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Originating Dragons

by Sandy Feinstein

Dragon lore...tells that Earth and the planets were formed from the vomit of the celestial Draco, whose fiery breath then lit the stars and blew all things into their whirling paths.

Hazard Adams, *The Truth about Dragons* (1970), p. 15.

As Earth was formed, long after the Big Bang, its crust became pleated and folded and bent into mountains and valleys. Its bottom became its top. The top became the bottom. And, from deep within, in its fissures and fires, volcanoes emerged. Etna. Vesuvius. These were ferocious volcanoes that disgorged their insides.

Scientists have taken samples from inside the cavernous deep and after their fire bursts. They have tested lava. They have tested the scorched soil and ash. They catalogue the trilobites, ammonites, scarabs, and seared bones of hoopoes and narwhal. They try to reconstruct their former lives in oceans and woods and rock and air. They estimate their age. But who sees what should not be there? *Paradoxa*, Linnaeus called those kinds of creatures, the last to acknowledge even the idea. But he was, after all, a believer.

If it's big and scaly or feathery or hairy and very, very old, it must, the thought (science and popular hope) goes, be a dinosaur or mammoth.

Never mind the fire, never mind the dark materials ricocheting into flight.

Terra, Natura, Luna, gendered and personified, embodying the mystery of life. Yet, few are quite willing to shuffle off the metaphors to give *Mater* her due. She is a wily creator. No, that's not quite right. Creator is too close to belief, *credo*, and only in Old Icelandic is the relationship between belief and truth made word (*tror*: believe. Belief is truth, the latter etymologically and homophonically following). No, *Natura mater* is a crater. A volcano. *Vol*, for flight, *cano* for "with" (*con*).

The first seeds were fired there, then expelled to populate Earth. You can ask the scientists. They have found shells. They have found bones. They have tested them and found them old.

They have not found dragon bones. And if they had, they wouldn't believe what they found. They'd have nothing to compare them to. If they had, maybe they'd note a resemblance to moray eels (teeth, tail) or to Komodo dragons (scales, feet, teeth). But they haven't had to account for what they don't believe in. Because there are no bones. Not there.

Perhaps fish found land, where fins became feet and gills readjusted. And maybe dragons are related to them. Poseidon might have offered his bounty to *Natura*, and with a great wave pushed the part-fish, part-frog into the great crater. But while fish bones and frog bones may be sifted from ash, none test credulity, as a dragon.

Dragons are not found because it was inside the crater where earth and rock and fire made them. As they took shape, with iron scales and gravel grinders, and grew and grew, the volcano, swollen with its spawn, knew what to do, and spewed them forth. And as each one flew up into the darkened air, it tried to fly, and sometime did, and sometimes didn't and landed on its taloned feet.

Far they ranged, and far they travelled, as if well knowing what they had to do. Instinct, it could be said. To survive. They found the deepest caves, where veins of gold and diamond rock make up their homes and beds. Too deep for men to find, but if they do, they lose their way and life before they get too near.

And so there are no specimens as there are with dinosaurs. No sightings like the ivory-billed woodpecker. To be seen and collected, at least one species knows, is one more way to die and truly disappear.