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# Hatchling to Beast

Exploring Intensities in Literary Dragons

Bachelor's thesis in English

Supervisor: Yuri Cowan

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## Abstract

Drawing on academic theories on affect and psychology, this dissertation explores the wide range of emotion in literary dragons, and considers how affect, the non-conscious experience of intensity, is capable of triggering distinctive bodily changes and behaviour. Ultimately, the specific affect depends on experience and context, which is presented through a close examination of the dragons in the chosen works: *Call me Dragon* by Mark Secchia, *Dragon Champion* by E.E. Knight, the epic poem *Beowulf*, and *Grendel* by John Gardner. Similar to the classical representation of the dragon, often a symbol of great evil, these dragons' distinctive character will often express possessiveness. And while some dragons manage self-regulation and cognitive abilities, much like humans do, other dragons may exhibit less of these traits, instead remaining extremely draconic, ascertaining distinctiveness from the emotional patterns of humans.

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# Hatchling to Beast

## Exploring Intensities in Literary Dragons

Magnificent, terrifying, voracious, and powerful, dragons have long been ingrained in folklore and fairy tales, inciting both fear and awe in humans. The iconic creatures of folklore are the literary descendants of snakes, a depiction which can be traced back all the way to ancient Greece. Dragons make their first literary appearance in Aristotle's *History of Animals*, 350 B.C (Senter et al. 72). In modern literature, dragons are depicted in myriad ways. Some dragons closely resemble their predecessors from literature or folklore. In such cases, dragons are portrayed as being susceptible to anger, violence, and treasure hoarding. Cities are burned to the ground, and mediaeval kingdoms are under attack. Other stories featuring dragons introduce new elements, depicting dragons as wise and benevolent, oftentimes showing human-like traits and complex emotions that resemble fear, jealousy, pride, joy, and sadness. The immediate physical response to these emotions is what we call affect. Ultimately, the specific affect depends on experience and context, which will be presented in this dissertation through a close examination of the dragons in the chosen works: *Call me Dragon* by Mark Secchia, *Dragon Champion* by E.E. Knight, the epic poem *Beowulf*, and *Grendel* by John Gardner. This paper examines the wide diversity in literary dragons' affect and behaviour, as well as their distinctiveness from the emotional patterns of humans. While dragons assert independence in their respective texts, they maintain ties with traditional expectations of a dragon, where affect, the non-conscious experience of intensity, is based on a completely different worldview than that of a human. Drawing on academic theories on affect and psychology, this dissertation will unveil the emotional resonances embedded in dragons.

While anthropomorphism is a common feature used in literature where animals or fictional beings speak and experience what we refer to as human emotion, this dissertation will not acknowledge that dragons are anything but mythical, non-human individuals. So, while the dissertation will include studies done on humans and animals, the point is to examine the ways in which literary dragons are different from them, both in cognitive thinking, and how they act out in affect. However, it is necessary to address similarities when and if such should occur. I intend to view affect as immediate unconscious performance, and present close readings in which these physical manifestations are triggered. It is

relevant to show that textual and content markers may indicate affective triggers, including words, primary outbursts of feelings, the physical behaviour of others, and objects. Literature offers vicarious experiences, and to see how affect is represented in a work of fiction will broaden our understanding of that work. To make sense of this dissertation, we must assume that emotions are not only an aspect of human or animal existence but also belong, respectively, to the fictional entities that are literary dragons.

The dissertation will give an overview on how various scholars have theorized the concept of affect, leaning on Brian Massumi and Baruch Spinoza's two separate dimensions of affect, *affectio* and *affectus* (Spinoza 103-141). Further, it will determine the dragon's response to threats, using Jaak Panksepp's terminology, which was developed to understand the primary process level in animals. Moreover, it will consider E. B Titchener's terminology to analyse memories that evoke affect and feeling. In addition, it is important to examine experiences that elicit positive affect. Isen shows to studies indicating that positive affect influences social behaviour, fosters helpfulness to others, as well as kindness to oneself, and improves interactions with others (Isen 184). Isen's commentary suggests that positive affect leads people to think about things more, be more efficient and less defensive. The thesis will discuss whether this theory corresponds with dragons as well. If such links are found it is important to think about what the opposite will lead to, and if negative affect will invoke impulsive decision-making for a self-destructive dragon such as Blitz in *Call me Dragon*. Perspectives on positive affect and self-regulation are something this dissertation will focus on.

Auron, the dragon in *Dragon Champion* is a hatchling that has just broken through his eggshell. He discovers the world through colours and noise. The effects that these experiences have on a new-born creature are different from the dragon in *Call me Dragon* who has better impulse control and superior cognitive thinking. Emotions that stir within these two characters are different. Ultimately, the hatchling has a different way of cognitively processing the sensations that will eventually lead to affect. Also, we shall see that Auron's methods for processing sensations differ from when he is a hatchling to when he is a full-grown dragon. Further, the dissertation will consider how dragons manage anger and the motives behind self-control. A close reading of the chosen texts will create an impression of the dragons' diversity in affect and performance and highlight individuality and distinctiveness to human patterns.

Dragons have often appeared as villainous forces and a symbol of great evil and are noticeably presented as such in the epic poem *Beowulf*. The dragon is a popular antagonist in fantasy. The hero-dragon confrontation is the classic representation of the fight between good and evil. But as the dragon is examined closer, behind the formula of old myths and instead keeping a focus on affect, we will see



that even *Beowulf's* dragon, while dangerous and bad-tempered, is not entirely evil. Including an analysis of John Gardner's *Grendel*'s presentation of this dragon will further prove my point. Treasure and dragon value stands to be the main textual and content marker that indicate affective triggers. The dragons from all four texts share similar obsessions with treasure, where each promises destruction upon those who attempt to steal from them. Where does it come from; this need to hoard treasure? And what is the price of greed? While several fictional works featuring dragons have clear links with their literary predecessors, this dissertation seeks to find literature that will introduce new elements. Over time, the dragon in literature has evolved into a character in and of itself with personal drives. By observing patterns, or similar detail, I will decipher the dragons' different behaviour in affect, mainly how their unconscious performance will respond to threats.

Part one of this dissertation determines the terminology it is built upon. Part two will study intensities and affective value in *Call me Dragon*. Part three focuses on the unconscious performance of Auron in *Dragon Champion* and examines what elicits these performances. Part four presents a wide range of emotion and consider how dragons manage anger and the motives behind self-control. Part five gives a study of literature that includes an analysis of how *Beowulf* presents its dragon. Part six will examine the role of treasure and analyse the relationship between possessiveness and dragon value. Finally, in part seven I discuss the text's individual independence, comparing the classic and traditional interpretation of the dragon in *Beowulf*, to the contemporary image of Blitz in *Call me Dragon*, which will act as a conclusion for the dissertation.

## I. Affect Theory

Brian Massumi, a social theorist who has developed studies on affect theory, claims that affect is outbursts of feelings that are the immediate physical response to something (qtd. in Leys 442). Massumi states that affect is the body's movement and reaction to an ongoing experience that registers personally at a given moment (Massumi 5), and a kind of thought that is expressed in bodily feeling before conscious reflection (9-10). Affect is therefore not entirely conscious. It is not a thinking movement, but a movement of thought. Following Massumi, Eric Shouse shares the idea that affect is a pre-personal, non-conscious experience of intensity, and the body's way of preparing itself for action in different circumstances (Leys 442). Spinoza's view of affect entails two separate dimensions: *affectio*, and *affectus*. *Affectio* refers to the particular state of one body's reaction to another body having

affected it. Spinoza states that this is based on when something in relation to the world or nature affect someone. He associated affectio with three states: desire, pleasure, and pain (Spinoza 141). In *affectus*, he maintains that a “body can be affected in many ways by which its power of activity is increased or decreased” (103). While these theories are based on humans, they can also be integrated into literary analysis of dragons, to better grasp the nuances of their personalities. Massumi emphasizes the core of Spinoza’s definitions of affect as the power “to affect and be affected” (Massumi 48). The preoccupations that theorists share is that affect theory is grounded in movements or flashes of mental or somatic activity (Figlerowicz 4), which is the practice that helps one survey one's internal self and listen to the signals the body sends about how you are feeling. By using methods for measuring affective response, one can find which of the dragons are able to recognize these signals and take them into account before movement. According to Massumi, the uncertainty of instantaneous judgement is what produces an affective change in a situation (Massumi 11). So, to apply affect theory in a literature study will provide an opportunity to study affect-induced changes. The chosen direction will therefore result in uncovering the drive of a character.

In addition to *affectio* and *affectus*, further terminologies that frame this thesis are based on studies by Layard, which states that happiness can be measured (Layard 13), Berlant, who describes happiness as being either “cruel” (Berlant 26) or “stupid” optimism (126), Ahmed, who claims that happiness can involve a promise of deferral (Ahmed 33), which becomes clear when studying the dragon in *Call me Dragon*. Further included is Isen’s report on positive affect, Panksepps study on ancestral memories in animals, and Titchener’s disciplines of affective memory. The close readings will have elements that corresponds with one or more of the terms and theories presented.

## II. Intensities and affective value in *Call me dragon*

*Call me Dragon* by Marc Secchia tells the tale of Blitz the Devastator. Although measuring fifty-three feet from nose tip to tail spike, Blitz is a fireless dragon shunned by his dragon clan and has never done a day’s devastating or pillaged so much as a cattle shelter in his twenty years of life. In the story, he finds himself perched atop the tallest tower of a castle, contemplating recreational pillaging when he overhears the King threaten Princess Azania of T’nagru into marrying his son. Blitz states directly his thoughts on this and his “senses delved deeper, testing the hearts of these men. Treachery. Foul ambition. The bitter tangs of immoral intent. This sire and his son did not mean this Princess well. He doubted they even

meant to ransom her” (Secchia 19). Blitz detests the King’s ideas in letting his son violate Azania. He recalls a scroll he once read, where it was conventional behaviour that humans imprisoned Princesses in the highest tower, where in time, their fathers would arrive to petition the dragon for the return of their daughter in exchange for half the riches of their kingdom. Blitz sees an opportunity rise and concludes that he would never have to pillage another village, and perhaps finally be of a worthy dragon in the eyes of his clan. The dragon rescues the rebellious princess, which is the beginning of a beautiful relationship between two characters who do not fit their stereotypes.

Blitz’s view of females is entirely different from the novel’s human community’s views. Humans do not consider women fit for neither thought nor rule, while female dragons are revered and respected members of society in dragon culture. These differences are essentially what motivates him to kidnap the princess. When Blitz overhears the prince’s threat to violate Azania, Blitz intervenes in affect: “Enough! These words were acid squirted inside his ears!... Before he even knew what he was doing, he punched right through the tower wall” (27). The worldviews of dragons and humans are based upon entirely different social codes. Although being a beloved princess said to be the most beautiful in the land, Azania is treated as nonentity. Even her own subjects do not acknowledge her as an authority, instead waiting for Blitz to speak, to act and to decide. The human community does not even deign to notice women’s behaviour, and women’s’ behaviour when noticed is often met with insults or condescension. Azania is told that “[p]rincesses have other duties, unrelated to rule or decision-making” (696). As Azania readies herself for battle, her brother says, “[i]t would help if you behaved in less of a brazen manner, Azania. You’ve gone so ... wild. It’s unnatural, that’s what it is” (637). Another warrior exclaims to Azania that “[a]ll you are to this kingdom is chattels, woman. A pretty price for a pretty face” (769). The Princess is seemingly unbothered, surely used to the mannerism, but Blitz is infuriated on her behalf. In some dragon cultures, females are warriors, and males are roost keepers and egg-raisers. Often, it is human norms and the injustice of how women, in particular Princess Azania, are treated by society that triggers Blitz’ affect.

Breathing fire accumulates affective value. When Blitz is not able to produce fire, affect sticks in his body, thus causing unhappiness. It causes anger and resentment which reinforce his misery. According to Layard, happiness is feeling good, by which can be measured (Layard 13). Blitz measures happiness by how much of an authentic traditional dragon he can become, which is why he is so unhappy. He is not able to produce fire, he does not spend his days pillaging castles for treasure, and until this moment, he has never kidnapped a princess. He is moral and spends most of his days painting inside his cave. Being respected by his dragon clan is all he truly aims for. Blitz does not think happiness is possible

without living by the norms and rules of his clan, which include fire breathing, pillaging and the destruction of cities. Berlant describes this prescribed nature of happiness as “cruel optimism”, as it is based on people choosing to ride the wave of a system (Berlant 28). Similarly, she calls the notion of letting ourselves be trapped in the same fantasy and the same promise of happiness “stupid optimism” (126). So, for Blitz to become happy, he believes he needs to follow the rules and prescribed nature of happiness of his dragon clan, making the pursuit of his own happiness quite difficult.

Blitz actually finds happiness without having to resort to the prescribed methods of his clan, in the adventures he shares with Princess Azania. According to Sara Ahmed, parents can live with the failure of happiness by placing their hope for happiness in their children. Ultimately, happiness can involve a promise of deferral (Ahmed 33). Allegorically, as Blitz continues his journey with Princess Azania, which he begins to view as his family, he realises that his main objective is changing. He now wishes the princess the best and does his best to aid her in her happiness rather than his own. For Ahmed, a happy object accumulates positive value even in situations of unhappiness (33). As the novel begins to conclude, Blitz is captured by enemies, and tortured by a machine that produces electricity. Being electrocuted is what triggers his fire to emerge. In a moment where the princess is captured and seemingly all hope is lost, the one thing that had promised happiness finally occurs. This is an example of positive affect in response to a negative situation.

Affect changes the body’s capacity to act. It can either diminish or enable movement. Isen shows studies indicating that positive affect influences social behaviour, such as helping and generosity, and cognitive processes such as memory, judgement, decision making and problem solving. Ultimately, the work indicates that positive affect fosters helpfulness to others, as well as kindness to oneself, and improves interactions with others (Isen 184). Isen points out that people in whom positive affect had been induced would not work to maintain said affect, but rather, that behaviour is multidetermined. Affect maintenance depends therefore on motives in each situation. The process of positive-affect regulation and its influence on self-regulation is based on the ability to consider the major effects and ramifications that positive feelings have (184). Princess Azania had the day before made breakfast for Blitz, which deeply touched him. Later, Blitz finds his princess in a camp deep in a cluster of splintered trunks where hostile humans had her at their mercy. Again, it is the injustice of the situation that motivates Blitz to save her, despite the danger of being embedded in the trees himself. He says that “[h]er value had nothing to do with this. A craving for justice burned like bile in his throat” (140). While positive affect may have influenced his behaviour, Blitz does not show any signs of being aware of the ramifications that positive

feeling has. Neither does he attempt to maintain the positive affect throughout the day as he continues to kill the remaining humans in the camp. Later, he finds himself with family when a hatchling falls down the mountain, and he “dived into the abyss before further thought intruded. One of the hatchlings tumbled ahead of him” (236). It is unclear whether this action is triggered by the positive affect Princess Azania has on Blitz, or if it is merely a case of instinct forcing him to save his kin.

### III. *Dragon Champion*: Unconscious Performance and Affective Memories

In the novel *Dragon Champion*, E.E. Knight writes an adventurous story about Auron, a rare grey dragon who escapes the murder of his family and is forced to set off alone in a world filled with danger in search of his own kind. This novel is full of affect. Auron deals with struggles, uncertainties, and yearning from the very beginning of his life, as he wanders in solitude.

In comparison to Blitz, Auron lets emotion and instinct drive him forward. Where Blitz might hold back in circumstances not warranting murder, Auron does not follow these conventions. He kills and eats humans. In his first years, he has no moral compass, instead acting upon each impulse that reaches him. Not surprisingly, Auron’s affect is based on an entirely different worldview than that of a human. In scenes where he finds himself surrounded with men spearing him and hounds biting into him, and all hope seems lost, he does not utter a single thought of fear, further proving that his emotional response differ from those of a human. He reflects upon blood loss and his body being weak from hunger but shows no other signs of contemplation, much like the malicious, traditional dragon we will find in *Beowulf*.

Affect is not something that can be reduced to one thing, but it precedes consciousness. It is based on the primal, reactive, and intuitive reaction to scenes of impact. An important component to understanding the affect in Auron is studying the scenes of impact before he is conscious of life. Especially sensations that elicit instinctive affect. Only minutes after Auron breaks through his eggshell, he sees his siblings fight each other. Auron sees the threatening crest atop the other dragon sweeping back from the armoured ridge of its eyes, which instinctively puts him into a seething rage. Without contemplation or conscious thinking, he manages to kill his brother and shove one brother off the ledge of the cavern. This affect is the reaction to stimuli before the cognitive process starts, which corresponds with Massumi’s claim that affect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness. Auron’s anger is elicited from the biologically prepared threat, which triggered his fight or flight response. The affect is

entirely different from that of a human. No human infant is born with the instinct to kill off their siblings, and no human parent would linger close by and watch as it happens. Human infants do not have the capacity to process threats or understand fear, not even on an intuitive level. But while Auron's affect as a response to fear is different from that of a human infant, he responds similarly to the human body: Muscles tense and stress hormones are released.

There are several elements that correspond with the Spinozan concepts. *Affectus* maintain that affect can affect a body to move, which is seen when a group of dwarves enters the cavern and Auron and his sister must flee. The only thing that drives the continuing digging through the ice to reach the top of the mountain is the anger, loneliness, and the determination to see his sister survive. The emotions that stir within Auron increase the body to act, it is what drives the need to survive. Auron's first time breathing fire draws on Spinozan's concept of *affectio* in the form of the physical manifestation being caused by men injuring him. He gets a hook buried in his neck which seizes his body, and "[s]omething hotter than his fury boiled out of his throat, pulsing along the roof of his mouth. As the hot slime struck air, it burst into flame, surprising Auron as much as the men" (Knight 183). This corresponds to Massumi's concept of affect that stimuli happens outside of consciousness; it remains purely a biological response to a threat, an idea that will be examined more closely in the following section.

Similar to dragon properties, Jaak Panksepp refers to 'ancestral memories' in animals, which he claims are genetically provided tools for living that arises at a primary process level, from the homologous lower brain function (Panksepp 2905). This is relevant on two accounts. First, considering the fight with his siblings, Auron knows what to do the minute he hatches from his egg. Second, he recognizes threatening mannerism from his father: «Father extended his neck, and Auron shrank back, afraid of the great crested-and-horned head" (Knight 47). Similar is Auron's sentiment of finding it intolerable having the scent of another young male so close to his sisters. There is no apparent reason for why he should find these characteristics so threatening. Unless the 'ancestral memories' has provided tools which Auron possesses and can take advantage of. He might not understand why the crested and horned head is threatening yet, nor does he understand why the need to kill his sibling arises, it just does. It might also derive from the magic that exists within dragons and in their ability to transfer images, thoughts, and wisdom to each other. Either way, the intuitive feelings which cause the affect exists on an unconscious level.

Sometimes, the affect of the situation is reflected by memories. For Titchener, false or abstract affective memory is the recalling of circumstances of pleasure or pain, and whether they were

accompanied by pleasantness or unpleasantness (Titchener 69-70). Auron's first encounter with the world outside of the cavern was the mountain's tree line. They reminded him of spiked spears, which he had faced twice and associated with something deadly. Immediately, it sparked a sense of dread in the hatchling. The conditions of the elicited fear in Auron are triggered not by actual spears, but subjectively, something that reminds him of his own unpleasant memories of them. The scenes of impact have much to say in how Auron will handle a situation. When imprisoned by elves in a cage below deck in a ship, Auron is eventually accompanied by other hatchling prisoners, equally caged and in bad shape. But the smell of the other dragons comforts him because it elicits a memory of his own family. A female elf is caring for the hatchling while being on the ship. The sensation of touch as she pats and strokes him warms him: "Auron didn't understand her language, but at her touch, he knew her feelings. They were warm and caring, similar to Mother's, and lifted some of his misery" (129). Auron is endowed with a kind of memory recall.

According to Titchener, there are moments where affective constituents of an emotion are revived from memories (Titchener 68). He refers to three types of revival. First is intellectual memory, which is the recall of the circumstances and accessories of the emotion. The smell of the other hatchlings on the ship calms Auron because the smell of his family usually calms him. Similarly, when the female elf strokes him, it elicits the feeling of his mother petting him, which lifts his misery. Second is true affective memory, when the person is remembering not the condition of the feeling but the feeling state itself. The revival of a feeling is the feeling that begins. Auron grants a friend a favour, where he must travel across a desert wasteland with a four-year-old human girl. The delighted giggles and the sensation of the happy child on his back elicits memories of his mother, resulting in him feeling protective of her. The memory of a protective presence revives his own, making him care for the child for years. Also, the child's giggles elicit abstract affective memory, the giggles cause recalling of circumstances that are accompanied by pleasantness, which causes positive affect, mirrored in his sudden necessity to protect, and care for her. The third type of revival is objectifying memory, which is the state represented only in the form of its bodily expression. If one imagines anger, one sees anger (Titchener 68). Only, the literary analysis shows that this does not apply to Blitz or Auron. In short, the dragons in these novels are too wise. No circumstances occur where these dragons imagine an emotion, only for it to trigger said emotion. This is a clear indication of the human brain and dragon brain not aligning. However, not surprisingly, the dragon in *Beowulf* shows signs of objectifying memory, which will be further discussed in part four.

In Isen's study, it is assumed that positive affect feeds positive affect. That it influences social behaviour, judgement, and helpfulness to others (Isen 184). Although Auron is a dragon closer to the traditional idea of one, where instinct will often overshadow such ideas, Isen's theories are evident even here. As Auron grows, he travels and acquaints himself with friends that help him reach his goal. His first friend is the female elf that sets him free on the ship. The second friend is a wolf, which he spares the life of, and in return gains companionship. The wolf later saves him when he is trapped by hunters. The third friend is a dwarf, they help each other travel across dangerous roads. Hieba, the human child fills a void inside him, such that when she returns to him fourteen years later with requests of help in the oncoming war, he is quick to assist her. Auron experiences pain of saying good-bye to these friends through death and distance but gains more than the hole he claims they leave. The positive affect these characters show, have an impact on Auron's thinking and behaviour. It influences motivation and regulates his impulse control. He is taught how to be kind and moral, which is important to gain a proud dragon-song. Positive affect does seem to foster good behaviour and its affect also has an impact on self-regulation, which is regulating the emotion of anger.

#### IV. When Dragons Rage: Destruction and Self-control

We bring into this dissertation the presumption that anger in a dragon tends to be inevitable and uncontrollable. One would expect behaviour such as slaughtering whoever angered them or burning down their cities. But this presumption is an animalistic view of dragons. In truth, dragons are not animals. They are magical, mythical beings who surpass the minds of animals, and sometimes men. Often, they are simply too wise. Lived experiences on a variety of dimensions will affect every aspect of attitudes and behaviour. In the light of self-regulation and anger, we address two questions. First, are the dragons able to self-regulate and overcome the draconic instincts we believe exist? Second, are the affective triggers similar for some dragons? There are several instances throughout the novels that catch this nature of emotional experience.

Blitz claims that he is indifferent to humans, although his behaviour would suggest otherwise. He refers to them as lice, fleas or cockroaches, other times, hordes of toads. He kills at least fifteen humans throughout the story. When dragon slayers come to steal Princess Azania, Blitz "champed his fangs in anger" (Secchia 48), and "his paw twitched involuntarily" (55). There are times where Blitz controls his emotions, where he, despite the unlikeliness of a dragon managing his anger, actually does spare humans.



A woman fell over Blitz's paw, and "[t]he pain made him see black ... he snarled horribly, 'Your husband is fine. Feed the Princess. Now, you quivering worm'" (68). Despite the negative *affectio*, he does not act upon the violent, perhaps predictable response when something "made his right forepaw twitch in a desire to swat her" (93). Instead, he has a habit of stomping off in a fury. He even reflects upon his ability to still his displeasure, rather than act upon whatever instinct may lie unconsciously. Considering the medieval scene of the novel, dragons repressing emotions seem out of character, which makes for an untraditional dragon. The motives behind this behaviour might derive from the need to please their human companions. There are limits to what a human will tolerate in a friend, especially a child. Auron may have taught himself restraint so as not to frighten his human ward. Blitz may have taught himself restraint so as to not be left alone again.

Although not always in complete control, Blitz often experiences what the dissertation has explained as *affectus*, where he is affected in ways which increase the power of activity. Princess Azania escapes in the night, enraging Blitz into immediately charging out of his lair to seek her out: "Jealous rage pumped thick clots of silver blood through his Dragon hearts. That Princess – he roared, Mine, mine, mine!!" (Secchia 131). Massumi explains that when one responds to an outburst of anger, there is no sense of explicitly thinking through possibilities, for there is simply no time for that. Instead, there is instantaneous judgement that brings the entire body into the situation (Massumi 9). Losing what he regards as his treasure is an outcome worse than inflicted pain.

We treat emotions as a subject's phenomenologically salient responses to significant events, that in turn are capable of triggering distinctive bodily changes and performances. In *Dragon Champion*, Auron receives news that upset him: "Deep pain drove a spike through Auron, further angering him. He wanted to roar and stomp, lose the hurt awakened in him in an orgy of death. But he fought down the emotions and hugged his body to the mountainside. The cool rock under his chin soothed him" (Knight 606). Auron is able to contain his reaction, rather than act on instinct or the drive that attempts to consume him. This is because he remembers his mother's wisdom voiced to him as a hatchling saying: "Your wrath shouldn't win, when spears strike your scale. Anger kills cunning, which you will need to prevail" (21). It seems the wisdom of his mother has been ingrained in him and helps him handle intensities. Auron's reaction to witnessing a friend being murdered is: "His fire bladder throbbled hot. He jumped onto the wall and bellowed a challenge of pure fury; he had no words for the rage he felt. He would make a pyre of this place—" (569). Auron is fully prepared to lay waste to the camp, but he stops when the enemy has his human ward in a death-grip. He instantly calms and contemplates the situation, evidence

of his ability to regulate high and powerful emotions. However, there are situations that nearly get the best of him. As Hieba is released, the enemy quickly falls under Auron's fury. He obliterates the entire camp with sharp teeth, claws, and fire. The anger is not easily controlled, which is seen when Hieba "jumped onto his back; his head whipped back, and he almost bit her, so mindless was his anger in the fight" (573). Discussion remains: was his anger produced because of fear for his human ward, or did it come from something of value that was taken from him? It reminisces of another dragon in the book, NooMoakh. He is an ancient, sick dragon that sits on a cave of gold and in a moment of memory-loss, he forgets his friendship with Auron, instead driven on by fury born of instinct as he sees another male in his cave: "My hold, my city, my mountains! I'll throw your bones to the cave rats, you jackal" (492). This is not so unlike Auron's outbursts when Hieba is taken from him, nor is it unlike Blitz's reaction to losing something he considers valuable. Frequently, valuables are the catalyst for intense emotions. Most dragons in *Dragon Champion* eat metal to keep their scales healthy and armour-like. Auron is a grey dragon, meaning that he has no scales. Having no appetite for gems or gold allows him to roam the world free from men. We are then to assume that he has no possessive qualities, but this interaction with Hieba says otherwise. Other dragons, such as the one found in *Beowulf* do not merely have an appetite for gold, his possessiveness for it is the foundation for all his behaviour.

#### V. *Beowulf*: Scales of Malevolence

Dragons have often appeared as villainous forces and as a symbol of power and great evil. Often revered and respected in myth and legends, heroes still strain to slay the serpent. The dragon symbolises the chaos of destruction, a threat to life and property. Killing the dragon represents the ultimate victory of Cosmic Truth and Order over Chaos (Watkins 299). In Indo-Iranian culture, the dragon represents chaos that blocks life-giving forces, which are released by the victorious act of the hero (300). They are portrayed as being susceptible to anger and will protect what they view as treasure, by whatever means necessary. Evidently presented as such is the dragon in the ancient poem *Beowulf*, composed sometime between the middle of the seventh and the end of the tenth century of the first millennium. It contains more than three thousand lines and stands as one of the foundational works of poetry in English (Heaney).

The poem concerns the deeds of a Scandinavian prince by the name Beowulf. Early in the poem he crosses the sea to Denmark to defeat a horrible demon named Grendel who kills and eats the Danes. Beowulf kills him, and eventually Grendel's mother when she comes seeking revenge for her son's death.

He then returns to Geatland where he eventually ascends the throne, which he rules for fifty years. Then, a thief disturbs a mound where a dragon lies guarding a horde of treasure. The dragon emerges enraged from the barrow and begins unleashing fiery destruction upon the Geats. An ageing Beowulf goes to fight the dragon and succeeds, but as he gives the killing blow, he gets bitten, the venom killing him shortly after.

The physical characteristics of the dragon may be gathered from various passages in Beowulf's last adventure. He is described as "[a] strange serpent on the ground, gruesome and vile" (Beowulf line 3040). He is portrayed as large, being "[f]rom head to tail, his entire length / was fifty feet" (3042-43). Beowulf states that the dragon's breath is poisonous, and as "molten venom/in the fire he breathes" (2522-23).

The poem states that it is in a dragon's nature to seek out treasure in the earth, and to guard the gold through age-long vigils. This suggests a greedy and dangerous trait to the dragon, where the limits of its threshold for destruction seem low. The poem states that "[a]n old harrower of the dark / happened to find the hoard open" (2271-72). The man that plunders the cave enters while the dragon sleeps, and after finding a gold cup, he "hurried to his lord / with the gold-plated cup" (2281-82). When the dragon awakens, "trouble flared again./He rippled down the rock, writhing with anger / when he saw the footprints of the prowler who had stolen/too close to his dreaming head" (2287-90). The realization that someone has stolen and ultimately challenged the dragon in his own sieged hold begins to flare and emotions begin to stir. The poem continues, explaining that the dragon "scorched the ground as he scoured and hunted/for the trespasser who had troubled his sleep./Hot and savage he kept circling and circling/the outside of the mound. No man appeared/in that desert waste, but he worked himself up/by imagining battle" (2294-99). The dragon is disposed to rile himself up. This is a clear example of Titchener's theories on objectifying memory, where if one imagines anger, one sees anger (Titchener 68). The dragon works himself up by imagining battle, and eventually becomes uncontrollable, eventually burning the city down. This proves that this dragon might not be aligned with Auron and Blitz in matters of contemplation and consequence thinking. The dragon continues to rile himself up, fuming as he searches for the thief with no results: "His pent-up fury/at the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back/and lash out in flames" (2304-06). At this point it becomes clear that the dragon does not stop to contemplate, and his affect is immediate. Then, the dragon "began to belch out flames/and burn bright homesteads; there was a hot glow/that scared everyone, for the vile sky-winger/would leave nothing alive in his wake" (2312-15). The consequences of the theft were not so much dealt upon the thief as upon the

Geat people. The poem states that after the dragon had destroyed the town, he “swinged the land, swathed it in flame,/in fire and burning, and now he felt secure/in the vaults of his barrow” (2321-23). He feels no remorse for what he has done, instead feeling that his acts were completely justified. He feels secure and sated back in his barrow now that he has attempted to avenge the unjust acts done upon him and his beloved treasure. As Beowulf pursues the fight for the glory of winning, he enters the barrow and bellows a challenge for the dragon. When this happens, hate is ignited: “The hoard-guard recognized/a human voice, the time was over/for peace and parleying. Pouring forth/in a hot battle-fume, the breath of the monster/burst from the rock” (2554-58). Merely the sound of the challenge in a human voice ignites hatred, immediately eliciting breaths of fire. Beowulf sees the dragon coming at him and reflects: “The serpent looped and unleashed itself/swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing/and racing toward its fate” (2568-70). This is where the story of Beowulf and the dragon ends.

Ward Parks claims that readers often note that the dragon is dissimilar from his monstrous foregoers: he is neither so predatorial nor so human as Grendel is. Though the dragon destroys Geatland with evident contempt for the opposition, Parks has observed that the poem never mentions if the dragon eats anyone, making the claim that this omission is significant. He argues that the dragon is not a predator as his fellow antagonists but fits into a certain human stereotype, a “guardian, hall-dweller, the miserly and vengeful king” (Parks, 14). Parks also note that the dragon does not appear to have a tribe or clan and does not boast about his genealogy (14). Auron and Blitz often boast about their genealogy, which is a significant part of Blitz’s life, because the premise of happiness lies in living up to the expectations of the infamous Devastator clan. For Auron, the need to make his parents proud influences much of his behaviour. He often boasts on genealogy and refers to himself as a proud descendant of NooMoakh, the largest and oldest dragon on the continent.

For the sake of this study, we assume that the dragon in *Beowulf* has indeed never eaten anyone. Would that fact merit a capacity to self-regulate, making him similar to Blitz and Auron in some cases? In such a case, he would have to be empathically aware of others to limit his anger and spare human lives. But there are few things that point to him having much patience for humans: “A wildness rose/in the dragon again and drove it to attack,/heaving up fire, hunting for enemies,/the humans it loathed” (Beowulf 2669-72). He perceives humans as his enemies, and feels superior to them, and much will trigger the anger towards those the dragon considers beneath him. If he does not eat humans, evidence points to the reason being simply a lack of appetite, and not because he is capable of self-restraint.

## VI. The Allure of the Hoard

It becomes important to examine the motivations behind the dragons' obsession with treasure to understand why it triggers affect. The dragons from all four texts share similar obsessions with treasure, where each promises destruction upon those who attempt to steal from them. Where does it come from; this need to hoard treasure? *Grendel*, a novel written by John Gardner, is the retelling of the poem *Beowulf* from the perspective of the antagonist, Grendel. This story shows another side of *Beowulf's* dragon. Grendel shows up at the dragon's cave and the dragon does not show any of the seriousness presented in the poem, but rather appears as quirky. But as Grendel picks up an emerald, the dragon sobers instantly: "'Never never never touch my things,' he said. Flame came out with the words and singed the hair on my belly and legs" (Gardner 60). In *Call Me Dragon*, Blitz shows a similar behaviour when the princess is taken from him. He roars, "[m]ine, mine, mine!!" (Secchia 131) And in an attempt to scare off dragon slayers, Blitz roars his jealousy, "I will rip this town apart to find you, and woe betide the louse who dares to lay a paw upon my Princess!" (539). While the two dragons might appear different, where one is basing his existence on treasure, and the other on adventure, family, and friendship, the possessive draconic instinct remains. Even Auron, who has no appetite for gold, and was not raised to pillage and hoard treasure, does hold value to certain things. He values his friends and considers them his treasure. Auron becomes equally destructive if these are threatened.

Grendel has come to the dragon to seek advice and receives one: "My advice to you, my violent friend, is to seek out gold and sit on it" (Gardner 74). In *Grendel*, everything the dragon cares about is his gold. He rejects fundamental aspects of human existence, which Grendel is clearly infatuated with. Instead, the dragon gives the best life advice he could possibly give. The dragon's ambition is to count his treasure and sort it into piles, which might seem completely meaningless. But the dragon attaches his own sense of value to it, making it significant. Assuming *Grendel's* dragon and *Beowulf's* dragon are the same, it is then easy for the dragon to act destructively in affect when someone comes to steal the only thing that matters to him; the only thing that gives reason to his entire existence. This dragon has but one simple task in life, to find gold and sit on it, for however long it takes, this is what he is supposed to do. Although the dragon in *Beowulf* does not entertain human emotion such as sadness, fear, or pride, the poem shows that the dragon does act out in affect, and the intensity that he responds to leads, unsurprisingly, to anger and destruction.

## VII. From Hatchling to Beast: A Comparison

At this point it is necessary to compare the root of affect in the different dragons we have analysed in *Call me Dragon*, *Dragon Champion*, *Grendel*, and *Beowulf*. Experiences will affect every aspect of attitudes and behaviour. We have seen that all four dragons have a relatively similar view of humans, but the content markers differ in affect. Blitz is often able to control the unconscious performance because of his moral and fair heart. Auron processes markers differently when he is a hatchling from when he is a full-grown dragon. This is because, at an early stage in life, his primal and instinctual reactions are stronger than his capacity for rational contemplation. With age he becomes critical and can regulate the biological responses to threats. Blitz and Auron's literary predecessor do not merit this distinction. *Beowulf's* dragon does not regulate emotions or contemplate, but instead relies solely on instinctive drives. But one must remember that the poem states that it is in a dragon's nature to seek out treasure and guard it. Therefore, I have concluded that while he is bad-tempered and shows no leniency, he does not fit into the symbol of great evil often given to dragons in literature.

Although the dragons presented in this dissertation maintain individual independence in their respective text, they show many similarities to the classical representation of the dragon that we see in *Beowulf*, ascertaining that these dragons demonstrate affect that differ from human intensities. This dissertation has shown that Auron and Blitz manage self-regulation and cognitive abilities, much like humans do, while *Beowulf's* dragon may exhibit less of these traits, instead remaining cognitively, extremely draconic. This conclusion stems from the fundamental human aspects that bring a sense of value to Auron and Blitz. Since *Beowulf's* dragon seems to be a nihilist, the intensities that hit him will erupt entirely without restraint, leaving no room for such traits. For Auron and Blitz, a sense of value is less about the gold and more about the human aspect that *Beowulf's* dragon rejects. But they too act out in an equally destructive manner when something triggers affect in the same way that the thief in *Beowulf* did. Evidence shows that there is a catalyst similar for all dragons. When something they consider treasure is threatened, whether it is family, friends, or gold, they swiftly resort to extreme and dangerous behaviour. Overall, the methods chosen for this dissertation finds that over time, dragons in literature have evolved from the bestial force to a character in its own right, with personal drives and aspiration. This proves that theories on affect and psychology are valuable tools for a literary analysis and applying them will unveil emotional dimensions embedded in dragons. But while the dissertation

has shown that much of the studies on affect align with the characters, dragons do not measure up to the wide emotional patterns of humans.

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