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# Putting the Spotlight on Smaug

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PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT

ON

SMAUG

By

Casey Pellerin

An Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Honors

in

The Department of English

The School of Arts and Science

Rhode Island College

2009

PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT  
ON SMAUG

An Undergraduate Honors Project Presented

By

Casey Pellerin

To

Department of English

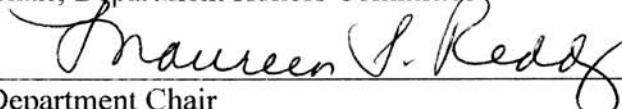
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### *Introduction*

Since its original publication in 1937, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* has gone on to become one of the most enduringly popular children's books of all time.<sup>\*</sup> Most people are familiar with the plot, in which a respectable hobbit by the name of Bilbo Baggins is recruited to join a party of dwarves making their way to the Lonely Mountain in an attempt to reclaim the treasure that was stolen from them by the evil Dragon, Smaug the Golden. After a long and dangerous journey, guided in part by the wizard Gandalf, the party of fourteen is successful. The treasure is reclaimed and Smaug is killed, and although several of the Dwarves also die, Bilbo manages to return home safely, having become a wiser (and considerably more prosperous) hobbit.

Despite its popularity, much of the scholarly criticism available on Tolkien's works focus on his even more popular and well-known epic, *The Lord of the Rings*, or his earlier work, *The Silmarillion*. *The Hobbit*, due to its traditionally younger audience, does not receive nearly as much attention. Much of the criticism of *The Hobbit* engenders does not focus on the dragon. Smaug is one of the focal characters in the story, and yet very little has been written about him. Almost all of the critical treatments I have found do not address Smaug as a character, but treat him as a plot device, a literary archetype, or evidence of Tolkien's interest in and knowledge of Norse mythology. For example, a recent book-length study, *Myth and Middle-Earth* by Leslie Ellen Jones, mentions Smaug only in comparison to the dragon in *Beowulf*. Even critics who view Smaug as exceptionally well-written often consider his function in the novel to be that of a destructive force to be overcome, as Sandra Unerman does in her essay "Dragons in Twentieth-

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<sup>\*</sup> Based on customer ratings on online bookstores, as well as a list of favorite books compiled by the National Education Association. According to the BBC, *The Hobbit* has sold more than 100 million copies ("Tolkien's Hobbit fetches £60,000," BBC News website, November 26 2004).

Century Fiction.” In *The Mythology of Middle-Earth*, Ruth S. Noel argues that “Wherever a dragon appears in Tolkien’s works, it is wholly within the tradition of European myth” (154) and that “Once Tolkien left the adventure story for the ethical quest, the dragon became too stereotyped a symbol to use” (156).

I believe that investigating Smaug, his origins, his role in the story, and his characteristics, will provide the field of Tolkien Studies with new tools with which to evaluate and understand Tolkien’s work, and provide a deeper understanding of *The Hobbit* as a novel. In this thesis, I will investigate three interrelated questions: 1) What is Smaug’s relationship to the various mythological and literary traditions of dragons; 2) What texts and images influenced Tolkien’s own conception of Smaug and how did he evolve; and 3) What is the larger significance of Smaug in terms of the enduring popularity of *The Hobbit* as a whole?

One of the few critics to look at Smaug, William Green describes Smaug as a foil to Bilbo in his book *The Hobbit: A Journey into Maturity*. But is this Smaug’s only purpose, or is there more to his function as a character? In order to answer these questions, I will examine the ways in which Smaug can be seen both as an embodiment of the traditional role of a dragon, and as a departure from that history, one whose mythic roots are as deeply embedded in the late nineteenth century and the era of Tolkien’s childhood as they are in the *Völsunga Saga*. There is no single source, of course, for Smaug: as C.W. Sullivan has said, “the best fantasy authors who do not draw on a specific body of lore ... may synthesize all of those sources and weave a masterpiece of fantasy” (287). To determine how Tolkien did this will involve some work from within comparative mythology, as well as an examination of the cultural contexts and conflicts

of which Tolkien was a part, including changing practices in the field of children's literature, World War I, and his life as a member of Oxford's university culture.

Gaining a fuller understanding of Smaug's origins will also require a close critical analysis of the original composition and publication of *The Hobbit* as a text, and an analysis of Tolkien's creative process during a period of ferocious activity which brought forth not only *The Hobbit* but also *Roverandom* and *Farmer Giles of Ham*. These two children's stories were both created and written down in the years immediately preceding and following those of *The Hobbit*, and both, curiously enough, contain dragons. Their relationship gives fresh insight into Tolkien's evolving conception about dragons, and helps put Smaug into the context of Tolkien's larger "secondary creation" as a whole. Sullivan describes this "Second World" as one in which the mind can enter and believe that everything in it is real (280). Also, Tolkien's artwork, specifically his own illustrations for these books, will provide insight. All of the above undertakings require close reading of passages from of *The Hobbit* and Tolkien's other works, both to trace Smaug's origins and to determine more precisely just *how* Smaug functions as a character.

### *Tolkien in his Time: The Origins of Smaug*

Fantasy and myth often feature magnificent and unique creatures, and one such creature is the dragon. Renowned for its evil nature and virtual invulnerability, the dragon strikes fear in the hearts and minds of its opponents. Throughout history, it has featured prominently in many famous tales and legends, such as *Beowulf*, the story of Saint George, and the *Völsunga Saga*. In the twentieth century, the legacy of the dragon

was made popular once again when John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's *The Hobbit* was published. Telling the tale of an extraordinary hobbit and his dwarven companions on a quest to reclaim the dwarves' ancestral home from the dreaded dragon Smaug, it became an instant hit, and remains so to this day. *The Hobbit*, along with many other novels by Tolkien, has evoked much critical analysis, often over the roles of the hero or Tolkien's visionary ability to create a completely new world. But what of Smaug, the dragon whose actions lead the story? How does he fit into the mythology and genealogy of mythical and fictional dragons? The answers to this question are not simple, because Smaug both conforms to the mold of the traditional dragon and breaks it when compared to dragons in other stories, coming as he does from ancient mythology, individual imagination, and personal experiences; he is not a pawn or beast existing only to further the exploits of the main characters, but a fully developed character.

As an integral character within the text, Smaug did not appear out of thin air, but was the product of one man's imagination, and knowing something of the history of that man is one part of understanding the dragon he created. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in January of 1892. His father died when he was four, leaving his mother, Mabel, to raise him and his brother, Hilary. Mabel Tolkien firmly believed in the importance of education, and it was she who fostered Tolkien's love of literature and learning. Tolkien maintained this love of learning, long after his mother's death in 1904. Memories of these days also stayed with him, leaving him with a sense of nostalgia and an idealized, almost Romantic image of the country side that can be seen in his portrayal of the Shire.

Tolkien received a thorough formal education, which he supplemented with research of his personal interests. He attended the King Edward's School, where he

became a librarian in the school's library in 1910. Along with other student librarians with whom he became close friends, Tolkien formed what they called the Tea Club and Barrovian Society, or TCBS. This group was similar to the one he formed with friends as an adult, called the Inklings. Both groups provided Tolkien with an outlet for his intellectual and creative energy, and an audience that was both friendly and critical. While at King Edward's School, Tolkien was taught or taught himself how to speak at least four different languages - Latin, Greek, Gothic, and Anglo-Saxon, otherwise called Old English (Carpenter 54). Also during his time at King Edward's, Tolkien met Edith Bratt, the woman he would later marry.

After graduating from King Edward's in 1911, Tolkien attended Exeter College in Oxford. He originally studied Classics, which were Latin and Greek studies, but he found it almost too easy (Carpenter 61). He specialized in Comparative Philology, also known as language studies, and did very well in it, thanks in part to his professor and in part because Tolkien found it so interesting. After exams, it was suggested that Tolkien change to the Honour School of English Language and Literature (Carpenter 70). As an English major, Tolkien studied old texts, like *Beowulf*, the poetry of Cynewulf, and more, texts which he used as inspirations and models for his own writing. He learned Welsh because it interested him and because he thought it would be useful, and he and began to work on his artistic abilities. He also continued inventing his own language, which would later be featured in *The Silmarillion*. In 1914 and 1915, Tolkien began to write creatively, and these pieces laid the foundation for his personal mythology that would become Middle-Earth (Carpenter 81-5).

Tolkien's interest in language and literature continued after graduation. When Tolkien took up a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Lancaster Fusiliers, he specialized in codes and signaling because it involved languages (Carpenter 87). During World War I, Tolkien suffered the loss of nearly all the other members of the TCBS. When Tolkien became ill with trench fever, he was hospitalized and later discharged from the army. While recovering in the hospital, he worked on writing *The Silmarillion*, the first account of his invented legends and the foundation of all his later work. His experiences in WWI certainly had an impact on his work. He once said, "A taste for fairy-stories was awakened by philology on the threshold of manhood, and quickened to full life by war" (Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories* 42). Tolkien's attitude towards honor, the importance of glory, and the long-term effects of an individual's choices were influenced by his experiences in the war (Croft 8-9). Tolkien draws a clear line between honor, such as Bilbo's actions during the face-off between the dwarves, humans, and elves and their opponents after Smaug is killed, and glory, like what Thorin desires. His experiences also affected his descriptions of battles, such as one that occurs in *The Hobbit* after Smaug is killed, the difficulties faced by refugees (Croft 16), like the now homeless inhabitants of Lake-town, and the anxiety of waiting for something to happen (Croft 36), as Bilbo and the dwarves experience after being trapped in the Lonely Mountain. After the Treaty of Versailles, Tolkien got a job as an assistant lexicographer on the New English Dictionary in Oxford, and then went to the University of Leeds, where he worked on a new edition of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" in 1922. In 1925, Tolkien won a Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, and stayed at Oxford for twenty years.

It was while he was grading exams at Oxford that Tolkien found the blank page on which he wrote the now famous words “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit” (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 8). To date, all known surviving drafts of *The Hobbit* feature a dragon as the impetus for the journey taken by Bilbo and the dwarves and the villain of the plot. In a way this is hardly surprising. From his earliest reading, dragons played a central role in forming Tolkien’s life-long passion for invented mythologies and languages. At the age of seven, he wrote his first, and for many years only, fictional short story about a “green great dragon” (Carpenter 24). His mother told him that it should be phrased as “great green,” but was unable to explain why to her son’s satisfaction. Tales of dragons, whether from children’s books or the Norse sagas, were a significant part of Tolkien’s childhood. This was a time ripe with literature to feed Tolkien’s mind. Children’s literature had begun to shift away from the didacticism and moral “lessons” of older nursery tales and toward a fuller embrace of fancy for fancy’s sake. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* appeared in 1865, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was published in 1900, and Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* was released in 1908. Although none of these were among Tolkien’s favorites, they were all representative of a time that revolutionized the literature read by children (Brown). But Tolkien did enjoy some of the stories he read in Andrew Lang’s *The Red Fairy Book*, and this included an edited version of the *Völsunga Saga*. The *Völsunga Saga* is the legend of two generations of a prominent Norse family, and the version in *The Red Fairy Book* included Sigurd’s fight and conversation with the dragon Fafnir (Carpenter 23). In an essay based on a lecture titled “On Fairy-Stories,” which was part of a series of memorial lectures devoted to the legacy of Andrew Lang and given in 1938, Tolkien confessed, “I

desired dragons with a profound desire ... of course, I in my timid body did not wish to have them in the neighborhood. But the world that contained even the imagination of Fafnir was richer and more beautiful at whatever the cost of peril” (Tolkien, *Fairy-Stories* 41). In a BBC interview in 1965, he explained this fascination a bit more. “They seemed to be able to comprise human malice and bestiality together so extraordinarily well, and also a sort of malicious wisdom and shrewdness - terrifying creatures!” (Petty 34). Tolkien found dragons to be fascinating. They were frightening because they were so foreign to everything accepted in reality, and yet their basic nature could be so easily understood, and this made them attractive to Tolkien.

Tolkien drew upon this knowledge of language and literature to create a story of a hobbit-turned-thief that he hoped would awaken a “desire to know”. Tolkien believed that if a story awakened desire, then the story was a success (Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories* 40). But Tolkien’s knowledge did not end with literature. As an enthusiast for fantasy literature and a father of four, Tolkien knew what was likely to please the reader. He knew from personal experience that dragons were part of the best stories he had read as a child, and he understood why that was the case. He had already composed a number of tales that centered on dragons in the years just preceding the composition of *The Hobbit*, among them Glaurung from *The Silmarillion*, the White Dragon from *Roverandom*, and Chrysophylax Dives from *Farmer Giles of Ham*. Another minor, though highly suggestive, connection in Tolkien’s life between childhood and dragons lay in his children’s school; during the years Tolkien was writing *The Hobbit*, at least two of his sons were attending the Dragon School in Oxford.

Tolkien's own education, both formal and informal, offered him a way to continue his interest in fantasy into his adulthood, and contributed a great deal to his writing. As a student at Exeter College in Oxford, Tolkien had enrolled in the Honour School of English Language and Literature (Carpenter 76), and as he began writing *The Hobbit*, he was a Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford (Carpenter 122). By this time, Tolkien had created his own language, and spoke at least six more. Over the course of his studies and career, he was exposed to older texts, like Cynewulf's poetry and Old English riddles, which were later used as sources for the competition between Bilbo and Gollum, and then again as a source for the way Bilbo speaks to Smaug. He had read *Beowulf* and the *Völsunga Saga*, and he knew about dragons in literature and what made them fascinating to readers. As he created the character of Smaug, Tolkien drew upon this vast wealth of knowledge.

### *Smaug and the Genealogy of Dragons*

In order to determine Smaug's role and place in *The Hobbit* and dragon mythology, it is imperative to know something about dragons. Dragons often share specific characteristics. These include personality traits, common activities, and physical characteristics, though this does not mean that all dragons are the same. Many people would recognize two very distinct categories – Eastern and Western Dragons. Perhaps the most recognizable Eastern dragon is the Chinese dragon. It is brightly colored, and can fly despite its lack of wings. The Chinese dragon is a symbol of prosperity, divinity and goodness (Shuker 86-9). In contrast, the Western dragon is presented and portrayed as an evil being. Slaying a dragon was a necessary feat of which only the strongest and most

courageous were capable. The typical dragon of medieval stories has no morals and no compunctions against killing humans and animals (Borges 70). Others categorize dragons using a different set of criteria. In *Dragons: A Natural History*, Karl Shuker classifies dragons into four categories: serpent dragons, semi-dragons, classical dragons, and sky-dragons (Shuker 95). Shuker approaches the study of dragons from literary, historical, and biological standpoints, arguing that the dragons of many famous stories exist or can be explained based on what they are represented as or next to in various cultures, or based on accounts of how these tales came into existence. As an example of the former method, Babylonian dragons include the sirrush, one of the sacred animals of Marduk, the ancient Assyrian sun god. The sirrush is portrayed next to two definitively real creatures, the bull and the lion, which raises questions about whether or not it was, or potentially is, also real (Shuker 72). An example of Shuker's second method to explaining the existence of dragons can be seen in the chapter on Regulus, a Roman General, and the Carthaginian Serpent Giant (26-9), where he points to the African rock python as a potential source for the story.

According to Shuker's classification system, Smaug can be considered a classical dragon. Shuker defines classical dragons as traditionally reptilian in appearance, with scaly bodies and clawed feet; they have four legs and wings (57), characteristics Smaug possesses. As for Shuker's other classifications of dragons, serpent dragons resemble snakes (11). Famous ones include Jormungander, the Midgard Serpent that was killed by the Norse god Thor (Shuker 20) and Cetus, who belonged to the Greek god Poseidon (Shuker 30). Semi-dragons fall into three categories – lindorms, wyverns, and wingless. Wyverns and lindorms are very similar. Both are scaly, reptilian, and two legged, but

wyverns have wings while lindorms do not (Shuker 39). Some semi-dragons, like Fafnir from the *Völsunga Saga*, are portrayed as four-legged and wingless. Sky-dragons would be Shuker's classification for the Chinese dragon. These dragons often look similar to serpent dragons, they do not always have wings, and yet they are capable of flight (Shuker 77).

These classifications do not span all of the physical attributes or abilities of dragons. Physically, dragons are often very large, ranging in size from that of a horse to that of a house. For example, Fafnir drank stream water by lowering his head down over a cliff that rose "thirty fathoms high" (Byock 63), or approximately 180 feet high. This is taller than most lighthouses in the United States. Dragons are strong, capable of catching and killing large herd animals without effort. This trait is useful for daily survival and for defensive purposes. Other defensive traits include virtual indestructibility. Some dragons have as few as one vulnerable part or spot on their bodies. Another external defense that dragons may have is the ability to breathe fire. Sometimes, a dragon's breath, blood, or bite is poisonous or venomous. Inhaling the dragon's breath, as Thor does during his battle with Jormungander (Shuker 23), or getting the creature's blood into an open wound, as "Beowulf discovered deadly poison suppurating inside him" (Heaney 2713-14), can be deadly to an attacker, even if the dragon is killed as well.

In her article "Fifty-British Dragons: An Analysis," Jacqueline Simpson looked at dragon tales from England, Scotland, and Wales, and compiled a list of common dragon activities. Simpson found that, with three exceptions, "it is always assumed and usually explicitly stated, that the dragon destroys animals and men" (79). The dragon is a destructive force, never one of the "good guys," and this makes the dragon instantly

recognizable. There are multiple stories, like that of Saint George, where the dragons eat maidens. In that story, the dragon attacks a community for no obvious reason. Offerings of milk, a drink that Simpson found popular among dragons, and cows appease the creature initially, but this stops when no more cows remain to be sacrificed. The next step is to offer a young maiden to the beast every day. This ends only because Saint George arrives and is able to kill the dragon (Shuker 58-61). In other words, the creature is a normal dragon, acting in a predictable and accepted manner. Interestingly enough, Simpson found that hoarding treasure is not common among British dragons from medieval tales, but it is a trait found in dragons of Germanic literature (Simpson 79).

Dragons are also said to live in certain types of habitats. Many live near or in bodies of water, whether the body of water is a lake, swamp, ocean, river, or well (Simpson 79). Examples include the Lambton Worm, which is caught by the local lord's son in a river and then deposited down a well (Shuker 12). The creature thrives in the well, and soon grows large enough to terrorize the townsfolk. Other habitats include hills, woods, and caves (Simpson 79). Fafnir, after killing his father, "set out for the wilds" (Byock 59). The dragon in *Beowulf* lived within a barrow, otherwise known as an ancient tomb (Heaney 2212). The barrow in *Beowulf* was underground, creating a cave-like atmosphere.

### *Tolkien's Dragons*

As William Green has observed, "Smaug is ... like so much in Tolkien, a synthesis of sources" (103). While Tolkien drew heavily upon Fafnir and Beowulf's Bane as sources for Smaug, he also drew upon the dragons he had created in previous years as

sources of inspirations. He drew both physical and personality traits from these dragons, as well as his beliefs about the role of dragons within a story, and combined them in order to create his newest dragon as he wrote *The Hobbit*.

The first dragon Tolkien produced is named Glaurung. Glaurung appeared in *The Silmarillion* and *The Book of Lost Tales*, which he began writing before graduating from college. Recently, in 2007, *The Children of Húrin* was published, which greatly expands the story of Túrin, Niënor, and Glaurung. Glaurung's dragon ancestry is highly evident. His role within *The Children of Húrin* is borrowed from both *Beowulf* and the *Völsunga Saga*. Like Fafnir, Glaurung helps the protagonist build his reputation and fulfill his destiny. Also like Fafnir, Glaurung is not killed in a battle. Túrin kills Glaurung by stabbing him in the stomach while hiding on the edge of a cliff, similar to how Sigurd kills Fafnir while hiding in a trench. Other traits shared by the two dragons are their ability to speak and their physical forms, for both dragons are classified as semi-dragons. Glaurung is also like the dragon of *Beowulf*. Both have poisonous blood, and both cause the hero's death with their own. *Beowulf's* Bane killed *Beowulf* with poisoned blood in a battle *Beowulf* knew would kill him, while Glaurung kills Túrin by poisoning his heart and driving him to suicide. Unlike his predecessors, Glaurung has very powerful magical abilities. With them, he can manipulate minds and emotions, and even erase memories, as he does to Niënor.

Tolkien's second dragon was the White Dragon of the children's novella *Roverandom*, which was written in 1925. The White Dragon, unlike Glaurung but like Smaug, is a classical Western Dragon. The narration describes for the reader some of the White Dragon's past deeds, like fighting "the Red Dragon in Caerdragon in Merlin's

time, ... Later he did lots more damage in the Three Islands, and went to live on the top of Snowdon for a time. People did not bother to climb up while that lasted” (Tolkien, *Roverandom* 33), and his status as a typical, fierce, aggressive Western dragon is further confirmed by his unprovoked chase of the dog Roverandom and his friend the Moondog. Beyond confirming this status, though, the White Dragon is not very developed. He is not a major character in the story and his role does not require much development. He is a plot device that appears only once, like the spiders or trolls that Tolkien later writes about in *The Hobbit*. He’s exciting, he’s interesting, but he’s not entirely necessary. The dragon could just as easily be changed into an entirely different creature, and the effect would remain almost exactly the same. This role as an evil dragon for pure entertainment was virtually unheard of at the time. There had been *The Reluctant Dragon* by Kenneth Grahame published in 1898, but that dragon is more gentlemanly than most humans, and is in no way evil (Stein 181). In *Roverandom*, the dragon comes, is defeated yet left alive after taking a blow to the stomach from the Man-in-the-Moon, and then life goes on. Roverandom’s quest to become a real dog continues with no loss of momentum. Despite the uniqueness of his role, the White Dragon does share some similarities with his predecessors. Like Fafnir and Glaurung, the White Dragon can speak, and breathe fire. According to *Roverandom*, it is the flames from the White Dragon that are the cause of the lunar eclipse (33-4), and this explains why the Man-in-the-Moon doesn’t kill him, because the dragon has an important place in the moon’s small society.

Another of Tolkien’s dragons is Chrysophylax Dives of *Farmer Giles of Ham*. As a novella by Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham* is unique, because it is the only piece of Tolkien’s fantasy writing featuring dragons that is set entirely in England. The story of

Farmer Giles is set during a lost period of Saxon history, and contains several anachronisms, like fourteenth century armor and the use of a blunderbuss to scare off a giant. It also has more than one dragon, though only one plays a significant role in the story. As for Chrysophylax, his role in the story changes as the plot continues. At first, he is an antagonist. The dragon burns farmlands and forests, eats livestock and people, including the parson of Oakley, and people all around are terrified of him. When the King insists on taking the treasure that Farmer Giles has taken from the dragon with no help from the King or his Knights, Chrysophylax switches sides because he can see that the farmer will treat him better than the King will. He becomes an ally instead of an enemy, and scares the King off. Though the relationship between dragon and farmer begins as one of mutual benefit, it soon grows into one of mutual respect. Throughout the story, Chrysophylax comes across as a humorous, arrogant, yet sympathetic character. Unlike the White Dragon's unprovoked attack on the two dogs, Chrysophylax is looking for food, because "It was bitter cold in the mountains and food was scarce. The talk got louder. Lowland sheep and kine from the deep pastures was much discussed. The dragons pricked up their ears. They were hungry, and these rumours were attractive" (Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham* 22). Chrysophylax avoids conflict when he can because he is slightly lazy and sees no advantage to sustaining injury. He would rather talk his way out of a situation, as he does with the villagers of Ham, and this greatly showcases his ability to think and reason.

For all of his dragons, including Smaug, Tolkien borrowed several unmistakable traits from Fafnir. Most noticeably, he borrowed the ability to speak. As Tolkien wrote in a letter in December of 1949, "Fafnir in the late Norse versions of the Sigurd-story is

better; and Smaug and his conversation obviously is in debt there” (Tolkien, *Letters* 133). Another similarity between Tolkien’s dragons, including Smaug, and Fafnir is the terror they incite in the local populace. As Fafnir tells Sigurd, “I have borne a helm of terror over all people since I lay on my brother’s inheritance. ... so that none dared come near me,” (Byock 64). In *The Hobbit*, the guides sent from town with the dwarves and Bilbo refuse to go any closer than one day’s travel to the Lonely Mountain because they are terrified of Smaug (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 255). Fafnir also stated that he felt no fear from an attack, a trait that Smaug shared.

In other ways, Tolkien made Smaug similar to Beowulf’s Bane. For example, the item the dragon of *Beowulf* finds missing is a goblet, and Smaug finds a two-handle cup stolen. Both dragons are first seen by readers sleeping atop a pile of treasure. Beowulf’s enemy and Smaug are capable of dreaming. Beowulf’s enemy “saw footprints of the prowler who had stolen too close to his dreaming head” (Heaney 2289-91), while Smaug “did not wake - not yet - but shifted into other dreams of greed and violence,” (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 271) as Bilbo crept around his lair. Another trait shared by these two dragons is their reactions to the theft. Both dragons are instantly outraged beyond description. Both scour the area around their lairs for signs of the thief, belching flames as they do so, and this testifies to their temper and physical capabilities. Finally, the death of both dragons brings about a change in leadership for those affected by the dragon’s wrath. In *Beowulf*, Beowulf dies after naming Wiglaf his heir. In *The Hobbit*, Bard, a descendent of Girion Lord of Dale, is put in charge by popular consent after Smaug’s death. The difference here is that Bard’s ascension is described as a positive

event after the former leader is proven incompetent, while Wiglaf's promotion and Beowulf's death is seen as the beginning of the end for the Geats.

Tolkien also mixed some of the characteristics of these dragons while creating Smaug. When he created Smaug's choice of homes and landscaping, he used the examples in *Beowulf* and the *Völsunga Saga* as models. In *The Hobbit*, Smaug lives in a vast cavern within the Lonely Mountain that once belonged to the dwarves, and the area around the mountain is known as the Desolation of the Dragon. It is bare of all life, and the ground is covered in scorch marks. Smaug turned this once forested area into a barren landscape when he attacked the Mountain and stole the dwarves' treasure. The dragon of *Beowulf* took similar actions. Before he discovered the treasure and settled down to sleep, which allowed the land to recover, he burned all of the fields and forests in the surrounding area. In this way, the two dragons share a taste in landscaping. Smaug also shares his taste of homes with Fafnir. The text of the *Völsunga Saga* describes Fafnir's home as being located on or near a heath, but the illustrations that have been published with the story, like those in Lang's *Red Fairy Book*, show Fafnir living in a cave located in a rocky and mountainous area, much like the Lonely Mountain



Fig. 1. Illustration for “The Story of Sigurd” by Lancelot Speed, *The Red Fairy Book* (London 1901) 361.



Fig. 2. Illustration for “The Story of Sigurd”, Artist unknown, *The Red Fairy Book* (London 1901) 359.

Despite their similarities, Tolkien created Smaug to possess other abilities that these two “real” dragons did not have, or greatly modified those they do. Fafnir, for

example, converses with Sigurd through straight questions and answers. Though Sigurd first attempts to answer in riddles, he soon capitulates and provides direct answers to Fafnir's questions. Smaug and Bilbo converse through riddle-talk for their entire conversation, because Bilbo refuses to give the dragon straight answers to his questions, leaving Smaug the task of deciphering them. This provides the reader with insight into Smaug's mind and reveals his ability to reason and retain information. Another trait that Tolkien modified from Fafnir was Smaug's ability to withstand attack. Whereas Fafnir relied mainly on strength and reputation, Smaug actually armored the most vulnerable part of his body, his stomach, with gems. In doing so, Smaug acknowledges that strength and fear are not always enough. One of the traits from Beowulf's bane that Tolkien modified was Smaug's ability to dream. Smaug's dreams are actually described for the reader. First they are dreams of greed, and then they change into a dream of a tiny warrior in his lair. This dream is a remnant of Tolkien's original plot line, which called for Bilbo to kill Smaug instead of Bard. It also marks Smaug as important, more so than other adversaries the party has faced on their journey, and makes him more real to the reader because they can see inside his head even as he sleeps.

One of the qualities Smaug possesses that Beowulf's Bane and Fafnir do not have is a touch of magical abilities. Smaug, like Glaurung, is capable of putting people under "dragon-spell". Smaug attempts to ensnare Bilbo, and as a result, Bilbo "trembled, and an unaccountable desire seized hold of him to rush out and reveal himself and tell all the truth to Smaug" (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 280) whenever the dragon's eyes roamed over his invisible form. Smaug also uses his voice in a manner Tolkien calls "dragon-talk". This creates doubt in Bilbo's mind about the honesty and trustworthiness of his

dwarven companions. Tolkien's narrator comments "Bilbo of course ought to have been on his guard" (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 280-81), suggesting that magical capabilities like dragon-talk is a common enough trait among dragons of Middle-Earth that Bilbo, who has only old tales from the Shire to go on, should be aware and wary of its effects in order to avoid it. Smaug's lack of success, compared to Glaurung's encounters with Túrin and Niënor, indicates that the powers dragon's posses have declined over the Ages, which fits with the notion that Smaug is the last of the great dragons.

Tolkien had very definitive ideas about what a true dragon's role within a story should be. He believed that such dragons are "actually rare" and that they must be "essential both to the machinery and the idea of a poem or tale" (Tolkien, *Monsters* 9). There can not be another creature or situation that will work as well as a dragon within the text to convey the major themes or provide the proper instigation or resolution for the story. Tolkien argued that there are only two such dragons in northern literature: Fafnir and Beowulf's opponent. These dragons are irreplaceable and have a purpose in the stories of which they are a part.

In the case of Fafnir, the dragon's actions prior to his entrance to the story bring about the confrontation between Fafnir and Sigurd. The results of this confrontation affect the rest of Sigurd's life by helping him forge a reputation that follows him for the rest of his life and leaving Sigurd in possession of cursed treasure. Defeating a dragon is described as far more heroic than defeating enemies in battle. Sgiurd's teacher, Regin, calls Sigurd a coward for delaying his confrontation with Fafnir. It is this reputation and the effects of the curse that lead to his downfall when the two women that love him are unable to reconcile. The role of Fafnir is one of great consequence within the story.

Fafnir as a dragon is interesting, in part because Fafnir started life not as a dragon but as a dwarf. His form changed to reflect his greed after he killed his father and stole his treasure. As he lay dying, Fafnir asked his slayer questions to ascertain who it was that had killed him before warning Sigurd of the curse that had been laid upon his treasure. This gives Sigurd another opportunity to display his bravery by answering the dragon and accepting the curse as part of his life. Over the course of the story, the audience never sees Fafnir actually perpetrating evil deeds, they only hear about past deeds, and this distances them from Fafnir's evil nature.

The dragon of Beowulf is slightly different. This dragon came by his treasure in a finder's keeper's way. When the dragon learned that a "gem-studded goblet" (Heaney 2216) had been stolen, he took his rage out on the country-side. Beowulf's bane is the third monster Beowulf has fought, and ultimately provides the hero with a fitting and honorable death. A lesser creature would not have been able to provide such a death because it would not make sense nor would it be as tragic for the hero to die in a battle equal to or lesser than those he had already fought.

### *Smaug the Magnificent*

Smaug's role is different. He is not an agent of fate and a reputation builder like Fafnir, nor is he the means for a fitting death of a hero. Smaug is the villain of *The Hobbit*. He is not villainous like Sigurd's mentor, Regin, who teaches Sigurd to fight and forges his pupil a sword with the intention of killing him once Fafnir is dead, but in many ways a sympathetic villain like Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Smaug is cruel, and he is a killer, and his past actions are the driving force behind the

dwarves' journey. However, like Frankenstein's monster, Smaug acts with a sense of reason and legitimacy. To Smaug, there is no doubt that the treasure the dwarves once collected now belong to him. It is from him that Bilbo steals the initial cup, and he takes this theft as a personal insult. The dwarves' decision to employ Bilbo as a thief rather than attack the dragon openly in some ways validate Smaug's claim, though the decision is presented as a more feasible tactical decision. Smaug believes that his treasure was won by right of conquest, and is justifiably angry, not only with the dwarves and Bilbo, but also the men of the Lake. As Smaug proclaims to Bilbo, though he believes the hobbit beyond hearing, "'Barrel-rider!' he snorted. 'Your feet came from the waterside and up the water you came without a doubt. I don't know your smell, but if you are not one of those men of the Lake, you had their help. They shall see me and remember who is the real King under the Mountain!'" (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 288) The Lake-men have, in a way, committed treason against their ruler, though they see his claim to rule as illegitimate and despotic. Smaug feels justified in attacking the town because they aided his enemies and defied his rule, and this is what makes Smaug a sympathetic character. This is not to say that Smaug did not enjoy attacking the town. He is still a dragon, but this sense of justification is one very big way that Smaug differs from his dragon predecessors.

According to William Green, Smaug also acts as a foil to Bilbo, a mirror of sorts. A psychoanalytic critic, Green observes in *The Hobbit: A Journey into Maturity* that "the beginning of the story is echoed, however darkly, by Bilbo's encounter with the dragon at the Lonely Mountain" (42). Smaug shares qualities not only with his dragon ancestors, but with the novel's hero as well. Both live underground, their homes accessible through

tunnels, and both are stolen from, the difference being that Bilbo accepts the loss of his silver spoons while Smaug destroys the area around the Lonely Mountain. Aspects of the Lonely Mountain, such as the Doorstep and the smoke rising from the front door of the mountain, are similar to the Shire, where Bilbo sat outside his door blowing smoke rings. This role as mirror has the effect of making Bilbo's home more welcoming and Smaug's more frightening, as well as highlighting Bilbo's positive characteristics, such as his immunity against "dragon sickness" (Green 43), otherwise known as greed. This aspect and function of Smaug is the closest the dragon comes to being a plot device, but instead of reducing Smaug's presence and role in the novel, it increases it by adding depth to his character.

Besides their roles in the story, there are other major differences between Smaug and dragons like Beowulf's Bane and Fafnir. While Smaug participates in activities like hoarding treasure and causing the death of innocent bystanders, he is also described as a creature capable of thinking and feeling. Tolkien uses third person omniscient narration in a manner unique to dragon literature by revealing not only Bilbo's thoughts about the dragon he is encountering, but the dragon's thoughts on the hobbit standing in his cave. Not even *Farmer Giles of Ham* gets anywhere near as deep into its dragon's mind. Prior to *The Hobbit*, very few stories involved the dragon's thought process. Most notably, *Beowulf* included a brief description of the dragon's reaction when he discovers that one of his cups is missing. Other dragon stories describe the creatures' physical actions. In response to impending death, Fafnir asks Sigurd questions. In the story of Saint George, the dragon attacks Saint George, possibly because he is there or possibly because he is freeing his dinner, but there is no way to determine which is the actual reason because

none of these narratives allow the reader into the dragons' heads the way it does in *The Hobbit*. For example, Smaug feels amusement while listening to Bilbo's riddling talk, and triumph when Bilbo reveals enough information for him to draw a conclusion:

No dragon can resist the fascination of riddling talk and of wasting time trying to understand it. There was a lot here which Smaug did not understand at all (though I expect you do, since you know all about Bilbo's adventures to which he was referring), but he thought he understood enough, and he chuckled in his wicked inside. (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 279-80)

These are very human emotions, easily recognizable and readily understood. This fits with Tolkien's belief that the best dragons possess both animal and human characteristics.

Smaug is also proud. He is proud that he has the ability to destroy and to instill fear. He is proud of his ability to reason. He is proud of his physique. These are things he is good at or things he has cultivated that he can use to his advantage. He goes so far as to boast to Bilbo that his enemies are no more:

"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 spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!" (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 282)

Smaug's pride is what brings about his death. Hubris is a common tragic flaw in heroes and villains. By having Smaug exhibit his pride, Tolkien makes him stand out from other dragons, because, while this is characteristic that does exist in dragons such as Fafnir, it is not usually highlighted or explicitly described and does not play so obvious a role in the dragon's demise. Smaug is so proud of his impenetrable armor and physical capabilities that he believes he is indestructible. When Bilbo remarks that he once heard a rumor that dragon underbellies were very vulnerable, Smaug is annoyed that Bilbo is not wholly ignorant of dragon-lore, and also insulted that Bilbo thinks he cannot protect himself:

The dragon stopped short in his boasting. "Your information is antiquated," he snapped. "I am armoured above and below with iron scales and hard gems. No blade can pierce me."

"I might have guessed it," said Bilbo. "Truly there can nowhere be found the equal of Lord Smaug the Impenetrable. What magnificence to possess a waistcoat of fine diamonds!"

"Yes, it is rare and wonderful, indeed," said Smaug absurdly pleased. He did not know that the hobbit had already caught a glimpse of his peculiar under-covering on his previous visit, and was itching for a closer view for reasons of his own. The dragon rolled over. "Look!" he said. "What do you say to that?"

"Dazzlingly marvellous! Perfect! Flawless! Staggering!" exclaimed Bilbo aloud, but what he thought inside was: "Old fool! Why, there is a large patch in the hollow of his left breast as bare as a snail out of its shell!" (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 282-3)

Despite Bilbo's thoughts, Smaug's pride in and estimation of his prowess in regards to his ability to reason and protect himself is not unreasonably high. He forms a logical conclusion about Bilbo and the dwarves: if they are not from Lake-town, then they certainly received help from there, based on Bilbo's riddling talk. He decides to ignore the evidence he does not understand, such as not recognizing Bilbo's scent as that of a hobbit or Bilbo's intimation at a long journey. He is even correct in his conclusions regarding the involvement of the men of the Lake. The residents did provide aid to the party of fourteen in the form of supplies, and there were even some guides to lead them closer to the Lonely Mountain. In regards to his ability to protect himself, Smaug knows his physical capabilities. He has killed people and animals, destroyed villages, and conquered kingdoms. He did all that and more when he arrived at the Lonely Mountain. Now that he is an older dragon, Smaug is physically larger and stronger, so he believes he can attack any enemy and succeed in destroying them. He has acknowledged that his chest is his most vulnerable point and has taken steps to protect it. Bilbo privately regards Smaug as a fool for bragging about his armor while it is imperfect, but Smaug does not know about the bare patch. From his viewpoint he is demonstrating that he has planned ahead, and that fighting him would be a waste of time and life. Smaug is proud of his achievements and has no reason to doubt that they will fail him.

Smaug also possesses a physical trait unique from any other non-Tolkien dragon that came before him. Smaug is more than just capable of breathing fire; Smaug is a creature of fire. His existence depends on his inner "fires" continuing to burn. This is the source of the "red light steadily getting redder and redder," (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 270-1) and heat that Bilbo acknowledges as he creeps towards Smaug's lair. Tolkien has

Smaug acknowledge the existence and necessity of his inner fire as he attacks the town, as well as the dangers that go with such a life-force – “ ... he came over them, swept towards the bridges and was foiled! The bridge was gone, and his enemies were on an island in deep water – too deep and dark and cool for his liking. ... the lake was mightier than he, it would quench him before he could pass through” (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* 304). Smaug shares this physical trait with other dragons of Middle-Earth, though none of the others acknowledge it. Indeed, it is possible to see how Tolkien made use not only of Fafnir, Beowulf’s Bane, and other dragons passed down through the ages to create Smaug, but of the dragons he had created in the previous years.

As mentioned earlier, Tolkien’s dragons were also resources that Tolkien drew upon as he wrote *The Hobbit*. If one looks at Tolkien’s dragons as a process of evolution, then it is very believable that *Farmer Giles of Ham* was written before *The Hobbit*. First came Glaurung, who was almost entirely a product of Tolkien’s readings of Fafnir and Beowulf’s Bane. Then came the White Dragon, a creature who exemplifies all of the personality traits of a typical Western dragon, like aggression and a penchant for destruction, but whose only purpose is to entertain. Most importantly, he survives the battle. Next is Chrysophylax Dives, a dragon who actually *avoids* battles. As an antagonist in the story, he speaks with the hero, Farmer Giles. He is slightly arrogant in a humorous manner, and he too survives.

This brings us to Smaug. In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien mixes the episodic style of *Roverandom* with the humorous tone of *Farmer Giles of Ham* and the dignified, old-fashioned setting that Glaurung once inhabited. Within Smaug, we see the arrogance of Glaurung, as well as his ability to play mind games. We see the ferocity and willingness

to attack of the White Dragon, and a conversation similar to that of Chrysophylax Dives' and Farmer Giles' between hobbit and dragon. This doesn't mean that Tolkien copied these aspects of his dragon exactly to create Smaug. He modified them a bit, tempering the qualities of one dragon with qualities of another in a way that made each uniquely Smaug's.

By looking at Smaug alongside Tolkien's other dragons, the traits Tolkien considered essential or useful in a dragon stand out. For starters, all of his dragons breathe fire. The fires Smaug and the White Dragon emit are described as being red and green. All of Tolkien's dragons are described as hot or possessing an inner fire that causes their death when quenched. All of these dragons have been granted the ability to speak, though some speak more than others. Smaug and Chrysophylax speak the most. The narration of the White Dragon tells us he speaks to the two dogs, but not exactly what he says, while Smaug and Chrysophylax carry on full conversations. Glaurung carries on some conversations, but he does most of the talking, with very little response from whomever he is speaking to. All of Tolkien's dragons are destructive and surrounded by barren landscape. Glaurung's lair is surrounded by burnt tree stumps; much like the area around Chrysophylax's home is described as scorched and trampled. The White Dragon lives on the dark side of the moon, which is described as cold and dangerous, while Smaug is surrounded by the Desolation of the Dragon. When the White Dragon leaves his cave to pursue Roverandom, he smashes mountains. All of Tolkien's dragons not only live in barren lands, but help to create that barrenness.

Magical abilities are shared only between the dragons of Middle-Earth, which creates a sense of continuity. Glaurung is adept at using magic. He enthralls Túrin and

Niënor with his eyes, and tortures them with his words. Túrin is caught at the fall of Nargothrond, where “Without fear Túrin looked in those eyes as he raised up his sword; and straightway he fell under the dreadful spell of the dragon, and was as one turned to stone” (Tolkien, *The Children of Húrin* 178). Later, his sister, Niënor, is found by Glaurung, and “he drew her eyes into his, and her will swooned. And it seemed to her that the sun sickened and all became dim about her; and slowly a great darkness drew down on her and in that darkness there was emptiness; she knew nothing, and heard nothing, and remembered nothing” (Tolkien, *The Children of Húrin* 209). Glaurung uses his power to erase Niënor’s memories and bring about her demise. In *The Hobbit*, Smaug attempts to use this ability on Bilbo, though with much less success. Smaug’s voice has better effect, and with it he is able to create doubt in Bilbo’s mind about the honesty of his dwarven companions. Glaurung has a similar ability, and with it he makes Túrin believe that his family is in grave danger (Tolkien, *The Children of Húrin* 180), and tricks Niënor into revealing her heritage (Tolkien, *The Children of Húrin* 208). As mentioned earlier, Smaug’s powers are less than Glaurung’s which fits with the idea that dragons and dragon magic is in decline, leaving Smaug as the last great one.

Another trait shared by all of Tolkien’s dragons, along with other characters in his stories, is that their names have meaning, a trait which fits with Tolkien’s passion for languages. To Tolkien, the naming of his characters was important, and he put his language skills to use. In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien wanted his dragon’s name to have some significance, even if the common reader would be unaware of its existence. He called this “a low philological jest” (Carpenter 199). Originally, Tolkien named his dragon “Pryftan”, which is Welsh for “Fire Worm”, but the dragon was not to remain Pryftan for

long. Even before the dwarves and Gandalf had finished explaining to Bilbo why they wanted to reclaim the Lonely Mountain, Pryftan had been renamed Smaug. According to Tolkien, the name Smaug was from the past tense of the Germanic verb “smugan”, which means “to squeeze through a hole” (Carpenter 99). The irony of this, of course, is that Smaug’s inability to fit through a hole is what dooms him. Tolkien continued this practice with several of his other characters in *The Hobbit*, such as Thorin, whose name is from the *Elder Edda*, and Gandalf, whose name means “magic elf” in Old Norse (Carpenter 199). Like Smaug and the other characters of *The Hobbit*, Chrysophylax Dives and the White Dragon have names relevant to their personalities or physical traits. The White Dragon is so named because of his coloring. After chasing Roverandom and the moondog and the Man-in-the-Moon’s attack, he “never got the black splashes off where the spell hit him. I am afraid they will last for ever. They call him the Mottled Monster now.” (*Roverandom* 36) His name changes with his change in physical appearance. Chrysophylax Dives’ name means “rich treasure-guardian” (Rateliff 529), which is what Chrysophylax is and does. Even after making Farmer Giles and the people of Ham quite rich, he has plenty left in his cave when he is set free and allowed to go home.

### *The Dragon and the Pen: Tolkien as Illustrator*

Tolkien was a skilled author, possessed of a vivid imagination, a vast knowledge base, and plethora of talent. These same qualities served Tolkien well as an artist, too. Tolkien sketched and painted landscapes, patterns, and people. Every Christmas, he composed a letter to his children from Father Christmas. The letters always included decorative borders and illustrations of the events described by Father Christmas. Tolkien

also illustrated some of his novels and novellas, especially those pertaining to Middle-Earth. Like his books, Tolkien's illustrations drew in part from the visual traditions of earlier collections of fairy tales such as Lang's. These illustrations included both landscapes and plot events; at times, the landscapes include distant representations of the characters, as in the illustration for *The Hobbit* entitled "The Front Door." The image of Smaug flying around the Lonely Mountain is seen in this pen and ink sketch:

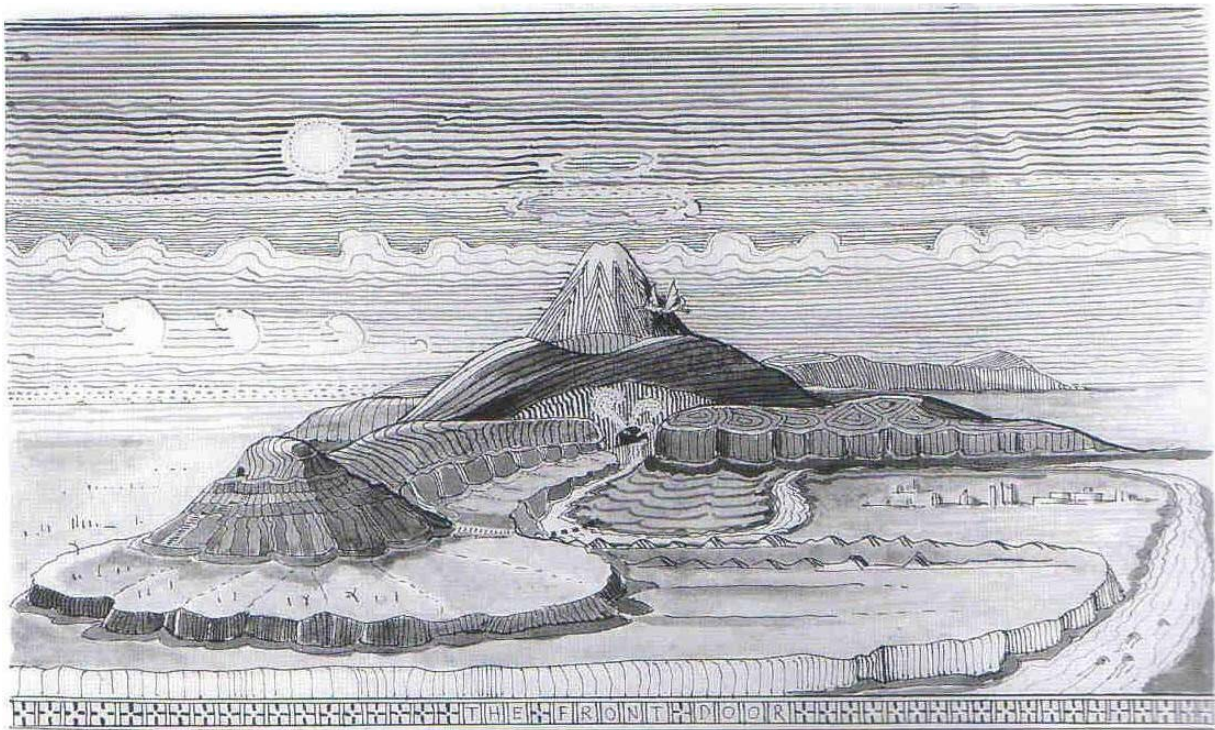


Fig. 3. "The Front Door" by J.T.R. Tolkien, *Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator* 142.

At other times, his landscapes are just that. They provide a visual image to match the description of the setting within the text, like in "Lunar Landscape," which shows the earth, the fields, and the rivers that Tolkien claims are found on the light side of the moon, but which are absent on the dark side where the White Dragon lives.



Fig. 4. “Lunar Landscape” by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Artist and Illustrator* 78.

Tolkien was very particular about how he illustrated plot events. He wanted the illustration to match the events and places in the text because he felt that continuity was very important. For example, one of his illustrations, entitled “Death of Smaug,” was considered for the cover of an early edition of *The Hobbit*. Tolkien rejected this idea, and wrote in the margins of the picture the reasons why, including inconsistencies like the phase of the moon.

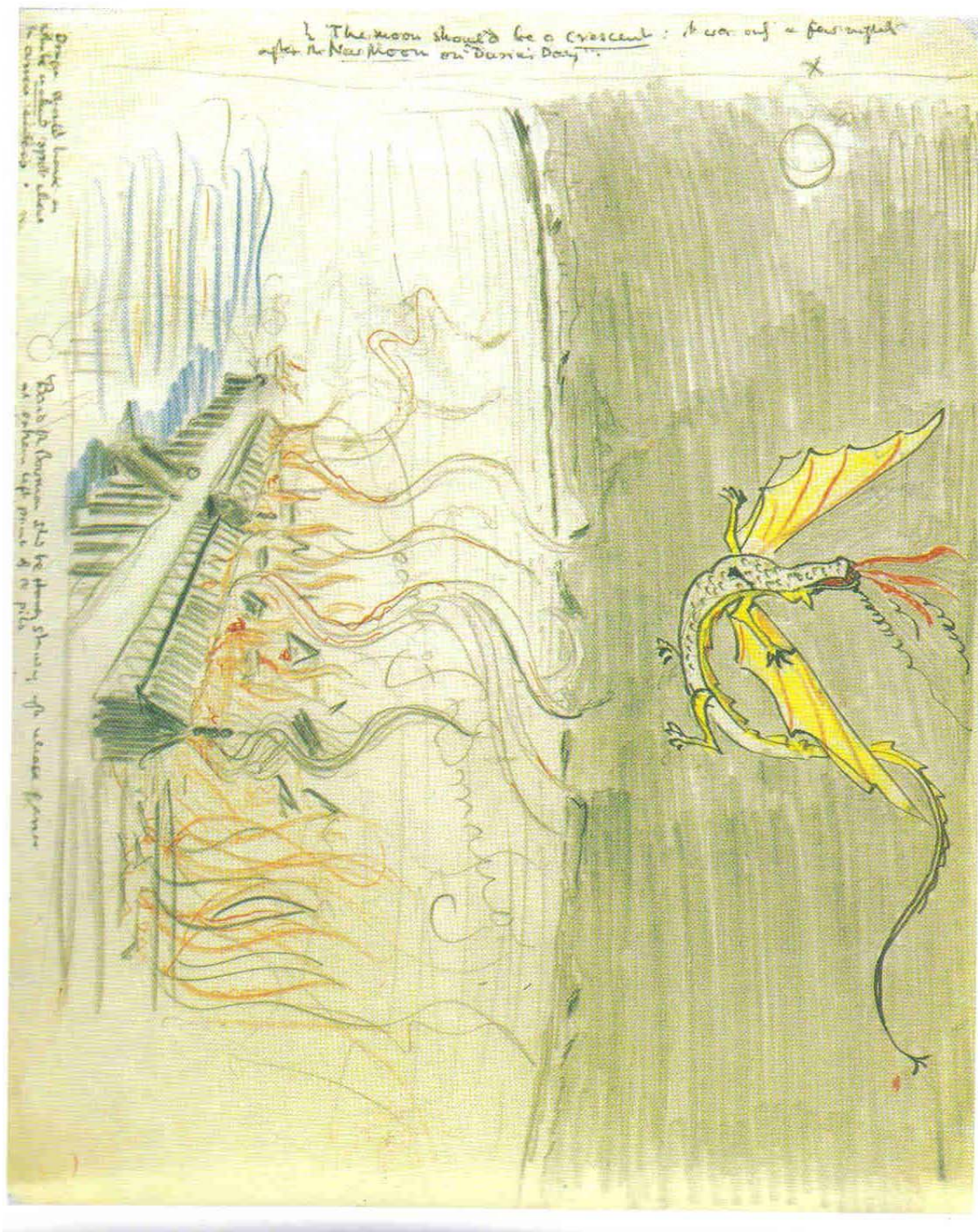


Fig. 5. "Death of Smaug" by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tolkien Artist and Illustrator* 144.

Though he drew and painted numerous illustrations of Middle-Earth and certainly several of Smaug, Glaurung is only seen in one of these and it bears the caption “Glórund Sets Forth to Seek Túrin”.

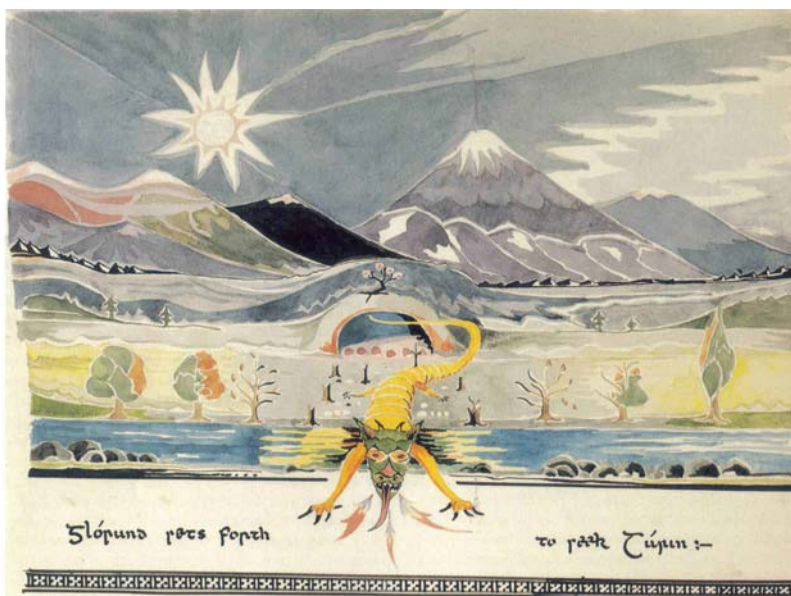


Fig. 6. “Glórund Sets Forth to Seek Túrin” by J.R.R. Tolkien, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator* 51.

This illustration clearly shows the difference between Glaurung’s physical appearance and Tolkien’s other dragons when compared to other images, such as one of Tolkien’s most famous illustrations, “Conversation with Smaug” from *The Hobbit*,



Fig. 7. "Conversation with Smaug" J.R.R. Tolkien: *Artist and Illustrator* 140.

as well as the illustration “The White Dragon pursues Roverandom and the Moondog” from *Roverandom*.



Fig. 8. “The White Dragon pursues Roverandom and the Moondog” by J.R.R. Tolkien, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator* 81.

Smaug and Glaurung are both colorful, and all three dragons are physically large, but Glaurung has no wings and is shown crawling across the ground instead of flying.

These illustrations highlight the physical similarities between the dragons. Smaug in “The Front Door” could easily be switched with the White Dragon in “The White Dragon pursues Roverandom and the Moondog.” Both dragons are large, both have forked tails, and both have snouts that turn up at the end like that of a crocodile. The illustrations also show the barren landscapes surrounding the dragons’ homes, emphasizing this common theme among Tolkien’s dragons.

These illustrations set Tolkien’s dragons apart from their predecessors. Before Tolkien, any illustrations that accompanied a dragon tale were the work of an independent artist. They were basing their work off of interpretations that were second-hand at best. For example, the illustrations of Fafnir in Lang’s *The Red Fairy Book* were based on a translation of the *Völsunga Saga* that was based on an oral tradition that had been around for at least several centuries before being written down for the first time in the thirteenth century. Many paintings that were supposed to represent Saint George defeating the dragon left off the very noticeable eye-spots on the dragon’s wings, and paintings of this subject were very popular during the Renaissance and up through the years. This picture, for example, shows the dragon with no wings at all:

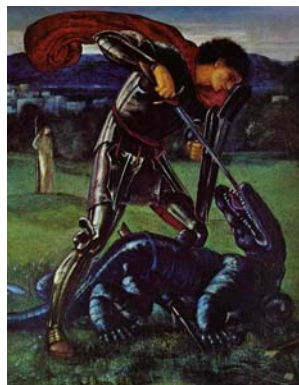


Fig. 9. “Saint George and the Dragon” by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, 1868

Other images show the maiden untied, something most versions of the story do not describe. Regardless, the images do not present accurate visual interpretations because they are inconsistent with the story. By illustrating his stories, Tolkien provided his audience with visual aides to understanding the stories that were true to his interpretation and visions of the tales, not someone else's. They provide a means to better understanding plot events, such as the conversation between Smaug and Bilbo, or Smaug's death. In the former, Tolkien includes such details as the bones of dwarves that surrounding the pile of treasure, and the Arkenstone, the piece of treasure most coveted by the dwarf Thorin, glowing on top of the pile. Bilbo's invisibility is rendered as a shadow surrounded by light. It is impossible to see details beyond his shape and hat. A look into Smaug's eyes reveals the dragon's amusement, and his posture, draped as he is over the treasure, is relaxed and comfortable with his wings still tucked in, indicating that the dragon feels no threat from the invisible intruder, a fact that the text makes clear.

As to the latter illustration, Tolkien was quick to point out the flaws and inconsistencies between what he considered a rough sketch of the "Death of Smaug" and the events as they were described in the text. Tolkien never intended for "Death of Smaug" to be published without revisions to bring it in line with the text of *The Hobbit*, because consistency was a crucial factor in Tolkien's writing and art.

### *Conclusion*

It is for the sake of consistency that dragons do not appear in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Consistency led Tolkien to write an addendum to *The Hobbit*, called "The Quest

for Erabor” (*Annotated Hobbit* xi) that was meant to bring the events of the story in line with later tales of Middle-Earth.

*The Hobbit* was the end of an era in Tolkien’s writing, and in his mythology of Middle-Earth. Tolkien had begun to disagree with prevailing notions about writing for children, such as simpler language and sticking to specific topics. Tolkien also disagreed with the idea that fairy tales should be just for children. He felt that they were appropriate, even vital, for adults (Brown; Tolkien, *Fairy-Stories* 33-36). This belief led Tolkien to change the tone of his writing when he worked on *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Instead of a friendly tone with “childish” language and a narrator that spoke directly to the reader, the trilogy has a more serious tone and formal language. It was written with children in mind - that they would be able to read and comprehend it, but it was also designed to catch the interest of adults as well.

*The Hobbit* was also Tolkien’s last dragon story. Since Smaug was the last of Middle-Earth’s great dragons, there could be no dragons of his caliber in *The Lord of the Rings*. Ending this tradition with Smaug allowed Tolkien the satisfaction of knowing that he had written and created a dragon that was unique, entertaining, and purposeful.

For a dragon, Smaug possesses an enduring popularity. He has been described as “one of the strongest portraits of any dragon in modern fiction” and “one of the most individual dragons in fiction” (Unerman 96). Others claim that “it was love at first sight” (Petty 46). As producers prepare to film the live action version of *The Hobbit*, a lot of time will be spent making sure that the story’s star dragon is just right (Ace Showbiz). As Tolkien remarked, dragons seamlessly blend both animal and human characteristics. Tolkien “finely etched the character with such affection and humor (regardless of the

worm's thoroughly wicked inclinations) that readers love Smaug even though they should hate him. He's frightening, but surprisingly knowable" (Petty 46). Smaug is not just some random dragon. Readers can understand him, connect with him, and sympathize with him. This accessibility makes Smaug stand out from other dragons and helps him remain popular with readers.

Smaug is a dragon with unique qualities. He fits within the mold of the traditional mythological dragon through his evil nature, his physical form, and his choice of activities. He breaks the mold through his role as villain and mirror within the text, through the narratives conveyance of his thoughts, and through his distinctive ability to reason, feel, and interact with other characters and his readers. As a product of Tolkien's imagination, he was the result of years of education, experience, and desire. Tolkien drew upon his education and knowledge of ancient dragons. He knew what made dragons desirable both from his own experiences as a child and from the reactions to dragons he had written about in the past. Through this knowledge and through the use of his exceptional talent as both an author and an artist, Tolkien was able to create a dragon that fit his criteria and beliefs about dragons – that they aid in the creation of a story that awakens a desire to know, that they do something in the story beyond forming reputations, and that they combine bestiality with human malice. Smaug is, without a doubt, a character that shines in the spotlight of dragons in literature.

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