

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

(How has the Germanic Dragon influenced its Modern Descendants?)

being a Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of

the requirements for the Degree of

(Master of Arts by Research)

in the University of Hull

by

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## Introduction

Dragons are the quintessential mythical creature. There are few people that do not know what is being referred to when dragons are mentioned. Modern writers have added to the dragon's appearance over time, some to the point that the dragon is beyond recognition. However the archetype is of the large beast with serpentine looks, the ability to fly, huge size and devastating fire breath. This archetype has been captured in various forms of literature from Tolkien through to George R. R. Martin. Predominantly, they are claimed by the fantasy genre, works including Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*, George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, the works of Tolkien to name a few, all feature with similar degree dragons, their history and their abilities. However the modern dragon so well beloved of modern literature and of modern film and television, owes its history to the Germanic Dragon. Tina Hanlon in her article *The Taming of the Dragon in Twentieth Century Picture Books* gives an extensive list of ways in which dragons are depicted, through illustration, in children's literature. The most striking aspect of her analysis was the conclusion she drew from examining so many examples of tame dragons. She states:

'In the century since Tolkien was a boy, we may have had fun meeting some of the more self-respecting friendly dragons and parodying the clichéd motifs of dragon lore. But the most satisfying books about dragons are those that celebrate the power of the imagination and dramatize without scorn or condescension our ongoing struggle to face the terrifying and magnificent dragons around us and within us.' (Hanlon, 2003 :22)

The dragon in the fantasy genre is as typical, sometimes stereotypical as aliens to science-fiction. However Hanlon is correct in her belief that in spite of the fun dragons that children engage with in their literature, those that are most remembered are indeed 'the terrifying and magnificent.' The most stunning and memorable dragons of modern literature appear to be

the dragons that reside in Middle-Earth, inspired by the Germanic dragons of Norse Mythology and Old English literature.

To identify what of the Germanic dragon inspires so many fantasy writers, the most important dragons must be identified. This therefore requires what defines a *Germanic* dragon and more importantly, what makes one dragon so much more infamous than another?

The definition used for the Germanic Dragon is a dragon that appears in a significant tale of Old English or Old Norse Literature or one which has some cosmological significance. While a number of Norse sagas feature dragons, some are more memorable than others. Tolkien defines two aspects of the dragon in his criticism of *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* he explains of *Beowulf's* dragon:

‘This dragon is a real worm, with a bestial life and thought of his own, but the conception, none the less, approaches *draconitas* rather than *draco*: a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the indiscriminating fortune of life that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life) (Tolkien, 2002: 114).

To draw distinction between the dragon-like and the dragon as a beast clearly defines the definition of a Germanic dragon. The ultimate combination of the dragon persona and the dragon beast creates the most memorable monsters created in Norse mythology and Old English literature. Many of the lesser dragons encountered in the sagas lack the *draconitas*. While they are fearsome beasts that are battled by brave heroes, nothing about them is truly distinctive. The four dragons that stand out as best representatives of both aspects are *Beowulf's* Dragon, Fafnir, Jormungandr and Nidhogg.

These individual dragons are immediately identifiable and provide the basis for the most important aspects of a legendary dragon and therefore the most likely aspects to inspire their modern descendants. The dragon's anatomy provides ample analysis for the *draco* aspect of

each, their personality as depicted through dialogue (if available) and their actions will help define the draconitas.

The difficulty of the analysis comes when selecting modern dragons for comparison. Fantasy literature is so full of dragons of various type and persona, however many share the same source of inspiration. Tolkien's creation of Middle Earth altered the fantasy genre in a fundamental way, giving it a credibility suitable for adults and not just children. Furthermore, some modern writers have sought inspiration from the eastern dragon archetype. These dragon hybrids are inappropriate for comparison as the Eastern dragon has different tropes, being more allegorical and bearing more complex personalities to the Germanic dragon so cannot be used.

The difficulty of assessing the influence of the Eastern Dragon, in other words, dragons that are predominant in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese literature is first and foremost, these dragons have origins in countries where the language is vastly different from English. English can be traced back through the Germanic and Latin roots that has long been well established. The linguistic similarities can enable the translation of the Norse texts and Old English much more accurate than attempting to translate for example ancient Chinese back to modern and then into English. What was a feature of the eastern dragon may easily be lost in translation. Furthermore, the Eastern dragon's symbolism is much more complex than the European and requires its own in depth analysis before a comparison can be made.

Furthermore, many authors frequently uses hybridised versions of dragons, some that have the appearance of the European fused with the personality of the Eastern, assuming that the Eastern dragon's personality is correctly established. Hybridisation potentially is responsible for making dragons reasonable, rational and almost unrecognisable from their progenitors. Therefore, the extent of hybridisation will not be discussed and ultimately does not need to be because there are no rules to depicting a dragon.

However, Tolkien's dragons are free from hybridisation and would appear to be directly influenced by the Germanic dragons. One other dragon can serve to lend a true comparison and that is the Reluctant Dragon from the short story of the same name by Kenneth Grahame. *The Reluctant Dragon* is a parody of the St. George myth. It is a children's story so provides a unique setting to develop the reluctant dragon's character which can be an interesting comparison for the Germanic dragon.

#### The *Beowulf* dragon

Known from a single manuscript dating from around the eleventh century, *Beowulf* tells of the heroic feats of the eponymous Beowulf who rises to become king after defeating two ogres, Grendel and his mother. The climactic finale involves Beowulf fighting a fire-breathing dragon after it destroyed much of Beowulf's home, owing to a thief stealing from the dragon's horde. Beowulf is clearly based on an older story and references the dragonslayer Sigemund, though in the *Volsunga Saga*, it was Sigurd that was the dragonslayer. The reference perhaps reconciles the older legend and the poem. Aligning Beowulf to Sigemund: 'æþelinges bearn, ana geneðde/ frecne dæde[...]draca morðre swealt.' (888-892) 'A prince's son, had ventured alone on that daring deed [...] the dragon died a violent death' (Swanton, 1997: 77). The reference to Sigemund is intended to flatter Beowulf and praise his courage that is paralleled in Sigemund's exploits. For the audience and reader, this is a metaphor that describes Beowulf and the comparison, though unnecessary, is like a public proclamation, in case anyone doubts it. It also foreshadows Beowulf's eventual meeting with the dragon.

As with other Germanic dragons, the *Beowulf* dragon is a fire breather and spits poison. Beowulf knows 'ac ic ðær heaðufyres hates wene, / oreðes ond attres;' (2522-2523) 'I expect hot battle-fire and poisonous breath' (Swanton, 1997: 155). It is also capable of flight. This dragon is suitably armed not just with the mortal weapons of real world predators, tusks and

venom, but also supernatural weapons, fire and flight. This dragon naturally is synonymous with violence, however only when provoked. M. Amodio erroneously states that the dragon is 'even in death, so far outside the realm of human comprehension that the Geats cannot even attempt to bring it within their society.' (Amodio, 1995: 67) Amodio argues that the dragon's lack of familiarization compared to Grendel, for example, makes it an unknowable quantity in the story and therefore 'the audience must actively participate in the narrative process (filling in what in Iserian terms would be a significant gap of indeterminacy) by fleshing out the creatures in idiosyncratic and terrifying detail' (Amodio, 1995: 66). Amodio's argument postulates that this lacks objectivity of interpretation. He suggests that the dragon's image, because its description is limited, is ultimately the product of the reader's imagination.

However, the lack of detail about the dragon is as a result of the author or *sceop* assuming its anatomical traits would be common knowledge. This is due to the belief that dragons existed at the time of composition. Furthermore, their likeness is found on numerous archaeological finds across the Viking and Anglo-Saxon Ages it would be difficult to assume there was a person living at the time who didn't understand what a dragon was or what it looked like. It is also difficult to understand the need to examine the dragon closely when Beowulf has just died. In spite of this, the *Beowulf* dragon is detailed enough to make the reader appreciate what it looks like and to understand the ferocity it has.

The dragon is depicted as an army unto itself with each aspect of its anatomy suitably answering a military tactic. The dragon's ability to fly makes it a threat to any earthbound opponent. Its fire can destroy virtually any organic material and the poison can be regarded as an internal weapon that affects a warrior's ability to function normally. The dragon is said to be 'se wæs fiftiges fotgemeances/ lang on legere' (3042) It measured fifty feet long as it lay.' (Swanton, 1997: 179) Hilda Ellis Davidson in her article *The Hill of the Dragon*, compares the length to a sperm whale, giving Beowulf's dragon a weighty real life basis for

comparison. Size and strength create a perfect military weapon and therefore a foe worth more than any army. The supernatural ability to breathe fire, sets the dragon apart from creatures that are based on real life animals, therefore the supernatural ability can be limitless in its devastation. It cannot be underlined enough how powerful an enemy the dragon is, ergo, how incredible the human is that chooses to face it. It would seem somewhat illogical that a single individual (in *Beowulf*'s case, two people) would choose to face such a gigantic monster alone, however it appears that the dragon becomes a measure for the greatness for the hero they oppose.

Furthermore, the dragon displays a sense of excitement when considering the prospect of battle as 'hwæðre wiges gefeh, beaduwe weorces;' (2298-2299), 'it rejoiced in anticipation of conflict, an act of war;' (Swanton, 1997: 145). Ultimately this line suggests that, while the dragon is a victim of theft and therefore injustice, it isn't particular about retrieving the cup, it just wants to exact revenge. This mirrors the intellect and prophetic knowledge of Fafnir. If the *Beowulf* dragon anticipates war, it must reason or have prior knowledge of this. This path of logic can also be interpreted as prophesying, again tying *Beowulf* and the dragon to the weaving of fate. From this, *Beowulf*'s dragon has as part of its personality a desire for chaos, battle and violence. From this, it can be deduced that *Beowulf*'s dragon has a sense of, if not just bloodlust, then at least eagerness to prove itself. Therefore, the Germanic dragon's persona somewhat echoes the tradition that a man's reputation in life is an important legacy after death as stated in '*Havamal*'

'The self must also die;

But the glory of reputation never dies,

For the man that can get himself a good one' (406-408).

Arguably, this humanizes the dragon and is a subtle deviation from the probable intention that the dragon is willing to fight only because it is written to do so. Having human

personality traits is not unusual for Germanic dragons. Often they are gifted with superior knowledge and wisdom compared to mundane creatures such as horses or wolves. Giving them human qualities such as a sense of vengeance and pride makes them a frightening foe that are both physically and mentally superior to humans.

The fact that the dragon makes its home in a barrow is interesting. The dragon's situation is briefly explained:

‘He gesecean sceall

hord on hrusan, þær he hæþan gold

warað wintrum frod; ne byð him wihte ðy sel.’ (2275-2277)

‘It is its nature to seek out a hoard in the earth where wise with winters, it guards heathen gold; it is none the better for that’ (Swanton, 1997: 143). This suggests that dragons are more content to own and guard treasure than make it themselves. Unlike dwarves, the dragon does not mine and forge treasure, it seeks it out. Furthermore the Gnostic verses that explain the nature of things as they should be state ‘Draca sceal on hlæwe, frōd, frætwum wlanc.’(26-27) ‘Dragon must live in mound, old, proud in his adornments.’ (Hamer, 1970: 111) The dragon actively sought out the burial mound and protects the treasure as if it owns it. The dragon here can represent the consequences of grave robbery and thereby act as a deterrent moral that would have been upheld during the Viking Age.

Furthermore, the Norse word for ghost or spirit is ‘Draugr’ and seems very close to Dragon. It is important to note that draugr and dragon are not interchangeable, as draugr have their own mythology. A useful similarity can be drawn from *Grettis Saga*, ‘There on the ness stands a mound [...] and in it was laid Kar the Old, Thorfinn’s father; first of all he and his son had only one farm on the island, but after Kar died he has haunted the place,’ (Faulkes, 2001: 104) Kar becomes a draugr and haunts the barrow presumably to prevent intrusion. The dragon is not a vengeful spirit as the dragon is not born into the barrow, but more that it is a



personified consequence of grave robbery. This has extended into the depiction of dragons as a symbol of greed.

In Hilda Ellis' article *Hoard of Nibelungs*, she implies that 'There is undoubtedly a link between the menacing dragon in his lair and the dead man transformed into a dangerous *draugr*, implied if not actually stated in *Beowulf* when the last survivor of the owners of the treasure apparently becomes a dragon after death and dwells in the burial mound.' (Ellis, 1942: 476) While the role of the dragon and the draugr do bear similarities, both associated with death and the burial mound, it is erroneous to assume they are inter-linked. The dragon in *Beowulf* 'seeks out barrows' whereas the draugr in *Grettis Saga* was already in the burial mound once he'd died. There is no evidence in *Beowulf* to suggest the last owner became the dragon as he is said to simply have moved away and died.

Dragons in old English were also called 'wyrn' from which comes the English 'worm' as in earthworm or maggot, most likely to be found in a grave. From a literary perspective all these etymological similarities give the dragon the motif of death. No ill seems to come to the dragon for invading a barrow which may be perceived as disturbing the dead. Possibly, the Vikings and Anglo-Saxons believed this to be part of a dragon's nature that it *should* exist in a burial mound. The role the dragon fills in the world of the Norse mind is that they live to guard the hoard of the deceased and will violently defend it if necessary.

However, while describing what the dragon does, it is also stated that 'it is none the better for that' (2278). This is somewhat ambiguous. At first glance can lead the interpretation that the dragon is not thanked for this task of guarding treasure hoards. If that is the dragon's sole purpose for existing, no human is grateful or happy to know that there are dragons in the barrows of the dead. It is possible to interpret 'it is none the better for that' as the dragon residing in the barrow is somehow detrimental to the creature. A curse on the dragon's hoard is a frequent motif that appears in the *Volsunga Saga* and in *Beowulf*, but it is not clear

whether the curse affects the dragon itself. It is possible that the mere knowledge of a treasure hoard is enough to spark greed in humans and therefore arguably that is a curse on the dragon. Whether the lifelong decay of the hero's life because of the gold is worse than the immediate battle and death for the dragon is open for debate. From a Norse perspective the former would be worse than the latter.

Beekman Taylor extends further the nature of this curse by observing, 'The treasure is a hidden polluting agent whose destructive force is effected once a portion of it is brought to light. The dragon is, in this sense, the embodiment of a cursed artefact.' (Beekman Taylor, 1997: 230) He refers to the nature of the gold being laid in the barrow as a result of a cursed man; as stated in *Beowulf*, 'Heald þu nu, hruse, nu hæleð ne mostan, eorla æhte!' (2247-2248) 'Hold now, you earth, the possession of warriors, now that the heroes cannot!' (Swanton, 1997: 141). By alluding to the curse of the man that placed the treasure in the barrow, Beekman Taylor observes that the dragon's presence is as a result of his curse that he laid on the items of this specific tale. The dragon is an unknown factor until the end of the story and so until the treasure is disturbed, the dragon, the treasure's curse, is not a threat. This seems to have a moral link to it which is alluded to earlier, but can be interchangeably a feature of the Germanic dragon, or just the *Beowulf* dragon.

The dragon is also depicted as having some aversion to daylight but this is never explained why. The dragon 'with difficulty [...] waited until evening came.' (Swanton, 1997: 145) A simplistic approach to this feature is that the dragon through interpolation is evil and therefore fears the light. Grendel also attacks during the night but this seems more as an aspect of his unholy nature, darkness is the equivalent of evil according to Christianity and therefore evil is repulsed by the brightness of God's creation. Grendel is said 'sinnihte heold mistige moras', (161-162) 'in perpetual darkness he ruled the misty wastelands' (Swanton, 1997: 43). However the dragon finds footprints outside the barrow so isn't afraid of daylight.

The secondary interpretation is that the dragon, being an intelligent creature, knows to attack under cover of darkness as a military tactic where it will not be easily seen to counter-attack. This adds to the terror of the people it inevitably kills. It is reasonable to interpret this as the earliest fears associated with civilisation as what lies in the homestead is protected but the external wilderness, which, particularly at night, is treacherous. Here the dragon is the chief threat that appears in the darkness and so carries the extra characteristic of inherent terror.

The role of the thief seems somewhat convenient and aids defining Beowulf's character more than it does the dragon. Beowulf in this instance is innocent of antagonizing the dragon but fights it on the belief that a king should protect his people. Joseph Marshall argues that the dragon's overreaction points to the:

'structure and unity of Beowulf, because just as the music—another source of communal bonding—angers Grendel in part 1, the missing cup angers the dragon in part 2. This striking similarity in motive reveals that both monsters detest the joy and order of society from which they have been permanently excluded.' (Marshall, 2010: 15)

Marshall makes an insightful comparison between the music which angers Grendel and the theft of the cup which angers the dragon. Both are indeed depicted outside of society and correctly, both triggers for the behaviour of the monsters serve a communal purpose. The unity of people is at stake every time a monster appears. This comparison can be extended somewhat to Grendel's mother who is motivated by revenge. Instead the act of slaughtering her son, which serves to preserve the community, is the object of her anger. The three monsters serve to represent the danger that Beowulf must face to protect his people.

However, the detestation of the music on the part of Grendel seems to suggest a particular resentment towards joyful expression whereas the dragon was motivated by an injustice caused to it. This contributes a subtle feature of the Germanic dragon and that has to be an

awareness of injustice done to itself. Marshall identifies that the dragon's reaction is disproportionate to the crime against it. The dragon has a motive for attacking but this is tenuous as previously mentioned and doesn't depict the dragon actively searching for the cup, just ruining the dwellings of men perhaps either as punishment or provocation to battle. It is possible that owing to this being part of Beowulf's destiny to fight the dragon, the dramatic nature of this dragon's response to such a small theft echoes the interweaving of fate that repeatedly occurs in the poem. One small act has great consequences. In which case, fate-weaving applies to the dragon as much as it does the human characters.

The *Beowulf* dragon, as is the case with Fafnir poses the question as to why creatures are given as much attention in fate as men. In examining the slave's actions, he is said to

Nealles mid gewældum wýrmhord abræc,  
Sylfes Willum, se ðe him are gesceod;[...]  
Ond ðær inn fealh, secg synbýsig.' (2221-2226)

'He who grievously despoiled it did not break into the serpent's hoard on purpose by his own choice at all [...] a man troubled by sin.' (Swanton, 1997: 140-141) From this, the slave is clearly not acting with a determination to steal from the dragon, he seeks shelter and in a sudden move chooses to steal a cup for his own purposes. *Beowulf* is littered with foreshadowing which mimics the concept of fate-weaving; that every action is linked to another and is foretold. It is therefore the case that the thief was not merely a plot convenience but that his story leading up to the theft of the cup was predetermined. It was necessary for the thief to steal the cup to anger the dragon that ultimately kills Beowulf.

Christine Rauer makes the assertion that the dragon's widespread destruction and Beowulf attempting to fight it alone has little similarity with Scandinavian heroes, in other words, the heroes slaying the dragon is for personal fame and or fortune. In Beowulf's case there is more similarity in 'Christian Hagiography, where a saint rescues a community from a destructive

dragon after a conflict in front of terrified onlookers.’ (Simpson, 2002: 281) While Beowulf’s act does seem to have a more selfless motivation, his desire to protect his people, more so than Sigurd for example, there is no invocation of God’s power in order to complete the task at any point in the text. The dragon serves the text to enhance the greatness of Beowulf’s character, to be an exceptional marauder against Beowulf’s great, courageous and selfless kingship. The juxtaposition between the two draws emphasis to the character as opposed to being an act of mercy created by and for God. Furthermore, the dragon is affected by the warp and weft of fate which suggests perhaps that as a part of the Norse cosmology, all living things are. What it does suggest more concretely is that a hero and the dragon he slays are tied together in a way that is unavoidable.

In spite of its prowess and literary spectacle, the dragon and the ogres were side-lined in early criticism. Tolkien reports that ‘Nothing [Chambers says] could better show the disproportion of Beowulf which puts the irrelevances in the centre and the serious things on the outer edges’ [...] we have a situation which the old heroic poets loved, and would not have sold for a wilderness of dragons’ (Tolkien, 1937). Once the dragon was earmarked as a mythical creature, it seems that Chambers decided the dragon was ‘an irrelevance’ as it didn’t seem as important as the humanist themes of honour, duty and revenge. The dragon is a concrete depiction of the monster plot, a story trope which is often seen in myths and clearly is as close to the modern reader’s heart as it was to the ancient people that first heard the story. In this case the dragon cannot be considered an irrelevance as it is a structural pillar of the poem. Chambers is correct though that the modern literary scene (in fantasy at least) is ‘a wilderness of dragons’, many of whom bear the hallmarks of Beowulf’s dragon most notably, Smaug in the *Hobbit*. In spite of scholarly debate, the human demand for the fierce, fire-breathing menace appears as strong as ever.

## Fafnir

Despite its age the *Volsunga* saga remains one of the most famous stories of early Scandinavia and has developed through time to the Germanic *Nibelungenlied* and Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. The *Volsunga* saga contains in its story one of the seven basic plots as defined by Christopher Booker of the hero setting out to slay the monster, in this case, Sigurd slays Fafnir. Being a basic plot, instantly it is memorable, spectacular, and pitches the finest of mankind's warriors against the deadliest of nature's monsters. It is no wonder that the saga was not lost to the ages. The Saga contains some features that are important to consider when studying the role of Fafnir. The first is that Odin's part in the tale is subtle. He has attempted to breed the ideal warrior and in Sigurd, he appears successful. Odin disguised as an old man, instructs Sigurd to dig the ditches to surprise Fafnir and thus ensures victory. The second is that Fafnir knows the gold he protects is cursed and warns Sigurd of the curse. In spite of this, Sigurd goes on to take the gold for his own and continues to suffer the effects of the curse into his later exploits. This is apparently not a wise decision and so indicates that fate works against him in this manner. Fate here is defined according to the Norse idea of fate which is determined by the Norns. As all are subject to their fate, the events of the sagas and anything that occurs in the Norse Cosmology is predetermined and inescapable.

Firstly, Fafnir comes into possession of his treasure hoard when Fafnir's brother Otr is killed in the form of an otter by Odin, Loki and Hoenir. Hreidmar, Fafnir's father demands compensation for Otr's death which Loki obtains from the dwarf Andvari who, in the form of a pike, lived in the waterfall where Otr used to fish. The gods take Andvari's wealth including a ring which Andvari curses before giving it to Loki. The gods stuff Otr's otter skin with the gold and pile it on top but Hreidmar insists he has the ring as well to cover one whisker. At this, Loki explains:

‘With gold you are now paid

And as payment you have  
Much for my head.  
No ease  
Is assigned to your son;  
Death it is to you both. (Byock, 1999: 59)

As Loki is the trickster god, it is somewhat unsurprising that in taking the gold from Andvari he is the cause for spreading the curse to Fafnir's family and then on to Sigurd. This movement of the curse suggests fate and the method in which it was required and obtained is contrary to the gift-giving that is seen in *Beowulf*. Fafnir steals the treasure which was stolen from Andvari which suggests the movement of gold for selfish reasons is nothing other than ill fated. Loki warns of the curse, suggesting that the gold is ample what his 'head' is worth but 'death it is to you both.' In spite of this warning the events of the Saga continue. This not only suggests that dragons as well as Gods and men are subject to the whim of fate and, in this case, curses, but also that the dragon is cursed in that he hoards gold for himself but does not share it the way a king is expected to.

Little of Fafnir's outward appearance is described in detail. He is shown to be larger than a grass snake. How large is difficult to determine as 'It is said that this cliff is thirty fathoms high at the spot where Fafnir lay to get water.' (Byock, 1999: 63) Thirty fathoms is equivalent to 180 feet. If Fafnir can easily reach the water by lying on the top of the cliff, the assumption would be that he is truly gargantuan, larger than the *Beowulf* dragon. This would explain why Fafnir does not see the trench Sigurd hides in as to any smaller creature it would be obvious.

There is a further description that could refer to his patterns and colour. Flom suggests in his *Study in Semantics* the term Frani used to describe Fafnir means spotted. He asserts 'in [Old Norse] there was, beside the poetical application of the term in the old and with new

meaning elements, also the ordinary heiti, fræning, for serpent, no doubt also purely a popular noa-name for the serpent in meaning ‘the spotted, many coloured one.’ (Flom, 1926: 309)

Flom cites many similar words across numerous dialects to support this hypothesis and helps to illuminate the appearance of Fafnir as not just large by spectacular too. It is tempting to recount the sheen of snake skin and in some species iridescence to appreciate the subtlety of this description. This gives the dragon a quality of beauty that would otherwise be overlooked by its ferocity and size. The dragon is not normally considered a beautiful creature but this description suggests the dragon’s colouration or patterns is at least a beautiful feature dragons possess.

Fafnir is unique among most other dragons in that he was born a human who transformed into a dragon. While this occurs in some other tales, Fafnir, perhaps due to his role in the *Volsunga saga* remains the most famous. Regin, Fafnir’s brother explains to Sigurd that “Fafnir became so ill-natured that he set out for the wilds and allowed no one to enjoy the treasure but himself. He has since become the most evil serpent and now lies upon his hoard.’ (59) Fafnir’s betrayal of his family can be attributed to the nature of the cursed ring, however it seems also to suggest that Fafnir was inclined to evil from the beginning. If the father of the family was murdered it was the duty of the child to avenge them. This is a recurrent theme throughout *Volsunga Saga*. As Fafnir commits patricide, the portrayal of his character is sub-human and obviously monstrous. There is an extended interpretation from this which is that as Sigurd slays Fafnir, he slays the metaphorical concept that is patricide. Sigurd has fulfilled all of his obligations after this. Fafnir then by extension can be representative of the dark side of human nature which is ‘oath-breaking’ a fate deserving of a place in Niflheim in the Norse cosmos.



In Tolkien's essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, Tolkien makes the distinction between the beast that is the dragon and the aspect of the dragon whose features are notably defined. He claims:

'Beowulf's dragon, if one wishes really to criticize, is not to be blamed for being a dragon, but rather for not being dragon enough, plain pure fairy-story dragon. There are in the poem, some vivid touches of the right kind--as *pa se wrym onwoc, wroht waes geniwad; stone aefter stane* [when the dragon awoke, strife was renewed; he then moved quickly along by the rock], 2285--in which this dragon is real worm, with a bestial life and thought of his own, but the conception, none the less, approaches *draconitas* [dragon-ness] rather than *draco* [dragon]: a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the indiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life). (Tolkien, *Monsters* 16-17) (6)

It is perhaps as much personification of the *draconitas*, the dragon-esque that gives Fafnir this dark edge as much as he becomes *draco*, a physical dragon. Nevertheless, Fafnir's obsession with the gold points to a very clear conclusion that the dragon is fatefully tied with treasure. R. Waterhouse, in his discussion on the *Beowulf* dragon does assert the difference between the self and the other, and in this case his argument can be more finely attuned to Fafnir who represents both the human and the monstrous. Fafnir to both an historic and contemporary reader is the alarming amalgam of the human and the monstrous. This is perhaps the more uncomfortable part of understanding *draconitas* is that, if dragons were mere beasts in Norse mythology, they would not be so terrifying as they would be simply killed and dealt with. However it is the dragon-like persona that is so unnerving as this persona can exist within people. In many ways it is similar, but not the same as the Christian ideology of combating one's inner demons, in the case of Fafnir, he loses to his lust for gold and is transformed as a result.

Fafnir's heroic pairing is with Sigurd, the young hero who eventually defeats him. This pairing has a great significance not only as the plot device but also pitching man against monster. Sigurd has been bred for this, as shown by Odin's influence in the saga but also in the way that Fafnir speaks to Sigurd as he dies. In the 'Lay of Fafnir' in the poetic Edda, Fafnir asks repeatedly, 'To what young man were you born?/Whose son are you,' (Larington, 2014: 1-2) It is explained that to give a dying man one's name and lineage allows him to curse his killer. In this case, Fafnir chooses not to curse Sigurd with his dying breath. Arguably, it is irrelevant as the treasure Fafnir guards is cursed anyway, but this seems to suggest nobility. Fafnir, as a human, committed an heinous act, and yet as a dying dragon, converses with Sigurd with as much respect as if they had only sparred as friends. Once again, Fafnir's dual nature makes it difficult to pinpoint what the dragon side is exactly, but this loftier attribute, perhaps can only be displayed by the dragon. Fafnir in his descriptions in the prose and poetic *eddas* is not portrayed well. He is murderous and greedy, however as a dying dragon he displays restraint and chooses to provide knowledge where he could just have easily been spiteful. The dragon may be the antagonist of man, but in this case, that does not necessitate it being evil. Instead, it suggests a loftiness of persona. While the dragon is condemned as an antagonistic being, it has obviously served to benefit humans by defining their virtues against its vices. Fafnir is clearly older and wiser than Sigurd and conveys this wisdom to the young hero to no benefit for himself. This is not a recurring trait of the Germanic dragons but it is interesting to notice that at least two of Tolkien's dragons do the opposite, that is to mislead their heroic counterparts.

Additionally, Sigurd's heroic persona is somewhat defined by his slaying of Fafnir, he earns the title Fafnisbani. This is thoroughly explored in Armann Jakobsson's essay *Enter the Dragon* which emphasises the importance of fear and Sigurd's lack of it during his interactions with Fafnir. At no point is Sigurd afraid of Fafnir which seems to be something

that confuses Fafnir. Jakobsson explains that 'fear (symbolised by the helmet) is the dragon's most powerful tool, far more powerful than any poison, fire or brute force.' (Jakobsson, 2010, 44) Jakobsson suggests the helm of terror is a personification of the fear and later became an object that Sigurd can claim as his own. It would certainly seem that Fafnir's chief weapon is fear because he does not go into lengthy combat with Sigurd as Beowulf did against his opposing dragon. From a metaphorical perspective, the dragon is a monster that inspires fear and is a controller of fear. It does not appear that Fafnir has any fear either, neither in life or death. For a man to beat him, suggests that he has won that reputation for his own, in other words, his reputation is one that is more fearsome than the dragon's. This helps define Sigurd the dragonslayer as the title is an accolade for Sigurd's reputation. The dragon therefore is synonymous with the fear it inspires. This is also seen with Beowulf's men at the entrance to the dragon's lair and their reluctance to aid him and by the fear expressed by Hymir when Thor fishes up Jormungandr.

One of Fafnir's attributes, best shown in the *Lay of Fafnir* is his eloquence. When compared to *Lokasenna*, the same eloquence is displayed in both poems. In the Lay of Fafnir, it seems that Sigurd is portrayed as the untrusting party and Fafnir observes 'Spiteful words you reckon to hear in everything,/ but I'll tell you only truth:' (Larrington, 2014: 9-10) Fafnir's eloquence certainly has become a feature of the modern dragon, most notably, Tolkien's Smaug and Glaurung. Speech indicates a human-like quality, giving the creature character through it. If speech is shown by an animal, it lends mysticism. Fafnir combines both and is a useful resource for Sigurd as he is told about the Norns and the danger of the cursed gold. Again, like the *Beowulf* dragon, Fafnir is credited with being affected by fate. Due to Fafnir's dual nature both man and dragon, it is not clear if speech is a trait of all Germanic dragons. Though Nidhogg is said to pass insults to the eagle in Yggdrasil's branches via Ratatosk, one might argue that this is outside the realm of human speech as it is

one beast speaking to a bird. This is further supported by the fact that Sigurd only understands birds once he eats the heart of Fafnir.

Peter Baker in his introduction to *Honour Exchange and Violence in Beowulf* makes an insightful statement that ‘Violence is a social practice, and every violent act is a social transaction. In quoting Guy Halsall makes the key point ‘Violent relationships can often be seen as a discourse.’ (Baker, 2013: 7) This is exceptionally important when considering the nature of violence that exists between men and dragons. Exchanges in the sagas between men and dragons are usually, though not exclusively, acts of violence as neither are shown to communicate with each other in any other way. Baker goes on to make comparisons about asymmetric warfare where one side’s methods of warfare are often different or unequal to the opposition. Fafnir himself asks ‘Have you not heard that all people are afraid of me and my helm of terror?’ (Byock, 1999: 64) In the case of dragons, their warfare is tantamount to utter chaotic destruction, the like of which can only be achieved by an army. Sigurd’s attack on Fafnir was one of cunning, one which Fafnir could not see and therefore could not fathom. The discourse would have been a typical one of non-understanding on both sides had Fafnir not had the ability to speak to Sigurd. This discourse of violence is clearly a modern interpretation but unconsciously, but by giving Fafnir the power of speech, Fafnir can communicate with Sigurd and display an unusual connection for a dragon and dragonslayer. Fafnir elaborates on this by noting ‘You take everything I say as spoken with malice.’ (Byock, 1999: 64) The key factor here is that the image of the fierce and deadly dragon who destroys everything indiscriminately is clearly one developed from the storyteller’s perspective, whether the *sceop* or writer, it is still a human perspective. Here, Fafnir gives the dragon’s perspective which uniquely observes the fact that the dragon is consciously driving humans away from it, i.e. it does not crave human society or is not jealous of it, and is aware that human’s distrust dragons in spite of their wisdom and intelligence. Fafnir grants the modern

reader a brief glimpse of the Norse world through the dragon's eyes, which transforms the dragon from a monster plot device into its own character. This is fundamentally different from Beowulf's dragon in that Beowulf's dragon is given thought processes and feelings from the human narrator.

Another interesting aspect of Fafnir is that his heart grants Sigurd the ability to understand bird's speech. He learns from the nuthatches that 'Sigurd would be wise to follow their advice. Afterward he should ride to Fafnir's den and take the magnificent hoard of gold which is there, then ride up to Hindarfell, where Brynhild sleeps.' (Byock, 1999: 66) The nuthatches are surprisingly useful to direct Sigurd in this way and his knowledge would not have been improved any further had he not eaten Fafnir's heart. Arguably Sigurd is being directed by fate to the next part in his quest which is the rescue of Brynhild. A comparison here can be drawn between Sigurd listening to the nuthatches and Odin receiving news from his two ravens. Therein lies the interpretation that Sigurd's similarity to Odin is represented by the gaining of knowledge, something Odin devotes a lot of time and effort into obtaining. This further adds the question, why does Fafnir's heart grant this ability? The easiest answer is that it is part of the warp and weft of fate, a frequent motif in Norse culture and literature.

A very unusual interpretation could explain this when observing the natural order of beasts in the Norse Cosmology. 'The main argument concerning the initiation of kings and their relation to Odin was proposed by Jere Fleck in 1970. On the basis of analysis of the relevant passages in the poems *Hyndluljóð*, *Grímnismál* and *Rígsþula* he argues that each interaction represents the numinous teaching of a potential king by a divine being [...] 'In any case, Fleck as well as others, has argued convincingly that some sort of initiation, including the acquisition of numinous knowledge, took place before a person could be placed on the throne.' (Schjødt. 2007: 142-3) This text focusses on the significant relationship between kings and Odin who is king over the gods, however the most significant phrase to be applied

to Fafnir is ‘the acquisition of numinous knowledge, took place before a person could be placed on the throne.’ As is often alluded to, ‘knowledge is power’, and Odin’s fight at Ragnarok is something he prepares for, which is arguably the purpose of the *Volsunga* saga, to demonstrate how Odin meant to accomplish this task.

The obtaining of knowledge is as important as military strength and one could argue that Fafnir, at the time just before his death possessed both. Additionally, Schjødt goes on to state Odin ‘Is characterized by his possession of a thorough knowledge. Óðinn is the god who *knows*. He knows because he acquires his knowledge from the dead, from the underworld, and from further representatives of *the other* – that is, knowledge from another dimension. And eventually, he is able to pass this knowledge onto his chosen men.’ (150)

If a man chosen to be king must gain divinely distributed knowledge in order to become king, this seems remarkably similar to Fafnir knowing about the Norns and his heart giving the power to understand birds. Another parallel here can be seen, with Mimir’s head being preserved at the fountain to give knowledge, of body parts delivering information. Ideally here the fate driven words of the nuthatches could represent knowledge of or from ‘the other’. By this definition, the dragon seems to be something of a king among beasts. The dragon is never mentioned in this context in the sagas and not said to be king of beasts however the parallel is similar. (Odin transforms into a serpent to obtain the mead of poetry in *Skaldskaparmal*) It is also interesting to note that during the events of Ragnarok, Odin is slain by Fenrir, the king of gods is killed by a wolf and Thor is slain by Jormungandr, a warrior god is slain by a dragon. If the above interpretation stands firm, this would suggest a subtle fear that the king is slaughtered by the beast that represents violent outcasts, while the warrior god is killed by the beast that best represents an outcast king.

The temptation is to place this in context as fear of outsiders, those that are the natural enemies of the reigning king. Ideally, a king would defeat a king and a warrior defeat a

warrior, however the destinies of the gods at Ragnarok suggests breakdown of order, which is the main outcome of Ragnarok. It represents the dissemination of order into chaos, something which all civilisation naturally fears. Robert Blurst suggests in *Origins of Dragons* ‘There is a general, if imperfect correlation, which links the belief in dragons to urbanized, state-level societies and the belief in the rainbow-serpent to tribal societies.’ (Blurst, 2000: 533) While the rainbow serpent doesn’t appear in Norse mythology, the aspects of dragons that are feared do coincide with the fears of the non-civilised, external threats that exist in the wilderness outside the homestead. Whether that is a town or an isolated dwelling. This is well demonstrated in *Beowulf* with the fear and hatred for Grendel, his mother and the dragon and to an extent the banishment of Sigmund and Sinfjotli in *Volsunga saga* as both become associated with wolves and therefore outcasts. Dragons being interpreted as kings is unlikely from an historical perspective as no dragon is named as such however to the modern perspective, it gives the dragon a further elevation in status, not just martially strong but also with a kingship that is unrivalled in the natural world.

### Jormungandr

Jormungandr is most often known as the Midgard Serpent and plays a more minor role than Fafnir and the *Beowulf* dragon in the sense that he is cosmologically significant as opposed to being a major character in a story. Jormungandr is known from the many references in texts about his size, although his major appearances in Norse literature are from the prose Edda. His name is translated as ‘Huge Monster’ but is referred to by many other titles ‘water-soaked earth-band’, ‘The encircler of all lands’, ‘Steep-way’s [land’s] ring’, ‘red-fish’, ‘coal-fish of the earth’, coal-fish that bounds all lands’, ‘sea-bed-fish’, ‘ugly ring’, ‘sea-thread’ (Sturlusson, 1995: 69-83) In analysing these kennings, Jormungandr is arguably the best described of all dragons. As he is referred to as ‘red-fish’ and ‘coal-fish’ it is safe to

assume this refers directly to his aquatic home. It could also link to the fact that many species of fish share a similar body shape to snakes, most notably a long thin body covered with scales. The most important feature in the kennings is 'sea-thread,' 'earth-band and the encircler of all lands' the vastness of Jormungandr is truly staggering in literary terms. It is tempting for a modern reader to interpret Jormungandr as the personification of or the explanation for unseen underwater currents. Jormungandr's legacy to modern descendants is not just his size but also the fear that such size inspires.

Jormungandr is the son of Loki who "with [Angrboda] had three children. One was Fenriswolf, the second Iormungand (i.e. the Midgard Serpent), the third is Hel. And when the gods realised that these three siblings were being brought up in Giantland, and when the gods traced prophecies stating that from these siblings great mischief and disaster would arise for them, then they all felt evil was to be expected from them, to begin with because of their mother's nature, but still worse because of their father's." (Sturlusson, 1995: 27)

Jormungandr's ancestry from this excerpt causes him to become an automatic antagonist to the Æsir. This dragon was born from the trickster god Loki and a giantess. Ironically, the giants have always been the opponents of the gods in Norse mythology and perhaps this unlikely progeny shows the failure of uniting two opposing enemies. Jormungandr is treated as otherworldly as he 'is brought up in Giantland' suggesting his upbringing is one that cannot be good according to the Æsir, because of his childhood surroundings.

Had Jormungandr been anything other than a dragon his treatment might not seem so bad, but taken in the context of his siblings, they are collectively referred to as a monstrous brood. While the giants occasionally intermarry with the Æsir as both are humanoid, Jormungandr and Fenrir both are denounced for being bestial in form. Both Jormungandr and Fenrir are termed monstrous mainly because of what they are. They are cast down by Odin because of prophecies relating to what will happen at Ragnarok however Odin's actions seem to ensure



it rather than prevent it. Jormungandr is cast down to Midgard, simply for being a dragon. In this case, it is unlikely that the Norse writers would have given Jormungandr a better reputation if he had grown up in Asgard, but the opposing force of the Giants and everything they are surrounds Jormungandr and he is condemned as an enemy. Jormungandr therefore offers a perspective of the Germanic dragon which is, they are deemed monstrous because men determine it is so. This is certainly true for the *Beowulf* dragon and Fafnir, both of which live outside human contact because they simply do not fit.

Later in the Edda, Jormungandr is brought before Odin as are his siblings, and of the three, his treatment seems the most extreme. ‘When they came to him, he threw the serpent into that deep sea which lies around all lands, and this serpent grew so that it lies in the midst of the ocean encircling all lands and bites on its own tail.’ (Sturlusson, 1995: 27) This is perhaps linked to the idea that what is not of human origin is considered a threat, in this case, Jormungandr grows to such an extent, one might argue he is the personification of storms at sea. As the Viking pioneers tackled sea voyages that took them in some cases across oceans, freak waves, powerful currents and storms would have been a constant threat. It is not surprising therefore, that a giant dragon would be the cause of these phenomena. By that extension, this ties Jormungandr with nature, in particular, its destructive forces. One key aspect of most dragons it seems is their reputation for power associated with nature. Dragons do not use tools or weapons in their tales, but only their poisonous or fiery breath, and teeth and claws. Jormungandr represents the power of nature and how deadly it is to mankind. It would appear that all dragons have this connection to nature, particularly as snakes do and often there is no distinction between the dragon and the serpent.

Jormungandr makes a minor appearance in *Gylfaginning* in which the kings explain to Gangleri some of Thor’s adventures. Thor meets a giant named Utgard-Loki who challenges Thor to some tasks, one of which includes lifting the king’s cat and ‘Thor went up and took

hold with his hand down under the middle of its belly and lifted it up. But the cat arched its back as much as Thor stretched up his hand.' (Sturlusson, 1995: 43) Thor's humiliation is a key aspect of this tale and it seems that Jormungandr is willing to participate in this.

Jormungandr does not resist violently, instead he is quite passive during the trial, suggesting that he had a role to play and therefore Thor would appear to be incapable of completing the task because he is weak as opposed to meeting resistance from the cat. The nature of the cat arching its back does bear some semblance to how a snake might look if picked up from the centre. Jormungandr's identity is revealed later on. The purpose of this is to show Utgarda-Loki as a trickster and excuse Thor's inability to complete any of the tasks. He is forgiven for not lifting the cat as it would appear even a God would struggle to lift a fully grown dragon the size of Jormungandr. It could be argued that Jormungandr's part in the tale could be an aid to glorify Thor's abilities as Thor struggled with a task that no mortal could achieve and he was treated unfairly whilst participating in the task. This would appear to be a feature of the dragons that are paired with heroes. Their fearsome reputation, size and power all contribute to the heroic aspect of their nemesis. The hero in part becomes defined by the monstrosity of the foe he is destined to overcome.

It is however important to note that, while Sigurd was defined by his dragon-slaying feat, Thor is not defined by his encounters with Jormungandr. Thor is most often known for the slaying of giants who appear to be a more direct threat to the Gods than the serpent that was cast down to Midgard. John Lindow remarks that 'Like his father Loki and his brother the Midgard Serpent, then, Fenrir is a creature who spends time among the gods, is bound or cast out by them, and returns at the end of the current mythic order to destroy them, only to be destroyed himself as a younger generation of gods, one of them his slayer, survives into the new world order. (Lindow, 2001: 114). Lindow makes the clear aspect of what happens to those that have lived among the gods and either betrayed them or will do. There is a clear

cycle of retribution at work in particular for the family but, by extension, a sense of futility about it as none of Loki or his brood survive Ragnarok. This could be a commentary upon the Norse ideal that vengeance must be obtained. It is eerily similar to the actions of the young Volsungs, Signy and Sigmund who avenge their father's death. In this case, Fenrir and Jormungandr fight alongside their father at Ragnarok. Whether this is borne out of convenience, that is, all were wronged by the Æsir (in their eyes) at some point or whether it is because of familial ties is unclear, however it could be one of the very few occasions in which a Germanic dragon demonstrates kinship. This is contradicted however by Fafnir who murders his own father and persuades Sigurd to kill his brother so there is not enough evidence to show whether the Germanic dragon is in any way interested in family bonds. Jormungandr is so powerful it seems, that only a god can slay him.

With the exception of Nidhogg, Jormungandr is possibly the largest of dragons in Norse mythology and is feared by all beings. Thor embarks on a fishing trip after his dealings with Utgard-Loki during which he catches Jormungandr. The giant Hymir 'said they had got so far out that it was dangerous because of the Midgard Serpent.' (Sturlusson, 1995: 47) In spite of being raised among giants, Jormungandr clearly is not selective about who or what he destroys on the ocean. At Ragnarok he is fated to ally with his brother Fenrir but before that, Jormungandr appears to be his own master. Thor fishes Jormungandr using an ox head as bait 'And one can claim that a person does not know what a horrible sight is who did not get to see how Thor fixed his eyes on the serpent, and the serpent stared back up at him spitting poison.' (Sturlusson, 1995: 47) This scene between Thor and Jormungandr comes after Thor was made to lift the king's cat. Thor, humiliated, seeks to restore his honour and befittingly, goes after Jormungandr who was instrumental in harming Thor's reputation.

This scene is certainly one of two foes locking eyes and seems to bear a striking semblance to two opponents sizing one another up. Jormungandr is set free by Hymir who

cuts the fishing line to stop the boat capsizing, most likely for his own safety rather than showing concern for Jormungandr. One could argue there is a cosmic significance to Hymir cutting the fishing line as Thor and Jormungandr are fated to slay one another. Fate is represented by weaving, and so cutting the line seems to suggest this fateful encounter must not lead to the end for either too soon. Again, the act of Hymir sets Jormungandr more solidly against Thor and therefore the Æsir. Jormungandr is juxtaposed with the god of thunder, fully embracing the image of storms at sea. As this is the second time Thor and Jormungandr come to conflict before their third and final encounter, Jormungandr is revealed to be a fearsome opponent against the beloved hero-God. Here the dragon becomes not just antagonistic to men, but to Gods as well, giving the dragon the attribute of the enemy to all aspects of humanity including their deities.

Furthermore it is clear, at least to a modern perspective that this gives a small insight of Jormungandr's personality. It is tempting to view Jormungandr as a gigantic, destructive force with no rational thought, however he chooses to lock eyes with Thor rather than attempt to attack him. Before Thor dealt with Utgard Loki, he stayed with peasants and served his chariot-pulling goats with a warning that their bones and skins be kept. Once he realises his order is disobeyed, 'everyone can imagine how terrified the peasant must have been when he saw Thor making his brows sink down over his eyes [...] he thought he would collapse at the very sight.' (38) Thor, being divine, and one with a reputation for violence and war, clearly intimidates the peasants with his wrath. At the time Thor fishes up Jormungandr, there is a sense of Thor intent on retribution for the way Jormungandr participated in tricking him.

Kevin Wanner accurately asserts in his article *Sewn lips, Propped Jaws and a Silent Áss* that Jormungandr's mouth being hooked is both 'Punitive and preventative.' (Wanner, 2012: 12) Punitive supports the idea that Thor sought revenge against Jormungandr. However, preventative suggests that the Midgard Serpent is rendered a non-threat after being fished, but

Wanner later suggests that Jormungandr never ‘spewed poison before the hook entered his mouth, though he certainly continues to do so after’. (Wanner, 2012: 12) As Jormungandr is one of the Norse dragons it would be reasonable to contradict Wanner and suggest that Jormungandr always had the ability to spew poison as Fafnir and the *Beowulf* dragon do, however it is likely that the hook may cause it to happen more frequently. A modern interpretation would suggest that the wound inflicted by the hook might over-stimulate poison to enter Jormungandr’s mouth, or that he is simply so enraged by the act that he is more inclined to do it.

Wanner also draws a cosmological link in his article between metal objects afflicting the mouths of Loki and his two sons, identifying it as a mythological motif. He identifies the wounding of Loki, Fenrir and Jormungandr all with different methods in order to incapacitate the mouth and goes further to suggest this is a mythological motif. The suggestion seems to be to render their mouths useless. As Jormungandr and Fenrir are both creatures their most deadly weapons is the killing power of their jaws. For Loki it is the power of his speech. It would appear no coincidence that a father and two sons share the fate of wounding as a punishment. This might suggest a ritual punishment however these mutilations do not appear to be used for the battles against giants or battles between men. From a modern perspective this kind of mutilation is incredibly barbarous and would seem to give Loki, Fenrir and Jormungandr enough cause to turn against the Æsir at Ragnarok. Again, this would suggest the irony of Odin attempting to avoid the terrible fate prophesized by the actions of these three but inevitably ensuring that fate by being so cruel.

No doubt the scene of the god and the dragon locking eyes is one of great tension and certainly Thor would have the same look of fury on his face as when he scowled at the peasants. This does not seem to faze Jormungandr who continues to spit poison. Jormungandr may not be acting out of courage, it seems that he too is equally annoyed at being

‘embarrassed’ to have fallen for the bait and be hauled up like a fish. It is also worth remembering Thor baited a hook with an ox-head. The hook would be lodged in Jormungandr’s mouth and then the wound aggravated by the reeling in, likely causing a lot of pain. Thor has reversed the trick played on him and now both are equally angry at each other. This has connotations that Jormungandr can experience pride and anger which is a familiar trait shown by Beowulf’s dragon and Fafnir. What is more sinister about Jormungandr is the way that Odin treated him earlier in the Edda which, to a modern reader, seems unjustified. Jormungandr has been cast down to Midgard for what he is foretold he will do as opposed to actually committing a crime. Jormungandr seems entitled to feel injustice at his treatment from the Æsir and during the fishing episode, can arguably be directing that hatred towards Thor.

While the feeling of injustice is clearly a modern interpretation, it is reasonable to assign Jormungandr a personality which is governed from the literary evidence predominantly by anger but also by pride. This portrayal of Jormungandr gives modern depictions of dragons pride and anger. If injustice is also attributed to Jormungandr, then modern dragons have an awareness of right and wrong as well as fairness. This can be translated into wisdom which is another common trait in modern dragon depictions.

## Nidhogg

Nidhogg is one of the more mysterious dragons in Norse mythology. He appears briefly in the *Eddas* and *Voluspa* and is a recognised figure in the cosmology of the Norse myths, but does not appear to play a role in any story apart from Ragnarok. In the nine worlds, ‘Yggdrasill’s ash suffers agony/ and Nidhogg rends it from beneath.’ 35 pg53 Grimnismal, poetic Edda) Nidhogg lives in Niflheim, ‘Three of the tree’s roots support it [...] the third extends over Niflheim, and under that root is Hvergelmir, and Nidhogg gnaws the bottom of

the root.’ (pg17) (gylfaginning prose Edda) In the cosmology Nidhogg does nothing apart from gnaw the roots of Yggdrasil and pass insults to the eagle that lives in Yggdrasil’s branches. As Eagles and snakes have been widely known opponents, it is not surprising to see this polarity existing in Yggdrasil. Murphy suggests a link between the Christian Cross and Yggdrasil and vaguely states ‘One thing that the cross could do that its predecessor Yggdrasil could not was stop the mouth of the dragon-snake by providing for the resurrection of the dead’. This is erroneous as Nidhogg nowhere displays the power to resurrect the dead, and further, the Nordic world is not divided into good or bad, therefore Nidhogg is not expressly evil despite existing in the realm of the dead. Nidhogg’s determination to chew the roots is not evil; there are other beings that cause damage to Yggdrasil and perhaps represents the world order as it is. Nidhogg therefore is a unified part of the Norse cosmology and represents another aspect of nature, one of death.

In Voluspa, Nidhogg appears when the seeress describes:

‘There she saw wading in turbid streams  
false oath swearers and murderers,  
and the seducer of another man’s close confidante;  
there Nidhogg sucks the corpses of the dead.’ (verse 38 p9)

This description of Nidhogg tormenting the dead souls that led dishonourable lives seems suspiciously similar to the description of the Christian Hell where Satan (often depicted as a dragon) torments the dead. It is most likely that Nidhogg’s role in the unpleasantness in Corpse Strand aids to develop a stark contrast to the glorious wonder and joy to be found in Valhalla. Again, Nidhogg become the polar opposite of the Gods in that he is a repulsion. No man would choose to spend eternity suffering by a dragon so Nidhogg is a deterrent to those who would choose to lead evil lives. However this seems to conflict with the Norse world view where there is no real concept of absolute good or evil therefore this interpretation

would seem contrary. It is likely that Nidhogg's role fulfils the association with death as most Germanic dragons do.

In association with the dead, Nidhogg lives in Niflheim although it is never stated that he has anything to do with the ruler of Niflheim, Hel. In fact, Nidhogg has no heroic counterpart, no hero to slay him and no associated being to draw a comparison. In appearing in *Voluspa*, it can be theorized that Nidhogg can be paired with the seeress, who predicts:

‘There comes the shadow-dark dragon flying,  
The gleaming serpent, up from Dark-of-moon Hills;  
Nidhogg flies over the plain, in his pinions

He carries corpses; now she will sink down.’ (Larrington, 2014: 62-65)

Nidhogg's pairing with the seeress is very tenuous. She shows no indication of any relationship to the dragon and can therefore be dismissed. However it could be possible that the seeress' line 'now she will sink down' has less to do with concluding the conversation with Odin and more that Nidhogg is reclaiming a soul that really should be under his control. The fact that the final stanza seems to unusual compared to the preceding events in *Voluspa* suggests the possibility that Nidhogg has realised the *Volva* is not under his command and therefore has come to fetch her.

His pairing with Hel again is not discussed so it is reasonable to assume he has no relationship with her. The only real conclusion to be drawn is the fact the Nidhogg is described at the end of *Voluspa*, indicating he will act after Ragnarok and the world has been reborn. It is not clear why he chooses not to be active during the events of Ragnarok and the only conclusion to be drawn from his inactivity is that he is not fated to act in that battle. His fate is reserved for the world that comes afterwards. This is indicative of a cyclical nature of the universe, where by death and rebirth continue indefinitely. In this case, Nidhogg is the second destroyer of the world. It is not certain why, only that he is destined to do so.



Nidhogg is also, apparently the only thing to cause the second destruction of the world and therefore indicates his incredible size and power. Ragnarok was a systematic chain of events that led to war that involved almost every living being, in this case, Nidhogg does it alone. It is possible that the reason why Nidhogg has no heroic pairing is because he is so vast and so destructive, that there is no being, immortal or mortal that can defeat him. Nidhogg here represents absolute doom, doom of gods and men. Nidhogg can be seen to be the alternative to the life giving Yggdrasil which, if not directly stated, then it seems to sustain life. Nidhogg undoubtedly is supposed to take it. Bearing this in mind, the Norse dragon has a very clear association with death and in particular violent death. It is irrelevant the size or scale of what will die, only that the dragon is either the cause or the close associate of death.

Hilda Ellis Davidson in her article *The Hill of the Dragon* asserts there may be an older connection between dragons and the dead whereby the dead become dragons in an effort to guard their grave goods. She draws the comparison between Fafnir becoming a dragon and the Bishop of Orleans dreaming of a dragon escaping the tomb of Charles Martel. Martel being the dragon. She goes on to acknowledge;

‘A more primitive form of this conception may be preserved in the shape of Niðhogg, who must have occupied some place in Norse heathen beliefs about the dead.’ (Ellis Davidson, 1950: 181) Nidhogg is associated with the dead far more than other Germanic dragons, he lives among them and eats them. Ellis Davidson suggests that an earlier concept of the grave-guarding dragon was that the dead person themselves became a dragon. This theory would make Fafnir’s example less exceptional if a man intent on guarding his wealth would become a monster in order to keep it. This has some allegorical significance as to why the dragon becomes a symbol of wealth but also of greed in later medieval art and Christian texts.

It may also suggest Nidhogg’s original role, perhaps as the original guardian of the grave, not of grave goods but of the dead themselves. This is contradicted however in Gylfaginning

that 'with Loki will be all Hel's people.' (Sturlusson, 1995, 54) Nidhogg clearly is not in charge of the dead, which is Hel's role and apparently has no issue with them being brought to the battlefield during Ragnarok. Nidhogg is not a hoarder in the sense that the corpses he rends do not incite him into blinding rage as they are taken from him to be used as warriors. Where Beowulf's dragon flies into a fiery rage at having a single cup stolen from him, Nidhogg doesn't react when corpses are taken from him. This would suggest that his role is not of a guardian of the dead but more of a tormenter of the dead. He seems more concerned with the insults from the eagle in Yggdrasil's branches than he is with multitudes of the dead. From this it is possible to deduce an element of pride or vanity in the Germanic dragon and an apparent lack of concern for humans in general. This seems appropriate as their size and intelligence would indicate a contempt for anything smaller or weaker than themselves.

#### Transition from medieval attitudes to modern

Following the advent of Christianity in the medieval world, the dragon's status as a beast of the field becomes somewhat more allegorical. The depiction of Satan as a dragon did not start in the Norse world, however the demonization of the serpentine or draconic merged successfully with the pagan world. As a rule, the Christian world held the dragon as the demonic and so emerges the stories of saints slaying or taming dragons as an allegory for Christian virtue to overcome evil. The dragon is not lost however. Examples of medieval heraldry depict dragons not just as monsters, but symbols of wealth and power. The dragon is synonymous with greed but also of power. The pagan tales instil on folkloric memory the strength of the dragon. To take the dragon as a symbol says a great deal about the pride and possibly the wealth of that individual.

However the dragon is not lost at this point. It begins to lose its status closer to modern day. Medieval bestiaries do depict the dragon as a real creature but it isn't until Linneaus'

cataloguing of the natural world that the dragon is proven to be mythical. Its namesake is given to various species of lizards and some fish, but otherwise it is debunked. Modern naturalists even began to use Glaurung and Smaug as classifications for certain lizards, seemingly as a generous nod to the legacy of these characters.

In 1898 the dragon takes on a new feature. *The Reluctant Dragon* depicts a spin on the St. George story and shows the dragon to be friendly towards a human child and show a neat solution to a fight. This is one of the earliest examples of the dragon being a friendly, co-operative character but the key feature is his human friend. The significance of the child being present puts the dragon squarely in the place of children's literature. To have friendly dragons as sidekicks or mentors is a common feature in modern children's literature. The reluctant dragon begins the revolutionary aspect of dragons in literature, it is infantilised. The dragon of Germanic tradition is a far cry from this friendly beast but does bear one similarity. The Reluctant Dragon resolves a dilemma, replaying the dragon's intellectual prowess in this instance to appease the townspeople and St. George. Ironically it is now the dragon that must play to the whim of the people and not the other way around.

The infantilised dragon is now a staple in many examples of modern fantasy, especially children's literature. The dragon is somehow more than a mere pet, it is a pet-like friend to the child, not just friend to characters but a friend to the child reading it. The dragon is bracketed with many fairy story beings and being no threat to an adult, how can it threaten a child?

Modern literature, with its development away from mere chronicling to character depth and varied plot devices has room for the dragon to appear in almost any circumstance. The dragon is a versatile plot device as shown in *The Inheritance Cycle*. Their size, strength, power and ability to fly makes them highly convenient characters. In the Song of Ice and Fire

series, the dragons are redefined as the children of their human carer and so enjoy a special place before they are inevitably used to bolster the strength of the Khaleesi's army.

It is clear that a large portion of modern depictions of dragons owe their inspiration to Tolkien's writing. *The Lord of the Rings* in particular is credited and if not directly, then at least inspires other works. *The Silmarillion*, though not as influential as the *Lord of the Rings*, opens up the possibility of fantasy alternate realities even further, by creating its own mythology from the beginning of time to the events of the books. This can also be seen in the *Chronicles of Narnia* and to an extent the *Inheritance cycle* and *A song of Ice and Fire*. This openness of the fantasy genre is seen in other media such as gaming and film, and is a product of an expansiveness that invites exploration.

In order to see how the dragons of these modern expanses fit in, the main sources are the works of Tolkien in which dragons appear to other characters and are not mentioned as background lore. The purpose of this is that it is fairly likely that modern sources derive their inspiration from Tolkien. As he drew his from the original Germanic sources, it is a fair representation of the modern dragon to focus on the three major named dragons of Middle Earth. They would appear archetypal for the modern era and as Tolkien was so familiar with the Germanic text, it would be fair to assume that his deviations from the original Germanic dragons are intentional.

## Smaug

The role of Smaug in *The Hobbit*, though arguably one of the most iconic modern depictions of dragons is very small in comparison with the size of the text. *The Hobbit* was written in 1937 though the story focuses on the adventures of Bilbo and the thirteen dwarves, Smaug is mentioned as a distant and threatening figure through most of the adventure and his appearance in the tale is the beginning of the climax of the story. Smaug serves the role as the

monster in the basic hero overcomes the monster plot, as he drove the dwarves from the Lonely Mountain to make their treasure his hoard.

In this story, the first close description is of the sound he makes likened to 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.’ (Tolkien, 1997: 201) This initial description is, of course, before Bilbo sees Smaug, however the difference in language compared to the encounter with, for example, Beowulf’s dragon is quite different. The dragon is referred to as the ‘ancient pre-dawn scourge [...] – The smooth skinned, malicious dragon who flies by night encircled by fire.’ (Swanton 1997: 143) While these descriptions denote the immensity and ferocity of the dragon concerned, Smaug’s description opens with an array of quite domestic imagery. ‘Large pot on the fire’ and ‘tom-cat’ purring seem to downplay the danger. Perhaps this is due to a likeness between Bilbo’s character and the target audience, children. Bilbo is of small stature from a comfortable, domestic sphere, very much like a young reader and so would have a limited frame of reference to the great and terrible dragon of Germanic folklore. Tolkien uses the commonplace to better help the reader understand the sound of Smaug. It could also be a literary device to build suspense towards the reveal of Smaug on the treasure.

Progressing to the actual encounter with Smaug, the reader is treated to ‘a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; a thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber [...] 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.’ (Tolkien, 1997; 202) This is far more substantial description than that of the older Germanic dragons as the reader knows Smaug is both gigantic, his colour and the shape of his wings. Later in the story he is revealed to be a quadruped ‘straight to the hollow by the left breast where the foreleg was flung wide.’ (Tolkien, 1997: 236) The description of the dragons from an anatomical perspective is limited in the *Eddas* and the *Beowulf* poem,

here, thanks to modern story writing, the reader knows exactly what Smaug looks like. This may be in part due to the fact that *The Hobbit* is a novel and not a tale passed down through oral tradition. Furthermore the focus is clearly on the spectacle of the monster and not the spectacle of heroic exploits. Bard is Smaug's heroic counterpart but he is not the focus of the story. Here, the similarity with the Germanic dragons is apparent as Smaug is doomed to die at a hero's hand, but in this case, this hero is a minor character who serves the plot by removing Smaug as an obstacle in the story. Further, unlike the Germanic dragons, Smaug is a more realised incarnation of the dragon monster.

An interesting feature of Smaug is his hypnotic gaze. It would appear at first glance to be an aspect of his domineering personality, however Bilbo 'caught a sudden thin and piercing ray of red from under the drooping lid of Smaug's left eye.' (Tolkien, 1997: 208) and later gives the experience of being caught in the light from Smaug's eyes. He '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.' (211)

This is a unique aspect of Smaug. None of the Germanic dragons are shown to have this dragon-spell, although it might be a more developed explanation for how the dragon inspires fear in their victims. Smaug shares this trait with his forebear Glaurung who uses it to its most effective manipulation in the *Silmarillion*. This weapon seems to have the same effect as the lure of an anglerfish and perhaps is meant for that purpose, to manipulate their victims into non-resistance. This adds to the overarching trope of the modern dragon which is a more developed sense of evil and specifically, an overbearing personality.

The most interesting aspect of Smaug is of course his personality, his eloquence, and his ability to cast a spell on the minds of those he talks to. Smaug comes across as both wise and vain with his conversation with Bilbo:

‘and the light of his eyes lit the hall from floor to ceiling like scarlet lightning.  
“Revenge! The King under the Mountain is dead and where are his 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 are spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my winds a hurricane, and my breath death!”’ (Tolkien, 1997: 213)

Through this excerpt Smaug reveals an eloquence that can only be compared to Fafnir. Here, however, it is certain that in Tolkien’s world dragons are capable of speech independently from men. Smaug makes use of many similes and metaphors to explain his grandeur to Bilbo, this seems very much like a nod to the Old Norse kennings that described Jormungandr. The Midgard Serpent is often described as ‘the Earth Girdle’ or ‘Encircler of all lands,’ which feels reminiscent of Smaug explaining ‘my armour is like tenfold shields.’ Furthermore Smaug makes reference to ‘tenfold shields, my teeth are swords, my claws are spears.’ (213) These articles of war further illustrate the association of the dragon with its warlike capabilities. Not only are these items relevant to the place and period of the setting, they also illustrate Smaug’s willingness to engage with violence, something he shares with Beowulf’s dragon. Additionally he evokes imagery of thunderbolts and hurricanes, again, very similar to Jormungandr associated with storms and oceanic violence.

Practicality would suggest that Smaug is so mighty that he would not need to justify his confidence to a mere Hobbit, which therefore concludes that he is conceited. This is not a

trait that appears with Beowulf's dragon or Jormungandr and is not easily applied to Nidhogg. None of these dragons are given the opportunity to speak in the Eddas or the poem, Fafnir does seem surprised by his mortal wound but his words in *The Poetic Edda* are more befitting a warrior's confidence rather than a braggart. However, it is difficult to pin that label on Smaug when what he says at least to the smaller beings in the world would appear true. Smaug shows off a superb intellect in this verbal display which is restrained by his vanity. When Bilbo asks to see 'a waistcoat of diamonds [...] Smaug [is] absurdly pleased.' (Tolkien, 1997: 213) Smaug describes himself, in particular the strength of his scales and body and takes pride in the gems stuck to his belly, which eventually provides Bilbo with the information to kill him. Smaug represents quite literally, pride before the fall.

Jane Chance in *Tolkien's Art* takes this concept of pride before the fall a step further to suggest a structural parallel between Beowulf and the Hobbit which means 'Gollum assumes Grendel's place and, thus, epitomizes the "lesser and more nearly human" vices, as Smaug assumes the dragon's place in the second part and thus epitomizes the "older and more elemental" vices [...] and expresses "spiritual sin" chiefly through his pride, although he also manifests, wrath, avarice, and envy.' (Chance, 2001: 56-57) To evaluate Smaug's behaviour according to Christian ideology seems much more appropriate for him due to the fact that the modern dragon is developed enough to express evil. Smaug indeed is incredibly proud of himself and displays the vices appropriate with a deep spiritual sin. Comparing Gollum to Grendel is an interesting interpretation and would fit given that both are monstrous deformations of the human form. In addition, Tolkien was raised a Catholic, so it is unsurprising that he has created Smaug by using almost all the spiritual sins to define his character. Smaug is evil in a sense that is neither compromising nor redeemable. The Germanic dragon was never depicted as an uncertain or fearful monster, but the modern



dragon takes the character development to truly satanic levels of evil, giving an already apocalyptically powerful body a persona to match.

Vanity can only come from a well-developed personality for the dragon, something which is remarked upon by Armann Jakobsson in his essay *Talk to the Dragon: Tolkien as Translator*. He asserts that ‘Tolkien’s dragon, on the other hand, is not a beast. The moment it speaks, it becomes a character, an intelligent person who is not merely governed by his bestial instincts. He still retains these bestial instincts though.’ (Jakobsson, 2009: 28)

Jakobsson suggests that Tolkien is translating the ideas of the interaction in *Fafnismal* into *the Hobbit* and the conversation between Sigurd and Fafnir is echoed in Bilbo and Smaug. Smaug’s character has more human qualities than that of Fafnir and vanity is one of them. Jakobsson also asserts that this makes Smaug more of an uncanny monster, almost human except for his monstrous exterior. Smaug’s origins are uncertain although he hails from the race created by Morgoth in *the Silmarillion*, suggesting no human origins. However it is the humanity in his personality that Jakobsson highlights and that humanity makes for a more menacing threat to the company. It is a lot easier to outwit a dumb beast, but an intelligent, witty monster makes for a deadlier opponent.

Jakobsson asserts an unusual link between Smaug and Fafnir, suggesting that both take a kind of paternal role towards Bilbo and Sigurd respectively. Jakobsson suggests:

‘We do not even really need to be inspired by Freud to see the tunnel as an image of birth: in the tunnel, Bilbo is born a hero. What does he then meet in the bright world beyond? He enters the lair of the dragon, the brightness of which is explained by the treasure, and encounters a big, strangely familiar creature that is intimidating and whose motives are unclear.’ (Jakobsson, 2009: 33)

Jakobsson goes on to discuss the relation Fafnir becomes to Sigurd as a surrogate father figure through their relations with Regin. Bilbo evokes his father’s wisdom about the

weakness found in every worm but goes on to learn from Smaug not to trust the dwarves. It certainly is tempting to view the reveal of the Smaug on the treasure pile as the intimidating other. A new-born already has a relationship with its mother but is introduced to its father. Perhaps the heroic pairing of the hero and the dragon he is destined to slay is a subtle concept of surpassing one's father in feats of glory. It is noticeably clear that this is what Sigurd accomplishes as a teenager, being reborn as a man. In *the Hobbit*, Bilbo is already an independent adult, but gains acceptance, fame and respect after engaging with the dragon for a more vocal battle than physical. He theoretically wins with the last stab about catching burglars which provokes Smaug to retaliate aggressively. The paternal role of the dragon can be applied to Glaurung who is the literal father of dragons in *the Silmarillion* however being a paternal figure to their human (or hobbit) counterparts seems unlikely, however an interesting theory.

An interesting trait of Smaug is what would appear to be 'They could see him as a spark of fire rushing towards them growing ever huger and more bright [...] and the lake rippled red as fire beneath the awful beating of his wings.' (Tolkien, 1997: 234) it is obvious that dragons in Tolkien's universe breathe fire and this is already well established before Smaug reaches Laketown what is unusual for Germanic dragons and is certainly a trait of Smaug's is that he seems to be on fire, at least when he goes to attack people. The reader glimpses into his perspective when he considers the lake '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.' (Tolkien, 1997: 234) Tolkien may not be the first to suggest that dragons can set themselves on fire if they choose as the *Beowulf* dragon 'flies by night encircled by fire.' (Swanton, 1997: 143) It is difficult to imagine that Beowulf's dragon breathes fire continuously over himself, especially when the translation is 'encircled by fire.' It is not clear if the intention is

to say the dragon not only breathes fire but either cloaks itself in fire or is made of fire, it certainly seems to be the intended form for Smaug. If he submerges in water he will die. Lakowski, quoting Scull and Hammond, discusses Tolkien's lecture on dragons which explained 'the nature of dragon's fire: "The real dragon's fire may seem fiery enough and set real things in flame; but it is not a cooking fire. It comes from the heat of the dragon's spirit."' (Scull, 59) Lakowski makes no further mention of this but it is evident that at least in Middle-Earth, the dragon's fieriness and flame comes from its spirit. Clearly this has not been supported in any Norse text as the methods of how a dragon breathes fire is not the focus in Norse texts. However it does have an interesting appeal to modern readers especially as it gives Smaug an extra supernatural ability. It also explains why Smaug thinks and feels the way he does. Fire generally is considered to be volatile and destructive so for a being to be dominated by a fiery spirit enhances the fearsome persona he has already displayed. While this trait of Smaug's is not shared with his Germanic counterparts, it is somewhat suggested with Beowulf's dragon.

### Glaurung

*The Silmarillion* tells the story of Middle Earth from its creation until the events of *The Lord of the Rings* which are briefly mentioned. This collection of tales from Middle Earth reads less as individual short stories and more like a history told chronologically. *The Silmarillion* was posthumously published in 1977 However Tolkien worked on it and refined it over much of his writing career. Chapter 13: Of the Return of the Noldor deals with the first appearance of Glaurung though his major story occurs in chapter 21: Of Túrin Turambar. Glaurung causes great strife when he creates an incestuous relationship between Túrin and Nienor which leads to their commit suicide.

Glaurung appears predominantly in *the Silmarillion* as an antagonistic character. His first appearance in *Valaquenta* seemingly without permission from Melkor his creator. His debut to the story describes ‘the first of the Urulóki, the fire-drakes of the North, issued from Angband’s gates by night. He was yet young and scarce half-grown, for long and slow is the life of the dragons.’ (Tolkien, 1999: 132) The interesting trait here is that Glaurung is set apart from the Germanic dragons in that he appears to have a childhood. Arguably Fafnir must have had one being a human once but as far as Nidhogg, Jormungandr and the *Beowulf* dragon are concerned, their lives appear timeless. They are not depicted in diminutive form nor do they appear to mature. They begin and end their parts in their tales with the same character traits. Smaug mentions once that he was ‘But young and tender. Now I am old and strong, strong, strong!’ (Tolkien, 1997:213) This suggests that in Middle Earth, the dragon is born and has a childhood. The purpose of this seems to naturalise them in the world. They are not beings that just appear without cause or reason, they have a function in that landscape. How Glaurung was created being the Father of dragons is not clear but his purpose is clear and that is to serve Melkor. The part of Glaurung on the other hand suggests misjudgement and over-confidence, something that perhaps all dragons show, however Tolkien’s dragons, both Smaug and Glaurung appear to fall foul of this over-confidence.

It is interesting to observe also that Glaurung’s appearance, not only suggests misjudgement and over-confidence, but also disobedience. One of the few creatures that gives an impression of limited servitude in *The Silmarillion* is Ungoliant although she reluctant to serve Melkor as ‘she was torn between lust and great fear; for she was loath to dare the perils of Aman.’ (Tolkien, 1997: 77) Ungoliant aided Melkor but was ultimately betrayed by him showing that her fear was justified. On the other hand, Glaurung was created by Melkor and therefore would have no other will but that of his master. While Tolkien does explain that not all serve Melkor willingly, Glaurung deliberately reveals himself at his own

whim, suggesting that Melkor does not thoroughly inspire fear in him. It is likely that Tolkien intended Glaurung's appearance to suggest youthful wilfulness but it also suggests an independence and to some degree a lack of fear. It does therefore raise the question why Glaurung allows himself to be subservient to Melkor. The easiest answer is that Melkor is one of the Ainur, one of the most powerful beings on Arda, however Melkor demonstrates mostly his ability to manipulate his victims through fear or anger. Glaurung is shown to be intelligent on his own and to show no fear so it isn't clear why this is the case, except possibly that he has a common goal with Melkor as is seen with Ungoliant. Fearlessness is a trait shared with the Germanic dragons who enter into combat seemingly without fear. Even Fafnir who was once human and could understand the concept of fear seems utterly fearless when he faces Sigurd. Nothing in his speech suggests a fear of dying. Glaurung owes this fearlessness to his Germanic ancestors.

Glaurung is linked to Germanic myth through the invented name 'Urulóki'. This term bears as part of its etymology Loki, the name of the Norse demigod associated with cunning and mischief. He is also a primary antagonist in Ragnarok and father of Jormungandr. His relationship to Jormungandr is mentioned as a genealogical statement and there is no myth or tale to indicate any close relationship between Loki and Jormungandr. It would seem that when Loki is bound to a rock to have a serpent drip venom onto his face, the dragon and serpentine are not friendly to Loki at all. It is possibly the malicious element of Loki's nature that inspired this etymology. However, a comparison may be drawn in the way Glaurung uses his sharp wit to torment Turin 'Evil has been all thy ways, son of Húrin. Thankless-fosterling, outlaw, slayer of thy friend, thief[...] and Túrin being under the spell of Glaurung hearkened to his words, and saw himself as in a mirror misshapen by malice.' (Tolkien, 1999: 255) As in *Lokasenna*, Glaurung is deliberately turning events on their head through his words to attempt to dishearten his opponent. He calls into question Túrin's honour by calling him a

murderer and a thief, as well as an ungrateful brat or 'Thankless-fosterling,' Glaurung takes a lie disguised as a truth which only one as witty as himself would be likely to understand.

Túrin's difficult life and decisions are turned against him in a seemingly accurate light which is the skill shared with Loki who famously uses the same trick against all the gods in *Lokasenna*.

In addition, Glaurung's ability to speak is well developed. He speaks in much the same manner as Melkor, and that is to manipulate his victims. This trait is not seen in the Germanic dragons, however their eloquence, in particular Fafnir's does much to contribute to Glaurung's malicious character. It is not enough that Tolkien created one of the most physically powerful dragons of Middle-Earth, Glaurung is truly evil in nature. Whilst fighting Túrin '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?'' (Tolkien, 1999: 255) Glaurung here manipulates Túrin to the most agonizing degree. He names Morwen and Nienor, both his mother and sister and forces him to choose between them. Glaurung questions Túrin's devotion to Morwen suggesting his pursuit of slaying the dragon is greater than his love for either his mother or his sister. At the same time he suggests Túrin's devotion to his family bonds are weak for the same reason. Of course Glaurung organised this event to occur but instead of Túrin calling out such injustice, Glaurung's words, like poison, force Túrin to see himself differently and act in accordance to the dragon's will. At this point in *The Silmarillion*, Glaurung has grown considerably from his first encounter with the elves and now possesses adult wisdom and confidence. The Germanic dragon here influences Glaurung through the horror that comes with great size and indomitable strength. This is an early encounter with men, who, unlike elves do not live long and do not possess the same ages of wisdom. The

factor of fear is therefore much greater to Túrin than it was to the elves. Glaurung owes that much to his literary ancestry, to instil great fear in his human opponent.

It must be observed however that Glaurung is definitely evil. The Germanic dragons, in spite of their obvious natural prowess were only antagonistic to men and the two are not be synonymous. Glaurung was the creation of Melkor who is marked as an antagonistic Ainur for his constant conflict with them and desire to dominate Arda. Glaurung '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.' (Tolkien, 1999: 256) A parallel can be drawn between Melkor and Glaurung as both use twisted words to influence their enemies which is something that the Germanic dragons don't seem to do. Furthermore, this is often a trait observed in Christian descriptions of demons and the devil, he is wily. One might consider a further comparison with the serpent in the Garden of Eden that tempted Eve with clever words. From this it can be deduced that Glaurung is a more Satanic dragon, influenced by Christian ideology as much as the Germanic dragons. It is not just his apparent delight in tormenting his opponent but also the wanton destruction of the bridge and surrounding area by fire. Very often the Christian depiction of Satan is through the use of fire, in particular a fiery dragon. While the Germanic dragons were strong and imposing, and certainly fire-breathing, the way Glaurung uses his words is very similar to the way demons and the Devil is often said to lead Christians from the correct path. From this it can be stipulated that Tolkien used the template of the Germanic dragon and added the antagonistic arch to create an incredibly menacing monster whose service to Melkor is his badge of evil.

An interesting exchange occurs between Glaurung and Nienor which is a very early example of a male dragon and a female opponent. She is not here a virginal sacrifice either as '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.’ (Tolkien, 1999: 260-261) It is indisputable that Nienor is in need of rescue however she is not the hapless maiden that has become archetypal of the St. George dragon story. Here Nienor ‘Strove with him’ indicating conflict and in this case, conflict of willpower or the mind. This kind of warfare is again unusual as in the Germanic sagas it is primarily armed combat that drives the story. Here armed combat is replaced with combat based purely on either magic or the mind. In either case, this is not a feature of the Germanic dragons. Glaurung is destined to die by Túrin, so in this sense Glaurung is heroically paired with Túrin, however in their first encounter Glaurung held Túrin captive the same as he does with Nienor. It is not shown in the Germanic sagas the female contradicting tradition and facing the dragon in place of her lover. She is unsuccessful, but the dragon enables and empowers Nienor’s position by combat. This type of combat has the added empowerment of a battle of the minds which, arguably, a female is more competent than a male in the tradition of Germanic sagas. No such empowerment exists in the Sagas where a dragon and heroine engage in combat. This is of Tolkien’s own creation.

An interesting alternative view of the role of the female and the dragon is the way that Glaurung influences other characters through his speech. While it is not unknown for male characters to attempt this in the Germanic sagas (see Beowulf) generally it is women that achieve this and are known as ‘whetters’, for sharpening the, often eavesdropping, men’s war-driven attitude with idle gossip or worse, questions of their honour. Glaurung does the same thing in spite of being a male character. At no point does Fafnir speak to Sigurd with the intention of riling him, instead he provides warning. Glaurung deliberately questions Túrin’s honour to guide him down the path that Melkor has devised. This is a strange overlap of male and female roles from a Norse perspective and would suggest an unusual character trait for Glaurung. It is likely this is a tactical manoeuvre. On the one hand, Glaurung is in command of Orcs and therefore is using a stratagem to trap his opponent, on the other, he is



neither human nor a man and therefore chooses a form of combat that is unusual for a warrior to engage in. The Germanic dragons were never under duress or dominion of other beings (not counting fate) so this aspect of Glaurung's character is unique and non-Germanic. Their cleverness is apparent however so Glaurung's use of underhand tactics to manipulate his opponents can be seen as a development from being an intelligent creature to a manipulative one.

Glaurung however is not governed by underhand tactics and for sheer pleasure burned the place down. Glaurung clearly has an affinity for fire as according to Tolkien the Middle Earth dragons have fire spirits. However this destruction of an already destroyed hall seems to serve no purpose other than to entertain Glaurung. It could suggest that he wants to destroy for the sake of destruction and enjoys doing so, in a way that a child might enjoy demolishing a friend's creation because they can. This would suggest that Glaurung has a sense of dominance over other beings and demonstrates this superiority by wanton destruction. It also has connotations of chaos against order as Glaurung destroys the hall which was meticulously crafted. Buildings suggest community and civilisation and the Germanic dragon was considered outside of civilisation. This is the same for Glaurung to a degree, as he destroys a building to represent external forces doing what mankind fears the most, disrupting the heart of civilisation.

It is worth noting however that the Germanic dragon is not truly a wild beast as they seem to have a habit of invading human dwellings. Beowulf's dragon invaded a barrow that was built by men and Fafnir stole the treasure from his father and stored it in a hall. Smaug invaded the dwarves' home to steal their treasure and Glaurung destroys the hall. Both Glaurung and Ancalagon are presumably housed in Melkor's fortress so upset the continued theme of some deadly, chaotic force invading the civilised area. It is worth noting that Glaurung and Ancalagon serve a master who has his own dominion but it cannot be

considered civilised. It is certainly artificial and therefore Glaurung and Ancalagon have an unusual position in the world of the Ainur. They were part of the discordant sections of the song sung by the Ainur in the beginning. Their place in the world is more aligned with an invading enemy than it is an unstoppable force of nature. Where Beowulf's dragon comes from another place to invade the barrow, it is not considered an issue until he takes his revenge, no different than a distant landslide. Ancalagon and Glaurung share the abode of a dark Ainur and therefore are enemies, not just antagonists. This is contradictory to the role of the Germanic dragon but can be considered a development of the role of the dragon from natural disaster to a motivated enemy.

### Ancalagon

Ancalagon like a number of minor characters in Tolkien's *Silmarillion* plays a small part yet is named. Ancalagon's full appearance in *The Silmarillion* is merged with the arrival of 'the winged dragons, that had not before been seen; and so sudden and ruinous was the onset of that dreadful fleet that the host of the Valar was driven back, for the coming of the dragons was with great thunder, and lightning, and a tempest of fire.' (Tolkien, 1999: 302) Tolkien describes the winged dragon as unseen in middle-earth and therefore offers the origin story of the winged dragon, a creature that is iconic outside of the Middle-Earth canon. The appearance of the winged dragons is a final assault by Morgoth to overcome his enemies and has he saved the best of his forces until last. The dragons are aligned with 'Thunder and lightning and a tempest of fire' once again alluding to the forces of nature as were Jormungandr and Nidhogg. There is an additional detail that the fire-breathing, winged dragons are associated with storms, perhaps the most visually spectacular and frightening of weather phenomena, solidifying their association with flight. Furthermore they also come with 'a tempest of fire' evoking images of wildfire. Tolkien introduces the winged dragons,

along with Ancalagon with spectacular description. Ancalagon has inherited this from his Germanic predecessors who all had great size and the forces of nature to embellish their presence in their stories.

Furthermore, the issue from Angband is somewhat evocative of the forces of hell. The ‘tempest of fire’ is perhaps the best description of this as it evokes images of the dark fortress coming alive with flame as hundreds of dragons take to the skies to assault the Valar. While *The Silmarillion* is not an allegory this scene in particular has some level of Christian influence. What can be worse than the red dragon of Hell? An army of dragons. This scene is one of desperation on the part of Morgoth but Tolkien evokes an iconic last stand of ultimate evil against the forces of the Valar. This scene is highly evocative of the ongoing good versus evil motif present in Christian allegory. Furthermore the arrival of Eärendil who assumes the role of the morning star brings also includes ‘all the great birds of heaven and Thorondor [the eagle] was their captain, and there was battle in the air all the day and through a dark night of doubt.’ (Tolkien, 1999: 302) This image seems very evocative of a host of angels, whether this was the original intention it is uncertain, however it is unmistakably a final battle between good and evil and one which the dragon takes the role of the evil opponent. This is an aspect more of the dragon from the Christian perspective rather than the Germanic dragon as Germanic dragons were not representatives of evil.

Ancalagon’s appears when ‘before the rising of the sun Eärendil 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, 1999: 302-303) Unlike his ancestor Glaurung who was gold, Ancalagon is black, emphasizing his association with darkness and evil. The difference in colour between the two dragons has some literary significance. Glaurung demonstrates an interest in gold and his association with it. Further, one could draw an association with his ‘honeyed words’ and his colouration. It could also be

a representation of him being the first among dragons and a by extension a king among dragons. Additionally he lies to Túrin which suggests corruption, a trait commonly seen in the greedy and covetous. The lordly splendour of the colour of gold becomes a colour of evil. Ancalagon is black however which has connotations of a dark heart or a dark mind, but his role in the *Silmarillion* is one of pure fighting force. It is likely that black was chosen as it is the colour of shadows emphasizing how terrifying Ancalagon is for being a giant black monster. Ancalagon bears a remarkable similarity to Nidhogg who is described in *Voluspa* as ‘the shadow-dark dragon flying,/ the gleaming serpent, up from Dark-of-moon Hills,’ (Larrington, 2014: 62-63) Nidhogg and Ancalagon are so similar in their appearances that it would appear Nidhogg is the inspiration behind Ancalagon. It is possible that the reason for this comes from Tolkien himself who mentions in his letters ‘I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands.’ (Tolkien, 1951, xi) Tolkien admits to using other mythologies ‘as an ingredient’ for the *Silmarillion* and it would be impossible to develop such an extensive mythology without the influence of others. It does not devalue Ancalagon’s appearance, brief as it may be, but it seems to honour his Germanic predecessor. However the important difference is Ancalagon has a heroic nemesis, Eärendil, who defeats him in spectacular fashion. Nidhogg has no nemesis and no equal, therefore is destined to destroy the world. In the *Silmarillion*, good inevitably triumphs over evil as the *Silmarillion* precedes *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* canonically.

Once again, Ancalagon demonstrates size that was inherited from his Germanic ancestors as ‘he fell upon the towers of Thangorodrim, and they were broken in his ruin.’ (Tolkien, 1999: 303) Ancalagon’s size as clear as Jormungandr’s. Morgoth ‘delved anew his vast vaults and dungeons, and above their gates he reared the threefold peaks of Thangorodrim, and a

great reek of dark smoke was ever wreathed about them.’ (Tolkien, 1999: 86) Ancalagon’s death destroys three mountains, giving him incredible size compared to most other beings of Middle-Earth. His death is spectacular as the destruction of the mountains is a spectacular climax to the end of *The Silmarillion*. His end seems somewhat ironic as he destroys Thangorodrim, his home and the heart of Morgoth’s strength. Morgoth’s finest creation is ultimately turned against him and destroys his fortification. This is an interesting deviation from the spectacle that is Ragnarok. In this instance, the enemy is not only defeated but they have nowhere left to go. Tolkien essentially wipes evil off the map by defeating Ancalagon, and although the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* prove evil still endured in Middle Earth, it would take another age for its like to be seen again. Arguably the defeat of Ancalagon is a symbolic defeat of the dragons in Middle Earth and aside from Smaug and another mentioned in the Appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*, they are considered extinct during the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. This perhaps is beneficial to the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* who can make use of the eagles with only the Nazgul as serious threats. If the species of the Middle Earth dragon were under Sauron’s control, the fellowship likely would have failed sooner.

Tolkien’s decision to destroy Ancalagon also has the overtones of subduing the pride and arrogance of the enemy. Psychological warfare is a phenomenon that is seen in *The Lord of the Rings* in particular the effects of despair. In *The Silmarillion* it seems to be best demonstrated with Glaurung, however Ancalagon’s visage is a spectacle that clear is designed to induce terror and despair. He is slain just before the dawn, suggesting that he made his final moments at least during the night. Ancalagon’s association with blackness and darkness is clearly a key feature of Morgoth’s tactics as he used Ungoliant’s darkness to destroy the trees and hides his armies in the depths beneath Thangorodrim and Angband. Ancalagon’s death becomes a full-stop on the war and is a fitting, climactic finale to the battle and the

chapter. Furthermore, Ancalagon's title of 'the Black' might be an allusion to his silhouette against the sky which, undoubtedly, would have darkened at his passing. In addition, Ancalagon's association with darkness is made more poignant as he is slain 'before dawn'. This has significant connotations of rebirth and renewal. The old age of darkness is over and a new dawn arrives. Great size is a common trait of the Germanic dragon which gives them literary spectacle. Tolkien uses this to fantastic effect with Ancalagon's death.

Jonathan Evans expands this by suggesting:

'Tolkien imaginatively and selectively organized medieval dragon motifs to reconstruct a wholly imaginary asterisk-history of these diverse elements in something like a hypothetical "natural history" of dragons [...] To the extent that Middle-earth's Fourth Age is analogous to the ancient epoch of our own world- and Tolkien himself made this explicit- then his fictionalized history of dragons is meant to connect seamlessly with the actual status of dragons in medieval literature, where they appear as facts about an earlier time in a world accessible only through the imagination in epic, elegy, legend, and folklore. (Evans, 1998:

188-189)

Evans theorizes that Tolkien seamlessly linked the demise of his dragons with the dragons depicted in reality. It would certainly be a fitting end for these beasts of war. Evan's analysis gives the dragons almost a nostalgic end, as though this should not be a surprise to the reader. There is another thought provoking edge which is what comes after the Middle-Earth dragons which is the plethora of Modern dragons in their many forms. Ancalagon's death could even be considered a sight that wouldn't be considered out of place in a depiction of the Extinction Event that killed off the dinosaurs. From a modern perspective, this is appropriate given the physical age of the Silmarillion as well as its canonical age. The great dragons of Norse mythology are long gone as are those of The Silmarillion. Although Ancalagon is not the last of the Middle-Earth dragons, he represents their ultimate peak in its history, their most

glorious and this is brought to a spectacular end. Ancalagon inherited another lasting legacy from his Germanic ancestors, which is the glorious death that is only achievable in battle. While it was preferred in Norse society for a man to die in battle, it almost certainly assured that any dragon slain also achieved the ideal death proving its worth in combat.

### The Reluctant Dragon

*The Reluctant Dragon* is a short story from *Dream Days* by Kenneth Grahame. It was first published in 1898. *The Reluctant Dragon* is a framed narrative about two children following what appears to be dragon tracks through the snow. They encounter a circus man who tells them the story of the reluctant dragon who befriended a young boy from the local village who organised a staged fight between the dragon and St George in order to save face and help the dragon integrate into society. The story is the earliest example of a friendly dragon but also of the nursery dragon, that is, the dragon archetype of children's literature. The reluctant dragon is an alternative perspective of the St George story and a comical twist on the old tale. The dragon is no threatening monster but an endearing show-off that helps demonstrate the lesson St. George delivers to the townspeople that mindless violence is ultimately wrong and embellished stories are equally wrong.

The reluctant dragon's appearance is well established which is unusual compared to his Germanic counterparts. When the two children, Charlotte and the narrator are examining the strange footprints, Charlotte describes them as '*Lizardy*. Did you say an iguanodon? Might be that p'raps. But that's not British, and we want a real British beast. *I think it's a dragon!*' (Grahame, n.d.) What she appears to refer to are the sculptures of lizard-like interpretations of the iguanodon unveiled at Crystal Palace Park in 1854. These sculptures, the iguanodons being arguably the most iconic (while scientifically inaccurate) give a shrewd idea of the model for Grahame's reluctant dragon, Grahame undoubtedly would have been aware of their

existence. The suggestion of the framed narrative is that the circus man they meet is the reluctant dragon in disguise. When the children come to the end of the trail they find the circus man who is smoking. While this activity is not so unusual, it hints that he smokes because of dragon's association with fire rather than as a pastime.

Within the framed narrative, the reluctant dragon is described as 'big as four cart-horses, and all covered with shiny scales – deep blue scales, at the top of him shading off to a tender sort o' green below. As he breathed, there was that sort of flicker over his nostrils that you see over our chalk roads on a baking windless day in summer. He had his chin on his paws.' This description comes from the shepherd who is flustered telling the description. Later it is revealed that all the townsfolk embellish their stories to St. George about the dragon's antics which he reprimands them for. So this description may be somewhat embellished, however the first interesting observation, is the Reluctant Dragon is decidedly smaller than his Germanic ancestors. While dragons such as Nidhogg and Jormungandr are enormous enough to pose a threat to the gods, even Beowulf's dragon was significantly larger at fifty feet long. A mass compared to 'four cart-horses' in any measurement of size, pales in comparison to the vast whale-sized dragon. This is likely due to the Crystal Palace Park models but also the reluctant dragon is diminutive for his readers. As this is a children's tale, it seems likely that the large, ferocious monsters of Norse Mythology are downsized to make the reluctant dragon less monstrous and far more accessible to its young readers.

The dragon's blue colouration is an interesting choice and quite different from the Germanic dragons. Generally, if the colour of the dragons is given, it is usually red or black, as with Jormungandr and Smaug, Nidhogg and Ancalagon, either are described in terms of brightness or darkness or as red or black in colouration. Glaurung is the exception being gold in colour. The brightness of Beowulf's dragon leans towards the interpretation of being surrounded in fire as Smaug is during the attack on Iketown. Red often has connotations of



war, courage and violence. Black usually is of darkness, deception or death. Together, they have a disturbing amalgam of violence and horror whereas the reluctant dragon is blue, green and when he cleans up 'shone like a great turquoise' (Grahame, n.d.) blue and green are both heavily associated with the earth which suits the description the dragon gives of how he came to be in the cave. Blue is often associated with intelligence and tranquillity and green with nature and peace. All of these are traits of the dragon's personality. Grahame has designed his dragon to be the stark opposite of the Germanic dragons which the people of the town and St. George initially believe him to be. This sets up the farce which mocks the hero slaying the dragon motif. By rendering the dragon in colours associated with calm and passivity, the reader automatically does not fear the dragon but likes him. Furthermore, to compare him to a turquoise gives the sense of something pleasing to the eye, a kind of beauty, which is rarely attributed to dragons. Certainly they are magnificent in the Norse Mythology, but frightening more like a volcano is impressive but deadly whereas a snow capped mountain inspires beauty.

The reluctant dragon demonstrates a remarkable ability to converse. Not only can he speak, he is also eloquent, a trait shared by the Germanic dragon, Fafnir. When speaking to the boy about poetry composition, he remarks 'Now you've got culture, you have, I could tell it on you at once, and I should just like your candid opinion about some little things I threw off lightly [...] I'm awfully pleased to have met you, and I'm hoping the other neighbours will be equally agreeable.' (Grahame, n.d.) He is also a poet which arguably makes him an eloquent beast. The reluctant dragon has so much persona in his speech that he could easily be a human character rather than a dragon. The dragon's speech is outdated by modern standards as he litters his speech with very stereotypical qualifiers 'I'm awfully pleased to have met you.' His method of speaking makes him more endearing now than it probably did during the time of publication. His methods of speech can be compared to Ratty and Mole

from *Wind in the Willows*, by the same author, and the exaggerated exuberance of speech would now be considered a cliché. He very polite in speech, generally, as well as flattering. Unlike most comic characters, the reluctant dragon is not deliberately rude or sarcastic, instead he is somewhat bumbling and loveable, to the point where he almost seems to not realise he is a dragon. He hopes ‘the other neighbours will be equally agreeable’ conveniently forgetting that he is not the same as his neighbours. Arguably his flattery has an ulterior motive as he is trying to ingratiate himself in order to settle near the village, but his character isn’t obviously malicious. This is in stark contrast to his Germanic Ancestors whose personalities were less endearing and dominated by ferocity and aggression.

However, the reluctant dragon displays a kind of manipulative streak. This is described during the conversation between the shepherd’s son and the dragon about the arrival of St. George. The dragon being manipulative is expressed ““Oh, I think not,” said the dragon in his lazy way. “You’ll be able to arrange something. I’ve every confidence in you, you’re such a *Manager*. Just run down, there’s a dear chap, and make it all right. I leave it entirely to you.”” (Grahame n.d.) The dragon is described as lazy, which is accurate as he uses manipulative speech to get the boy to do what he wants, in this case is to keep St. George away from him. He does this through flattery, uplifting the boy by praising ‘I’ve every confidence in you, you’re such a *Manager*.’ The emphasis on confidence and calling the boy a manager raises the boy above his station as a shepherd’s son. This is not considered a true vice in the dragon in the same way that Smaug or Glaurung’s manipulative speech causes harm to the people they interact with. The dragon seems to be gently mocked for being lazy, a lazy dragon is after all not as frightening to children as an aggressively active one. Furthermore, it could be a satire of the treasure-guarding dragon, a suggestion that if they sit on gold all day, they are bound to be lazy creatures. The reluctant dragon is vastly different from his Germanic ancestors by admitting to laziness and expecting a child negotiate with St. George on his

behalf. It demonstrates an indifference to the Germanic dragon stereotype, which is what the townspeople believe he is.

The reluctant dragon does not appear to have a heroic counterpart that is destined to slay him. The dragon interacts mostly with the boy but is supposed to fight St. George. The majority of the narrative follows the boy's point of view point which explains the infantilized persona of the Reluctant Dragon. He is labelled 'A storybook dragon which is why the Boy has the confidence to deal with him, because his parents have always encouraged his interest in fairytales and natural history. But the fight with St. George reads like Grahame's vision of a folk play or spectacle at a fair' (Unerman, 2002: 95) Sandra Unerman clearly stipulates that the dragon's passivity is due to the fact that he exists in a children's story. By extending Unerman's theory, the dragon is a kind of reward for the boy for pursuing an interest in reading. Most children fantasize about their favourite characters and even Tolkien wished for dragons to exist although not in his back yard. The reluctant dragon makes this wish come true for the boy who, in spite of having human friends in the village, seems to have a greater affinity for the dragon. This is arguably closer to the boy having the dragon as a kind of pet than a friend but the magical pet that speaks which has become a very common trope for the children's fantasy genre. The lack of heroic counterpart is really only shown by Nidhogg of the Germanic dragons and for a very different reason. Nidhogg's lack of slayer is mainly due to the fact that no-one is able to kill him as opposed to the reluctant dragon who does not need to be killed.

As it is not in the dragon's basic nature to be violent there is no need to have a heroic counterpart who is destined to slay the dragon. St. George's inclusion turns the story into a spoof. The reluctant dragon is no threat and him being perceived as one turns the dragon-slaying spectacle into a farce. Unerman describes it as 'a folk play or spectacle at a fair.' Overall the intention is clear, the dragon fight is intended to be light-hearted entertainment

and not a brutal fight to the death. Grahame gives a crowd pleasing battle scene but one in which no-one is hurt which is both exciting and neatly wrapped up by the end of the story. This is ideal story-telling for children. Every character achieves what they want: St. George gets to maintain his reputation by pretending to battle the dragon; the boy keeps his friend and the dragon doesn't die and integrates into society. Even the villagers get the fight they wanted to see. This is in contrast to the Norse Sagas and to the *Beowulf* poem that exemplify or honour deeds. *Beowulf* in particular has the overwhelming sense of dignified regret throughout and the *Saga of the Volsungs* details the struggles of the heroes in their attempts to become the ultimate good Norsemen, with varying success. If there is a message to be read from *The Reluctant Dragon* it is about the absurdity of the dragon-slayer story and that any excuse for violence is a poor one. It might also suggest the notion that judging by appearances is wrong and to be smart is better than being aggressive. Clearly the ideals presented by the sagas and *The Reluctant Dragon* have different readers in mind, therefore different values. This affects the dragons as well. The reluctant dragon is not what is being mocked in the story but the stereotype he objects to is. There is no heroic counterpart as the dragon is not perceived as the problem to the reader, but the townspeople's wish to see fighting is the problem. This deviates from the trope that exists among Germanic dragons as their very violent nature is a threat to humanity and so there is a need to slay them.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Germanic dragon in its most dramatic and apocalyptic form is the amalgam of draco, of the beast that is the dragon, and of draconitas, the persona of the dragon. The two attributes keenly displayed of the dragon's body is size a size which is not matched by most living things. The dragon possesses strength, strength that has the capacity to if not put fear into gods then prove such a challenge to them that they are considered a

scourge and a danger. The dragon has the supernatural powers of flight, fire-breathing and or spitting poison. These gifts of violence transforms the dragon beyond a mere brute of the wild to a being of such devastating power that only a human army is realistically equipped to deal with it.

The aspects best representative of draconitas are found in the dragon's natural violence. These Norse monsters are the masters of fear, they do not succumb to it themselves, instead they use it as their most formidable of weapons. It is no mere mortal that has the ability to stand up to a dragon, it can only be a hero or a god that achieves this. They are at their heart creatures of war, designed to attack anything that disturbs their most natural of positions, guarding a barrow or treasure hoard. It would appear that the dragon is synonymous with death. Not a passive death, but a violent one. The hero is decidedly beyond all men if he can successfully defeat the threat of a dragon. In addition, should he defeat the dragon, he is immortalized by his reputation for slaying the beast and earns its reputation for his own.

As part of the arsenal of the Germanic dragon speech and through that speech intelligence. Dragons are no mere brutes. They combine two of the most fearsome weapons, brains and brawn to become a volatile force to be reckoned with. A hero facing the dragon must outwit it and overcome its strength if he hopes to succeed. They have the ability to recognise justice and are as swift to execute it. They have a sense of vengeance, of knowing when what appears to them is wrong and it would appear, a sense of duty. If they are fated to destroy the world, they will. If they are meant to guard a barrow, they will.

The Germanic dragon is the embodiment of destructive force and doom. It is their place in the world to provide the threat of the external to such a degree, that an exceptional hero must rise in order to remove that danger from the realm of men. The dragon is oddly dual in its nature, it is both designed to threaten mankind, but ultimately to be defeated by it. This duality of nature is both magnificent and sombre, as the dragon, in spite of its prowess is

doomed to fall to men at the whim of the writer. The dragon is ultimately at the mercy of the writer that determines an even more impressive being, the dragon's heroic counterpart is always superior. Realistically this would not be the case.

The traits of the Germanic dragon have filtered down to the modern dragon which is distinctly different to their Germanic counterparts. Owing to the improved methods of storytelling in the modern era, the modern dragon shows a richer depth of personality. In characters such as Smaug and Glaurung, the level of manipulation obvious to the reader is as horrifying as the visage described. The modern dragon has achieved another aspect of personality that was not given to their Germanic ancestors, they have achieved evil. Whereas the Germanic dragon could be forgiven for its forceful destructiveness, the modern dragon is known to act for the sake of evil in spite of knowing what good is or can be. In Tolkien's universe, Smaug and Glaurung are the products of evil creation and in their nature is woven malice, vanity and cunning.

The exception to this is the reluctant dragon whose evolution forked from the dark dragons of Middle-Earth. Here the reluctant dragon developed the guardian's role to one that is happy to do the sitting, but not much else. The Reluctant dragon displays manipulative speech and intelligence but has a softer personality, one that seems ridiculous given his species. He has inherited from his Germanic ancestors the size and arsenal of the dragon but not the natural violence. He is the result of satire but he himself is not the object of mockery, rather the traditional tropes of the Germanic dragons are.

The reluctant dragon expands upon the intellect of the Germanic dragon to while away his days composing poetry and has no greater desire than to get along with his neighbours. By extension, to integrate into society. He barely recognises himself as a dragon and believes that he has as much of a place among people as any visitor to the town would. He does

however have the heartwarming trait that he is the friend of the shepherd's son and if the circus-man is the same dragon in disguise, then a friend to the narrator and his sister.

This suggests an affinity towards the purity of children that the dragon is more inclined to trust children to treat him kindly than adults. The reluctant dragon is once again demonstrating the ability of his ancestors to elevate the position of his friends, as opposed to his enemies, by being a friend and a helper when they are surrounded by adults who think they know better.

The modern dragon has done what all creatures do and that is evolve. Where the Germanic dragon is the ferocious dinosaur of mythology, the modern dragon is the bird descended from them, caged and taught to sing whatever tune the writer fancies. The Modern dragon has been developed and redesigned to suit any fantasy universe. The Germanic dragon is the template and the modern dragon is the realisation. This analogy is suitable as the Germanic Dragon, while well described, is not described with the same attention to detail as demanded by the modern reader. Instead, it is a malleable outline which has been redeveloped in some stories beyond recognition. Dragons now are said to come in all shapes and sizes, usually pocket sized or domestic animal sized in order to be a child friendly plaything. They are often adopted into society by performing tasks usually relegated to machinery. There is a sense of understanding between the friendly dragon and his humans that they are after all friends and help one another out. However the sense of becoming tamed to perform the will of humans cannot be shaken from these infantilised beasts.

The dragon above all possesses spectacle which is why it is so popular and so enduring a mythical being. They have become exceptionally popular in new forms of media such as gaming and film media. Their sense of spectacle is what lends them so well to these genres who give them new life by their portrayals on screen. The sheer audacity of any human willing to combat such a phenomenal beast is surely a story worth telling. That spirit of

unique spectacle is not lost among the modern dragons. While the modern dragon has been tamed, used as a household appliance, beast of burden and special friend, underneath that anthropomorphized form is the underlying knowledge of its ancestry, of the terrifying monsters that inspired the modern dragon's position. Dragons can always serve as a grand and mystical spectacle in almost any story. This unique trait is perhaps why the dragon is one of the most iconic of all fantasy creatures. They are memorable and defined by this.

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