How are dragons presented in children’s literature?

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How are Dragons Presented in Children's Literature?

by

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A Master's Dissertation, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts degree of Loughborough University.

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Abstract

How Are Dragons Portrayed in Children’s Literature?

This study looks at the portrayal of dragons in children’s literature and to a lesser extent, the effect on the child reader. Beginning with the origins of dragons in myths, legends, folk-tales and chapbooks, these early origins were examined to see how much they influenced later dragons in the twentieth century. Being mythical creatures, the reasons behind their origin have particular significance to how they are regarded. This produced the stereotype of the evil monster but also the incredible power that dragons are perceived to possess. The variety of dragons in fairy-tales is also discussed. The three main areas examined in twentieth century literature are: the domestication of the dragon, dragons in fantasy and finally the psychological impact of dragons on children.

Making a virtue out of necessity, the primary sources were concentrated on due to the scarcity of secondary sources. The only two critics of note who have analysed the portrayal of dragons are Ruth Berman and Margaret Blount. Major themes associated with dragons were also discussed, these being: gold, fire, princesses and the dragon-slayer as a hero. Discussion of how these themes began is also included.

The conclusion of this dissertation considers the influence society’s attitude towards dragons and the major developments in children’s literature has had on dragons’ portrayal. Earlier attitudes led to the stereotyping of dragons however other cultures regarded them as magical beings. Earlier this century, the development of consideration towards animals has extended towards dragons and they began to be regarded with sympathy. The rise of fantasy and psychology later on has had an important influence on dragons, producing an exciting variety. Nowadays, dragons are free to be portrayed exactly how the author wishes them to be.
Acknowledgements

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# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>The Mythical Monster</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>The Dragon Slayer</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>The Fairy-Tale Dragon</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>The Taming of the Dragon</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>Let There Be Dragons</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>Inside Each of Us Is A Serpent</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Introduction

Dragons are mythological creatures who have never really existed, yet they appear in children’s literature in many shapes, sizes and characters. It is my intention to examine their portrayal in children’s literature and to look at their background to see what influences they have undergone and also, to a lesser extent, the effect they produce on the child reader.

As dragons’ origins go back centuries I found it necessary to look in depth at the beginnings of dragons as told in legends, myths, folktales and fairy-tales. The chapbook was also very briefly examined: otherwise the rest of the dissertation concentrated on the twentieth century, which has the greatest variety of dragons. The reason why the study has focused on these two main bodies of literature was simply that the dragon was neglected for centuries hardly making an appearance at all, except in the chapbooks.

I have limited the study of children’s literature mainly to British authors. The foreign books and foreign authors that are also included are ones that are popular and available to children in this country.

There are a few very well known dragons that I have concentrated on as they are the ones that provide inspiration for other writers who have taken these dragons as their model.

Owing to the scarcity of the secondary sources, most of the analysis has come from the primary sources themselves. There have only been two critics of note who have looked at dragons in detail: Ruth Berman and Margaret Blount. Despite their extensive research in dragons there are still gaps. Other critics writing on the subject of dragons have usually discussed what they consider to be the main dragons, particularly if they are written by such well-known and popular authors as J.R.R Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Other writers of interesting dragons, such as Nicholas Stuart Grey, have been almost completely ignored. The critics have also concentrated mainly on the twentieth century or on dragons of legend. There was very little or no discussion on dragons in fairy-tales.
But what does a dragon really look like?

"A mythical monster, represented as a huge and terrible reptile, usually combining ophidian and crocodilian structure, with strong claws, like a beast or bird of prey and a scaly skin, it is generally represented with wings and sometimes as breathing out fire. The heraldic form combines reptilian and mammalian form with the addition of wings." (1)

Despite this general description, dragons' body structure, colour and physical attributes seem to change from story to story. Sometimes they fly, often they are pictured breathing fire, but mostly they're huge powerful creatures. Occasionally they are small enough to put in your pocket. Dragons are very versatile creatures. They can appear exactly as the author wishes them to, or indeed the illustrator. I have not looked at illustration in depth as the character of the dragon was of more importance but I have included some of what I consider to be the most interesting illustrations of dragons, of which there are a variety. What has been an interesting theme is how the description of the dragon often reflects its personality or how the author wishes the reader to regard it. Thus friendly dragons are colourful, beautiful beasts while dragons who are evil or nasty are usually portrayed as being ugly.

Another theme is the longevity of dragons which possibly has something to do with the dragons association with dinosaurs. Indeed sometimes the dragons' shape reflect the shape of a dinosaur. The Chinese certainly believed that dragons came from dinosaurs.

"The ancient Chinese were in no doubt about what dinosaur fossils were. They were the bones of dragons, and so were ground up for use in medicines." (2)

Both dinosaurs and dragons are perceived as reptiles and it is no coincidence that both tend to resemble each other. The term dragon has no zoological meaning, but it has been applied in the Latin generic name *Draco* to a number of species of small lizards found in the Indo-Malayan region. The name is also popularly applied to the giant monitor, *Varanus komodoensis*, discovered on Komodo, in Indonesia. (3)

Dragons, though, are mythological creatures with their special status of being powerful creatures of
legend who can fly, breathe fire and prove almost invincible. They are definitely recognizable:

"The thing that came out of the cave was something he had never even imagined - a long lead-coloured snout, dull red eyes, no feathers or fur, a long lithe body that trailed on the ground, legs whose elbows went up higher than its back like a spider's, cruel claws, bat's wings that made a rasping noise on the stones, yards of tail. And the two lines of smoke were coming from its two nostrils. He never said the word Dragon to himself." (4)

Dragons are creatures that have long fascinated me. Likewise, they have fascinated many children. They are amazing creatures and the variety and versatility of dragons have proved it to be a popular character in children's literature.
References


Chapter One

The Mythical Monster

"Myths are about the creation of all things, the origin of evil, and the salvation of man's soul; the legends and sagas are about the doings of kings and peoples in the period before records were kept; fairy tales, folk tales and fables are about human behaviour in the world of magic, and often become incorporated in legends." (1)

Dragons appear in many famous myths, sagas, legends, folk tales and fables and their influence, in respect of the way dragons are perceived, persists right through to the twentieth century. Myths, legends and fairy tales have been the staple diet of children's storytelling for many centuries and in the later nineteenth century many writers began to introduce them to children in book form rather than in the original oral tradition. In the twentieth century there has also been a revival:

"Since the last war many fresh versions of myths and legends have been made by accomplished and imaginative writers for children." (2)

The origins of dragons in myths and legends explains not only their character but objects commonly associated with them such as treasure, gold and fire. Early Christian views on dragons see them as being the devil with links to the serpent, whereas Greek mythology see them as being beneficent creatures. The Chinese venerate their dragons and value them highly. All these views have had an influence on the portrayal of dragons in children's literature, and interestingly enough the one attribute they all have in common is the immense power that these creatures possess.

In the very beginning the dragon appears in serpent form or is referred to as a serpent. The first definition of 'dragon' in the Oxford English Dictionary is that of a 'serpent or huge snake' (3) as opposed to being a 'mythical monster'. However throughout children's literature there is this clear picture of dragons as beasts or reptiles rather than snakes, though occasionally in the early myths and
In the beginning it seems that they were more serpents than dragons and this could account for their often serpent-like form. It would also account for the fact that they are often referred to as worms.

Another definition backs this up:

`'Legendary monster usually conceived as a huge, bat-winged, fire-breathing, scaly lizard or snake with a barbed tail....In Greece the word drakon, from which the English word was derived, was used originally for any large serpent and the dragon of mythology, whatever shape it later assumed, remained essentially a snake.'(5)

The Serbian folk-tale of *The Shepherd and the Dragon* (6) shows both serpent and dragon as being the same creature. The Shepherd encountered the King of Serpents in a cave. Later when he broke his promise not to return he ended up in a fight with the Serpent who changed into a green dragon. The dragon then flew off with the shepherd who was only saved by a green leaf from Paradise. This green leaf changed the dragon back into a serpent again.

To examine this development from a snake it is necessary to look at the very beginnings of dragons.

In what form did they originate?

**The Book of Beasts**

Dragons appear in the Bestiary, the medieval 'Book of Beasts' whose origins were from the classical world. The illustration overleaf shows a medieval dragon which shows quite clearly the long serpent-like body thus showing the dragon's origins. (7) The descriptions of the beasts, both real and imagined, in the book had the purpose of informing the reader about the natural world and God's intents and purposes revealed in it. The dragon represented the devil, being the strongest and most powerful of the creatures even able to destroy the elephant. The elephant and the dragon are
perceived to be mortal enemies, the elephant possessing extremely cold blood which the dragon being hot-blooded wishes to have to cool itself. It was believed that the dragon originated in India and Ethiopia as these were countries that were perpetually hot.

"...for a dragon, lying in wait near the paths along which the elephants usually saunter, lassoes their legs in a knot with its tail and destroys them by suffocation." (8)

However the dragon does not enjoy its victory for very long as after it has drunk the blood from the elephant it is crushed to death by the elephant's body. The power and the might of the dragon is recognized as being one of the strongest of beasts and the lying in wait for the elephant has clear, direct links with the devil.

"The allegory likens this to the Devil who lies in wait for those treading the path towards Heaven, entangles them with insidious deceit, knots them up in sin and despatches them to Hell." (9)

The idea was for people to turn to the Catholic faith and the wisdom of the Holy Ghost. The dragon was always surrounded by fire and there was a direct parallel to the gates of hell being a dragon's mouth.

"Take care lest that Dargon, the serpent of old, should seize you and gobble you up like Judas - who, as soon as he went out from the Lord and his brother apostles, was instantly devoured by a demon and perished." (10)

The dragon in serpent form clearly has Biblical origins as the two words are used indiscriminately for representations of the devil. In Revelations, the last book of the Bible, the Dragon represents the Devil and has links with the 'Beast', both of whom end up burning forever in hell-fire.

"And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world." (11)

The links with hell-fire and the dragons lassoing elephants originating from hot countries explains why dragon are so often portrayed as breathing fire and scorching everything in their path. Indeed, the idea of fire-breathing dragons is such a strong one it is almost impossible to find one that is not
linked with fire in one form or another.

Through the ages the devil has often been portrayed as a part-man, part-beast. The anti-Christ is often portrayed as a beast and this links with bestiality.

"What, for example, were religion and morality, if not attempts to curb the supposedly animal aspects of human nature, what Plato called 'the wild beast within us?'" (12)

The dragon portrayed the worst kind of beast-like behaviour spreading death and desolation, the work of the devil. This accounts for later presentations of dragons in such legends as St George and the Dragon. This view of dragons also accounts for its disappearance in children's literature for many centuries.

**Early Mythology and Folk-Lore**

In other mythologies the dragon was also perceived as being an evil creature. One of the earliest dragons was that of Tiamat, the dragon-goddess of chaos, or confusion. She was invented by the Babylonians who believed her death was the beginning of creation. The other gods wanted to establish order in the world so with their combined power she was eventually destroyed. Her body was divided into two and one part became the earth and the other part became the heavens. Again she was seen as a symbol of evil which accounts for many wicked dragons appearing in later legends. (13) As the first dragon myth, the mythology began to spread world-wide.

"...the dragon myth was assembled first in Babylonia of elements from Egyptian mythology and thence spread largely by diffusion eastward through India to China where its development has been manifold, and westward through Greece to the people of Europe."

(14)

Dragons which came into folk-lore in Britain were perceived as evil. *The Laidly Worm* (15) and *Lambton Worm* (16) terrified their local areas with destruction and desolation. The Laidly Worm was originally the Princess Margaret, who had been bewitched by her evil stepmother and could only be rescued by her brother. The Lambton Worm was likened to the devil. The Childe Lambton who
originally found it spent seven years abroad on a Crusade in the vain hope that his piety would rid
the land of the monster. On his return he sought the help of a witch who made him vow to slay the
first creature who greeted him after the battle. He slew the monster but his family broke the vow so
the Lambtons were cursed and none of them died peacefully for many generations.

Chinese Dragons

However, in China the Chinese dragon has had a completely different development, it is highly
regarded and venerated.

"The dragon was believed to be the god of water, thunder, clouds, and all good blessings.
It was also a symbol of good fortune and prosperity." (17)

The Chinese dragon is far more complex than the Christian conception. There are good dragons, evil
dragons, dragon-lords capable of changing their shape into human-form, dragons controlling the
weather and magical dragons. The emperors were allegedly descended from dragons and the imperial
dragon which decorates the emperor's palace and belongings had five claws as opposed to the
common dragon with four claws. Dragons have been divided into five families;

"Blue Spirit Dragons, very compassionate kings; Red Spirit Dragons, kings of lakes;
Yellow Spirit Dragons, kings who receive vows favourably; White Spirit Dragons, virtuous
pure kings; Black Spirit Dragons, kings of mysterious lakes. Another classification: Spirit
Dragons are those who rise to Heaven; Earthly Dragons are those hidden in the earth who
protect treasure." (18)

One of the most famous tales is The Daughter of the Dragon-King. (19) Her uncle, Chien Tang, was
a red dragon, king of all river dragons. He was once insulted by a peasant so in a rage he caused
floods that lasted nine years. As a punishment, the Supreme Ruler of the Heavens chained him to a
pillar in his brother's palace. Thus he heard about his niece's ill-treatment by her husband from a
scholar who was carrying the message for her to her family. In a flash of fury he ate her husband, rescued her and gained freedom from the pillar. The lucky scholar married the girl and became a dragon himself, thus living for ten thousand years.

In The Yellow Dragon (20) the young boy Wu offers a Dragon Lord hospitality as he passes by. As a reward when the floods come the boy's family is safe and their property untouched as the Yellow Dragon protected them. During the storm Wu paid homage to the dragon and so the Yellow Dragon on his return gave him a scale from his horse's neck. Wu performed miracles with this scale and so ended up a royal magician of the Emperor's. Both stories show clearly the incredible power of the dragons that can control and command the elements and the importance of honouring them. By showing them respect and courtesy their rewards were magnificent. The two young men gained treasures beyond their dreams.

Other Mythology

Apart from the Chinese other mythologies also found that there were some positive aspects to the serpent and/ or dragons.

"At this point we should also realise that dragons and snakes did not have a uniformly bad reputation in Greece and the Near East." (21)

The Greeks and the Romans, although accepting that serpents and dragons were deadly creatures also believed in their good qualities:

"at times conceived the drakontes as beneficent powers-sharp-eyed dwellers in the Inner parts of the Earth." (22)

The Greeks sometimes paid homage dragons giving them offerings of food proffered by young maidens and in return the dragon would guarantee a good harvest if the offerings pleased him. In two Greek stories from Aelianus who lived in 3rd Century A.D. the two dragons repaid past kindnesses from men. In The Boy and the Dragon (23) a boy found a baby dragon who was lost and badly
needed nourishment. He took it home and looked after it, despite its rapid growth. Eventually, his father who was a shepherd and feared for the safety of his flock took the dragon away and abandoned it. Many years later the boy was attacked by robbers and he cried out for help. The dragon heard him from far away and recognized his voice. He flew down and killed the robbers, then took the boy back to his cave. There he looked after him till he was recovered then flew him back to his people.

In another tale, *The Dragon of Macedonia* (24), Pindus a young and handsome man was driven from the throne by his jealous brothers. Pindus accepted this and became skilled at hunting instead. Whilst hunting one day he encountered a dragon and he immediately offered him the spoils from the chase that morning and promised to bring the dragon half of what he killed each day. He kept his promise and good fortune seemed to follow him in whatever he did. He became more popular and his brothers became even more jealous. They ambushed him one day when he was hunting. As he was dying he cried for help and the dragon heard him, remembering how faithfully he fed him. When he found Pindus lying dead and surrounded by his evil brothers he attacked and killed them, then guarded the corpse of Pindus until he was buried with due honour.

As well as honouring kind actions from men, dragons were shown to have other good qualities.

"The stories of Balder and Hotherus, of Fafnir's heart, eaten by Sigurd, and others, show that the serpent was regarded as an animal which gave health, strength and wisdom." (25)

In German mythology Sigurd ate the heart of the dragon Fafnir in *Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer*. (26) When he roasted it for his foster father Regin to eat he touched it to see if it had yet cooked. It burned his finger so he licked it to cool and from the gravy of the heart-blood he understood the speech of birds and realized that Regin was plotting to kill him.

He also learned more:

"If he ate it himself he would become the wisest of all men, and the most fortunate. For we could tell him how to win the lady Brynhild, Odin's daughter, from her magic sleep to be his wife – and how to become a great king too." (27)

Sigurd ate the heart after killing Regin but he also took the dragon's gold including the cursed ring.
which the dragon had already warned him about.

"There is a curse on it. If you have that gold, you will die from possessing it... It will lead to your death and the death of every man who owns it after you." (28)

The dragon's prophecy did come true.

**The Dragon's Gold**

The dragon is also strongly associated with gold and guarding treasure, and idea which persists through children's literature. In the old Greek fable the dragon explained why he guarded gold;

"I guard my gold for no reason of reward or gain, but because great Zeus has made this the proper employment of dragons." (29)

In the Greek tale of *Jason and the Dragon of Colchis*, the dragon who never slept guarded the Golden Fleece day and night and Jason was only able to steal the Fleece when the dragon was put to sleep by enchanted music. (30)

One of Phaedrus's fables described a treasure-guarding dragon in *The Fox and the Dragon*. (31) A fox digging his den made it so deep that he broke into a cave in the mountain-side where he found a dragon guarding a 'great heap of treasure'. (32)

The fox enquired why the dragon sits there all the time, just guarding, the dragon replied,

"I guard the treasure because by the will of Zeus, king of the gods, I have always done so!"(33)

The fox found out that the treasure was never used or given to others but stayed in the cave while the dragon accepted his 'fate' that he would never do anything else but guard it. The fox had a sharp criticism to make of this;

"...it strikes me that you and those like you must be suffering under a curse set upon you by Zeus and the gods for some crime you have committed. In the world of men there are a few like you who hoard up their gold, never get any pleasure out of life and never give any to another human being. They are called misers, and are regarded with nothing but pity and
contempt. I feel just that for you." (34)

Both the curse of Fafnir's ring and 'Fox and the Dragon' show the fatal appeal of gold, a theme that is developed by later writers, notably Tolkien and C.S Lewis, who will be discussed in the final chapter.

Gold has always been regarded as a highly precious metal even from the earliest times and the idea of dragon's guarding gold may come from tales of gryphons as recorded by the Greek historian Herodotus, who wrote about 450 B.C.

"These gryphons were like dragons without a tail, being pictured frequently in Greek art-in sculptures and on vases-as huge lions with the wings of an eagle...The Northern parts of Europe are very much richer in gold than any other region...the story runs that the one-eyed Arimaspians purloin it from the gryphons." (35)

The Dragon's Power

Dragons not only possessed both protective and terror-inspiring qualities but also had decorative effigies, and so dragons were early on used as warlike emblems. Thus in the Iliad, King Agamemnon had on his shield a blue three-headed snake, just as the Norse warriors in later times painted dragons on their shields and carved dragon's heads on the prows of their ships. In England before the Norman Conquest, the dragon was chief among the royal ensigns in war, having been instituted as such by Uther Pendragon, father of King Arthur. In the 20th century the dragon was officially incorporated in the armorial bearings of the Prince of Wales, the red dragon being a symbol of the freedom of Wales.

From these origins of dragons the links between dragons and fire are clearly established along with the lust for gold and treasure that dragons are perceived to possess. Two other major themes are being developed. The first is the biblical fire-breathing evil dragon who must be destroyed, thus leading to the legends of the dragon-slayers, for such powerful wicked creatures have to be killed, the well-known theme in children's literature of good battling evil. The other is more complex. Good
qualities are being attributed to dragons along with magical powers and these ideas are developed in fairy-tales. However the one attribute in common with both themes is that of the dragon's power and strength. The dragon is perceived as being one of the strongest creatures in creation, a highly significant factor in the dragon's development in children's literature.
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Chapter Two

The Dragon Slayer

Legends and myths from Northern Europe retold by modern writers are particular favourites with children, their appeal lying in their simplicity.

"They expect a story to be a good yarn, in which the action is swift and the characters clearly and simply defined. And legends and fairy tales are just like that." (1)

Legends and folktales have been part of an oral tradition for countless centuries and many survive today, to be read still to children. Dragons are a favourite theme and as symbols of evil it was obvious that they had to be killed. Yet their power and strength was such that only heroes could attempt the task.

"It was inevitable that the concept of the dragon should beget stories of the slayer of the dragon. Such stories are numerous and widespread.....It would seem that the slaying of the dragon has been added to their stock of exploits to enhance their stature as heroes." (2)

Dragon and dragon slayer go along hand-in-hand, or as Joseph Campbell put it;

"These are not contradictory doctrines, but different ways of telling one and the same story; in reality, Slayer and Dragon, sacrificer and victim, are of one mind behind the scenes, where there is no polarity or contraries, but mortal enemies on the stage....(Dragon Father) is the Death, on whom our life depends." (3)

This gives another dimension to the dragon-slaying legends, the battle between good and evil and the battle between life and death itself.

St George, Beowulf and Tristram are three well-known heroes whose origins date back centuries, yet they are still children's favourites today.

"The Hero tales have always been a part of storytelling. The legendary hero's adventures,
often the personification of national ideals, are full of action, courage, and even tragedy."

(4)

Heroes are important for children, as the ideals of behaviour that heroes demonstrate provide children with role models to emulate and admire. The heroes are also of national consequence, such as the English patron saint, St George.

**St George - The Patron Saint of England**

One of the most famous dragon-slaying heroes is St George, the patron saint of England. It is his red cross on a white background that represents England on the Union Jack. Yet ironically this famous English legend actually originated in Syria and was brought to England by the Crusaders, and St George was not English at all. He was a Christian knight during the time of the Roman Empire in the province of Cappadocia in Asia Minor and he encountered the dragon by the city of Silene in the modern country of Libya in North Africa.

"Here we see the virtues of the Crusaders personified and the vices of the Infidel exemplified in the dragon, with the Christian concept of sin being attributed to the Serpent." (5)

The character of St George is given far more significance than the dragon. The dragon exists as a poisonous beast spreading destruction with fire and preying upon innocent people. There is this description of the dragon:

"But when the foul and loathsome Dragon came out of his lair, his countenance was so terrible, and he so breathed out fire and poison, and he so lashed with his tail, that the men of our city all fled away in fear of his fiery breath, which made their courage die within them." (6)

There is not much detail about the dragon except for the main fact that no hero is brave enough to fight this monster spurring poison and fire everywhere. The most outstanding characteristic of St George is his piety. He has courage whereas other men had none. Before charging the dragon George made the sign of the Cross and thus his charge was successful and he wounded the dragon. He made
it a condition that to kill the dragon the whole town must be baptized and he ordered a church to be built on the spot where he slaughtered the dragon.

"The tale of St George is a more childlike legend of dragon-slaying than either the story of Sigurd or Beowulf. Perhaps this is because it is more reminiscent of the Greek myths than of the northern ones, with its note of chivalry and romance and comparative lack of blood and thunder and guts." (7)

Certainly the fight was shorter and less bloody then either Beowulf's or Tristram's and this simple tale also embodies the ideal of knighthood.

A much more adventurous version of the St George legend appears in the chap books. These were one of the earliest forms of popular literature, usually sold at a penny a time, and originating in their popular form in the late seventeenth century, although their heyday was the mid to late eighteenth century.

"In short, the chapbook, from 1700 to 1840 or thereabouts, contained all the popular literature of four centuries in a reduced or degenerate form: most of it in a form rudely adapted for use by children and poorly educated country folk." (8)

St George and the dragon was one of the earliest chap books and many of the stories were inspired by medieval romances of knights and maidens, of heroes and battles. As these books catered for the poorer classes of England, many children read them as the other alternatives were didactic, religious and moral in tone. The chap book version is a far more marvellous and exciting tale than the original.(9) St George is thoroughly anglicized and his exploits as a hero considerably developed.

St George was born in Coventry and his father was a renowned peer named Lord Albert and his mother was the King's daughter. There is an enchantress, invincible armour and a magic wand. As well as fighting the dragon he also encountered opposition from the King of Morocco. He had several adventures including marrying Sabra and fighting pagans in Hungary. He ended up by fighting with a dragon on Dunsmore Heath and killing it. But the dragon had infected him with poison so he died two days later. St George is shown in this tale to be an extraordinary hero, survivor of many plots.
against him and invincible in battle. This fantastic tale has many elements of the fairy-tale about it which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Beowulf

"The story of the Anglo-Saxon epic is ...representing the Viking spirit, devoid of humour, but courageous, generous, strong and loyal. The fire-eater has been characterized as the Devil, internal evil, personifying malice, greed and destruction. He coveted gold, not souls."

(10)

The Anglo-Saxon epic of Beowulf had the aged warrior king confronting the dragon in his final battle. He was already a hero, after fighting three terrible monsters, such as the Sea-Hag. The trouble began when a thief stole a golden cup from the dragon's hoard.

"Old English dragon lore and the Scandinavian analogues in which it is based define a semantic space for /dragon/ in four main subcategories of meaning - physiognomy, psychology, habitat and behaviour - all of which emphasize differences between the human and the monstrous." (11)

The common picture of dragons in legends is that they are ferocious monsters, usually breathing fire. Such a picture fits the dragons that both St George and Beowulf faced. The dragon in Beowulf is an incredibly fiery monster:

"Heat played over its scales so that they changed colour, green and blue and gold, as the colours play on a sword-blade heated for tempering, and all the air danced and quivered about him. Fire was in his wings and a blasting flame leapt from his eyes." (12)

The only emotion the dragon was capable of was anger and it behaved in a non-human manner by attacking, destroying and hoarding gold. It also lived in the a cave, far from human habitation.

"Old English and Old Norse dragon-slayer episodes, the chief cultural artifacts in which dragon lore is preserved, distribute these semantic features in such a way as to produce texts exhibiting this narrative structure: prepare, travel, combat, slaying, and reward." (13)
In preparation for the fight, since the dragon is no ordinary foe, Beowulf had his shield of iron especially forged. As the dragon lived far from human habitation, Beowulf had to ride to battle. Since the dragon, who was rarely attacked, will be in a monstrous rage, the only result of the dramatic combat was death. Beowulf struck the dragon with his sword but was unable to give the dragon a mortal wound, while the dragon enveloped him in fire:

"On the hill above the watching thanes saw the terrible figure of their lord in its rolling shroud of flame, and brave men though they had been in battle, terror seized them and they turned to fly; all save one." (14)

The thane that came to his rescue, Wiglaf, gave Beowulf new courage to fight the dragon. The two of them fought him together in a terrific combat till at last Wiglaf jumped clear and stabbed the dragon in his 'scaleless underparts'.(15) The dragon fell wounded, giving Beowulf the chance to hack the dragon to death. The dragon died but Beowulf had received his fatal wound. Beowulf was buried with great honour and the dragon's hoard was buried with him, thus he gained his reward. This story is showed how one hero died but yet another arose to take his place. Wiglaf had proved his worth when all the other thanes had fled and his reward was to be the one chosen to rule in Beowulf’s stead.

**Tristram**

"The folk-tale is not afraid of greatness....Because it believed in human nature it believed that human nature could transcend itself and become god-like. Its heroes are so full of vitality that no giant or dragon or wicked stepmother manages to hamper them in the long run. They go their appointed course with a divine carelessness. They are immortal until they have fulfilled their purpose." (16)

_Sir Tristram in Ireland_ (17) is only part of the greater story of Tristram and Iseult. He had already fought and killed Sir Marhault, champion of Ireland but he fought the dragon in order to win Iseult for his uncle’s bride.

Tristram also had to face the burning breath and a terrific combat:
"A terrible monster it was, with great shining claws, scales of blue and green, and jaws breathing smoke and fire between sharp white teeth." (18)

Tristram charged the dragon and his spear entered the dragon's mouth and pierced through to its heart. The dragon killed the horse with its fire and began to eat it, but the pain from its internal wound was so great that he wandered off. Tristram who had abandoned his horse before it was slain followed the dragon with his sword.

"Then Tristram drew his sword, thinking to slay the monster easily, but it was a hard battle, the hardest he had ever fought, and in truth he did not think to survive it. For the dragon brought against him smoke and flame, teeth and claws sharper than any razor; and Tristram found it hard to shelter behind trees and rocks, for the fight was so fierce that the shield he held on his arm was all twisted with the heat and well-nigh melted away."(19)

Eventually the dragon received his death wound but Tristram had almost died in the process. It was his incredible strength that had kept him going through the bitter conflict against such a terrible dragon.

"Then the dragon let out a roar so grim and terrible that it sounded as if heaven and earth were falling together; and that death cry was heard far and wide through the land." (20)

The plot was further complicated by the fact that the Seneschal tried to claim that he was the dragon-slayer but he was exposed and driven from court. This aspect of dragon-slaying, when someone else tried to take both the honour and the reward for slaying the dragon is a familiar one in fairy-tales and will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Heroes and Children**

"There is a need for heroes in children's literature." (21)

These three heroes are men who exemplify ideal standards of behaviour, showing the better part of human nature triumphing over the bad.

"Compassion plays a part in it. So do tenderness, the impulse to self-sacrifice, and the sense
that one must follow an ideal. Where all these exist, we naturally also find such concepts as conscience, honour, and chivalry, all of which call for absolute standards of behaviour. And where we wish to preserve such absolutes, we need heroes to portray them." (22)

The dilemma of whether to go one way or the other is faced by each generation. Each child has an internal battle between good and evil.

"The true hero in all the folk tales and fairy tales is not the youngest son,... or the ugly duckling, but the soul of man. It was a world where a great deal of discomfort and sorrow had to be borne, and where the most useful virtue was the passive virtue of fortitude; but in the folk tales it is not this passive virtue is exalted, but daring, boldness, originality, brains—because the people who made them realized that the hopes of humanity lay not in passivity but in action." (23)

The heroes' extraordinary vitality contrasts vividly with the passivity of the victims, particularly that of the Princess Sabra. She is a poignant figure. A young, innocent maiden dressed in her wedding clothes, she was helpless against such a savage beast. She was also no ordinary girl. The theme of princess and dragon has its original in the St George legend and a slightly different version in Tristram and Iseult. This theme is developed in fairy stories and in later children's literature quite extensively until the two become almost synonymous. These heroes though, who fight dragons to save or gain princesses are of such standing that the question must be asked of whether children can relate to them or not. After all, these heroes are not children but grown men, proven warriors. However, the simplicity of the tale is the attraction for children. Beowulf has a simple plot: the hero fought and killed four monsters, and more complicated themes are omitted. This is easy for child to understand.

"It enabled him to see the monsters as fiends, and to show the weakness of man, together with his capacity for loyalty or disloyalty." (24)

The eleven thanes who deserted Beowulf in the heat of the conflict and in his hour of need demonstrate human weakness in their cowardice. The story ends in their reproach and shame.
"The Northern stories therefore intensify the heroic ideal of courage and loyalty. The hero must keep his promises and justify his boast words. Courage and loyalty are virtues which children of ten can appreciate as virtues. They seem to see, more clearly than their sophisticated elders, that these qualities are, in sober fact, the foundation of any human goodness." (25)

The old battle between good and evil is demonstrated by these heroes after all children play such games in the playground. 'Cops and robbers' is just a variation on the theme of dragon and dragon-slayer. It exemplifies virtues to emulate and to inspire similar behaviour. The dragon-slayer in these legends is of more importance than the dragon, which is a symbol of destruction and evil. However in all these legends the power of the dragon is time and time again emphasized and is measured against a vital characteristic of the hero: St George's piety, Beowulf and Wiglaf's bravery, Tristram's strength. This interaction is important, as it enhances the hero's stature and establishes the legend for many centuries. The final word must go to C.S Lewis:

"It would be nice if no little boy in bed, hearing, or thinking he hears, a sound, were ever at all frightened. But if he is going to be frightened, I think it better that he should think of giants and dragons than merely of burglars. And I think St George, or any bright champion in armour, is a better comfort than the idea of the police." (26)

Dragons, along with monsters and other things that go bump in the night are symbols of the child's fear of the dark and the unknown and the heroes who defeat and slay them reassure children that these fears are groundless as these dragons can be killed.
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(14) Suthcliffe, ref. 12, p. 86.

(15) Ibid., p. 87.

(16) Cook, ref. 1, p. 8.

(17) Hoke, ref. 5, p. 68.

(18) Ibid., p. 70.

(19) Ibid., p. 70.

(20) Ibid., p. 71.


(22) Ibid., p. 147.

(24) Cook, ref. 1, p. 27.

(25) Ibid., p. 25.

Chapter Three

The Fairy-Tale Dragon

"Fairy stories are not in normal English usage stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that Faerie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls and giants, or dragons; it holds the sea, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal man, when we are enchanted." (1)

Fairy-tales have always been popular favourites with children, tales where the incredible and the impossible can happen, and where magic mixes naturally with the normal. The portrayal of dragons in them varies greatly. Many are frightening monsters, fearsome creatures needing a hero to kill them. These heros defeat the dragon with the aid of magical gifts, not by strength alone. Others, though nasty are easily outwitted, and they are often portrayed as having home lives similar to humans. Some are friendly beasts giving the hero some amazing gifts developing fantasy to its full potential, while others have the power to change shape. Some dragons combine both power and magical ability and assist the hero in the tale.

What a Horrible Monster!

A common appearance of dragons in fairy-tales is one of a monster spreading desolation everywhere.

"From the earliest times man has shown a readiness to be fascinated by monsters. Monsters are chaos beasts, lurking at the interstices of order, be they conceived as mythical creatures who preceded creation......or beings who appear in nightmares....a single principle holds good for a majority of them: a monster is out of place, conforming to no class or violating existing classes. This is most frequently expressed by the monster's having hybrid form (the result of a mixture of species, attributes, sexes and other categories) being a result of a transformation, or having dislocated or superfluous parts. Because modes of locomotion and
other bodily characteristics are prime modes of classification, the superfluity or lack of organs removes the monster from the ordinary taxonomic divisions." (2)

Children enjoy being fascinated by monsters, no matter how terrible they are because defeat is always inevitable. One such terrible monster is *The Dragon of the North*. (3) He certainly is a hybrid creature and as well as having invincible strength, he bewitched his victims with the power of his eyes. He was one of the most awful dragons who could not be overcome by strength and bravery alone.

"The monster had a body like an ox and legs like a frog, two short forelegs and two long ones behind, and besides that it had a tail like a serpent, ten fathoms in length. When it moved it jumped like a frog, and with every spring it covered half a mile of ground... Nothing could hunt it, because its whole body was covered with scales, which were harder than stone or metal. Its two great eyes shone by night, and even by day, like the brightest lamps; and anyone who had the ill luck to look into those eyes became bewitched and was obliged to rush into those monster's jaws." (4)

This monster which devastated whole neighbourhoods without any trouble could only be defeated by 'King Solomon's signet ring', (5) the ring which told the hero how to kill it. Once dead it still was a problem as its rotting corpse provoked pestilence.

Heroes who kill dragons in fairy-tales often need special or magical gifts to help them defeat the monster. The hero in *The Dragon of the North* (6) needed to learn the speech of birds, to trick a witch-maiden and to find a friendly magician before he could defeat the dragon. Similarly to legends, the dragon-slayer is also one of the most common tales in fairy stories:

"The oldest is the dragon sacrifice story known all over the world. The central episode deals with a youth who, when he discovers a maiden (or Princess) about to be sacrificed to a dragon, kills the monster,... extracts the tongues, and goes his way, telling the girl that he would see the world before marrying her. He returns ... to find the Princess about to be married to an imposter who claims that he is the one who killed the dragon. The hero shows
up the imposter, proves his own identity by producing the tongues and matching them up with the proper heads, and so marries the Princess." (7)

A story that follows this pattern is *The Three Dogs*. (8) The hero killed the dragon but only with the aid of his three magical dogs, thus saving the Princess. Mario, the hero immediately left wanting to see the world, promising though to return in three years. The coachman who had driven the Princess to her fate made her promise to say that he was the one who killed the dragon. The King believing them, betrothed her to him but she put off the marriage for three years, hoping Mario would return. In due course he did and with the aid to his three remarkable dogs exposed the imposter and married the Princess.

Another variation on this pattern is *The Dragon Slayer*. (9) This tale involved the theft of the golden apples by a dragon, which obviously succumbed to its fascination for gold. It was pursued by the hero and his two brothers. There were in fact three dragons; a one-headed, a three-headed and a seven-headed dragon living in three palaces of bronze, silver and gold. Naturally the hero fought them all and slew them, whilst rescuing a fair young noble maiden at the same time. He faced treachery from his brothers but all was resolved and he and the maiden were married. Hence the victim was rescued twice, once from the dragon and the second from a distasteful marriage, thus enhancing the hero twice over.

These monstrous dragons could be rightly accused of scaring children, particularly very young ones, but Andrew Lang justified their appearance.

"Probably you who read the tales know very well how much is true and how much is only make-believe.....If there are frightful monsters in fairy-tales, they do not frighten you now, because that kind of monster is no longer going about the world, whatever he may have done long, long ago. He has been turned into stone, and you may see his remains in museums. Therefore, I am not afraid that you will be afraid of the magicians and dragons." (10)

Certainly the dragons which have been discussed so far are horrendous in appearance which demonstrates their awful and evil nature. However, being mythical beasts the child knows that there
are no dragons alive today, thus reassuring the child that there is nothing to be scared of. At the same time the awesome wonder of dragons have a fascination for children as Tolkien described it:

"I desired dragons with a profound desire. Of course, I in my timid body did not wish to have them in the neighbourhood, intruding into my relatively safe world, in which it was, for instance, possible to read stories in peace of mind, free from fear. But the world that contained even the imagination of Fafnir was richer and more beautiful, at whatever cost of peril." (11)

Two highly unusual monsters that stimulate the imagination appear in *Prince Prigio and the Firedrake* (a fiery dragon). The Prince pitted the firedrake, which swam in volcanoes for pleasure, against the Remora, a strange creature who was 'as cold as the Firedrake is hot!'(12) On delivering the challenge to a fight the Prince went to visit the firedrake in his volcano.

"It was dreadfully hot, even high up in the air, where the Prince hung invisible. Great burning stones were tossed up by the volcano, and nearly hit him several times. Moreover, the steam and smoke, and the flames which the Firedrake spouted like foam from his nostrils, would have daunted even the bravest man." (13)

There was a huge battle between the two creatures, which ended with the death of them both:

"The Prince, watching from the hill-top, could scarcely believe that these two awful scrounges of Nature which had so long devastated his country, were actually dead." (14)

Dragons often have the same function in fairy-tales with other monsters such as giants and ogres:

"Dragon tales blend with tales of giants and ogres with several heads who breathe fire, the same motifs, rescue of a people and princess, cutting off of heads, cave dwellings and the like, are common to both types of story."(15)

Dragons, along with ogres, giants and witches are objects of horror and creatures of power and strength and yet there are tales that show how they can be outwitted by the ordinary man.
Foolish Dragons

The two fairy-tales, Stan Bolovan(16) and Amin and the Ghul(17) both show similarities to each other though one concerns a dragon, the other a ghul, "a demon of a very unpleasant kind".(18) Both heroes were afraid of the creatures which were much stronger than they were but both were determined not to be scared. In Stan Bolovan (19) Stan tricked the dragon by being one step ahead of him and giving him tales of his pretended strength:

"It would be a good thing to turn a hurricane into this cave for a few hours, I think there must be fleas in it. One bit me on the forehead last night so hard that I still have a small lump there."

"Do you hear that?" whispered the Dragon to his Mother. "He thinks it was only a flea- and I broke my best club on his head!"(20)

Stan frightened the dragon so much that the dragon paid him gold and carried it home for him; such was the terror that Stan's alleged strength inspired. A similar tale is Constantes and the Dragon.(21) Constantes constantly outwitted the dragon in order to steal his possessions, his superior intelligence being recognized by the dragon.

"When the dragon saw him, he thought, 'Ah, that lad is a cleverer rogue than I!'"(22)

Constantes was helped by the fact that the dragoness was rather slow-witted, thus easily fooled and she ended up roasting in her own oven, instead of Constantes.

"Folklore dragons always talk - their semi-human nature has a wily intelligence. Sometimes they are regal, sometimes cowardly, less often have some sort of home life with a dragoness or even an old mother." (23)

The dragon and the dragoness are portrayed as having a home life. They have a bed with a counterpane, a silver horse and a kitchen. They talk: in short, they live as humans. In The Dragon and his Grandmother(24) or as an earlier version called it, The Devil and his Grandmother,(25) the dragon's grandmother was actually an old woman. The dragon had given three soldiers freedom and as much money as they could want for seven years and at the end, if they couldn't guess the
riddle that the dragon gave them then he would posses them for ever. A good picture of the dragon and his potential victims is shown overleaf. (26) Just before the end of the seven years one of the soldiers came across the grandmother, who promised to help him;

"I'm the dragon's grandmother, that's who I am!
But he doesn't treat me right. Would you believe it? He leaves me here without a bed and without a fire, and without a penny piece to call my own!" (27)

The soldier helped her out by giving her money and in return she found out the answer to the riddle. Thus the dragon is cheated of his victims. All these dragons are really human rogues in dragon form, thus deserving of the treatment meted out to them by the hero, but they still posses their superior power. In Stan Bolovan the dragon is far stronger than Stan: the dragon in Constantes and the Dragon ate people up in a trice while the third dragon could fly through the air, carrying the three soldiers, and sleep in volcanoes. Despite their superior power however the dragons lacked intelligence, and in the case of Stan Bolovan the dragon was a real coward at heart.

Friendly Dragons

It is interesting to see that two fairy-tales where the dragons show friendliness to humans are from Greece, where the dragon did not have the uniformly bad reputation that existed elsewhere in Europe.

"Greece too had its benevolent reptilian deities: snakes that were sprits of springs, genii loci, embodiments or attributes of gods, e.g; Asklepios, Athena, Apollo..... Zeus himself." (28)

Pepito (29) and The Dragon of the Well (30) show how this belief in their benevolence has influenced fairy tales.

In Pepito the abandoned hero received a welcome from the dragon that he didn't expect;

"So he stood staring at Pepito, and then he smiled. And, yes, he actually wagged his spiked tail.

'Come to stay?' he said. 'Come to live here?'

'I - I don't know,' said Pepito.
'Oh, do stay!' said the dragon, 'What's your name?'

'Pepito.'"(31)

The lonely dragon was so pleased to find a friend that he couldn't do enough for Pepito and assisted him in his adventures to find his wife. He ended up giving Pepito a poplar that would take him anywhere, a hat to make him invisible and a sword that would cut down anything. Pepito rescued his wife using the magical gifts that the dragon gave him and also rescued a dragoness. They all returned to the dragon who was pining away for Pepito;

"The dragon was standing at the gates of his palace. He looked very thin and unhappy, for he hadn't touched a morsel of food since Pepito went away. He wanted to die before his time, did that poor dragon."(32)

The arrival of a dragoness though cured his loneliness and as Pepito and his family left they admired the handsome couple the two dragons made. In The Dragon of the Well(33) because the hero called the dragon 'friend' (34) instead of screeching at the sight of him, the dragon was so pleased that he gave the hero three magical pomegranates that brought him great riches. By the heroes showing friendliness to the dragons they were richly rewarded, a theme that occurred in other early Greek tales. As well as possessing great powers the dragons showed their desire for friendship from humans.

Changing Shapes

In Chinese tales dragons change their form into human shape as seen in the earlier tales of The Yellow Dragon (35) and The Daughter of the Dragon King. (36)

Since primeval people believed in spirits that inhabited both man, beast and nature it was easy to believe that these could change shape easily enough.

"Consequently, since our fairy-tales embody the original or modified forms of ancestral beliefs, we find transformation and transmigrations abundantly represented in them; indeed, no incident is better known." (37)
The Prince and the Dragon (38) is a tale where dragon changed shape into other animals. The story began when the elder two sons of the Emperor, whilst chasing a hare, got caught by the dragon. The youngest one went in pursuit and fought the dragon three times. He threw the dragon into the air and it broke into pieces, a wild boar appeared, the hounds gave chase and tore it to shreds. Out of it came the hare. The hounds killed it and then came a pigeon. The hawk gave chase and brought it back to the prince. He cut it open and finds the sparrow. The sparrow told him where he could find his brothers and so the prince released him. He rescued his brothers and the dragon's other victims.

The two tales of King Dragon (39) and Green Serpent (40) showed humans being cursed with the form of a dragon.

In King Dragon (41) the Queen, desperate for a child, disobeyed instructions to eat only one special rose and ate both. As a result, when the child was born it was a dragon. The dragon had its way all the time as it threatened his father: "I'll tear you to pieces and smash the whole castle to bits!" (42)

He ate the two princesses, whom he had insisted upon marrying, till the third bride, on advice from an old woman, delivers the dragon from its body with the aid of 'ten shifts, a bucket of lye, a bucket of milk and a bundle of switches.' (43)

The Countess D'Aulnoy wrote a fairy-story entitled Green Serpent (44) featuring a king who had been changed by a wicked fairy, Magotine, into a green serpent. He fell in love with Princess Laidronette who had been cursed with 'perfect ugliness' (45), also by the same bad fairy. However, when she met him, the description she gave seemed to indicate a dragon rather than a serpent.

"What a horrible monster!" said the Princess to herself. "He has green wings, a body of a thousand colours, ivory claws, fiery eyes, and on his head is a bristling mane of long hair." (46)

Both hero and heroine, after various trials and tribulations, were released from their hideous appearances and were married, a traditional fairy-tale ending. The dragons' hybrid shape can quite easily give rise to a very ugly creature, hideous to look upon.
Dragon Power

Finally, the power of dragons is still very much recognized in fairy-tales and sometimes this is used to help the hero.

In *The Black Dragon and the Red Dragon* (47) the dragons helped the hero, the Padishah who was looking for his stolen children. The dragons were remarkable creatures, as the black dragon changed the Padishah into a 'tobacco-box in her girdle'. (48) Her brother, the Red Dragon had to be approached by the Padishah from the back, otherwise he would 'become a victim of the fiery glances of his eyes.' (49) The red dragon and his sons assisted the Padishah in his adventures against the Porsuk-Dew. Both the Black Dragon and the Red Dragon gave him hairs from behind their ears which protected him and his children from the malevolent powers of the Porsuk-Dew.

Themes in children's literature are often developed from early beginnings such as the simple fairy-tale. In fairy-tales nightmarish monsters are killed by heroes with the aid of magic, rescuing princesses. Roguish dragons, who live in domestic settings, are outwitted by the human who is cleverer than they are.

"The fairy tale has .....helped the child orient himself to the surrounding world, has enriched his spiritual life, has made him regard himself as a fearless participant in imaginary struggles for justice, goodness, and freedom......."(50)

The children relate to the heroes, joining in their adventures, as well as being reassured that they are safe from dragons. The richness and variety of it all has a great charm and appeal and fabulous magical gifts fascinate the child. The power of the dragon whether it is in his strength or in his magical abilities has been retained and the portrayal of dragons in fairy tales is a great influence for their development in fantasy.
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(48) Ibid., p. 78.

(49) Ibid., p.79.
Chapter Four

The Taming of the Dragon

After the chapbook of *St George and the Dragon* there was a long period when dragons hardly appeared at all in tales written for children. But things began to change in the latter part of the nineteenth century particularly after Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Children's literature was moving away from the moral didactism of the earlier century and moving more towards fantasy.

"During the eighteenth century, most kinds of fantasy were discouraged. During the nineteenth century fantasy became a genre, but the absence of dragons among the wealth of ghost, witches, devil, mer-folk, fairies etc is striking." (1)

Many original monsters were created in the nineteenth century such as Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, but there was a reluctance to use dragons in children's literature. The same critic, Ruth Berman, offers a good explanation for this absence of dragons;

"The reluctance to use dragons was probably a result of the too rigid identification of the dragon with the dragon of the Book of Revelations, that is, Satan." (2)

But this began to change along with a great development in the portrayal of animals;

"The widespread use of animals in modern literature dates from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1877 Anna Sewell began the vogue with Black Beauty, the best selling horse story which pleaded for more humane treatment of domestic animals." (3)

There was a great shift in attitudes towards animals. No longer were they viewed as creatures to be used by man, but it was regarded as normal to treat them more humanely. About the turn of the century dragons began to reappear and their portrayal reflected this trend. The twentieth century has seen the greatest development of the dragon, establishing it as a popular figure with children.
contrast to its former evil reputation the most significant development has been the domestication of the dragon, when it becomes a completely harmless creature. The focus has also shifted away from heroes and warriors towards children befriending the creatures. But dragons as mythological beasts have problems in fitting in with modern life and it is interesting to see how various authors deal with this interaction between myth and reality. The danger in domesticating dragons too much is that they lose their status as marvellous magical mythical beasts and practically become household pets. The most significant dragon who appeared at the turn of the century was *The Reluctant Dragon*. (4)

"Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*, 1899 is the prototype of most modern storybook dragons that are, in theory, possible to live with. Its sting has been removed, it is an Indian without bow and arrow and scalping knife, a Bull who likes flowers rather than fighting." (5)

The theme of domesticated talking animals was beginning to appear in children's literature, and this dragon was the beginning of most modern dragons. One critic describes him as being 'the most memorable of them all,' (6) and another as 'a happy Bohemian'. (7) The dragon is a highly likable and friendly creature freely chatting to the boy about his main occupation, poetry;

"Did you ever-just for fun-try and to make up poetry-verses, you know?" (8)

He is completely harmless and a self-confessed indolent creature.

"You'd never guess it if you tried ever so!-fact is, I'm such a confounded lazy beggar!" (9) It was the only one of its kind, as the others had since disappeared, probably due to their chasing knights and maidens all over the place, whereas this dragon just sat there and day-dreamed. The boy who befriended the dragon tried to make him aware of his function in life, ie that of a monster.

"You'll have to be exterminated, according to their way of looking at it! You're a scourge and a pest and a baneful monster!" (10)

The village naturally enough also held this view and told St George tall tales of their alleged sufferings;

"'Yes, come in, boy,' said the Saint kindly. 'Another tale of misery and wrong, I fear me. Is
it a kind parent, then, of whom the tyrant has bereft you? Or some tender sister or brother?

Well, it shall soon be avenged." (11)

The story is a humorous satirical joke on the St George and the Dragon legend when the dragon was expected to act to the stereotype of the evil monster but refused. Hence the title, 'The Reluctant Dragon'. He was clearly no monster and had no fighting tendencies whatsoever.

"My dear little man, said the dragon solemnly, 'just understand, once for all, that I can't fight and I won't fight. I've never fought in my life, and I'm not going to begin now, just to give you a Roman holiday." (12)

The dragon was eventually persuaded to fight but it is all show and the dragon enjoyed his afternoon of play-acting. The real villains of the piece are the villagers for wanting the fight yet unwilling to participate themselves, something that the Saint recognizes:

"This is an evil world, and sometimes I begin to think that all the wickedness in it is not entirely bottled up inside the dragons" (13)

The dragon, with his wish for a peaceful, quiet life contrasting with the villagers thirst for a fight shows him to be the better creature, a view of his superiority that Kenneth Grahame wished to express:

"He wished both to show the animal's moral superiority to the human species, and at the same time, by an anthropomorphizing trick, to satirize his society." (14)

Grahame went on to develop his animal characters more fully in his later book of The Wind in the Willows but he wrote them with the same intentions that he wrote 'The Reluctant Dragon'. In this dramatic change of portrayal of dragons it is interesting to look into the character of Grahame who really began this trend:

"St George is the side of Grahame concerned with Honour and Duty...the champion of convention.......But it is the Dragon whose character is drawn in greatest detail, for whom Grahame obviously felt most affection and sympathy: and the Dragon, beyond any reasonable doubt, is a living portrait of Grahame's anarchic, artistic, anti-social,
irresponsible, indolent self." (15)

The dragon's description of how he burrowed his way out of the earth symbolizes Grahame's mind:

"Graham's creative mind, driven inward by the drudging, conventional duty required of him, has at last, with great effort, broken free." (16)

The dragon completely broke from the convention and enjoyed his entry into society. However the dragon's character could be interpreted in a different manner:

"Yet the dragon can also be read in another way, as a symbol of nature. He is, after all, a beast, however supernatural. His rescue from the villagers' bloodthirsty expectations includes with it the rescue of a badger, held by the villagers to be baited. The association of the supernatural beast with all natural beasts, touched on only lightly in this story." (17)

The element of bestiality in his character was revealed in the battle-scene as he got carried away with his fire-breathing, a hint of the danger that he could be. However this charming dragon was an original character and his influence could be seen in twentieth century children's literature:

"The Reluctant Dragon set a precedent for the introduction into written literature of dragons that are shy, helpful, toy-like and domestic, raging in size from great enormous ones to cuddly pets." (18)

Another writer at the time was also turning the St George legend upside down was Elizabeth Nesbit. She wrote a collection of tales featuring dragons, mainly evil ones but with great humour:

"The evil nature of these dragons is not taken seriously." (19)

In The Deliverers of Their Country (20) the country was infested with all sizes of dragons, all eating different things. There was great humour in the tale despite the dragons being dangerous:

"The largest kind ate elephants as long as there were any, and then went on with horses and cows. Another size ate nothing but lilies of the valley, and a third size ate only Prime Ministers if they were to be had, and if not, would feed freely on boys in buttons. Another size lived on bricks and three of them ate two-thirds of the South Lambeth Infirmary in one afternoon."(21)
The children, Harry and Effie go to wake up St George in the church both wearing their 'dragon-proof frock' and 'best dragon poison' (22) but the twist to the tale is that St George is unable to save the country thus making the children responsible.

"It's no good," he said, "they would be one too many for poor old George. You should have waked me before. I was always for a fair fight-one man one dragon, was my motto." (23)

With the traditional hero refusing to play his role, the children have to take his advice and get rid of the dragons themselves.

Another parody by E.Nesbit is *The Fiery Dragon* (24). The heroine is Sabrinetta, supposedly a grand-daughter of St George and Sabra who lives in a dragon-proof tower complete with accessories such as dragon-proof bottles. The real villain of the story is not actually the dragon, but her cousin, the evil Prince, who had stolen the kingdom from Sabrinetta leaving her only the tower. But the princess was not eaten by the dragon turning the tale on its head;

"dragons cannot eat white Princesses with hearts of gold." (25)

The dragon was far more interested in eating the evil Prince instead, a good way to dispose of the villain.

In another story, *Uncle James, or the Purple Stranger* (26) again the dragon is really used as a device to depose of the wicked uncle. The uncle wished to give the Princess to the dragon thus gaining her kingdom, but of course the hero Tom, the gardener's son, ruined his plans.

"The other stories in her collection.....are implicit parodies, with the comedy turning, in each case on the discovery of an ingenious and unheroic way of getting rid of dragons." (27)

The dragon in *The Fiery Dragon* shrunk in the night, thus enabling the hero to get him in the dragon-proof bottle and the Purple dragon had his tail tied to a pillar and was miniaturized when the island went spinning. The children in *The Deliverers of their Country* turn on the taps so it rained so hard that the dragons were all drowned.

*The Dragon Tamers* (28) deals with a dragon in a dungeon who at various times announces his intention to eat up the town but was constantly outwitted, so remained chained up in a dungeon. After
twenty years as a captive, and eating bread and milk, the dragon announced that he was 'tame'.

"I am so tame, won't you undo me?" (29)

The dragon was released at last and his wings and his plates fell off so he became an extremely large cat.

"And from that day he grew furrier and furrier, and he was the beginning of all cats. Nothing of the dragon remained except the claws, which all cats have still, as you can easily ascertain." (30)

This dragon demonstrates the extent of domestication that it was undergoing by becoming a familiar everyday household pet. Similarly in *The Last of the Dragons* the dragon, who was tame and befriended by the princess, becomes the first aeroplane.

"It is not entirely surprising when one of Nesbit's dragons is tamed by kindness and deceit ..... and turns into a pussy-cat. These dragons are defeated not by heroic, militant virtue, but by non-heroic ingenuity." (31)

The heroes who defeated this dragon were children. The child in *The Reluctant Dragon* is interestingly enough never referred to by name but always as 'boy'. But it was the boy who arranged everything. He was the go-between organizing the mock fight and was sometimes presumed on a little too much:

"There ought to be a princess. Terror-stricken and chained to a rock, and all that sort of thing. Boy, can't you arrange a princess?" (32)

The boy quite naturally refused as he had done enough already and it was past his bedtime! It was possible that the use of 'boy' was deliberate, so he appeared as a figure, so children could relate to him:

"The Boy, of course, is the recurrent 'I'-figure of far-sighted childhood, 'wonderful knowing about book-beasts, as everyone allows,' transferred for the occasion to a more exotic setting." (33)

At the end of the novel there is little to distinguish the three revellers from each other, the three
appear equally important.

All these stories are amusing and very light-hearted:

"With the appearance of these comic dragons, the dragon lost its conventional, stereotyped identification as a Satanic figure." (34)

Further development of these harmless dragons practically domesticates them to the level of ordinary animals:

"American authors usually present a dragon as a great, huge, lovable lump of some thing not too intellectual but likeable all the same, thereby giving our young listeners or readers a sense of superiority over the dragon—certainly no fears." (35)

In a more modern story *How Droofus the Dragon Lost his Head* (36) the dragon, separated from his family by a storm, first became vegetarian. He was then discovered by a shepherd boy and ended up living with him and his family proving his worth on the farm, by clearing rocks, weeding etc. In other words he had become a sort of glorified shire horse.

Another domesticated dragon, *Albert*, has been described as 'The ultimate domesticated dragon' (37) behaving almost like a human. He was also a vegetarian and helped around the house. He had no great strength or magical powers and you begin to wonder why he was a dragon at all. He certainly could not claim to have the stature of a mythical beast.

"It is in human nature to want mythical animals to be true, or to wish that they were, and make up stories in which they are.....It is face saving that takes the magical and mythical talking animals out of fairy-tale settings and puts them in contemporary ones; they are slightly tamed by being known, but at the same time grow even more interesting by contrast with the kind of story —...which is rooted in real life." (38)

There are many stories that feature dragons in real-life situations and give back the dragon's status as mythical beasts. One of them is Margaret Mahy's 'The Dragon of an Ordinary Family'. (39) A small dragon was brought back as a pet for the boy of the family:

"'UNUSUAL PET, VERY CHEAP.' In smaller lettering underneath, it said
Gaylord loved his new pet but the problems began when it grew bigger than an elephant. The mayor suggested some solutions:

"Mr Belsaki, you are just an ordinary family, an you should stick to ordinary pets. Mr Belsaki, you must sell it ..to a zoo. Or to a circus.. Or to a handbag factory. Some people would pay a lot for dragon-skin." (41)

The solution was found when the dragon takes the family to the Isles of Magic for a holiday. There they found all sorts of characters found in a fairy-tales, princes, princess, witches, giants, lost cities etc. The dragon of course stayed there, it was his natural home but sends the family home on a magic carpet:

"The dragon stayed, for the Isles of Magic are the proper place for dragons."(42)

In Dragonrise (43) the main character Tom, found a dragon underneath his bed. This dragon, despite its friendliness, showed no signs of being domesticated. It could breathe fire and smoke and told tales of fights it had enjoyed. The dragon appeared at 'Dragonrise', which is each evening and showed a true dragon characteristic: his favourite food:

"You mean you eat girls?"

"What else? When I can get them, that is. The supply isn't as reliable as it might be." (44)

The novel centred around the boy trying to persuade the dragon not to eat his sister but after a family argument he changed his mind and asked him to eat her, the ultimate in sibling revenge. Naturally the dragon was delighted:

"Give me a dish that is ever new,
A maiden pie or a damsel stew.
Eaten slowly- nothing crude-
Swallowed only when well chewed,
That's the food that I call food."(45)

In both stories, Dragonrise and The Dragon of an Ordinary Family, the problem of being a
mythical creature trying to live in the modern world is a problematic one. While giving children a
glimpse of the fantastic the stories all end by the dragon leaving. The proper place for dragons is not
in ordinary families.

With the rise of more sympathetic attitudes towards animals, the appearance of *The Reluctant
Dragon* was a natural progression in the changing of the portrayal of animals in children’s literature.
The dragon was able at last to cast off his stereotyped image of the evil creature, breathing fire and
poison which needed to be killed. However the dragon was still in danger of becoming a stereotype,
but this time as a domesticated creature wanting to be good and friendly and even becoming
vegetarian: in short, not much different from other domestic animals. For the dragons that mix the
ordinary with the fantastic there is still the difficulty of being mythical dragons in today’s world as
their natural desires and habitat do not fit into an average family. Dragons fullest development as
characters appear best in fantasy worlds which will be discussed in the next chapter.
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Chapter Five

Let there be dragons

"The setting of fairy tale is customarily (though not invariably) an enchanted country which we must seek in what Jung called the collective unconscious. We may more properly call those stories fantasy, which bring the magic and the irrational into our own world. Fantasy takes known objects and scenes and reshapes them in its own terms. This, at least, is one way of classifying the numerous tales which are not fairy tales, although they may have traditional elements." (1)

Fantasy is one of the most popular genres in children's literature and dragons are a popular figure within it. The rise of fantasy this century was seen particularly in the fifties with a predominance of authors creating a plethora of magical worlds. Magical lands are a far more natural habitat for mythical creatures than the world today. Many of these magical worlds which dragons inhabit show the 'traditional elements' of the fairy-tale such as knights, kings, queens and castles or they live in a historical time period that seems so long ago that children can believe that was a natural time for dragons. More modern dragons combine the ordinary and the fabulous. With the rise of feminism, females are playing a far more active role in dealing with dragons. In 'high' fantasy where the story is set completely in a secondary world which is 'a self-contained universe, existing autonomously from the primary world and having no connection with it' (2), the dragon becomes a far more developed character. The dragon often possessing extraordinary powers, thus moving away from the previous theme of domestication and reverting back to being fabulous creatures of legend.

As discussed in the last chapter dragons do have a difficulty in living in today's world. Grimbold's Other World (3) demonstrates some of the problems that mythical creatures have. The dragons had fallen through from another world and think that humans are the stuff of legends as believed by
Georgina, the dragonlet:

"You're funny!" giggled Georgina. 'Fancy believing fairy-tales at your age! There's not such thing as humans!' (4)

Reputations are reversed as humans are seen as ugly monsters that terrify dragons:

"They're ugly, and cruel, and fierce! With six arms! And they make us dragons so angry that they blow flames. Mum doesn't want to see one." (5)

The dragons are domesticated to the extent that Georgina being a baby, drinks milk, naturally lives with her mother (who suffers from asthma) was named 'after a friend of my grandpa's.' (6)

But they are obviously powerful creatures as seen by the description of her mother:

"Mum was enormous. Sixty feet from her great craggy snout to the tip of her armoured tail. Her wings were folded back against her flanks, and she gleamed and glinted in the sunshine. Flickers of light ran over her, as the green scales lifted and sank to her heavy breathing. Her eyes were shut. Small puffs of smoke shot from her relaxed jaws. Her scaly feet, with their huge claws, were twitching as though she dreamed she was running fast. She looked frightful." (7)

The problem faced by the hero, Muffler, was to get them back to the world where they belonged.

"...and through a gap they must go. To the world of magic, where they cannot be hurt, or frightened. Where nothing can be hurt by them. Where the grass grows instantly green again, and a tree springs from its own ashes. And man is a legend to frighten babies!" (8)

It is clear that there is no room for mythical creatures in Muffler's ordinary world as they would only face persecution. Another character, the unicorn, when he accidentally fell into the ordinary world, was hunted by man to the extent that he almost died from exhaustion.

A dragon is a royal beast

Timeless atmospheres often produce good scope for dragons. These are set in the past when it was a fairy-tale atmosphere with kings and queens, knights, castles and wicked witches. Dragons are
often portrayed as almost immortal creatures living for hundreds of years, perhaps a reflection of their common links with dinosaurs or a legacy of the Chinese belief that dragons lived for thousands of years. Two stories that are set in the past are *The Dragon of Og* (9) and *The Dragon's Quest* (10) and that also feature long living dragons who are good dragons and behave themselves royally. The former dragon 'came to full dragonhood when he was nine hundred years old'. (11) He lived peacefully in 'the pool of the water of Milk' (12) and fed occasionally on bullocks. The villagers saw him as a symbol of luck. He does not eat girls though he would have liked to;

"Would if offend the villagers?" the Dragon asked his Mother, ....... 'If I ate just one, now and then?''

'I believe it would;' said his Mother, 'so don't.'" (13)

The dragon was a gentlemanly soul and rather shy when befriended by Matilda, the lady of the castle but he was soon 'being as obedient to Matilda as he had been to his mother'. (14) He was a magnificent beast:

"He had grown into a beautiful dragon, far more beautiful than his Uncle; his scales were more emerald, more turquoise and royal blue, his crest and his claws more golden, the lining of his wings, if he had unfolded them, a deeper ruby red, his tail so long that it stretched from the bank to the river." (15)

Both he and Matilda make an excellent picture, from the illustration overlead shows them both together. It is clear from his remarkable appearance that he is regarded as having royal status, he is obviously no ordinary beast. (16) His magical powers appeared in three different ways: firstly, when his eyes bewitch the bullock before it was eaten, thus giving it a painless death, secondly, when dead, his blood was perceived to have excellent healing powers and finally his ability to rejoin his head and body together. He also could not covert to vegetarianism thus retaining his dignity as a rare and fabulous creature.

In *The Dragon's Quest* (17) the dragon describes his adventures in the time of King Arthur. He was a vegetarian dragon who aspired to knighthood and went in search of a lost giant who had been
snatched by the wicked Morgan Le Fay. In contrast to the dragon's bravery and the motto of 'Dragons Never Despair'(18) his boon companion was Sir Gryfflet who was a complete coward. The dragon was a reformed character as he freely admitted he used to be 'wicked' and having 'eaten several maidens' so everyone 'hated and feared' him(19) but a holy man helped him to change and so put his talents to good use. He was good at blowing green smoke and flying and he developed the skill of being a 'Listener'(20), able to hear the faintest of sounds. He was an honest, likeable character who showed no great cunning or cleverness or indeed wished to harm anyone. The period of King Arthur gave the dragon more scope and dignity in his adventures than enjoyed by the dragon in one of the previous novels, Green Smoke (21) when he ate buns and tamely dusted out his cave, an anticlimax for a dragon. As one critic commented:

"but perhaps anticlimax is the penalty of living out one's age". (22)

The Magic Passage

Other fantasy stories have more interaction with children:

"Like all fantasies, the books of enchanted realism have to provide a mechanism and raison d'être for the departure from reality to enchantment. The usual means is to portray the child characters as highly sensitive persons who feel emotionally imprisoned by ennui and tension imposed by their surroundings. They are looking for a way out, and it comes by way of Magic." (23)

A Dragon in Spring-Term. (24) combines the dragon, Scales, and his Magic Mountain with a variety of characters living in the ordinary world of school. He was a friendly, fun creature who was the special friend of all the class. The adventures that they had on Magic Mountain included meeting Scales' 'silly cousins', 'Grandrag' and 'Aunt Spiny'.(25) The dragons also assisted the children in fighting their own battles and in finding their inner strength. Billy, who had family problems disappeared and ended up on Magic Mountain having a fun fight with Grandrag. Billy told them that he is running away only to be contradicted by Grandrag:
"oh, no, no, no, no, no, The Billy Bottom doesn't run away. My grandson's Billy Bottom's not a coward. My Sir William stands and fights!" (26)

Scale's Mum also helped Billy by building his self-esteem. Scales had already assisted Sam with his spelling and dealing with the school bully. One interesting episode was the 'Maiden Devouring Day' (27) when a princess is taken out to be devoured by Scales' Dad. The girls of the class were very resourceful and organized a rescue party, taking the princess to safety and offering a pastry princess instead all whilst the boys watch. Their plan is successful:

"Make me a pastry princess every year and NO MORE GIRLS!" (28)

The dragons fulfil the function of being a 'special friend' that many children wishfully desire, a friend to help them out in times of trouble. They also provide much excitement by living in a magical world that enlivens their everyday lives. Indeed when it comes to it, they'd rather have Scales than a computer!

I'm not St George, I'm a Girl

Traditionally it has always been men fighting dragons but with the rise of feminism there are now more heroines. Writers 'employ modern concepts and a modern treatment of them in their works. The portrayal of girls and women is only one example.' (29) The world of fantasy has given rise to modern heroines and it also now includes modern technology.

In Georgie and the Dragon Georgie is a young girl who has killed '1072 372' (30) dragons on her computer, till one day she found a new disk entitled:

"Dragon's Revenge
warning:
super-real
Handle with care." (31)

Unable to resist the challenge she put it in her disk drive and instantly was sucked into a world where she was faced by a dragon and his three rules:
"1. Kill Georgie,
2. Eat Georgie,
3. Georgie kills dragon." (32)

It is another variation on the theme of St George and the Dragon with a marvellous sense of humour, a heroine and inside a computer. The dragon tried to decide the best way to eat her:

"Georgie Burgers?
Georgie and mash?
A barbeque would be nice!" (33)

The story is further enlivened when her two and a half year old sister, Tank, got into her room and started playing with the computer and always at the critical moment manages to press the right key. However she ended up in a castle and everyone thought she was Saint George coming to save the princess, so she had to fight the dragon.

The dragon does evince an element of sympathy though from the reader:

"He accused her of killing all his relations: his granny, his aunty, his uncle Bill, his cousin Dwayne and his wife Hilda." (34)

With the assistance of Tank, the gatekeeper's smelly socks and her own wits she managed to strike a deal with the dragon. They agreed to change the rules and 'kill' becomes 'kiss' instead. (35) The story follows the mode started by E.Nesbit in her A Complete Book of Dragons when ingenious and peaceful methods of dealing with dragons are involved rather than violence.

Two other fantasy stories have females dealing with dragons. Dragonfield (36) has the heroine Tansy not only discovering the wild plant 'Dragon's Bane' but assisting the hired 'hero' in defeating the dragon. The 'hero' (37) turns out not to be one at all but with her assistance they not only formulate a plan but carry it out successfully with the dragon destroyed.

So You Want to be a Wizard (38) has two heroines who are training to be wizards, traditionally male territory. The book cleverly combines reality with fantasy.
For example, they found a dragon underneath Manhattan during their quest for the 'Book of Night with Moon'.(39) The dragon, who was referred to as 'the Eldest'(40) was guarding his enormous hoard and accused them of being thieves. They communicated 'in the Speech' (41) and struck a bargain with the dragon, which included a spell to seal the dragon's hoard so no-one could steal it. The dragon's hoard was so enormous that he is not entirely sure himself what was there.

However, despite the appearance of more heroines the dragons still remain stubbornly male, female dragons are still very far and few between.

'High' Fantasy

Writers such as Ursula Le Guin have 'traditional secondary worlds' (42) in their novels. A real world is created following set rules and a proper structure. Fantasy books like her 'Earthsea' novels and Anne McCaffrey's science fiction novels appeal far more for older readers, usually leading onto more adult fantasy novels, such as the 'Discworld' novels by Terry Prachett or onto the fantasy game of 'Dungeons and Dragons'.

"McCaffrey's simple, descriptive dragonlore begs comparison with that of Ursula LeGuin's in 'A Wizard of Earthsea', which has a profound mythic connotation."(43)

Ursula Le Guin's dragons are based more on myth and folklore and so revert back to their former evil reputation:

"Dragons in folklore are fierce enemies, a menace to men. They are also cunning and gold­loving."(44)

Dragons provide the reason Ged goes to Low Torning in order to protect them from the dragon who had taken the island of Pendor, killing the Lord and his men with his fire, driving the townspeople into the sea and taking the riches for himself in that ruined town. The description of the Old Dragon of Pendor reflected his character:

"When he was all afoot his scaled head, spike-crowned and triple-tongued, rose higher than the broken tower's height, and his taloned forefeet rested on the rubble of the town below."
His scales were grey-black, catching the daylight like broken stone. Lean as a hound he was and huge as a hill. Almost he stared into the dragon's eyes and was caught, for one cannot look into a dragon's eyes. He glanced away from the oily green gaze that watched him, and held up before him his staff, that looked now like a splinter, like a twig." (45)

Ged, as a dragon-lord (one who able to converse with dragons) and a powerful wizard spoke 'Old Speech' (46) which was their own language and used to their own ends but he is still afraid of the dragon's sorcery:

'He feared dragon-magic, for old dragons are very powerful and guileful in a sorcery like and unlike the sorcery of men." (47)

The dragons were such powerful creatures that their only real rivals were wizards. Their tendency was to inhabit the fringes of the earth away from human habitation, and they can live for thousands of years reflecting folkloric traits and showing bestial tendencies:

"Ursula Le Guin in her Earthsea books ....made use of deliberate ambivalence in the creation of amoral dragons, not in themselves wicked, but irrelevant to or contemptuous of, human morality; they seem to represent Nature as seen from the view Grahame chose not to use, the Nature of the Wild Wood."(48)

The dragons' wild power and their fierce nature can be seen in this description of a flight of dragons in The Farthest Shore.

'All the glory of mortality was in that flight. Their beauty was made up of terrible strength, and utter wildness, and the grace of reason. For these were thinking creatures, with speech, and ancient wisdom: in the patterns of their flight there was a fierce, willed concord.' (49)

It is interesting to contrast the two descriptions of the Old Dragon of Pendor and Orm Embar the dragon who asks Ged for help in The Farthest Shore and proves to be his ally. This dragon though still with 'iron-grey scales' has also a 'glitter of gold in them' and is 'magnificent in death'. (50) This more flattering description shows that this dragon was a better character than the other.

Fantasy, as well as producing some of the most imaginative magical worlds also produce a variety
of dragons. Some, harking back to times past are dignified royal beasts, others introduce the children
to their own magical world while others provide a chance for girls to break from traditional
stereotyping. But they all retain some sort of power and with the exception of Dragon's Bane they
all posses magical powers of some description, the dragons of the 'Earthsea' novels far more than
most. Fantasy, with its creation of secondary worlds, gives dragons the scope to be amazing mythical
creatures, contrasting with the tameness and rather dull dragons who are domesticated. As Tolkien
said:

"I never imagined that the dragon was of the same order as the horse......The dragon had the
trade-mark Of Faerie written plainly upon him. In whatever world he had his being it was
an Other-world." (51)

Other worlds give dragons their full potential to be fuller, more rounded and interesting characters
and thus helping to introduce children to the wonder of fantasy.
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Chapter Six

Inside each of us is a serpent

Dragons, with their long-held evil reputation have been portrayed as a potential for wrong-doing and fear within the child’s internal life:

"Folktales, for example, had long been seen as vehicles for the vicarious slaying of dragons within a child’s life and consciousness."(1)

The dragons’ lust for gold and the futility of hoarding it away had its origin in the third century and Tolkien and Lewis, two important writers for children this century, resurrected the idea, passing the failing onto human characters, thus using the theme to teach a lesson to the reader. Nicholas Stuart Grey cleverly used the dragon as a symbol of self-hatred, a mirror of the unconscious in his tale The Hunting of the Dragon. Likewise Maurice Sendak and William Mayne used dragon-type figures as the externalisation of what the child’s feelings and emotions. Finally there is a princess who turns herself into a dragon in the quest to find a man who really loves her. All these stories either take place completely in the fantasy world or use it to some extent as fantasy gives the dragon the freedom to be whatever shape or form the author wishes it to be.

Tolkien, who is one of the most successful creators of a secondary world restored the dragon’s wicked and wily character:

"The comic dragons might have resulted eventually in a stereotype as rigid as that of the Satanic dragon, but Tolkien restored the dragon’s potential for primarily non-comic evil in Smaug." (2)

Smaug in The Hobbit (3) returns to the original dragon’s role of the evil gold-hoarder. He attacked and killed the dwarves in the Lonely Mountain and also ruined the nearby town of Dale, carried off all the treasure and killed and ate anyone who got in his way.

62
"There was a most specially greedy, strong and wicked worm called Smaug." (4)
The picture of him lying on his bed of ill-gotten treasure is a memorable one, as seen overleaf, (5) and the lure of the gold is quite understood.

"There he lay, 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. Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across the unseen floors, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light." (6)

But there is far more complexity to his character than the stereotype symbol of evil as revealed in his conversation with Bilbo. Here the truth was not spoken, both of them were devious, Smaug because that is what he is by nature, Bilbo, because he had a mission to carry out, so they both talked in riddles:

"This of course is the way to talk to dragons, if you don't want to reveal your proper name (which is wise), and don't want to infuriate them by a flat refusal (which is also very wise). No dragon can resist the fascination of riddling talk and of wasting time trying to understand it." (7)

The dragon very cleverly put doubt in the mind of Bilbo that the dwarves would keep to their promises of rewarding him but the real danger was the 'bewitchment of the hoard'. (8) As soon as Smaug was dead then everyone fell prey to the lust of treasure and Thorin was the main victim:

"But also he did not reckon with the power that gold has upon which a dragon has long brooded, nor with dwarvish hearts. Long hours in the past days Thorin had spent in the treasury, and the lust of it was heavy on him." (9)

The fatal hold that gold had upon Thorin lead to trouble with Bard and the King of the Elves, but most importantly it lead to the final breaking up of the fellowship after they had been through so much together. In Tolkien's The Hoard from The Adventures of Tom Bombadil (10) the curse and futility of hoarding gold to the extent that there is no other joy in life is well described:
"There was an old dragon under grey stone; 
his red eyes blinked as he lay alone.
His joy was dead and his youth spent,  
he was knobbled and wrinkled, and his limbs bent  
in the long years to his gold chained;  
in his heart's furnace the fire waned." (11)

The dragon is a pathetic creature who had no life because he guarded his treasure and he rightly deserves the readers' scorn:

"In 'The Hoard' Tolkien portrayed an ambivalent dragon- like the elves, the dwarf, and the human hero who have also tried to possess the hoard, the dragon is to be pitied as well as condemned."(12)

Another object of pity and condemnation is Eustace in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (13) who had an unusual adventure with a dragon. As an unwilling participant in the voyage he spent most of it being selfish, sulky and unco-operative. On arriving on a strange island he shirked the necessary work and encountered a old dragon who died before his eyes. Seeking shelter in the dragon's lair he fell prey to the lure of the dragon's gold.

"They don't have any tax here,' he said. 'And you don't have to give treasure to the government. With some of this stuff I could have quite a decent time here - perhaps in Calormene." (14)

Eustace had a nasty shock though when he awoke.

"He had turned into a dragon while he was asleep. Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself."(15)

His first thought was one of relief, after all now he could get back at the others but very soon his thoughts turned to despair:

"He wanted to be friends. He wanted to get back among humans and talk and laugh and share things. He realised that he was a monster cut off from the whole human race. An
appalling loneliness came over him. He began to see that the others had not really been
fiends at all. He began to wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always
supposed." (16)

This was a hard lesson for Eustace. Physically he acted like a dragon (like eating the dead dragon
for instance) but mentally he was still the same boy inside. He could not communicate and he realised
how lonely he was. He therefore went through a character change:

"It was, however, clear to everyone that Ecstasy's character had been rather improved by
becoming a dragon. He was anxious to help... The pleasure (quite new to him) of being liked
and still more, of liking other people, was what kept Eustace from despair. For it was very
dreary being a dragon." (17)

An interesting learning experience for him was the extent of the dislike of the rest of the crew, as up
to that point he had been a real nuisance. This episode provided a turning point for him. He was not
truly evil, just a boy who was self-centred:

"As noted, Lewis made use of the dragon as a symbol of (redeemable) evil in the
transformation of Eustace in 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader.' (18)

Redemption of characters is a common theme in the Narnia books and the dragon episode is one of
the most striking and unforgettable.

The Dragon Inside

"We each carry a dragon inside, the worm gnawing at the guts, the cunning of the hidden
heart, the squatter on the captured jewels. Even the humorous dragon stories cannot disguise
that fact." (19)

Prince Michael found two dragons when he went in search of the only creature who would give him
a fight in The Hunting of the Dragon. (20) The author Nicholas Stuart Grey drew 'upon the basic
resources of the folk-tale and to interpret and adorn them with his inimitable wit and his wry
tenderness. In this immemorial material he found the seeds of eternal truths.' (21)
In this tale Prince Michael had to look deep inside himself and face up to the dragon inside, his nasty, bitter personality, whilst he sought out a battle with the dragon, unconquerable Morgan.

"I am here to kill you," said Michael.

'You poor, bitter thing,' said the dragon.

'Or to be killed by you.'

'I am not interested in your death.'" (22)

The dragon refused adamantly to do Prince Michael's will. However his tears in the night disturbed Michael, for the very first time in his life he felt pity for another creature, but he still attacked and killed the dragon. The dragon turned into a rabbit, a vulnerable creature, the hunted rather than the hunter, the weak versus the strong.

"Most people have a dragon in them, and a rabbit,' said Morgan, faintly. 'A loving and a hating. It is madness to suppress the first and let the other rule alone. Join me together, Michael, free me.'" (23)

Michael was defeated by Morgan's plea, but he killed the rabbit only for the creature to change into human form, his long-lost brother. The story demonstrated the two different emotional capacities, to love and to hate. Michael not only physically released Morgan but the deep hatred within himself, for himself. He sought the dragon as a physical being to defeat by brute force but he conquered the unconscious dragon within instead, and was at last able to develop feelings for another person, his brother Morgan.

"Jung called the dragon the 'mother image' or the mirror of the maternal, or the unconscious; the Gnostics saw it as katholiko ophis, or 'the way through all things.'" (24)

In Where the Wild Things Are (25)Max creates his monsters, dragon-type creatures because of his anger with his mother after she had punished him by sending him supperless to bed. He went on a night journey through a forest and across the sea in his own boat to where the really wild things were with 'their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws.' (26) He became king of them after he stared into their eyes without blinking, thus
taming them to do his will. The story showed a child's fears, terrors and frustrations: in short, 'the angry and helpless side of a child's nature' (27). However terrifying they looked in the pictures there was no danger from them:

"Max's dream monsters are of his own making and under his control; their behaviour personifies his emotional conflicts." (28)

They ran wild till Max got fed up and stopped them.

"And Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all." (29)

Max returned and found his hot supper waiting for him, in his own bedroom. His anger spent, he wanted the security of his mother's love back again. The pictures played a highly important part in this story, giving a visual impact and response from children who saw that 'his perception of their need to walk safely, but a little fearfully, in the wild, wild wood.' (30) An example can been seen overleaf. (31)

Max Sendak expresses his own view of childhood in The Wild Things. (32)

"Certainly we want to protect our children from new and painful experiences that are beyond their emotional comprehension and that intensify anxiety; and to the point we can prevent premature exposure to such experiences. That is obvious. But what is just as obvious- and what is too often overlooked- is the fact that from their earliest years children live on familiar terms with disrupting emotions, that fear and anxiety are an intrinsic part of their everyday lives, that they continually cope with frustration as best they can. And it is through fantasy that children achieve catharsis. It is the best means they have for taming Wild Things." (33)

This view of childhood also applied to the central character, Donald Jackson, in the novel, A Game of Dark, which is more for teenager readers. (34). His catharsis appeared in the creation of a horrendous worm, who personified the feelings he had for his dying, disabled father. It was an invasion, on a psychological level, of an alien world.
"Here the unconscious mind of an unhappy boy, unable to cope with the reality of his father's illness, is seized by the alien power of a gigantic worm." (35)

This worm was an absolutely monstrous figure preying on a town, coming out in the dark to eat people and leaving a poisonous, reeking trail behind.

"It came on, screwing its way towards the cow. It was about ninety feet long, of a white colour, limbless, and had two protuberances, one either side, about half way along itself. The head was a searcher on a thick neck. The mouth opened and closed in time to its movements forwards. Its eyes were not plain to see, but it had been proved to possess sight, and a sense of smell and it could hear." (36)

It was the smell that predominates and it made him feel sick. The worm also had wings, and it discharged a 'green slime' (37) so poisonous that it could kill.

The father rarely spoke to his son, as he was so locked in his own world of pain that it affected his mind:

"'My father has gone mad,' said Donald to himself, words of logic and not feeling." (38)

Donald was a very lonely adolescent; he had no close friends. The only friend he could talk to and then not very successfully was the vicar, Berry. His mother was no help as she was only critical of him:

"I wish I could rely on you more to make the right decisions for yourself, but you don't seem to be able to think things out except with reference to what you want for yourself." (39)

He was alienated from them both to the extent that he wondered if they really were his parents:

"If the man called Daddy was not his father, and the woman called Mum not his mother, then he had no need to feel guilty for no longer loving them as parents." (40)

In his fantasy world which resembled the medieval, he was called by his surname and the only friends he had is the lord, who could represent Berry the vicar. The other was Carrica who might represent his dead sister Cecily.

Finally, in the fantasy world in which he lived more and more Jackson killed the worm, after others
have failed and with the death of the worm comes release.

"The battle between the hero and the dragon ... shows more clearly the archetypal theme of the ego's triumph over regressive trends. For most people the dark or negative side of the personality remains unconscious. The hero, on the contrary, must realize that the shadow exists and that he can draw strength from it. He must come to terms with its destructive powers if he is to become sufficiently terrible to overcome the dragon. I.e., before the ego can triumph, it must master and assimilate the shadow." (41)

He was finally able to come to terms with his feelings, to love his father and he made the conscious decision to leave forever his dream world.

In Conrad and the Dragon,(42) a lonely princess was the dragon who ate her suitors. Princess Hermione, a very beautiful princess had many suitors for her hand but each time they arrived and declared their exaggerated love for her, a dragon appeared and ate them. Rather than be put off more and more suitors appeared all desperate to kill the dragon for the love of the princess. Conrad, the hero, is the first man the princess had feelings for:

"I like him for not wanting to offer up his life for me. I like him for thinking that women have other interests than watching men gratify their vanity by running into danger. I like him because he credits me with intelligence. I like him because he considers my feelings, and longs to be near me when there is no glory to be gained by it. I like him because he would study my moods and find out what I needed, and care for me all the day long, even when I was in no particular danger."(43)

The princess wanted to be loved for what she is, rather than have a hero to die for her so Conrad's letter made her for the first time regard a man with tender feelings. But Conrad, who hated the dragon and who was completely indifferent to the princess's love, challenged the dragon and attacked it. The princess as the dragon cannot eat Conrad but 'licked the dust at Conrad's feet'.(44) Conrad still attacked and the dragon retired, fatally wounded. The story illustrates how the princess wanted to be loved as a person, not as a princess and becoming a dragon was her means for gaining her aim.
It also demonstrates the futility of heroic self-sacrifice, the foolishness of masculine aggression to win love.

All these dragons give interesting psychological insights into the themselves and to the reader. Smaug, whilst restoring the dragon's evil reputation and enhancing it with his devious cleverness is one of the most memorable dragons of this century. His legacy, the treasure of the Lonely Mountain revives the curse of the dragon's hoard began in mythology by Fafnir and this was further emphasised in *Tom Bombadil*. Eustace, though redeemed by Aslan also fell prey to the curse of the dragon's hoard and learned the bitter lesson that friendship is more precious than treasure. The dragons that inhabit the inner consciousness provide valuable lessons for the child reader:

    "A child will have to learn to overcome the beast within him while stealing from it the vitality it can provide."(45)

Michael turned his self-hatred into warm emotions for his brother, Max learned to control his anger against his mother, Donald used the fight against the worm to find love for his father, and the Princess would rather die than not be truly loved. These dragons all teach the child reader something about themselves and it provides them with much food for thought.
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(5) Ibid., p. 225.
(6) Ibid., p. 235.
(7) Ibid., p. 252.
(8) Ibid., p. 276.
(9) Ibid., p. 288.
(11) Ibid., p. 54.
(12) Berman, ref. 2. p. 56.
(14) Ibid., p. 70.
(15) Ibid., p. 73.
(16) Ibid., p. 74.
(17) Ibid., p. 80.
(22) Ibid., ref 20, p. 160.
(23) Ibid., p. 161.
(24) Yolen, ref. 19, p. 387.
(26) Ibid.
(28) Ibid., p. 252.
(29) Sendak, ref. 25.
(30) Egoff, ref. 27. p. 251.
(31) Sendak. ref. 25.
(32) Ibid.
(33) Egoff, ref. 27. p. 251.
(35) Egoff, ref. 27. p. 85.
(36) Mayne, ref 34, p. 91.
(37) Ibid., p. 90.
(38) Ibid., p. 45.
(39) Ibid., p. 72.
(40) Ibid., p. 75.
(43) Ibid., p. 240.
(44) Ibid.

72
Conclusion

This study has examined the presentation of dragons in children's literature and how their portrayal has reflected both society's attitude towards them and the changing developments within children's literature. Myths, legends, folktales and fairy-tales have provided the basis and inspiration for many twentieth century dragons. The twentieth century itself has seen three major influences in children's literature which have a particular significance for dragons. Beginning in the later part of the nineteenth century, the changing attitudes towards animals has led to the domestication and taming of the dragon. The major rise of fantasy and psychology, particularly in the last forty years, has given children some of the most interesting dragons ever encountered.

Dragons' origins from the serpent and association with the devil and hell-fire gave them an evil stereotype that proved very difficult to shake off for centuries. This lead to their destruction in many tales by many heroes. The slaying of dragons have enhanced the status of many heroes for they were regarded as creatures of incredible power. The physical power and fire-breathing of dragons are two characteristics that they have always been acknowledged as having. Whilst their shape and character may vary widely they have always been regarded as having extraordinary abilities which are beyond the range of humans. These abilities have been influenced by the background of the tale. In myths and legends the dragon is a beast of superhuman strength that can be overcome by heroes, who have one outstanding characteristic or attribute that enables them to defeat the dragon. In fairy-tales the dragons are of such monstrous power that magic is needed to kill these incredible dragons. Yet, at the same time, dragons are also the giver of amazing powers. Those fairy-tales that show dragons as friendly beasts are influenced by the country's mythology which shows dragons as being beneficent creatures. This is particularly true of tales originating in China and Greece. Folklore gives dragons a roguish, wily character that are still easily outwitted by the human hero. Dragons are also shown as having a "home life", living in a house very much the same way as humans do.
The fantastic element in fairy-tales has provided the inspiration for many twentieth century writers to write fantasy featuring dragons. In fantasy dragons really can live up to their image of mythical creatures: dragons that breathe fire and smoke, fly around and prove dangerous when angered. The general picture of a mythical dragon is a dragon who also possesses hypnotic power with his eyes that draw the victim willingly into his jaws, and as a creature who is almost immortal, often living for thousands of years. This idea persists throughout literature in the twentieth century, particularly with the major development of children’s fantasy in the fifties and beyond. It is a picture which I think fits dragons best, after their portrayal earlier this century as cuddly, domestic animals. How then do you distinguish between a dragon and an ordinary domesticated animal such as a cat? It is then robbed of its power and status as a legendary creature and of its dignity. Dragons are of such stature that they naturally possess great dignity. But then dragons never live comfortably in the modern world, a problem not resolved very well in children’s literature. However, are dragon comfortable creatures? Their two main obsessions which date back centuries are with eating young maidens, particularly princesses (their origin being the legend of St George and the Dragon) and with the hoarding of gold or treasure, which if gained by humans usually leads to their downfall. There are such an amazing amount of variations on these two themes in children’s literature, which naturally now includes recent developments in feminism and technology, that it is hard to find a dragon not associated with gold or a princess, or indeed both. However, despite the rise of feminism, most dragons obstinately remain single males who live on their own, either in a cave or in water. There are very few dragonesses; the ones there are do not seem to be very intelligent nor are there many dragon families portrayed. Perhaps one dragon is enough. Finally, modern developments in psychology have shown that dragons are symbols of the unconscious, the dragon as a symbol of the child’s fear, emotion or isolation. This is very significant and important for children, they can relate to and learn to conquer their own dragons within themselves. Dragons remain one of the most interesting and versatile creatures to analyse within children’s
literature. Nowadays with no major influence regarding dragons, authors have a completely free hand to portray them as they wish; they appeal to all ages from the youngest child to the teenager and often beyond into adulthood.
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