil One) he thought that all the world was his.

The farmer then wheeled his horse round and rode straight for the hill. He had with him a broadsword with which to sever the creature’s head; but he soon found that this would not avail him at all, for before he came near to the foot of the hill, he felt the worm’s poisonous breath coming towards him in waves of fetid heat, and became so weak and faint that he could go no further. He returned crestfallen to where the people were waiting for him, and great were their lamentations on seeing his dejected mien (...). When he had recovered somewhat from his faintness, he borrowed a seven-ell-long spear, and asked the astonished villagers if they had any pitch. They said that they had, and he ordered them to boil some of it in a pot. He then went onto the moor and cut a great divot of peat. He thrust the end of the long spear through the peat, and dipped it into the boiling pitch. With this strange weapon in his hand, he mounted his horse once more and rode towards Cnoc na Cnoimh. The country people followed at a distance, wondering. As soon as Hector Gunn came near the monster, and it opened its mouth to suck him in with its poisonous breath, he held out the spear with the reeking peat at the end, and the wind blew the fumes right into the worm’s face. So strange and pungent was the smoke that the creature was almost suffocated, and drew in its breath, and wound itself tighter round the hill in its agony. Hector rode nearer and nearer, until he was on a level with the monster, then in one quick movement he thrust the burning peat down its throat and held it there till the fearsome creature died.

Thus was the valley of Cassley delivered from the worm; and William the Lion rewarded Hector Gunn with gifts of land and money. And – to this day, men may go to “Cnoc na Cnoimh” and see traces of this old story in the spiral indentations said to have been made on the hillside by the worm as its coils tightened in its death throes.

(Robertson, 1961: 130-131)

### ***John Aller and the Dragon (Somerset, England)***

#### **Version 1**

This poison-breathing monster, which had the shape of a great flying serpent and was protected by an armour of scales, lived in a den on the south side of the Round Hill above Aller. It descended to devastate the villages in the marshy valley, and wherever it flew the crops and trees were poisoned. Milkmaids fled at the first hiss of its wing-beat; and a score of pails had their contents drunk in a few minutes. People lived in dread of a horrible death for themselves, their children, and their cattle. At last a knight called John of Aller, or the Lord of Aller, came boldly to their rescue. He plastered his body with

pitch and put on a mask so that the dragon's breath could not harm him; he armed himself with a long spear specially fashioned for this exploit, journeyed to the dragon's den, and attacked it while it slept. After a fierce fight in the darkness, he killed it. Seeing two or three baby dragons in the den, he went home to fetch several of his labourers to stop up the hole with the spikes of an iron harrow (...). Some who related the legend declare that "The Dragon of Aller was slain by a harrow". In the north wall of the chancel of Aller church (...) there lies the defaced effigy of a knight, with his dagger suspended by two cords from a richly ornamented baldric. He, they say, is John of Aller who killed the dragon, and the spear he used still exists. At one time it was kept in the belfry of Aller church, but now (...) [it is at Low Ham church.] It is a kind of dart nine feet long, made of light wood, its shaft curiously painted in a band-pattern of brown, green and yellow, with rings of black between.

(Lawrence, 1973: 95-6, in Westwood, 2001: 67-8)

## **Version 2**

The following story was told me in the summer of 1885 by a farmer at Aller in Somersetshire (Mr. Dudridge), to account for the origin of the name of the village. He also informed me that there was a monument to Aller in the church, but this was incorrect. The village of Aller is distant about two miles from Curry Rivell, both villages are on the sides of hills, and the intervening country is flat and marshy. The spot pointed out to me as the site of the encounter is a bare patch of sand, very noticeable on the green hill-side as you approach by the Langport road. The rector of Aller had never heard the story.

"Many years ago a fiery flying dragon lived at Curry Rivell. At certain times it used to fly across the marsh to Aller, and destroy the crops and all it came near with its fiery breath. At last one John Aller, a brave and valiant man who lived at Aller, vowed that he would kill it. He lay in wait, and when next the dragon flew across to Aller Hill he attacked it, and after a fierce struggle slew it and cut off its head. Then its fiery blood ran out and scorched up all the grass around, and from that day to this grass has never grown on that spot. John Aller was so burned by the dragon's breath that he died almost at the same moment as the dragon. The people took up his body, buried it in the church, and called the village after him."

(Higgins, 1893: 399-400)

## ***The Dragon at Castle Carlton (Lincolnshire, England)***

Then did Sir Hugh cry to the Saints, and to Saint Bartholomew and Saint Guthlac in particular, promising to heap up riches upon the altar at Crowland if he might prove victorious that day. And he saw the blazing eye of the dragon's forehead fixed balefully upon him, and said: 'Thinkest thou to destroy me, O mine enemy? Now I challenge thee, and may St Guthlac defend me.'

And at that the monster spread his wings and flew with the swiftness of the wind to seize the knight, as he stood at bay with his sword in his hand.

Suddenly the clouds opened and a drenching downpour of rain came between the knight and his enemy, and a black darkness overshadowed him. And a voice came from the darkness, saying: 'Look for the bright light from heaven which shall blind the dragon – in the instant that light shines strike hard or thou shalt perish.'

Whereupon there sounded a mighty thunderclap and a vivid flash illuminated the sky. And silhouetted against the darkness was the perfect outline of the monster, with the triple brass guard protecting his thigh, standing out in bold relief. And on the instant Sir Hugh struck with all his strength so that his sword clave the brass guard in the middle and penetrated the wart and flesh beneath. Then did the dragon howl so that the noise was heard full twelve miles off, and opened his mouth and rushed upon the knight to devour him.

But again came the cloud and the sound of thunder so that he paused affrighted. And Sir Hugh stood awaiting the last onslaught, for he knew that his sword had opened the wart and that the monster must die. So the dragon wandered in the midst of the darkness seeking his enemy and breathing fire and brimstone. But the wound began to throb and he knew his last moments had come. So he stretched himself out on the earth, and the cloud vanished, and Sir Hugh saw him stiff and senseless on the beach. Then did the knight advance and with one stroke cut off that baleful head, so that it rolled well-nigh into the sea.

(Marlowe, 1976: 59-60, in Simpson, 2001: 74-5)

### ***The Dragon of Filey (Yorkshire, England)***

HERE be a tale young Charley, the Yorkshire undergroom, used to tell. There was a Dragon who lived in a deep gully and no-one else cared about living near him except old Mrs Greenaway, in a cottage in the woods above and she were a 'gifted' woman as had a way with warts and such like so maybe she had a way with a Dragon - anyway up there she stayed safe and sound, and down there he stayed too, getting hungrier and hungrier. The farmers had moved back along over the hill to the village with all their stock. The hill grazing was rich but no-one with their full senses let good beasts fatten to feed a dragon. For that matter an angry sturdy farmer could come a tasty snack like.

On tother zide of gully right atop the hill were Billy Biter, the travelling Tailor, and folks kept atelling Billy twere real dangerous to live there. They all had a liking for Billy Biter and not one a good word for Hepzibah, his wife, and her girt black-jack. Billy's cottage had been the most welcoming in the parish while his old mother lived. All the folks found some excuse to go avisiting up the hill. There were always a kettle ready to boil hanging on the crook, and a good back log burning in hearth and Old Tom Puss awashing himself in the chimbley corner. They brought in the logs and carried fresh water in for her when Billy was away on his tailoring and twas believed Old Mrs Greenaway kept an eye on the dear soul too. Anyways the cottage were a picture while she lived but when she died things was very different.

A man needs a home to come back to after his days labour so poor Billy he went and married Hepzibah and everyone said she proper terrified him into it. He were only a little fellow, kind as they come, and she were six foot high and so thin as a yard of pumpwater - but twasn't pumpwater as Hepzibah were always apouring down her gullet from her black-jack. The folk reckoned she only married Billy because the cottage

wasnt a half a mile down to the Inn and every day Hepzibah would come staggering and all adraggle-tail to get black-jack filled and if she got back up whoame twas a month's wonder. There wadn't no fire till Billy trudged home and a faggot with him. He'd fetch water for the kettle and swept up a bit and old Tom Puss could sit in a warm chimney corner for a two-dree minutes afore Billy took the wheelbarrow and went to look for Hepzibah. There were times when she were fast asleep halfway home and black-jack were empty beside her, times she were nearly home and not such a troublesome load for a bone weary little man, and times she was really to home and all a sprawl in old Mrs Biter's rocking chair that Hepzibah had sat right thro' the seat of, and then Billy and Tom Puss went a tip-toe while they kept one eye open in case she moved. When she moved a foot they was both out of the door and atop of the roof where she were too bone idle to reach, and there they sat the whole night cuddled to chimney for a bit of warmth. Folks talked and Billy went on same way, too tired to do ought about it until one day he met Mrs Greenaway. 'Where be your pay money, Billy?' she say and somehow Billy give it over - she give him a silver sixpence back. 'That'll all be down Hepzibah's dreat by tomorrow' she say, 'Get this bite of bread and cheese inside you.' And Billy Biter went a home feeling fine. He give Hepzibah the sixpence and then he joined Tom Puss up against the chimney pot. Hepzibah were too handy with a broom handle for comfort and she could run a deal too fast for his thin liddle tailor's legs. Bye and bye there was no smoke up chimney and cottage windows was dark and old Mrs Greenaway noted it - and the Dragon below give a girt groan he were that hungry but he didn't stir out for all that.

Next night twas the same - Hepzibah were a'sprawl across drashel so Billy went up on roof to join Tom Puss and sat there in the rain and Mrs Greenaway noted that too and the Dragon give another girt hollow groan but he didn't stir neither.

The third night they give Billy Biter a good Yorkshire tea at the farm afore sending him on his way and he'd kept back a bit in his pocket for Tom Puss but Varmer's wife had her own notions. They was all fond of Billy Biter. He had been a merry little soul, he could isng tunable at his work and dance dapper and laugh like a pixy, so now she had packed him a load of good vittles. 'If Hepzibah can't trouble herself to cook 'en you up and vind a time and place', she said and Varmer bound a good dry faggot atop. 'Tidn so heavy as wheelbarrow load', he say, and watch Billy Biter go into the vog looking like a walking hod-me-dod. Hod-me-dod or no Billy made good time until he smelled summat so good it somehow brought him out of his way to Mrs Greenaway's wood. She come to her door. 'Come in Billy Biter, you and your good vittles and faggot. Hepzibah wont be wanting 'en. Hand over.' Well she was old and had been good to his old mother and twas cruel hard to go hungry as Billy well knew but for all that he hands over the load. But Mrs Greenaway she don't trouble herself to undo it, she just shakes summat like flour over it. 'I been a bakin' she say, Can ee smell my parkin?'

(Parkin, Charley say, be a Yorkshire girt square ginger cake. He don't think much of our thin gingerbread - He say it should be square and sticky, but for all that he eat enough of it)

Billy could smell nothing else nor could the hungry Dragon far below. 'I'll give ee a mouthvill to warm your road whoame' and with that she cut a huge slice for Billy from the square baking sheet on the hearth. 'A bit for Tom Puss to go in your pocket so well - and this in corner be for Hepzibah alone - no-one else mind.' And with that she broke off a girt corner, wrapped it up in clean leaves and laid it on the load. 'Tisn't vor such as you and Tom Puss, mind now - on your way and sleep well tonight.' And out went Billy full of good food and with his own girt wedge of warm parkin to nibble on his trudge on

home. He were even full of hope that Hepzibah might take a fancy to a hot meal and cook'n vor the once and so twas no wonder that misty moisty night he step right over the edge of the Dragon's gully, and down he went arsey-varsey almost down his gullet too. He landed on his load which were softer than all the oven hot rock down there and up against a girt red light that blinked. 'That be my eye you be poking your faggot in' say Dragon. 'Lets have a proper look at what I'm to dine on.' Poor Billy's knees chattered and he dropped his wedge of parking afore Dragon's nose - out come a girt hot tongue and golloped it while even Tom Puss half a mile uphill could hear the clatter of Billy Biter all atremble below - But the parkin just wouldn't gollop - it stuck to Dragon's teeth and he found it so welcome as flowers in May. 'What do ee call this?' He say droo the sticky chumble. 'P-p-parkin' say Billy still atwitter and all adrench wi' cold sweat. For all that his load were beginning to scorch gentle. 'Then go back and bring me some more' say Dragon, sneezing out a crumb as were tickling his gullet. That sneeze fair blew Billy Biter clean out of the gully and atop of Tom Puss by the cold cottage chimney and rope on his load were so scorched droo that it broke and down inside chimney tumbled the whole load on the dying embers. It just passed Hepzibah's head where she lay all a'sprawl, her shoes all untied, her skirts atatter and greasy and black-jack empty alongside. The smell of her own girt corner or parkin made her nose twitch and she sat up to gobble it, then she got up and kicked faggot which were beginning to catch and crackle a bit. 'You come down here, Billy', she yelled up chimney, 'Drowing cake at your poor wife. What be it anyway.' 'P-p-parkin', say Billy coming down carefully. Tom Puss he didn't stir, not he. 'Parkin!' yells Hebzibah. 'Give I the sack I'll show thee how to bake parkin.' And she did too! Billy were kept on the gallop filling pigtrough with the dough, she kicked and trampled till it were ready to use and Tom Puss watched down the chimney in between the smoke. 'She 've a girt dollop of dough on a baking sheet zo long and round as a wagon wheel and tis still zwellin. Parkins is square', whispered Billy. 'I'm biding here.' 'When tis cooked us'll see' say Hepzibah. Believe it or not in two minutes that girt round parkin were baked and zmelling rich and strange. Billy took to the roof when Hepzibah hauled the hugeous round out of the blaze without a burn to it. 'I'll show ee broom end', shrieks Hepzibah, 'when I comes back vrom showing the old witch how to bake parkin!' And she tumbled over a shoe-lace and out of the door. She lost one shoe, then she lost tother, then she lost the girt round parkin and it went abowling and arolling downwards towards gully where Dragon were still waiting hopeful and Hepzibah staggered after it yelling like a flock of crows - the village come out to look-see. They seed Billy's cottage lit up and they seed the girt round parkin abouncing and jouncing down over and they seed Hepzibah run right over the edge of the gully and they heard Dragon give a gollop as he swallowed her. 'Twadn't a very tasty morsel', he say and then the girt round parkin what had been a spinning and wig-wagging on the edge above plump down afore his nose. 'Cor!' say Dragon and he bit into it hearty that he couldn't say no more and he never didn't on account his teeth were that stuck he couldn't only snort - When the folk see what come of it they all runned for sledge hammers, and pickforks and axes and such but how to get into gully without being fried they couldn't tell. Dragon he settled it vor 'en nicely - He took off away down to the sea to wash the girt round parkin vrom between his teeth where it were clinging so loving as an ivy-bine. Well the folk followed and they was just in time to see Dragon ker-vlop right down in deep water and stick his head under then they run and give his nose arf-dozen whister-poops as stopped his breath and run back to safety and avore Dragon come to there were a girt oncome of waves and he drouded then and there. When folks come rejoicing back past Billy's cottage, door were wide open, house



were all clean and tidy - there was vittles on table, a kettle on the crook, Tom Puss awashing himself in chimbley corner, and a nice square parkin on baking sheet avore the fire and Billy mending the seat of the rocking chair - and I don't doubt old Mrs Greenaway saw that too. Charley say Dragon's bones turned into a long stretch of rock folk up there call - Filey Brigg - but I never heard of 'en.

(Tongue, 1967: 137-141)

### ***Lé Dragon d'la Hougue Bie (Jersey)***

The story opens with a dragon living in the marshes of St. Lawrence, in the lowlands bordering St. Aubin's Bay called *L'Mathais d'St. Louothains* (Le Marais de St. Laurens). From there he would set out to terrorise the neighbouring communities, killing whoever came his way and ravaging the land. The local population appealed to the seigneur of Hambie to come and rid them of this monster. Having bid his wife "au revoir", he landed in Jersey with his squire and went to seek out the dragon on his own. Once the two had found each other, a fierce battle ensued in which both were severely wounded, but eventually the lord of Hambie prevailed and struck off the dragon's head. He then collapsed beneath a tree, waiting for his servant to tend his wounds. Seeing an opportunity of fame and fortune, the squire took advantage of his master's weakened state and crept up on him, cutting his throat and hiding his body. He then returned to the seigneur's wife in Hambie, with the story that her husband had died fighting the dragon and that *he*, the squire, had killed the serpent in revenge. He claimed that his master's dying wish had been that he should return to Hambie to take his place, both in the seigneurie and in his bed. So the seigneur's wife and the deceitful squire were married. In the course of the nights that followed the usurper was troubled by this conscience or perhaps visited by his dead master in his dreams and in his nocturnal mumblings revealed to the widow fragments of what had really happened. Her suspicions aroused, she had her new husband seized and interrogated, and after hearing his confession, she had him put to death, his corpse being thrown to the dogs. *La Dame de Hambie* went to Jersey and found her first husband's body, had it taken to a high point in the east (overlooking the coast of France) and buried him beneath a huge mound, which she had raised as a grave marker that she could see from the window of her château in Normandy. As it would seem the dragon never went near La Hougue Bie, a more appropriate name for this story might have been *Lé Dragon dé l'Mathais d'St. Louothains*.

(Bois, 2010: 42-3)

### ***The Dragon of Kingston St. Mary (Somerset, England)***

There was a terrible dragon to Kingston St Mary, breathed out viery vlamés he did, an' cooked his meat to a turn, looky zee. Well, no one couldn't get near to kill'n for vear of bein' roasted so brown's a partridge. Now, there were a bold veller as had a good head on him. And her climbed lane by Ivyton where there was a gurt rock those days. "Tis a

steep hill, look, and rock was right on brow, so he give a shout to dragon. Well then, dragon he d' look up and zees "n. Then he opens his gurt mouth to roar vlames, and the veller gives the rock a shove off. It rolled straight down hill into dragon's mouth and choked'n dead. Yes, it did.

(01.22.2012. <http://www.ksmvillagehall.co.uk/Dragon.html>)

### ***The Dragon of Llandeilo Graban (Radnorshire, Wales)***

It would seem that Welsh dragons, like bulls, where easily provoked by the colour red; there was one at Llandeilo Graban who was also infuriated by it, according to a story current in the early years of this century. The monster used to settle on top of the church tower every night to sleep, until a ploughboy thought up a way of killing it at no risk to himself:

He made a dummy man out of a large log of oak, and, aided by the local blacksmith, armed it with numerous iron hooks, powerful, keen and barbed. Then he dressed the mummy in red and fixed it firmly on top of the tower. At dawn the following day the dragon first saw his daring bedfellow, and dealt him with a violent blow with his tail, which was badly torn by the hooks. Infuriated by the pain, he attacked the dummy with tooth, claw, wing and tail, and finally coiled himself round his wooden foe and bled to death.

(Howse, 1949: 201, in Simpson, 2001: 83-4)

### ***The Dragon of Le Trou Baligan (Flamanville, Normandy, France)***

A gigantic serpent sometimes lived in the cavern called *Le Trou Baligan* in the cliffs at le Cap de Flamanville. From time to time he went out along the coast to catch any children who came his way. He caused so much trouble and damage in the searching for someone to eat that the people decided to forestall him by making a weekly offering of a child chosen by lot. In desperation at the desolation of the district, they called for St. George, but he lived too far away to hear their faint calls. On one of the occasions they were abandoning a child to his fate, they were confronted by something extraordinary. On the calm waters they saw a man standing, a mitre on his head and cross in his hand with a cape over his shoulders, who seemed to glide rather than walk. As he came closer it became apparent he was carried in a cartwheel. As the tide was high, the man (who was saint Germain-la-Rouelle) was able to walk straight into the serpent's cave. The serpent drew back and tried to withdraw into his lair, a recess in which his tail was partly concealed, but the saint barred his way and struck him with his cross, on which the animal fell writhing to the ground and after a few convulsions became still. They left him to become encrusted into a block of granite, which could still be viewed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then the saint baptised the crowd that stood dumbfounded on the cliffs and left in the direction from which had come, on his cartwheel.

In another version of this story the dragon used to eat daily, but settled for the offer of a weekly meal, in this version, St. Germain rode the sea on a cartwheel and “appeared from the Channel Islands” (carrying a crosier). It is unfortunate we have no record of his having been based here, but no doubt as the islands lay to the west, in the direction of the setting sun and the “other world”, from the coasts of *Le Contentin* they were identified with the mythical “Isles of the West” (synonymous with the spirit world).

(Bois, 2010: 46-7)

### ***The Dragon of Loch CorrieMhor (Scotland)***

At Loch CorrieMhor there lived for many years a flying serpent, so terrible and wild that nobody could fish in the loch, nor come within a mile of it. At last one summer, when there was a drought and a dearth, a man said to his son, "Let us go and fish in Loch CorrieMhor, and maybe the serpent will not heed us." So they went; but they had not made two casts when they see her coming, swimming across the loch. The man said, " It is time we should be out of this." And they ran together, but the serpent outran them, and they could feel her hot breath. "Run you, my son, for my hour is come," said the man. So the lad fled, and his father went up into a tree, having put his cap upon his sword, and struck that into the trees root, hoping to frighten the beast. But she snuffed at the cap, and knocked down the sword, and began to wind round the tree. Then he began to shoot arrows at her; but she pulled them out with her teeth as fast as he put them into her. The last arrow had an iron head and two barbs, and was of the kind which men call *saidh baiseh*, or the *death arrow*, which they do not part with till the last struggle. Just as the serpent reached him, and opened her jaws to seize his feet, he shot at her open jaws with the two-barbed dart. It fastened there, and could not be pulled out. So, after a struggle, the terrible beast died, and the man got home to tell the tale. N.B.-A whole kid was taken out of the serpent at her death.- (D. M., Stack)

(Dempster, 1888: 231-2)

### ***The Dragon of Shervage Wood (Somerset)***

A third<sup>1</sup> dragon, which had its habitation in Shervage Wood, below the Danesborough camp, on the eastern slope of the hills, is however told of very definitely, and is still used as a deterrent to children who might linger too late among the whortleberry bushes. It was a long dragon, 'one of the sort they call a worm', and it devoured every living within reach. Consequently the local woodman was unable to go to the wood and cut the faggots on which his living depended. At last, however, starvation drove him to work at a time when the dragon seemed to have gone elsewhere in search of prey, and

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<sup>1</sup> Before getting to this story, the author mentions that three legends featuring dragons were once localised in the Roman camp near Petherton: the first, that King Arthur once hunted a dragon in the “marsh of the Car”, at Carhampton; the second, that on the western slope of the hills, there used to live a dragon with two heads, which was slain by an unnamed champion at Crowcombe (Whistler, 1908: 34-5).

during the morning he cut wood unmolested, seeing and hearing nothing of the terror. At noon he sat on a fallen log half buried in fern to eat his 'nummit' (noon-meat), and as he sat, the log heaved under him. Whereupon in desperation he leaped up, and crying 'So thee do movey, do'ee? Take that then!', he struck his axe into the beast, and fled. But what became of the dragon afterwards no man knows, for it was never seen afterward.

(Whistler, 1908: 35)

### ***The Knucker of Lyminster (West Sussex, England)***

#### **Version 1**

Near Lyminster church is a deep pool (TQ 023049) fed by an underground spring so powerful that though a stream flows out of the pool it never dries up, even in the hottest weather. The pool is about thirty feet (9 m) deep, but used to be thought bottomless - the story goes that the villagers once took the six bellropes from the church tower and tied them end to end, but still they did not touch the bottom.

This pool, is known as the Knucker Hole, and in it once lived the Lyminster Knucker, a fearsome dragon who for years ravaged the countryside for many miles around, carrying off cattle and men, and devouring them in the marsh-fastnesses of the Arun valley. At last the King of Sussex offered his daughter's hand to anyone who could kill the Knucker, and a passing knight errant undertook the task, killed the monster and married the princess. Being now a married man, he gave up errantry to settle at Lyminster, where he later died. His grave can still be seen in the churchyard there.

(Westwood, 1994: 114-116)

#### **Version 2**

The hedger laid his gloves atop of the carefully wiped bill, and settling himself on the bank where the crisp tongues of the primroses had begun to push aside the rustle of drifted leaves, began to untie his "elevenes".

"They do say," he observed deliberately, as he spread his red and white spotted handkerchief across his knees, "that a dunnamany years ago there was a gert dragon lived in that big pond there – Knucker his name was, and Knucker Hole we calls it today. An thisyer ole dragon, you know, he uster go spannelling about the Brooks by night to see what he could pick up for supper, like – few horse, or cows maybe – he'd snap 'em up soon as look at 'em. Then bymby he took to sitting top o' Causeway, and anybody come along there, he'd lick 'em up, like a toad licking flies off a stone.

So what with that, and him swimming in the river otherwhile and sticking his ugly face up again the winders in Shipyard when people was sitting having their tea, things was in a tidy old Humphrey up Ar'ndel way, no bounds.

So the Mayor of Ar'ndel, as was then, he offered a reward for anyone as "ud put an end to "en. I misremember how much "twas, but something pretty big, I reckon. Howsomever, everybody was so feared on "en, that they was onaccountable backward in coming forward, as you might say.

So Mayor, he doubled the reward; and this time a young chap from Wick put up for it. Now some people says he was an Ar'ndel man, but that ain't true. Young Jim Puttock his name was, and he came from Wick. I've lived at Toddington all my life, so I reckon I oughter know. Sides, my great-aunt Judith, what lived down along there where you turns up by they gert ellum trees, just tother side o' the line, uster say that when she was a gal there was a man lived 'long o' them as was courting a gal that "ventually married a kind of descendant of this Jim Puttock.

Let be how 'twull, this Jim Puttock he goos to Mayor and tells him his plan. And Mayor he says everybody must give en what he asks, and never mind the expense, 'cause they oughter be thankful anyway for getting rid of the Knucker.

So he goos to the smith and horders a gert iron pot – 'bout *so* big. And he goos to the miller and asks en for so much flour. And he goos to the woodmen and tells 'em to build a gert stack-fire in the middle of the Square. And when 'twas done he set to and made the biggest pudden that was ever seen. And when 'twas done – not that 'twas quite done – bit sad in the middle, I reckon, but that was all the better, like – they heaved 'em onto a timber-tug, and somebody lent him a team to draw it, and off he goos, bold as a lion.

All the people followed en as far as the bridge; but they dursen't goo no furdur, for there was old Knucker, lying just below Bill Dawes's place. Least, his heads was, but his neck and body-parts lay all along up the hill, past the station, and he was a-tearing up the trees in Batworth Park with his tail.

And he sees thisyer tug a-coming, and he sings out, affable-like, "How do, Man?"

"How do, Dragon?" says Jim.

"What you got there?" says Dragon, sniffing.

"Pudden", says Jim.

"Pudden?" says Dragon. "What be that?"

"Just you try," says Jim.

And he didn't want no more telling – pudden, horses, tug, they was gone in a blink. Jim 'ud 'a gone too, only he hung on to one o' they trees what blew down last year.

"Tweren't bad," says Knucker, licking his lips.

"Like another?" says Jim.

"Shouldn't mind," says he.

"Right," says Jim, "bring 'ee one 'sartenoon." But he knew better'n that, surelye.

Afore long they hears en rolling about, and roaring and bellering fit to bust hisself. And as he rolls, he chucks up gert clods, big as houses, and trees and stones and all manner, he did lash about so with his tail. But that Jim Puttock, he weren't afeard, not he. He took a gallon or so with his dinner, and goos off to have a look at en.

When he sees en coming, old Knucker roars out: "Don't you dare bring me no more o' that there pudden, young man!"

"Why?" says Jim. "What's matter?"

"Collywobbles," says Dragon. "It do set so heavy on me I can't stand up, nowhows in the wurreld."

"Shouldn't bolt it so," says Jim. "But never mind, I got a pill here, soon cure that."

"Where?" says Knucker.

"Here," says Jim. And he ups with an axe he'd held behind his back, and cuts off his head."

The hedger took a long pull at his tea-bottle, and lapsed into silence.

"That's all?" said I.

“That’s all, sir. But if you goos through that liddle gate there into the churchyard, you’ll see his grave. By the porch, left-hand side, in the corner like, between the porch and the wall of the church.”

And sure enough, the grave is there, and covered with a great coped slab of Horsham stone. But it is without inscription, and though many are proud to show it, this hedger was the only one I ever met who gave the hero “a local habitation and a name”. To all the rest, he was simply “the man who killed the dragon”.

(Joiner, 1929, in Simpson, 2001: 143-5)

### ***The Lambton Worm (Durham, England)***

#### **Version 1**

The young heir of Lambton led a dissolute and evil course of life, equally regardless of the obligations of his high estate, and the sacred duties of religion. According to his profane custom, he was fishing on a Sunday, and threw his line into the river to catch fish, at a time when all good men should have been engaged in solemn observance of the day. After having toiled in vain for some time, he vented his disappointment at his ill success in curses “loud and deep” to the great scandal of all who heard him on their way to Holy Mass, and to the manifest peril of his own soul.

At length he felt something extraordinary “tugging” at his line, and in the hope of catching a large fish, he drew it up with the utmost skill and care, yet it required all his strength to bring the expected fish to land. But what was his surprise and mortification when, instead of a fish, he found that he had only caught a worm of most unseemly and disgusting appearance, and he hastily tore it from his hook and threw it into a well hard by (still known by the name of Worm Well).

He again threw in his line, and continued to fish; when a stranger of venerable appearance, passing by, asked him, “What sport?” To which he replied, “I think I’ve caught the Devil,” and directed him to look in the well. The stranger saw the worm, and remarked that he had never seen “the like of it” before – that it was like an eft, but that it had nine holes on either side of its mouth, and “tokened no good”.

The worm remained neglected in the well, but soon grew so large that it became necessary to seek another abode. It usually lay in the daytime coiled round a rock in the middle of the river, and at night frequented a neighbouring hill, twining itself around the base, and it continued to increase in length until it could “lap” itself three times round the hill (i.e. the Worm Hill near Fatfield).

It now became the terror of the neighbourhood, devouring lambs, sucking the cows’ milk, and committing every species of injury on the cattle of the affrighted peasantry. The immediate neighbourhood was soon laid waste, and the worm, finding no further support on the north side of the river, crossed the stream towards Lambton Hall, where the old Lord was then living in grief and sorrow; the young heir of Lambton having repented him on his former sins, and “gone to the wars in a far distant land”, according to some “to wage war against the infidels”.

The terrified household assembled in council, and it was proposed by the steward, a man “far advanced in years, and of great experience”, that the large trough which stood in the courtyard should be filled with milk. The monster approached, and eagerly

drinking the milk, returned without inflicting further injury, to repose around its favourite hill.

The worm returned next morning, crossing the stream at the same hour, and directing its way to the hall. The quantity of milk to be provided was soon found to be that of “nine kye”; and if any portion of this quantity was neglected or forgotten, the worm showed the most violent signs of rage, by “lashing” its tail round the trees in the park, and tearing them up by the roots.

Many a gallant knight of undoubted fame and prowess had sought to slay this monster, “which was the terror of the whole countryside”; and it is related that in these mortal combats, though the worm was frequently cut asunder, yet the several parts had immediately reunited, and the valiant assailant never escaped without the loss of life or limb, so that, after many fruitless and fatal attempts to destroy the worm, it remained, at length, in tranquil possession of its favourite hill – all men fearing to encounter so deadly an enemy.

At length, after seven long years, the gallant heir of Lambton returned from the wars of Christendom, and found the broad lands of his ancestors laid waste and desolate. He heard the wailings of the people, for their hearts were filled with terror and alarm. He hastened to the hall of his ancestors, and received the embraces of his aged father, worn out with sorrow and grief, both for the absence of his son, whom he had considered dead, and for the dreadful waste inflicted on his fair domain by the devastations of the worm.

He took no rest until he crossed the river to examine the worm, as it lay coiled around the base of the hill; and being a knight of tried valour and sound discretion, and hearing the fate of all those who had fallen in the deadly strife, he consulted a Sybil on the best means to be pursued to slay the monster.

He was told that he himself had been the cause of all the misery which had been brought upon the country, which increased his grief, and strengthened his resolution; that he must have his best suit of mail studded with spear blades, and take his stand on the rock in the middle of the river, commend himself to Providence and to the might of his sword, first making a solemn vow, if successful, to slay the first living thing he met; or, if he failed to do so, the Lords, of Lambton for nine generations would never die in their beds.

He made the solemn vow in the chapel of his forefathers, and had his coat studded with the blades of the sharpest spears. He took his stand on the rock in the middle of the river, and unsheathing his trusty sword, which had never failed him in his hour of need, he commended himself to the will of Providence.

At the accustomed hour the worm uncoiled its lengthened folds, and leaving the hill, took its usual course towards Lambton Hall, and approached the rock where it sometimes reposed. The knight, nothing dismayed thereat, struck the monster on the head with all his might and vexing the worm, which, closing with the knight, clasped its frightful coils around him, and endeavoured to strangle him in its poisonous embrace. But the knight was provided against that unexpected extremity, for the more closely he was pressed by the worm, the more deadly were the wounds inflicted by his coat of spear blades, until the river ran with a crimson gore of blood. The strength of the worm diminished as its efforts increased to destroy the knight, who, seizing a favourable opportunity, made such good use of his sword that he cut the monster in two; the severed part was immediately carried away by the force of the current and the worm being thus unable to reunite itself, was, after a long and desperate conflict, finally destroyed by the gallantry and courage of the Knight of Lambton.

The afflicted household were devoutly engaged in prayer during the combat; but on the fortunate issue, the knight according to promise, blew a blast on his bugle to assure his father of his safety, and that he might let loose his favourite hound, which was destined to be the sacrifice. The aged parent, forgetting everything but his parental feelings, rushed forward to embrace his son.

When the knight beheld his father he was overwhelmed with grief. He could not raise his arm against his parent, yet hoping that his vow might be accomplished, and the curse averted, by destroying the next living thing that he met, he blew another blast on his bugle. His favourite hound broke loose, and bounded to receive his caresses, when the gallant knight, with grief and reluctance, once more drew his sword, still reeking with the gore of the monster, and plunged it into the heart of his faithful companion. But in vain. The prediction was fulfilled, and the Sybil's curse pressed heavily on the house of Lambton for nine generations.

Popular tradition has handed down to us, through successive generations, with very little variation the most romantic details of the ravages committed by these all-devouring worms, and of the valour and chivalry displayed by their destroyers. Without attempting to account for the origin of such tales, or pretending to vouch for the matters of fact contained in them, it cannot be disguised that many of the inhabitants of the county of Durham in particular still implicitly believe in these ancient superstitions. The Worm of Lambton is a family legend, the authenticity of which they will not allow to be questioned. Various adventures and supernatural incidents have been transmitted from father to son, illustrating the devastation occasioned, and the miseries inflicted, by the monster – and marking the self-devotion of the Knight of the Lambton family, through whose intrepidity the worm was eventually destroyed. But the lapse of centuries has so completely enveloped in obscurity the particular details, that it is impossible to give a narration which could in any degree be considered as complete.

The present history has been gleaned with much labour on the banks of the Wear, on both sides, near the scene of action, from both sexes, and the result faithfully recorded (...) It is not now possible to account satisfactorily for the origin of the Lambton Worm legend. The story has been repeated without variation for centuries, and we must be content to leave it in its wonted obscurity.

(Arthur & Everatt, c.1875, in Simpson, 2001: 137-41)

## Version 2

One Sunday morning Lambton went  
A-fishing in the Wear,  
And caught a fish upon his hook,  
He thought looked very queer,  
But whatten a kind of fish it was  
Young Lambton couldn't tell;  
He wouldn't fash to carry it home,  
So he hoyed it in a well.

### *Chorus*

Whisht, lads, and hold your gobs,  
And I'll tell you all an awful story;



Whisht, lads, and hold your gobs,  
And I'll tell you 'bout the Worm.

Now Lambton felt inclined to gan  
And fight in foreign wars,  
He joined a troop of Knights that cared  
For neither wounds nor scars,  
And off he went to Palestine,  
Where strange things him befell,  
And he very soon forget about  
The queer worm in the well.

*Chorus*

Whisht, lads, ...

Not t'Worm got fat and growed and growed,  
And growed an awful size;  
He'd great big teeth, a great big gob,  
And great big goggly eyes;  
And when at night he crawled about  
To pick up bits of news,  
If he felt dry upon the road,  
He milked a dozen cows.

*Chorus*

Whisht, lads, ...

This fearful Worm would often feed  
On calves and lambs and sheep,  
And swallow little bairns alive  
When they lay down to sleep,  
And when he'd eaten all he could  
And he had had his fill,  
He crawled away and lapped his tail  
Ten times round Lambton Hill.

*Chorus*

Whisht, lads, ...

The news of this most awful Worm  
And his queer goings-on  
Soon crossed the seas and reached the ears  
Of brave and bold Sir John.  
So home he came and caught the beast  
And cut him in two halves,  
And that soon stopped him eating bairns  
And sheep and lambs and calves.

*Chorus*

Whisht, lads, ...

So now you know how all the folks  
On both sides of the Wear  
Lost lots of sheep and lots of sleep  
And lived in mortal fear;  
So let's have one to bold Sir John  
That saved the bairns from harm,  
Saved cows and calves by making halves  
Of the famous Lambton Worm.

*Chorus*

Now, lads, I'll hold my gob,  
That's all I know about the story  
Of bold Sir John and what he done  
Wi' the awful Lambton Worm.

(Simpson, 2001: 141-2)

### ***The Linton Worm (West Linton, Scotland)***

#### **Version 1**

Crossing the Border into Roxburghshire, we approach the haunts of the Worme of Linton, and very romantic they are. There is the mountain stream of the Kale, bursting in brightness from the Cheviot Hills, and hurrying into the plain below, where it pauses, ere it wends its way to join the Teviot; there is the low, irregular mound, marking where stood the Tower of Linton, the stronghold of the Somervilles; there is the old village church, standing on its remarkable knoll of sand; there are the stately woods of Clifton, and, above all, the lofty heights of Cheviot crowning the distance.

Such is the fair scene which tradition avers was once laid waste by a fierce and voracious monster. His den, still named the "Worm's Hole," lay in a hollow to the east of the Hill of Linton; and small need had he to leave it, for from this retreat he could with his sweeping and venomous breath draw the neighbouring flocks and herds within reach of his fangs. Still he did occasionally emerge and coil himself round an eminence of some height, at no great distance, still bearing the name of Wormington or Wormiston. Liberal guerdons were offered to any champion who would rid the country of such a scourge, but in vain – such was the dread inspired by the monster's poisonous breath. Not only were the neighbouring villagers beside themselves with terror, but the inhabitants of Jedburgh, full ten miles off, were struck with such a panic that they were ready to desert their town.

At last, however, the Laird of Lariston, a man of reckless bravery, came forward to the rescue of this distressed district; and, as the Linton cottagers testify to this day, having once failed in an attack with ordinary weapons, he resorted to the expedient of thrusting down the worm's throat a peat dipped in scalding pitch and fixed on his lance. The device proved perfectly successful. The aromatic quality of the burning pitch, while it suffocated and choked the monster, preserved the champion from the effects of its

poison-laden breath. While dying, the worm is said to have contracted its folds with such violent muscular energy that the sides of Wormington Hill are still marked with their spiral impressions. In requital of his service, the Laird of Lariston received the gift of extensive lands in the neighbourhood.

(VV.AA, 1998: 292-294)

## **Version 2**

In the parochien of Lintoun, within the sheriffdom of Roxburgh; there happened to breed a monster, in form of a serpent, or worme; in length, three Scots yards, and somewhat bigger than an ordinary man's leg (. . .). It had its den in a hollow piece of ground, a mile south-east from Lintoun church; it destroyed both men and beast that camne in its way. Several attempts were made to destroy it, by shooting of arrows, and throwing of darts, none daring to approach so near as to make use of a sword or lance. John Somerville undertakes to kill it, and being well mounted, and attended with a stoute servant, he cam, before the sun-rising, before the dragon's den, having prepared some long, small, and hard peats (bog-turf dried for fuel), bedabbed with pitch, rosett, and brimstone, fixed with small wyre upon a wheel, at the point of his lance: these, being touched with fire, would instantly break out into flames; and (...) about the sun-rising, the serpent, dragoune, or worme, so called by tradition, appeared with her head, and some part of her body, without the den; whereupon his servant set fire to the peats upon the wheel, at the top of the lance, and John Somerville, advancing with a full gallop, thrust the same with the wheel, and a great part of the lance, directly into the serpent's mouthe, which wente down its throat into the belly, and was left there, the lance breaking by the rebounding of the horse, and giving a deadly wound to the dragoun; for which action he was knighted by King William; and his effigies was cut in stone in the posture he performed this action, and placed above the principal church door of Lintoun, where it is yet to be seen, with his name and sirname: and the place, where this monster was killed, is at this day called, by the common people (...) the Wormes Glen. And further to perpetuate these actions, the barons of Lintoun, Cowthally, and Drum, did always carry for crest, a wheel, and theron a dragon.

(Westwood, 1994: 470-2)

### ***The Longwitton Dragon (Northumberland, England)***

In a wood not far from the village of Longwitton are three wells which have been famous for many years. Long ago people used to travel from far and near to drink the water from the wells, for it was as sweet as wine and had great healing powers. Many a shepherd whose bones ached after the long wet winter on the hills came to drink and ease his pains, and many a sickly child found new health there. The people of Longwitton were justly proud of their wells, for there seemed to be magic in them.

One day, however, a ploughman going to quench his thirst was alarmed to find a huge dragon there. It had coiled its tail round one of the trees, and pushed its long black tongue into the well, and was lapping the water like a dog. When it heard him approach it vanished; but the ploughman knew that it had only made itself invisible, for he heard

its claws in the dead leaves and felt its hot breath on his face. He fled from it in terror, and only escaped by zigzagging through the trees.

From that day no pilgrim dared visit the magic wells, for the dragon haunted them. It was a fearsome monster, with a skin as warty as a toad's and a long tail like a big lizard's. It tore up the ground with its claws, and scraped the bark from the trees as it brushed past them. But few people caught sight of it, for when anyone drew near, it made itself invisible, and nothing could be seen except the leaves trembling before its breath and the flowers being crushed beneath its feet. It did little harm, and seemed content to live alone in the wood and drink from the wells; but whenever the men of Longwitton set out to attack it, it was infuriated, and the trees shook round about it as if a whirlwind had suddenly struck the wood. It seemed to have claimed the wells and would not give them up to anyone. The wells grew overgrown and untidy, while the shepherds had to nurse their aches as best they could. But one day there came riding by Longwitton a knight in search of adventure.

"We have here a jealous dragon, sir," said the people of Longwitton to him, "which we would gladly be rid of, but it has the power of making itself invisible, and no man can get near enough to strike a blow at it."

"I will overcome that difficulty," said the knight. "I will stay here to-night, and give battle to the dragon to-morrow."

So the next morning he anointed his eyes with a magic ointment which he had been given on his travels, and rode to the wood. The dragon was lying sleeping near one of the wells, but when it heard the sound of the horse's hoofs in the dry leaves, its ears pricked up and the spines on its back rose. Then trusting to its invisibility, it charged. The knight was ready. The dragon, over-careless, struck wildly with its claws, and the knight plunged his sword into its side. The dragon roared with pain, for the wound was severe, but it backed quickly until it stood defending the well, and prepared to attack again. But no matter how dreadful a wound the knight inflicted, the dragon seemed to keep its strength, and the wounds healed as quickly as they were received. For hours they fought, the dragon with its clumsy movements being no match for the nimbler man; but at last the knight, worn out and arm-weary, rode away.

He was almost ashamed to confess his failure to the villagers, but he was not easily dismayed.

"I will fight the dragon again to-morrow," he said.

But the next day, although he delivered enough blows to kill a thousand dragons, the beast was as strong at the end of the day as at the beginning, and the knight was forced to retire again.

"I will try a third time," he said. "This dragon must possess some other magical power which I have not noticed. To-morrow I will use my eyes more and my arm less."

So he went out the third day, and for the third time attacked the dragon. But this time, as he laid about him, he kept his eyes wide open, and at last he noticed that no matter how fiercely he drove against the dragon it would not stir from the well; and then looking more clearly he observed that it always lay so that the tip of its tail dipped into the water.

"Ah! That is the secret," he said. And he dismounted from his horse, and led a little into the wood. Then he approached the dragon on foot, and pierced it lightly here and there till, enraged, it roared wildly and leapt at him. Then he retreated, fighting faintly and deluding the monster into thinking that he was exhausted and beaten. Step by step he fell back until he had lured it from the well. Then suddenly leaping on to his horse he rode round the dragon, and placed himself between it and the well. The dragon

perceiving how it had been tricked roared like a mad bull, and fought desperately to get back to the well. But the knight, knowing now that he had mastered it, dealt it blow on blow, and this time every wound weakened it more and more. The blood dripped from its side and burned the grass beneath it; it grew feebler and feebler, until it fell heavily and lay still.

The next day the people of Longwitton buried it. Then they tidied the wells, and sent out news that the monster was dead, and there was rejoicing that night in every cottage for twenty miles around.

(Grice, 1949: 95-99)

### ***The Ludham Dragon (Norfolk, England)***

#### **Version 1**

A fearsome winged dragon once terrified the people of Ludham in Norfolk by appearing in the village every night, so that no one dared to venture abroad after dark. Each morning, when the monster had returned to its lair, the villagers filled up the entrance with bricks and stones, but these failed to prevent the dragon from making his nightly excursions.

One afternoon the inhabitants were horrified to see the beast issuing from its burrow. When it had gone some distance away, a courageous man placed a single round stone in front of the lair, completely filling it up. The dragon, after basking in the warm sunshine, returned home, but finding it impossible to move the stone, made its way, lashing its tail with fury and bellowing loudly, over the fields towards the Bishop's Palace and along the causeway to the ruined Abbey of St Benet, where it passed under the great archway and vanished in the vault beneath. After a time its former lair was filled in and the people of Ludham saw no more of the dragon.

(Porter, 1974: 130, in Simpson, 2001: 77)

#### **Version 2**

Legend tells of a dragon that terrorised the village of Ludham. The dragon made a lair of tunnels under the churchyard and across to the main street. Whilst the dragon was out basking in the sunshine one day a young fellow blocked the entrance to its tunnel. Enraged, the dragon flew off to St. Benet's Abbey and after smashing its tail against the wall, vanished, never to be seen or heard of again!

(02.08.2012. [https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Ludham,\\_Norfolk](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Ludham,_Norfolk))

### ***Martin and the Dragon (Denbighshire, Wales)***

Long ago, when Scotland was still infested with beasts of prey, there was a peasant lived at Pittempton, about three miles from Dundee, who had nine beautiful

daughters. One day he sent the eldest to fetch a pitcher of water from the well a short distance from the house. When she did not return, he sent the next eldest to look for her, and after her the next. It was not until the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth daughters had all gone to the well and none returned, though night was falling, that their father became alarmed, and catching up his fish-spear ran to the well. There to his horror he found a dragon lying besmeared with blood, seemingly having devoured all nine of the maidens. Unable to deal with the monster by himself, the peasant gathered several hundred of his neighbours and returned. The dragon tried to flee, but the villagers gave chase, foremost a young man called Martin, the lover of one of the nine girls. The dragon veered north, but was presently hard beset at a place called Baldragon, now drained but then a moss, where he was wetted (Scots *draiglit*). Away again to the north and he was surrounded, and Martin struck him with his club. As he was about to retaliate, the onlookers cried out, 'Strike, Martin!', and Martin gave him another blow, which was almost the end of him. He crawled heavily away, until half a mile further on he was again hemmed in, and finished off by the heroic Martin

(Westwood, 1994: 509)

### ***The Mester Stoor Worm (The Orkney Islands)***

In Orkney lore, there was an evil creature known as the Mester Stoor Worm.

An air of mystery surrounded the origin of the Stoor Worm but it was generally believed that he had been hatched into life by a malignant spirit.

Wherever he came from, he was placed in the depths of the sea, where he was destined to become "one of the nine curses that plagued mankind".

The Stoor Worm's fetid breath was poisonous to any living thing, and he destroyed ships like eggshells.

With his massive forked tongue he could, at a whim, sweep entire cities into the sea or crush the largest castle and suck every living thing into his gaping mouth.

Whenever the Stoor Worm lay with his head near a kingdom it was expected that the people of that unfortunate land had to satisfy his terrible hunger and supply the creature with food.

Every Saturday at sunrise, the Stoor worm would wake, open his cavernous mouth and yawn nine times. He would then demand a meal of seven virgins for as the old tales records: "although he was a venomous beast he had a dainty taste."

Now, a long time ago, the Stoor Worm set his awful head near the shore of an ancient country and as usual, the folk of that country had to feed the beast every Saturday at sunrise.

Needless to say the unfortunate people of this land soon grew tired of giving up their daughters, watching them being devoured in the pitiless jaws of the worm so they took the advice of an old wizard. This wizard said to the folk that if the King's daughter were fed to the Worm, he would leave and trouble them no more.

On hearing this, the King grew sorry. The Princess was his only daughter and he loved the child dearly.

Nevertheless, his duty to the Kingdom was clear and he was forced to agree - to save the land his beloved daughter should go to the Stoor worm. The grief-stricken King pleaded

tearfully against this judgment and was granted ten weeks respite - ten weeks in which he sent couriers to all corners of the land seeking a hero to slay the mighty Stoor Worm in the hope that he might save his daughter.

The King declared that the man who could slay the Stoor Worm would be given the kingdom and the famous sword Sikkersnapper, that he had inherited from Odin himself. Many valiant warriors attended the call but upon seeing the great beast all but twelve fled. These twelve brave men were not successful.

On the last day, a hero arrived.

An unlikely hero in the form of a common farm boy named Assipattle. The youngest of seven sons, Assipattle lived with his father and mother and brothers on a farm by a burn. All his family worked hard on the farm save Assipattle, who could be persuaded to do little. He spent his days lying beside the big open fire in the kitchen caring little when he became covered in the thick peat ash.

Assipattle's mother and father despaired of him and his brothers cursed him for a fool, kicking and beating him regularly. The entire family would laugh out loud when Assipattle recounted his fantastic tales and sagas in which he was the hero of countless incredible battles.

Upon hearing of the King's plea, Assipattle had slipped away from the farm set out to sea in his little boat carrying only a bucket in which lay a smoldering peat from his hearth. As he approached the slumbering monster he could see its head as big as a mountain with eyes like dark round lochs.

The sun began to rise and as it was Saturday, the creature began to yawn. Assipattle steered closer as the creature yawned a second time. With each yawn a vast tide of water was swept down into the Worm's throat until finally, when he was close enough one of these waves swept Assipattle's tiny little boat into the Stoor Worm's maw.

Assipattle and his boat were carried through a cavernous mouth, then down a long throat, through twisting passages and deep dark tunnels. Mile after mile he was whirled, with sea water gurgling all around him until at last the current lessened and the water level dropped. The boat grounded and Assipattle knew he only had a short time before the Stoor Worm yawned again so climbed from his boat and ran as he had never run before.

Turning one corner after another he finally came across the creature's liver. Pulling out a "muckle ragger" (large knife), Assipattle cut a hole in the liver and stuffed the smoldering peat into the wound. He blew on the peat for all he was worth, despairing that it "wid no tak" but finally it took light. With a crackle and a splutter the Worm's monstrous liver began to burn and was soon blazing like a Johnsmas Bonfire.

Assipattle ran back to his boat and managed to clambering aboard just in time for the burning liver had made the Stoor Worm retch. A flood of water from its stomach picked up the little boat and set it hurtling back towards the Worm's mouth. With a spray of water, Assipattle was spewed from the Stoor Worm's mouth and hurtled back over the sea before landing safely on the shore. Once back on shore, Assipattle watched as the fire grew bigger.

Black smoke billowed from the monster's nostrils and in his agony his forked tongue shot out and caught hold of one of the horns of the moon. Fortunately it slipped from moon and fell with such a crash that it made a deep rift on the earth.

The tide rushed into the rift and became the Baltic Sea. The Stoor Worm twisted and writhed in torment, flinging his head up into the sky. Every time it fell back to earth the whole world shook and groaned.

With each fall, teeth dropped from the vile, foaming mouth. The first lot of falling teeth became the Orkney Islands with the next forming the Shetland Islands.

Last of all, when the Stoor Worm was almost dead, the Faroe Islands fell with an almighty splash.

In the end the creature coiled itself together tightly into a huge mass that was said to become the far country of Iceland. Once the sky had cleared and the sun shone again, the King took Assipattle into his arms and called him his son.

A week later, Assipattle and the Princess were married in the Royal Palace and never was there such a wedding and never shall there be one like it again for the folk rejoiced that the Stoor Worm was finally dead.

(05.15.2014. <http://www.orkneyjar.com/folklore/stoor.htm>)

### ***The Mordiford Dragon (Herefordshire, England)***

The most extreme example of a low-status hero is the malefactor at Mordiford – an anonymous criminal under sentence of death, who is said to have volunteered to fight the dragon as an alternative to execution. This disreputable personage was very popular with nineteenth-century storytellers at Mordiford, who described his exploit in several different versions. Some said he tracked the monster to its den in the woods, caught it sleeping, hacked it to pieces with his sword and tore out its tongue as proof that he had fulfilled his task; for this he was granted his life and freedom. Others, more numerous, spoke of “the battle of the barrel”. According to this version, the criminal hid in a cider barrel at the junction of the rivers Lugg and Wye, where the dragon was in the habit of coming to drink, poked the muzzle of a gun through the bunghole of the barrel, and shot him dead. Or else, so others said, the barrel he hid in was bristling with knife blades and steel hooks which wounded the dragon horribly as he lashed himself against it, smashing the wood to pieces; the hidden hero jumped out and gave the dragon his death blow, but with his last breath the dragon poisoned him, and so both fell dead together. The same tragic fate overtakes the hero even in the versions where he stays inside the barrel and shoots from there, for the deadly breath seeps in through the bunghole, so that he never lives to enjoy the freedom he had earned

(Simpson, 2001: 68-70)

### ***Le Serpent de Villedieu-les-Bailleul (Orne, Normandy, France)***

The church of *Le Serpent de Villedieu-les-Bailleul* was dedicated to St. John the Baptist. In a small valley nearby was a hole or cave surrounded by huge overturned rocks. The cave was extensive and held treasure, it reached in many directions and as far as *Vaux-Dobires-sur-Bailleul*, at which the footprints of the god-genie *La Calotte-Rouge* could be seen. In the opening at *Villedieu* lived a huge serpent that long terrorised the neighbourhood. To pacify his rages, he was given the first-fruits of the harvest and the purest milk from the herds; on the occasions when this failed to calm his nerves, he was offered a young maiden who he dragged into his lair, where he devoured her. The valley



had a body of water along which the dragon would stroll, vomiting fire as he went and leaving a burning trail behind him. Once he swept through the country with a resounding noise and tore into various towns and villages about, everyone hiding in their homes. Finally, having devoured a maiden of the ancient and noble family of *Bailleul* as she was on her way to him, a gentleman of her house resolved to rid the country of the monster. Being as strong as Satan, he prepared to attack; he armoured himself in white iron, covering both himself and his horse. As he approached the monster saw him and so, armed to the teeth, he bravely swam across the water and threw himself at it in a fury. The knight struck such heavy blows that the monster's end was certain, but in its rage it breathed enough fire to suffocate the knight, then to compound matters the horse turned, exposing a gap in its armour, and the flames consumed both horse and rider from within. The monster collapsed onto their remains and the people, saved by the hero, added the name of their liberator to that of their commune.

(Bois, 2010: 48-49)

### ***The Sexhow Worm (Cleveland, England)***

Sexhow is a small hamlet or township in the parish of Rudby, some four miles from the town of Stokesley in Cleveland. Upon a round knoll at this place a most pestilent dragon or worm took up its abode; whence it came or what its origin no one knew. So voracious was its appetite that it took the milk of nine cows daily to satisfy its cravings (...). Its breath was so strong as to be absolutely poisonous (...). At length the monster's day of doom dawned; a knight clad in complete armour passed that way, whose name and country no one knew; and after a hard fight he slew the monster and left it dead upon the hill, and passed on his way. He came, he fought, he won, and then he went away. The inhabitants of Stokesley took the skin of the Worm and suspended it in a church over the pew belonging to the hamlet of Sexhow, where it long remained, a trophy to the knight's victory and their own deliverance from the terrible monster.

(Henderson, 1973: 252, in Simpson, 2001: 98-9)

### ***Sir John Conyers and the Sockburn Dragon (Durham, England)***

S<sup>r</sup> John Conyers de Sockburn Kn' who slew y<sup>e</sup> monstrous venomd & poisond wiverne Ask or worme which overthrew & devourd many people in fight, for the scent of the poyson was soe strong, that noe p[er]son was able to abide it, yet hee by the providence of god overthrew it, 8c lyes buried at Sockburn before the Conquest, but before hee did enterprise it (having but one child), he went to the church in compleate armour & offerd vp his sonne to the holy ghost, which monum' is yet to see, & the place where the serpent lay is called Graystone.

(Westwood, 1994: 419)

### ***Sir Peter Loschy and the Dragon (Yorkshire, England)***

It was in Loschy Wood near Stonegrave that this saddest of tales begins, and it is in Nunnington Church under a stone effigy of a knight and his dog that it has its lachrymose ending. Those who have never loved a dog or been loved by a felicitous canine can not know the sadness that opens to the hearts of those of us who are otherwise blessed.

Although you would be hard pressed to find it now, once upon a time there lived a giant dragon that breathed fire and smoke and terrorised the neighbourhood round about. Those who saw him tell that his teeth were as long and as piercing as the tines of a pitchfork and a tongue that slavered poison. This fearsome beast had taken the life of all the knights that sallied forth to do battle with it. He had gnawed their flesh, chewed their bones, chomped their armour into dust, and devoured their horses – saddle and all! Then came brave Sir Peter Loschy, a bold and fearless warrior whom, when he heard of the slaughter that the fiery beast was wreaking on the innocent, determined to put a stop to the flame breather with the poisonous tongue, or else to die trying. Tenacity is the stuff of heroes, and the course recommended to those who would be heroes.

Sir Peter was not only brave, but also clever. Before he went to do battle with the brute he had the blacksmith fashion a suit of armour that was covered with razor sharp edges, all facing outwards against his foe. When first he donned the suit his squire asked him how it felt. “Sharp,” was his reply, followed by a cheerful wink to the page.

Right quick he mounted on his steed and armed to the teeth with the accoutrements of knighthood he aimed his horse towards the slopes of Loschy Wood whereon the dragon had its lair. He rode up the hill in the dense part of the wood with his faithful dog Leo. As he got to the middle, he heard a tremendous crashing sound as if a house was rolling through the trees, and a voice crying, “Don’t trouble yourself to come up, I’m coming down!” It was the fire-breathing monster and he was indeed coming down.

Before he had chance to escape, the dragon caught hold of Sir Peter with its massive tail and wound it tight around him to crush out his life and make himself a dinner of canned knight food. He would have done it too, except he had not reckoned on the razor blades that cut him into hundreds of pieces. The tighter he coiled, the more he was cut, and the greater was the pain he suffered.

He let out a yelp, “YEEEEEOUIIIIIIAAAAAAARRRRRRGH,” which is an awful sound to come out from a dragon’s mouth, and immediately released the bold knight. The dragon was enraged, which, when you consider that he lived in a state of permanent anger, resulted in a terrible escalation of his meanness and doubled, nay threbled, his intention to have that doughty knight for his supper. But as he released his grip the knight unsheathed his sword and struck the wounded animal some fierce blows, one of which cut the dragon deep on his shoulder. “Ha! Now I will finish him,” quoth the warrior, but the dragon did no more than roll on the ground and his wounds were magickally healed.

The pair was locked in ferocious mortal combat for the space of three hours, but each time the sword cut the animal’s flesh, it rolled on the ground and was healed, and his strength renewed. One blow struck off the dragon’s tail, and at that Sir Peter whistled Leo, and his dog ran and took the tail between its teeth all the way to the hill close by Nunnington church, so that it could not be rejoined to the body.

When he ran back to the bloody arena, the dog snatched up another piece of leg that the knight had just detached, and did the same with that that he had done with the tail. Time

and time again the dog returned, picked up the loppings of his master, and took them to the hill. This he did until only the head of the creature remained, and Leo took possession of this also and delivered it to the hill, whereupon it was certain that the knight was victorious and the dragon was dead.

The dog was so pleased that his lord was safe than he ran to him wagging his tail. “Well done,” said Peter Loschy, patting his faithful companion on the head. As he did so, the dog licked his face, as dogs are wont to do to those they love the most.

Oh, dreadful moment! On Leo’s tongue was some of the poison from the dragon’s body, and it was so venomous that the knight fell backwards instantly and was a dead corpse. The dog was so sorrowful at the death of his master that he would not leave his side, but laid on his body and died there of a broken heart.

Sir Peter was entombed in Nunnington church; his grave topped with a stone effigy showing Leo laid at his feet as a symbol of the dog’s outstanding fidelity to his owner. How moving a tale, how sad that victory should end in defeat, but how gloriously told is the tale of the love of a faithful friend.

(02.12.2012. [http://yorkshiretales.com/main/page\\_the\\_dragon\\_of\\_loschy\\_wood.php](http://yorkshiretales.com/main/page_the_dragon_of_loschy_wood.php))

### ***Sir Piers Shonks (Hertfordshire, England)***

The lair of the Brent Pelham dragon was a cave under the roots of a great and ancient yew tree that once stood on the boundary of Great Pepsells and Little Pepsells fields. A terror to the neighbourhood, this dragon is said to have been a favourite of the Devil himself.

One day, so the story goes, Piers Shonks, the lord of Pelham, who lived in the moated house the ruins of which are still known as “Shonkes”, said by some to be a giant, and by most a mighty hunter, set out to destroy the evil monster. In full armour, with sword and spear, Shonks was accompanied by an attendant and three favourite hounds, so swift of foot that they were thought to be winged. Shonks at length found the dragon, and after a terrible struggle thrust his spear down the monster’s throat, giving him a mortal wound. The forces of evil, however, had not been overcome, for the Devil himself now appeared and cried vengeance upon Shonks for the killing of his minion. The Devil vowed to have Shonks’ body and soul, when he died, were he buried within Pelham church, or outside it. Nothing daunted, Shonks defied the Devil, saying that his soul was in the Lord’s keeping, and that his body would rest where he himself chose. Years later, when Shonks lay dying, he called for his bow, and shot an arrow that struck the north wall of the nave of Pelham church. There Shonks’ tomb was made, and there, as he had foretold, his body rests in peace beyond the Devil’s reach: neither within Pelham church nor outside it<sup>1</sup>

(Jones-Baker, 1977: 60-1, in Simpson, 2001: 93)

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<sup>1</sup> Burial “neither inside the church nor out of it” is a common way of thwarting the Devil in British legends (Simpson, 2001: 93).

### ***The Three Munster Heroes and the Piast (Ireland)***

A long time ago, the valleys on the south-eastern side of Mount Leinster were laid waste by a terrible animal, whose haunt was in a pool near the bridge of Thuar. It is indifferently called by the names of serpent, dragon, eel, and elephant. At last a deputation was sent to the court of the King of Munster, begging that some knight of prowess might be sent to destroy the pest; and three warriors were selected for the enterprise. One of these did not cease to boast from the beginning, that he himself alone was worthy of achieving the exploit; but, when the day of departure drew near, his heart failed him, and he insisted on renouncing the dangerous honour. However, a big, simple, quiet brother of his, who, to this time, had never done anything more remarkable than hold the plough or drive home the cows, started up from the ash-corner on hearing his brother's profession of fear, and vowed that he would devote himself for the honour of the family. So the three set forward, and arrived safely at the top of Mount Leinster, the nearest point from which they could get a glimpse of the enemy with any safety, for he had the undesirable power (as far as his neighbours were concerned) of sucking into his throat any living object that had the ill luck to come within three miles of his hold. “ Having taken a peep at the black pool lying far below them, and the terrible ' piast' lying in a state of coma at its side, for he was now in a stupid condition after a huge meal in which he had lately indulged, they cast lots, and our big 'omadhan' was pointed out for the first trial. Telling his comrades that if he escaped alive he would light a fire at the edge of the pool, he got himself carefully inserted into a big sack of charcoal, and, being provided with a trusty sharp skene, he had himself conveyed to the neighbouring hill of Coolgarrow to abide the awakening of the dragon. This revival taking place in the usual course, the monster turned himself round, and getting scent of flesh in the southern direction, he began to exhaust the air on that side, and the sack and its contents were soon in his gullet. Feeling the hard charcoal under his tusks, he concluded that they were bones, and swallowed his prize without any misgivings. When the champion judged that he had got well inside, he began to use his weapon underneath ; and the 'piast' finding something uncomfortable going on inside, rushed into his pool with all the speed he could make, and just as he was taking the plunge, our brave and cautious Munsterman had cleared his passage, and was left high and dry on the bank. After thanking heaven devoutly, he lighted the fire, and soon the whole country was in a blaze of joy. The three warriors were granted the whole Duffrey district for their services, and the successful champion determined to raise a splendid church near the pool in memory of the thing, and to show gratitude to God for his mercy; but he was warned in a dream to follow the first living things he would meet next morning, and build wherever they would rest. At sunrise he came out, and the first objects that met his sight were a duck and drake, which flew easily before him, a mile or so, and then alighted on each side of the stream, where the church and churchyard of Templeshanbo now stand. He raised a monastery on one side, and a nunnery on the other, and I believe became prior himself. The O'Farrells, the O'Briens, and O'Kennedys boast themselves the descendants of the three Munster heroes; and for hundreds of years back men only were buried on the east side of the brook, the women being laid on the side where the nunnery was built.

(Carey, 1855: 416)

### ***The Two Dragons on Loch Merkland (Scotland)***

There were a pair of dragons, one of them had wings and another had not. They lived one on each side of the loch. They were in girth about twice that of a man, and the flying one roared so as to be heard a mile off. A carrier killed the one and a soldier the other and rendered the place safe for travellers.-(J. MacLeod) [The wings with which dragons are endowed are only the emblem of the promptitude with which the serpent pounces on his prey, or in order to seize it gets into trees.- The Philosophy of Magic, by Eusebe Salverte.]

(Dempster, 1888: 232)

### ***The Walmsgate Dragons (Lincolnshire, England)***

There is a Long Barrow on the roadside at Walmsgate, in the Wolds; locally the name is pronounced Wormsgate, and it is said that once, long ago, three Dragons lived in the neighbourhood, devastating the land. An unnamed hero took arms against them. He slew one, and it is buried in the long mound-this accounts for the name Wormsgate. Another Dragon flew away towards the Trent, but did not succeed in crossing that river. It settled down in Corringham Scroggs, a flight of some 35 miles; the place was known as Dragon's Hole ever after; in fact, it is mentioned in the late Enclosure Award of 1852. The third Dragon was fatally wounded, and crept away and died at the next village of Ormsby, which they say was once Wormsby.

(Rudkin, 1955: 388)

### ***Wyvill and the Dragon (North Yorkshire, England)***

The tradition is that betwixt Malton and this towne ther was sometymes a serpent that lyved upon pray of passengers, which this Wyvill and dogg did kill wher he received his deathe's wound. Ther is a great hole half a myle from the towne, round within and 3 yerdes broad and more, wher this serpent lay, in which tyme the street was turned a myle on the South side, which doth still show itt self, if any take payns to search it.

(Westwood, 1994: 418)

## **Appendix B: Dragon Stories in Literature**



Here, the reader will find the specific chapters or sections of the literary works studied where the scenes with the dragon are displayed. I have added a translation for those texts which are originally in Old English. Other variations of English are, I believe, close enough to modern English that they may be read in the original, whenever available. Also, due to space restrictions, it has been necessary to alter the size and structure of some texts, to enhance their readability.

### Extracts from *Beowulf*

2200	Eft þæt geiode ufaran dogrum hildehlæmmum, syððan Hygelac læg ond Heardrede hildemeceas under bordhreoðan to bonan wurdon, ða hyne gesohtan on sigeþeode	Now further it fell with the flight of years, with harrings horrid, that Hygelac perished, and Heardred, too, by hewing of swords under the shield-wall slaughtered lay, when him at the van of his victor-folk
2205	hearde hildfreccan, Heaðoscilfingas, niða genægðan nefan Hererices, syððan Beowulfe brade rice on hand gehwearf; he geheold tela fiftig wintra (wæs ða frod cyning,	sought hardy heroes, Heatho-Scilfings, in arms o'erwhelming Hereric's nephew. Then Beowulf came as king this broad realm to wield; and he ruled it well fifty winters, a wise old prince,
2210	eald eþelweard), oððæt an ongan deorcum nihtum draca ricsian, se ðe on heaum hofe hord beweotode, stanbeorh steapne; stig under læg, eldum uncuð. þær on innan giong	warding his land, until One began in the dark of night, a Dragon, to rage In the grave on the hill a hoard it guarded, in the stone-barrow steep. A strait path reached it, unknown to mortals. Some man, however,
2215	niða nathwylc, se ðe neh gefeng hæðnum horde, hond ....., since fahne. He þæt syððan ....., þeahðe he slæpende besyredwurde þeofes cræfte; þæt sie ðiod onfand,	came by chance that cave within to the heathen hoard. In hand he took a golden goblet, nor gave he it back, stole with it away, while the watcher slept, by thievish wiles: for the warden's wrath

2220	þufolc beorna, þæt he gebolgen wæs. Nealles mid gewældum wyrmhord abræc sylfes willum, se ðe him sare gesceod, ac for þreanedlan þeow nathwylces hæleða bearna heteswengeas fleah,	prince and people must pay betimes! That way he went with no will of his own, in danger of life, to the dragon's hoard, but for pressure of peril, some prince's thane. He fled in fear the fatal scourge,
2225	ærnes þearfa, ond ðær inne fealh, secg synbysig, sona onfunde þæt þær ðam gyste gryrebroga stod; hwæðre earmsceapen ...sceapen	seeking shelter, a sinful man, and entered in. At the awful sight tottered that guest, and terror seized him; yet the wretched fugitive rallied anon from fright and fear ere he fled away,
2230	þa hyne se fær begeat. Sincfæt .....; þær wæs swylcra fela in ðam eorðhuse ærgestreona, swa hy on geardagum gumena nathwylc, eormenlafe æþelan cynnes,	and took the cup from that treasure-hoard. Of such besides there was store enough, heirlooms old, the earth below, which some earl forgotten, in ancient years, left the last of his lofty race,
2235	þanchycgende þær gehydde, deore maðmas. Ealle hie deað fornam ærran mælum, ond se an ða gen leoda duguðe, se ðær lengest hwearf, weard winegeomor, wende þæs ylcan,	heedfully there had hidden away, dearest treasure. For death of yore had hurried all hence; and he alone left to live, the last of the clan, weeping his friends, yet wished to bide
2240	þæt he lytel fæc longgestreona brucan moste. Beorh eallgearo wunode on wonge wæteryðum neah, niwe be næsse, nearocræftum fæst. þær on innan bær eorlgestreona	warding the treasure, his one delight, though brief his respite. The barrow, new-ready, to strand and sea-waves stood anear, hard by the headland, hidden and closed; there laid within it his lordly heirlooms
2245	hringa hyrde hordwyrðne dæl, fættan goldes, fea worda cwæð: "Heald þu nu, hruse, nu hæleð ne moston, eorla æhte! Hwæt, hyt ær on ðe gode begeaton. Guðdeað fornam,	and heaped hoard of heavy gold that warden of rings. Few words he spake: "Now hold thou, earth, since heroes may not, what earls have owned! Lo, erst from thee brave men brought it! But battle-death seized
2250	feorhbealo frecne, fyra gehwylcne leoda minra, þara ðe þis lif ofgeaf, gesawon seledream. Ic nah hwa sweord wege oððe feormie fæted wæge, dryncfæt deore; duguð ellor sceoc.	and cruel killing my clansmen all, robbed them of life and a liegeman's joys. None have I left to lift the sword, or to cleanse the carven cup of price, beaker bright. My brave are gone.
2255	Sceal se hearda helm hyrsted golde fætum befallen; feormynd swefað, þa ðe beadogriman bywan sceoldon, ge swylce seo herepad, sio æt hilde gebad ofer borda gebræc bite irena,	And the helmet hard, all haughty with gold, shall part from its plating. Polishers sleep who could brighten and burnish the battle-mask; and those weeds of war that were wont to brave over bicker of shields the bite of steel



2260	broснаð æfter beorne. Ne mæg byrnan hring æfter wigfruman wide feran, hæleðum be healfe. Næs hearpan wyn, gomen gleobeames, ne god hafoc geond sæl swingeð, ne se swiftra mearh	rust with their bearer. The ringed mail fares not far with famous chieftain, at side of hero! No harp's delight, no glee-wood's gladness! No good hawk now flies through the hall! Nor horses fleet
2265	burhstede beateð. Bealocwealm hafað fela feorhcynna forð onsended!" Swa giomormod giohðo mænde an æfter eallum, unbliðe hwearf dæges ond nihtes, oððæt deaðes wylm	stamp in the burgstead! Battle and death the flower of my race have reft away." Mournful of mood, thus he moaned his woe, alone, for them all, and unblithe wept by day and by night, till death's fell wave
2270	hran æt heortan. Hordwynne fond eald uhtsceaða opene standan, se ðe byrnende biorgas seceð, nacod niðdraca, nihtes fleogeð fyre befangen; hyne foldbuend	o'erwhelmed his heart. His hoard-of-bliss that old ill-doer open found, who, blazing at twilight the barrows haunteth, naked foe-dragon flying by night folded in fire: the folk of earth
2275	: : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : nan. Hé gesécean sceall hearm on hrúsan þaér hé haéðen gold warað wintrum fród· ne byð him wihte ðý sél. Swá se ðéodsceaða þréo hund wintra héold on hrúsan hordærna sum	dread him sore. 'Tis his doom to seek hoard in the graves, and heathen gold to watch, many-wintered: nor wins he thereby! Powerful this plague-of-the-people thus held the house of the hoard in earth
2280	eacencræftig, oððæt hyne an abealch mon on mode; mandryhtne bær fæted wæge, frioðowære bæd hlaford sinne. ða wæs hord rasod, onboren beaga hord, bene getiðad	three hundred winters; till One aroused wrath in his breast, to the ruler bearing that costly cup, and the king implored for bond of peace. So the barrow was plundered, borne off was booty. His boon was granted
2285	feasceaftum men. Frea sceawode fira fyrngeweorc forman siðe. þa se wyrn onwoc, wroht wæs geniwad; stonc ða æfter stane, stearcheort onfand feondes fotlast; he to forð gestop	that wretched man; and his ruler saw first time what was fashioned in far-off days. When the dragon awoke, new woe was kindled. O'er the stone he snuffed. The stark-heart found footprint of foe who so far had gone
2290	dyrnan cræfte dracan heafde neah. Swa mæg unfæge eaðe gedigan wean ond wræcsið, se ðe waldendes hyldo gehealdeþ! Hordward sohte georne æfter grunde, wolde guman findan,	in his hidden craft by the creature's head. -- So may the undoomed easily flee evils and exile, if only he gain the grace of The Wielder! -- That warden of gold o'er the ground went seeking, greedy to find
2295	þone þe him on sweofote sare geteode, hat ond hreohmod hlæw oft ymbehwearf ealne utanweardne, ne ðær ænig mon on þære westenne; hwæðre wiges gefeh, beaduwe weorces, hwilum on beorh æthwearf,	the man who wrought him such wrong in sleep. Savage and burning, the barrow he circled all without; nor was any there, none in the waste.... Yet war he desired, was eager for battle. The barrow he entered,

2300	sincfæt sohte. He þæt sona onfand ðæt hæfde gumena sum goldes gefandod, heahgestreona. Hordweard onbad earfoðlice oððæt æfen cwom; wæs ða gebolgen beorges hyrde,	sought the cup, and discovered soon that some one of mortals had searched his treasure, his lordly gold. The guardian waited ill-enduring till evening came; boiling with wrath was the barrow's keeper,
2305	wolde se laða lige forgyldan drincfæt dyre. þa wæs dæg sceacen wyrme on willan; no on wealle læg, bidan wolde, ac mid bæle for, fyre gefysed. Wæs se fruma egeslic	and fain with flame the foe to pay for the dear cup's loss. -- Now day was fled as the worm had wished. By its wall no more was it glad to bide, but burning flew folded in flame: a fearful beginning
2310	leodum on lande, swa hyt lungre wearð on hyra sincgifan sare geendod. ða se gæst ongan gledum spiwan, beorht hofu bærnan; bryneleoma stod eldum on andan. No ðær aht cwices	for sons of the soil; and soon it came, in the doom of their lord, to a dreadful end. Then the baleful fiend its fire belched out, and bright homes burned. The blaze stood high all landsfolk frightening. No living thing
2315	lað lyftfloga læfan wolde. Wæs þæs wyrmes wig wide gesyne, nearofages nið nean ond feorran, hu se guðsceaða Geata leode hatode ond hynde; hord eft gesceat,	would that loathly one leave as aloft it flew. Wide was the dragon's warring seen, its fiendish fury far and near, as the grim destroyer those Geatish people hated and hounded. To hidden lair,
2320	dryhtsele dyrnne, ær dæges hwile. Hæfde landwara lige befangen, bæle ond bronde, beorges getruwode, wiges ond wealles; him seo wen ge Leah.	to its hoard it hastened at hint of dawn. Folk of the land it had lapped in flame, with bale and brand. In its barrow it trusted, its battling and bulwarks: that boast was vain!

Beowulf was then apprised of the situation, not least because his own castle had become the target of the dragon's wrath. He was properly angered and ordered a shield of iron, to better resist the attack of the monster.

With a company of eleven warriors, he hailed to the mainland where the dragon had his lair. There, the man who had stolen the goblet (which was the catalyst to the events) reluctantly guides them to the barrow. There, Beowulf reminisced about his past deeds of arms and vowed that he would singlehandedly slay the dragon, command his men to wait on the barrow.

<p>2540</p>	<p>Aras ða bi ronde rof oretta, heard under helme, hiorosercean bær</p>	<p>Up stood then with shield the sturdy champion, stayed by the strength of his single manhood,</p>
<p>2545</p>	<p>under stancleofu, strengo getruwode anes mannes. Ne bið swylc earges sið! Geseah ða be wealle se ðe worna fela, gumcystum god, guða gedigde, hildehlemma, þonne hnitān feðan,</p>	<p>and hardy 'neath helmet his harness bore under cleft of the cliffs: no coward's path! Soon spied by the wall that warrior chief, survivor of many a victory-field where foemen fought with furious clashings,</p>
<p>2550</p>	<p>standan stanbogan, stream ut þonan breacan of beorge. Wæs þære burnan wælm heaðofyrum hat; ne meahte horde neah unbyrnende ænige hwile deop gedygan for dracan lege.</p>	<p>an arch of stone; and within, a stream that broke from the barrow. The brooklet's wave was hot with fire. The hoard that way he never could hope unharmed to near, or endure those deeps,[4] for the dragon's flame.</p>
<p>2555</p>	<p>Let ða of breostum, ða he gebolgen wæs, Wedgeata leod word ut faran, stearcheort styrmdē; stefn in becom heaðotorht hlynnan under harne stan. Hete wæs onhrered, hordweard oncnio</p>	<p>Then let from his breast, for he burst with rage, the Weder-Geat prince a word outgo; stormed the stark-heart; stern went ringing and clear his cry 'neath the cliff-rocks gray. The hoard-guard heard a human voice;</p>
<p>2560</p>	<p>mannes reorde; næs ðær mara fyrst freode to friclan. From ærest cwom oruð aglæcean ut of stane, hat hildeswat. Hruse dynede. Biorn under beorge bordrand onswaf</p>	<p>his rage was enkindled. No respite now for pact of peace! The poison-breath of that foul worm first came forth from the cave, hot reek-of-fight: the rocks resounded. Stout by the stone-way his shield he raised,</p>
<p>2565</p>	<p>wið ðam gryregieste, Geata dryhten; ða wæs hringbogan heorte gefysed sæcce to seceanne. Sweord ær gebræd god guðcýning, gomele lafe, ecgum <b>unslaw</b>; æghwæðrum wæs</p>	<p>lord of the Geats, against the loathed-one; while with courage keen that coiled foe came seeking strife. The sturdy king had drawn his sword, not dull of edge, heirloom old; and each of the two</p>
<p>2570</p>	<p>bealohycgendra broga fram oðrum. Stiðmod gestod <b>wið</b> steapne rond winia bealdor, ða se wyrm gebeah snude tosomne; he on searwum bad. Gewat ða byrnende gebogen scriðan,</p>	<p>felt fear of his foe, though fierce their mood. Stoutly stood with his shield high-raised the warrior king, as the worm now coiled together amain: the mailed-one waited. Now, spire by spire, fast sped and glided</p>
<p>2575</p>	<p>to gescipe scyndan. Scyld wel gebearg life ond lice læssan hwile mærum þeodne þonne his myne sohte, ðær he þy fyrste, forman dogore wealdan moste swa him wyrð ne gescraf</p>	<p>that blazing serpent. The shield protected, soul and body a shorter while for the hero-king than his heart desired, could his will have wielded the welcome respite but once in his life! But Wyrð denied it,</p>
<p>2575</p>	<p>hreð æt hilde. Hond up abræd Geata dryhten, gryrefahne sloh incgelafe, þæt sio ecg gewac brun on bane, bat unswiðor þonne his ðiodcýning þearfe hæfde,</p>	<p>and victory's honors. -- His arm he lifted lord of the Geats, the grim foe smote with atheling's heirloom. Its edge was turned brown blade, on the bone, and bit more feebly than its noble master had need of then</p>

2580	bysigum gebæded. þa wæs beorges weard æfter heaðuswenge on hreoum mode, wearp wælfyre; wide sprunon hildeleoman. Hreðsigora ne gealp goldwine Geata; guðbill geswac,	in his baleful stress. -- Then the barrow's keeper waxed full wild for that weighty blow, cast deadly flames; wide drove and far those vicious fires. No victor's glory the Geats' lord boasted; his brand had failed,
2585	nacod æt niðe, swa hyt no sceolde, iren ærgod. Ne wæs þæt eðe sið, þæt se mæra maga Ecgðeowes grundwong þone ofgyfan wolde; sceolde ofer willan wic eardian	naked in battle, as never it should, excellent iron! -- 'Twas no easy path that Ecgtheow's honored heir must tread over the plain to the place of the foe; for against his will he must win a home
2590	elles hwergen, swa sceal æghwylc mon alætan lændagas. Næs ða long to ðon þæt ða aglæcean hy eft gemetton. Hyrte hyne hordweard (hreðer æðme weoll) niwan stefne; nearo ðrowode,	elsewhere far, as must all men, leaving this lapsing life! -- Not long it was ere those champions grimly closed again. The hoard-guard was heartened; high heaved his breast once more; and by peril was pressed again,
2595	fyre befongen, se ðe ær folce weold. Nealles him on heape handgesteallan, æðelinga bearn, ymbe gestodon hildecystum, ac hy on holt bugon, ealdre burgan. Hiora in anum weoll	enfolded in flames, the folk-commander! Nor yet about him his band of comrades, sons of athelings, armed stood with warlike front: to the woods they bent them, their lives to save. But the soul of one
2600	sefa wið sorgum; sibb æfre ne mæg wiht onwendan þam ðe wel þenceð.	with care was cumbered. Kinship true can never be marred in a noble mind!

While Beowulf thus accosted the fearful monster and wrestled with him in the midst of the flamed, his men, terrified ran from the spot. Only one, Wiglaf, was brave enough to stay by his king. After declaring that this is the time when one's loyalty is truly tested, he went into battle with his king.

2670	æfter ðam wordum wurm yrre cwom, atol inwitgæst, oðre siðe fyrwylmum fah fionda niosian, laðra manna; ligyðum for. Born bord wið rond, byrne ne meahte geongum garwigan geoce gefremman,	At the words the worm came once again, murderous monster mad with rage, with fire-billows flaming, its foes to seek, the hated men. In heat-waves burned that board[4] to the boss, and the breastplate failed to shelter at all the spear-thane young. --
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2675	ac se maga geonga under his mæges scyld elne geeode, þa his agen wæs gledum forgrunden. þa gen guðcýning <b>mærða</b> gemunde, mægenstrengo sloh hildebille, þæt hyt on heafolan stod	was driven into the dragon's head, Yet quickly under his kinsman's shield went eager the earl, since his own was now all burned by the blaze. The bold king again had mind of his glory: with might his glaive
2680	niþe genyded; Nægling forbærst, geswac æt sæcce sweord Biowulfes, gomol ond grægmæl. Him þæt gifeðe ne wæs þæt him irenna ecge mihton helpan æt hilde; wæs sio hond to strong,	blow nerved by hate. But Naegling[5] was shivered, broken in battle was Beowulf's sword, old and gray. 'Twas granted him not that ever the edge of iron at all could help him at strife: too strong was his hand,
2685	se ðe meca gehwane, mine gefræge, swenge ofersohte, þonne he to sæcce bær wæpen <b>wundrum</b> heard; næs him wihte ðe sel. þa wæs þeodsceaða þridan siðe, frecne fyrdraca, fæhða gemyndig,	so the tale is told, and he tried too far with strength of stroke all swords he wielded, though sturdy their steel: they steaded him nought. Then for the third time thought on its feud that folk-destroyer, fire-dread dragon,
2690	ræsde on ðone rofan, þa him rum ageald, hat ond heaðogrim, heals ealne ymbefeng biteran banum; he geblodegod wearð sawuldriore, swat yðum weoll. ða ic æt þearfe <b>gefrægn</b> þeodcýninges	and rushed on the hero, where room allowed, battle-grim, burning; its bitter teeth closed on his neck, and covered him with waves of blood from his breast that welled. 'T <small>WAS</small> now, men say, in his sovrán's need
2695	andlongne eorl ellen cyðan, cræft ond cenðu, swa him gecynde wæs. Ne hedde he þæs heafolan, ac sio hand gebarn modiges mannes, þær he his <b>mæges</b> healp, þæt he þone niðgæst nioðor hwene sloh,	that the earl made known his noble strain, craft and keenness and courage enduring. Heedless of harm, though his hand was burned, hardy-hearted, he helped his kinsman. A little lower the loathsome beast
2700	secg on searwum, þæt ðæt sweord gedeaf, fah ond fæted, þæt ðæt fyr ongon sweðrian syððan. þa gen sylf cýning geweold his gewitte, wællseaxe gebræd biter ond beaduscearp, þæt he on byrnan wæg;	he smote with sword; his steel drove in bright and burnished; that blaze began to lose and lessen. At last the king wielded his wits again, war-knife drew, a biting blade by his breastplate hanging,
2705	forwrat Wedra helm wýrm on middan. Feond gefyldan (ferh ellen wræc), ond hi hyne þa begen abroten hæfdon, sibæðelingas. Swylc sceolde secg wesan, þegn æt ðearfe!	and the Weders'-helm smote that worm asunder, felled the foe, flung forth its life. So had they killed it, kinsmen both, athelings twain: thus an earl should be in danger's day!

Beowulf's and Wyglaf's triumph was bittersweet, for the king had received a fatal bite.

The venom of the dragon quickly extended through his body and he used the last of his strength to instruct his loyal Wyglaf to inspect the treasure and bring an armload of it

for him to admire. Grateful for his thane's assistance and loyalty, he unfastened a golden ring he wore around his neck and gave it to him as token.

Translation from OE by Francis Gummere

(02.01.2013. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/beowulf.asp>)

### **Extracts from *Sir Tristrem***

#### XXVII

Out of Develin toun,  
The folk wel fast ran,  
In a water to droun,  
For doute of o dragoun,  
Thai seyde to schip thai wan,  
To haven that were boun;  
No rouht thai of what man  
In lede,  
That may him sle or tan,  
Ysonde schal have to mede.

#### XXVIII

Tristrem blithe was he,  
He cleped his knightes stithe,  
- "What man he is, Ins se,  
That take this bataile swithe?" –  
Alle thai beden lat be,  
Durst non himselven kithe;  
- "For nede now wo is me!" –  
Seyd Tristrem, that sithe,  
Right than.  
Listen now who wil lithe,  
Al of an hardi man.

#### XXIX

A stede, of schip, thai drewe,  
The best that he hadde brought;  
His armes weren al newe,  
That richeliche were wrought;  
His hert was gode and trewe,  
No failed it him nought;  
The cuntre wele he knewe,

Er he the dragoun sought;  
And seighe:  
Helle fere him thought,  
Fram that dragoun fleighe.

XXX

Asaut to that dragoun  
Tristrem toke that tide,  
As a lithely lioun  
That bataile wald abide;  
With a spere feloun,  
He smot him in the side;  
It no vailed o botoun,  
Oway it gan to glide,  
His dent;  
The devil dragounis hide  
Was hard so ani flint!

XXXI

Tristrem, al in tene,  
Oft that spere tok he,  
Oyain that dragoun kene,  
It brast on peces thre:  
The dragoun smot bidene,  
The stede he gan sle,  
Tristrem, withouten wene,  
Stirt under a tre,  
Al stille.  
And seyde – “God in Trinite,  
No lat thou me nought spille!” –

XXXII

Ogain that fende dragoun,  
A fot he tok the fight;  
He faught with his fauchoun,  
As a douhti knight  
His nether chavel he smot down,  
With a stroke of might;  
Tho was the dragon boun,  
And cast fere ful right,  
And brend  
His armes that were bright  
Schamliche he hath hem schent.

XXXIII

Swiche fer he cast oyain,  
That brend scheld and ston;  
Now lith his stede y slain,  
His armes brent ichon;  
Tristrem raught his brain,  
And brack his nek bon;  
No was he never so fain,  
As thatn that bataile was don,  
To bote,  
His tong hath he ton,  
And shorn of bi the rote.

XXXIV

In his hose next the hide,  
The tong oway he bar;  
No yede he bot ten stride,  
His speche les he thar;  
Nedes he most abide,  
That he no may ferther far;  
The steward com that tide,  
The heued oway he schar,  
And brought;  
And toke it Ysonde thar,  
And seyde dere he hadde hir bought.

The following stanzas deal with the deception of the seneschal and how Tristrem proved his rights to the reward by producing the tongue he had torn from the dragon's mouth.

(Scott, 1811: 90-5 )

**Extracts from *Tristan and Isolt* by Gottfried von Strassbourg**

Tristan may be safe for the moment,  
but as yet you haven't heard  
what he's going to try next.  
And that you certainly should know,  
lest you lose all interest in the story.  
It goes on to tell about  
a very dangerous serpent  
that inhabited the country.  
This wicked renegade  
had overwhelmed land and people  
with depredations so severe  
and wrought so much destruction  
that the king took a solemn vow

8900



upon his royal truth and word:  
to him who should kill the thing  
he would give his only daughter,  
provided he be a noble knight.  
This widely known challenge  
and the maiden, so desirable,  
had already led thousands  
who came from far and wide to try it  
only to a miserable end.  
The stories were told everywhere,  
and Tristan too knew them well.  
From this alone he resolved  
to undertake the journey,  
it being by far his best assurance,  
in the absence of any other hope.  
And the time is now. Have at it!  
Very early the next morning  
he armed himself as thoroughly  
as does a man facing danger.  
Mounted on a sturdy charger,  
he took from his squires a spear  
as heavy and as solid  
as could be found in the ship,  
the stiffest and the best.  
He then set out on his way  
across fields and countryside.  
He took many a twist and turn  
in passing through that wilderness.  
As the sun began to climb,  
he sped on purposefully  
toward the vale of Anferginan,  
where the dragon had its lair,  
as you can read in the legend.  
In the distance he caught sight  
of four men in full armour  
going at a flying gallop  
(rather faster than a canter)  
across the fields and the rough.  
Of these four, one of them  
was seneschal to the queen.  
He also proudly aspired to be  
suitor for the young princess,  
although much against her will.  
Whenever anyone rode out  
in search of manly adventure,  
this enthusiast was there,  
no matter when, no matter where,  
in order that it would be said  
he was always on the scene

8950

whenever others took a chance.  
But that was about the size of it,  
because at the first sign of the dragon  
he stormed away in retreat.  
To Tristan it was obvious  
from the speed of their flight  
that the dragon lurked somewhere near.  
So he explored in that direction  
and had not ridden very far  
before a sight smote his vision—  
the frightfully revolting serpent!  
Spurting from its gaping jaws  
a blast of smoke and flames  
worthy of the devil's kind,  
it advanced straight at him.  
Tristan levelled his great spear  
and took his horse with the spurs.  
His charge carried with such force  
that the spear, tearing through its jaws,  
penetrated down its throat  
very nearly to the heart.  
Rider and horse together  
collided with the beast so hard  
that the horse was killed by the impact  
and the rider was lucky to survive.  
The dragon ravaged the dead horse  
with slashing teeth and flames  
until this monster had consumed  
the half of it before the saddle.  
But now the spear in its gut  
began to cause it such agony  
that it left the carcass that remained  
and fled toward its stony lair.  
But Tristan, its real opponent,  
followed hot on its trail.  
The fiend went raging on ahead  
with such violent impetus  
while ripping through the underbrush  
and scorching it to ashes  
that the entire forest resounded  
with its frightful roaring.  
But at the climax of its rampage  
its painful wound overcame it  
and it wedged itself for refuge  
deep beneath a stony cliff.  
Tristan, approaching, drew his sword,  
hoping to find it exhausted.  
Not at all—the fight grew worse  
than ever it had been before.

9000

Yet never did it get so fearsome  
as to deter Tristan from attack.  
The dragon fought back ferociously,  
putting the man to such great peril  
he thought it would be his end.  
Still he diverted its worst assaults,  
or it quickly would have left him  
without attack or defences.  
Nor was this viper a simple foe—  
it brought as allies into battle  
not only smoke and vapours  
but other armaments as well,  
fire and things to strike with,  
huge teeth and fearsome claws  
acute as though honed  
to a point and cutting edge  
sharper than a razor.  
Brandishing these weapons  
the dragon chased him around,  
dodging trees and through the bush—  
he had to take whatever cover  
might give him some protection,  
for now it had him on the run.  
While doing his best to parry  
the worst of its onslaughts,  
his shield had been scorched to cinders  
almost down to his hand,  
since trying to repel the flames  
had left him almost no escape.  
But then the tide began to turn—  
that bloodthirsty serpent  
began to reach the point  
where its vigour had to slacken.  
The embedded spear, working deeper,  
finally brought the creature down  
where it lay in twisting agony.  
Tristan swiftly took his chance,  
driving straight in for the kill.  
Next to the spear, he plunged his sword  
right through the heart, up to his hand.  
At this the fiendish scourge  
burst out with one last howl  
as awesome and so dire  
from deep within its dismal gullet  
as at the collapse of earth and heaven,  
and this final mortal shriek  
echoed across hills and fields—  
Tristan himself was horrified.  
But when he saw the fallen dragon

9050

had at last relaxed in death,  
he tore its vile maw asunder  
with all the strength at his command.  
And out of its boiling throat he sliced  
the tongue away, with his sword,  
as far down as he could reach.  
Sequestering it under his vest of mail  
he forced the jaws together again.  
Then he retired to the wilderness,  
his purpose being only this:  
he meant to find a respite there,  
to spend a day in recovering  
as much of his strength as possible,  
and then as evening would fall  
to return again to his countrymen.  
The heat, however, bore him down,  
both from his great exertions  
and from the dragon's exhalations.  
He nearly yielded to fatigue,  
a lethargy so oppressive  
that he might never have recovered.  
He vaguely saw the shimmer  
of a pool, small and narrow,  
fed at one end by a brook  
flowing from a massive cliff.  
In full armour, he fell in  
and sank straight to the bottom,  
leaving only his mouth showing.  
There he lay that day and night,  
for the noxious tongue he still carried  
had robbed him of all his vigour.  
It gave off fumes that stunned him,  
which alone were quite enough  
to render him pale and powerless,  
so that he didn't emerge again  
until the queen pulled him out.

Translation by lee Stvenhagen

(02.08.2013. <http://stavenhagen.net/GvS/Tris.html>)

*Sir Beues of Hamtoun*

- 2421 After Iosian is cristing  
Beues dede a gret fizting.  
Swich bataile dede neuer non  
Cristene man of flesch ne bon
- 2425 Of a dragoun þer beside  
þat Beues slou3 þer in þat tide  
Saue sire Launcelet de Lake;  
He fau3t wiþ a fur drake,  
And Wade dede also,
- 2430 & neuer kni3tes boutē þai to.  
Gij a Warwik, ich vnderstonde,  
Slou3 a dragoun in  
Norþhumberlonde.  
How þat ilche dragoun com þer  
Ich wile 3ow telle in what maner.
- 2435 þar was a king in Poyle londe  
And anoþer in Calabre, ich  
vnderstonde;  
þis twe kinge fou3te ifere  
More þan foure and twenti 3ere,  
þat hii neuer pes nolde,
- 2440 Naiþer for seluer ne for golde,  
And al þe contre, saundoute,  
þai distruede hit al aboute.  
þai hadde mani mannes kours  
Wharþour3 hii ferden wel þe wors;
- 2445 þarfore hii deide in dedli sinne  
And helle pine þai gan hem winne.  
After in a lite while  
þai become dragouns vile,  
And so þai fou3te dragouns ifere
- 2450 Mor þan foure & þretti 3ere.  
An ermite was in þat londe  
þat was feld of Godes sonde;  
To Ihesu Crist a bed a bone,  
þat he diliure þe dragouns sone
- 2455 Out of þat ilche stede  
þat hii namore harm ne dede.  
And Ihesu Crist þat sit in heuene  
Wel herde þat ermites steuene  
And grauntede him is praiere.
- 2460 Anon þe dragouns boþe ifere  
To[ke] here flizt and flowe awai  
þar neuer eft man hem ne sai.  
þat on fle3 anon wiþ þan  
Til a com to Toscan.
- 2465 þat oþer dragoun is flizt nome  
To seinte Peter is brige of Rome;  
þar he schel leggen ay,  
Til hit come domes dai.  
And eueri seue 3er ones,
- 2470 Whan þe dragoun moweþ is bones,  
þan comeþ a roke & a stink  
Out of þe water vnder þe brink  
þat men þerof takeþ þe feuere  
þat neuer after mai he keuere;
- 2475 And who þat nel nou3t leue me,  
Wite at pilgrimes þat þer haþ be  
For þai can telle 3ow, iwis,  
Of þat dragoun how it is.  
þat oþer þanne fle3 an hizē
- 2480 þour3 Toskan and Lombardie,  
þour3 Prouince wiþouten ensoine  
Into þe londe of Coloyne;  
þar þe dragoun gan ariue  
At Coloyne vnder a cliue.
- 2485 His eren were rowe & ek long,  
His frount before hard & strong;  
Eizte toskes at is mouþ stod out,  
þe leste was seuentene ench about,  
þe her, þe cholle vnder þe chin,
- 2490 He was boþe leiþ and grim;  
A was imaned ase a stede;  
þe heued a bar wiþ meche pride,  
Betwene þe scholder & þe taile  
Foure and twenti fot, saunfaile.
- 2495 His taile was of gret stringeþe,  
Sextene fot a was a lingþe;  
His bodi ase a wintonne.  
Whan hit schon þe brizte sonne,  
His wingges schon so þe glas.
- 2500 His sides wer hard ase eni bras,  
His brest was hard ase eni ston;  
A foulere þing nas neuer non.  
3e þat wile a stounde dwelle  
Of his stringeþe I mai 3ow telle.
- 2505 Beues 3ede to bedde a ni3t  
Wiþ torges and wiþ candel lizt.  
Whan he was in bedde ibrou3t  
On Ihesu Crist was al is þou3t.  
Him þou3te a king þat was wod
- 2510 Hadde wonded him þer a stod;

- He hadde wonded him biter & sore,  
 A wende a miȝte leue namore,  
 And ȝet him þouȝte a virgine slo.”  
 Him brouȝte out of al is pine.
- 2515 Whan he of is slepe abraid  
 Of is sweuene he was afraid.  
 Þanne a herde a reuli cri 2550  
 And besouȝte Ihesu merci  
 “For þe venim is on me þrowe  
 Beues armede him ful wel  
 Boþe in yrene and in stel  
 And gerte him wiþ a gode bronde  
 And tok a spere in is honde.
- 2520 Her I legge al toblowe  
 And roteþ me flesh fro þe bon;  
 Bote ne tit me neuer non.” 2555  
 Out ate gate he gan ride  
 And Ascopard be his side.  
 And in is cri a seide “Allas,  
 Else hii wente in here pleȝing  
 Hii speke of mani selkouþ þing.  
 Pat dragoun lai in is den  
 Pat euer ȝet I maked was.” 2560  
 And seȝ come þe twei men  
 A made a cri and a wonder  
 Ase hit were a dent of þonder.  
 Ascopard was adrad so sore,  
 Forþer dorste he go namore;
- 2525 Anon whan hit was dailiȝt  
 Beues awakede & askede riȝt  
 What al þat cri miȝte ben.  
 His men him answerde aȝen  
 And seide þat he was a kniȝt, 2565  
 A seide to Beues þat was is fere  
 In bataile he was holden wiȝt;  
 “A wonder þing ȝe mai here.”  
 “Else a wente him to plaie  
 Beues seide “Haue þow no doute  
 Aboute her in þis contrai,  
 In þis contre aviroun,  
 A mette wiþ a vile dragoun  
 Hadde we þe dragoun wonne
- 2530 And venim he haþ on him þrowe;  
 Par a liþ al toblowe.” 2570  
 We hadde þe feireste pris vnder  
 par a liþ al toblowe.”  
 sonne.”  
 “Lord Crist queþ Beues þo,  
 Ascopard swor, be sein Ion,  
 “Mai eni man þe dragoun slo?”  
 A fot ne dorste he forþer gon.  
 Beues answe[r]de and seide þo  
 “Ascopard, whi seistow so?”
- 2540 His men answerde wiþouten lesing  
 “Par nis neiþer emperur ne king  
 2575  
 Whi schelt þow afered be  
 Of þing þat þow miȝt nouȝt sen?”  
 Pat come þar þe dragoun wore,  
 An hondred þosend men & more,  
 Pat he nolde slen hem euerichon,  
 Ne scholde hii neuer þannes gon.”  
 A swor else he moste þen  
 He nolde him neiþer hire ne sen  
 “Icham weri, ich mot haue reste.
- 2545 “Ascopard” a seide “whar ertow?”  
 2580  
 Go now forþ and do þe beste.”  
 “Icham her. What wille now?”  
 Þanne seide Beues þis wordes fre  
 “Wile we to þe dragoun gon.  
 “Schame hit is to terne aȝe.”

- A smot his stede be þe side,  
 Aȝen þe dragoun he gan ride.  
 2585 Þe dragoun seȝ þat he cam  
 ȝenande aȝenes him anan,  
 ȝenande & gapande on him so  
 Ase he wolde him swolwe þo.  
 Whan Beues seȝ þat ilche siȝt,  
 2590 Þe dragoun of so meche miȝt,  
 Hadde þerþe opnede anon,  
 For drede a wolde þerin han gon.  
 A spere he let to him glide  
 And smot þe dragoun on þe side;  
 2595 Þe spere sterte aȝen anon  
 So þe hail vpon þe ston  
 And tobarst on pices fiue.  
 His swerd he drouȝ also bliue;  
 Þo þai fouȝte also I ȝow sai  
 2600 Til it was hiȝ noun of þe dai.  
 Þe dragoun was atened stronge  
 Þat o man him scholde stonde so  
 longe;  
 Þe dragoun harde him gan asaile  
 And smot his hors wiþ þe taile  
 2605 Riȝt amideward þe hed  
 Þat he fel to grounde ded.  
 Now is Beues to grounde brouȝt,  
 Helpe him God þat alle þing wrouȝt.  
 Beues was hardi and of gode hert,  
 2610 Aȝen þe dragoun anon a stert  
 And harde him a gan asaile,  
 And he aȝen wiþ strong bataile;  
 So betwene hem leste þat fiȝt  
 Til it was þe þerke niȝt.  
 2615 Beues hadde þanne swich þrast  
 Him þouȝte his herte tobrast;  
 Þanne seȝ he a water him beside,  
 So hit miȝte wel betide,  
 Fain a wolde þeder flen,  
 2620 He ne dorste fro þe dragoun ten.  
 Þe dragoun asailede him fot-hot,  
 Wiþ is taile on his scheld a smot  
 Þat hit cleuede heuene ato,  
 His left scholder dede also.  
 2625 Beues was hardi & of gode hert,  
 Into þe welle anon a stert.  
 Lordinges, herkneþ to me now.  
 Þe welle was of swich vertu:  
 A virgine wonede in þat londe,  
 2630 Hadde baþede þerin, ich  
 vnderstonde;  
 Þat water was so holi  
 Þat þe dragoun sikerli  
 Ne dorste neȝe þe welle aboute  
 Be fourti fote, saundoute.  
 2635 Whan Beues parseuede þis  
 Wel glad a was in hertte, iwis;  
 A dede of is helm of stel  
 And coledede him þerin fraiche wel  
 And of is helm a drank þore  
 2640 A large galon oþer more.  
 A nemenede sein Gorge, our leuedi  
 kniȝt,  
 And sete on his helm þat was briȝt;  
 And Beues wiþ eger mode  
 Out of þe welle sone a ȝode.  
 2645 Þe dragoun harde him asaile gan,  
 He him defendeþ ase a man.  
 So betwene hem leste þe fiȝt  
 Til hit sprong þe dailiȝt.  
 Whan Beues miȝte aboute sen  
 2650 Bliþe he gan þanne ben;  
 Beues on þe dragoun hew,  
 Þe dragoun on him venim þrew;  
 Al ferde Beues bodi þere  
 A foule mesel also ȝif a were;  
 2655 Þar þe venim on him felle,  
 His flesch gan ranclen & tebelle,  
 Þar þe venim was icast,  
 His armes gan al tobrast;  
 Al tobrosten is ventaile,  
 2660 And of his hauberk a þosend maile.  
 Þanne Beues sone an hiȝe  
 Wel loude he gan to Ihesu criȝe  
 “Lord, þat rerede þe Lazaroun,  
 Diliure me fro þis fend dragoun.”  
 2665 Þo he seȝ his hauberk toren,  
 “Lord,” a seide “þat I was boren.”  
 Þat seide Beues þar a stod  
 And leide on ase he wer wod.  
 Þe dragoun harde him gan asaile  
 2670 & smot on þe helm wiþ is taile  
 Þat his helm cleuede ato  
 And his bacinet dede also.  
 Tweies a ros and tweies a fel,

2675	Be þredde tim ouerþrew in þe wel; Parinne a lai vpriȝt, A neste whaper hit was dai [o]þe[r] niȝt.	2695	Beues ran after, wiþouten faile, And þe dragoun he gan asaile; Wiþ is swerd þat he out braide On þe dragoun wel hard a laide, And so harde a hew him þan
2680	Whan ouergon was his smerte And rekeured was of is hertte, Beues set him vp anon; Be venim was awei igon, He was ase hol a man, Ase he was whan he þeder cam. On is knes he gan to falle, To Ihesu Crist he gan to calle	2700	A karf ato his heued pan; And hondred dentes a smot þat stonde, Er he miȝte keuren a wonde, A hitte him so on þe cholle And karf ato þe þrote bolle.
2685	“Help” a seide “Godes sone, Pat þis dragoun wer ouercome. Boute ich mowe þe dragoun slon Er þan ich hennes gon Schel hit neuer aslawe be For noman in Cristente.”	2705	þe dragoun lai on is side, On him a ȝenede swiþe wide. Beues þanne wiþ strokes smerte Smot þe dragoun to þe herte, An hondred dentes a smot in on, Er þe heued wolde fro þe bodi gon; And þe gode kniȝt Beuoun þe tonge karf of þe dragoun; Vpon þe tronsoun of is spere þe tonge a stikede for to bere.
2690	To God he made his praiere And to Marie his moder dere; Pat herde þe dragoun þer a stod, And fleȝ awei ase he wer wod.	2715	A wente þo wiþouten ensoine Toward þe toun of Coloine.

(02.08.2013. <http://auchinleck.nls.uk/contents.html>)

### ***Guy of Warwick***

Guy having given them his hearty thanks for all the undeserved honours paid him, straight hoisted sail, and, having a fair wind, in four day's time arrived on English ground; the noise of which soon reached King Athelstan, who then at York his royal palace kept: thither, being commanded by the king, he forthwith went to pay his duty and allegiance to him. The king received them (for Heraud was with Guy wherever he went) with so much joy and goodness that nothing could be more; welcoming them with such kind of words as these:

“Welcome to me, renowned martial man, my princely love upon you I bestow; I in your fortunate success rejoice, for fame has loudly told us all your story. Guy, thou hast laid a heavy hand, I hear, on Pagan infidels, and with thy sword hast sent them home to the dark vaults where unbelievers dwell. Devouring beasts thou also hast destroyed, which have the terror been of human creatures: yet, worthy man, I think thou never didst slay, of all those monster terrible and wild, a creature that is more cruel than there is one that at this day destroys whatever he meets, no farther off than is Northumberland, which is a dreadful dragon that haunts there. I speak not this to animate thee on, and hazard thy life at setting foot on shore; for divers have endeavoured to destroy this wicked beast, and perished in the attempt. No, guy, I speak only to show thy happiness, which has exceeded that of other men, by freeing of them from their fears and dangers.”



“Dear lord,” said Guy, “as I am an English knight, faithful to God, and loyal to my king, I am resolved to go and see this dragon, and try whether my sword cannot work upon him; for I already have a dragon killed, with whom a lion first I found engaged, and whom he had also like to have overcome; but heaven my arm so strengthened that I soon overcame his power, and so I will do this.” Then, taking his humble leave, away he rides unto Northumberland to find the dragon, having a dozen knights to be his guides, who brought him where the dragon kept his den, feasting himself with nought but human flesh: “Now it is enough,” said Guy, “do you stand off, and give me leave to find this hydra’s head. He that has fed so much on human flesh shall never more devour a man again; but, gentlemen, if here you please to stay, you of our battle may spectator be.”

Then going to the cave, the dragon espied him, and forth he starts with lofty speckled breast, of form most dreadful; which when Guy beheld, into its rest he forthwith puts his lance, then spurs his horse, and to the dragon makes, encountering each the other with such fury as shook the very ground under them. Then Guy recoils and turns about his horse, and comes upon him with redoubled might: the dragon meets him with resistless force, and, like a reed, bit his strong lance in two. “Nay, then,” said Guy, “if you are good at biting, I have a tool to pick your teeth withal;” and drew his never failing flaming sword, and on him fell, with furious blows so fierce that many wide and bloody wounds he made. At which the dragon yawned, like hell’s wide mouth, roaring aloud with a most hideous noise, and with his claws he rent and tore the ground. Impatient of the smart he underwent, he with his wings would raise his body up, but Guy, with a bold stroke, so cooled his courage that to distend his wings he wanted strength; and, with a few strokes more, Guy brought him down upon the ground, all wallowing in his blood, and from his mouth a fiery flake proceeded whilst Guy with all his might was severing his monstrous head from his more monstrous body; which when he had done, “Now, bloody fiend,” said he, “thou hast thy deserved recompence for all the human blood which thou hast shed. And now upon this broken piece of spear unto the king I will bear thy monstrous head, which will by him, I am sure, be well accepted.”

The joyful knights then went and took a view of that same fearful creature without fear, which was indeed of strange and ugly hue; all wondering how it was possible to escape those teeth and claws so dreadful, sharp, and long. And when they had fixed the head upon a spear, and took measure of the body’s length unto the king, who had removed his court from York to Lincoln, they repair with speed where he with some impatience waited their return; who in his arms embraced the warlike Guy, congratulating him on his victory: then, looking on the dragon’s fearful head, “Heaven shield,” said he, “and save me from all harm! Why, here is a face may well outface the devil. What staring eyes of burning glass be these, that might, alive, two flaming beacons seem! What scales of harness arm the crooked nose! And teeth more strong and sharp than those of steel! And also that gaping mouth and forked tongue may, even dead, make all the living fear, but more rejoice that thou hast overcome it. Victorious knight, thy actions we admire, and place thee highly in our royal favour: throughout the spacious orb thy fame shall spread more lofty than the *primum mobile*. To the succeeding age of the world thy victories shall be transmitted down; for I will have the monster’s picture drawn on cloth of Arras, curiously wrought, which I in Warwick Castle will have placed, there to remain, and tell to after ages that worthy Guy, a man of matchless strength, and equal courage, destroyed a dragon thirty foot in length. And on this castle wall we will place his head, there to remain till length of time consume it. And, nobles all, make a triumphant festival, and give our knight the honour that he merits.”

(Merridew, 1821: 85-90)

## **Extracts from Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*.**

### **Book I, Capitulum xix**

Thēne after the departyng of kyng Ban and of kyng Bors kynge Arthur rode vnto Carlyon / And thyder cam to hym kyng Lots wyf of Orkeney in maner of a message / but she was sente thyder to aspye the Courte of kynge Arthur / and she cam rychely bisene with her four sones / gawayn Gaherys / Agrauaynes / and Gareth with many other knyghtes and ladyes / for she was a possynge fayr lady / wherfore the kynge cast grete loue vnto her / and desyred to lye by her / so they were agreed / and he begate vpon her Mordred / and she was his syster on the moder syde Igrayne / So ther she rested her a moneth and at the last departed / Thenne the kyng dremed a merueillous dreame wherof he was sore adrad / But al this tyme kyng Arthur knewe not that kyng Lots wyf was his syster / Thus was the dreame of Arthur / hym thought ther was come in to this land Gryffons and Serpentes / And hym thoughte they brente and slough alle the peple in the lād And thenne hym thoughte / he faughte with hem / and they dyd hym passynge grete harme / and wounded hym ful sore / but at the last he slewe hem / Whanne the kynge awaked / he was passynge heuy of his dreame / and so to put it oute of thoughtes / he made hym redy with many knyghtes to ryde on huntynge / As soone as he was in the forest / the kynge sawe a grete herte afore hym / this herte wille I chace said kynge Arthur / And so he spored the hors / and rode after longe / And so by fyne force ofte he was lyke to haue smyten the herte / where as the kynge had chaced the herte soo long that his hors had loste hys brethe and fylle doune dede / Thenne a yoman fette the kynge another hors / So the kyng sawe the herte enbusshed and his hors dede / he sette hym doune by a fontayne and there he fell in grete thoughtes / And as he satte so hym thoughte he herd a noyse of houndes to the somme of xxx / And with that the kynge sawe comyng toward hym the straungest best that euer he sawe or herd of / so the best wente to the welle and drank / and the noyse was in the bestes bely lyke vnto the questyng of xxx coupyl houndes / but alle the whyle the beest dranke there was no noyse in the bestes bely / and therwith the best departed with a grete noyse / wheros the kyng had grete merueyll / And so he was in a grete thoughte / and therwith he fell on slepe / Ryght so ther came a knyght a foote vnto Arthur / and sayd knyght full of thought and slepy / telle me yf thou sawest a straunge best passe this waye / Suche one sawe I said kynge Arthur / that is past two myle / what wold ye with the best said arthur Syre I haue folowed that best long tyme / and kyld myne hors / so wold god I had another to folowe my quest / ryȝte so came one with the kynges hors / and whan the knyght sawe the hors / he prayd the kyng to yeue hym the hors / for I haue folowed this quest this xij moneth / and other I shal encheue hym or blede of the best blood of my body / Pellinore that tyme kynge folowed the questynge best / and after his deth sir Palamydes folowed hit.

### **Book V, Capitulum iiij**

And as the kyng laye in his caban in shyp / he fyll in a slomerynge and dremed a merueyllous dreame / hym semed that a dredeful dragon dyd drowne moche of his peple / and he cam fleyng oute of the west / and his hede was enameled with asure / and his sholders shone as gold / his bely lyke maylles of a merueyllous hewe / his taylle ful of tatters / his feet ful of fyne sable / & his clawes lyke fyne gold And an hydous flamme of fyre flewe oute of his mouthe / lyke as the londe and water had flammed all of fyre / After hym semed there came oute of thoryent / a grymly bore al blak in a clowde / and his pawes as bygge as a post / he was rugged lokyng roughly / he was the foulest beest that euer man sawe / he rored and romed soo hydrously that it were merueill to here / Thenne the dredeful dragon auanced hym and cam in the wynde lyke a fawcon gyuyng grete strokes on the bore / and the bore hytte hym ageyne with his grysly tuskes / that his brest was al bloody / and that the hote blood made alle the see reed of his blood / Thenne the dragon flewe away al on a heyȝte / and come doune with suche a swough and smote the bore on the rydȝe whiche was x foote large fro the hede to the taylle / and smote the bore all to powdre bothe flesshe and bonys / that it flutteryd al abrode on the see / And therwith the kyng awoke anone / and was sore abashed of this dreame / And sente anone for a wyse philosopher / commaundyng to telle hym the sygnyfycacion of his dreame / Syre sayd the philosopher / the dragon that thow dremedest of / betokeneth thyn owne persone that sayllest here / & the colours of his wynges ben thy Royames that thow haste wonne / And his taylle whiche is al to tattered sygnefyeth the noble knyghtes of the round table

And the bore than the dragon slough comyng fro the clowdes / betokeneth some tyraunt that tormenteth the peple / or else thow arte lyke to fyghte with somme Geant thy self / beyng horryble and abhomyable whoos pere ye sawe neuer in your dayes / wherfore of this dredeful dreame doubteth the no thyng / but as a Conqueror come forth thy self / Thenne after this soone they had syghte of londe and saylled tyl they arryued atte Barflete in Flaundes / and whanne they were there he fond many of his grete lordes redy / as they had ben commaunded to awayte vpon hym

### **Book XI, Capitulum primum**

Now leue we syr Tristram de lyones / & speke we of sire launcelot du lake and of sire Galahalt syr launcelots sone hou he was gotten / and in what maner as the book of Frensshe reherceth Afore the tyme that syre Galahalt was gotten or borne / there came in an hermyte vnto kyng Arthur vpon whytsonday / as the knyghtes satte at the table round / And whan the hermyte sawe the syege perillous / he asked the kyng and alle the knyghtes why that sege was voyd / Sir Arthur and alle the knyghtes ansuerd / ther shalle neuer none sytte in that syege / but one / but yf he be destroyed / Thenne sayd the hermyte wote ye what is he / nay said Arthur / and alle the Knyghtes / we wote not who is he / that shalle sytte therin / thenne wote I said the hermyte / for he that shal sytte there is vnborne and vngoten / and this same yere he shalle be gotten that shalle sytte ther in that syege perillous / and he shall wyne the Sancgreal whan this hermyte had made this mensyon he departed from the courte of kyng Arthur / And thenne after this feeste syr launcelot rode on his aduenture tyl on a tyme by aduenture he past ouer the pounte of Corbyn / and there he sawe the fayrest toure that euer he sawe / and ther vnder was a fayre Towne ful of peple and alle the peple men and wymmen cryed at ones / welcome sir Launcelot du lake the floure of all knyghthode for by the

alle we shalle be holpen oute of daunger / what mene ye said sire Launcelot that ye crye soo vpon me / A fayr knyght said they alle here is within thys Toure a dolorous lady that hath ben ther in paynes many wynters and dayes / for euer she boyleth in scaldyng water / & but late said alle the peple sire Gawayne was here and he myght not helpe her / and soo he lefte her in payne / Soo may I saide syr Launcelot leue her in payne as wel as sire Gawayne dyd Nay said the peple we knowe wel that it is sir Laūcelot that shalle delyuer her / wel said launcelot / thenne shewe me what I shalle doo / thenne they brought sire launcelot in to the toure And when he came to the chamber there as this lady was the dores of yron vnlocked and vnbolted / And so syr launcelot wente in to the chambre that was as hote as ony stewe / And there syr launcelot toke the fayrest lady by the hand / that euer he sawe / and she was naked as a nedel / and by enchauntemēt Quene Morgan le fay and the Quene of Northgalys hadde put her there in that paynes by cause she was called the fairest lady of that countrey / and there she had ben fyue yeres / and neuer myghte she be delyuerd oute of her grete paynes vnto the tyme the best knyghte of the world had taken her by the hand / Thenne the peple broughte her clothes / And whanne she was arayed / syre launcelot thoughte she was the fayrest lady of the word / but yf it were Quene Gueneuer / thenne this lady said to sire Launcelot / syre yf hit please yow wille ye goo with me here by in to a chappel that we may yeue louyng and thankynge vnto god /

Madame said sir launcelot cometh on with me I wille goo with yow / Soo whanne they came there and gaf thankynge to god / alle the people both lerned and lewde gaf thankynge vnto god and hym / and sayd sir knyght syn ye haue delyuerd this lady / ye shall delyuer vs from a serpent that is here in a tombe / Thenne syr launcelot tooke his shelde and said brynge me thyder / and what I may doo vnto the pleasyr of god and yow I wille doo /

Soo whanne sir Laūcelot came thydder / he sawe wryten vpon the tombe letters of gold that said thus / Here shalle come a lybard of kynge blood / and he shalle slee this serpent / and this lybard shalle engendre a lyon in this foreyn countrey the whiche lyon shall passe alle other knyghtes / Soo thenne sir launcelot lyfte vp the tombe / and there came out an horryble & a fyendly dragon spytyng fyre oute of his mouthe / Thenne sir launcelot drewe his swerd and fought with the dragon longe / and atte laste with grete payne sir launcelot slewe that dragon / There with alle came kynge Pelles the good and noble knyght / and salewed syr launcelot and he hym ageyne / Fair knyghte sayd the kynge / What is your name / I requyre you of your kny3thode telle me

## **Book XI, Capitulum Quintum**

Thenne sir Bors thought he shold no more goo in to that chamber to reste hym / and soo syr Bors dressyd hym betwixe the knyghte and that chamber dore / and there sir Bors smote hym doune / and thenne that knyght yelded hym What is your name said syr Bors / Syr said he / my name is pedyuere of the streyte marches / Soo syre Bors made hym to swere at whytsonday next comyng to be atte court of kyng arthur / and yelde hym there as a prysoner as an ouercome knyghte by the handes of syr Bors / Soo thus departed syr pedyuere of the straye marches / And thenne syre Bors layd hym doune to reste / and thenne he herd and felt moche noyse in that chamber / and thenne sir Bors aspyed that there came in / he wist not whether at the dores nor wyndowes shot of arowes and of quarels soo thyck that he merueylled / and many felle vpon hym and hurte hym in the bare places / And thenne syre Bors was ware where came in an hydous lyon / soo sire

bors dressid hym vnto the lyon / & anone the lyon berafte hym his sheld & with his suerd syr bors smote of the lyons heed / Ryght soo syre Bors forth with all sawe a dragon in the courte passynge horryble / and there semed letters of gold wryten in his forhede / and sir Bors thoughte that the letters made a sygnifycacyon of kynge Arthur / Ryghte soo there came an horryble lybard and an old / and there they foughte longe / & dyd grete batail to gyders / And at the laste the dragon spytte oute of his mouthe as hit had ben an honderd dragons / and lyghtely alle the smal dragons slewe the old dragon and tare hym all to pyeces / Anone with alle there came an old man in to the halle / and he satte hym doune in a fayre chayre / and there semed to be two edders aboute his neck / and thenne the old man had an harp / and there he sange an old songe how Ioseph of Armathye came in to this land / thenne whanne he had songen / the old man bad sir Bors go from thens / for here shall ye haue no mo aduentures / and ful worshypfully haue ye done / and better shalle ye doo here after / And thenne sir Bors semed that there came the whyttest douue with a lytel golden senser in her mouthe / And anone there with alle the tēpest ceased and passed that afore was merueyllous to here / Soo was alle that Courte ful of good sauours / Thenne syre Bors sawe four children berynge four fayre tapres / and an old man in the myddes of the children with a senser in hys owne hand / and a spere in his other hand / and that spere was called the spere of vengeaunce

### **Book XXI, Capitulum iij**

And thenne the kyng lete serche all the townes for his knyghtes that were slayne / and enteryd them / & salued them with softe salues that so sore were wounded / Thenne moche peple drewe vnto kynge Arthur / And thenne they sayd that sir Mordred warred vpon kyng Arthur with wronge / and thenne kynge Arthur drewe hym with his hoost doune by the see syde westward toward Salysbury / and ther was a day assygned betwixe kyng Arthur and sire mordred that they shold mete vpon a doune besyde Salysbury / and not ferre from the see syde / and this day was assygned on a monday after Trynyte sonday / wherof kyng Arthur was passyng glad that he myghte be auengyd vpon sire Mordred / Thenne syr Mordred areysed moche peple aboute london / for they of Kente Southsex and Surrey / Estsex and of Southfolke and of Northfolk helde the most party with sir Mordred / and many a ful noble knyghte drewe vnto syr Mordred and to the kyng / but they loued sir Launcelot drewe vnto syr Mordred Soo vpon Trynyte sonday at nyghte kyng Arthur dremed a wonderful dreme / & that was this / that hym semed / he satte vpon a chaflet in a chayer / and the chayer was fast to a whele and therupon satte kynge Arthur in the rychest clothe of gold that myghte be made / and the kyng thoughte ther was vnder hym fer from hym an hydous depe blak water / and there in were alle maner of serpentis and wormes and wylde bestes foule and horryble / and sodenly the kyng thoughte the whele torned vp soo doune / and he felle amonge the serpentys / & euery beest took hym by a lymme / and thenne the kyng cryed as he lay in his bedde and slepte / helpe / And thenne knyghtes squyers and yomen awaked the kyng / and thenne he was soo amased that he wyst not where he was / & thenne he felle on slomberynge ageyn not slepyng nor thorouly wakyng / So the kyng semed veryly that there came syr Gawayne vnto hym with a nombre of fayre ladyes with hym And whan kynge Arthur sawe hym / thenne he sayd welcome my systers sone / I wende thou haddest ben dede / and now I see the on lyue / moche am I beholdyng vnto almyghty Ihesu / O fayre neuewe and my systers sone / What ben these ladyes that hydder be come with yow / Sir said sir Gawayne / alle these ben ladyes for whome I

haue foughten whanne I was man luyng / and alle these are tho / that I dyd batail for  
in ryghteous quarel / and god hath gyuen hem that grace at their grete prayer / by cause  
I dyd bataille for hem / that they shold bryng me hydder vnto yow / thus moche hath  
god gyuen me leue for to warne yow of youre dethe / for and ye fyghte as to morne with  
syre Mordred / as ye bothe haue assygned / doubte ye not / ye must slayne / and the  
moost party of your peple on bothe partyes / and for the grete grace and goodenes that  
almighty Ihesu hath vnto yow and for pyte of yow / and many moo other good men  
there shalle be slayne God hath sente me to yow of his specyal grace gyue yow  
warnyng / that in no wyse ye doo bataille as to morne / but that ye take a treatyce for a  
moneth day and profer yow largely / so as to morne to be putte in a delaye / For within a  
monethe shall come syr launcelot with alle his noble knyghtes and rescowe yow  
worshipfully / and slee sir mordred and alle that euer wylle holde with hym / Thenne syr  
Gawayne and al the ladyes vaynquysshed And anone the kyng callyd vpon hys knyghtes  
squyers and yemen and charged them wyghtly to fetche his noble lordes and wyse  
bysshoppes vnto hym / And whan they were come the kyng tolde hem his auysyon what  
sir Gawayn had tolde hym / and warned hym that yf he faught on the morne he shold be  
slayn /

Than the kyng comaunded syr Lucan de butlere And his broder syr Bedwere with two  
bysshoppes wyth hem and charged them in ony wyse & they myght take a traytise for  
a monthe day wyth Syr mordred / And spare not proffre hym londes & goodes as moche  
as ye thynke best / So than they departed & came to syr Mordred where he had a  
grymme hoost of an hondred thousand men / And there they entreted syr Mordred longe  
tyme and at the laste Syr mordred was agreyd for to haue Cornwayl and kente by  
Arthures dayes After alle England after the dayes of kyng Arthur /

(03.01.2013. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:23.3?rgn=div2;view=toc>)

### ***Kemp Owyne***

Her mother died when she was young,  
Which gave her cause to make great moan;  
Her father married the warst woman  
That ever lived in Christendom.

She served her with foot and hand,  
In every thing that she could dee,  
Till once, in an unlucky time,  
She threw her in ower Craigy's sea.

Says, "Lie you there, dove Isabel,  
And all my sorrows lie with thee;  
Till Kemp Owyne come ower the sea,  
And borrow you with kisses three,  
Let all the world do what they will,  
Oh borrowed shall you never be!

Her breath grew strang, her hair grew lang,  
And twisted thrice about the tree,  
And all the people, far and near,  
Thought that a savage beast was she.

These news did come to Kemp Owyne,  
Where he lived, far beyond the sea;  
He hasted him to Craigy's sea,  
And on the savage beast lookd he.

Her breath was strang, her hair was lang,  
And twisted was about the tree,  
And with a swing she came about:  
"Come to Craigy's sea, and kiss with me.

"Here is a royal belt," she cried,  
"That I have found in the green sea;  
And while your body it is on,  
Drawn shall your blood never be;  
But if you touch me, tail or fin,  
I vow my belt your death shall be."

He stepped in, gave her a kiss,  
The royal belt he brought him wi;  
Her breath was strang, her hair was lang,  
And twisted twice about the tree,  
And with a swing she came about:  
"Come to Craigy's sea, and kiss with me."

"Here is a royal ring," she said,  
"That I have found in the green sea;  
And while your finger it is on,  
Drawn shall your blood never be;  
But if you touch me, tail or fin,  
I swear my ring your death shall be."

He stepped in, gave her a kiss,  
The royal ring he brought him wi;  
Her breath was strang, her hair was lang,  
And twisted ance about the tree,  
And with a swing she came about:  
"Come to Craigy's sea, and kiss with me.

"Here is a royal brand," she said,  
"That I have found in the green sea;  
And while your body it is on,  
Drawn shall your blood never be;

But if you touch me, tail or fin,  
I swear my brand your death shall be."

He stepped in, gave her a kiss,  
The royal brand he brought him wi;  
Her breath was sweet, her hair grew short,  
And twisted nane about the tree,  
And smilingly she came about,  
As fair a woman as fair could be.

(Child, 1965: 1: 306)

### ***The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh***

In Bamborough Castle once lived a king who had a fair wife and two children, a son named Childe Wynd and a daughter named Margaret. Childe Wynd went forth to seek his fortune, and soon after he had gone the queen his mother died. The king mourned her long and faithfully, but one day while he was hunting he came across a lady of great beauty, and became so much in love with her that he determined to marry her. So he sent word home that he was going to bring a new queen to Bamborough Castle.

Princess Margaret was not very glad to hear of her mother's place being taken, but she did not repine but did her father's bidding. And at the appointed day came down to the castle gate with the keys all ready to hand over to her stepmother. Soon the procession drew near, and the new queen came towards Princess Margaret who bowed low and handed her the keys of the castle. She stood there with blushing cheeks and eye on ground, and said: "O welcome, father dear, to your halls and bowers, and welcome to you my new mother, for all that's here is yours," and again she offered the keys. One of the king's knights who had escorted the new queen, cried out in admiration: "Surely this northern Princess is the loveliest of her kind." At that the new queen flushed up and cried out: "At least your courtesy might have excepted me," and then she muttered below her breath: "I'll soon put an end to her beauty."

That same night the queen, who was a noted witch, stole down to a lonely dungeon wherein she did her magic and with spells three times three, and with passes nine times nine she cast Princess Margaret under her spell. And this was her spell:

I weird ye to be a Laidly Worm,  
And borrowed shall ye never be,  
Until Childe Wynd, the King's own son  
Come to the Heugh and thrice kiss thee;  
Until the world comes to an end,  
Borrowed shall ye never be.

So Lady Margaret went to bed a beauteous maiden, and rose up a Laidly Worm. And when her maidens came in to dress her in the morning they found coiled up on the bed a dreadful dragon, which uncoiled itself and came towards them. But they ran away shrieking, and the Laidly Worm crawled and crept, and crept and crawled till it reached the Heugh or rock of the Spindleston, round which it coiled itself, and lay there basking with its terrible snout in the air.



Soon the country round about had reason to know of the Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh. For hunger drove the monster out from its cave and it used to devour everything it could come across. So at last they went to a mighty warlock and asked him what they should do. Then he consulted his works and his familiar, and told them: "The Laidly Worm is really the Princess Margaret and it is hunger that drives her forth to do such deeds. Put aside for her seven kine, and each day as the sun goes down, carry every drop of milk they yield to the stone trough at the foot of the Heugh, and the Laidly Worm will trouble the country no longer. But if ye would that she be borrowed to her natural shape, and that she who bespelled her be rightly punished, send over the seas for her brother, Childe Wynd."

All was done as the warlock advised, the Laidly Worm lived on the milk of the seven kine, and the country was troubled no longer. But when Childe Wynd heard the news, he swore a mighty oath to rescue his sister and revenge her on her cruel stepmother. And three-and-thirty of his men took the oath with him. Then they set to work and built a long ship, and its keel they made of the rowan tree. And when all was ready, they out with their oars and pulled sheer for Bamborough Keep.

But as they got near the keep, the stepmother felt by her magic power that something was being wrought against her, so she summoned her familiar imps and said: "Childe Wynd is coming over the seas; he must never land. Raise storms, or bore the hull, but nohow must he touch shore." Then the imps went forth to meet Childe Wynd's ship, but when they got near, they found they had no power over the ship, for its keel was made of the rowan tree. So back they came to the queen witch, who knew not what to do. She ordered her men-at-arms to resist Childe Wynd if he should land near them, and by her spells she caused the Laidly Worm to wait by the entrance of the harbour.

As the ship came near, the Worm unfolded its coils, and dipping into the sea, caught hold of the ship of Childe Wynd, and banged it off the shore. Three times Childe Wynd urged his men on to row bravely and strong, but each time the Laidly Worm kept it off the shore. Then Childe Wynd ordered the ship to be put about, and the witch-queen thought he had given up the attempt. But instead of that, he only rounded the next point and landed safe and sound in Budle Creek, and then, with sword drawn and bow bent, rushed up followed by his men, to fight the terrible Worm that had kept him from landing.

But the moment Childe Wynd had landed, the witch-queen's power over the Laidly Worm had gone, and she went back to her bower all alone, not an imp, nor a man-at-arms to help her, for she knew her hour was come. So when Childe Wynd came rushing up to the Laidly Worm it made no attempt to stop him or hurt him, but just as he was going to raise his sword to slay it, the voice of his own sister Margaret came from its jaws saying:

"O, quit your sword, unbend your bow,  
And give me kisses three;  
For though I am a poisonous worm,  
No harm I'll do to thee."

Childe Wynd stayed his hand, but he did not know what to think if some witchery were not in it. Then said the Laidly Worm again:

"O, quit your sword, unbend your bow,  
And give me kisses three,  
If I'm not won ere set of sun,  
Won never shall I be."

Then Childe Wynd went up to the Laidly Worm and kissed it once; but no change came over it. Then Childe Wynd kissed it once more; but yet no change came over it. For a third time he kissed the loathsome thing, and with a hiss and a roar the Laidly Worm reared back and before Childe Wynd stood his sister Margaret. He wrapped his cloak about her, and then went up to the castle with her. When he reached the keep, he went off to the witch queen's bower, and when he saw her, he touched her with a twig of a rowan tree. No sooner had he touched her than she shrivelled up and shrivelled up, till she became a huge ugly toad, with bold staring eyes and a horrible hiss. She croaked and she hissed, and then hopped away down the castle steps, and Childe Wynd took his father's place as king, and they all lived happy afterwards.

But to this day, the loathsome toad is seen at times, haunting the neighbourhood of Bamborough Keep, and the wicked witch-queen is a Laidly Toad.

(Jacobs, 1890, 190-6)

### **Extracts from George Peele's *The Old Wives' Tale***

*Madge.* Once upon a time there was a king or a lord or a duke that had a fair daughter, the fairest that ever was; as white as snow and as red as blood; and once upon a time his daughter was stolen away, and he sent all his men to seek out his daughter, and he sent so long that he sent all his men out of his land.

*Frolic.* Who dressed his dinner, then?

*Madge.* Nay, either hear my tale, or kiss my tail.

*Fantastic.* Well said! On with your tale, gammer.

*Madge.* O Lord, I quite forgot! There was a conjurer, and this conjurer could do anything, and he turned himself into a great dragon, and carried the king's daughter away in his mouth to a castle that he made of stone, and there he kept her I know not how long; till at last all the king's men went out so long that her two brothers went to seek her.

So, the fair Delia is sought far and wide. The full text is available online from different sources. I have resorted to Adam's simplified version, which is nevertheless detailed enough for the purposes of this study:

En route they [her brothers] encounter an old man who is under the spell of the same conjurer and, although actually a youth, he is doomed to spend his nights as a bear and his days by the cross as an old man, forever separated from his lady who is also under a charm and is running mad in the woods. The brothers are kind to the old man and in return for their kindness he riddles them advice. A neighbor seeks the advice of the old man and recounts his tale of woe. He has two daughters, one beautiful but shrewish, the

other horribly ugly; each is by a different wife and neither has a husband. The old man tells him to send his daughters to the well of the water of life, and there they will find "unlooked for fortune." A braggart and a fool who are also in search of the princess encounter the old man, who asks them for alms. The braggart refuses and goes on his way, while the fool gives the old man some cake and in return is riddled a prediction: "He shall be deaf when thou shalt not see."

Meanwhile, the princess has asked the conjurer to spread the table with a grand feast and immediately the table spreads itself. The two brothers arrive, recognize their sister and call out to her, but the conjurer sends her away before she hears them. The brothers are placed under a charm, and two furies carry them off. The princess is given a potion which unpairs her memory, and the conjurer reveals the magic lamp which is his source of power. He brags that the glass cannot be broken except by "one that is neither wife, nor maid" and that he will never die but by a dead man's hand. A wandering knight in search of the princess, who is his love, asks the old man for a prophecy and is told: "Bestow thy alms, give more than all / till dead men's bones come at thy call / Farewell my son! Dream of no rest / till thou repent that thou didst best." As he is puzzling over this, the knight encounters two men haggling with the churchwarden and sexton over the fee to bury their friend Jack. The knight pays the required fee and is left but three farthings.

"Fe, fa, fum, here is the Englishman," says the braggart who boasts of his prowess and is immediately struck down by the conjurer, who also strikes the fool blind. The conjurer returns to where the princess is goading her brothers while they dig for gold and praises her for retaining the secret of the magic lamp which the brothers have accidentally uncovered. Meanwhile, the beautiful but waspish daughter goes to the well seeking a husband, is angered by a head that appears in the well and gives her advice, and goes off to wed the braggart who has been struck deaf. The knight has met the ghost of Jack, who offers to become his servant but becomes instead his copartner, agreeing to share everything by halves, when the knight explains he cannot afford a servant. Jack sees to it that they are well fed and they go on their way. Back at the well, the ugly sister and the blinded fool are wedded. A head appears at the well and asks to be combed; the ugly girl complies, treating it gently where her sister had been brusque, and is rewarded with a lap full of gold. Jack has the knight wait while he goes ahead to make arrangements with the conjurer. While Jack is gone, the conjurer approaches the knight, Jack returns in his invisible form, snatches the wreath from the conjurer's head and the sword from his hand. The conjurer dies, the lamp is broken and is blown out by the mad lady of the old man, who is summoned by a horn which Jack has the knight blow upon, and all are freed from their enchantments. Before touching the princess, the knight wishes her Godspeed three times; she awakens, and he tells her of his long, arduous journey to rescue her. Jack arrives with the conjurer's head, the knight blows again upon the horn, and all come together to rejoice.

Jack reminds the knight that they had agreed to share half of everything and asks for half of the princess. The knight is reluctant; but not wanting to go back on his word, he offers all of her to Jack. Jack refuses, insisting upon the letter of the agreement, and the knight acquiesces, raising his sword to cut the princess in two. Jack stops him, explaining that this was merely a test of the knight's constancy. Jack then mentions the corpse which the knight had paid to have buried, says, "Thank that good deed for this good turn," and jumps into the ground. All return to their homes. The old woman narrator arouses her audience, telling them that it is dawn and they must have breakfast.

(Adams 1963: 14-15)

### *The Dragon of Wantley*

Old stories tell, how Hercules  
A dragon slew at Lerna,  
With seven heads, and fourteen eyes,  
To see and well discern-a:  
But he had a club, this dragon to drub,  
Or he had ne'er done it, I warrant ye;  
But More of More Hall, with nothing at all,  
He slew the dragon of Wantley.

This dragon had two furious wings,  
Each one upon each shoulder;  
With a sting in his tail, as long as a flail,  
Which made him bolder and bolder.  
He had long claws, and in his jaws  
Four and forty teeth of iron;  
With a hide as tough as any buff,  
Which did him round environ.

Have you not heard how the Trojan horse  
Held seventy men in his belly?  
This dragon was not quite so big,  
But very near, I tell ye.  
Devoured he poor children three,  
That could not with him grapple;  
And at one sup he ate them up,  
As one would eat an apple.

All sorts of cattle this dragon did eat,  
Some say he ate up trees,  
And that the forest sure he would  
Devour up by degrees;  
For houses and churches were to him geese and turkies;  
He ate all, and left none behind,  
But some stones, dear Jack, which he could not crack,  
Which on the hills you will find.

In Yorkshire, near fair Rotherham,  
The place I know it well;  
Some two or three miles, or thereabouts,  
I vow I cannot tell;  
But there is a hedge, just on the hill's edge,  
And Matthew's house hard by it;  
There and then was this dragon's den,

You could not chuse but spy it.

Some say, this dragon was a witch;  
Some say, he was a devil,  
For from his nose a smoke arose,  
And with it burning snivel,  
Which he cast off, when he did cough,  
In a well that he did stand by;  
Which made it look just like a brook  
Running with burning brandy.

Hard by a furious knight there dwelt,  
Of whom all towns did ring,  
For he could wrestle, play at quarter-staff, kick, cuff and huff,  
Call son of a whore, do anything more;  
By the tail and the mane, which his hands twain,  
He swung a horse till he was dead;  
And that which is stranger, he for very anger  
Ate him all up but his head.

These children, as I told, being eat,  
Men, women, girls and boys,  
Sighing and sobbing, came to his lodging,  
And made a hideous noise:  
“O save us all, More of More Hall,

Thou peerless knight of these woods;  
Do but slay this dragon, who won't leave us a rag on,  
We'll give thee all our goods.”

“Tut, tut,” quoth he, “no goods I want;

But I want, I want, in sooth,  
A fair maid of sixteen, that's brisk and keen,  
With smiles about the mouth;  
Hair black as sloe, skin white as snow,  
With blushes her cheeks adorning;  
To anoint me o'er night, e'er I go to fight,  
And to dress me in the morning.”

This being done, he did engage  
To hew the dragon down;  
But first he went, new armour to  
Bespeak at Sheffield town;  
With spikes all about, not within but without,  
Of steel so sharp and strong;  
Both behind and before, arms, legs, and all o'er,

Some five or six inches long.

Had you but seen him in this dress,  
How fierce he looked and how big,  
You would have thought him to be  
Some Egyptian porcupig.  
He frighted all, cats, dogs and all,  
Each cow, each horse and each hog;  
For fear they did flee, for they took him to be  
Some strange, outlandish hedgehog.

To see this flight, all people then  
Got up on trees and houses,  
On churches some, and chimneys too,  
But these put on their trousers,  
Not to spoil their hose. As soon as he rose,  
To make him strong and mighty,  
He drank by the table six pots of ale,  
And a quart of aqua-vitae.

It is not strength that always wins,  
For with doth strength excel;  
Which made our cunning champion  
Creep down into a well,  
Where he did think this dragon would drink,  
And so he did in truth;  
And as he stooped low, he rose up and cried "Boh!"  
And hit him in the mouth.

"Oh," quoth the dragon, "pox take thee, come out,  
Thou disturbs me in my drink."

And then he turned, and shat at him –  
Good lack! How he did stink!  
"Beshrew thy soul, thy body's foul,

Thy dung smells not like balsam;  
Thou son of a whore, thou stinkest so sore,  
Sure thy diet is unwholesome"

Our politic knight, on the other side,  
Crept out upon the brink,  
And gave the dragon such a douse  
He knew not what to think.  
"By cock," quoth he, "say you so, do you see?"

And then at him he let fly  
With hand and foot, and so they went to't,  
And the word was "Hey, boys, hey!"

"Your words," quoth the dragon, "I don't understand."

Then to it they fell at all  
Like two boars so fierce, if I may  
Compare great things with small.  
Two days and a night, with this dragon did flight  
Our champion on this ground;  
Though their strength it was great, their skill it was neat,  
They never had one wound.

At length the hard earth began to quake,  
The dragon gave him a knock,  
Which made him to reel, and straightaway he thought  
To lift him as high as a rock,  
And thence let him fall. But More of More Hall  
Like a valiant son of Mars,  
As he came out like a lout, so he turned him about,  
And hit him a kick on the arse.

"Oh," quoth the dragon, with a deep sigh,

And turned six times together,  
Sobbing and tearing, cursing and swearing,  
Out of his throat of leather;  
"More of More Hall" Oh thou rascal!

Would I had seen thee never!  
With the thing at thy foot, thou hast prick'd my arse-gut,  
And I'm quite undone for ever.

"Murder, murder!" the dragon cried,

"Alack, alack for grief!

Had you but missed that place, you could  
Have done me no mischief."

Then his head he shook, trembled and quaked,  
And down he laid and cried;  
First on one knee, then on back tumbled he,  
So groaned, kicked, shat and died.

(Simpson, 2001: 146-50)

### **Extracts from Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon***

"I've brought a friend to see you, dragon," said the Boy, rather loud.

The dragon woke up with a start. "I was just--er--thinking about things," he said in his simple way. "Very pleased to make your acquaintance, sir. Charming weather we're having!"

"This is St George," said the Boy, shortly. "St. George, let me introduce you to the dragon. We've come up to talk things over quietly, dragon, and now for goodness' sake do let us have a little straight common-sense, and come to some practical business-like arrangement, for I'm sick of views and theories of life and personal tendencies, and all that sort of thing. I may perhaps add that my mother's sitting up."

"So glad to meet you, St. George," began the dragon rather nervously, "because you've been a great traveller, I hear, and I've always been rather a stay-at-home. But I can show you many antiquities, many interesting features of our country-side, if you're stopping here any time--"

"I think," said St. George, in his frank, pleasant way, "that we'd really better take the advice of our young friend here, and try to come to some understanding, on a business footing, about this little affair of ours. Now don't you think that after all the simplest plan would be just to fight it out, according to the rules, and let the best man win? They're betting on you, I may tell you, down in the village, but I don't mind that!"

"Oh, yes, DO, dragon," said the Boy, delightedly; "it'll save such a lot of bother!"

"My young friend, you shut up," said the dragon severely. "Believe me, St. George," he went on, "there's nobody in the world I'd sooner oblige than you and this young gentleman here. But the whole thing's nonsense, and conventionality, and popular thick-headedness. There's absolutely nothing to fight about, from beginning to end. And anyhow I'm not going to, so that settles it!"

"But supposing I make you?" said St. George, rather nettled.

"You can't," said the dragon, triumphantly. "I should only go into my cave and retire for a time down the hole I came up. You'd soon get heartily sick of sitting outside and waiting for me to come out and fight you. And as soon as you'd really gone away, why, I'd come up again gaily, for I tell you frankly, I like this place, and I'm going to stay here!"

St. George gazed for a while on the fair landscape around them. "But this would be a beautiful place for a fight," he began again persuasively. "These great bare rolling Downs for the arena,--and me in my golden armour showing up against your big blue scaly coils! Think what a picture it would make!"

"Now you're trying to get at me through my artistic sensibilities," said the dragon. "But it won't work. Not but what it would make a very pretty picture, as you say," he added, wavering a little.

"We seem to be getting rather nearer to BUSINESS," put in the Boy. "You must see, dragon, that there's got to be a fight of some sort, 'cos you can't want to have to go down that dirty old hole again and stop there till goodness knows when."

"It might be arranged," said St. George, thoughtfully. "I MUST spear you somewhere, of course, but I'm not bound to hurt you very much. There's such a lot of you that there must be a few SPARE places somewhere. Here, for instance, just behind your foreleg. It couldn't hurt you much, just here!"



"Now you're tickling, George," said the dragon, coyly. "No, that place won't do at all. Even if it didn't hurt,--and I'm sure it would, awfully,--it would make me laugh, and that would spoil everything."

"Let's try somewhere else, then," said St. George, patiently. "Under your neck, for instance,--all these folds of thick skin,--if I speared you here you'd never even know I'd done it!"

"Yes, but are you sure you can hit off the right place?" asked the dragon, anxiously.

"Of course I am," said St. George, with confidence. "You leave that to me!"

"It's just because I've GOT to leave it to you that I'm asking," replied the dragon, rather testily. "No doubt you would deeply regret any error you might make in the hurry of the moment; but you wouldn't regret it half as much as I should! However, I suppose we've got to trust somebody, as we go through life, and your plan seems, on the whole, as good a one as any."

"Look here, dragon," interrupted the Boy, a little jealous on behalf of his friend, who seemed to be getting all the worst of the bargain: "I don't quite see where YOU come in! There's to be a fight, apparently, and you're to be licked; and what I want to know is, what are YOU going to get out of it?"

"St. George," said the dragon, "Just tell him, please,--what will happen after I'm vanquished in the deadly combat?"

"Well, according to the rules I suppose I shall lead you in triumph down to the market-place or whatever answers to it," said St. George.

"Precisely," said the dragon. "And then--"

"And then there'll be shoutings and speeches and things," continued St. George. "And I shall explain that you're converted, and see the error of your ways, and so on."

"Quite so," said the dragon. "And then--?"

"Oh, and then--" said St. George, "why, and then there will be the usual banquet, I suppose."

"Exactly," said the dragon; "and that's where I come in. Look here," he continued, addressing the Boy, "I'm bored to death up here, and no one really appreciates me. I'm going into Society, I am, through the kindly aid of our friend here, who's taking such a lot of trouble on my account; and you'll find I've got all the qualities to endear me to people who entertain! So now that's all settled, and if you don't mind--I'm an old-fashioned fellow--don't want to turn you out, but--"

"Remember, you'll have to do your proper share of the fighting, dragon!" said St. George, as he took the hint and rose to go; "I mean ramping, and breathing fire, and so on!"

"I can RAMP all right," replied the dragon, confidently; "as to breathing fire, it's surprising how easily one gets out of practice, but I'll do the best I can. Goodnight!"

They had descended the hill and were almost back in the village again, when St. George stopped short, "KNEW I had forgotten something," he said. "There ought to be a Princess. Terror-stricken and chained to a rock, and all that sort of thing. Boy, can't you arrange a Princess?"

The Boy was in the middle of a tremendous yawn. "I'm tired to death," he wailed, "and I CAN'T arrange a Princess, or anything more, at this time of night. And my mother's sitting up, and DO stop asking me to arrange more things till tomorrow!"

Next morning the people began streaming up to the Downs at quite an early hour, in their Sunday clothes and carrying baskets with bottle-necks sticking out of them, every one intent on securing good places for the combat. This was not exactly a simple matter, for of course it was quite possible that the dragon might win, and in that case even those

who had put their money on him felt they could hardly expect him to deal with his backers on a different footing to the rest. Places were chosen, therefore, with circumspection and with a view to a speedy retreat in case of emergency; and the front rank was mostly composed of boys who had escaped from parental control and now sprawled and rolled about on the grass, regardless of the shrill threats and warnings discharged at them by their anxious mothers behind.

The Boy had secured a good front place, well up towards the cave, and was feeling as anxious as a stage-manager on a first night. Could the dragon be depended upon? He might change his mind and vote the whole performance rot; or else, seeing that the affair had been so hastily planned, without even a rehearsal, he might be too nervous to show up.

The Boy looked narrowly at the cave, but it showed no sign of life or occupation. Could the dragon have made a moon-light flitting?

The higher portions of the ground were now black with sightseers, and presently a sound of cheering and a waving of handkerchiefs told that something was visible to them which the Boy, far up towards the dragon-end of the line as he was, could not yet see. A minute more and St. George's red plumes topped the hill, as the Saint rode slowly forth on the great level space which stretched up to the grim mouth of the cave. Very gallant and beautiful he looked, on his tall war-horse, his golden armour glancing in the sun, his great spear held erect, the little white pennon, crimson-crossed, fluttering at its point. He drew rein and remained motionless. The lines of spectators began to give back a little, nervously; and even the boys in front stopped pulling hair and cuffing each other, and leaned forward expectant.

"Now then, dragon!" muttered the Boy impatiently, fidgeting where he sat. He need not have distressed himself, had he only known. The dramatic possibilities of the thing had tickled the dragon immensely, and he had been up from an early hour, preparing for his first public appearance with as much heartiness as if the years had run backwards, and he had been again a little dragonlet, playing with his sisters on the floor of their mother's cave, at the game of saints-and-dragons, in which the dragon was bound to win.

A low muttering, mingled with snorts, now made itself heard; rising to a bellowing roar that seemed to fill the plain. Then a cloud of smoke obscured the mouth of the cave, and out of the midst of it the dragon himself, shining, sea-blue, magnificent, pranced splendidly forth; and everybody said, "Oo-oo-oo!" as if he had been a mighty rocket! His scales were glittering, his long spiky tail lashed his sides, his claws tore up the turf and sent it flying high over his back, and smoke and fire incessantly jetted from his angry nostrils. "Oh, well done, dragon!" cried the Boy, excitedly. "Didn't think he had it in him!" he added to himself.

St. George lowered his spear, bent his head, dug his heels into his horse's sides, and came thundering over the turf. The dragon charged with a roar and a squeal,--a great blue whirling combination of coils and snorts and clashing jaws and spikes and fire.

"Missed!" yelled the crowd. There was a moment's entanglement of golden armour and blue-green coils, and spiky tail, and then the great horse, tearing at his bit, carried the Saint, his spear swung high in the air, almost up to the mouth of the cave.

The dragon sat down and barked viciously, while St. George with difficulty pulled his horse round into position.

"End of Round One!" thought the Boy. "How well they managed it! But I hope the Saint won't get excited. I can trust the dragon all right. What a regular play-actor the fellow is!"

St. George had at last prevailed on his horse to stand steady, and was looking round him as he wiped his brow. Catching sight of the Boy, he smiled and nodded, and held up three fingers for an instant.

"It seems to be all planned out," said the Boy to himself. "Round Three is to be the finishing one, evidently. Wish it could have lasted a bit longer. Whatever's that old fool of a dragon up to now?"

The dragon was employing the interval in giving a ramping-performance for the benefit of the crowd. Ramping, it should be explained, consists in running round and round in a wide circle, and sending waves and ripples of movement along the whole length of your spine, from your pointed ears right down to the spike at the end of your long tail. When you are covered with blue scales, the effect is particularly pleasing; and the Boy recollected the dragon's recently expressed wish to become a social success.

St. George now gathered up his reins and began to move forward, dropping the point of his spear and settling himself firmly in the saddle.

"Time!" yelled everybody excitedly; and the dragon, leaving off his ramping, sat up on end, and began to leap from one side to the other with huge ungainly bounds, whooping like a Red Indian. This naturally disconcerted the horse, who swerved violently, the Saint only just saving himself by the mane; and as they shot past the dragon delivered a vicious snap at the horse's tail which sent the poor beast careering madly far over the Downs, so that the language of the Saint, who had lost a stirrup, was fortunately inaudible to the general assemblage.

Round Two evoked audible evidence of friendly feeling towards the dragon. The spectators were not slow to appreciate a combatant who could hold his own so well and clearly wanted to show good sport, and many encouraging remarks reached the ears of our friend as he strutted to and fro, his chest thrust out and his tail in the air, hugely enjoying his new popularity.

St. George had dismounted and was tightening his girths, and telling his horse, with quite an Oriental flow of imagery, exactly what he thought of him, and his relations, and his conduct on the present occasion; so the Boy made his way down to the Saint's end of the line, and held his spear for him.

"It's been a jolly fight, St. George!" he said with a sigh. "Can't you let it last a bit longer?"

"Well, I think I'd better not," replied the Saint. "The fact is, your simple-minded old friend's getting conceited, now they've begun cheering him, and he'll forget all about the arrangement and take to playing the fool, and there's no telling where he would stop. I'll just finish him off this round."

He swung himself into the saddle and took his spear from the Boy.

"Now don't you be afraid," he added kindly. "I've marked my spot exactly, and HE'S sure to give me all the assistance in his power, because he knows it's his only chance of being asked to the banquet!"

St. George now shortened his spear, bringing the butt well up under his arm; and, instead of galloping as before, trotted smartly towards the dragon, who crouched at his approach, flicking his tail till it cracked in the air like a great cart-whip. The Saint wheeled as he neared his opponent and circled warily round him, keeping his eye on the spare place; while the dragon, adopting similar tactics, paced with caution round the same circle, occasionally feinting with his head. So the two sparred for an opening, while the spectators maintained a breathless silence.

Though the round lasted for some minutes, the end was so swift that all the Boy saw was a lightning movement of the Saint's arm, and then a whirl and a confusion of

spines, claws, tail, and flying bits of turf. The dust cleared away, the spectators whooped and ran in cheering, and the Boy made out that the dragon was down, pinned to the earth by the spear, while St. George had dismounted, and stood astride of him.

It all seemed so genuine that the Boy ran in breathlessly, hoping the dear old dragon wasn't really hurt. As he approached, the dragon lifted one large eyelid, winked solemnly, and collapsed again. He was held fast to earth by the neck, but the Saint had hit him in the spare place agreed upon, and it didn't even seem to tickle.

"Bain't you goin' to cut 'is 'ed orf, master?" asked one of the applauding crowd. He had backed the dragon, and naturally felt a trifle sore.

"Well, not TO-DAY, I think," replied St. George, pleasantly. "You see, that can be done at ANY time. There's no hurry at all. I think we'll all go down to the village first, and have some refreshment, and then I'll give him a good talking-to, and you'll find he'll be a very different dragon!"

(Grahame, 1988: 20-40)

## **Extracts from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit***

### **Chapter 12. Inside Information**

For a long time the dwarves stood in the dark before the door and debated, until at last Thorin spoke:

"Now is the time for our esteemed Mr. Baggins, who has proved himself a good companion on our long road, and a hobbit full of courage and resource far exceeding his size, and if I may say so possessed of good luck far exceeding the usual allowance-now is the time for him to perform the service for which he was included in our Company; now is the time for him to earn his Reward." You are familiar with Thorin's style on important occasions, so I will not give you any more of it, though he went on a good deal longer than this. It certainly was an important occasion, but Bilbo felt impatient. By now he was quite familiar with Thorin too, and he knew what he was driving at. "If you mean you think it is my job to go into the secret passage first, O Thorin Thrain's son Oakenshield, may your beard grow ever longer," he said crossly, "say so at once and have done! I might refuse. I have got you out of two messes already, which were hardly in the original bargain, so that I am, I think, already owed some reward. But 'third time pays for all' as my father used to say, and somehow I don't think I shall refuse. Perhaps I have begun to trust my luck more than I used to in the old days" - he meant last spring before he left his own house, but it seemed centuries ago - "but anyway I think I will go and have a peep at once and get it over. Now who is coming with me?"

He did not expect a chorus of volunteers, so he was not disappointed. Fili and Kili looked uncomfortable and stood on One leg, but the others made no pretence of offering - except old Balin, the look-out man, who was rather fond the hobbit. He said he would come inside at least and perhaps a bit of the way too, really to call for help if necessary.

The most that can be said for the dwarves is this: they intended to pay Bilbo really handsomely for his services; they had brought him to do a nasty job for them, and they did not mind the poor little fellow doing it if he would; but they would all have done their best to get him out of trouble, if he got into it, as they did in the case of the trolls at

the beginning of their adventures before they had any particular reasons for being grateful to him. There it is: dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money; some are tricky and treacherous and pretty bad lots; some are not, but are decent enough people like Thorin and Company, if you don't expect too much.

The stars were coming out behind him in a pale sky barred with black when the hobbit crept through the enchanted door and stole into the Mountain. It was far easier going than he expected. This was no goblin entrance, or rough wood-elves' cave. It was a passage made by dwarves, at the height of their wealth and skill: straight as a ruler, smooth-floored and smooth-sided, going with a gentle never-varying slope direct to some distant end in the blackness below.

After a while Balin bade Bilbo "Good luck!" and stopped where he could still see the faint outline of the door, and by a trick of, the echoes of the tunnel hear the rustle of the whispering voices of the others just outside. Then the hobbit slipped on his ring, and warned by the echoes to take more than hobbit's care to make no sound, he crept noiselessly down, down, down into the dark. He was trembling with fear, but his little face was set and grim. Already he was a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket-handkerchief from Bag-End long ago. He had not had a pocket-handkerchief for ages. He loosened his dagger in its sheath, tightened his belt, and went on.

"Now you are in for it at last, Bilbo Baggins," he said to himself. "You went and put your foot right in it that night of the party, and now you have got to pull it out and pay for it! Dear me, what a fool I was and am!" said the least Tookish part of him. "I have absolutely no use for dragon-guarded treasures, and the whole lot could stay here for ever, if only I could wake up and find this beastly tunnel was my own front-hall at home!" He did not wake up of course, but went still on and on, till all sign of the door behind had faded away. He was altogether alone. Soon he thought it was beginning to feel warm. "Is that a kind of a glow I seem to see coming right ahead down there?" he thought. It was. As he went forward it grew and grew, till there was no doubt about it. It was a red light steadily getting redder and redder. Also it was now undoubtedly hot in the tunnel. Wisps of vapour floated up and past him and he began to sweat. A sound, too, began to throb in his ears, a sort of bubbling like the noise of a large pot galloping on the fire, mixed with a rumble as of a gigantic tom-cat purring. This grew to the unmistakable gurgling noise of some vast animal snoring in its sleep down there in the red glow in front of him.

It was at this point that Bilbo stopped. Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterward were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait. At any rate after a short halt go on he did; and you can picture him coming to the end of the tunnel, an opening of much the same size and shape as the door above. Through it peeps the hobbit's little head. Before him lies the great bottommost cellar or dungeon-hall of the ancient dwarves right at the Mountain's root. It is almost dark so that its vastness can only be dimly guessed, but rising from the near side of the rocky floor there is a great glow. The glow of Smaug! There he lay, a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber.

Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across the unseen floors, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light.

Smaug lay, with wings folded like an immeasurable bat, turned partly on one side, so that the hobbit could see his underparts and his long pale belly crusted with gems and fragments of gold from his long lying on his costly bed. Behind him where the walls were nearest could dimly be seen coats of mail, helms and axes, swords and spears hanging; and there in rows stood great jars and vessels filled with a wealth that could not be guessed. To say that Bilbo's breath was taken away is no description at all. There are no words left to express his staggerment, since Men changed the language that they learned of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful. Bilbo had heard tell and sing of dragon-hoards before, but the splendour, the lust, the glory of such treasure had never yet come home to him. His heart was filled and pierced with enchantment and with the desire of dwarves; and he gazed motionless, almost forgetting the frightful guardian, at the gold beyond price and count.

He gazed for what seemed an age, before drawn almost against his will, he stole from the shadow of the doorway, across the floor to the nearest edge of the mounds of treasure. Above him the sleeping dragon lay, a dire menace even in his sleep. He grasped a great two-handled cup, as heavy as he could carry, and cast one fearful eye upwards. Smaug stirred a wing, opened a claw, the rumble of his snoring changed its note.

Then Bilbo fled. But the dragon did not wake-not yet but shifted into other dreams of greed and violence, lying there in his stolen hall while the littlehobbit toiled back up the long tunnel. His heart was beating and a more fevered shaking was in his legs than when he was going down, but still he clutched the cup, and his chief thought was: "I've done it! This will show them. 'More like a grocer than a burglar' indeed! Well, we'll hear no more of that."

Nor did he. Balin was overjoyed to see the hobbit again, and as delighted as he was surprised. He picked Bilbo up and carried him out into the open air. It was midnight and clouds had covered the stars, but Bilbo lay with his eyes shut, gasping and taking pleasure in the feel of the fresh air again, and hardly noticing the excitement of the dwarves, or how they praised him and patted him on the back and put themselves and all their families for generations to come at his service.

The dwarves were still passing the cup from hand to hand and talking delightedly of the recovery of their treasure, when suddenly a vast rumbling woke in the mountain underneath as if it was an old volcano that had made up its mind to start eruptions once again. The door behind them was pulled nearly to, and blocked from closing with a stone, but up the long tunnel came the dreadful echoes, from far down in the depths, of a bellowing and a trampling that made the ground beneath them tremble.

Then the dwarves forgot their joy and their confident boasts of a moment before and cowered down in fright. Smaug was still to be reckoned with. It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him. Dragons may not have much real use for all their wealth, but they know it to an ounce as a rule, especially after long possession; and Smaug was no exception. He had passed from an uneasy dream (in which a warrior, altogether insignificant in size but provided with a bitter sword and great courage, figured most unpleasantly) to a doze, and from a doze to wide waking. There was a breath of strange air in his cave. Could there be a draught from that little hole? He had never felt quite happy about it, though was so small, and now he glared at it in suspicion and wondered why he had never blocked it up. Of late he had half fancied he had caught the dim echoes of a knocking sound from far above that came down through it to his lair. He stirred and stretched forth his neck to sniff. Then he missed the cup!

Thieves! Fire! Murder! Such a thing had not happened since first he came to the Mountain! His rage passes description - the sort of rage that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something that they have long had but have never before used or wanted. His fire belched forth, the hall smoked, he shook the mountain-roots. He thrust his head in vain at the little hole, and then coiling his length together, roaring like thunder underground, he sped from his deep lair through its great door, out into the huge passages of the mountain-palace and up towards the Front Gate. To hunt the whole mountain till he had caught the thief and had torn and trampled him was his one thought. He issued from the Gate, the waters rose in fierce whistling steam, and up he soared blazing into the air and settled on the mountain-top in a spout of green and scarlet flame. The dwarves heard the awful rumour of his flight, and they crouched against the walls of the grassy terrace cringing under boulders, hoping somehow to escape the frightful eyes of the hunting dragon.

There they would have all been killed, if it had not been for Bilbo once again. "Quick! Quick!" he gasped. "The door! The tunnel! It's no good here." Roused by these words they were just about to creep inside the tunnel when Bifur gave a cry: "My cousins! Bombur and Bofur - we have forgotten them, they are down in the valley!"

"They will be slain, and all our ponies too, and all our stores lost," moaned the others. "We can do nothing."

"Nonsense!" said Thorin, recovering his dignity. "We cannot leave them. Get inside Mr. Baggins and Balin, and you two Fili and Kili-the dragon shan't have all of us. Now you others, where are the ropes? Be quick!" Those were perhaps the worst moments they had been through yet. The horrible sounds of Smaug's anger were echoing in the stony hollows far above; at any moment he might come blazing down or fly whirling round and find them there, near the perilous cliff's edge hauling madly on the ropes. Up came Bofur, and still all was safe. Up came Bombur, puffing and blowing while the ropes creaked, and still all was safe. Up came some tools and bundles of stores, and then danger was upon them. A whirring noise was heard. A red light touched the points of standing rocks. The dragon came. They had barely time to fly back to the tunnel, pulling and dragging in their bundles, when Smaug came hurtling from the North, licking the mountain-sides with flame, beating his great wings with a noise like a roaring wind. His hot breath shrivelled the grass before the door, and drove in through the crack they had left and scorched them as they lay hid. Flickering fires leaped up and black rock-shadows danced. Then darkness fell as he passed again. The ponies screamed with terror, burst their ropes and galloped wildly off. The dragon swooped and turned to pursue them, and was gone. "That'll be the end of our poor beasts!" said Thorin.

"Nothing can escape Smaug once he sees it. Here we are and here we shall have to stay, unless any one fancies tramping the long open miles back to the river with Smaug on the watch!"

It was not a pleasant thought! They crept further down the tunnel, and there they lay and shivered though it was warm and stuffy, until dawn came pale through the crack of the door. Every now and again through the night they could hear the roar of the flying dragon grow and then pass and fade, as he hunted round and round the mountain-sides.

He guessed from the ponies, and from the traces of the camps he had discovered, that men had come up from the river and the lake and had scaled the mountain-side from the valley where the ponies had been standing; but the door withstood his searching eye, and the little high-walled bay had kept out his fiercest flames. Long he had hunted in vain till the dawn chilled his wrath and he went back to his golden couch to sleep - and to gather new strength.

He would not forget or forgive the theft, not if a thousand years turned him to smouldering stone, but he could afford to wait. Slow and silent he crept back to his lair and half closed his eyes.

When morning came the terror of the dwarves grew less. They realized that dangers of this kind were inevitable in dealing with such a guardian, and that it was no good giving up their quest yet. Nor could they get away just now, as Thorin had pointed out. Their ponies were lost or killed, and they would have to wait some time before Smaug relaxed his watch sufficiently for them to dare the long way on foot. Luckily they had saved enough of their stores to last them still for some time.

They debated long on what was to be done, but they could think of no way of getting rid of Smaug - which had always been a weak point in their plans, as Bilbo felt inclined to point out. Then as is the nature of folk that are thoroughly perplexed, they began to grumble at the hobbit, blaming him for what had at first so pleased them: for bringing away a cup and stirring up Smaug's wrath so soon.

"What else do you suppose a burglar is to do?" asked Bilbo angrily. "I was not engaged to kill dragons, that is warrior's work, but to steal treasure. I made the best beginning I could. Did you expect me to trot back with the whole hoard of Thrór on my back? If there is any grumbling to be done, I think I might have a say. You ought to have brought five hundred burglars not one. I am sure it reflects great credit on your grandfather, but you cannot pretend that you ever made the vast extent of his wealth clear to me. I should want hundreds of years to bring it all up, if I was fifty times as big, and Smaug as tame as a rabbit."

After that of course the dwarves begged his pardon.

"What then do you propose we should do, Mr. Baggins?" asked Thorin politely.

"I have no idea at the moment - if you mean about removing the treasure. That obviously depends entirely on some new turn of luck and the getting rid of Smaug.

Getting rid of dragons is not at all in my line, but I will do my best to think about it. Personally I have no hopes at all, and wish I was safe back at home."

"Never mind that for the moment! What are we to do now, to-day?" "Well, if you really want my advice, I should say we can do nothing but stay where we are. By day we can no doubt creep out safely enough to take the air. Perhaps before long one or two could be chosen to go back to the store by the river and replenish our supplies. But in the meanwhile everyone ought to be well inside the tunnel by night.

"Now I will make you an offer. I have got my ring and will creep down this very noon-then if ever Smaug ought to be napping-and see what he is up to. Perhaps something will turn up. 'Every worm has his weak spot,' as my father used to say, though I am sure it was not from personal experience." Naturally the dwarves accepted the offer eagerly. Already they had come to respect little Bilbo. Now he had become the real leader in their adventure. He had begun to have ideas and plans of his own. When midday came he got ready for another journey down into the Mountain. He did not like it of course, but it was not so bad now he knew, more or less, what was in front of him. Had he known more about dragons and their wily ways, he might have been more frightened and less hopeful of catching this one napping. The sun was shining when he started, but it was as dark as night in the tunnel. The light from the door, almost closed, soon faded as he went down. So silent was his going that smoke on a gentle wind could hardly have surpasses it, and he was inclined to feel a bit proud of himself as he drew near the lower door. There was only the very fainter glow to be seen. "Old Smaug is weary and asleep," he thought. "He can't, see me and he won't hear me. Cheer up Bilbo!" He had forgotten or had never heard about dragons' sense of smell.



It is also an awkward fact that they keep half an eye open watching while they sleep, if they are suspicious. Smaug certainly looked fast asleep, almost dead and dark, with scarcely a snore more than a whiff of unseen steam, when Bilbo peeped once more from the entrance. He was just about to step out on to the floor when he caught a sudden thin and piercing ray of red from under the drooping lid of Smaug's left eye. He was only pretending to sleep! He was watching the tunnel entrance! Hurriedly Bilbo stepped back and blessed the luck of his ring. Then Smaug spoke.

"Well, thief! I smell you and I feel your air. I hear your breath. Come along! Help yourself again, there is plenty and to spare!" But Bilbo was not quite so unlearned in dragon-lore as all that, and if Smaug hoped to get him to come nearer so easily he was disappointed. "No thank you, O Smaug the Tremendous!" he replied. "I did not come for presents. I only wished to have a look at you and see if you were truly as great as tales say. I did not believe them."

"Do you now?" said the dragon somewhat flattered, even though he did not believe a word of it. "Truly songs and tales fall utterly short of the reality, O Smaug the Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities," replied Bilbo.

You have nice manners for a thief and a liar," said the dragon. "You seem familiar with my name, but I don't seem to remember smelling you before. Who are you and where do you come from, may I ask?"

"You may indeed! I come from under the hill, and under hills and over the hills my paths led. And through the air, I am he that walks unseen." "So I can well believe," said Smaug, "but that is hardly our usual name." "I am the clue-finder, the web-cutter, the stinging fly. I am chosen for the lucky number."

"Lovely titles!" sneered the dragon. "But lucky numbers don't always come off."

"I am he that buries his friends alive and drowns them and draws them alive again from the water. I came from the end of a bag, but no bag went over me."

"These don't sound so creditable," scoffed Smaug.

"I am the friend of bears and the guest of eagles. I am Ringwinner and Luckwearer; and I am Barrel-rider," went on Bilbo beginning to be pleased with his riddling.

"That's better!" said Smaug. "But don't let your imagination run away with you!"

This of course is the way to talk to dragons, if you don't want to reveal your proper name (which is wise), and don't want to infuriate them by a flat refusal (which is also very wise). No dragon can resist the fascination of riddling talk and of wasting time trying to understand it. There was a lot here which Smaug did not understand at all (though I expect you do, since you know all about Bilbo's adventures to which he was referring), but he thought he understood enough, and he chuckled in his wicked inside.

"I thought so last night," he smiled to himself. "Lake-men, some nasty scheme of those miserable tub-trading Lake-men, or I'm a lizard. I haven't been down that way for an age and an age; but I will soon alter that!" "Very well, O Barrel-rider!" he said aloud. "Maybe Barrel was your pony's name; and maybe not, though it was fat enough. You may walk unseen, but you did not walk all the way. Let me tell you I ate six ponies last night and I shall catch and eat all the others before long. In return for the excellent meal I will give you one piece of advice for your good: don't have more to do with dwarves than you can help!"

"Dwarves!" said Bilbo in pretended surprise.

"Don't talk to me!" said Smaug. "I know the smell (and taste) of dwarf-no one better. Don't tell me that I can eat a dwarf-ridden pony and not know it! You'll come to a bad end, if you go with such friends. Thief Barrel-rider. I don't mind if you go back and tell them so from me."

But he did not tell Bilbo that there was one smell he could not make out at all, hobbit-smell; it was quite outside his experience and puzzled him mightily.

"I suppose you got a fair price for that cup last night?" he went on. "Come now, did you? Nothing at all! Well, that's just like them. And I suppose they are skulking outside, and your job is to do all the dangerous work and get what you can when I'm not looking-for them? And you will get a fair share? Don't you believe it! If you get off alive, you will be lucky." Bilbo was now beginning to feel really uncomfortable. Whenever Smaug's roving eye, seeking for him in the shadows, flashed across him, he trembled, and an unaccountable desire seized hold of him to rush out and reveal himself and tell all the truth to Smaug. In fact he was in grievous danger of coming under the dragon-spell. But plucking up courage he spoke again. "You don't know everything, O Smaug the Mighty," said he. "Not gold alone brought us hither."

"Ha! Ha! You admit the 'us'," laughed Smaug. "Why not say 'us fourteen' and be done with it. Mr. Lucky Number? I am pleased to hear that you had other business in these parts besides my gold. In that case you may, perhaps, not altogether waste your time.

"I don't know if it has occurred to you that, even if you could steal the gold bit by bit-a matter of a hundred years or so - you could not get it very far? Not much use on the mountain-side? Not much use in the forest? Bless me! Had you never thought of the catch? A fourteenth share, I suppose, Or something like it, those were the terms, eh? But what about delivery? What about cartage? What about armed guards and tolls?" And Smaug laughed aloud. He had a wicked and a wily heart, and he knew his guesses were not far out, though he suspected that the Lake-men were at the back of the plans, and that most of the plunder was meant to stop there in the town by the shore that in his young days had been called Esgaroth.

You will hardly believe it, but poor Bilbo was really very taken aback. So far all his thoughts and energies had been concentrated on getting to the Mountain and finding the entrance. He had never bothered to wonder how the treasure was to be removed, certainly never how any part of it that might fall to his share was to be brought back all the way to Bag-End Under-Hill. Now a nasty suspicion began to grow in his mind-had the dwarves forgotten this important point too, or were they laughing in their sleeves at him all the time? That is the effect that dragon-talk has on the inexperienced. Bilbo of course ought to have been on his guard; but Smaug had rather an overwhelming personality.

"I tell you," he said, in an effort to remain loyal to his friends and to keep his end up, "that gold was only an afterthought with us. We came over hill and under hill, by wave and win, for "Revenge". Surely, O Smaug the unassessably wealthy, you must realize that your success has made you some bitter enemies?"

Then Smaug really did laugh-a devastating sound which shook Bilbo to the floor, while far up in the tunnel the dwarves huddled together and imagined that the hobbit had come to a sudden and a nasty end. "Revenge!" he snorted, and the light of his eyes lit the the hall from floor to ceiling like scarlet lightning. "Revenge! The King under the Mountain is dead and where are hi kin that dare seek revenge? Girion Lord of Dale is dead, and I have eaten his people like a wolf among sheep, and where are his sons' sons that dare approach me? I kill where I wish and none dare resist. I laid low the warriors of old and their like is not in the world today. Then I was but young and tender. Now I am old and strong, strong strong. Thief in the Shadows!" he gloated. "My armour is like tenfold shields, my teeth are swords, my claws spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!"

"I have always understood," said Bilbo in a frightened squeak, "that dragons were softer underneath, especially in the region of the-er-chest; but doubtless one so fortified has thought of that."

The dragon stopped short in his boasting. "Your information is antiquated," he snapped. "I am armoured above and below with iron scales and hard gems. No blade can pierce me."

"I might have guessed it," said Bilbo. "Truly there can; nowhere be found the equal of Lord Smaug the Impenetrable. What magnificence to possess a waistcoat of fine diamonds!"

"Yes, it is rare and wonderful, indeed," said Smaug absurdly pleased. He did not know that the hobbit had already caught a glimpse of his peculiar under-covering on his previous visit, and was itching for a closer view for reasons of his own. The dragon rolled over. "Look!" he said. "What do you say to that?"

"Dazzlingly marvellous! Perfect! Flawless! Staggering!" exclaimed Bilbo aloud, but what he thought inside was: "Old fool! Why there is a large patch in the hollow of his left breast as bare as a snail out of its shell!" After he had seen that Mr. Baggins' one idea was to get away. "Well, I really must not detain Your Magnificence any longer," he said, "or keep you from much needed rest. Ponies take some catching, I believe, after a long start. And so do burglars," he added as a parting shot, as he darted back and fled up the tunnel.

It was an unfortunate remark, for the dragon spouted terrific flames after him, and fast though he sped up the slope, he had not gone nearly far enough to be comfortable before the ghastly head of Smaug was thrust against the opening behind. Luckily the whole head and jaws could not squeeze in, but the nostrils sent forth fire and vapour to pursue him, and he was nearly overcome, and stumbled blindly on in great pain and fear. He had been feeling rather pleased with the cleverness of his conversation with Smaug, but his mistake at the end shook him into better sense.

"Never laugh at live dragons, Bilbo you fool!" he said to himself, and it became a favourite saying of his later, and passed into a proverb. "You aren't nearly through this adventure yet," he added, and that was pretty true as well.

The afternoon was turning into evening when he came out again and stumbled and fell in a faint on the 'door-step.' The dwarves revived him, and doctored his scorches as well as they could; but it was a long time before the hair on the back of his head and his heels grew properly again: it had all been singed and frizzled right down to the skin. In the meanwhile his friends did their best to cheer him up; and they were eager for his story, especially wanting to know why the dragon had made such an awful noise, and how Bilbo had escaped.

But the hobbit was worried and uncomfortable, and they had difficulty in getting anything out of him. On thinking things over he was now regretting some of the things he had said to the dragon, and was not eager to repeat them. The old thrush was sitting on a rock near by with his head cocked on one side, listening to all that was said. It shows what an ill temper Bilbo was in: he picked up a stone and threw it at the thrush, which merely fluttered aside and came back.

"Drat the bird!" said Bilbo crossly. "I believe he is listening, and I don't like the look of him."

"Leave him alone!" said Thorin. "The thrushes are good and friendly-this is a very old bird indeed, and is maybe the last left of the ancient breed that used to live about here, tame to the hands of my father and grandfather. They were a long-lived and magical race, and this might even be one of those that were alive then, a couple of hundreds

years or more ago. The Men of Dale used to have the trick of understanding their language, and used them for messengers to fly to the Men of the Lake and elsewhere." "Well, he'll have news to take to Lake-town all right, if that is what he is after," said Bilbo; "though I don't suppose there are any people left there that trouble with thrush-language."

"Why what has happened?" cried the dwarves. "Do get on with your tale!"

So Bilbo told them all he could remember, and he confessed that he had a nasty feeling that the dragon guessed too much from his riddles added to the camps and the ponies. "I am sure he knows we came from Lake-town and had help from there; and I have a horrible feeling that his next move may be in that direction. I wish to goodness I had never said that about Barrel-rider; it would make even a blind rabbit in these parts think of the Lake-men." "Well, well! It cannot be helped, and it is difficult not to slip in talking to a dragon, or so I have always heard," said Balin anxious to comfort him. "I think you did very well, if you ask me-you found out one very useful thing at any rate, and got home alive, and that is more than most can say who have had words with the likes of Smaug. It may be a mercy and a blessing yet to know of the bare patch in the old Worm's diamond waistcoat." That turned the conversation, and they all began discussing dragon-slayings historical, dubious, and mythical, and the various sorts of stabs and jabs and undercuts, and the different arts, devices and stratagems by which they had been accomplished. The general opinion was that catching a dragon napping was not as easy as it sounded, and the attempt to stick one or prod one asleep was more likely to end in disaster than a bold frontal attack. All the while they talked the thrush listened, till at last when the stars began to peep forth, it silently spread its wings and flew away. And all the while they talked and the shadows lengthened Bilbo became more and more unhappy and his foreboding. At last he interrupted them. "I am sure we are very unsafe here," he said, "and I don't see the point of sitting here. The dragon has withered all the pleasant green, and anyway the night has come and it is cold. But I feel it in my bones that this place will be attacked again. Smaug knows now how I came down to his hall, and you can trust him to guess where the other end of the tunnel is. He will break all this side of the Mountain to bits, if necessary, to stop up our entrance, and if we are smashed with it the better he will like it."

"You are very gloomy, Mr. Baggins!" said Thorin. "Why has not Smaug blocked the lower end, then, if he is so eager to keep us out? He has not, or we should have heard him."

"I don't know, I don't know-because at first he wanted to try and lure me in again, I suppose, and now perhaps because he is waiting till after tonight's hunt, or because he does not want to damage his bedroom if he can help it - but I wish you would not argue. Smaug will be coming out at any minute now, and our only hope is to get well in the tunnel and shut the door." He seemed so much in earnest that the dwarves at last did as he said, though they delayed shutting the door-it seemed a desperate plan, for no one knew whether or how they could get it open again from the inside, and the thought of being shut in a place from which the only way out led through the dragon's lair was not one they liked. Also everything seemed quite quiet, both outside and down the tunnel. So for a longish while they sat inside not far down from the half-open door and went on talking. The talk turned to the dragon's wicked words about the dwarves. Bilbo wished he had never heard them, or at least that he could feel quite certain that the dwarves now were absolutely honest when they declared that they had never thought at all about what would happen after the treasure had been won. "We knew it would be a desperate venture," said Thorin, "and we know that still; and I still think that when we have won it

will be time enough to think what to do about it. As for your share, Mr. Baggins, I assure you we are more than grateful and you shall choose your own fourteenth, as soon as we have anything to divide, am sorry if you are worried about transport, and I admit the difficulties are great-the lands have not become less wild with the passing of time, rather the reverse-but we will do whatever we can for you, and take our share of the cost when the time comes. Believe me or not as you like!"

From that the talk turned to the great hoard itself and to the things that Thorin and Balin remembered. They wondered if they were still lying there, unharmed in the hall below: the spears that were made for the armies of the great King Bladorthin (long since dead), each had a thrice-forged head and their shafts were inlaid with cunning gold, but they were never delivered or paid for; shields made for warriors long dead; the great golden cup of Thrór, two-handed, hammered and carved with birds and flowers whose eyes and petals were of jewels; coats of mail gilded and silvered and impenetrable; the necklace of Girion, Lord of Dale, made of five hundred emeralds green as grass, which he gave for the arming of his eldest son in a coat of dwarf-linked rings the like of which had never been made before, for it was wrought of pure silver to the power and strength of triple steel. But fairest of all was the great white gem, which the dwarves had found beneath the roots of the Mountain, the Heart of the Mountain, the Arkenstone of Thráin. "The Arkenstone! The Arkenstone!" murmured Thorin in the dark, half dreaming with his chin upon his knees. "It was like a globe with a thousand facets; it shone like silver in the firelight, like water in the sun, like snow under the stars, like rain upon the Moon!"

But the enchanted desire of the hoard had fallen from Bilbo. All through their talk he was only half listening to them. He sat nearest to the door with one ear cocked for any beginnings of a sound without, his other was alert for echoes beyond the murmurs of the dwarves, for any whisper of a movement from far below.

Darkness grew deeper and he grew ever more uneasy. "Shut the door!" he begged them. "I fear that dragon in my marrow. I like this silence far less than the uproar of last night. Shut the door before it is too late!" Something in his voice gave the dwarves an uncomfortable feeling. Slowly Thorin shook off his dreams and getting up he kicked away the stone that wedged the door. Then they thrust upon it, and it closed with a snap and a clang. No trace of a keyhole was there left on the inside. They were shut in the Mountain!

And not a moment too soon. They had hardly gone any distance down the tunnel when a blow smote the side of the Mountain like the crash of battering-rams made of forest oaks and swung by giants. The rock boomed, the walls cracked and stones fell from the roof on their heads. What would have happened if the door had still been open I don't like to think. They fled further down the tunnel glad to be still alive, while behind them outside they heard the roar and rumble of Smaug's fury. He was breaking rocks to pieces, smashing wall and cliff with the lashings of his huge tail, till their little lofty camping ground, the scorched grass, the thrush's stone, the snail-covered walls, the narrow ledge, and all disappeared in a jumble of smithereens, and an avalanche of splintered stones fell over the cliff into the valley below. Smaug had left his lair in silent stealth, quietly soared into the air, and then floated heavy and slow in the dark like a monstrous crow, down the wind towards the west of the Mountain, in the hopes of catching unawares something or somebody there, and of spying the outlet to the passage which the thief had used. This was the outburst of his wrath when he could find nobody and see nothing, even where he guessed the outlet must actually be. After he had let off his rage in this way he felt better and he thought in his heart that he would not be

troubled again from that direction. In-the meanwhile he had further vengeance to take. "Barrel-rider!" he snorted. "Your fee came from the waterside and up the water you came with out a doubt. I don't know your smell, but if you are not one of those men of the Lake, you had their help. They shall see me and remember who is the real King under the Mountain!"

He rose in fire and went away south towards the Running River.

(Tolkien, 2012: 35-59)

## **Chapter 14. Fire and Water**

Now if you wish, like the dwarves, to hear news of Smaug, you must go back again to the evening when he smashed the door and flew off in rage, two days before.

The men of the lake-town Esgaroth were mostly indoors, for the breeze was from the black East and chill, but a few were walking on the quays, and watching, as they were fond of doing, the stars shine out from the smooth patches of the lake as they opened in the sky. From their town the Lonely Mountain was mostly screened by the low hills at the far end of the lake, through a gap in which the Running River came down from the North. Only its high peak could they see in clear weather, and they looked seldom at it, for it was ominous and dreary even in the light of morning. Now it was lost and gone, blotted in the dark.

Suddenly it flickered back to view; a brief glow touched it and faded. "Look!" said one. "The lights again! Last night the watchmen saw them start and fade from midnight until dawn. Something is happening up there." "Perhaps the King under the Mountain is forging gold," said another. "It is long since he went north. It is time the songs began to prove themselves again."

"Which king?" said another with a grim voice. "As like as not it is the marauding fire of the Dragon, the only king under the Mountain we have ever known."

"You are always foreboding gloomy things!" said the others. "Anything from floods to poisoned fish. Think of something cheerful!" Then suddenly a great light appeared in the low place in the hills and the northern end of the lake turned golden.

"The King beneath the Mountain!" they shouted. "His wealth is like the Sun, his silver like a fountain, his rivers golden run! The river is running gold from the Mountain!" they cried, and everywhere windows were opening and feet were hurrying.

There was once more a tremendous excitement and enthusiasm. But the grim-voiced fellow ran hotfoot to the Master. "The dragon is coming or I am a fool!" he cried. "Cut the bridges! To arms! To arms!"

Then warning trumpets were suddenly sounded, and echoed along the rocky shores. The cheering stopped and the joy was turned to dread. So it was that the dragon did not find them quite unprepared. Before long, so great was his speed, they could see him as a spark of fire rushing towards them and growing ever huger and more bright, and not the most foolish doubted that the prophecies had gone rather wrong. Still they had a little time. Every vessel in the town was filled with water, every warrior was armed, every arrow and dart was ready, and the bridge to the land was thrown down and destroyed, before the roar of Smaug's terrible approach grew loud, and the lake rippled red as fire beneath the awful beating of his wings.

Amid shrieks and wailing and the shouts of men he came over them, swept towards the bridges and was foiled! The bridge was gone, and his enemies were on an island in deep water-too deep and dark and cool for his liking. If he plunged into it, a vapour and a steam would arise enough to cover all the land with a mist for days; but the lake was mightier than he, it would quench him before he could pass through.

Roaring he swept back over the town. A hail of dark arrows leaped up and snapped and rattled on his scales and jewels, and their shafts fell back kindled by his breath burning and hissing into the lake. No fireworks you ever imagined equalled the sights that night. At the twanging of the bows and the shrilling of the trumpets the dragon's wrath blazed to its height, till he was blind and mad with it. No one had dared to give battle to him for many an age; nor would they have dared now, if it had not been for the grim-voiced man (Bard was his name), who ran to and fro cheering on the archers and urging the Master to order them to fight to the last arrow.

Fire leaped from the dragon's jaws. He circled for a while high in the air above them lighting all the lake; the trees by the shores shone like copper and like blood with leaping shadows of dense black at their feet. Then down he swooped straight through the arrow-storm, reckless in his rage, taking no heed to turn his scaly sides towards his foes, seeking only to set their town ablaze.

Fire leaped from thatched roofs and wooden beam-ends as he hurtled down and past and round again, though all had been drenched with water before he came. Once more water was flung by a hundred hands wherever a spark appeared. Back swirled the dragon. A sweep of his tail and the roof of the Great House crumbled and smashed down. Flames unquenchable sprang high into the night. Another swoop and another, and another house and then another sprang afire and fell; and still no arrow hindered Smaug or hurt him more than a fly from the marshes. Already men were jumping into the water on every side. Women and children were being huddled into laden boats in the market-pool. Weapons were flung down. There was mourning and weeping, where but a little time ago the old songs of mirth to come had been sung about the dwarves. Now men cursed their names. The Master himself was turning to his great gilded boat, hoping to row away in the confusion and save himself. Soon all the town would be deserted and burned down to the surface of the lake. That was the dragon's hope. They could all get into boats for all he cared. There he could have fine sport hunting them, or they could stop till they starved. Let them try to get to land and he would be ready. Soon he would set all the shoreland woods ablaze and wither every field and pasture. Just now he was enjoying the sport of town-baiting more than he had enjoyed anything for years. But there was still a company of archers that held their ground among the burning houses. Their captain was Bard, grim-voiced and grim-faced, whose friends had accused him of prophesying floods and poisoned fish, though they knew his worth and courage. He was a descendant in long line of Girion, Lord of Dale, whose wife and child had escaped down the Running River from the ruin long ago. Now he shot with a great yew bow, till all his arrows but one were spent. The flames were near him. His companions were leaving him. He bent his bow for the last time. Suddenly out of the dark something fluttered to his shoulder. He started-but it was only an old thrush. Unafraid it perched by his ear and it brought him news. Marvelling he found he could understand its tongue, for he was of the race of Dale.

"Wait! Wait!" it said to him. "The moon is rising. Look for the hollow of the left breast as he flies and turns above you!" And while Bard paused in wonder it told him of tidings up in the Mountain and of all that it had heard. Then Bard drew his bow-string to

his ear. The dragon was circling back, flying low, and as he came the moon rose above the eastern shore and silvered his great wings.

"Arrow!" said the Bowman. "Black arrow! I have saved you to the last. You have never failed me and always I have recovered you. I had you from my father and he from of old. If ever you came from the forges of the true king under the Mountain, go now and speed well!"

The dragon swooped once more lower than ever, and as he turned and dived down his belly glittered white with sparkling fires of gems in the moon-but not in one place. The great bow twanged. The black arrow sped straight from the string, straight for the hollow by the left breast where the foreleg was flung wide. In it smote and vanished, barb, shaft and feather, so fierce was its flight. With a shriek that deafened men, felled trees and split stone, Smaug shot spouting into the air, turned over and crashed down from on high in ruin.

Full on the town he fell. His last throes splintered it to sparks and gledes. The lake roared in. A vast steam leaped up, white in the sudden dark under the moon. There was a hiss, a gushing whirl, and then silence. And that was the end of Smaug and Esgaroth, but not of Bard. The waxing moon rose higher and higher and the wind grew loud and cold. It twisted the white fog into bending pillars and hurrying clouds and drove it off to the West to scatter in tattered shreds over the marshes before Mirkwood. Then the many boats could be seen dotted dark on the surface of the lake, and down the wind came the voices of the people of Esgaroth lamenting their lost town and goods and ruined houses. But they had really much to be thankful for, had they thought of it, though it could hardly be expected that they should just then: three quarters of the people of the town had at least escaped alive; their woods and fields and pastures and cattle and most of their boats remained undamaged; and the dragon was dead. What that meant they had not yet realized. They gathered in mournful crowds upon the western shores, shivering in the cold wind, and their first complaints and anger were against the Master, who had left the town so soon, while some were still willing to defend it. "He may have a good head for business-especially his own business," some murmured, "but he is no good when anything serious happens!" And they praised the courage of Bard and his last mighty shot. "If only he had not been killed," they all said, "we would make him a king. Bard the Dragon-shooter of the line of Girion! Alas that he is lost!"

And in the very midst of their talk, a tall figure stepped from the shadows. He was drenched with water, his black hair hung wet over his face and shoulders, and a fierce light was in his eyes.

"Bard is not lost!" he cried. "He dived from Esgaroth, when the enemy was slain. I am Bard, of the line of Girion; I am the slayer of the dragon!" "King Bard! King Bard!" they shouted; but the Master ground his chattering teeth.

"Girion was lord of Dale, not king of Esgaroth," he said. "In the Lake-town we have always elected masters from among the old and wise, and have not endured the rule of mere fighting men. Let 'King Bard' go back to his own kingdom-Dale is now freed by his valour, and nothing binders his return. And any that wish can go with him, if they prefer the cold shores under the shadow of the Mountain to the green shores of the lake. The wise will stay here and hope to rebuild our town, and enjoy again in time its peace and riches." "We will have King Bard!" the people near at hand shouted in reply. "We have had enough of the old men and the money-counters!" And people further off took up the cry: "Up the Bowman, and down with Moneybags," till the clamour echoed along the shore.



"I am the last man to undervalue Bard the Bowman," said the Master warily (for Bard now stood close beside him). "He has tonight earned an eminent place in the roll of the benefactors of our town; and he is worthy of many imperishable songs. But, why O People?"-and here the Master rose to his feet and spoke very loud and clear - "why do I get all your blame? For what fault am I to be deposed? Who aroused the dragon from his slumber, I might ask? Who obtained of us rich gifts and ample help, and led us to believe that old songs could come true? Who played on our soft hearts and our pleasant fancies? What sort of gold have they sent down the river to reward us? Dragon-fire and ruin! From whom should we claim the recompense of our damage, and aid for our widows and orphans?"

As you see, the Master had not got his position for nothing. The result of his words was that for the moment the people quite forgot their idea of a new king, and turned their angry thoughts towards Thorin and his company. Wild and bitter words were shouted from many sides; and some of those who had before sung the old songs loudest, were now heard as loudly crying that the dwarves had stirred the dragon up against them deliberately! "Fools!" said Bard. "Why waste words and wrath on those unhappy creatures? Doubtless they perished first in fire, before Smaug came to us." Then even as he was speaking, the thought came into his heart of the fabled treasure of the Mountain lying without guard or owner, and he fell suddenly silent. He thought of the Master's words, and of Dale rebuilt, and filled with golden bells, if he could but find the men.

At length he spoke again: "This is no time for angry words. Master, or for considering weighty plans of change. There is work to do. I serve you still-though after a while I may think again of your words and go North with any that will follow me."

Then he strode off to help in the ordering of the camps and in the care of the sick and the wounded. But the Master scowled at his back as he went, and remained sitting on the ground. He thought much but said little, unless it was to call loudly for men to bring him fire and food. Now everywhere Bard went he found talk running like fire among the people concerning the vast treasure that was now unguarded. Men spoke of the recompense for all their harm that they would soon get from it, and wealth over and to spare with which to buy rich things from the South; and it cheered them greatly in their plight. That was as well, for the night was bitter and miserable. Shelters could be contrived for few (the Master had one) and there was little food (even the Master went short). Many took ill of wet and cold and sorrow that night, and afterwards died, who had escaped uninjured from the ruin of the town; and in the days that followed there was much sickness and great hunger. Meanwhile Bard took the lead, and ordered things as he wished, though always in the Master's name, and he had a hard task to govern the people and direct the preparations for their protection and housing. Probably most of them would have perished in the winter that now hurried after autumn, if help had not been to hand. But help came swiftly; for Bard at once had speedy messengers sent up the river to the Forest to ask the aid of the King of the Elves of the Wood, and these messengers had found a host already on the move, although it was then only the third day after the fall of Smaug. The Elvenking had received news from his own messengers and from the birds that loved his folk, and already knew much of what had happened. Very great indeed was the commotion among all things with wings that dwelt on the borders of the Desolation of the Dragon. The air was filled with circling flocks, and their swift-flying messengers flew here and there across the sky. Above the borders of the Forest there was whistling, crying and piping. Far over Mirkwood tidings spread: "Smaug is dead!" Leaves rustled and startled ears were lifted. Even before the Elvenking rode forth the news had passed west right to the pinewoods of the Misty

Mountains; Beorn had heard it in his wooden house, and the goblins were at council in their caves.

"That will be the last we shall hear of Thorin Oakenshield, I fear," said the king. "He would have done better to have remained my guest. It is an ill wind, all the same," he added, "that blows no one any good." For he too had not forgotten the legend of the wealth of Thrór. So it was that Bard's messengers found him now marching with many spearmen and bowmen; and crows were gathered thick, above him, for they thought that war was awakening again, such as had not been in those parts for a long age. But the king, when he received the prayers of Bard, had pity, for he was the lord of a good and kindly people; so turning his march, which had at first been direct towards the Mountain, he hastened now down the river to the Long Lake. He had not boats or rafts enough for his host, and they were forced to go the slower way by foot; but great store of goods he sent ahead by water. Still elves are light-footed, and though they were not in these days much used to the marches and the treacherous lands between the Forest and the Lake, their going was swift. Only five days after the death of the dragon they came upon the shores and looked on the ruins of the town. Their welcome was good, as may be expected, and the men and their Master were ready to make any bargain for the future in return for the Elvenking's aid.

Their plans were soon made. With the women and the children, the old and the unfit, the Master remained behind; and with him were some men of crafts and many skilled elves; and they busied themselves felling trees, and collecting the timber sent down from the Forest. Then they set about raising many huts by the shore against the oncoming winter; and also under the Master's direction they began the planning of a new town, designed more fair and large even than before, but not in the same place. They removed northward higher up the shore; for ever after they had a dread of the water where the dragon lay. He would never again return to his golden bed, but was stretched cold as stone, twisted upon the floor of the shallows. There for ages his huge bones could be seen in calm weather amid the ruined piles of the old town. But few dared to cross the cursed spot, and none dared to dive into the shivering water or recover the precious stones that fell from his rotting carcass. But all the men of arms who were still able, and the most of the Elvenking's array, got ready to march north to the Mountain. It was thus that in eleven days from the ruin of the town the head of their host passed the rock-gates at the end of the lake and came into the desolate lands.

(Tolkien, 2012: 74-85)

### **Extracts from J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham***

Early on the Epiphany they went up the hill, carrying the strange result of their handiwork. Giles was expecting them. He had now no excuses left to offer; so he put on the mail jerkin and the breeches. The miller sniggered. Then Giles put on his topboots and an old pair of spurs; and also the leathercovered helmet. But at the last moment he clapped an old felt hat over the helmet, and over the mail coat he threw his big grey cloak.

'What is the purpose of that Master?' they asked.

'Well,' said Giles, 'if it is your notion to go dragonhunting jingling and dingling like Canterbury Bells, it ain't mine. It don't seem sense to me to let a dragon know that you are coming along the road sooner than need be. And a helmet's a helmet, and a challenge to battle. Let the worm see only my old hat over the hedge, and maybe I'll get nearer before the trouble begins.'

They had stitched on the rings so that they overlapped, each hanging loose over the one below, and jingle they certainly did. The cloak did something to stop the noise of them, but Giles cut a queer figure in his gear. They did not tell him so. They girded the belt round his waist with difficulty, and they hung the scabbard upon it; but he had to carry the sword, for it would no longer stay sheathed, unless held with main strength.

The farmer called for Garm. He was a just man according to his lights. 'Dog,' he said, 'you are coming with me.'

The dog howled. 'Help! help!' he cried.

'Now stop it!' said Giles. 'Or I'll give you worse than any dragon could. You know the smell of this worm, and maybe you'll prove useful for once.'

Then Farmer Giles called for his grey mare. She gave him a queer look and sniffed at the spurs. But she let him get up; and then off they went, and none of them felt happy. They trotted through the village, and all the folly clapped and cheered, mostly from their windows. The farmer and his mare put as good a face on it as they could; but Garm had no sense of shame and slunk along with his tail down.

They crossed the bridge over the river at the end of the village. When at last they were well out of sight, they slowed to a walk. Yet all too soon they passed out of the lands belonging to Farmer Giles and to other folk of Ham and came to parts that the dragon had visited. There were broken trees, burned hedges and blackened grass, and a nasty uncanny silence.

The sun was shining bright, and Farmer Giles began to wish that he dared shed a garment or two; and he wondered if he had not taken a pint too many. 'A nice end to Christmas and all,' he thought. 'And I'll be lucky if it don't prove the end of me too.' He mopped his face with a large handkerchief which was green, not red; for red rags infuriate dragons, or so he had, heard tell.

But he did not find the dragon. He rode down many lanes, wide and narrow, and over other farmers' deserted fields, and still he did not find the dragon. Garm was, of course, of no use at all. He kept just behind the mare and refused to use his nose.

They came at last to a winding road that had suffered little damage and seemed quiet and peaceful. After following it for half a mile Giles began to wonder whether he had not done his duty and all that his reputation required. He had made up his mind that he had looked long and far enough, and he was just thinking of turning back, and of his dinner, and of telling his friends that the dragon had seen him coming and simply flown away, when he turned a sharp corner.

There was the dragon, lying half across a broken hedge with his horrible head in the middle of the road 'Help!' said Garm and bolted. The grey mare sat down plump, and Farmer Giles went off backwards into a ditch. When he put his head out, there was the dragon wide awake looking at him.

'Good morning!' said the dragon. 'You seem surprised!'

'Good morning!' said Giles. 'I am that.'

'Excuse me,' said the dragon. He had cocked a very suspicious ear when he caught the sound of rings jingling, as the farmer fell. 'Excuse my asking, but were you looking for me, by any chance?'

'No, indeed!' said the farmer. 'Who'd a'thought of seeing you here? I was just going for a ride.'

He scrambled out of the ditch in a hurry and backed away towards the grey mare. She was now on her feet again and was nibbling some grass at the wayside, seeming quite unconcerned.

'Then we meet by good luck,' said the dragon. 'The pleasure is mine. Those are your holiday clothes, I suppose. A new fashion, perhaps?' Farmer Giles's felt hat had fallen off and his grey cloak had slipped open; but he brazened it out.

'Aye,' said he, 'brand-new. But I must be after that dog of mine. He's gone after rabbits, I fancy.'

'I fancy not,' said Chrysophylax, licking his lips (a sign of amusement). 'He will get home a long time before you do, I expect. But pray proceed on your way, Master and let me see, I don't think I know your name?'

'Nor I yours,' said Giles; 'and we'll leave it at that.'

'As you like,' said Chrysophylax, licking his lips again, but pretending to close his eyes. He had a wicked heart (as dragons all have), but not a very bold one (as is not unusual). He preferred a meal that he did not have to fight for; but appetite had returned after a good long sleep. The parson of Oakley had been stringy, and it was years since he had tasted a large fat man. He had now made up his mind to try this easy meat, and he was only waiting until the old fool was off his guard.

But the old fool was not as foolish as he looked, and he kept his eye on the dragon, even while he was trying to mount. The mare, however, had other ideas, and she kicked and shied when Giles tried to get up. The dragon became impatient and made ready to spring.

'Excuse me!' said he. 'Haven't you dropped something?'

An ancient trick, but it succeeded; for Giles had indeed dropped something. When he fell he had dropped Caudimordax (or vulgarly Tailbiter), and there it lay by the wayside. He stooped to pick it up; and the dragon sprang. But not as quick as Tailbiter. As soon as it was in the farmer's hand, it leaped forward with a flash, straight at the dragon's eyes.

'Hey!' said the dragon, and stopped very short. 'What have you got there?'

'Only Tailbiter, that was given to men by the Ring' said Giles.

'My mistake!' said the dragon. 'I beg your pardon.' He lay and grovelled, and Farmer Giles began to feel more comfortable. 'I don't think you have treated me fair.'

'How not?' said Giles. 'And anyway why should I?'

'You have concealed your honourable name and pretended that our meeting was by chance; yet you are plainly a knight of high lineage. It used, sir, to be the custom of knights to issue a challenge in such cases, after a proper exchange of titles and credentials.'

'Maybe it used, and maybe it still is,' said Giles, beginning to feel pleased with himself. A man who has a large and imperial dragon grovelling before him may be excused if he feels somewhat uplifted. 'But you are making more mistakes than one, old worm. I am no knight. I am Farmer Aegidius of Ham, I am; and I can't abide trespassers. I've shot giants with my blunderbuss before now, for doing less damage than you have. And I issued no challenge neither.'

The dragon was disturbed. 'Curse that giant for a liar,' he thought. 'I have been sadly misled. And now what on earth does one do with a bold farmer and a sword so bright and aggressive?' He could recall no precedent for such a situation. 'Chrysophylax is my

name,' said he, 'Chrysophylax the Rich. What can I do for your honour?' he added ingratiatingly, with one eye on the sword, and hoping to escape battle.

'You can take yourself off, you horny old varmint,' said Giles, also hoping to escape battle. 'I only want to be shut of you. Go right away from here, and get back to your own dirty, den!' He stepped towards Chrysophylax, waving his arms as if he was scaring crows.

That was quite enough for Tailbiter. It circled flashing in the air; then down it came, smiting the dragon on the joint of the right wing, a ringing blow that shocked him exceedingly. Of course Giles knew very little about the right methods of killing a dragon. or the sword might have landed in a tenderer spot; but Tailbiter did the best it could in inexperienced hands. It was quite enough for Chrysophylax and he could not use his wing for days. Up he got and turned to fly, and found that he could not. The farmer sprang on the mare's back. The dragon began to run. So did the mare. The dragon galloped over a field puffing and blowing. So did the mare. The farmer bawled and shouted, as if he was watching a horse race; and all the while he waved Tailbiter. The faster the dragon ran the more bewildered he became; and all the while the grey mare put her best leg foremost and kept close behind him.

On they pounded down the lanes, and through the gaps in the fences, over many fields and across many brooks. The dragon was smoking and bellowing and losing all sense of direction. At last they came suddenly to the bridge of Ham, thundered over it, and came roaring down the village street. There Garm had the impudence to sneak out of an alley and join in the chase.

All the people were at their windows or on the roofs. Some laughed and some cheered; and some beat tins and pans and kettles; and others blew horns and pipes and whistles; and the parson had the church bells rung. Such a to-do and an on-going had not been heard in Ham for a hundred years.

Just outside the church the dragon gave up. He lay down in the middle of the road and gasped. Garin came and sniffed at his tail, but Chrysophylax was past all shame.

'Good people, and gallant warrior,' he panted, as Farmer Giles rode up, while the villagers gathered round (at a reasonable distance) with hayforks, poles, and pokers in their hands. 'Good people, don't kill me! I am very rich. I will pay for all the damage I have done. I will pay for the funerals of all the people I have killed, especially the parson of Oakley; he shall have a noble cenotaph even though he was rather lean. I will give you each a really good present, if you will only let me go home and fetch it.'

'How much?' said the farmer.

'Well,' said the dragon, calculating quickly. He noticed that the crowd was rather large. 'Thirteen and eightpence each?'

'Nonsense!' said Giles.

'Rubbish!' said the people.

(Tolkien, 1988: 35-45)

They had come, indeed, to the places where Chrysophylax often roamed, or alighted after taking his daily exercise in the air. The lower hills, and the slopes on either side of the path, had a scorched and trampled look. There was little grass, and the twisted stumps of heather and gorse stood up black amid wide patches of ash and burned earth. The region had been a dragon's playground for many a year. A dark mountain-wall loomed up before them.

Farmer Giles was concerned about his mare; but he was glad of the excuse for no longer being so conspicuous. It had not pleased him to be riding at the head of such a cavalcade in these dreary and dubious places. A little later he was gladder still, and had reason to thank his fortune (and his mare). For just about midday it being then the Feast of Candlemas, and the seventh day of their riding Tailbiter leaped out of its sheath, and the dragon out of his cave.

Without warning or formality he swooped out to give battle. Down he came upon them with a rush and a roar. Far from his home he had not shown himself over bold, in spite of his ancient and imperial lineage. But now he was filled with a great wrath; for he was fighting at his own gate, as, it were, and with all his treasure to defend. He came round a shoulder of the mountain like a ton of thunderbolts, with a noise like a gale and a gust of red lightning.

The argument concerning precedence stopped short. All the horses shied to one side or the other, and some of the knights fell off; the ponies and the baggage and the servants turned and ran at once. They had no doubt as to the order of precedence.

Suddenly there came a rush of smoke that smothered them all, and right in the midst of it the dragon crashed into the head of the line. Several knights were killed before they could even issue their formal challenge to battle, and several others were bowled over, horses and all. As for the remainder, their steeds took charge of them, and turned round and fled, carrying their masters off, whether they wished it or no: most of them wished it indeed.

But the old grey mare did not budge. Maybe she was afraid of breaking her legs on the steep stony path. Maybe she felt too tired to run away. She knew in her bones that dragons on the wing are worse behind you than before you, and you need more speed than a race-horse for flight to be useful. Besides, she had seen this Chrysophylax before, and remembered chasing him over field and brook in her own country, till he lay down tame in the village highstreet. Anyway she stuck her legs out wide, and she snorted. Farmer Giles went as pale as his face could manage, but he stayed by her side; for there seemed nothing else to do.

And so it was that the dragon, charging down the line, suddenly saw straight in front of him his old enemy with Tailbiter in his hand. It was the last thing he expected. He swerved aside like a great bat and collapsed on the hillside close to the road. Up came the grey mare, quite forgetting to walk lame. Farmer Giles, much encouraged, had scrambled hastily on her back.

'Excuse me,' said he, 'but were you looking for me, by any chance?'

'No indeed!' said Chrysophylax. 'Who would have thought of seeing you here? I was just flying about.'

'Then we meet by good luck,' said Giles, 'and the pleasure is mine; for I was looking for you. What's more, I have a bone to pick with you, several bones in a manner of speaking.'

The dragon snorted. Farmer Giles put up his arm to ward off the hot gust, and with a flash Tailbiter swept forward, dangerously near the dragon's nose.

'Hey!' said he, and stopped snorting. He began to tremble and backed away, and all the fire in him was chilled. 'You have not, I hope, come to kill me, good master?' he whined.

'Nay! nay!' said the farmer. 'I said naught about killing.' The grey mare sniffed.

'Then what, may I ask, are you doing with all these knights?' said Chrysophylax.

'Knights always kill dragons, if we don't kill them first.'

'I'm doing nothing with them at all. They're naught to me,' said Giles. 'And anyway, they are all dead now or gone. What about what you said last Epiphany?'

'What about it?' said the dragon anxiously.

'You're nigh on a month late,' said Giles, 'and payment is overdue. I've come to collect it. You should beg my pardon for all the bother I have been put to.'

'I do indeed!' said he. 'I wish you had not troubled to come.'

'It'll be every bit of your treasure this time, and no market-tricks,' said Giles, 'or dead you'll be, and I shall hang your skin from our church steeple as a warning.'

'It's cruel hard!' said the dragon.

'A bargain's a bargain,' said Giles.

(Tolkien, 1988: 59-63)

## **Extracts from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion***

### **Chapter 21. Of Túrin Turambar**

Rian, daughter of Belegund, was the wife of Huor, son of Galdor; and she was wedded to him two months before he went with Hurin his brother to the Nirnaeth Arnoediad. When no tidings came of her lord she fled into the wild; but she was aided by the Grey-elves of Mithrim, and when her son Tuor was born they fostered him. Then Rian departed from Hithlum, and going to the Haudh-en-Ndengin she laid herself down upon it and died.

Morwen, daughter of Baragund, was the wife of Hurin, Lord of Dor-lomin; and their son was Turin, who was born in the year that Beren Erchamion came upon Luthien in the Forest of Neldoreth. A daughter they had also who was called Lalaith, which is Laughter, and she was beloved by Turin her brother; but when she was three years old there came a pestilence to Hithlum, borne on an evil wind out of Angband, and she died. Now after the Nirnaeth Arnoediad Morwen abode still in Dor-lomin, for Turin was but eight years old, and she was again with child. Those days were evil; for the Easterlings that came into Hithlum despised the remnant of the people of Hador, and they oppressed them, and took their lands and their goods, and enslaved their children. But so great was the beauty and majesty of the Lady of Dor-lomin that the Easterlings were afraid, and dared not to lay hands upon her or her household; and they whispered among themselves, saying that she was perilous, and a witch skilled in magic and in league with the Elves. Yet she was now poor and without aid, save that she was succoured secretly by a kinswoman of Hurin named Aerin, whom Brodda, an Easterling, had taken as his wife; and Morwen feared greatly that Turin would be taken from her and enslaved. Therefore it came into her heart to send him away in secret, and to beg King Thingol to harbour him, for Beren son of Barahir was her father's kinsman, and he had been moreover a friend of Hurin, ere evil befell. Therefore in the autumn of the Year of Lamentation Morwen sent Turin forth over the mountains with two aged servants, bidding them find entry, if they could, into the kingdom of Doriath. Thus was the fate of Turin woven, which is fulltold in that lay that is called *Narn i Hin Hurin*, the Tale of the Children of Hurin, and is the longest of all the lays that speak of those days. Here that tale is told in brief, for it is woven with the fate of the Silmarils and of the Elves; and it

is called the Tale of Grief, for it is sorrowful, and in it are revealed most evil works of Morgoth Bauglir.

In the first beginning of the year Morwen gave birth to her child, the daughter of Hurin; and she named her Nienor, which is Mourning. But Turin and his companions passing through great perils came at last to the borders of Doriath; and there they were found by Beleg Strongbow, chief of the marchwardens of King Thingol, who led them to Menegroth. Then Thingol received Turin, and took him even to his own fostering, in honour of Hurin the Steadfast; for Thingol's mood was changed towards the houses of the Elf-friends. Thereafter messengers went north to Hithlum, bidding Morwen leave Dor-lomin and return with them to Doriath; but still she would not leave the house in which she had dwelt with Hurin. And when the Elves departed she sent with them the Dragon-helm of Dor-lomin, greatest of the heirlooms of the house of Hador.

Turin grew fair and strong in Doriath, but he was marked with sorrow. For nine years he dwelt in Thingol's halls, and during that time his grief grew less; for messengers went at times to Hithlum, and returning they brought better tidings of Morwen and Nienor.

But there came a day when the messengers did not return out of the north, and Thingol would send no more.

Then Turin was filled with fear for his mother and his sister, and in grimness of heart he went before the King and asked for mail and sword; and he put on the Dragon-helm of Dor-lomin and went out to battle on the marches of Doriath, and became the companion in arms of Beleg Cuthalion.

And when three years had passed, Turin returned again to Menegroth; but he came from the wild, and was unkempt, and his gear and garments were way-worn. Now one there was in Doriath, of the people of the Nandor, high in the counsels of the King; Saeros was his name. He had long begrudged to Turin the honour he received as Thingol's fosterson; and seated opposite to him at the board he taunted him, saying: 'If the Men of Hithlum are so wild and fell, of what sort are the women of that land? Do they run like deer clad only in their hair?' Then Turin in great anger took up a drinking-vessel, and cast it at Saeros; and he was grievously hurt.

On the next day Saeros waylaid Turin as he set out from Menegroth to return to the marches; but Turin overcame him, and set him to run naked as a hunted beast through the woods. Then Saeros fleeing in terror before him fell into the chasm of a stream, and his body was broken on a great rock in the water. But others coming saw what was done, and Mablung was among them; and he bade Turin return with him to Menegroth and abide the judgement of the King, seeking his pardon. But Turin, deeming himself now an outlaw and fearing to be held captive, refused Mablung's bidding, and turned swiftly away; and passing through the Girdle of Melian he came into the woods west of Sirion.

There he joined himself to a band of such houseless and desperate men as could be found in those evil days lurking in the wild; and their hands were turned against all who came in their path Elves and Men and Orcs.

But when all that had befallen was told and searched out before Thingol, the King pardoned Turin, holding him wronged. In that time Beleg Strongbow returned from the north marches and came to Menegroth, seeking him; and Thingol spoke to Beleg, saying: 'I grieve, Cuthalion; for I took Hurin's son as my son, and so he shall remain, unless Hurin himself should return out of the shadows to claim his own. I would not have any say that Turin was driven forth unjustly into the wild, and gladly would I welcome him back; for I loved him well.'



And Beleg answered: 'I will seek Turin until I find him, and I will bring him back to Menegroth, if I can; for I love him also.'

Then Beleg departed from Menegroth, and far across Beleriand he sought in vain for tidings of Turin through many perils.

But Turin abode long among the outlaws, and became their captain; and he named himself Neithan, the Wronged. Very warily they dwelt in the wooded lands south of Teiglin; but when a year had passed since Turin fled from Doriath, Beleg came upon their lair by night. It chanced that at that time Turin was gone from the camp; and the outlaws seized Beleg and bound him, and treated him cruelly, for they feared him as a spy of the King of Doriath. But Turin returning and seeing what was done, was stricken with remorse for all their evil and lawless deeds; and he released Beleg, and they renewed their friendship, and Turin foreswore thenceforward war or plunder against all save the servants of Angband.

Then Beleg told Turin of King Thingol's pardon; and he sought to persuade him by all means that he might to return with him to Doriath, saying that there was great need of his strength and valour on the north marches of the realm. 'Of late the Orcs have found a way down out of Taur-nu-Fuin,' he said; 'they have made a road through the Pass of Anach.'

'I do not remember it,' said Turin.

'Never did we go so far from the borders,' said Beleg. 'But you have seen the peaks of the Crissaegrim far off, and to the east the dark walls of the Gorgoroth. Anach lies between, above the high springs of Mindeb, a hard and dangerous road; yet many come by it now, and Dimbar which used to be in peace is falling under the Black Hand, and the Men of Brethil are troubled. We are needed there.'

But in the pride of his heart Turin refused the pardon of the King, and the words of Beleg were of no avail to change his mood. And he for his part urged Beleg to remain with him in the lands west of Sirion; but that Beleg would not do, and he said: 'Hard you are, Turin, and stubborn. Now the turn is mine. If you wish indeed to have the Strongbow beside you, look for me in Dimbar; for thither I shall return.'

On the next day Beleg set out, and Turin went with him a bowshot from the camp; but he said nothing. 'Is it farewell, then, son of Hurin?' said Beleg. Then Turin looked out westward, and he saw far off the great height of Amon Rudh; and unwitting of what lay before him he answered: 'You have said, seek me in Dimbar. But I say, seek for me on Amon Rudh! Else, this is our last farewell.' Then they parted, in friendship, yet in sadness.

Now Beleg returned to the Thousand Caves, and coming before Thingol and Melian he told them of all that had befallen, save only of his evil handling by Turin's companions. Then Thingol sighed, and he said: 'What more would Turin have me do?'

'Give me leave, lord,' said Beleg, 'and I will guard him and guide him as I may; then no man shall say that elvenwords are lightly spoken. Nor would I wish to see so great a good run to nothing in the wild.'

Then Thingol gave Beleg leave to do as he would; and he said: 'Beleg Cuthalion! For many deeds you have earned my thanks; but not the least is the finding of my fosterson. At this parting ask for any gift, and I will not deny it to you.'

'I ask then for a sword of worth,' said Beleg; 'for the Orcs come now too thick and close for a bow only, and such blade as I have is no match for their armour.'

'Choose from all that I have,' said Thingol, 'save only Aranruth, my own.'

Then Beleg chose Anglachel; and that was a sword of great worth, and it was so named because it was made of iron that fell from heaven as a blazing star; it would cleave all

earth-delved iron. One other sword only in Middle-earth was like to it. That sword does not enter into this tale, though it was made of the same ore by the same smith; and that smith was Eol the Dark Elf, who took Aredhel Turgon's sister to wife. He gave Anglachel to Thingol as fee, which he begrudged, for leave to dwell in Nan Elmoth; but its mate Anguirel he kept, until it was stolen from him by Maeglin, his son.

But as Thingol turned the hilt of Anglachel towards Beleg, Melian looked at the blade; and she said: 'There is malice in this sword. The dark heart of the smith still dwells in it. It will not love the hand it serves; neither will it abide with you long.'

'Nonetheless I will wield it while I may,' said Beleg.

'Another gift I will give to you, Cuthalion,' said Melian, 'that shall be your help in the wild, and the help also of those whom you choose.' And she gave him store of lembas, the waybread of the Elves, wrapped in leaves of silver, and the threads that bound it were sealed at the knots with the seal of the Queen, a wafer of white wax shaped as a single flower of Telperion; for according to the customs of the Eldalie the keeping and giving of lembas belonged to the Queen alone. In nothing did Melian show greater favour to Turin than in this gift; for the Eldar had never before allowed Men to use this waybread, and seldom did so again. Then Beleg departed with these gifts from Menegroth and went back to the north marches, where he had his lodges, and many friends. Then in Dimbar the Orcs were driven back, and Anglachel rejoiced to be unsheathed; but when the winter came, and war was stilled, suddenly his companions missed Beleg, and he returned to them no more.

Now when Beleg parted from the outlaws and returned into Doriath, Turin led them away westward out of Sirion's vale; for they grew weary of their life without rest, ever watchful and in fear of pursuit, and they sought for a safer lair. And it chanced at a time of evening that they came upon three Dwarves, who fled before them; but one that lagged behind was seized and thrown down, and a man of the company took his bow and let fly an arrow at the others as they vanished in the dusk. Now the dwarf that they had taken was named Mim; and he pleaded for his life before Turin, and offered as ransom to lead them to his hidden halls which none might find without his aid. Then Turin pitied Mim, and spared him; and he said: 'Where is your house?'

Then Mim answered: 'High above the lands lies the house of Mim, upon the great hill; Amon Rudh is that hill called now, since the Elves changed all the names.'

Then Turin was silent, and he looked long upon the dwarf; and at last he said: 'You shall bring us to that place.'

On the next day they set out thither, following Mim to Amon Rudh. Now that hill stood upon the edge of the moorlands that rose between the vales of Sirion and Narog, and high above the stony heath it reared its crown; but its steep grey head was bare, save for the red seregon that mantled the stone. And as the men of Turin's band drew near, the sun westering broke through the clouds, and fell upon the crown; and the seregon was all in flower. Then one among them said: 'There is blood on the hill-top.'

But Mim led them by secret paths up the steep slopes of Amon Rudh; and at the mouth of his cave he bowed to Turin, saying: 'Enter into Bar-en-Danwedh, the House of Ransom; for so it shall be called.'

And now there came another dwarf bearing light to greet him, and they spoke together, and passed swiftly down into the darkness of the cave; but Turin followed after, and came at length to a chamber far within, lit by dim lamps hanging upon chains. There he found Mim kneeling at a stone couch beside the wall, and he tore his beard, and wailed, crying one name unceasingly; and on the couch there lay a third. But Turin entering stood beside Mim, and offered him aid. Then Mim looked up at him, and said: 'You can

give no aid. For this is Khim, my son; and he is dead, pierced by an arrow. He died at sunset. Ibun my son has told me.'

Then pity rose in Turin's heart, and he said to Mim: 'Alas! I would recall that shaft, if I could. Now Bar-enDanwedh this house shall be called in truth; and if ever I come to any wealth, I will pay you a ransom of gold for your son, in token of sorrow, though it gladden your heart no more.'

Then Mim rose, and looked long at Turin. 'I hear you,' he said. 'You speak like a dwarf-lord of old; and at that I marvel. Now my heart is cooled, though it is not glad; and hi this house you may dwell, if you will; for I will pay my ransom.'

So began the abiding of Turin in the hidden house of Mim upon Amon Rudh; and he walked on the greensward before the mouth of the cave, and looked out east, and west, and north. Northward he looked, and descried the Forest of Brethil climbing green about Amon Obel in its midst, and thither his eyes were drawn ever and again, he knew not why; for his heart was set rather to the north-west, where league upon league away on the skirts of the sky it seemed to him that he could glimpse the Mountains of Shadow, the walls of his home. But at evening Turin looked west into the sunset, as the sun rode down red into the hazes above the distant coasts, and the Vale of Narog lay deep in the shadows between.

In the time that followed Turin spoke much with Mim, and sitting with him alone he listened to his lore and the tale of his life. For Mim came of Dwarves that were banished in ancient days from the great Dwarf-cities of the east, and long before the return of Morgoth they wandered westward into Beleriand; but they became diminished in stature and in smith-craft, and they took to lives of stealth, walking with bowed shoulders and furtive steps. Before the Dwarves of Nogrod and Belegost came west over the mountains the Elves of Beleriand knew not what these others were, and they hunted them, and slew them; but afterwards they let them alone, and they were called Noegyth Nibin, the Petty-Dwarves, in the Sindarin tongue. They loved none but themselves, and if they feared and hated the Orcs, they hated the Eldar no less, and the Exiles most of all; for the Noldor, they said, had stolen their lands and their homes.

Long ere King Finrod Felagund came over the Sea, the caves of Nargothrond were discovered by them, and by them its delving was begun; and beneath the crown of Amon Rudh, the Bald Hill, the slow hands of the Petty-Dwarves had bored and deepened the caves through the long years that they dwelt there, untroubled by the Grey-elves of the woods.

But now at last they had dwindled and died out of Middle-earth, all save Mim and his two sons; and Mim was old even in the reckoning of Dwarves, old and forgotten. And in his halls the smithies were idle, and the axes rusted, and their name was remembered only in ancient tales of Doriath and Nargothrond.

But when the year drew on to midwinter, snow came down from the north heavier than they had known it in the river-vales, and Amon Rudh was covered deep; and they said that the winters worsened in Beleriand as the power of Angband grew. Then only the hardiest dared stir abroad; and some fell sick, and all were pinched with hunger. But in the dim dusk of a winter's day there appeared suddenly among them a man, as it seemed, of great bulk and girth, cloaked and hooded in white; and he walked up to the fire without a word. And when men sprang up in fear, he laughed, and threw back his hood, and beneath his wide cloak he bore a great pack; and in the light of the fire Turin looked again on the face of Beleg Cuthalion.

Thus Beleg returned once more to Turin, and their meeting was glad; and with him he brought out of Dimbar the Dragon-helm of Dor-lomin, thinking that it might lift Turin's

thought again above his life in the wilderness as the leader of a petty company. But still Turin would not return to Doriath; and Beleg yielding to his love against his wisdom remained with him, and did not depart, and in that time he laboured much for the good of Turin's company. Those that were hurt or sick he tended, and gave to them the lembas of Melian; and they were quickly healed, for though the Greyelves were less in skill and knowledge than the Exiles from Valinor, in the ways of the life of Middle-earth they had a wisdom beyond the reach of Men. And because Beleg was strong and enduring, farsighted in mind as in eye, he came to be held in honour among the outlaws; but the hatred of Mim for the Elf that had come into Bar-en-Danwedh grew ever greater, and he sat with Ibun his son in the deepest shadows of his house, speaking to none. But Turin paid now little heed to the Dwarf; and when winter passed, and spring came, they had sterner work to do.

Who knows now the counsels of Morgoth? Who can measure the reach of his thought, who had been Melkor, mighty among the Ainur of the Great Song, and sat now, a dark lord upon a dark throne in the North, weighing in his malice all the tidings that came to him, and perceiving more of the deeds and purposes of his enemies than even the wisest of them feared, save only Melian the Queen? To her often the thought of Morgoth reached out, and there was foiled.

And now again the might of Angband was moved; and as the long fingers of a groping hand the forerunners of his armies probed the ways into Beleriand. Through Anach they came, and Dimbar was taken, and all the north marches of Doriath. Down the ancient road they came that led through the long defile of Sirion, past the isle where Minas Tirith of Finrod had stood, and so through the land between Malduin and Sirion, and on through the eaves of Brethil to the Crossings of Teiglin. Thence the road went on into the Guarded Plain; but the Orcs did not go far upon it, as yet, for there dwelt now in the wild a terror that was hidden, and upon the red hill were watchful eyes of which they had not been warned. For Turin put on again the Helm of Hador; and far and wide in Beleriand the whisper went, under wood and over stream and through the passes of the hills, saying that the Helm and Bow that had fallen in Dimbar had arisen again beyond hope. Then many who went leaderless, dispossessed but undaunted, took heart again, and came to seek the Two Captains. Dor-Cuarthol, the Land of Bow and Helm, was in that time named all the region between Teiglin and the west march of Doriath; and Turin named himself anew, Gorthol, the Dread Helm, and his heart was high again. In Menegroth, and in the deep halls of Nargothrond, and even in the hidden realm of Gondolin, the fame of the deeds of the Two Captains was heard; and in Angband also they were known. Then Morgoth laughed, for now by the Dragonhelm was Hurin's son revealed to him again; and ere long Amon Rudh was ringed with spies.

In the waning of the year Mim the Dwarf and Ibun his son went out from Bar-en-Danwedh to gather roots in the wild for their winter store; and they were taken captive by Orcs. Then for a second time Mim promised to guide his enemies by the secret paths to his home on Amon Rudh; but yet he sought to delay the fulfilment of his promise, and demanded that Gorthol should not be slain. Then the Ore-captain laughed, and he said to Mim: 'Assuredly Turin son of Hurin shall not be slain.'

Thus was Bar-en-Danwedh betrayed, for the Orcs came upon it by night at unawares, guided by Mim. There many of Turin's company were slain as they slept; but some fleeing by an inner stair came out upon the hill-top, and there they fought until they fell, and their blood flowed out upon the seregon that mantled the stone. But a net was cast over Turin as he fought, and he was enmeshed in it, and overcome, and led away.

And at length when all was silent again Mim crept out of the shadows of his house; and as the sun rose over the mists of Sirion he stood beside the dead men on the hill-top. But he perceived that not all those that lay there were dead; for by one his gaze was returned, and he looked in the eyes of Beleg the Elf. Then with hatred long-stored Mim stepped up to Beleg, and drew forth the sword Anglachel that lay beneath the body of one that had fallen beside him; but Beleg stumbling up seized back the sword and thrust it at the Dwarf, and Mim in terror fled wailing from the hill-top. And Beleg cried after him: 'The vengeance of the house of Hador will find you yet!'

Now Beleg was sorely wounded, but he was mighty among the Elves of Middle-earth, and he was moreover a master of healing. Therefore he did not die, and slowly his strength returned; and he sought in vain among the dead for Turin, to bury him. But he found him not; and then he knew that Hurin's son was yet alive, and taken to Angband.

With little hope Beleg departed from Amon Rudh and set out northward, towards the Crossings of Teiglin, following in the track of the Orcs; and he crossed over the Brithiach and journeyed through Dimbar towards the Pass of Anach. And now he was not far behind them, for he went without sleeping, whereas they had tarried on their road, hunting in the lands and fearing no pursuit as they came northward; and not even in the dreadful woods of Taur-nu-Fuin did he swerve from the trail, for the skill of Beleg was greater than any that have been in Middle-earth. But as he passed by night through that evil land he came upon one lying asleep at the foot of a great dead tree; and Beleg staying his steps beside the sleeper saw that it was an Elf. Then he spoke to him, and gave him lembas, and asked him what fate had brought him to that terrible place; and he named himself Gwindor, son of Guilin.

Grieving Beleg looked upon him; for Gwindor was now but a bent and fearful shadow of his former shape and mood, when in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad that lord of Nargothrond rode with rash courage to the very doors of Angband, and there was taken. For few of the Noldor whom Morgoth captured were put to death, because of their skill in forging and in mining for metals and gems; and Gwindor was not slain, but put to labour in the mines of the North. By secret tunnels known only to themselves the mining Elves might sometimes escape; and thus it came to pass that Beleg found him, spent and bewildered in the mazes of Taur-nu-Fuin.'

And Gwindor told him that as he lay and lurked among the trees he saw a great company of Orcs passing northwards, and wolves went with them; and among them was a Man, whose hands were chained, and they drove him onward with whips. 'Very tall he was', said Gwindor, 'as tall as are the Men from the misty hills of Hithlum.' Then Beleg told him of his own errand in Taur-nu-Fuin; and Gwindor sought to dissuade him from his quest, saying that he would but join Turin in the anguish that awaited him. But Beleg would not abandon Turin, and despairing himself he aroused hope again in Gwindor's heart; and together they went on, following the Orcs until they came out of the forest on the high slopes that ran down to the barren dunes of Anfauglith. There within sight of the peaks of Thangorodrim the Orcs made their encampment in a bare dell as the light of day was failing, and setting wolf-sentinels all about they fell to carousing. A great storm rode up out of the west, and lightning glittered on the Shadowy Mountains far away, as Beleg and Gwindor crept towards the dell.

When all in the camp were sleeping Beleg took his bow, and in the darkness shot the wolf-sentinels, one by one and silently. Then in great peril they entered in, and they found Turin fettered hand and foot and tied to a withered tree; and all about him knives that had been cast at him were embedded in the trunk, and he was senseless in a sleep of great weariness. But Beleg and Gwindor cut the bonds that held him, and lifting him

they carried him out of the dell; yet they could bear him no further than to a thicket of thorn-trees a little way above. There they laid him down; and now the storm drew very near. Beleg drew his sword Anglachel, and with it he cut the fetters that bound Turin; but fate was that day more strong, for the blade slipped as he cut the shackles, and Turin's foot was pricked. Then he was aroused into a sudden wakefulness of rage and fear, and seeing one bending over him with naked blade he leapt up with a great cry, believing that Orcs were come again to torment him; and grappling with him in the darkness he seized Anglachel, and slew Beleg Cuthalion thinking him a foe.

But as he stood, finding himself free, and ready to sell his life dearly against imagined foes, there came a great flash of lightning above them; and in its light he looked down on Beleg's face. Then Turin stood stone-still and silent, staring on that dreadful death, knowing what he had done; and so terrible was his face, lit by the lightning that flickered all about them, that Gwindor cowered down upon the ground and dared not raise his eyes.'

But now in the dell beneath the Orcs were aroused, and all the camp was in a tumult; for they feared the thunder that came out of the west, believing that it was sent against them by the great Enemies beyond the Sea. Then a wind arose, and great rains fell, and torrents swept down from the heights of Taur-nu-Fuin; and though Gwindor cried out to Turin, warning him of their utmost peril, he made no answer, but sat unmoving and unweeping in the tempest beside the body of Beleg Cuthalion.

When morning came the storm was passed away eastward over Lothlann, and the sun of autumn rose hot and bright; but believing that Turin would have fled far away from that place and all trace of his flight be washed away, the Orcs departed in haste without longer search, and far off Gwindor saw them marching away over the steaming sands of Anfauglith. Thus it came to pass that they returned to Morgoth empty-handed, and left behind them the son of Hurin, who sat crazed and unwitting on the slopes of Taur-nu-Fuin, bearing a burden heavier than their bonds.

Then Gwindor roused Turin to aid him in the burial of Beleg, and he rose as one that walked in sleep; and together they laid Beleg in a shallow grave, and placed beside him Belthronding his great bow, that was made of black yew-wood. But the dread sword Anglachel Gwindor took, saying that it were better that it should take vengeance on the servants of Morgoth than lie useless in the earth; and he took also the lembas of Melian to strengthen them in the wild.

Thus ended Beleg Strongbow, truest of friends, greatest in skill of all that harboured in the woods of Beleriand in the Elder Days, at the hand of him whom he most loved; and that grief was graven on the face of Turin and never faded. But courage and strength were renewed in the Elf of Nargothrond, and departing from Taur-nu-Fuin he led Turin far away. Never once as they wandered together on long and grievous paths did Turin speak, and he walked as one without wish or purpose, while the year waned and winter drew on over the northern lands. But Gwindor was ever beside him to guard him and guide him; and thus they passed westward over Sirion and came at length to Eithel Ivrin, the springs whence Narog rose beneath the Mountains of Shadow. There Gwindor spoke to Turin, saying: 'Awake, Turin son of Hurin Thalion! On Ivrin's lake is endless laughter. She is fed from crystal fountains unfailling, and guarded from defilement by Ulmo, Lord of Waters, who wrought her beauty in ancient days.' Then Turin knelt and drank from that water; and suddenly he cast himself down, and his tears were unloosed at last, and he was healed of his madness.

There he made a song for Beleg, and he named it Laer Cu Beleg, the Song of the Great Bow, singing it aloud heedless of peril. And Gwindor gave the sword Anglachel into his

hands, and Turin knew that it was heavy and strong and had great power; but its blade was black and dull and its edges blunt. Then Gwindor said: 'This is a strange blade, and unlike any that I have seen in Middle-earth. It mourns for Beleg even as you do. But be comforted; for I return to Nargothrond of the house of Finarfin, and you shall come with me, and be healed and renewed.'

'Who are you?' said Turin. 'A wandering Elf, a thrall escaped, whom Beleg met and comforted,' said Gwindor. 'Yet once I was Gwindor son of Guilin, a lord of Nargothrond, until I went to the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, and was enslaved in Angband.'

'Then have you seen Hurin son of Galdor, the warrior of Dor-lomin?' said Turin.

'I have not seen him,' said Gwindor. 'But rumour of him runs through Angband that he still defies Morgoth; and Morgoth has laid a curse upon turn and all his kin.'

'That I do believe,' said Turin.

And now they arose, and departing from Eithel Ivrin they journeyed southward along the banks of Narog, until they were taken by scouts of the Elves and brought as prisoners to the hidden stronghold. Thus did Turin come to Nargothrond.

At first his own people did not know Gwindor, who went out young and strong, and returned now seeming as one of the aged among mortal Men, because of his torments and his labours; but Finduilas daughter of Orodreth the King knew him and welcomed him, for she had loved him before the Nirnaeth, and so greatly did Gwindor love her beauty that he named her Faelivrin, which is the gleam of the sun on the pools of Ivrin. For Gwindor's sake Turin was admitted with him into Nargothrond, and he dwelt there in honour. But when Gwindor would tell his name, Turin checked him, saying: 'I am Agarwaen the son of Umarth (which is the Bloodstained, son of Ill-fate), a hunter in the woods'; and the Elves of Nargothrond questioned him no more.

In the time that followed Turin grew high in favour with Orodreth, and well-nigh all hearts were turned to him in Nargothrond. For he was young, and only now reached his full manhood; and he was in truth the son of Morwen Eledhwen to look upon: dark-haired and pale-skinned, with grey eyes, and his face more beautiful than any other among mortal Men, in the Elder Days. His speech and bearing were that of the ancient kingdom of Doriath, and even among the Elves he might be taken for one from the great houses of the Noldor; therefore many called him Adanedhel, the Elf-Man. The sword Anglachel was forged anew for him by cunning smiths of Nargothrond, and though ever black its edges shone with pale fire; and he named it Gurthang, Iron of Death. So great was his prowess and skill in warfare on the confines of the Guarded Plain that he himself became known as Mormegil, the Black Sword; and the Elves said: 'The Mormegil cannot be slain, save by mischance, or an evil arrow from afar.' Therefore they gave him dwarf-mail, to guard him; and in a grim mood he found also in the armouries a dwarf-mask all gilded, and he put it on before battle, and his enemies fled before his face.

Then the heart of Finduilas was turned from Gwindor and against her will her love was given to Turin; but Turin did not perceive what had befallen. And being torn in heart Finduilas became sorrowful; and she grew wan and silent.

But Gwindor sat in dark thought; and on a time he spoke to Finduilas, saying: 'Daughter of the house of Finarfin, let no grief lie between us; for though Morgoth has laid my life in ruin, you still I love. Go whither love leads you; yet beware! It is not fitting that the Elder Children of Iluvatar should wed with the Younger; nor is it wise, for they are brief, and soon pass, to leave us in widowhood while the world lasts. Neither will fate suffer it, unless it be once or twice only, for some high cause of doom that we do not perceive. But this Man is not Beren. A doom indeed lies on him, as seeing eyes may

well read in him, but a dark doom. Enter not into it! And if you will, your love shall betray you to bitterness and death. For hearken to me! Though he be indeed agarwaen son of umarth, his right name is Turin son of Hurin, whom Morgoth holds in Angband, and whose kin he has cursed. Doubt not the power of Morgoth Bauglir! Is it not written in me?'

Then Finduilas sat long in thought; but at the last she said only: 'Turin son of Hurin loves me not; nor will.'

Now when Turin learnt from Finduilas of what had passed, he was wrathful, and he said to Gwindor: 'In love I hold you for rescue and safe-keeping. But now you have done ill to me, friend, to betray my right name, and call my doom upon me, from which I would lie hid.'

But Gwindor answered: 'The doom lies in yourself, not in your name.'

When it became known to Orodreth that the Mormegil was in truth the son of Hurin Thalion he gave him great honour, and Turin became mighty among the people of Nargothrond. But he had no liking for their manner of warfare, of ambush and stealth and secret arrow, and he yearned for brave strokes and battle in the open; and his counsels weighed with the King ever the longer the more. In those days the Elves of Nargothrond forsook their secrecy and went openly to battle, and great store of weapons were made; and by the counsel of Turin the Noldor built a mighty bridge over the Narog from the Doors of Felagund, for the swifter passage of their arms. Then the servants of Angband were driven out of all the land between Narog and Sirion eastward, and westward to the Nenning and the desolate Falas; and though Gwindor spoke ever against Turin in the council of the King, holding it an ill policy, he fell into dishonour and none heeded him, for his strength was small and he was no longer forward in arms. Thus Nargothrond was revealed to the wrath and hatred of Morgoth; but still at Turin's prayer his true name was not spoken, and though the fame of his deeds came into Doriath and to the ears of Thingol, rumour spoke only of the Black Sword of Nargothrond.

In that time of respite and hope, when because of the deeds of the Mormegil the power of Morgoth was stemmed west of Sirion, Morwen fled at last from Dor-lomin with Nienor her daughter, and adventured the long journey to Thingol's halls. There new grief awaited her, for she found Turin gone, and to Doriath there had come no tidings since the Dragon-helm had vanished from the lands west of Sirion; but Morwen remained in Doriath with Nienor as guests of Thingol and Melian, and were treated with honour.

Now it came to pass, when four hundred and ninety-five years had passed since the rising of the Moon, in the spring of the year, there came to Nargothrond two Elves, named Gelmir and Arminas; they were of Angrod's people, but since the Dagor Bragollach they dwelt in the south with Cirdan the Shipwright. From their far journeys they brought tidings of a great mustering of Orcs and evil creatures under the eaves of Ered Wethrin and in the Pass of Sirion; and they told also that Ulmo had come to Cirdan, giving warning that great peril drew nigh to Nargothrond.

'Hear the words of the Lord of Waters!' said they to the King. 'Thus he spoke to Cirdan the Shipwright: 'The Evil of the North has defiled the springs of Sirion, and my power withdraws from the fingers of the flowing waters. But a worse thing is yet to come forth. Say therefore to the Lord of Nargothrond: Shut the doors of the fortress and go not abroad. Cast the stones of your pride into the loud river, that the creeping evil may not find the gate.'''



Orodreth was troubled by the dark words of the messengers, but Turin would by no means hearken to these counsels, and least of all would he suffer the great bridge to be cast down; for he was become proud and stern, and would order all things as he wished. Soon afterwards Handir Lord of Brethil was slain, for the Orcs invaded his land, and Handir gave them battle; but the Men of Brethil were worsted, and driven back into their woods. And in the autumn of the year, biding his hour, Morgoth loosed upon the people of Narog the great host that he had long prepared; and Glaurung the Uruloki passed over Anfauglith, and came thence into the north vales of Sirion and there did great evil. Under the shadows of Ered Wethrin he defiled the Eithel Ivrin, and thence he passed into the realm of Nargothrond, and burned the Talath Dirnen, the Guarded Plain, between Narog and Teiglin.

Then the warriors of Nargothrond went forth, and tall and terrible on that day looked Turin, and the heart of the host was upheld, as he rode on the right hand of Orodreth. But greater far was the host of Morgoth than any scouts had told, and none but Turin defended by his dwarf-mask could withstand the approach of Glaurung; and the Elves were driven back and pressed by the Orcs into the field of Tumhalad, between Ginglith and Narog, and there they were penned. On that day all the pride and host of Nargothrond withered away; and Orodreth was slain in the forefront of the battle, and Gwindor son of Guilin was wounded to the death. But Turin came to his aid, and all fled before him; and he bore Gwindor out of the rout, and escaping into a wood there laid him on the grass.

Then Gwindor said to Turin: 'Let bearing pay for bearing! But ill-fated was mine, and vain is thine; for my body is marred beyond healing, and I must leave Middle-earth. And though I love thee, son of Hurin, yet I rue the day that I took thee from the Orcs. But for thy prowess and thy pride, still I should have love and life, and Nargothrond should yet stand a while.' Now if thou love me, leave me! Haste thee to Nargothrond, and save Finduilas. And this last I say to thee: she alone stands between thee and thy doom. If thou fail her, it shall not fail to find thee. Farewell!'

Then Turin sped back to Nargothrond, mustering such of the rout as he met with on the way; and the leaves fell from the trees in a great wind as they went, for the autumn was passing to a dire winter. But the host of the Orcs and Glaurung the Dragon were there before him, and they came suddenly, ere those that were left on guard were aware of what had befallen on the field of Tumhalad. In that day the bridge over Narog proved an evil; for it was great and mightily made and could not swiftly be destroyed, and the enemy came readily over the deep river, and Glaurung came in full fire against the Doors of Felagund, and overthrew them, and passed within.

And even as Turin came up the dreadful sack of Nargothrond was well nigh achieved. The Orcs had slain or driven off all that remained in arms, and were even then ransacking the great halls and chambers, plundering and destroying; but those of the women and maidens that were not burned or slain they had herded on the terraces before the doors, as slaves to be taken into Morgoth's thralldom. Upon this ruin and woe Turin came, and none could withstand him; or would not, though he struck down all before him, and passed over the bridge, and hewed his way towards the captives.

And now he stood alone, for the few that followed him had fled. But in that moment Glaurung issued from the gaping doors, and lay behind, between Turin and the bridge. Then suddenly he spoke, by the evil spirit that was in him, saying: 'Hail, son of Hurin. Well met!'

Then Turin sprang about, and strode against him, and the edges of Gurthang shone as with flame; but Glaurung withheld his blast, and opened wide his serpent-eyes and

gazed upon Turin. Without fear Turin looked into them as he raised up the sword; and straightway he fell under the binding spell of the lidless eyes of the dragon, and was halted moveless. Then for a long time he stood as one graven of stone; and they two were alone, silent before the doors of Nargothrond. But Glaurung spoke again, taunting Turin, and he said: 'Evil have been all thy ways, son of Hurin.

Thankless fosterling, outlaw, slayer of thy friend, thief of love, usurper of Nargothrond, captain foolhardy, and deserter of thy kin. As thralls thy mother and thy sister live in Dor-lomin, in misery and want. Thou art arrayed as a prince, but they go in rags; and for thee they yearn, but thou carest not for that. Glad may thy father be to learn that he hath such a son; as learn he shall.' And Turin being under the spell of Glaurung hearkened to his words, and he saw himself as in a mirror misshapen by malice, and loathed that which he saw. And while he was yet held by the eyes of the dragon in torment of mind, and could not stir, the Orcs drove away the herded captives, and they passed nigh to Turin and crossed over the bridge. Among them was Finduilas, and she cried out to Turin as she went; but not until her cries and the wailing of the captives was lost upon the northward road did Claiming release Turin, and he might not stop his ears against that voice that haunted him after.

Then suddenly Glaurung withdrew his glance, and waited; and Turin stirred slowly, as one waking from a hideous dream. Then coming to himself he sprang upon the dragon with a cry. But Glaurung laughed, saying: 'If thou wilt be slain, I will slay thee gladly. But small help will that be to Morwen and Nienor. No heed didst thou give to the cries of the Elf-woman. Wilt thou deny also the bond of thy blood?'

But Turin drawing back his sword stabbed at the dragon's eyes; and Glaurung coiling back swiftly towered above him, and said: 'Nay! At least thou art valiant; beyond all whom I have met And they lie who say that we of our part do not honour the valour of foes. See now! I offer thee freedom. Go to thy kin, if thou canst. Get thee gone! And if Elf or Man be left to make tale of these days, then surely in scorn they will name thee, if thou spurnest this gift.'

Then Turin, being yet bemused by the eyes of the dragon, as were he treating with a foe that could know pity, believed the words of Glaurung and fuming away he sped over the bridge. But as he went Glaurung spoke behind him, saying in a fell voice: 'Haste thee now, son of Hurin, to Dor-lomin! Or perhaps the Orcs shall come before thee, once again. And if thou tarry for Finduilas, then never shalt thou see Morwen again, and never at all shalt thou see Nienor thy sister; and they will curse thee.'

But Turin passed away on the northward road, and Claiming laughed once more, for he had accomplished the errand of his Master. Then he turned to his own pleasure, and sent forth his blast, and burned all about him. But all the Orcs that were busy in the sack he routed forth, and drove them away, and denied them their plunder even to the last thing of worth. The bridge then he broke down and cast into the foam of Narog; and being thus secure he gathered all the hoard and riches of Felagund and heaped them, and lay upon them in the innermost hall, and rested a while.

And Turin hastened along the ways to the north, through the lands now desolate between Narog and Teiglin, and the Fell Winter came down to meet him; for in that year snow fell ere autumn was passed, and spring came late and cold. Ever it seemed to him as he went that he heard the cries of Finduilas, calling his name by wood and hill, and great was his anguish; but his heart being hot with the lies of Glaurung, and seeing ever in his mind the Orcs burning the house of Hurin or putting Morwen and Nienor to torment, he held on his way, and turned never aside.

At last worn by haste and the long road (for forty leagues and more had he journeyed without rest) he came with the first ice of winter to the pools of Ivrin, where before he had been healed. But they were now but a frozen mire, and he could drink there no more.'

Thus he came hardly by the passes of Dor-lomin, through bitter snows from the north, and found again the land of his childhood. Bare and bleak it was; and Morwen was gone. Her house stood empty, broken and cold; and no living thing dwelt nigh. Therefore Turin departed, and came to the house of Brodda the Easterling, he that had to wife Aerin, Hurin's kinswoman; and there he learned of an old servant that Morwen was long gone, for she had fled with Nienor out of Dor-Lomin, none but Aerin knew where.

Then Turin strode to Brodda's table, and seizing him he drew his sword, and demanded that he be told whither Morwen had gone; and Aerin declared to him that she went to Doriath to seek her son. 'For the lands were freed then from evil,' she said, 'by the Black Sword of the south, who now has fallen, they say.' Then Turin's eyes were opened, and the last threads of Glaurung's spell were loosed; and for anguish, and wrath at the lies that had deluded him, and hatred of the oppressors of Morwen, a black rage seized him, and he slew Brodda in his hall, and other Easterlings that were his guests. Thereafter he fled out into the winter, a hunted man; but he was aided by some that remained of Hador's people and knew the ways of the wild, and with them he escaped through the falling snow and came to an outlaws' refuge in the southern mountains of Dor-lomin. Thence Turin passed again from the land of his childhood, and returned to Sirion's vale. His heart was bitter, for to Dor-lomin he had brought only greater woe upon the remnant of his people, and they were glad of his going; and this comfort alone he had: that by the prowess of the Black Sword the ways to Doriath had been laid open to Morwen. And he said in his thought: 'Then those deeds wrought not evil to all.

And where else might I have better bestowed my kin, even had I come sooner? For if the Girdle of Melian be broken, then last hope is ended. Nay, it is better indeed as things be; for a shadow I cast wheresoever I come. Let Melian keep them! And I will leave them in peace unshadowed for a while.'

Now Turin coming down from Ered Wethrin sought for Finduilas in vain, roaming the woods beneath the mountains, wild and wary as a beast; and he waylaid all the roads that went north to the Pass of Sirion. But he was too late; for all the trails had grown old, or were washed away by the winter. Yet thus it was that passing southwards down Teiglin Turin came upon some of the Men of Brethil that were surrounded by Orcs; and he delivered them, for the Orcs fled from Gurthang. He named himself Wildman of the Woods, and they besought him to come and dwell with them; but he said that he had an errand yet unachieved, to seek Finduilas, Orodreth's daughter of Nargothrond. Then Dorlas, the leader of those woodmen, told the grievous tidings of her death. For the Men of Brethil had waylaid at the Crossings of Teiglin the Ore-host that led the captives of Nargothrond, hoping to rescue them; but the Orcs had at once cruelly slain their prisoners, and Finduilas they pinned to a tree with a spear. So she died, saying at the last: 'Tell the Mormegil that Finduilas is here.' Therefore they had laid her in a mound near that place, and named it Haudh-en-Elleth, the Mound of the Elf-maid.

Turin bade them lead him thither, and there he fell down into a darkness of grief that was near death. Then Dorlas by his black sword, the fame whereof had come even inter the deeps of Brethil, and by his quest of the King's daughter, knew that this Wildman was indeed the Mormegil of Nargothrond, whom rumour said was the son of Hurin of Dor-lomin. Therefore the woodmen lifted him up, and bore him away to their homes.

Now those were set in a stockade upon a high place in the forest, Ephel Brandir upon Amon Obel; for the People of Haleth were now dwindled by war, and Brandir son of Handir who ruled them was a man of gentle mood, and lame also from childhood, and he trusted rather in secrecy than in deeds of war to save them from the power of the North. Therefore he feared the tidings that Dorlas brought, and when he beheld the face of Turin as he lay on the bier a cloud of foreboding lay on his heart. Nonetheless being moved by his woe he took him into his own house and tended him, for he had skill in healing. And with the beginning of spring Turin cast off his darkness, and grew hale again; and he arose, and he thought that he would remain in Brethil hidden, and put his shadow behind him, forsaking the past. He took therefore a new name, Turambar, which in the High-elven speech signified Master of Doom; and he besought the woodmen to forget that he was a stranger among them or ever bore any other name. Nonetheless he would not wholly leave deeds of war; for he could not endure that the Orcs should come to the Crossings of Teiglin or draw nigh to Haudh-en-Elleth, and he made that a place of dread for them, so that they shunned it. But he laid his black sword by, and wielded rather the bow and the spear.

Now new tidings came to Doriath concerning Nargothrond, for some that had escaped from the defeat and the sack, and had survived the Fell Winter in the wild, came at last to Thingol seeking refuge; and the march-wardens brought them to the King. And some said that all the enemy had withdrawn northwards, and others that Glaurung abode still in the halls of Felagund; and some said that the Mormegil was slain, and others that he was cast under a spell by the dragon and dwelt there yet, as one changed to stone. But all declared that it was known to many in Nargothrond ere the end that the Mormegil was none other than Turin son of Hurin of Dor-lomin.

Then Morwen was distraught, and refusing the counsel of Melian she rode forth alone into the wild to seek her son, or some true tidings of him. Thingol therefore sent Mablung after her, with many hardy march-wards, to find her and guard her, and to learn what news they might; but Nienor was bidden to remain behind. Yet the fearlessness of her house was hers; and in an evil hour, in hope that Morwen would return when she saw that her daughter would go with her into peril, Nienor disguised herself as one of Thingol's people, and went with that ill-fated riding.

They came upon Morwen by the banks of Sirion, and Mablung besought her to return to Menegroth; but she was fey, and would not be persuaded. Then also the coming of Nienor was revealed, and despite Morwen's command she would not go back; and Mablung perforce brought them to the hidden ferries at the Meres of Twilight, and they passed over Sirion. And after three days' journeying they came to Amon Ethir, the Hill of Spies, that long ago Felagund had caused to be raised with great labour, a league before the doors of Nargothrond. There Mablung set a guard of riders about Morwen and her daughter, and forbade them to go further. But he, seeing from the hill no sign of any enemy, went down with his scouts to the Narog, as stealthily as they could go.

But Glaurung was aware of all that they did, and he came forth in heat of wrath, and lay into the river; and a vast vapour and foul reek went up, in which Mablung and his company were blinded and lost. Then Glaurung passed east over Narog.

Seeing the onset of the dragon the guards upon Amon Ethir sought to lead Morwen and Nienor away, and fly with them with all speed back eastwards; but the wind bore the blank mists upon them, and their horses were maddened by the dragon-stench, and were ungovernable, and ran this way and that, so that some were dashed against trees and were slain, and others were borne far away. Thus the ladies were lost, and of Morwen indeed no sure tidings came ever to Doriath after. But Nienor, being thrown by her

steed, yet unhurt, made her way back to Amon Ethir, there to await Mablung, and came thus above the reek into the sunlight; and looking westward she stared straight into the eyes of Glaurung, whose head lay upon the hill-top.

Her will strove with him for a while, but he put forth his power, and having learned who she was he constrained her to gaze into his eyes, and he laid a spell of utter darkness and forgetfulness upon her, so that she could remember nothing that had ever befallen her, nor her own name, nor the name of any other thing; and for many days she could neither hear, nor see, nor stir by her own will. Then Glaurung left her standing alone upon Amon Ethir, and went back to Nargothrond.

Now Mablung, who greatly daring had explored the halls of Felagund when Glaurung left them, fled from them at the approach of the dragon, and returned to Amon Ethir. The sun sank and night fell as he climbed the hill, and he found none there save Nienor, standing alone under the stars as an image of stone. No word she spoke or heard, but would follow, if he took up her hand. Therefore in great grief he led her away, though it seemed to him vain; for they were both like to perish, succourless in the wild.

But they were found by three of Mablung's companions, and slowly they journeyed northward and eastward towards the fences of the land of Doriath beyond Sirion, and the guarded bridge nigh to the inflowing of Esgalduin. Slowly the strength of Nienor returned as they drew nearer to Doriath; but still she could not speak or hear, and walked blindly as she was led. But even as they drew near the fences at last she closed her staring eyes, and would sleep; and they laid her down, and rested also, unheedfully, for they were utterly outworn. There they were assailed by an Orcband, such as now roamed often as nigh the fences of Doriath as they dared. But Nienor in that hour recovered hearing and sight, and being awakened by the cries of the Orcs she sprang up in terror, and fled ere they could come to her.

Then the Orcs gave chase, and the Elves after; and they overtook the Orcs and slew them ere they could harm her, but Nienor escaped them. For she fled as in a madness of fear, swifter than a deer, and tore off all her clothing as she ran, until she was naked; and she passed out of their sight, running northward, and though they sought her long they found her not, nor any trace of her. And at last Mablung in despair returned to Menegroth and told the tidings. Then Thingol and Melian were filled with grief; but Mablung went forth, and sought long in vain for tidings of Morwen and Nienor.

But Nienor ran on into the woods until she was spent, and then fell, and slept, and awoke; and it was a sunlit morning, and she rejoiced in light as it were a new thing, and all things else that she saw seemed new and strange, for she had no names for them. Nothing did she remember save a darkness that lay behind her, and a shadow of fear; therefore she went warily as a hunted beast, and became famished, for she had no food and knew not how to seek it. But coming at last to the Crossings of Teiglin she passed over, seeking the shelter of the great trees of Brethil, for she was afraid, and it seemed to her that the darkness was overtaking her again from which she had fled.

But it was a great storm of thunder that came up from the south, and in terror she cast herself down upon the mound of Haudh-en-Elleth, stopping her ears from the thunder; but the rain smote her and drenched her, and she lay like a wild beast that is dying. There Turambar found her, as he came to the Crossings of Teiglin, having heard rumour of Orcs that roamed near; and seeing in a flare of lightning the body as it seemed of a slain maiden lying upon the mound of Finduilas he was stricken to the heart. But the woodmen lifted her up, and Turambar cast his cloak about her, and they took her to a lodge nearby, and warmed her, and gave her food. And as soon as she looked upon Turambar she was comforted, for it seemed to her that she had found at last something

that she had sought in her darkness; and she would not be parted from him. But when he asked her concerning her name and her kin and her misadventure, then she became troubled as a child that perceives that something is demanded but cannot understand what it may be; and she wept. Therefore Turambar said: 'Do not be troubled. The tale shall wait. But I will give you a name, and I will call you Niniel, Tear-maiden.' And at that name she shook her head, but said: Niniel. That was the first word she spoke after her darkness, and it remained her name among the woodmen ever after.

On the next day they bore her towards Ephel Brandir; but when they came to Dimrost, the Rainy Stair, where the tumbling stream of Celebros fell towards Teiglin, a great shuddering came upon her, wherefore afterwards that place was called Nen Girith, the Shuddering Water. Ere she came to the home of the woodmen upon Amon Obel she was sick of a fever; and long she lay thus, tended by the women of Brethil, and they taught her language as to an infant. But ere the autumn came by the skill of Brandir she was healed of her sickness, and she could speak; but nothing did she remember of the time before she was found by Turambar on the mound of Haudh-en-Elleth. And Brandir loved her; but all her heart was given to Turambar.

In that time the woodmen were not troubled by the Orcs, and Turambar went not to war, and there was peace in Brethil. His heart turned to Niniel, and he asked her of marriage; but for that time she delayed in spite of her love. For Brandir foreboded he knew not what, and sought to restrain her, rather for her sake than his own or rivalry with Turambar; and he revealed to her that Turambar was Turin son of Hurin, and though she knew not the name a shadow fell upon her mind.

But when three years were passed since the sack of Nargothrond Turambar asked Niniel again, and vowed that now he would wed her, or else go back to war in the wild. And Niniel took him with joy, and they were wedded at the midsummer, and the woodmen of Brethil made a great feast. But ere the end of the year Glaurung sent Orcs of his dominion against Brethil; and Turambar sat at home deedless, for he had promised to Niniel that he would go to battle only if their homes were assailed. But the woodmen were worsted, and Dorlas upbraided him that he would not aid the people that he had taken for his own. Then Turambar arose and brought forth again his black sword, and he gathered a great company of the Men of Brethil, and they defeated the Orcs utterly. But Glaurung heard tidings that the Black Sword was in Brethil, and he pondered what he heard, devising new evil.

In the spring of the year after Niniel conceived, and she became wan and sad; and at the same time there came to Ephel Brandir the first rumours that Glaurung had issued from Nargothrond. Then Turambar sent out scouts far afield, for now he ordered things as he would, and few gave heed to Brandir. As it drew near to summer Glaurung came to the borders of Brethil, and lay near the west shores of Teiglin; and then there was great fear among the woodfolk, for it was now plain that the Great Worm would assail them and ravage their land, and not pass by, returning to Angband, as they had hoped. They sought therefore the counsel of Turambar; and he counselled them that it was vain to go against Glaurung with all their force, for only by cunning and good fortune could they defeat him. He offered therefore himself to seek the dragon on the borders of the land, and bade the rest of the people to remain at Ephel Brandir, but to prepare for flight. For if Glaurung had the victory, he would come first to the woodmen's homes to destroy them, and they could not hope to withstand him; but if they then scattered far and wide, then many might escape, for Glaurung would not take up his dwelling in Brethil, and would return soon to Nargothrond.

Then Turambar asked for companions willing to aid him in his peril; and Dorlas stood forth, but no others.

Therefore Dorlas upbraided the people, and spoke scorn of Brandir, who could not play the part of the heir of the house of Haleth; and Brandir was shamed before his people, and was bitter at heart. But Hunthor, kinsman of Brandir, asked his leave to go in his stead. Then Turambar said farewell to Niniel, and she was filled with fear and foreboding, and their parting was sorrowful; but Turambar set out with his two companions and went to Nen Girith.

Then Niniel being unable to endure her fear, and unwilling to wait in the Ephel tidings of Turambar's fortune, set forth after him, and a great company went with her. At this Brandir was filled all the more with dread, and he sought to dissuade her and the people that would go with her from this rashness, but they heeded him not. Therefore he renounced his lordship, and all love for the people that had scorned him, and having naught left but his love for Niniel he girt himself with a sword and went after her; but being lame he fell far behind.

Now Turambar came to Nen Girith at sundown, and there he learned that Glaurung lay on the brink of the high shores of Teiglin, and was like to move when night fell. Then he called those tidings good; for the dragon lay at CabedenAras, where the river ran in a deep and narrow gorge that a hunted deer might overleap, and Turambar thought that he would seek no further, but would attempt to pass over the gorge. Therefore he purposed to creep down at dusk, and descend into the ravine under night, and cross over the wild water; and then to climb up the further cliff, and so come to the dragon beneath his guard.

This counsel he took, but the heart of Dorlas failed when they came to the races of Teiglin in the dark, and he dared not attempt the perilous crossing, but drew back and lurked in the woods, burdened with shame. Turambar and Hunthor, nonetheless, crossed over in safety, for the loud roaring of the water drowned all other sounds, and Glaurung slept. But ere the middle-night the dragon roused, and with a great noise and blast cast his forward part across the chasm, and began to draw his bulk after. Turambar and Hunthor were well-nigh overcome by the heat and the stench, as they sought in haste for a way up to come at Glaurung; and Hunthor was slain by a great stone that was dislodged from on high by the passage of the dragon, and smote him on the head and cast him into the river. So he ended, of the house of Haleth not the least valiant. Then Turambar summoned all his will and courage and climbed the cliff alone, and came beneath the dragon.

Then he drew Gurthang, and with all the might of his arm, and of his hate, he thrust it into the soft belly of the Worm, even up to the hilts. But when Glaurung felt his death-pang, he screamed, and in his dreadful throe he heaved up his bulk and hurled himself across the chasm, and there lay lashing and coiling in his agony. And he set all in a blaze about him, and beat all to ruin, until at last his fires died, and he lay still.

Now Gurthang had been wrested from Turambar's hand in the throe of Glaurung, and it clave to the belly of the dragon. Turambar therefore crossed the water once more, desiring to recover his sword and to look upon his foe; and he found him stretched at his length, and rolled upon one side, and the hilts of Gurthang stood in his belly. Then Turambar seized the hilts and set his foot upon the belly, and cried in mockery of the dragon and his words at Nargothrond: 'Hail, Worm of Morgoth! Well met again! Die now and the darkness have thee! Thus is Turin son of Hurin avenged.'

Then he wrenched out the sword, but a spout of black blood followed it, and fell on his hand, and the venom burned it. And thereupon Glaurung opened his eyes and looked

upon Turambar with such malice that it smote him as a blow; and by that stroke and the anguish of the venom he fell into a dark swoon, and lay as one dead, and his sword was beneath him.

The screams of Glaurung rang in the woods, and came to the people that waited at Nen Girith; and when those that looked forth heard them, and saw afar the ruin and burning that the dragon made, they deemed that he had triumphed and was destroying those that assailed him. And Niniel sat and shuddered beside the falling water, and at the voice of Glaurung her darkness crept upon her again, so that she could not stir from that place of her own will.

Even so Brandir found her, for he came to Nen Girith at last, limping wearily; and when he heard that the dragon had crossed the river and had beaten down his foes, his heart yearned towards Niniel in pity. Yet he thought also: 'Turambar is dead, but Niniel lives. Now it may be that she will come with me, and I will lead her away, and so we shall escape from the dragon together.' After a while therefore he stood by Niniel, and he said: 'Come! It is time to go. If you will, I will lead you.' And he took her hand, and she arose silently, and followed him; and in the darkness none saw them go.

But as they went down the path to the Crossings the moon rose, and cast a grey light on the land, and Niniel said: 'Is this the way?' And Brandir answered that he knew no way, save to flee as they might from Glaurung, and escape into the wild. But Niniel said: 'The Black Sword was my beloved and my husband. To seek him only do I go.

What else could you think?' And she sped on before him. Thus she came towards the Crossings of Teiglin and beheld Haudh-en-Elleth in the white moonlight, and great dread came on her. Then with a cry she turned away, casting off her cloak, and fled southward along the river, and her white raiment shone in the moon.

Thus Brandir saw her from the hill-side, and turned to cross her path, but he was still behind her when she came to the ruin of Glaurung nigh the brink of Cabed-en-Aras. There she saw the dragon lying, but she heeded him not, for a man lay beside him; and she ran to Turambar, and called his name in vain. Then finding that his hand was burned she washed it with tears and bound it about with a strip of her raiment, and she kissed him and cried on him again to awake.

Thereat Glaurung stirred for the last time ere he died, and he spoke with his last breath, saying: 'Hail, Nienor, daughter of Hurin. We meet again ere the end. I give thee joy that thou hast found thy brother at last. And now thou shalt know him: a stabber in the dark, treacherous to foes, faithless to friends, and a curse unto his kin, Turin son of Hurin! But the worst of all his deeds thou shalt feel in thyself.'

Then Glaurung died, and the veil of his malice was taken from her, and she remembered all the days of her life.

Looking down upon Turin she cried: 'Farewell, O twice beloved! A Turin Turambar turun ambartanen: master of doom by doom mastered! O happy to be dead!' Then Brandir who had heard all, standing stricken upon the edge of ruin, hastened towards her; but she ran from him distraught with horror and anguish, and coming to the brink of Cabed-en-Aras she cast herself over, and was lost in the wild water.

Then Brandir came and looked down, and turned away in horror; and though he no longer desired life, he could not seek death in that roaring water. And thereafter no man looked again upon Cabed-en-Aras, nor would any beast or bird come there, nor any tree grow; and it was named Cabed Naeramarth, the Leap of Dreadful Doom.

But Brandir made his way back to Nen Girith, to bring tidings to the people; and he met Dorlas in the woods, and slew him: the first blood that ever he had spilled, and the last.



And he came to Nen Girith, and men cried to him: 'Have you seen her? For Niniel is gone.'

And he answered: 'Niniel is gone for ever. The Dragon is dead, and Turambar is dead; and those tidings are good.' The people murmured at these words, saying that he was crazed; but Brandir said: 'Hear me to the end! Niniel the beloved is also dead. She cast herself into Teiglin, desiring life no more; for she learned that she was none other than Nienor daughter of Hurin of Dor-lomin, ere her forgetfulness came upon her, and that Turambar was her brother, Turin son of Hurin.'

But even as he ceased, and the people wept, Turin himself came before them. For when the dragon died, his swoon left him, and he fell into a deep sleep of weariness. But the cold of the night troubled him, and the hilts of Gurthang drove into his side, and he awoke. Then he saw that one had tended his hand, and he wondered much that he was left nonetheless to lie upon the cold ground; and he called, and hearing no answer he went in search of aid, for he was weary and sick.

But when the people saw him they drew back in fear, thinking that it was his unquiet spirit; and he said: 'Nay, be glad; for the Dragon is dead, and I live. But wherefore have you scorned my counsel, and come into peril? And where is Niniel? For her I would see. And surely you did not bring her from her home?'

Then Brandir told him that it was so, and Niniel was dead. But the wife of Dorlas cried out: 'Nay, lord, he is crazed. For he came here saying that you were dead, and he called it good tidings. But you live.'

Then Turambar was wrathful, and believed that all Brandir said or did was done in malice towards himself and Niniel, begrudging their love; and he spoke evilly to Brandir, calling him Club-foot. Then Brandir reported all that he had heard, and named Niniel Nienor daughter of Hurin, and he cried out upon Turambar with the last words of Glaurung, that he was a curse unto his kin and to all that harboured him.

Then Turambar fell into a fury, for in those words he heard the feet of his doom overtaking him; and he charged Brandir with leading Niniel to her death, and publishing with delight the lies of Glaurung, if indeed he devised them not himself. Then he cursed Brandir, and slew him; and he fled from the people into the woods. But after a while his madness left him, and he came to Haudh-en-Elleth, and there sat, and pondered all his deeds. And he cried upon Finduilas to bring him counsel; for he knew not whether he would do now more ill to go to Doriath to seek his kin, or to forsake them for ever and seek death in battle.

And even as he sat there Mablung with a company of Grey-elves came over the Crossings of Teiglin, and he knew Turin, and hailed him, and was glad indeed to find him yet living; for he had learned of the coming forth of Glaurung and that his path led to Brethil, and also he had heard report that the Black Sword of Nargothrond now dwelt there. Therefore he came to give warning to Turin, and help if need be; but Turin said: 'You come too late. The Dragon is dead.'

Then they marvelled, and gave him great praise; but he cared nothing for it, and said: 'This only I ask: give me news of my kin, for in Dor-lomin I learned that they had gone to the Hidden Kingdom.'

Then Mablung was dismayed, but needs must tell to Turin how Morwen was lost, and Nienor cast into a spell of dumb forgetfulness, and how she escaped them upon the borders of Doriath and fled northwards. Then at last Turin knew that doom had overtaken him, and that he had slain Brandir unjustly; so that the words of Glaurung were fulfilled in him. And he laughed as one fey, crying: 'This is a bitter jest indeed!'

But he bade Mablung go, and return to Doriath, with curses upon it. 'And a curse too upon your errand!' he cried. 'This only was wanting. Now comes the night.'

Then he fled from them like the wind, and they were amazed, wondering what madness had seized him; and they followed after him. But Turin far out-ran them; and he came to Cabed-en-Aras, and heard the roaring of the water, and saw that all the leaves fell sere from the trees, as though winter had come. There he drew forth his sword, that now alone remained to him of all his possessions, and he said: 'Hail Gurthang! No lord or loyalty dost thou know, save the hand that wieldeth thee. From no blood wilt thou shrink. Wilt thou therefore take Turin Turambar, wilt thou slay me swiftly?' And from the blade rang a cold voice in answer: 'Yea, I will drink thy blood gladly, that so I may forget the blood of Beleg my master, and the blood of Brandir slain unjustly. I will slay thee swiftly.'

Then Turin set the hilts upon the ground, and cast himself upon the point of Gurthang, and the black blade took his life. But Mablung and the Elves came and looked on the shape of Glaurung lying dead, and upon the body of Turin, and they grieved; and when Men of Brethil came thither, and they learned the reasons of Turin's madness and death, they were aghast; and Mablung said bitterly: 'I also have been meshed in the doom of the Children of Hurin, and thus with my tidings have slain one that I loved.'

Then they lifted up Turin, and found that Gurthang had broken asunder. But Elves and Men gathered there great store of wood, and they made a mighty burning, and the Dragon was consumed to ashes. Turin they laid in a high mound where he had fallen, and the shards of Gurthang were laid beside him. And when all was done, the Elves sang a lament for the Children of Hurin, and a great grey stone was set upon the mound, and thereon was carven in runes of Doriath:

TURIN TURAMBAR DAGNIR GLAURUNGA

and beneath they wrote also:

NIENOR NINIEL

But she was not there, nor was it ever known whither the cold waters of Teiglin had taken her.

(Tolkien, 2013: 233-271)

## **Extracts from C. S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader***

### **Chapter 6. The Adventures of Eustace**

At that very moment the others were washing hands and faces in the river and generally getting ready for dinner and a rest. The three best archers had gone up into the hills north of the bay and returned laden with a pair of wild goats which were now roasting over a fire. Caspian had ordered a cask of wine ashore, strong wine of Archenland which had to be mixed with water before you drank it, so there would be plenty for all. The work had gone well so far and it was a merry meal. Only after the second helping of goat did Edmund say, "Where's that blighter Eustace?"

Meanwhile Eustace stared round the unknown valley. It was so narrow and deep, and the precipices which surrounded it so sheer, that it was like a huge pit or trench. The floor was grassy though strewn with rocks, and here and there Eustace saw black burnt patches like those you see on the sides of a railway embankment in a dry summer.

About fifteen yards away from him was a pool of clear, smooth water. There was, at first, nothing else at all in the valley; not an animal, not a bird, not an insect. The sun beat down and grim peaks and horns of mountains peered over the valley's edge.

Eustace realized of course that in the fog he had come down the wrong side of the ridge, so he turned at once to see about getting back. But as soon as he had looked he shuddered. Apparently he had by amazing luck found the only possible way down - a long green spit of land, horribly steep and narrow, with precipices on either side. There was no other possible way of getting back. But could he do it, now that he saw what it was really like? His head swam at the very thought of it.

He turned round again, thinking that at any rate he'd better have a good drink from the pool first. But as soon as he had turned and before he had taken a step forward into the valley he heard a noise behind him. It was only a small noise but it sounded loud in that immense silence. It froze him dead-still where he stood for a second. Then he slewed round his neck and looked.

At the bottom of the cliff a little on his left hand was a low, dark hole - the entrance to a cave perhaps. And out of this two thin wisps of smoke were coming. And the loose stones just beneath the dark hollow were moving (that was the noise he had heard) just as if something were crawling in the dark behind them.

Something was crawling. Worse still, something was coming out. Edmund or Lucy or you would have recognized it at once, but Eustace had read none of the right books. The thing that came out of the cave was something he had never even imagined - along lead-coloured snout, dull red eyes, no feathers or fur, a long lithe body that trailed on the ground, legs whose elbows went up higher than its back like a spider's cruel claws, bat's wings that made a rasping noise on the stones, yards of tail. And the lines of smoke were coming from its two nostrils. He never said the word Dragon to himself. Nor would it have made things any better if he had.

But perhaps if he had known something about dragons he would have been a little surprised at this dragon's behaviour. It did not sit up and clap its wings, nor did it shoot out a stream of flame from its mouth. The smoke from its nostrils was like the smoke of a fire that will not last much longer. Nor did it seem to have noticed Eustace. It moved very slowly towards the pool - slowly and with many pauses. Even in his fear Eustace felt that it was an old, sad creature. He wondered if he dared make a dash for the ascent. But it might look round if he made any noise. It might come more to life. Perhaps it was only shamming. Anyway, what was the use of trying to escape by climbing from a creature that could fly?

It reached the pool and slid its horrible scaly chin down over the gravel to drink: but before it had drunk there came from it a great croaking or clanging cry and after a few twitches and convulsions it rolled round on its side and lay perfectly still with one claw in the air. A little dark blood gushed from its wide-opened mouth. The smoke from its nostrils turned black for a moment and then floated away. No more came. This was the brute's trick, the way it lured travellers to their doom. But one couldn't wait for ever. He took a step nearer, then two steps, and halted again. The dragon remained motionless; he noticed too that the red fire had gone out of its eyes. At last he came up to it. He was quite sure now that it was dead. With a shudder he touched it; nothing happened.

The relief was so great that Eustace almost laughed out loud. He began to feel as if he had fought and killed the dragon instead of merely seeing it die. He stepped over it and went to the pool for his drink, for the heat was getting unbearable. He was not surprised when he heard a peal of thunder. Almost immediately afterwards the sun disappeared and before he had finished his drink big drops of rain were falling.

The climate of this island was a very unpleasant one. In less than a minute Eustace was wet to the skin and half blinded with such rain as one never sees in Europe. There was no use trying to climb out of the valley as long as this lasted. He bolted for the only shelter in sight - the dragon's cave. There he lay down and tried to get his breath.

Most of us know what we should expect to find in a dragon's lair, but, as I said before, Eustace had read only the wrong books. They had a lot to say about exports and imports and governments and drains, but they were weak on dragons. That is why he was so puzzled at the surface on which he was lying. Parts of it were too prickly to be stones and too hard to be thorns, and there seemed to be a great many round, flat things, and it all clinked when he moved. There was light enough at the cave's mouth to examine it by. And of course Eustace found it to be what any of us could have told him in advance - treasure. There were crowns (those were the prickly things), coins, rings, bracelets, ingots, cups, plates and gems.

Eustace (unlike most boys) had never thought much of treasure but he saw at once the use it would be in this new world which he had so foolishly stumbled into through the picture in Lucy's bedroom at home. "They don't have any tax here," he said, "And you don't have to give treasure to the government. With some of this stuff I could have quite a decent time here - perhaps in Calormen. It sounds the least phoney of these countries. I wonder how much I can carry? That bracelet now - those things in it are probably diamonds - I'll slip that on my own wrist. Too big, but not if I push it right up here above my elbow. Then fill my pockets with diamonds - that's easier than gold. I wonder when this infernal rain's going to let up?" He got into a less uncomfortable part of the pile, where it was mostly coins, and settled down to wait. But a bad fright, when once it is over, and especially a bad fright following a mountain walk, leaves you very tired. Eustace fell asleep.

(...)

Meanwhile Eustace slept and slept - and slept. What woke him was a pain in his arm. The moon was shining in at the mouth of the cave, and the bed of treasures seemed to have grown much more comfortable: in fact he could hardly feel it at all. He was puzzled by the pain in his arm at first, but presently it occurred to him that the bracelet which he had shoved up above his elbow had become strangely tight. His arm must have swollen while he was asleep (it was his left arm).

He moved his right arm in order to feel his left, but stopped before he had moved it an inch and bit his lip in terror. For just in front of him, and a little on his right, where the moonlight fell clear on the floor of the cave, he saw a hideous shape moving. He knew that shape: it was a dragon's claw. It had moved as he moved his hand and became still when he stopped moving his hand.

"Oh, what a fool I've been," thought Eustace. "Of course, the brute had a mate and it's lying beside me."

For several minutes he did not dare to move a muscle. He saw two thin columns of smoke going up before his eyes, black against the moonlight; just as there had been smoke coming from the other dragon's nose before it died. This was so alarming that he held his breath. The two columns of smoke vanished. When he could hold his breath no longer he let it out stealthily; instantly two jets of smoke appeared again. But even yet he had no idea of the truth.

Presently he decided that he would edge very cautiously to his left and try to creep out of the cave. Perhaps the creature was asleep - and anyway it was his only chance. But of course before he edged to the left he looked to the left. Oh horror! there was a dragon's claw on that side too.

No one will blame Eustace if at this moment he shed tears. He was surprised at the size of his own tears as he saw them splashing on to the treasure in front of him. They also seemed strangely hot; steam went up from them.

But there was no good crying. He must try to crawl out from between the two dragons. He began extending his right arm. The dragon's fore-leg and claw on his right went through exactly the same motion. Then he thought he would try his left. The dragon limb on that side moved too.

Two dragons, one on each side, mimicking whatever he did! His nerve broke and he simply made a bolt for it.

There was such a clatter and rasping, and clinking of gold, and grinding of stones, as he rushed out of the cave that he thought they were both following him. He daren't look back. He rushed to the pool. The twisted shape of the dead dragon lying in the moonlight would have been enough to frighten anyone but now he hardly noticed it. His idea was to get into the water.

But just as he reached the edge of the pool two things happened. First of all it came over him like a thunder-clap that he had been running on all fours - and why on earth had he been doing that? And secondly, as he bent towards the water, he thought for a second that yet another dragon was staring up at him out of the pool. But in an instant he realized the truth. The dragon face in the pool was his own reflection. There was no doubt of it. It moved as he moved: it opened and shut its mouth as he opened and shut his.

He had turned into a dragon while he was asleep. Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself.

That explained everything. There had been no two dragons beside him in the cave. The claws to right and left had been his own right and left claw. The two columns of smoke had been coming from his own nostrils. As for the pain in his left arm (or what had been his left arm) he could now see what had happened by squinting with his left eye. The bracelet which had fitted very nicely on the upper arm of a boy was far too small for the thick, stumpy foreleg of a dragon. It had sunk deeply into his scaly flesh and there was a throbbing bulge on each side of it. He tore at the place with his dragon's teeth but could not get it off.

In spite of the pain, his first feeling was one of relief. There was nothing to be afraid of any more. He was a terror himself and nothing in the world but a knight (and not all of those) would dare to attack him. He could get even with Caspian and Edmund now. But the moment he thought this he realized that he didn't want to. He wanted to be friends. He wanted to get back among humans and talk and laugh and share things. He realized that he was a monster cut off from the whole human race. An appalling loneliness came over him. He began to see that the others had not really been fiends at all. He began to wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always supposed. He longed for their voices. He would have been grateful for a kind word even from Reepicheep.

When he thought of this the poor dragon that had been Eustace lifted up its voice and wept. A powerful dragon crying its eyes out under the moon in a deserted valley is a sight and a sound hardly to be imagined.

At last he decided he would try to find his way back to the shore. He realized now that Caspian would never have sailed away and left him. And he felt sure that somehow or other he would be able to make people understand who he was.

He took a long drink and then (I know this sounds shocking, but it isn't if you think it over) he ate nearly all the dead dragon. He was half-way through it before he realized what he was doing; for, you see, though his mind was the mind of Eustace, his tastes

and his digestion were dragonish. And there is nothing a dragon likes so well as fresh dragon. That is why you so seldom find more than one dragon in the same county. Then he turned to climb out of the valley. He began the climb with a jump and as soon as he jumped he found that he was flying. He had quite forgotten about his wings and it was a great surprise to him - the first pleasant surprise he had had for a long time. He rose high into the air and saw innumerable mountain-tops spread out beneath him in the moonlight. He could see the bay like a silver slab and the *Dawn Treader* lying at anchor and camp fires twinkling in the woods beside the beach. From a great height he launched himself down towards them in a single glide.

(Lewis, 1998: 80-102)

## **Extracts from J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire***

### **Chapter 20. The First Task**

Harry got up on Sunday morning and dressed so inattentively that it was a while before he realized he was trying to pull his hat onto his foot instead of his sock.

When he'd finally got all his clothes on the right parts of his body, he hurried off to find Hermione, locating her at the Gryffindor table in the Great Hall, where she was eating breakfast with Ginny. Feeling too queasy to eat, Harry waited until Hermione had swallowed her last spoonful of porridge, then dragged her out onto the grounds. There, he told her all about the dragons, and about everything Sirius had said, while they took another long walk around the lake.

Alarmed as she was by Sirius's warnings about Karkaroff, Hermione still thought that the dragons were the more pressing problem.

"Let's just try and keep you alive until Tuesday evening," she said desperately, "and then we can worry about Karkaroff."

They walked three times around the lake, trying all the way to think of a simple spell that would subdue a dragon. Nothing whatsoever occurred to them, so they retired to the library instead. Here, Harry pulled down every book he could find on dragons, and both of them set to work searching through the large pile.

"Talon-clipping by charms... treating scale-rot..." This is no good, this is for nutters like Hagrid who want to keep them healthy...

"Dragons are extremely difficult to slay, owing to the ancient magic that imbues their thick hides, which none but the most powerful spells can penetrate. . . ! But Sirius said a simple one would do it..."

"Let's try some simple spellbooks, then," said Harry, throwing aside *Men Who Love Dragons Too Much*.

He returned to the table with a pile of spellbooks, set them down, and began to flick through each in turn, Hermione whispering nonstop at his elbow.

"Well, there are Switching Spells... but what's the point of Switching it? Unless you swapped its fangs for wine-gums or something that would make it less dangerous... The trouble is, like that book said, not much is going to get through a dragon's hide..."

I'd say Transfigure it, but something that big, you really haven't got a hope, I doubt even Professor McGonagall.... unless you're supposed to put the spell on yourself?

Maybe to give yourself extra powers? But they're not simple spells, I mean, we haven't done any of those in class, I only know about them because I've been doing O.W.L.

practice papers..."

"Hermione," Harry said, through gritted teeth, "will you shut up for a bit, please? I'm trying to concentrate."

But all that happened, when Hermione fell silent, was that Harry's brain filled with a sort of blank buzzing, which didn't seem to allow room for concentration. He stared hopelessly down the index of Basic Hexes for the Busy and Vexed. Instant scalping. . .

but dragons had no hair... pepper breath... that would probably increase a dragon's firepower... horn tongue... just what he needed, to give it an extra weapon...

"Oh no, he's back again, why can't he read on his stupid ship?" said Hermione irritably as Viktor Krum slouched in, cast a surly look over at the pair of them, and settled himself in a distant corner with a pile of books. "Come on, Harry, we'll go back to the common room... his fan club'll be here in a moment, twittering away..."

And sure enough, as they left the library, a gang of girls tiptoed past them, one of them wearing a Bulgaria scarf tied around her waist.

Harry barely slept that night. When he awoke on Monday morning, he seriously considered for the first time ever just running away from Hogwarts. But as he looked around the Great Hall at breakfast time, and thought about what leaving the castle would mean, he knew he couldn't do it. It was the only place he had ever been happy... well, he supposed he must have been happy with his parents too, but he couldn't remember that.

Somehow, the knowledge that he would rather be here and facing a dragon than back on Privet Drive with Dudley was good to know; it made him feel slightly calmer. He finished his bacon with difficulty (his throat wasn't working too well), and as he and Hermione got up, he saw Cedric Diggory leaving the Hufflepuff table.

Cedric still didn't know about the dragons... the only champion who didn't, if Harry was right in thinking that Maxime and Karkaroff would have told Fleur and Krum...

"Hermione, I'll see you in the greenhouses," Harry said, coming to his decision as he watched Cedric leaving the Hall. "Go on, I'll catch you up."

"Harry, you'll be late, the bell's about to ring -"

"I'll catch you up, okay?"

By the time Harry reached the bottom of the marble staircase, Cedric was at the top. He

was with a load of sixth-year friends. Harry didn't want to talk to Cedric in front of them; they were among those who had been quoting Rita Skeeter's article at him every time he went near them. He followed Cedric at a distance and saw that he was heading toward the Charms corridor. This gave Harry an idea. Pausing at a distance from them, he pulled out his wand, and took careful aim.

"Diffindo!"

Cedric's bag split. Parchment, quills, and books spilled out of it onto the floor.

Several bottles of ink smashed.

"Don't bother," said Cedric in an exasperated voice as his friends bent down to help him.

"Tell Flitwick I'm coming, go on..."

This was exactly what Harry had been hoping for. He slipped his wand back into his robes, waited until Cedric's friends had disappeared into their classroom, and hurried up the corridor, which was now empty of everyone but himself and Cedric.

"Hi," said Cedric, picking up a copy of *A Guide to Advanced Transfiguration* that was now splattered with ink. "My bag just split... brand-new and all..."

"Cedric," said Harry, "the first task is dragons."

"What?" said Cedric, looking up.

"Dragons," said Harry, speaking quickly, in case Professor Flitwick came out to see where Cedric had got to. "They've got four, one for each of us, and we've got to get past them."

Cedric stared at him. Harry saw some of the panic he'd been feeling since Saturday night flickering in Cedric's gray eyes.

"Are you sure?" Cedric said in a hushed voice.

"Dead sure," said Harry. "I've seen them."

"But how did you find out? We're not supposed to know..."

"Never mind," said Harry quickly - he knew Hagrid would be in trouble if he told the truth. "But I'm not the only one who knows. Fleur and Krum will know by now - Maxime and Karkaroff both saw the dragons too."

Cedric straightened up, his arms full of inky quills, parchment, and books, his ripped bag dangling off one shoulder. He stared at Harry, and there was a puzzled, almost suspicious look in his eyes.

"Why are you telling me?" he asked.

Harry looked at him in disbelief. He was sure Cedric wouldn't have asked that if he had seen the dragons himself. Harry wouldn't have let his worst enemy face those monsters unprepared - well, perhaps Malfoy or Snape...

"It's just...fair, isn't it?" he said to Cedric. "We all know now... we're on an even footing, aren't we?"

Cedric was still hooking at him in a slightly suspicious way when Harry heard a familiar clunking noise behind him. He turned around and saw Mad-Eye Moody emerging from a nearby classroom.

"Come with me, Potter," he growled. "Diggory, off you go."

Harry stared apprehensively at Moody. Had he overheard them?

"Er - Professor, I'm supposed to be in Herbology -"

"Never mind that, Potter. In my office, please..."

Harry followed him, wondering what was going to happen to him now. What if Moody wanted to know how he'd found out about the dragons? Would Moody go to Dumbledore and tell on Hagrid, or just turn Harry into a ferret? Well, it might be easier to get past a dragon if he were a ferret, Harry thought dully, he'd be smaller, much less easy to see from a height of fifty feet..

He followed Moody into his office. Moody closed the door behind them and turned to look at Harry, his magical eye fixed upon him as well as the normal one.

"That was a very decent thing you just did, Potter," Moody said quietly.

Harry didn't know what to say; this wasn't the reaction he had expected at all.

"Sit down," said Moody, and Harry sat, looking around.

He had visited this office under two of its previous occupants. In Professor Lockhart's day, the walls had been plastered with beaming, winking pictures of Professor Lockhart himself. When Lupin had lived here, you were more likely to come across a specimen of some fascinating new Dark creature he had procured for them to



study in class. Now, however, the office was full of a number of exceptionally odd objects that Harry supposed Moody had used in the days when he had been an Auror.

On his desk stood what looked like a large, cracked, glass spinning top; Harry recognized

it at once as a Sneakoscope, because he owned one himself, though it was much smaller than Moody's. In the corner on a small table stood an object that looked something like an extra-squiggly, golden television aerial. It was humming slightly. What appeared to be a mirror hung opposite Harry on the wall, but it was not reflecting the room. Shadowy figures were moving around inside it, none of them clearly in focus.

"Like my Dark Detectors, do you?" said Moody, who was watching Harry closely.

"What's that?" Harry asked, pointing at the squiggly golden aerial.

"Secrecy Sensor. Vibrates when it detects concealment and lies... no use here, of course, too much interference - students in every direction lying about why they haven't done their homework. Been humming ever since I got here. I had to disable my Sneakoscope because it wouldn't stop whistling. It's extra-sensitive, picks up stuff about a mile around. Of course, it could be picking up more than kid stuff," he added in a growl.

"And what's the mirror for?"

"Oh that's my Foe-Glass. See them out there, skulking around? I'm not really in trouble until I see the whites of their eyes. That's when I open my trunk."

He let out a short, harsh laugh, and pointed to the large trunk under the window. It had seven keyholes in a row. Harry wondered what was in there, until Moody's next question brought him sharply back to earth.

"So... found out about the dragons, have you?"

Harry hesitated. He'd been afraid of this - but he hadn't told Cedric, and he certainly wasn't going to tell Moody, that Hagrid had broken the rules.

"It's all right," said Moody, sitting down and stretching out his wooden leg with a groan. "Cheating's a traditional part of the Triwizard Tournament and always has been."

"I didn't cheat," said Harry sharply. "It was - a sort of accident that I found out."

Moody grinned. "I wasn't accusing you, laddie. I've been telling Dumbledore from the start, he can be as high-minded as he likes, but you can bet old Karkaroff and Maxime won't be. They'll have told their champions everything they can. They want to win.

They want to beat Dumbledore. They'd like to prove he's only human."

Moody gave another harsh laugh, and his magical eye swiveled around so fast it made Harry feel queasy to watch it.

"So... got any ideas how you're going to get past your dragon yet?" said Moody.

"No," said Harry.

"Well, I'm not going to tell you," said Moody gruffly. "I don't show favoritism, me.

I'm just going to give you some good, general advice. And the first bit is - play to your strengths."

"I haven't got any," said Harry, before he could stop himself. "Excuse me," growled Moody, "you've got strengths if I say you've got them. Think now. What are you best at?"

Harry tried to concentrate. What was he best at? Well, that was easy, really -- "Quidditch," he said dully, "and a fat lot of help -"

"That's right," said Moody, staring at him very hard, his magical eye barely moving at all. "You're a damn good flier from what I've heard."

"Yeah, but..." Harry stared at him. "I'm not allowed a broom, I've only got my wand..."

"My second piece of general advice," said Moody loudly, interrupting him, "is to use a nice, simple spell that will enable you to get what you need."

Harry looked at him blankly. What did he need?

"Come on, boy..." whispered Moody. "Put them together... it's not that difficult..."

And it clicked. He was best at flying. He needed to pass the dragon in the air. For that, he needed his Firebolt. And for his Fire-bolt, he needed - "Hermione," Harry whispered, when he had sped into greenhouse three minutes later, uttering a hurried apology to Professor Sprout as he passed her. "Hermione - I need you to help me."

"What d'you think I've been trying to do, Harry?" she whispered back, her eyes round with anxiety over the top of the quivering Flutterby Bush she was pruning.

"Hermione, I need to learn how to do a Summoning Charm properly by tomorrow afternoon."

And so they practiced. They didn't have lunch, but headed for a free classroom, where Harry tried with all his might to make various objects fly across the room toward him.

He was still having problems. The books and quills kept losing heart halfway across the room and dropping like stones to the floor.

"Concentrate, Harry, concentrate..."

"What d'you think I'm trying to do?" said Harry angrily. "A great big dragon keeps popping up in my head for some reason... Okay, try again..."

He wanted to skip Divination to keep practicing, but Hermione refused point-blank to skive off Arithmancy, and there was no point in staying without her. He therefore had to endure over an hour of Professor Trelawney, who spent half the lesson telling everyone that the position of Mars with relation to Saturn at that moment meant that people born in July were in great danger of sudden, violent deaths.

"Well, that's good," said Harry loudly, his temper getting the better of him, "just as long as it's not drawn-out. I don't want to suffer."

Ron looked for a moment as though he was going to laugh; he certainly caught Harry's eye for the first time in days, but Harry was still feeling too resentful toward Ron to care.

He spent the rest of the lesson trying to attract small objects toward him under the table with his wand. He managed to make a fly zoom straight into his hand, though he wasn't entirely sure that was his prowess at Summoning Charms - perhaps the fly was just stupid.

He forced down some dinner after Divination, then returned to the empty classroom with Hermione, using the Invisibility Cloak to avoid the teachers. They kept practicing until past midnight. They would have stayed longer, but Peeves turned up and, pretending to think that Harry wanted things thrown at him, started chucking chairs across the room.

Harry and Hermione left in a hurry before the noise attracted Filch, and went back to the Gryffindor common room, which was now mercifully empty.

At two o'clock in the morning, Harry stood near the fireplace, surrounded by heaps of objects: books, quills, several upturned chairs, an old set of Gobstones, and Neville's toad, Trevor. Only in the last hour had Harry really got the hang of the Summoning Charm.

"That's better, Harry, that's loads better," Hermione said, looking exhausted but very pleased.

"Well, now we know what to do next time I can't manage a spell," Harry said, throwing a rune dictionary back to Hermione, so he could try again, "threaten me with a dragon.

Right..." He raised his wand once more. "Accio Dictionary!"

The heavy book soared out of Hermione's hand, flew across the room, and Harry caught it.

"Harry, I really think you've got it!" said Hermione delightedly.

"Just as long as it works tomorrow," Harry said. "The Firebolt's going to be much farther away than the stuff in here, it's going to be in the castle, and I'm going to be out there on the grounds..."

"That doesn't matter," said Hermione firmly. "Just as long as you're concentrating really, really hard on it, it'll come. Harry, we'd better get some sleep... you're going to need it."

Harry had been focusing so hard on learning the Summoning Charm that evening that some of his blind panic had left him. It returned in full measure, however, on the following morning. The atmosphere in the school was one of great tension and excitement. Lessons were to stop at midday, giving all the students time to get down to the dragons' enclosure - though of course, they didn't yet know what they would find there.

Harry felt oddly separate from everyone around him, whether they were wishing him good luck or hissing "We'll have a box of tissues ready, Potter" as he passed. It was a state of nervousness so advanced that he wondered whether he mightn't just lose his head when they tried to lead him out to his dragon, and start trying to curse everyone in sight.

Time was behaving in a more peculiar fashion than ever, rushing past in great dollops, so that one moment he seemed to be sitting down in his first lesson, History of Magic, and the next, walking into lunch... and then (where had the morning gone? the last of the dragon-free hours?), Professor McGonagall was hurrying over to him in the Great Hall.

Lots of people were watching.

"Potter, the champions have to come down onto the grounds now... You have to get ready for your first task."

"Okay," said Harry, standing up, his fork falling onto his plate with a clatter.

"Good luck, Harry," Hermione whispered. "You'll be fine!"

"Yeah," said Harry in a voice that was most unlike his own.

He left the Great Hall with Professor McGonagall. She didn't seem herself either; in fact, she looked nearly as anxious as Hermione. As she walked him down the stone steps

and out into the cold November afternoon, she put her hand on his shoulder.

"Now, don't panic," she said, "just keep a cool head... We've got wizards standing by to control the situation if it gets out of hand... The main thing is just to do your best, and nobody will think any the worse of you... Are you all right?"

"Yes," Harry heard himself say. "Yes, I'm fine."

She was leading him toward the place where the dragons were, around the edge of the forest, but when they approached the clump of trees behind which the enclosure would be clearly visible, Harry saw that a tent had been erected, its entrance facing them, screening the dragons from view.

"You're to go in here with the other champions," said Professor McGonagall, in a rather shaky sort of voice, "and wait for your turn, Potter. Mr. Bagman is in there... he'll be telling you the - the procedure... Good luck."

"Thanks," said Harry, in a flat, distant voice. She left him at the entrance of the tent. Harry went inside.

Fleur Delacour was sitting in a corner on a how wooden stool. She didn't look nearly as composed as usual, but rather pale and clammy. Viktor Krum looked even surlier than usual, which Harry supposed was his way of showing nerves. Cedric was pacing up and down. When Harry entered, Cedric gave him a small smile, which Harry returned, feeling the muscles in his face working rather hard, as though they had forgotten how to do it.

"Harry! Good-o!" said Bagman happily, looking around at him. "Come in, come in, make yourself at home!"

Bagman looked somehow like a slightly overblown cartoon figure, standing amid all the pale-faced champions. He was wearing his old Wasp robes again.

"Well, now we're all here - time to fill you in!" said Bagman brightly. "When the audience has assembled, I'm going to be offering each of you this bag" - he held up a small sack of purple silk and shook it at them - "from which you will each select a small model of the thing you are about to face! There are different - er - varieties, you see.

And I have to tell you something else too... ah, yes... your task is to collect the golden egg!"

Harry glanced around. Cedric had nodded once, to show that he understood Bagman's words, and then started pacing around the tent again; he looked slightly green. Fleur Delacour and Krum hadn't reacted at all. Perhaps they thought they might be sick if they opened their mouths; that was certainly how Harry felt. But they, at least, had volunteered for this. .

And in no time at all, hundreds upon hundreds of pairs of feet could be heard passing the tent, their owners talking excitedly, laughing, joking. . . . Harry felt as separate from the crowd as though they were a different species. And then - it seemed like about a second later to Harry - Bagman was opening the neck of the purple silk sack.

"Ladies first," he said, offering it to Fleur Delacour.

She put a shaking hand inside the bag and drew out a tiny, perfect model of a dragon - a Welsh Green. It had the number two around its neck. And Harry knew, by the fact that Fleur showed no sign of surprise, but rather a determined resignation, that he had been right: Madame Maxime had told her what was coming.

The same held true for Krum. He pulled out the scarlet Chinese Fireball. It had a number three around its neck. He didn't even blink, just sat back down and stared at the ground.

Cedric put his hand into the bag, and out came the blueish-gray Swedish Short-Snout, the number one tied around its neck. Knowing what was left, Harry put his hand into the silk bag and pulled out the Hungarian Horntail, and the number four. It stretched its wings as he looked down at it, and bared its minuscule fangs.

"Well, there you are!" said Bagman. "You have each pulled out the dragon you will face, and the numbers refer to the order in which you are to take on the dragons, do you see?"

Now, I'm going to have to leave you in a moment, because I'm commentating. Mr. Diggory, you're first, just go out into the enclosure when you hear a whistle, all right? Now. .

. Harry... could I have a quick word? Outside?"

"Er... yes," said Harry blankly, and he got up and went out of the tent with Bagman, who walked him a short distance away, into the trees, and then turned to him with a fatherly expression on his face.

"Feeling all right, Harry? Anything I can get you?"

"What?" said Harry. "I - no, nothing."

"Got a plan?" said Bagman, lowering his voice conspiratorially. "Because I don't mind

sharing a few pointers, if you'd like them, you know. I mean," Bagman continued, lowering his voice still further, "you're the underdog here, Harry... Anything I can do to help..."

"No," said Harry so quickly he knew he had sounded rude, "no - I - I know what I'm going to do, thanks."

"Nobody would know, Harry," said Bagman, winking at him.

"No, I'm fine," said Harry, wondering why he kept telling people this, and wondering whether he had ever been less fine. "I've got a plan worked out, I -"

A whistle had blown somewhere.

"Good lord, I've got to run!" said Bagman in alarm, and he hurried off.

Harry walked back to the tent and saw Cedric emerging from it, greener than ever. Harry tried to wish him luck as he walked past, but all that came out of his mouth was a sort of hoarse grunt.

Harry went back inside to Fleur and Krum. Seconds later, they heard the roar of the crowd, which meant Cedric had entered the enclosure and was now face-to-face with the living counterpart of his model.

It was worse than Harry could ever have imagined, sitting there and listening. The crowd screamed... yelled... gasped like a single many-headed entity, as Cedric did whatever he was doing to get past the Swedish Short-Snout. Krum was still staring at the ground.

Fleur had now taken to retracing Cedric's steps, around and around the tent. And Bagman's commentary made everything much, much worse... Horrible pictures formed in Harry's mind as he heard: "Oooh, narrow miss there, very narrow"... "He's taking risks, this one!"... "Clever move - pity it didn't work!"

And then, after about fifteen minutes, Harry heard the deafening roar that could mean only one thing: Cedric had gotten past his dragon and captured the golden egg.

"Very good indeed!" Bagman was shouting. "And now the marks from the judges!"

But he didn't shout out the marks; Harry supposed the judges were holding them up and showing them to the crowd.

"One down, three to go!" Bagman yelled as the whistle blew again. "Miss Delacour, if you please!"

Fleur was trembling from head to foot; Harry felt more warmly toward her than he had done so far as she hefted the tent with her head held high and her hand clutching her wand. He and Krum were left alone, at opposite sides of the tent, avoiding each other's gaze.

The same process started again... "Oh I'm not sure that was wise!" they could hear Bagman shouting gleefully. "Oh... nearly! Careful now... good lord, I thought she'd had it then!"

Ten minutes later, Harry heard the crowd erupt into applause once more... Fleur must have been successful too. A pause, while Fleur's marks were being shown... more clapping... then, for the third time, the whistle.

"And here comes Mr. Krum!" cried Bagman, and Krum slouched out, leaving Harry quite alone.

He felt much more aware of his body than usual; very aware of the way his heart was pumping fast, and his fingers tingling with fear... yet at the same time, he seemed to be outside himself, seeing the walls of the tent, and hearing the crowd, as though from far away.

"Very daring!" Bagman was yelling, and Harry heard the Chinese Fireball emit a horrible, roaring shriek, while the crowd drew its collective breath. "That's some nerve he's showing - and - yes, he's got the egg!"

Applause shattered the wintery air like breaking glass; Krum had finished - it would be Harry's turn any moment.

He stood up, noticing dimly that his legs seemed to be made of marshmallow. He waited.

And then he heard the whistle blow. He walked out through the entrance of the tent, the panic rising into a crescendo inside him. And now he was walking past the trees, through a gap in the enclosure fence.

He saw everything in front of him as though it was a very highly colored dream. There were hundreds and hundreds of faces staring down at him from stands that had been magicked there since he'd last stood on this spot. And there was the Horntail, at the other end of the enclosure, crouched low over her clutch of eggs, her wings half-furled, her evil, yellow eyes upon him, a monstrous, scaly, black lizard, thrashing her spiked tail, heaving yard-long gouge marks in the hard ground. The crowd was making a great deal of noise, but whether friendly or not, Harry didn't know or care. It was time to do

what he had to do... to focus his mind, entirely and absolutely, upon the thing that was his only chance.

He raised his wand.

"Accio Firebolt!" he shouted.

Harry waited, every fiber of him hoping, praying... If it hadn't worked... if it wasn't coming... He seemed to be looking at everything around him through some sort of shimmering, transparent barrier, like a heat haze, which made the enclosure and the hundreds of faces around him swim strangely....

And then he heard it, speeding through the air behind him; he turned and saw his Firebolt hurtling toward him around the edge of the woods, soaring into the enclosure, and stopping dead in midair beside him, waiting for him to mount. The crowd was making even more noise... Bagman was shouting something... but Harry's ears were not working properly anymore... listening wasn't important....

He swung his leg over the broom and kicked off from the ground. And a second later, something miraculous happened....

As he soared upward, as the wind rushed through his hair, as the crowd's faces became mere flesh-colored pinpricks below, and the Horntail shrank to the size of a dog, he realized that he had heft not only the ground behind, but also his fear... He was back where he belonged....

This was just another Quidditch match, that was all... just another Quidditch match, and that Horntail was just another ugly opposing team.

He looked down at the clutch of eggs and spotted the gold one, gleaming against its cement-colored fellows, residing safely between the dragon's front legs. "Okay," Harry told himself, "diversionary tactics... let's go... "

He dived. The Horntail's head followed him; he knew what it was going to do and pulled out of the dive just in time; a jet of fire had been released exactly where he would

have been had he not swerved away... but Harry didn't care... that was no more than dodging a Bludger.

"Great Scott, he can fly!" yelled Bagman as the crowd shrieked and gasped. "Are you watching this, Mr. Krum?"

Harry soared higher in a circle; the Horntail was still following his progress; its head revolving on its long neck - if he kept this up, it would be nicely dizzy - but better not push it too long, or it would be breathing fire again - Harry plummeted just as the Horntail opened its mouth, but this time he was less lucky - he missed the flames, but the tail came whipping up to meet him instead, and as he swerved to the left, one of the long spikes grazed his shoulder, ripping his robes -- He could feel it stinging, he could hear screaming and groans from the crowd, but the cut didn't seem to be deep. . . . Now he zoomed around the back of the Horntail, and a possibility occurred to him....

The Horntail didn't seem to want to take off, she was too protective of her eggs. Though she writhed and twisted, furling and unfurling her wings and keeping those fearsome yellow eyes on Harry, she was afraid to move too far from them. . . but he had to persuade her to do it, or he'd never get near them... The trick was to do it carefully, gradually....

He began to fly, first this way, then the other, not near enough to make her breathe fire to stave him off, but still posing a sufficient threat to ensure she kept her eyes on him. Her head swayed this way and that, watching him out of those vertical pupils, her fangs bared...

He flew higher. The Horntail's head rose with him, her neck now stretched to its fullest extent, still swaying, like a snake before its charmer. . .

Harry rose a few more feet, and she let out a roar of exasperation. He was like a fly to her, a fly she was longing to swat; her tail thrashed again, but he was too high to reach now... She shot fire into the air, which he dodged... Her jaws opened wide....

"Come on," Harry hissed, swerving tantalizingly above her, "come on, come and get me...

up you get now. ."

And then she reared, spreading her great, black, leathery wings at last, as wide as those of a small airplane - and Harry dived. Before the dragon knew what he had done, or where he had disappeared to, he was speeding toward the ground as fast as he could go, toward the eggs now unprotected by her clawed front legs - he had taken his hands off his

Firebolt - he had seized the golden egg - And with a huge spurt of speed, he was off, he was soaring out over the stands, the heavy egg safely under his uninjured arm, and it was as though somebody had just turned the volume back up - for the first time, he became properly aware of the noise of the crowd, which was screaming and applauding as loudly as the Irish supporters at the World Cup - "Look at that!" Bagman was yelling. "Will you look at that! Our youngest champion is quickest to get his egg! Well, this is going to shorten the odds on Mr. Potter!"

Harry saw the dragon keepers rushing forward to subdue the Horntail, and, over at the entrance to the enclosure, Professor McGonagall, Professor Moody, and Hagrid hurrying to meet him, all of them waving him toward them, their smiles evident even from this distance. He flew back over the stands, the noise of the crowd pounding his eardrums, and came in smoothly to land, his heart lighter than it had been in weeks. . . . He had got through the first task, he had survived.

"That was excellent, Potter!" cried Professor McGonagall as he got off the Firebolt -which from her was extravagant praise. He noticed that her hand shook as she pointed

at his shoulder. "You'll need to see Madam Pomfrey before the judges give out your score..."

... Over there, she's had to mop up Diggory already... "

"Yeh did it, Harry!" said Hagrid hoarsely. "Yeh did it! An' agains' the Horntail an' all, an' yeh know Charlie said that was the wors' - "

"Thanks, Hagrid," said Harry loudly, so that Hagrid wouldn't blunder on and reveal that he had shown Harry the dragons beforehand.

Professor Moody looked very pleased too; his magical eye was dancing in its socket.

"Nice and easy does the trick, Potter," he growled.

"Right then, Potter, the first aid tent, please... " said Professor McGonagall.

Harry walked out of the enclosure, still panting, and saw Madam Pomfrey standing at the mouth of a second tent, looking worried.

"Dragons!" she said, in a disgusted tone, pulling Harry inside. The tent was divided into cubicles; he could make out Cedric's shadow through the canvas, but Cedric didn't seem to be badly injured; he was sitting up, at least. Madam Pomfrey examined Harry's shoulder, talking furiously all the while. "Last year dementors, this year dragons, what are they going to bring into this school next? You're very lucky... this is quite shallow... it'll need cleaning before I heal it up, though... "

She cleaned the cut with a dab of some purple liquid that smoked and stung, but then poked his shoulder with her wand, and he felt it heal instantly.

"Now, just sit quietly for a minute - sit! And then you can go and get your score."

She bustled out of the tent and he heard her go next door and say, "How does it feel now, Diggory?"

Harry didn't want to sit still: He was too full of adrenaline. He got to his feet, wanting to see what was going on outside, but before he'd reached the mouth of the tent, two people had come darting inside - Hermione, followed closely by Ron.

"Harry, you were brilliant!" Hermione said squeakily. There were fingernail marks on her face where she had been clutching it in fear. "You were amazing! You really were!"

But Harry was looking at Ron, who was very white and staring at Harry as though he were a ghost.

"Harry," he said, very seriously, "whoever put your name in that goblet - I - I reckon they're trying to do you in!"

It was as though the last few weeks had never happened - as though Harry were meeting Ron for the first time, right after he'd been made champion.

"Caught on, have you?" said Harry coldly. "Took you long enough."

Hermione stood nervously between them, looking from one to the other. Ron opened his mouth uncertainly. Harry knew Ron was about to apologize and suddenly he found he didn't need to hear it.

"It's okay," he said, before Ron could get the words out. "Forget it."

"No," said Ron, "I shouldn't've -"

"Forget it," Harry said.

Ron grinned nervously at him, and Harry grinned back. Hermione burst into tears.

"There's nothing to cry about!" Harry told her, bewildered.

"You two are so stupid!" she shouted, stamping her foot on the ground, tears splashing down her front. Then, before either of them could stop her, she had given both of them a hug and dashed away, now positively howling.



"Barking mad," said Ron, shaking his head. "Harry, c'mon, they'll be putting up your scores... "

Picking up the golden egg and his Firebolt, feeling more elated than he would have believed possible an hour ago, Harry ducked out of the tent, Ron by his side, talking fast.

"You were the best, you know, no competition. Cedric did this weird thing where he Transfigured a rock on the ground... turned it into a dog... he was trying to make the dragon go for the dog instead of him. Well, it was a pretty cool bit of Transfiguration, and it sort of worked, because he did get the egg, but he got burned as well - the dragon changed its mind halfway through and decided it would rather have him than the Labrador; he only just got away. And that Fleur girl tried this sort of charm, I think she was trying to put it into a trance - well, that kind of worked too, it went all sleepy, but then it snored, and this great jet of flame shot out, and her skirt caught fire - she put it out with a bit of water out of her wand. And Krum - you won't believe this, but he didn't even think of flying! He was probably the best after you, though.

Hit it with some sort of spell right in the eye. Only thing is, it went trampling around in agony and squashed half the real eggs - they took marks off for that, he wasn't supposed to do any damage to them."

Ron drew breath as he and Harry reached the edge of the enclosure. Now that the Horntail had been taken away, Harry could see where the five judges were sitting - right at the other end, in raised seats draped in gold.

"It's marks out of ten from each one," Ron said, and Harry squinting up the field, saw the first judge - Madame Maxime - raise her wand in the air. What looked like a long silver ribbon shot out of it, which twisted itself into a large figure eight.

"Not bad!" said Ron and the crowd applauded. "I suppose she took marks off for your shoulder. . .

Mr. Crouch came next. He shot a number nine into the air.

"Looking good!" Ron yelled, thumping Harry on the back.

Next, Dumbledore. He too put up a nine. The crowd was cheering harder than ever.

Ludo Bagman - ten.

"Ten?" said Harry in disbelief. "But... I got hurt... What's he playing at?"

"Harry, don't complain!" Ron yelled excitedly.

And now Karkaroff raised his wand. He paused for a moment, and then a number shot out of his wand too - four.

"What?" Ron bellowed furiously. "Four? You lousy, biased scum-bag, you gave Krum ten!"

But Harry didn't care, he wouldn't have cared if Karkaroff had given him zero; Ron's indignation on his behalf was worth about a hundred points to him. He didn't tell Ron this, of course, but his heart felt lighter than air as he turned to leave the enclosure.

And it wasn't just Ron... those weren't only Gryffindors cheering in the crowd. When it had come to it, when they had seen what he was facing, most of the school had been on his side as well as Cedric's... He didn't care about the Slytherins, he could stand whatever they threw at him now.

"You're tied in first place, Harry! You and Krum!" said Charlie Weasley, hurrying to meet them as they set off back toward the school. "Listen, I've got to run, I've got to go and send Mum an owl, I swore I'd tell her what happened - but that was unbelievable!

Oh yeah - and they told me to tell you you've got to hang around for a few more minutes..

... Bagman wants a word, back in the champions' tent."

Ron said he would wait, so Harry reentered the tent, which somehow looked quite different now: friendly and welcoming. He thought back to how he'd felt while dodging the Horntail, and compared it to the long wait before he'd walked out to face it.... There was no comparison; the wait had been immeasurably worse.

Fleur, Cedric, and Krum all came in together. One side of Cedric's face was covered in a thick orange paste, which was presumably mending his burn. He grinned at Harry when he saw him.

"Good one, Harry."

"And you," said Harry, grinning back.

"Well done, all of you!" said Ludo Bagman, bouncing into the tent and looking as pleased as though he personally had just got past a dragon. "Now, just a quick few words. You've got a nice long break before the second task, which will take place at half past nine on the morning of February the twenty-fourth - but we're giving you something to think about in the meantime! If you look down at those golden eggs you're all holding, you will see

that they open... see the hinges there? You need to solve the clue inside the egg - because it will tell you what the second task is, and enable you to prepare for it! All clear? Sure? Well, off you go, then!"

Harry left the tent, rejoined Ron, and they started to walk back around the edge of the forest, talking hard; Harry wanted to hear what the other champions had done in more detail. Then, as they rounded the clump of trees behind which Harry had first heard the dragons roar, a witch leapt out from behind them.

It was Rita Skeeter. She was wearing acid-green robes today; the Quick-Quotes Quill in her hand blended perfectly against them.

"Congratulations, Harry!" she said, beaming at him. "I wonder if you could give me a quick word? How you felt facing that dragon? How you feel now, about the fairness of the scoring?"

"Yeah, you can have a word," said Harry savagely. "Good-bye."

And he set off back to the castle with Ron.

(Rowling, 2000: 295-316)

## **Extracts from Naomi Novik's *His Majesty's Dragon***

### **Chapter 1**

Mr. Pollitt came down into the hold in his awkward way, clinging to the ladder edges with both hands and leaving bloody prints upon it; he was no kind of a sailor, having become a naval surgeon only at the late age of thirty, after some unspecified disappointments on land. He was nevertheless a genial man, well liked by the crew, even if his hand was not always the steadiest at the operating table. "Yes, sir?" he said, then saw the egg. "Good Lord above."

"It is a dragon egg, then?" Laurence said. It required an effort to restrain the triumph in his voice.

"Oh, yes indeed, Captain, the size alone shows that." Mr. Pollitt had wiped his hands on his apron and was already brushing more straw away from the top, trying to see the

extent. “My, it is quite hardened already; I wonder what they can have been thinking, so far from land.”

This did not sound very promising. “Hardened?” Laurence said sharply. “What does that mean?”

“Why, that it will hatch soon. I will have to consult my books to be certain, but I believe that Badke’s *Bestiary* states with authority that when the shell has fully hardened, hatching will occur within a week. What a splendid specimen, I must get my measuring cords.”

He bustled away, and Laurence exchanged a glance with Gibbs and Riley, moving closer so they might speak without being overheard by the lingering gawkers. “At least three weeks from Madeira with a fair wind, would you say?” Laurence said quietly.

“At best, sir,” Gibbs said, nodding.

“I cannot imagine how they came to be here with it,” Riley said. “What do you mean to do, sir?”

His initial satisfaction turning gradually into dismay as he realized the very difficult situation, Laurence stared at the egg blankly. Even in the dim lantern light, it shone with the warm lustre of marble. “Oh, I am damned if I know, Tom. But I suppose I will go and return the French captain his sword; it is no wonder he fought so furiously after all.”

Except of course he did know; there was only one possible solution, unpleasant as it might be to contemplate. Laurence watched broodingly while the egg was transferred, still in its crate, over to the *Reliant*: the only grim man, except for the French officers. He had granted them the liberty of the quarterdeck, and they watched the slow process glumly from the rail. All around them, smiles wreathed every sailor’s face, private, gloating smiles, and there was a great deal of jostling among the idle hands, with many unnecessary cautions and pieces of advice called out to the sweating group of men engaged in the actual business of the transfer.

The egg being safely deposited on the deck of the *Reliant*, Laurence took his own leave of Gibbs. “I will leave the prisoners with you; there is no sense in giving them a motive for some desperate attempt to recapture the egg,” he said. “Keep in company, as well as you can. However, if we are separated, we will rendezvous at Madeira. You have my most hearty congratulations, Captain,” he added, shaking Gibbs’s hand.

“Thank you, sir, and may I say, I am most sensible – very grateful –”, But here Gibbs’s eloquence, never in great supply, failed him; he gave up and merely stood beaming widely on Laurence and all the world, full of great goodwill.

The ships had been brought abreast for the transfer of the crate; Laurence did not have to take a boat, but only sprang across on the up-roll of the swell. Riley and the rest of his officers had already crossed back. He gave the order to make sail, and went directly below, to wrestle with the problem in privacy.

But no obliging alternative presented itself overnight. The next morning, he bowed to necessity and gave his orders, and shortly the midshipmen and lieutenants of the ship came crowding into his cabin, scrubbed and nervous in their best gear; this sort of mass summons was unprecedented, and the cabin was not quite large enough to hold them all comfortably. Laurence saw anxious looks on many faces, undoubtedly conscious of some private guilt, curiosity on others; Riley alone looked worried, perhaps suspecting something of Laurence’s intentions.

Laurence cleared his throat; he was already standing, having ordered his desk and chair removed to make more room, though he had kept back his inkstand and pen with several sheets of paper, now resting upon the sill of the stern windows behind him.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “you have all heard by now that we found a dragon egg aboard the prize; Mr. Pollitt has very firmly identified it for us.”

Many smiles and some surreptitious elbowing; the little midshipman Battersea piped up in his treble voice, “Congratulations, sir!” and a quick pleased rumble went around.

Laurence frowned; he understood their high spirits, and if the circumstances had been only a little different, he would have shared them. The egg would be worth a thousand times its weight in gold, brought safely to shore; every man aboard the ship would have shared in the bounty, and as captain he himself would have taken the largest share of the value.

The *Amitié*'s logs had been thrown overboard, but her hands had been less discreet than her officers, and Wells had learned enough from their complaints to explain the delay all too clearly. Fever among the crew, becalmed in the doldrums for the better part of a month, a leak in her water tanks leaving her on short water rations, and then at last the gale that they themselves had so recently weathered. It had been a string of exceptionally bad luck, and Laurence knew the superstitious souls of his men would quail at the idea that the *Reliant* was now carrying the egg that had undoubtedly been the cause of it.

He would certainly take care to keep that information from the crew, however; better by far that they not know of the long series of disasters which the *Amitié* had suffered. So after silence fell again, all Laurence said was simply, “Unfortunately, the prize had a very bad crossing of it. She must have expected to make landfall nearly a month ago, if not more, and the delay has made the circumstances surrounding the egg urgent.” There was puzzlement and incomprehension now on most faces, though looks of concert were beginning to spread, and he finished the matter off by saying, “In short, gentlemen, it is about to hatch.”

Another low murmur, this time disappointed, and even a few quiet groans; ordinarily he would have marked the offenders for a mild later rebuke, but as it was, he let them by. They would soon have more cause to groan. So far they had not yet understood what it meant; they merely made the mental reduction of the bounty on an unhatched egg to that paid for a feral dragonet, much less valuable.

“Perhaps not all of you are aware,” he said, silencing the whispers with a look, “that England is in a very dire situation as regards the Aerial Corps. Naturally, our handling is superior, and the Corps can outfly any other nation of the world, but the French can outbreed us two to one, and it is impossible to deny that they have better variety in their bloodlines. A properly harnessed dragon is worth at least a first-rate of one hundred guns to us, even a common Yellow Reaper or a three-ton Winchester, and Mr. Pollitt believes from the size and colour of the egg that this hatchling is a prime specimen, and very likely one of the rare large breeds.”

“Oh!” said Midshipman Carver, in tones of horror, as he took Laurence's meaning; he instantly went crimson as eyes went to him, and shut his mouth tight.

Laurence ignored the interruption; Riley would see Carver's grog stopped for a week without having to be told. The exclamation had at least prepared the others. “We must at least make the attempt to harness the beast,” he said. “I trust, gentlemen, that there is no man here who is not prepared to do his duty for England. The Corps may not be the sort of life that any of us has been raised to, but the Navy is no sinecure either, and there is not one of you who does not understand a hard service.”

“Sir,” said Lieutenant Fanshawe anxiously: he was a young man of very good family, the son of an earl. “Do you mean – that is, shall we all –“

There was an emphasis on that *all* which made it obviously a selfish question, and Laurence felt himself go near purple with anger. He snapped, "We all shall, indeed, Mr. Fanshawe, unless there is any man here who is too much of a coward to make the attempt, and in that case may explain himself to a court-martial when we put in at Madeira." He sent an angry glare around the room, and no one else met his eye or offered a protest.

He was all the more infuriated for understanding the sentiment, and for sharing it himself. Certainly no man not raised to the life could be easy at the prospect of suddenly becoming an aviator, and he loathed the necessity of asking his officers to face it. It meant, after all, an end to any semblance of ordinary life. It was not like sailing, where you might hand your ship back to the Navy and be set ashore, often whether you liked it or not.

Even in times of peace, a dragon could not be put into dock, nor allowed to wander loose, and to keep a full-grown beast of twenty tons from doing exactly as it pleased took very nearly the full attention of an aviator and a crew of assistants besides. They could not really be managed by force, and were finicky about their handlers; some would not accept management at all, even when new-hatched, and none would accept it after their first feeding. A feral dragon could be kept in the breeding grounds by the constant provision of food, mates, and comfortable shelter, but it could not be controlled outside, and it would not speak with men.

So if a hatchling let you put it into harness, duty forever tied you to the beast. An aviator could not easily manage any sort of estate, nor raise a family, nor go into society to any real extent. They lived as men apart, and largely outside the law, for you could not punish an aviator without losing the use of his dragon. In peacetime they lived in a sort of wild, outrageous libertinage in small enclaves, generally in the most remote and inhospitable places in all Britain, where the dragons could be given at least some freedom. Thought he men of the Corps were honoured without question for their courage and devotion to duty, the prospect of entering their ranks could not be appealing to any gentleman raised up in respectable society.

Yet they sprang from good families, gentlemen's sons handed over at the age of seven to be raised to the life, and it would be an impossible insult to the Corps to have anyone other than one of his own officers attempt the harnessing. And if one had to be asked to take the risk, then all; though if Fanshawe had not spoken in so unbecoming a way, Laurence would have liked to keep Carver out of it, as he knew the boy had a poor head for heights, which struck him as a grave impediment for an aviator. But in the atmosphere created by the pitiful request, it would seem like favouritism, and that would not do.

He took a deep breath, still simmering with anger, and spoke again. "No man here has any training for the task, and the only fair means of assigning the duty is by lot. Naturally, those gentlemen with family are excused. Mr. Pollitt," he said, turning to the surgeon, who had a wife and four children in Derbyshire, "I hope that you will draw the name for us. Gentlemen, you will each write your name on a sheet here, and cast it into this bag." He suited word to deed, tore off the part of the sheet with his own name, folded it, and put it into the small sack.

Riley stepped forward at once, and the others followed suit obediently; under Laurence's cold eye, Fanshawe flushed and wrote his name with a shaking hand. Carver, on the other hand, wrote bravely, though with a pale cheek; and at the last Battersea, unlike virtually all the others, was incautious in tearing the sheet, so that his

piece was unusually large; he could be heard murmuring quietly to Carver, “Would it not be famous to ride a dragon?”

Laurence shook his head a little at the thoughtlessness of youth; yet it might indeed be better were one of the younger men chosen, for the adjustment would be easier. Still, it would be hard to see one of the boys sacrificed to the task, and to face the outrage of his family. But the same would be true of any man here, including himself.

Though he had done his best not to consider the consequences from a selfish perspective, now that the fatal moment was at hand he could not entirely suppress his own private fears. One small bit of paper might mean that wreck of his career, the upheaval of his life, disgrace in his father’s eyes. And, too, there was Edith Galman to think of; but if he were to begin excusing his men for some half-formed attachment, not binding, none of them would be left. In any case, he could not imagine excusing himself from this selection for any reason; this was not something he could ask his men to face, and avoid himself.

He handed the bag to Mr. Pollitt and made an effort to stand at his ease and appear unconcerned, clasping his hands closely behind his back. The surgeon shook the sack in his hand twice, thrust his hand in without looking, and drew out a small folded sheet. Laurence was ashamed to feel a sensation of profound relief even before the name was read: the sheet was folded over once more than his own entry had been.

The emotion lasted only a moment. “Jonathan Carver,” Pollitt said. Fanshawe could be heard letting out an explosive breath, Battersea sighing, and Laurence bowed his head, silently cursing Fanshawe yet again; so promising a young officer, and so likely to be useless in the Corps.

“Well; there we have it,” he said; there was nothing else to be done. “Mr. Carver, you are relieved of regular duty until the hatching; you will instead consult with Mr. Pollitt on the process to follow for the harnessing.”

“Yes, sir,” the boy responded, a little faintly.

(...)

The next week passed uncomfortably. It was impossible not to perceive Carter’s anxiety, especially as the week wore on and the armourer’s attempt at the harness began to take on a recognizable shape, or the unhappiness of his friends and the men of his gun-crew, for he was a popular fellow, and his difficulty with heights was no great secret.

Mr. Pollitt was the only one in good humour, being not very well informed as to the state of the emotions on the ship, and very interested in the harnessing process. He spent a great deal of time inspecting the egg, going so far as to sleep and eat beside the crate in the gunroom, much to the distress of the officers who slept there: his snores were penetrating, and their berth was already crowded. Pollitt was entirely unconscious of their silent disapproval, and he kept his vigil until the morning when, with a wretched lack of sympathy, he cheerfully announced that the first cracks had begun to show.

Laurence at once ordered the egg uncrated and brought up on deck. A special cushion had been made for it, out of old sailcloth stuffed with straw; this was placed on a couple of lockers lashed together, and the egg gingerly laid upon it. Mr. Rabson, the armourer, brought up the harness: it was a makeshift affair of leather straps held by dozens of buckles, as he had not known enough about the proportions of dragon to make it exact. He stood waiting with it, off to the side, while Carver positioned himself before the egg. Laurence ordered the hands to clear the space around the egg to leave more room; most

of them chose to climb into the rigging or onto the roof of the roundhouse, the better to see the process.

It was a brilliantly sunny day, and perhaps the warmth and light were encouraging to the long-confined hatchling; the egg began to crack more seriously about as soon as it was laid out. There was a great deal of fidgeting and noisy whispering up above, which Laurence chose to ignore, and a few gasps when the first glimpse of movement could be seen inside: a clawed wing tip poking out, talons scrabbling out of a different crack.

The end came abruptly: the shell broke almost straight down the middle and the two halves were flung apart onto the deck, as if by the occupant's impatience. The dragonet was left amid bits and pieces, shaking itself out vigorously on the pillow. It was still covered with the slime of the interior, and shone wet and glossy under the sun; its body was a pure, untinted black from nose to tail, and a sight of wonder ran throughout the crew as it unfurled its large, six-spined wings like a lady's fan, the bottom edge dapples with oval markings in grey and dark glowing blue.

Laurence himself was impressed; he had never seen a hatchling before, though he had been at several fleet actions and witnessed the grown dragons of the Corps striking in support. He did not have the knowledge to identify the breed, but it was certainly an exceedingly rare one: he did not recall ever seeing a black dragon on either side, and it seemed quite large, for a fresh-hatched creature. That only made the matter more urgent. "Mr. Carver, when you are ready," he said.

Carver, very pale, stepped towards the creature, holding out his hand, which trembled visibly. "Good dragon," he said; the words sounded rather like a question. "Nice dragon."

The dragonet paid him no attention whatsoever. It was occupied in examining itself and picking off bits of shell that had adhered to its hide, in a fastidious sort of way. Though it was barely the size of a large dog, the five talons upon each claw were still an inch long and impressive; Carver looked at them anxiously and stopped an arm's length away. Here he stood waiting dumbly; the dragon continued to ignore him, and presently he cast an anxious look of appeal over his shoulder at where Laurence stood with Mr. Pollitt.

"Perhaps if he were to speak to it again," Mr. Pollitt said dubiously.

"Pray do so, Mr. Carver," Laurence said.

The boy nodded, but even as he turned back, the dragonet forestalled him by climbing down from its cushion and leaping onto the deck past him. Carver turned around with hand still outstretched and an almost comical look of surprise, and the other officers, who had drawn closer in the excitement of the hatching, backed away in alarm.

"Hold your positions," Laurence snapped. "Mr. Riley, look to the hold." Riley nodded and took up position in front of the opening, to prevent the dragonet's going down below.

But the dragonet instead turned to exploring the deck; it flicked out a long, narrow forked tongue as it walked, lightly touching everything in its reach, and looked about itself with every evidence of curiosity and intelligence. Yet it continued to ignore Carver, despite the boy's repeated attempts to catch its attention, and seemed equally uninterested in the other officers. Though it did occasionally rear up onto its hind legs to peer at a face more closely, it did as much to examine a pulley, or the hanging hourglass, at which it batted curiously.

Laurence felt his heart sinking; no one could blame him, precisely, if the dragonet did not show any inclination for an untrained sea-officer, but to have a truly rare dragonet caught in the shell go feral would certainly feel like a blow. They had arranged the

matter from common knowledge, bits and pieces out of Pollitt's books, and from Pollitt's own imperfect recollection of a hatching which he had once observed; now Laurence feared there was some essential step they had missed. It had certainly seemed strange to him when he learned that the dragonet should be able to begin talking at once, freshly hatched. They had not found anything in the texts describing any specific invitation or trick to induce the dragonet to speak, but he should certainly be blamed, and blame himself, if it turned out there had been something omitted.

A low buzz of conversation was spreading as the officers and hands felt the moment passing. Soon he would have to give it up and take thought to confining the beast, to keep it from flying off after they fed it. Still exploring, the dragon came past him; it sat up on its haunches to look at him inquisitively, and Laurence gazed down at it in unconcealed sorrow and dismay.

It blinked at him; he noticed its eyes were a deep blue and slit-pupiled, and then it said, "Why are you frowning?"

Silence fell at once, and it was only with difficulty that Laurence kept from gaping at the creature. Carver, who must have been thinking himself reprieved by now, was standing behind the dragon, mouth open; his eyes met Laurence's with a desperate look, but he drew up his courage and stepped forward, ready to address the dragon once more. Laurence stared at the dragon, at the pale, frightened boy, and then took a deep breath and said to the creature, "I beg your pardon, I did not mean to. My name is Will Laurence; and yours?"

No discipline could have prevented the murmur of shock which went around the deck. The dragonet did not seem to notice, but puzzled at the question for several moments, and finally said, with a dissatisfied air, "I do not have a name."

Laurence had read over Pollitt's books enough to know how he should answer; he asked, formally, "May I give you one?"

It – or rather he, for the voice was definitely masculine – looked him over again, paused to scratch at an apparently flawless spot on his back, then said with unconvincing indifference, "If you please."

And now Laurence found himself completely blank. He had not given any real thought to the process of harnessing at all, beyond doing his best to see that it occurred, and he had no idea what an appropriate name might be for a dragon. After an awful moment of panic, his mind somehow linked dragon and ship, and he blurted out, "Temeraire," thinking of the noble dreadnought which he had seen launched, many years before: the same elegant gliding motion.

He cursed himself silently for having nothing thought out, but it had been said, and at least it was an honourable name; after all, he was a Navy man, and it was only appropriate – But he paused here in his own thoughts, and stared at the dragonet in mounting horror: of course he was not a Navy man anymore; he could not be, with a dragon, and the moment it accepted the harness from his hands, he would be undone.

The dragon, evidently perceiving nothing of his feelings, said, "Temeraire? Yes. My name is Temeraire." He nodded, an odd gesture with the head bobbing at the end of a long neck, and said more urgently, "I am hungry."

A newly hatched dragon would fly away immediately after being fed, if not restrained; only if the creature might be persuaded to accept the restraint willingly would he ever be controllable, or useful in battle. Rabson was standing by gaping and appalled, and had not come forward with the harness; Laurence had to beckon him over. His palms were sweating, and the metal and leather felt slippery as the man put the harness into his hands. He gripped it tightly and said, remembering at the last moment to use the new



name, "Temeraire, would you be so good as to let me put this on you? Then we can make you fast to the deck here, and bring you something to eat."

Temeraire inspected the harness which Laurence held out to him, his flat tongue slipping out to taste it. "Very well," he said, and stood expectantly. Resolutely not thinking beyond the immediate task, Laurence knelt and fumbled with the straps and buckles, carefully passing them about the smooth, warm body, keeping well clear of the wings.

(Novik, 2006: 7-21)

## **Extracts from Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon***

### **Chapter 12: The Green Death**

It is one thing to approach a primeval nightmare when you are part of a crowd of four hundred people. It is quite another to do so on your own. Hiccup had to force himself to put one foot in front of the other.

Stoick offered to send a guard of his finest soldiers, but Hiccup preferred to go alone. "Less chance of anybody doing anything Heroic and stupid," he said.

Although this is the part of the story that the bards tend to focus on as the bit where Hiccup was particularly Heroic, I do not agree. It is a lot easier to be brave when you know you have no alternative. Hiccup knew in his heart of hearts that the Monster intended to kill them all anyway. So he didn't have a lot to lose.

Nonetheless, he was sweating as he peered over the edge of the cliff. There, below him, was the impossibly large Dragon, filling up the beach. It appeared to be asleep.

But an eerie singing was coming from the direction of its belly. The song went something like this:

Watch me, Gnat Destroyer, as settle down to lunch, killer whales an tasty 'cos thry've got a lot of crunch. Gnat wharks sharks are scrumptious ,but here's a little tip: Those teeny weeny pointy teeth can give a nasty nip....

How odd, thought Hiccup, he can sing with his mouth shut.

Hiccup nearly jumped clear out of his leggings when the Dragon opened both his crocodile eyes and spoke directly to him.

"Why so odd?" said the Dragon, who appeared to be amused. "A dragon with Ms eyes shut is not necessarily asleep, so it follows that a dragon with his mouth shut is not necessarily singing;. All is not what it seems. That noise that you hear is not me at all. THAT, my Hero, is tie sound. of a singing suffer."

"A singing suffer?" echoed Hiccup, quickly remembering that you should never, ever, look into the eyes of a large, malevolent Dragon like this one.

This was a mistake, as Hiccup suddenly realized that the Dragon was holding a herd of pathetically bleating sheep captive under one massive claw. He pretended to allow one of them to escape, let the poor animal practically reach the safety of the rocks, then picked it up by its wool with a delicate pincer movement and tossed it way, way up into the air.

This was a trick Hiccup had often done himself, but with blackberries. Now the Dragon threw back his great head and the woolly speck fell down into the terrible jaws, which

closed behind it with a mighty crash. There was a horrible sound of crunching as he chewed and swallowed the unfortunate sheep.

The Dragon saw Hiccup watching him in fascinated horror and he brought his ridiculously enormous head down closer to the boy. Hiccup nearly passed out as his offensive Dragon breath poured out in a disgusting, yellow-green vapor. It was the stench of DEATH itself -- a deep, head-spinning stench of decaying matter; of rotting haddock heads and sweating whale; of long-dead shark and despairing souls. The revolting steam curled its way around the boy in repellent coils and wormed its way up into his nose until he coughed and spluttered.

"Some poeple say you should de-bone a sheep before you eat it," sneered the Dragon confidentially, "but I think it adds just a nice crunch to what would otherwise be a bit of a soggy meal ...."

The Dragon burped. The belch came out as a perfect loop of fire that soared through the air like a smoke ring and landed on the heather surrounding Hiccup, setting it alight, so that for a moment he was standing right in the middle of a circle of bright green flames. The heather was damp, however, and the blaze flared for only a few moments, then extinguished itself.

"Ooops," giggled the Dragon evilly. "Pardon me ... A little party trick...."

He then placed one gigantic claw against the edge of the cliff that Hiccup was standing on.

"Humans, however," continued the Dragon thoughtfully, "humans really should be filleted. The spine in particular can be very tickly as it goes down the throat...."

As the Dragon spoke, he extended his claws, the talons slowly emerging from the thick stumps of his fingers and rising up until they resembled nothing more than gigantic razors, six feet wide and twenty feet long, with points on the end like a surgeon's scalpel.

"Removing the human backbone is a delicate job," hissed the Dragon nastily, "but one that I am particularly good at... a small incision at the back of tie neck" -- he gestured at Hiccup's neck -- "a swift stroke downward, then filck it out. . . it's practically painless. For ME ..."

Hiccup was thinking very fast indeed. There is nothing like staring Death in the face for speeding up your thoughts. What did he know about dragons that could work against an Invincible Monster like this one?

He could see the Dragon Motivation page he had written in his mind's eye. GRATITUDE: dragons are never grateful. FEAR: clearly hopeless. GREED: not a good idea to appeal to at this particular point in time. VANITY and REYENGE: could be useful but he couldn't quite think how. That left JOKES AND RIDDLING TALK. This Dragon looked a bit exalted for jokes. But from his manner of talking he clearly fancied himself as a bit of a philosopher. Maybe Hiccup could buy himself some time if he engaged him in a riddling conversation. . . .

"I've heard of singing for your suffer," said Hiccup, "but what is a singing supper?"

"A good question," said the Dragon, in surprise. "An EXCELLENT question, in fact." He drew back his claws and Hiccup sighed with relief. "It's a long time since the supper has shown such intelligence. They're generally too bound up with their little lives to bother with the Really Big Questions.

"Now let me think," said the Dragon and, as he thought, he forked a protesting sheep on the end of a talon, then chewed on it reflectively. Hiccup was sorry for the sheep but deeply grateful that it wasn't him disappearing down the ravenous reptilian gullet.

"How shall I put it, to a brain so much) small er and less clever than mine.... Tie thing is, we are all, in a sense, supper. Walking, talking, breathing suppers, that's what we are. Take you, for instance. YOU are about to be eaten by ME, so that makes you supper. That's obvious. But even a murderous carnivore like myself will be a supper for worms one day. We're all snatching precious moments from the peaceful jaws of time," said the Dragon cheerfully.

"That's why it's so important," he continued, "for the supper to sing as beautifully, as it can."

He gestured to his stomach, from where the voice could still be heard singing, though more and more faintly.

Humans can be bland, but if you have some salt to hand, A little hit of brim, will make them taste. divi-I-I-I-ne....

"That PARTICULAR, supper," said the Dragon, "that you hear singing now, was a dragon rather smaller than me, but very full of himself. I ate him about half an hour ago."

"Isn't that cannibalism?" asked Hiccup.

"It's delicious," said the Dragon. "Besides, you can't call an ARTIST like myself a CANNIBAL." He sounded a bit exasperated now. "You are very rude for such a small person. What do you want, Little Supper?"

"I have come," said Hiccup, "to find out whether you come in PEACE or in WAR."

"Oh, peace, I think," said the Dragon. "I am going to kill you though," he added.

"All of us?" asked Hiccup.

"You first," said the Dragon kindly. "Anil then everybody else when I've had a little nap and got my appetite bad;. It takes a little while to wake up completely from a Sleep Coma."

"But it's all so unfair!" said Hiccup. "Why do YOU get to eat everybody, just because you're bigger than everybody else?"

"It's the way of the world," said the Dragon. "Besides, you'll find that you come round to my point of view once you're inside me. That's the marvellous thing about digestion.... But where are my manners? Let me introduce myself. I am the Green Death. What is your name, Little Supper?"

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third," said Hiccup.

And the most extraordinary thing happened.

As Hiccup said his name the Green Death trembled, as if a sudden wind had made him shiver. Neither the Green Death nor Hiccup noticed.

"Hmmm .. .," said the Green Death. "I'm sure I've heard that name somewhere before. But it's rather a mouthful so I shall just call you Little Supper. Now, Little Supper, before I eat you, tell me your problem."

"My problem?" asked Hiccup.

"That's right," said the Dragon. "Your Why-Can't-I-More- Like- My-Father? problem Your It's-Harh-to-Be-a-Hero problem. Your Snotlout-Would-Make-a-Better-Chief-Than-Me problem. I have helped. the problems of many a Supper. Some-how meeting a Really Big problem like myself seems to put everything else in proportion."

"Let me get this straight," said Hiccup. "You know all about my father, and me not being a Hero and everything ~"

"I can see things like that," said the Green Death modestly.

"-and you want me to tell you my problems and then you're going to eat me?"

"We're back at the beginning again," sighed the Green Death. "We're all going to be eaten SOMETIME. You can win yourself some extra time, though, if you're a smart little crabstick. A few scraps from the burning...."

The Green Death yawned.

"I'm suddenly rather tired," he said. "You ARE; a clever little crabstick, you've kept me talking for AGES. . . ." and the Dragon yawned again. "I'm too tired to eat you right now, you'll have to come back in a couple of hours ... and I'll tell you how to deal with your problem then. I have a feeling I can help you... ."

And the terrible monster really did fall asleep this time, and snored most heavily. His great claws relaxed and fell open and the remaining sheep, their woolly sides trembling with terror, scrambled over the tops of the terrible talons and bolted up the cliff path.

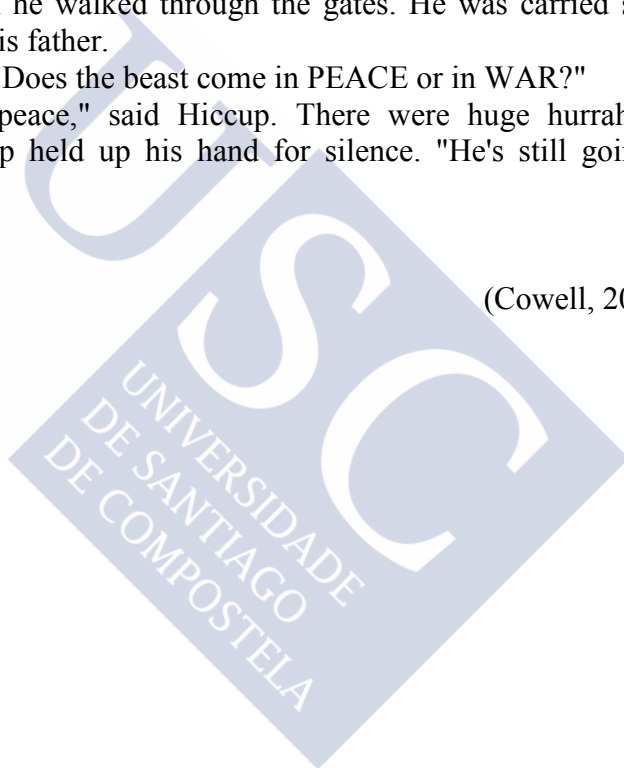
Hiccup stood watching the Dragon thoughtfully for a second, then he trudged slowly back through the heather toward the village.

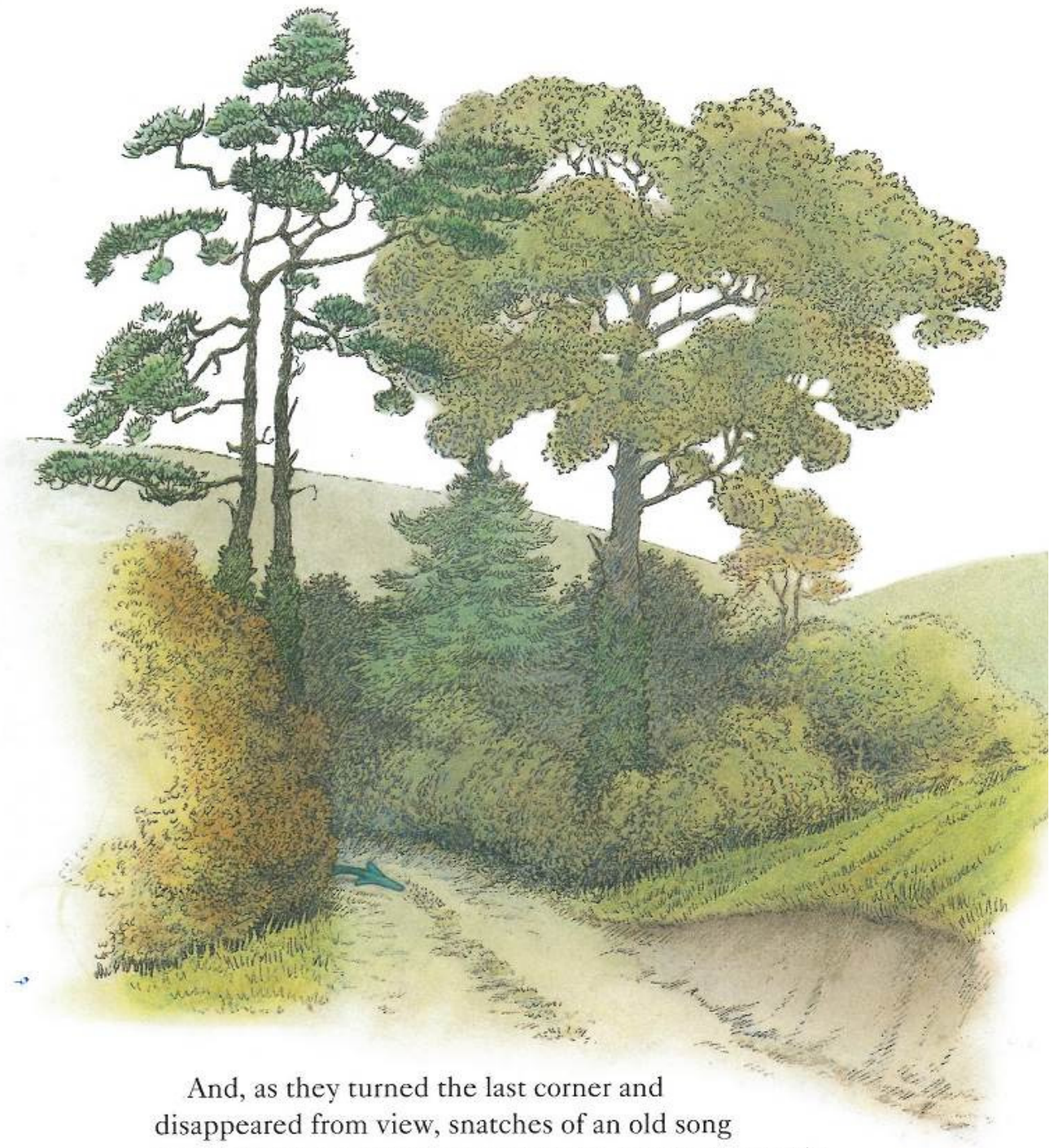
Everybody cheered when he walked through the gates. He was carried shoulder high and set down in front of his father.

"Well, son," said Stoick. "Does the beast come in PEACE or in WAR?"

"He says he comes in peace," said Hiccup. There were huge hurrahs and heavy stampings of feet. Hiccup held up his hand for silence. "He's still going to kill us, though."

(Cowell, 2010: 155-165)





And, as they turned the last corner and disappeared from view, snatches of an old song were borne back on the night breeze. I can't be certain which of them was singing, but I *think* it was the Dragon!

Last sentences of Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*, describing how the three friends (the boy, the dragon, and St. George) walk away together (illustration: Inga Moore).