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Letters

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Letters



ETTERS

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