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Letters

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Ethan Campbell's & Robert Jackson's interesting article on
"'Good, Not Safe': Structure vs. Chaos in Narnia and the Writing
Workshop" (Mythlore 99/100) comments that the creatures in Lewis's
list of evil creatures witnessing Aslan's death come from a variety of
mythologies, more than a child reader would be able to recognize,
and two would certainly be unknown to the reader, as "Orknies and
Wooses" come not from tradition but from "Lewis's imagination."
They wouldn't be recognized by most children, but they're probably
not Lewis's inventions, either. "Orknies" must surely be a re-
spelling of Old English "Orcneas," the term (known from Beowulf) for one of several
species of monster descended from Cain. It's a plural, and the singular would be orc, a
term Lewis would have known (besides his direct knowledge of Beowulf) from having
heard Tolkien read The Lord of the Rings. "Woose" looks like a re-spelling (possibly a
typo?) for "wose," a term going back to Old English "wasa," known in the
compound "wuduwasa," "woodwose," meaning a wild man-like creature living in
the woods (presumably something like a faun, satyr, sasquatch, or yeti). Again, apart
from his own scholarship, Lewis would have known the term from Tolkien, who had
the Rohirrim call the pukel-men "woses." The remaining term filling out the list of
evil creatures, "ettins," is another Old English word, meaning "giants." Bilbo, in The
Hobbit, passed Ettensmoor, and besides knowing the term from their adult
scholarship, both Lewis and Tolkien would no doubt have read the story "The Red
Ettin" as children in Andrew Lang's The Blue Fairy Book; but at the time he was
creating Narnia, Lewis may have associated "ettin" with Tolkien's work as much as
with "The Red Ettin."

A child reading The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe when it came out in
1950 had no access to LotR (and the early editions of The Hobbit referred to "goblins"
rather than "orcs," aside from the mention of the sword Orcrist), and a child at any
time would be unlikely to be reading widely in Old English literature, so it's correct to
say that a child wouldn't recognize Orknies and Wooses. But they're probably not
Lewis's independent inventions—rather, they're a little bow to Tolkien's influence.
Tolkien really didn't like having Lewis draw on—and respell—references from his
mythology (c.f. the "Numinor" of That Hideous Strength), and I suppose it's safe to
guess that he didn't like it in Narnia, either, the more so, since, as Eric Seddon's article
on "Letters to Malcolm and the Trouble with Narnia: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and
Their 1919 Crisis" (Mythlore 99/100) discusses, Tolkien didn't like Narnia. But it's a
nice little tribute all the same.

—Ruth Berman