

GENDERING THE DRAGON

Dictionary entry (KS spelling)

dragon *f* *dragonas* dragon

First allusion to Smaug (page 13)

In the song of the dwarves, ninth verse:

The mountain smoked beneath the moon;

The dwarves, they heard the tramp of doom.

They fled their hall to dying fall

*Beneath **his** feet, beneath the moon.*

In the Cornish translation this becomes

An meneth a vegy in dann loor, (*incorrectly dadn in the printed edition*)

an corras a glêwas dos an dom;

y a fias dhe'n fo adhann gà tho

in dann y dreys, in dann an loor.

Williams opts to use the masculine possessive pronoun **y** on the ground that Smaug is a male dragon and he's translating English *his*. The trouble is, we the readers don't know anything about Smaug at this point. We are only just finding out for the first time about *a* dragon that drove dwarves from their mountain home; we don't even know yet that this history belongs to the very dwarves who are singing the song. The English phrase *beneath his feet* as a first reference to the dragon is designed by Tolkien to be tantalizing. But the Cornish translation **in dann y dreys** is obscure – perhaps too obscure – because we would expect pronoun **hy** for a dragon about which we as yet know nothing, on the ground that **hy** is the default pronoun for a feminine noun. So we're left floundering to think *what else y* could be referring to – given that it cannot *prima facie* (or, if you like, generically) be referring to a dragon at all. On the other hand, within the narrative the *dwarves* know they're referring to a male dragon, so the *internal logic* of the story militates against using **hy** here. It's a tricky dilemma. A comparison with the other Celtic translations will be worthwhile.

Second allusion to Smaug (page 15)

Williams himself is not consistent, introducing further confusion when Gloin says **saw udn scrij a'n sort-na dhyworto in termyn frobmus a via lowr dhe dhyfuna an dhragon hag oll hy goos nessa**. If we did think that **in dann y dreys** could refer to the dragon's feet after all, we will now have to revise our opinion or assume that a *second* dragon (who may be female or just gender unknown) is involved. This is too much of a muddle. Tolkien wrote 'his', consistently with 'his' of the song (not, for example, 'its').

Eventually things settle down; Smaug is finally named (by Thorin in his explanation at page 20); and from then on Williams translates every *his* of Tolkien's original referring to Smaug as **y**. But Williams does, throughout the whole book, stick with the feminine gender of **dragon** in phrases like **an dhragon**. Contrast Williams' more radical approach in *An Gwyns in Helyk* where from the outset 'the Mole' is **an Goodh'or**, even though **goodh'or** is usually treated by lexicographers as a feminine noun – it may be, however, that Williams is merely choosing to omit Second State mutation on the ground he's effectively dealing with a proper name – compare **an Logosen Dhowr** 'the Water Rat', also male, but retained feminine gender is here apparent.