



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Dragons and “the Other” in Modern Fantasy

Tolkien, McCaffrey and Novik Compared

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

Dragons, in stories from Western culture, used to be fearsome monsters which hoarded treasures and were slain by heroes, whereas in today's literature dragons are often accompanied by dragonriders who use them as transports or fighters. This essay explores the different usages of dragons in three works of modern fantasy and science fiction, in relation to the postcolonial concept of "the Other" as defined by Edward Said: J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* and Naomi Novik's *Temeraire*. Smaug from *The Hobbit* is the closest to "the Other" because he functions the same as the dragons from traditional dragon tales in which the dragon inhabits and represents the uncivilized wilderness. However, as a character Smaug is an inversion of "the Other," as he shares qualities with the British upper-class, having been reared in an industrial environment. In *Dragonriders of Pern*, the dragons are extraterrestrial creatures that humans have tamed and bred to use them to destroy a dangerous substance. Their minds are mostly impulse-driven and the humans, to whom they are bonded, control them through telepathy. The dragons' impulses affect the humans, their political positions and social norms. Unlike "the Other," the Pernese dragons are not fixed entities but a developing species, undergoing progress in physical and mental attributes. In the 19th century-based *Temeraire*, dragons are also tamed and bred by humans but they possess human-like intelligence. Treatment of dragons varies between countries, e.g. Chinese dragons are respected and treated as equals to humans whereas in Europe they are treated as mindless animals, used in warfare. The dragons have human handlers, and there is great affection between them but the general attitude towards the dragons is similar to like towards a social minority. They start a campaign, led by the main characters, for draconic freedom and must fight ingrained norms to achieve it.

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1. Introduction

Dragons have existed in mankind's imagination in many forms and roles, in myths, fairy tales and stories throughout the ages. They have been portrayed as flying or crawling, wise or ferocious, good or evil, wild or tamed, natural or supernatural. In Western stories they have traditionally been depicted as fire-breathing, treasure-hoarding, princess-guarding monsters to be slain by heroes. Although there are innumerable variations on dragon stories, tales such as that of George and the Dragon, have made that image iconic and the most recognized. It seems that there was a period in which dragons underwent a decline in their popularity in Western literature as, according to Sandra Unerman, a dragon was rarely if ever found as "a significant character in a work of fiction between Spenser's description of the battle with the Red Cross Knight in Book One of the *Faerie Queene* [published in the late sixteenth century] and the end of the nineteenth century" (94-5). This is probably due to the fact the dragons simply had no place within the literary movements of those periods, which included the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Realism and the Victorian period ("Literature Periods"). Since the nineteenth century, however, there has been a constant and increasing influx of dragons into literature, especially with the flourishing of the fantasy genre, as well as science fiction and literature aimed for children.

Although often drawing on myths and folk lore, authors of those genres generally try to put their own spin on their dragons and use them for original purposes where they have central or important roles. In 1898, a short children's story, "The Reluctant Dragon" by Kenneth Grahame was published. As the title indicates, the dragon in the story is not a fierce monster but, in fact, a peaceable poet. According to Margaret Blount, this story is a prototype for later stories of sympathetic dragons (117). Then of course, the fantasy genre took off when Tolkien published *The Hobbit* in 1937 and *The Lord of the Rings* in 1955 and though he himself in some ways clung to the more traditional version of dragons, other authors have been prolific in publishing fantasy stories in which sympathetic dragons feature.

The reason why dragons' role in modern fiction has been so reversed may be rooted in modernist and postmodernist ideas in which "the most fundamental elements of practice were challenged and rejected" (Barry 78). That is to say, traditional ideas were rejected, in this case the stereotypical monster dragon, which has given fantasy authors a wide berth to invent new original and creative ways of using dragons in fiction. Also, it may be hypothesized, that in some works, dragons have come to represent a part of human society, a part that is either

accepted as by humans or treated as a disadvantaged minority group or even just elevated pets.

Dragons in Western fiction, which had previously belonged to the inferior realm of “the Other,” have, since the beginning of last century, moved significantly away from “the Other” and towards inclusion into human society, as they have come to be utilized by humans and have become increasingly civilized and dependent on humans and their society, both emotionally and socially.

My intention is to examine three representations of dragons in three types of Western modern literature. Firstly, Tolkien’s dragons in Middle Earth which appear in *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion* (1977) which are both fantasy, though *The Hobbit* is also classified as children’s literature. This section will be mainly focused on Smaug from *The Hobbit* and how he seems to have an identity crisis. On the one hand, he fits the traditional definition of “the Other,” with respect to his role in the plot and certain other characteristics. On the other hand, it seems that Tolkien has inverted the idea of “the Other” (as per Edward Said’s *Orientalism* [2003]) which is reflected in certain traits that Smaug shares with the Western [British] upper class which might be explained by the origins of dragons in Tolkien’s Middle Earth.

Secondly, Anne McCaffrey’s dragons from her science fiction series *Dragonriders of Pern* series will be examined. The discussion will be centered on the first three books which are *Dragonflight* (first published in 1968), *Dragonquest* (1971) and *The White Dragon* (1978). What has distanced those dragons from “the Other” is that they have become the companions of humans instead of their feared enemies. In fact, they are specifically bred for humans. While it may seem to be an equal relationship because they are telepathically and emotionally bonded, the dragons are somewhat inferior to humans in intelligence, having more of an animalistic nature and furthermore are only accepted in parts of society. Also, unlike “the Other” the dragons from Pern are not a fixed entity but a developing species. Although they do have some unintentional influences in the human society because the social status of the human riders is largely dependent on their dragon’s size, the dragons themselves have neither power over it nor any interest in it.

Thirdly and finally, I will look at Naomi Novik’s historical fantasy series *Temeraire* which so far contains seven books: *His Majesty’s Dragon* (2006), *Throne of Jade* (2006), *Black Powder War* (2006), *Empire of Ivory* (2007), *Victory of Eagles* (2009), *Tongues of Serpents* (2010) and *Crucible of Gold* (2012). The Western dragons of *Temeraire* are like a minority struggling for the same equality that dragons in other parts of the world enjoy and against the deeply ingrained Western ideas of them as “the Other.”

2. Tolkien's Dragons

Although Smaug in *The Hobbit* follows the same pattern as traditional occidental dragons in dragon-slaying stories, in which dragons are evil beings, representing “the Other,” he is very much defined by his strong character, which at times appears relatively civilized. In literary theories, structuralism and post-structuralism and other subsequent theories, “the Other” is the latter and less privileged component of dyads or paired opposites (Barry 71). Examples of such dyads would be male/female, light/darkness, order/chaos or civilization/wilderness and dragons are often associated with chaos and wilderness and hence “the Other.” Indeed, there are numerous mythologies from all over the world in which a dragon or draconic creatures are presented as a threat to order (Simpson 24). Moreover, in many medieval tales, dragons are creatures of the wilderness and those are the models for Smaug. He fulfills the same role as dragons did in traditional, medieval dragon-slaying stories, which, as Jonathan Evans traces, are generally outlined thus:

[T]he hero, a *human*, generally travels from a social setting . . . into wilderness, where he meets a series of foes including a dragon; he does battle with the dragon in order to deliver a captive (maiden, lion or . . . another warrior). The rewards for his success . . . frequently . . . [involve] a kingdom or a share in one, a marriageable princess, or a monetary treasure. The dragon, on the other hand, a nonhuman *monster*, inhabits the wilderness and way-lays those who venture from social centers. Often the dragon wanders from its own habitat into areas of human settlement on marauding missions; but the battle between hero and dragon ends in the monster's death, and if the dragon's habitat includes a den in which is treasure is hoarded, the knight who wins the victory plunders the hoards and claims the treasure as rightful spoils of battle. (Evans “Semiotics” 95)

This does sound similar to the plot of *The Hobbit*. Bilbo, not exactly a human, travels from a social setting and into the wilderness where he indeed meets a series of foes which includes the dragon Smaug. However, Bilbo's purpose is not to deliver a maiden, though Smaug does have a taste for them (*Hobbit* 23), but to relieve the dragon of his treasure which he has hoarded, for which Bilbo has been promised monetary rewards. Furthermore, it is not Bilbo who eventually slays the dragon but another hero, Bard, who is, in fact, a human, after the dragon has attacked Laketown, the human settlement, in revenge for his twice-stolen piece of treasure. So while Tolkien's hero does not entirely follow the traditional formula, Smaug does.

However, while Smaug's actions are fairly traditional, his character is more modern and, in some respects, civilized. For instance, one of the first things we learn about dragons in *The Hobbit* is that "they usually have a good notion of the current market value" (*Hobbit* 22). Smaug himself, when he appears, shows more of this materialistic mindset when he asks Bilbo how he is going to get his share of the treasure home: "But what about delivery? What about cartage? What about armed guards and tolls?" (212). Even his speech sounds very posh. Tom Shippey says of him, that he "speaks in fact with the characteristic aggressive politeness of the British upper class" (103). Furthermore, there are other ways of connecting Smaug to some aspects of civilization and, in particular, the British upper class. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said speaks of how traits of undesirable members of Western societies were projected onto the Orientals: "The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien" (207). So, the Orientals were generally connected to traits of weakness in the Westerners which they wished to ignore. This is applicable to the dragons in that it can be said that some negative but still strengthening and driving traits of the British upper class have been projected onto Smaug, i.e. a sense of superiority or snobbery and greed for useless things.

One might ask, why do dragons hoard treasure if they have no use for it? There is no way of answering this definitely for all dragons but in Smaug's case, his history has perhaps shaped him in some ways. This history is almost non-existent in *The Hobbit*. In Thorin's tale in the beginning, he generalizes about dragons that "they guard their plunder as long as they live . . . and never enjoy a brass ring of it" (22). Then he introduces Smaug: "There was a most specially greedy, strong and wicked worm called Smaug. One day he flew up into the air and came south" (23). This is in keeping with older tales in which the dragon appears only fully grown and without explanation of his existence although there are a few exceptions which tell of the dragon's birth and early life (Simpson 43). While there is no such account of Smaug, the story of the beginning of his kind in Tolkien's Middle Earth, exists in *The Silmarillion*. Dragons in Middle Earth did not originate in the wilderness but in Angband, the iron fortress of the Satan-like Morgoth where he created them as tools for his war with the Valar for the dominion of Middle Earth. The first dragon was Glaurung or The Great Worm, "the first of the Urulóki, the fire-drakes of the North" (*Silmarillion* 132). It appears that they were fire-breathers but not winged and when Glaurung first appeared in war he was so young that his scales had not hardened into armor though that did not stop him from terrifying their creator's enemies. Morgoth developed the winged variety much later and they were a force of great destruction. The greatest of them was Ancalagon the Black who was slain by Eärendil

(302). Out of the early dragons only Glaurung is presented as a character, the others are simply mentioned in passing so in general they just seem to be like Morgoth's war machines.

In fact, the way in which Morgoth keeps developing his new species can be seen as a form of industry. It is never explained in detail in *The Silmarillion* exactly how dragons are made but in *The Book of Lost Tales*, there is an account which supports Tolkien's idea of dragons as products of industry: "Then on a time Melko assembled all his most cunning smiths and sorcerers, and of iron and flame they wrought a host of monsters . . . creatures of pure flame that writhed like ropes of molten metal. . ." (qtd. in Evans "Dragon-Lore" 33-4). All this connection with metal work is inescapably reminiscent of industrialism and Jonathan Evans describes these dragons as "hybrid animal-mechanical dragons" ("Dragon-Lore" 33). Also, since there is sorcery involved, it is likely that Morgoth put something of himself into his creations who like him were all evil and what with his insatiable power hunger, he was nothing if not greedy. Hence, as industrialization is usually a mark of relatively advanced civilization, the history of dragons in Middle Earth may explain not only Smaug's civilized side but also his inherent evilness.

An additional sign of Smaug's move away from "the Other" is his habitat. As mentioned above, Shippey describes the paradoxes of his character, the paradox between the animalistic and human traits, but another paradox can be seen in his choice of dwelling. As already stated, dragons are typically associated with wilderness, that is, they inhabit the wilderness through which the hero must journey. Smaug, however, attacks and conquers a human habitat, the city of Dale, where he makes his lair. Of course, it is ideal for him as the dwarf city is situated inside a mountain but nevertheless it can be seen as his attempt to re-enter civilization; he was after all brought up in a fortress during a war and not in the wilderness. However, he does not uphold any aspects of civilization in his lair and he actually turns it into a wilderness since everyone naturally avoids the fearful place. This could mean that although he has this civilized side, it is still weaker than his bestial side so he is still essentially a part of "the Other" because he cannot fully embrace his civility.

On the surface then, Smaug appears to be a traditional dragon in that he has the same function in *The Hobbit* as dragons usually did in old fairy tales and myths, i.e. representing wilderness, the unknown, the evil, "the Other," though he has a rather amusing way of speaking. However, upon closer inspection, it emerges that there is more to this peculiarly snobbish speech mode than providing humor. In fact, his blend of bestial and civilized characteristics, combined with knowledge of other dragons in Tolkiens universe and how they

came to be – through a half-industrial process – implies that Tolkien’s dragons represent not only “the Other” but also partly, and conversely, the darker side of the British upper class.

3. McCaffrey's Dragons

If Smaug has some untraditional traits and leans towards modernity, Anne McCaffrey's dragons seem have taken a few steps ahead by having their function changed. According to Said's *Orientalism*, the Orientals belong to "the Other" and one of the things which define them, in the Westerners' eyes, is the Westerners' fixed perception of them. "[Orientalism] views the Orient as something whose existence . . . has remained fixed in time and place for the West" (108). The same can be said of the traditional Occidental dragons that have a fixed, stereotypical role as the malicious, treasure-hoarding monsters of the wild. McCaffrey has changed the role of dragons in her stories in which they are allied with humans, instead of being their enemies and thus moving them away from "the Other" and the traditional dragons. However, in other ways she seems to be holding back their advancement. In compliance with her invented science ideas, her dragons are not particularly civilized in general, their behavior being more governed by animalistic impulses and their riders guide their actions to match their purposes, leaving little room for independence.

McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* series follows the descendants of the colonizers of the planet Pern, who use their telepathic, teleportable and time-travelling dragons to help them fight "thread" which are "mycorrhizoid spores from the Red Star [Pern's neighbor planet] which descend on Pern and burrow into it, devouring all organic matter they encounter" (*Dragonflight* 294). The dragons' fiery breath, which is caused by their chewing of "phosphine-bearing mineral" (293), incinerates the thread in the air before it can burrow. Those dragons are, in fact, "a highly specialized variety of a life-form indigenous to [Pern]" that were named after the legendary creatures from Earth (Intro xii). A long time passes from when dragons were first bred by early settlers on Pern and until the events of the first book take place. So long, in fact, that by then the Pernese people have forgotten all about Earth and how they started to breed dragons, though in the third book, the dragons' ancestors are rediscovered. They turn out be small fire-lizards with which the humans have bonded and which they have bred to a huge size. Those dragons have, for the most part, moved away from "the Other" and have been accepted into human society, though not as equals, although the humans have adapted some of their social rules to the natural behavior of their dragons since they cannot change or control it. This acceptance comes at the price of the dragons' intelligence and independence which has been reduced, rendering the dragons less civilized and more animalistic and therefore more dependent on the humans for their place in society.

Unerman claims that “McCaffrey adapts the power and glamour of legendary dragons to express a vision of a society in which humans and animals can understand one another and live in a symbiotic relationship, not in antagonism” (97). However, this relationship is not entirely based on equality as McCaffrey has had to rationalize how creatures ten times the size of humans can be controlled by them and so she limits the dragons’ mental capacity and makes them dependent on humans.

In a sort of a ritual, called “Impression,” the newly hatched dragons and young riders are paired together and the telepathic bond is activated. In many ways, the relationship between the rider and the dragon is symbiotic. Aside from the riders’ necessity for the dragons when fighting thread, they consider themselves friends and their emotional bond is very strong. When Lessa, one of the main characters of *Dragonflight*, impresses the queen dragonet Ramoth, her feelings are described thus: “A feeling of joy suffused Lessa; a feeling of warmth, tenderness, unalloyed affection, and instant respect and admiration flooded mind and heart and soul” (83). However, it seems that the dragons are more dependent on the humans than vice versa since if a dragonrider dies, the dragon without exception commits suicide by going into the frozen void *between*¹ time and space. In the case of a dragon dying before his rider, the rider will be devastated and will want to die but he or she can survive as exemplified by Lytol in the first book and Brekke in the second.

The dragons’ dependence on humans is also reflected in their communicative abilities. While the dragon can communicate amongst themselves through a telepathic network which also includes the firelizards so people can communicate with each other over long distances via dragons, they can only communicate directly with one human, their rider, because the riders can only hear the dragon with whom they are bonded. Then there are exceptions, a few humans, such as Lessa and Brekke, who for some reason can hear all dragons. Yet they are exceptions so most humans can interact with only one dragon and there appear to be no dragons who can access the minds of all humans.

Furthermore, although the dragons are individual characters with independent thoughts, they are in some ways limited as Lessa is taught: “Dragon instinct [is] limited to here-and-now, with no ability to control or anticipate. Mankind [exists] in partnership with them to supply wisdom and order” (121). Essentially, the dragon’s mind functions as any other animal’s, broadly speaking since animals are not quite at the dragons’ level of eloquence. To say that if not for humans, the dragons would not need wisdom or order is a

¹ Always italicized in the text and both used as a noun and an adverb.

moot point, as they are specifically bred to human needs. The inability to control, along with the unquestioning affection for the rider, must make the dragons most convenient partners to the humans. Although, to judge from this, the dragons appear to be somewhat inferior to the humans, in many situations their instincts serve better than outthought human strategies as F'lar, the other main character of *Dragonflight*, notes during a thread engagement: "He ... felt suddenly superfluous. It was the dragons who were fighting this engagement. You encouraged your beast, comforted him when the Thread burned, but you depended on his instinct and speed" (201). So it seems the relationship is somewhat unbalanced in the favor of the rider. In the second book, *Dragonquest*, F'lar's brother F'nor ponders the dragons' minds: "Perhaps if their memories were more acute or associative, they'd refuse to fight" (9). Indeed, if they had more knowledge, they could be more independent and make decisions accordingly.

However, despite the limitations, there are times when the dragons override their human riders and the humans must adapt their social rules to the dragons' natural habits, especially when it comes to mating season. Lessa struggles to keep a mental tether on Ramoth during her mating flight, in which the queen dragon is chased through the air by the male dragons to ensure that the strongest and speediest dragons will spawn the next dragon generation. Inexplicably, the dragons seek to go *between* where they would be lost as they do not have their riders on their backs during mating flights to guide them back from the void. Why the dragons attempt to get to the same place to which they go to die while mating, is never explained but perhaps, when they are enthralled by their animal instincts, they try to escape human control. The mating flights are made difficult for the riders as the dragons' feelings overpower the riders' senses and affect their sexual behavior which can be an inconvenience but also an advantage since the dragons' strength determines the leadership of the dragonriders' community. Thus the hierarchy of the dragons is important in relation to the human hierarchy. There are five types of dragons on Pern: small blues and greens, larger browns and bronzes and the largest golden. The greens and the golden are apparently all female and the rest male. It is believed that only bronze dragons, the largest of the males, can mate with the golden queen dragon. In the time of *Dragonflight*, the end of a long interval – four hundred Pernese years in which thread has not fallen – the Weyrs have degenerated. In fact, there is only one Weyr left where there were once six. There is only one queen: Lessa's Ramoth, which inevitably makes Lessa Weyrwoman, a female leader of the Weyr. The rider, whose dragon will mate with Ramoth, will automatically become both Lessa's lover and Weyrleader. Just before Ramoth goes into heat, the sitting Weyrleader plans to retain his position by having the other bronze riders absent, so his dragon will have a better chance.

Conveniently, in this case, as F'lar and Lessa are already attracted to each other and F'lar has plans to restore the Weyrs to former glories, F'lar's dragon, Mnementh, appears in time and wins the right to mate with Ramoth, establishing his rider as Weyrleader. Hence, indirectly, the dragons can influence politics on Pern.

Furthermore, dragon mating can have social significance. Society on Pern is divided into Hold, Hall and Weyr. Holds are towns and villages and surrounding farms, governed by Lords, where the main concern is the production of food as the Holds must supply not only their own people with food but the Weyr people as well. People in the Holds are generally conservative, compared to the Weyrs in particular. Halls resemble medieval guilds, where various crafts are practiced under the control of craftmasters and Weyrs are the dwellings of dragonriders and their staff. They are far more liberal than others, for instance, in matters of sexual behavior because of the dragons. In *Dragonquest*, the number of Weyrs has increased as well as the number of queen dragons. When Brekke, whose dragon is a queen, falls in love with F'nor, the rider of a brown dragon, she worries that she will not be able to control her dragon during the mating flight because of her fear that she will have to sleep with the bronze rider whose dragon can catch hers. As F'nor tells her: "Weyrwomen can't be bound by any commoner moralities. A Weyrwoman has to be subservient to her queen's needs, including mating with many riders if her queen is flown by different dragons" (*Dragonquest* 160). But Brekke is brought up in a Hold where – unlike in the Weyrs – having multiple bedmates is unacceptable, at least in theory. As she only has eyes for F'nor, she believes that she will be too distressed at having her social values compromised by being surrounded by a group of lustful men, and feeling the same herself to boot, to guide her dragon's flight. She is expected to do this as the Weyrborn people have abandoned these conservative Hold values, being unable to control their feelings, so the dragons have clearly had a part in shaping the social norms in their communities.

However, whatever influence the dragons have had, it is not due to their own intentions but a matter of the humans constructing meaning around the dragons' natural habits and how it affects them, i.e. the humans. Moreover, again, this only applies in the Weyrs, the dragon communities, but not in the human society of Pern in general. So while it is true that humans and dragons live peacefully together on Pern, and despite the inadvertent influence they have in society, their mental shortcomings prevent them from becoming full-fledged, independent individuals in that society and they are accepted rather as elevated working animals.

In *Dragonriders of Pern*, not only has the dragons' basic role been changed but they are also in the process of biological development through the trilogy, further distancing them from fixed idea of "the Other." Over a long time, the dragons have been bred from small fire lizards into the enormous creatures they become. In a time of dire need, Lessa travels with Ramoth a few centuries back in time to bring forward dragons from the past to help fight thread and those older dragons, which come to be referred to as "Oldtimers," are rather smaller than the younger ones and less efficient at breeding: "the Oldtime queens didn't produce large clutches like the modern queens, nor many golden queen eggs" (*Dragonquest* 7).

Moreover, the dragons' evolution is not only reflected in their numbers and physical strength but also in their mental development. F'lar frequently remarks upon his dragon's initiative, because that is not a typical trait of Pernese dragons (*Dragonquest* 44), and Mnementh, the dragon, shows it, for example, when F'lar is trying to convince Lessa to become Weyrwoman. She runs away from him but Mnementh anticipates that his rider wants her so he bodily snatches her up and holds her until F'lar reaches them (*Dragonflight* 55). Then later he also shows some understanding of human affairs when he tells F'lar how to behave at an important political meeting (*Dragonquest* 18). The union of Mnementh and Lessa's prolific egg producer, queen dragon Ramoth, results in a new and prosperous generation of dragons and dragonriders, most notably the little, white dragon Ruth and his rider Lord Jaxom, the main characters of the third book *The White Dragon*. Ruth, the runt of one of Ramoth's clutches, is unexpectedly "Impressed" (see page 8 above) by the young Hold Lord Jaxom who believes that the little dragon can survive, a belief shared by the dragons but not the riders. Against the humans' predictions, Ruth turns out a healthy if small dragon who is exceptionally intelligent and takes his own decisions. Also, apparently he can travel through time and space without directions from his rider (*White Dragon* 54). However, although Ruth clearly has some mental advantages, they do not seem to be a part of the dragons' development as this uniquely smart specimen of a dragon is incapable of mating and thus transmitting his intelligence to a new generation (*White Dragon* 215). Then perhaps it is an indication of what Ramoth and Mnementh are capable of producing and so they may be able to breed this next stage in the development. Clearly there is an evolution of dragons in progress in the series so they are not a fixed entity as the traditional dragons of "the Other."

Thus by changing the function of the dragons in her stories, Anne McCaffrey has brought them away from the fixed identity of the traditional dragons that belonged to "the Other" and into human society. In order to do so, she has made them more bestial and

dependent on humans without whom the dragons cannot live as the two species become closely bonded. Yet their relationship sometimes resembles that of masters and working animals because their peaceful coexistence is rooted in the humans' need for the dragons' ability to fight thread whereas the humans believe that they must provide the dragons with order in their lives. However, there are times when the humans must succumb to the nature of the dragons because they are affected by their mating and cannot control them during mating seasons. The humans have accepted this powerlessness and thus political and social positions and standards are adjusted to the animals' natural habits. In addition, the Pernese dragons' physical and mental development differentiates them from "the Other" which is usually a fixed idea.

4. Novik's Dragons

In the alternate universe of *Temeraire*, Naomi Novik has, like Anne McCaffrey, distanced her dragons from “the Other,” changed their role and brought them into human society. In fact, there are many similarities to be found between the two series, such as the ideas of human riders who bond with dragons and use them to fight. However, unlike McCaffrey, Novik has not decreased the dragons’ mental capacity to make them easier for humans to accept into their society. Novik made her diverse and intelligent races of dragons representatives of any minority that wishes to be accepted in society and treated equally to humans. The story follows the Chinese Celestial dragon Temeraire and his British captain, Laurence, through the Napoleonic Wars and on their various missions across the world in the 19th century. One of the series’ most central theme is the friends’ realization of the inequality there exists between humans and the European dragons, and their subsequent struggle to enforce equality.

Novik has taken elements of dragonlore from all over the world, though mainly European and Chinese, mixed them together and drawn a new picture of dragons in fiction. Novik has put some efforts into developing the different breeds of dragons and serpentine creatures in every part of the world, based on already existing ideas. In the spirit of the aggressive and vicious creatures of the typical dragon stories, European dragons are bred by humans as air forces in war, like living, breathing, bomb-dropping fighter planes complete with crews of thirty men. They are bred for size, speed, strength and special offensive skills in accordance with the traditional ferocious, fire-breathing dragons whereas the Chinese dragons, who, in Chinese legends are most often benevolent (Simpson 17-18), are primarily bred for intelligence and become scholars and poets.

Temeraire – intended as a gift for Napoleon from the Chinese Emperor, but captured in his egg by the British navy from a French ship – is a Chinese Celestial dragon, which is the world’s rarest and most sophisticated breed. Therefore, Temeraire is an exceptionally intelligent dragon who builds on his experiences his view that dragons should be equal to humans. Early on he starts questioning human values, such as of duty, ownership and gender roles and, as he travels more, the treatment of dragons. In the British Aerial Corps, dragons are paired with handlers as soon as they hatch in a sort of a ceremony where the prospective handler tempts the dragonet with a meal which he may or may not accept and if the dragonet accepts, they become bonded. There is, however, nothing mystical about this bonding like McCaffrey’s *Impression*; it is purely natural and resembles all at once the bond between a parent and child, a pet and an owner and two best friends. Laurence, for example, resents

Temeraire slightly to begin with because he must sacrifice his naval career to become an aviator and only gradually warms up to him. Dragons and their handlers live in remote coverts and fight when required. Although the aviators know better, the British public looks down on them, often thinking the dragons to be mindless beasts and a burden on their handlers as well as the tax-payers since obviously, feeding dozens of ten to fifty ton dragons is expensive. The ignorance of people outside the Corps is revealed, for instance, when Laurence thinks back on a bill which the government published before the war began and proposed that all unharnessed dragons should be put down to save money. Laurence recalls that the aviators had threatened mutiny if the bill was passed and is disgusted with his own indifference concerning the matter at the time (*HMD* 117-18). Some of the ideas that the public has about dragons and aviators is summarized shortly before Temeraire hatches:

Even in times of peace, a dragon could not be put into dock, nor allowed to wander loose, and to keep a full-grown beast of twenty tons from doing exactly as it pleased took very nearly the full attention of an aviator and a crew of assistants besides. They could not really be managed by force, and were finicky about their handlers; some would not accept management at all, even when new-hatched, and none would accept it after their first feeding. A feral dragon could be kept in the breeding grounds by the constant provision of food, mates, and comfortable shelter, but it could not be controlled outside, and it would not speak with men. So if a hatchling let you put it into harness, duty forever after tied you to the beast. An aviator could not easily manage any sort of estate, nor raise a family, nor go into society to any real extent. They lived as men apart, and largely outside the law, for you could not punish an aviator without losing the use of his dragon. In peacetime they lived in a sort of wild, outrageous libertinage in small enclaves, generally in the most remote and inhospitable places in Britain, where the dragons could be given at least some freedom. (*HMD* 12)

This public view towards dragons is the same sort of view which the Westerners had of Orientals, who – according to Said – were not quite seen as humans: “. . . a white middle-class Westerner believes it is his prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition ‘it’ is not quite as human as ‘we’ are” (108). Obviously, the dragons are not human but most of them do have human-like intelligence and awareness but still the European humans insist on treating them like mindless beasts so this is applicable to them.

Nevertheless, the public believes that the aviators are completely in control of the dragons and when Laurence, originally an officer of the Navy where all rules are very strict,

finds out that things are allowed to happen in the Corps which the public would find abhorrent, he is indeed very shocked. He discovers two especially outrageous secrets of the Corps. Firstly, unharnessed dragons can be training masters in the coverts: “Everything he had ever heard about dragons was turned upon its head: that dragons were useless without their handlers . . . what would the world think, to know they were trained – given orders – by one of the beasts they supposedly controlled?” (*HMD* 117). Then later, when he is faced with the willful blindness of Prussian aviators, he comes to the logical conclusion that “a dragon properly trained ought to be a better judge of aerial maneuvers than any man” (*BPW* 231). Secondly, he finds out that women serve as officers in the Aerial Corps because some breeds of dragons only accept female handlers, including Britain’s most deadly, and thus most important, breed: the acid-spitting Longwings. So it seems that the Corps is quite radical in some ways, compromising society’s values in favor of conceding to the dragons’ preferences.

However, when viewed in a larger context, this does not seem so radical at all as Temeraire and Laurence discover. Even before arriving in China, Temeraire becomes concerned with the dragons’ freedom and Laurence answers that dragons cannot be allowed to roam free because it would terrify people (*ToJ* 256). Then, on their journeys to China and Africa, they find that “the common unthinking assumption by which men treated dragons as inconvenient if elevated livestock, to be managed and herded without consideration for their own sentiments” (*EoI* 17), is not at all universal. In China, dragons are fully accepted, individual members of society. They have their own personal lodgings and they eat cooked food and go about their business in big cities where the streets have been built wide enough to accommodate their size. They live and work independently as any human, without terrifying them at all, and they reap as they sow whereas in Europe they are provided for by the governments but confined to the coverts. Laurence is particularly affected to see a poor dragon:

[He was] inescapably forced to recognize the stark contrast in the treatment of dragons. The city streets were not wider than in London by some odd coincidence, or a question of taste . . . but plainly designed that dragons might live in full harmony with men, and that this design was accomplished, to the benefits of all parties, he could not dispute: the case of misery which he had seen served rather to illustrate the general good. (*ToJ* 316)

Also, the Chinese dragons are not dependent on humans. Indeed, they are not allowed to have human companions until they have matured and received proper education. This baffles Laurence as the Europeans believe that a dragon must be harnessed immediately when he

hatches or he will be uncontrollable (*ToJ* 310). In other words, the Europeans seem to believe in an animalistic imprinting connection between dragon and handler whereas the Chinese believe in enlightened choice where the dragon chooses a partner. Then, again, in Africa the two come in contact with another society where dragons are highly respected: The Tswana people who believe that the dragons are their ancestors reincarnated. In Africa, Temeraire is also exposed to slavery which, of course, he violently opposes and he comes to identify dragons with the slaves on account of the dragons having no choices about their lives. Simply put, his reasoning is that a dragon owns nothing of his own and if a dragon wishes not to accept a handler and fight with the Corps, and also refuses to stay in the breeding grounds or wishes to live freely among people, he would be forbidden to do so and he would be forced into the breeding grounds (*ToJ* 252-3). This identification with slavery is further strengthened when he finds out that dragon eggs are bought and sold like slaves and he has been taught that what is bought is rightful property (*BPW* 123). All these experiences are factors in his decision to return to Britain and fight for the improvement of dragons' conditions.

Temeraire's main problem is to get both people and dragons to understand his cause as they all seem to be under a hegemony: that which Novik describes as "the common unthinking assumption" (*EoI* 17) and, which according to Barry, is "an internalised form of social control which makes certain views seem 'natural' or invisible so that they hardly seem like views at all, just 'the way that things are'" (158). The government has little respect for dragons' lives as previous examples show and is further established when a deadly virus plagues the British Corps. Once a cure is found for the British dragons, the government sends a sick dragon to France with the intention of letting the virus spread all over the world until Britain is the only country with an air force. This infuriates the aviators and Laurence and Temeraire even make themselves guilty of treason when they steal and secretly smuggle the curative to France for which Laurence is sentenced to death, though the sentence is not carried out because Temeraire is too valuable a weapon to be sacrificed. People in general think that aviators have too much freedom and Laurence argues that it is in order to control the dragons. Essentially, that the handlers are government's puppets to keep the dragons in check, i.e. a dragon will be more obedient if his handler is threatened because the dragons themselves have nothing else to lose (*VoE* 65). Indeed, if a dragon is boarded in battle and his captain captured, it equals the surrender of the dragon into enemy hands. This comes up in Laurence's conversation with his first lieutenant who asks what else the dragons would fight for but the well-being of their handlers to which Laurence replies: "They care in China . . . and in Africa, they care all the more, that their rational sense is not imposed on, and their hearts put into

opposition with their minds. If they cannot be woken to natural affection for their country, such as we feel, it is our fault and not theirs” (*VoE* 65-6). In other words, those dragons in China and Africa, just like humans, are active members of society with a sense of national identity and therefore have cause to care about that society and will defend it in need out of patriotic duty and not only for the love of their handlers.

Temeraire has a similar conversation with unharnessed dragons who question why they should fight Napoleon as their conditions would not change no matter who was in charge of the country, the British or the French and Temeraire tries to awaken their patriotic sentiments: “. . . this country is our territory as much as it is any man’s; it belongs to us all together, and if we only sit here eating cows while Napoleon is trying to take it away, we have no right to complain of anything . . . You only *think* you have things as you like, because you have never seen anything better” (*VoE* 74). Evidently, Temeraire’s dilemma is not only changing the views of the humans but also those of the dragons whose attitudes are as ingrained in them as are the humans’. However, when roused on the subject of payment, the dragons eagerly adopt his views as they are, like their traditional forerunners, very fond of any kind of treasures and Temeraire manages to establish a regiment of unharnessed dragons and styles himself commander. As commander and, later, Colonel, he adjusts everything to suit the dragons and gives them a choice. They are not required to fight if they do not want to. For example, there is a dragon called Perscitia who fears battles and rather serves as strategic consultant and devises many clever fighting methods for the regiment (*VoE* 99). Eventually, Temeraire negotiates successfully with General Wellesley, later promoted to Duke of Wellington, about wages which the dragons receive themselves, though not all his other demands of draconic freedom are met, and he and Laurence are subsequently sent to Australia to prevent them from causing more upheaval among the dragons.

However, despite Temeraire’s equality struggle, Laurence is always his primary concern and, for instance, when Laurence is threatened with hanging, Temeraire threatens to join forces with the French to avenge him even if it would mean that he would not be able to continue fighting for his cause (*VoE* 140). Still, even if the dragons were not tied to a handler, it would be difficult for them to disassociate themselves from humans. Throughout the series, the matter of feeding the enormous dragons is a constant problem. In Britain, unharnessed dragons are not allowed freedom because not only would they frighten the humans but they would have to steal their meals because, as Temeraire notes, all edible animals on land seem to be someone’s property (*HMD* 52). A group of feral dragons from the Pamir Mountains in Central Asia is actually introduced which shows what kind of a life independent dragons

have. They have their own language and their own draconic leader and their only association with humans is stealing their livestock to feed themselves, much to the humans' aggravation of course, until they are recruited by the British Corps with a promise of steady meals and, later, steady payment. Without cooperation with the humans, the dragons could not but be in conflict with them and so the dragons must also adjust themselves to human society to be able to live peacefully.

Hence, in *Temeraire*, the dragons have been virtually stripped of their "Otherness" and have become, in some places, like a racial minority, seeking their rights which they are denied because the view that they are inferior beings is ingrained into the people. The dragons themselves are not interested in *Temeraire's* cause at first because they also have the deep-rooted views that their handlers are their only concern and that they have no reason to be independent as everything is provided for them by the government. In other places, dragons do live wild though it is not easy and sets them in conflict with people over food which shows that though they can be without handlers, they cannot be complete outsiders to human society. In still other places, such as China and Africa, the dragons have already been accepted as respected, contributing members of human society.

5. Conclusion

From examining these different types of dragons, it is clear that they have become decreasingly like their traditional Western forerunners of the dragon-slaying stories who often represented the mysterious and frightening “Other” and increasingly closer to humans and their societies. The dragons seem to be in a conflict between the traditional “otherness” and the more modern “otherness” where they may have a touch of civility in them, but are still too tainted by “the Other” to enter human society, or they have no or very little sense of civility but have been allowed into humans’ lives as what amounts to working animals, or they are perfectly civilized but not given equal rights to humans because the humans are maintaining their ideas of dragons belonging to “the Other.”

In *The Hobbit*, the dragon Smaug is conflicted between the traditional and the modern as his role in the story is purely traditional while his character is very modern and in many ways, he has been disassociated from “the Other.” This is because he has a practical, materialistic way of thinking, especially concerning treasures and finances. The disassociation is also reflected in his choice of a habitat inside a human or dwarf dwelling which in turn may be caused by Smaug’s creation and upbringing by Morgoth in the fortress of Angband where the dragons seem to be products of industrialism. In a way, Smaug has inverted “the Other” as usually negative Western societies project onto “the Other” traits of weakness which they themselves possess but to which they are blind in themselves. Tolkien, however, has projected the negative traits of Western upper classes onto Smaug which give him strength and motivation to continue his self interested ways.

The dragons in *Dragonriders of Pern*, although bearing some physical similarities to their traditional counterparts, have become important members of extraterrestrial human societies because of their defensive abilities though at the cost of their intelligence and independence. They are bound to human riders through a ritual and can usually only communicate with this rider on whom they are very emotionally dependent but they are generally isolated from other humans. While they may appear to have some social and political influence over the humans through their mental link over which they humans sometimes have no control, the dragons’ mental limitations prevent them from enjoying this influence for its own sake. However, they are not unchangeable and they may be developing their intelligence as exemplified by Mnemeth and Ruth so it is possible they might become smarter in the future.

In the alternate 19th century universe of *Temeraire*, where dragons are used as weapons in the war with Napoleon, dragons generally have the mental capabilities of humans but are still treated like animals in Britain which eventually causes them to start fighting for their rights. After observing the respectful treatment of dragons in other parts of the world, the Chinese dragon Temeraire and his British captain, Laurence, come to realize the inequality which the British dragons suffer without even realizing it themselves, being stuck in the hegemony of ingrained views. Eventually Temeraire manages to change some of these views and is successful in his struggle to make the dragons care about their own rights though it is much harder to convince the humans. However, even though they fight for autonomy, the dragons are dependent on humans since they have strong emotional bonds and the humans monopolize most of the food that the dragons need to survive. So a dragon that has nothing cannot buy his meal and must therefore steal it which makes the humans want to kill them. Clearly, mutual understanding and cooperation is important so that the dragons can live peacefully alongside the humans .

So these three types of dragons from the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Anne McCaffrey and Naomi Novik, have all in different ways been distanced from their former status as “the Other.” Tolkien’s dragons seem to originate from a half-industrial power, McCaffrey’s dragons are bred by and for humans for human needs and Novik’s dragons are similar but they are more intelligent and therefore fight for their rights within human society. All this shows that dragons have come a long way from the wilderness and into civilized society, where they are still struggling for their place.

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