DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

From Dragoun to Dragon:
The Role of the Dragon in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature

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‘From Dragoun to Dragon’

The Role of the Dragon in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature

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2021

Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.' Rwy'n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno'r gwaith gyda chytundeb fy Ngrichwyliwr (Goruchwylwyr)'

'I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.' I confirm that I am submitting the work with the agreement of my Supervisor(s

Stephanie Fox.

ABSTRACT.

This thesis discusses the literary representation of the dragon, what is was and what it became in the medieval, and Early Modern periods. The dragon has rarely been previously investigated for its own sake in different literary genres, and I intend to remedy this.

Beginning in the earliest oral culture, twenty-first century BCE, the myths and legends which gave birth to this most enigmatic of creatures spread through Asia to Europe and beyond. The Classical-era literature embraced and embellished the original oral retellings, setting them into texts, and reflecting both good and evil aspects of the beast, and giving it diverse physical appearances. The thesis begins by outlining the material that, in turn, informs the literary portrayal of the dragon in later periods.

The biblical and medieval eras cast the dragon as a villain wishing to bring about the downfall of mankind, terrifying and hellish, to be vanquished, whilst romance texts present a dragon that has to be defeated in order for a protagonist to proceed with a spiritual journey of self-knowledge and awareness. The Early-Modern poet, Edmund Spenser, assigns yet a different role to the dragon – that of a political and religious enemy that must be vanquished to save a
Queen and a country.

Using hagiographies, poems and sermons from the medieval era, and epic poetry from the Early Modern, the thesis centres on the reason for the inclusion of a dragon in literature, something which has seldom been addressed, and I believe my research will enable readings of these texts from a different perspective.

The material examined reflects the diverse literary incarnations of the dragon, providing answers to the questions set out at the beginning: where the dragon originated, what is it, and what makes it so important to the different literary genres researched for this study.

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I apologise if I have forgotten anyone, it's been a long time.

For Emma and Oliver, with love.

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Print made by: Thomas Cecill 1625-1640. Published by: Peter Stent

DRAGONS: AN INTRODUCTION

So, What IS a Dragon?

Where did dragon tales originate, and why, are the preliminary questions I will be asking, focussing later on their representation in late medieval and Early Modern literature in detail, in order to examine these questions. Although the dragon is a familiar feature in many genres – romance, epic, poetry – it has always been the villainous entity, without explanation of why. This study was undertaken to discover exactly that – why is the dragon always the villain? It is my expectation that the understanding of the texts and the representations they give will uncover this fact. Whilst it is not possible to 'begin at the beginning' of the oral tradition, I will trace the earliest textual recordings of dragon-related legends from other civilizations, certainly pre-biblical, which have survived in various forms. From ancient Mesopotamian and Samarian beginnings, via ancient Greek and Oriental lore, through to the Bible, religious literature, drama and poetry, there is a dragon trail. This trail informs the medieval and early modern understandings and literary portrayals of dragons on which the thesis focusses.

Chasing the tale of the dragon is a complex and diverting journey, and I hope, an interesting and entertaining one. The purpose of this thesis is not to examine the fantasy aspect of the dragon familiar from fairy tale and popular fiction; rather, it is intended to examine the perception and representation of the dragon and how it was understood in the late medieval and early modern periods, through close examination of dragon-related English texts produced during those periods.

Since the first literary mention of the dragon, the understanding of it has been through many changes. It has lost much of the air of magic and mystery that it had in the days of antiquity or the classical era, when it was thought of as being a deity or of the gods, as will be discussed. The medieval conception of the dragon was that it was an incarnation of the devil, sly and lascivious, with an appetite for virgins. Used in religious texts and manuscripts, the horror of being outcast and unacceptable to Heaven was demonstrated by the image of a dragon. Only faith could defeat this terrible monster,

which at that time represented Paganism. It was no longer considered a creature of the gods, indeed, quite the opposite. There was now no association with benevolence or worship as there had been in antiquity. The dragon no longer guarded water, or protected treasure. In the Middle Ages the beast did not fly but was epitomised by fire and pestilence, as is Hell. It now solely represented evil – a manifestation of Satan, and as will be shown, easily destroyed by a saintly 'tender girl'; slain with a bright, shining sword or Cross, or tamed and bound by the girdle of chastity. The once fearsome, proud dragon is brought low by faith in Christ. The increase in education under the influence of humanism, and the profound changes in religious experience brought about by the Reformation, led to an even greater alteration in the perception of the dragon in the Early Modern era. What was once a struggle between Christianity and Paganism, instead became a conflict between opposing factions of one religion. Falling out of favour after the period of medieval romance, the dragon was revived again in the late sixteenth century by Edmund Spenser. Heavily influenced by medieval literature, Spenser gave his audience a medieval dragon of spectacular proportions, a malevolent allegory of the Catholic church and religion. He created a polemical dragon, a paradoxical dragon, and tapped into the then current fascination with dragons and the exotic – as will be shown – in pamphlet and prophecy. Spenser's dragon was the perceived threat to the throne and the Protestant religion which was predominant in England under the rule of Elizabeth I.

Critics have perused the dragon from different perspectives, however during my research I have not found anyone or anything that addresses the *reason* for the dragon in detail. The medieval interpretation of a dragon is summed up neatly by Martha M. Dass as a representation of 'a variety of evils: social ills, the dark side of humanity, the wilderness itself, un-Christian beliefs, and of course, the Devil.'[1] The medieval stories are repetitious, reiterating the same message of saints and faith in each hagiography. The protagonist and the theme must remain similar as

> Such stories of exemplary individuals are subject to powerful pressures of conformity and tend to be assimilated to an existing archetype…One medieval

[1] Martha M. Daas, 'From Holy Hostess to Dragon Tamer: The Anomaly of Saint Martha', *Literature and Theology*, 22.1 (2007), pp.1–15. (p.11).

> saint is pretty much like another…one become exemplary by losing one's individuality.[2]

It was this repetition and similarity of the saints however, that drove home the message of good behaviour, conformity, and obedience to the Church.

The famous and familiar episode of St. Margaret being swallowed by a dragon was not always so well considered, as Sherry L. Reames discusses

> Some writers were uncomfortable with the idea that Margaret had actually been swallowed by the dragon; for instance, Jacobus de Voragine, the author of the *Legenda Aurea*, called the scene "apocryphal and not to be taken seriously" (trans. Ryan, 1.369), and other writers found alternative ways of presenting the episode. In this selection, the stanzaic Life attributes Margaret's escape not to her own gesture of making the sign of the cross, but to the actual cross on which Christ was crucified. Mirk says that the dragon took Margaret into his mouth, but not that he swallowed her. Lydgate's dragon gets only as far as Margaret's head before he splits open. Despite clerical discomfort with the dragon scene, it could not be dropped completely from vernacular lives of Margaret because it served as the source for the familiar iconography of this saint, who is traditionally shown either as emerging from the dragon or standing atop it in triumph. Mirk specifically calls his audience's attention to this moment as the image of Margaret that they know.[3]

The texts to be discussed will examine these differences and similarities and look at the effect they have on the overall concept of Margaret. Despite Voragine's scepticism, Juiana Dresvina asserts that Margaret remained one of 'the three most celebrated female saints of the Middle Ages and beyond'[4]

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[2] Roy M. Liuzza, '*Beowulf*: monuments, memory, history' in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old English and Middle English Literature,* Eds. David F. Johnson and Elaine Treharne, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.95-107 (pp.96-97).

[3] Footnote from Sherry L. Reames, ed. *Introduction to* 'Margaret of Antioch, Introduction | Robbins Library Digital Projects'<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/reames-middle-english-legends-of-women-saints-margaret-of-antioch-introduction> [accessed 28 March 2018].

[4] Juliana Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon. The Cult of St. Margaret of Antioch in Medieval England* (Oxford: The British Academy, Oxford University Press, 2016), p.2.

Martin Dodsworth claims Spenser's dragon 'represents evil itself'[5] whilst Linwood Orange takes the view that it 'symbolizes death.'[6] However, I feel the latter two are obvious, simplistic opinions, which though valid, have not addressed any other reason for Spenser's polymorphic dragon. This thesis will fill that gap and find the answers, which I believe will add a new, different dimension to the reading of Book I of *The Faerie Queene.*

The primary medieval texts I am working from are hagiographies of selected saints. These are sourced from Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend,* for St. George, St. Margaret, and St. Martha; John Lydgate's *St. George* and *St. Margaret,* and John Mirk's *Sermon on St. Margaret.* In addition, for St. George I have consulted the *South English Legendary* and Alexander Barclay for their versions of the legend. For Saint Margaret, the *Old English Lives of Saint Margaret* and Theotimus added different perspectives to the story. For St. Martha, my research found the *Scottish Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century,* and a further, later version of the *Golden Legend* by William Caxton. The medieval romance of *Guy of Warwick* is from the Auchinleck Manuscript, with additional material from the Caius Manuscript, whilst *Bevis of Hampton* is also from the Auchinleck Manuscript. For the early modern period, I have made an examination of Edmund Spenser's chivalric allegorical epic, *The Faerie Queene* (1590-1596). For the early chapters, I have referred to Daniel Ogden as a main source on dragon lore and myth, as his extensive works on dragons, dragon lore and cults addresses many of the areas of my research and have provided me with opportunities for further research into the literary acknowledgement of the dragon. My texts have been specifically chosen as they each contain important dragon encounters for the protagonists. They also demonstrate how the dragon was perceived in different religious cultures and historical moments. I will be seeking answers to the following questions for all eras, examining both differences and continuities:

1. How was the dragon conceived and understood, in both literal and metaphorical terms?

[5] Martin Dodsworth, 'The Spenserian Dragon' in *Book Reviews, academic.oup.com/english/article-abstract,* pp.43-51 (p.45). [accessed 12 October 2019].

[6] Linford E. Orange, 'Spenser's Old Dragon' in *Modern Language Notes,* Vol.4:8 Dec (1959), pp.679-681 (p.679). [accessed 25 October 2018].

2. How do dragons appear in the selected texts and what role(s) do they play? Are they episodic, or the main focus of the text; and to what degree is the dragon involved in the development of the protagonist?
3. What is the effect of the genre in which the dragon is used, and how does the genre impact on the representation of the dragon(s)?

The thesis is arranged in the chronological order of the texts examined and begins with an overall view of the concept of the dragon. Chapter One introduces the hagiographies, with the encounter between Saint George and the Dragon, using texts from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, looking at the similarities and differences in style and representation. Chapter Two continues the hagiographic theme, introducing female saintly dragon slayers, again using texts from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. I will discuss St. Margaret of Antioch, the reasons for her popularity and why she is associated with a dragon; and St. Martha of Tarascon – slightly less known, but important nonetheless for this thesis as she is one of a small number of female dragon tamers. Chapter Three focusses on medieval romance, and the dragon fights of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton – more in the nature of 'traditional' battles with dragons, as a means of self-improvement on a spiritual journey. The final Chapter Four is centred in the sixteenth century and discusses Edmund Spenser's dragon in *The Faerie Queene*, examining how he has used the concept of the dragon for polemical purposes. The conclusion draws all the threads together to answer the questions posed.

Before examining the literary texts, this introduction will establish the characteristics of dragons, and how these motifs carry across different eras and cultures. However, the fundamental concern of my research is the extent to which the nature and use of the dragon changed in the late medieval and early modern periods, and the reasons for this. It seems the dragon has never been examined as the central element to a text, and my thesis sets out to do just that. Why is it there, and what does it do, and where, in the beginning, did it come from?

The Nature of Dragons

Dragons are mainly male, especially in the classical world. Where there are female-gendered dragons, they are generally associated with creation, either of the world itself, or of a race of other beings similar to themselves. The relevant sections of the thesis will

examine this in closer detail. The dragon is presumed to live in a cave, near water, usually fresh, and almost always moving, such as a river. They are guardians, occasionally of something golden, but mainly of territory. There is an association with heat, such as fiery eyes, breath, or venom that burns and is also poisonous. The gaze of a dragon is a powerful hypnotic weapon, and dragons do not seem to sleep. This latter characteristic is also true of snakes, which are unable to close their eyes.[7] Thus, the blending of the dragon and the serpent begins. In battle, dragons are perceived as the most fearsome foe, territorial, able to utilise natural elements of air and wind against their opponents, and it always takes a superhero in the form of a god, demi-god, or in later eras, a saint or heroic man to overcome a dragon. The later dragons almost always receive a sacrifice of flesh, very often human, in order to placate them. However, it must be noted that this is a sacrifice given by the humans in the story – it is their interpretation of what the dragon will require. I have found no evidence that any of the dragons in my texts have been depicted as demanding a sacrifice, human or otherwise. With this in mind, it is therefore reasonable to suggest that sacrifices were offered in the hope of appeasement of a threatening and fearful god/entity/unexplained terror. In the surviving dragon texts from the Middle Ages, this human sacrifice is almost always a young, female virgin, an aspect that will be examined in a later section. One could speculate that the desire for virgin sacrifice has more to do with the male authors, than the wishes of the dragon. It is interesting to take note of genre here, the virgin sacrifice appears only in saints' lives, all of which were written by male authors, and the hagiographies usually include an attack on the saint's virginity. There are, of course, many variations on the main theme. The fact is that however the idea of dragons began, it has flourished and grown over the centuries, deeply embedded in the consciousness of evolving civilizations. The dragon/serpent was perceived differently by each civilization, and the pre-medieval origins of dragon myths/legends, and how this was construed and utilized by the different storytellers and authors, are the focus of this introduction.

The Earliest Recorded Dragons

All myths and legends begin somewhere. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines each thus:

[7] The eyes of the snakes do not have eyelids, and this means that they are not able to blink or close their eyes. In the place of the eyelids, there is a clear membrane cover at the corneas, and it is called brilles or spectacles. It is normally attached to the skin. https://www.mysnakepet.com <accessed 11 April 2022>.

> Legend. *n.* An unauthenticated or non-historical story, especially one handed down by tradition from early times and popularly regarded as historical.
> Myth. *n.* A traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon.[8]

The dictionary definitions reveal that both genres have their roots in history, and form part of the oral tradition of storytelling. Dragons, or belief in them, abound in many cultures and their traditions. According to Robert Blust, there is a 'general recognition that the idea of the dragon is a worldwide phenomenon.'[9] It is widely accepted in today's Western European society that dragons never existed. However, Blust poses the question that 'if dragons don't exist, how could such a convergence of beliefs arise?'[10] It has to be considered that the durability of the idea of dragons, and 'the pervasiveness of dragon myths in the folk legends of many cultures is', Blust suggests, 'probably no accident.'[11] Although Blust provides insights and evidence into the reasons for the legends and beliefs, and transcribes them into physical explanations, for example that the dragon and the rainbow derive from the same source, he presents no textual evidence for the origin of the dragon legend.[12] It is a quest for evidence of the origin of the story of the dragon that set me on the first section of our journey, to discover the first textual witness to the word 'dragon.'

The earliest civilised areas were 'at the northern end of the Persian Gulf,' according to S.G.F. Brandon.[13] In this area, the Sumerians laid the foundation of Mesopotamian culture. This earliest culture viewed water as 'the source of all things' and associated with the water was a dragon named Kur.[14] Kur was defeated by two warrior heroes, Enki and Inanna, and finally killed by a third warrior, Ninurta. The overthrow of Kur is told in three surviving fragmentary stone texts in cuneiform script and is quite

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[8] *OED Online,* (Oxford University Press, March 2015) [Accessed 14 May 2015].
[9] Robert Blust, "The Origin of Dragons." *Anthropos*, vol. 95, no. 2, 2000, pp. 519–536. *JSTOR*. www.jstor.org/stable/40465957. [Accessed 18 Apr. 2015].
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid, p. 521.
[12] Ibid., p534.
[13] S.G.F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963), pp.66-117 (p.67).
[14] Ibid., p.8.

possibly the earliest recorded mention of a dragon from any civilization anywhere in the world. Unfortunately, there is no surviving record of a physical description of Kur, other than 'a dragon.' Brandon describes the Mother goddess Mummu-Ti'âmat from the later Babylonian Creation Epic the *Enuma Elish,* … 'the personification of the salt-waters of the sea.'[15] Having already created 'a brood of monsters', Ti'âmat also produces 'fearsome serpents, dragons and other monsters to aid her in destroying the gods - a representation that would seem to imply that she herself was conceived of some monstrous serpentine or dragon form, an image that has some iconographic support.'[16] Marduk, a god – and the offspring of gods – defeats Ti âmat and her carcass is'...split like a shellfish in two parts', one half of which forms the sky.[17] The killing was by means of 'shooting an arrow through her opened mouth and into her heart.'[18] This is a method of dragon-slaying which will be repeated often.

It is here that Brandon's cosmogonies become a little intertwined. From the earlier Sumerian legend of the 'monstrous dragon Kur' is the belief that the beast was connected with the primeval waters. After Kur's defeat by Ninurta, these waters threaten to engulf the land and cut off the sweet [fresh] waters. Ninurta uses the carcass of Kur as a barrier against the primeval waters, and it holds them in check so that they do not engulf the land. In the later Babylonian legend, Marduk uses one half of Ti-âmat's body to form the 'protective canopy of the sky that holds back the surrounding ocean.'[19] There is an obvious connection between the two legends of a dragon-type beast rising forth from the waters of the sea to wreak havoc of some kind, although there is nothing in the telling which claims that either Kur or Ti'âmat caused any destruction to people or land. Whilst there is no doubt that either beast was monstrous and ferocious, Ti âmat was seeking revenge on just one man, Ninurta, to avenge the loss of a beloved spouse. A common element is that when both the beasts are defeated, order springs from chaos, the salt waters were contained, and the land became fit for cultivation, ergo survival, by human beings, who will serve the gods. The ones who battle and defeat the dragons, therefore,

[15] Ibid., p.94.
[16] Ibid., p.99.
[17] Ibid., p.101.
[18] Brandon as before, p.100.
[19] Ibid, p.102.

have to be more than mortal; they must be godlike and superhuman, and they themselves become revered.

The next textual reference, this time of a fire-breathing monster, occurs in *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* [20] an Assyrio-Babylonian epic poem dating from circa 2100 BCE Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, battles with a fire-breathing monster, Humbaba. Humbaba is 'a monster appointed by the god Enlil to guard the forest of cedars and is famous in Mesopotamian tradition for his hideous features.'[21] In one English translation, according to Benjamin Foster, the young men of the city of Uruk describe the monster thus: 'We have heard of Humbaba, his features are grotesque. Humbaba's cry is the roar of a deluge / His maw is fire, his breath is death.'[22] Another description from the 1916 translation by Georg Burckhardt indicates that 'he had the paws of a lion and a body covered in horny scales; his feet had the claws of a vulture, and on his head were the horns of a wild bull; his tail and phallus each ended in a snake's head.'[23] (Fig.4a.) In various other translations 'his face is a single coiling line like that of the coiled entrails of men and beasts.' Their description affords us the first mention of a male polymorphic monster, and as will be seen later, many mythical monsters were described as having multiple features from other beasts. So, from the earliest textual mention of dragons, there are already the now-familiar characteristics of creatures that are very large, serpentine, multi-headed, fire-breathing, and scaly. However, it must be noted that these characteristics are attributed to humanoid beings, which are in conflict with other humanoid beings, although of the semi-divine variety. Ti âmat is slain by Marduk who was created by the gods. Humbaba is killed by Gilgamesh with the assistance of Shamash, the Sun God. There is a link between them in that they are, except for Humbaba, associated with water, specifically seawater, and this will be examined in more detail in a later section. The physical appearance seems to be serpentine – again with the exception of Humbaba, who was humanoid in appearance, and covered in scales. Scales are now a common denominator for early dragons.

Despite the relatively narrow time span between the two civilizations, it is important to note already the differences in perception of the dragon-figure. The

[20] Benjamin R. Foster. Ed. and trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: W.W. Norton & Co. 2001).
[21] Ibid., p.224.
[22] Ibid., pp.21-22.
[23] J.A. Black, G. Cunningham, E. Fluckiger-Hawker, E. Robson, and G. Zólyomi. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (Oxford, 1998).

Sumerian text depicts a massive serpentine creature, whilst the later culture presents a hybrid human figure. All these beasts represent threat and danger, but only in defence of offspring and/or territory, and they have all been overcome by superhuman beings. Ordinary mortal humans are not threatened or harmed by the monsters. Despite the differences already observed, a pattern is emerging. From the earliest civilizations, it takes a superhero to defeat the monster. However, despite their threatening behaviour, enormous size, and being capable of great destruction, these creatures do not fly. At this historical moment, the wings have not become a feature, and are added much later. Figure 4a on the previous page is a modern interpretation of the appearance of Humbaba by a contemporary artist. The polymorphic aspect is clearly depicted: the horns, talons, scales and the snake-headed tail and phallus, and the intestine-like face. Ancient civilisations fusing the most dreadful aspects of familiar creatures with a humanoid figure could create terror in the imagination. Fig 4b shows stone carvings from ancient Mesopotamia. The bottom left image of the four is particularly interesting, as it shows an appearance much less human than the others as the lines on the face could be representations of scales, or indeed of coiled intestines. Note the teeth which are more fang-like, and the eyes which appear shiny – an interpretation of a fiery gaze, perhaps. Already it is clear that even the very earliest civilisations needed to have an entity on which to project fear and wonderment. The dragon has arrived.

Classical Dragons 500 BCE – 336 BCE

Moving forward in time from the Sumerian era of the twenty-first century BCE, the textual evidence comes in Greek mythology from 600 BCE TO 400 BCE, where dragon hybrids and serpents are recorded by eminent historians such as Euripides. Roman historians in the early first century CE have recorded accounts of dragons, [24] and a notable textual mention of a giant serpent-like creature is from the first century BCE, in an account by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus.[25] In his *Bibliotheca Historica* as

[24] Euripides, a tragedian of Classical Athens. 480 – 406 BCE. There is a timeline shown at Appendix I of the thesis.

[25] Diodorus Siculus, Greek historian, the author of a *Bibliothēkē* ("Library" known in Latin as *Bibliotheca Historica*), that ranged from the age of mythology to 60 BCE, Diodorus lived in the time of Julius Caesar and Augustus, and his own statements make it clear that he travelled in Egypt during 60–57 B.C. and also spent several years in Rome. The latest event mentioned by him belongs to the year 21BCE.
The *Bibliothēkē*, has survived where no other continuous historical source has. It remedies to some extent the loss of the works of earlier authors, from which it was compiled. Diodorus does not always quote his

translated by the late medieval poet John Skelton (1460? – 1529 CE), Diodorus records a hunt by King Ptolemy II of Egypt (283 – 246 BCE) for a giant serpent-like dragon. In this instance, the dragon is guarding fresh water, keeping other beasts from drinking; it is killing and feeding on them. The beast is captured by mortal men, in large numbers, and taken into captivity for inclusion in Ptolemy's zoo, where the creature is starved and beaten into submission. Diodorus' account purports to be a recording of an actual event, and he gives a very detailed description of the creature:

> Ptholomye the Second, passying desirous to have eliphaunts and other wondrefull bestes sauvaige of excessive hugeness bothe in might and in strengthe to be brought tofore hym, theym to behold for his roiall pleasure and disport...This serpent was xxx cubits of length…his glasyng ien glowing and flayming vnto fire, and how he lay likking his lippes with his towng, and the horrible sharpness and hardness of his scales…his tuskes…his lothely wide mowth…[26]

The description shows how characteristics attributed to the serpent are shared with the idea of the dragon: its massive size, scales, and fiery eyes are all common to the serpent and dragon. What differentiates this dragon from a serpent, however, is its enormous size and the huge tusk-like teeth, not found in serpents, and more in keeping with wild boar. After a long struggle capturing the beast, it is said to have been put on display for the general public, in order to prove its existence, as much as to prove the supremacy of Ptolemy. Diodorus records this as 'So mighty a wilde worme to be conveyed openly into every mannes sight – to be seen as the truth, not a fable or trifle of no substaunce. They affirmed for an assurance of trouthe' – if it can be seen, it has to be believed. The dragon-serpent was to be mightily feared, as it could terrify and constrict even 'myghty grete elephaunts with theire glistertying aspect and ien inflamed', and thus overcoming their target, would feed on them.[27]

This is the first recorded instance of ordinary men capturing a dragon-like creature. Its size and appearance make it different from the normal serpent, and to mark this difference, although the beast is referred to as a serpent, it is perceived as a dragon. The *OED* defines a dragon as 'a huge serpent or snake; a python.' The English word dragon is derived from the Greek δράκων (*drákōn*), meaning 'dragon, serpent of huge

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authorities, but in the books that have survived his most important sources for Greek history were certainly Ephorus (for 480–340 BCE), and Hieronymus of Cardia (for 323–302 BCE); for Roman history he was heavily dependent on Polybius (to 146) and Posidonius. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Diodorus-Siculus [accessed 5 June 2015].

[26]Siculus Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica V.III.* Trans. John Skelton, eds. F.M. Salter and H.L.R. Edwards. G. Cumberlege, EETS (Oxford: University Press, 1956-7), pp. 261-2.

[27]Ibid.

size, or water-snake'.[28] As Ptolemy II was of Greek descent, it is quite possible that this is how the dragon got its name in ancient Egypt. Serpents and snakes lay eggs, and the python builds a nest where the female coils around the eggs until they hatch, ergo, it is highly probable that this is where the idea of the egg-laying dragon began.

In Greek mythology of the classical period, 500 BCE – 336 BCE, dragons are again the province of the gods, and tales abound of the dragon in various rôles and guises. Helios, the sun god, had a chariot pulled by fiery dragons. His granddaughter, Medea, the murderous partner of Jason[29], flew into a rage after Jason refused to marry her, and instead intended to marry Creusa, the daughter of King Creon. Medea killed Jason's children, slaughtered Creusa and her father, and fled in Helios' chariot. 'While the Attendants are still battering at the door Medea appears on the roof, standing on a chariot of winged Dragons, in which are the children's bodies.'[30] The dragons are still exercising their power to assist the gods, and now they have wings. Their ability to fly assisted Helios' granddaughter to escape. Both the Greeks and Romans of the period recorded dragons, and some of these recordings will be examined with the help of three historical studies: Joseph Fontenrose, *Python,* Daniel Ogden, *Drakōn*, and G. Karl Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme.*[31] These scholarly investigations range from the 1950s through to 2013 and demonstrate the ongoing interest in dragons in the academy.

The dragon/serpent trail is prevalent in pre-Greek civilization, mainly through the worship of the 'Snake Goddess' in the Minoan culture. Figurines depicting this cult were discovered in the Palace of Knossos in sealed caskets during Sir Arthur Evans' excavations 1900-1931 CE.[32] According to Daniel Ogden, there was some debate as to the purpose of the Snake Goddess: was she just for protection of the property, or was there a deeper, religious significance?[33] There is no written text from the Minoan era with which to explore further the cult of the dragon/serpent; however, the idea of the serpent

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[28] *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2015). [Accessed 5th June 2015].

[29] The Golden Fleece will be discussed later in the chapter.

[30] *The Medea of Euripides,* trans. Gilbert Murry M.A. LL.D. (New York: Oxford University Press 1906), http://www.gutenberg.net [Accessed 11 June 2015].

[31] Joseph Fontenrose, *Python. A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins,* (Berkley and L.A.: U. of California Press,1959); Karl G. Galinsky. *The Herakles Theme. The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century,* (Basil Blackwood: Oxford, 1972); Daniel Ogden. *Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013).

[32] Sir Arthur John Evans (1851-1941) was a British archaeologist, responsible for the discovery and excavation of the Palace of Minos at Knossos, Crete, between 1898-1934. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (Oxford University Press 2004-16).

[33] Ogden, p.8.

as a powerful entity has travelled through the centuries, and seemingly by word of mouth. Ogden describes this traversing as 'sitting in the cloud of international folk tale.'[34] Similarities with classical figures suggest that the Minoan snake goddesses had an impact on the classical age of serpents and dragons. The serpentine hair of the Minoan figure (Fig. 5c) is comparable with the head of the Gorgon, and the snakes twined around her arms and body can be seen in depictions of the dryads with their thyrsi (Fig.5b).[35] In the Minoan culture snakes were often seen as guardians of the house, and some women were said to be able to control them, and have no fear of them, hence the cult of snake goddesses.

The very nature of oral mythology means there is little, if any, textual foundation on which to base the developing stories of dragons and humans. Finding a chronological order for the dragon tales is difficult. However, a timeline of Greek and Roman writers who related dragon-based tales as fact, is provided in Appendix i. A discussion of the most significant early dragon texts follows here.

The most logical starting point is Homer, one of the earliest and most important of the Greek poets in the oral tradition. Flourishing around the eighth century BCE, Homer, in *The Iliad,* describes Agamemnon's armour as being heavily decorated with 'dark blue serpents' which 'writhed towards his throat' and a shield which bore the 'Gorgon's grim mask' and a triple-headed serpent.[36] The serpents are there as protectors of Agamemnon, at his most vulnerable area, the throat and upper chest. The serpents represent power and strength, both of which Agamemnon will need in the forthcoming battle for Troy. The face of Medusa will strike fear into the hearts of his enemies. The palimpsest of writings crosses over and back, so I have elected to deal with them dragon by dragon, rather than by writer.

Echidna, the offspring of Ceto and Phorcys

Hesiod (c.633 BCE) called Echidna the 'mother of monsters. Half woman, half snake, and the mate of Typhon, she was born and lived in a cave beneath a hollow rock. Her face was beautiful, but her torso and legs were serpentine. This feature can be seen often

[34] Ogden, pp.7-9.

[35] A staff or spear, wreathed with ivy and topped with a pinecone, as carried by votaries of Dionysus.

[36] Robert Fagles, (Trans,) *The Iliad* (Bath, Bath University Press, 1990), p.297, line 28, line 42.

in descriptions of mermaids in later cultures. She gave birth to Orth's[37] and Cerebus[38], and the Hydra of Lerna. According to Hesiod, Echidna was also the mother of the Chimera 'that breathed irresistible fire.' The Chimera was tripartite, having the head of a lion and the body of a goat, while the rear end was a dragon, 'breathing forth the terrible might of burning fire.' The last offspring of Echidna was Ladon, 'a terrible snake which guards all-gold apples within his great coils in his lair.' According to Ogden, Hesiod's work 'helps to establish the integrity of the concept of the dragon in antiquity.[39] Comparisons with Mummu-Ti âmat[40] giving birth to legions of monsters can be made here, and the argument that the idea of a 'mother of dragons' has carried through the centuries from the first civilization to Ancient Greek culture gains credibility.

Typhon

Typhon, the youngest son of Gaea (Earth) and Tartarus (of the nether world) is described as a grisly monster with a hundred dragons' heads who was conquered and cast into the underworld by Zeus. Among his children by his wife, Echidna, were Cerberus, the hound of hell, the multiheaded Lernaean Hydra, and the Chimera. Depicted by Apollodorus as being a mixture of man and beast, below his thighs Typhon consisted of hissing vipers, 'his body was covered in wings' and 'fire could be seen in his eyes.'[41] Typhon and Zeus battle for supremacy of the world, a battle which is related by both Hesiod and Apollodorus and is very like the battle between Marduk and Ti âmat. Thunderbolts, fire, and the natural elements are used as weapons by both Typhon and Zeus. Typhon is finally subdued by Zeus, bound in his own coils, and buried beneath Mount Etna, where he is still said to breathe a fiery blast from time to time. There are accounts of this battle by Hesiod, Aeschylus, Diodorus Siculus, Ovid and Seneca, amongst others.

Hydra of Lerna, the offspring of Echidna

The Hydra is a multi-headed *drakaina*, or female dragon,[42] and different writers have attributed to her a varying number of heads, ranging from nine to one hundred.[43] Her

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[37] A two-headed dog killed by Herakles.

[38] The multi-headed dog which guarded the gates of Hades.

[39] Hesiod, *Theogony* (270-336) as quoted in Daniel Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents and Slayers in the Classical and Early Christian Worlds. A Sourcebook.* (New York: Oxford University Press 2013), pp.14-16.

[40] Page 7 above.

[41] Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* as quoted in Ogden, p.27.

[42] Gendered terms existed in classical texts. Echidna is clearly described as female, being named as 'mother' to other monsters, among them Hydra, who is also female (*'drakaina'* Greek for female dragon). Typhon is a son of Tartarus. The dragons of Ladon and Colchia are not gendered.

[43] See Appendix i.

name derives from the Greek word for 'water snake.' One of Herakles' labours was to kill the Hydra, which was living in the swamp of Lerna where she was reared. She would terrorise the local area, killing cattle and plundering the land. This behaviour dovetails nicely with the usual concept of a dragon as destructive and seemingly indestructible. In his version, Apollodorus claims that although the Hydra was multi-headed, only the middle head was immortal. Herakles, with the help of Iolaus, destroys the mortal heads with fire – thus using the dragon's own weapon against her – and is able then to chop off the immortal head. He also dips his arrows in her poisonous venom, [44] and later uses these same arrows to kill Ladon, who is the final offspring of Echidna and Typhon.

Ladon

Ladon is the dragon which guarded the Golden Apples of the Hesperides. There are versions by both Hesiod and Apollonius of the story of Herakles and Ladon. One of Herakles' labours was to collect the Golden Apples given by Hera to Zeus as a wedding gift. Apollonius has two interpretations of the task, one in which Herakles just steals the apples, leaving Ladon alive, and the other in which Ladon is mortally wounded. He further describes how some years later, Jason, returning from Colchis with the Golden Fleece, hears the Hesperides lamenting over the still-twitching body of the dragon:

> …they reached a holy place where still on the previous day Ladon, a serpent born from the earth, guarded golden apples…. however, the snake had been destroyed by Herakles, and it lay against the trunk of the apple tree; only the tip of its tail moved freely, as it sprawled lifeless from its head to the end of its dark spine. The arrows had left the angry poison of the Lernaian hydra in its blood…Nearby, the Hesperides lamented in shrill voices…[45]

The constellation of Herakles, named by Ptolemy as Hercules, is close to the constellation of Draco. The constellation Draco - Latin for dragon - is said to be Ladon. The gods immortalised the two mighty warriors side by side in the sky. In another version of the origin of the constellation myth, the goddess Minerva battled and killed a dragon. She tossed the beast into the sky, where it became frozen over what is known now as the North Pole. The juxtaposition of the constellations appears to show Herakles in combat with Draco. The interpretation of Herakles as the Archangel Michael, and Draco as the Serpent, demonstrate how the dragon myth was continued and interpreted through

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[44] Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* c.100 A.D. after Ogden, p.20.

[45] R L Hunter, *Jason and the Golden Fleece :The Argonautica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.131.

developing cultures which followed on from the classical era, when the Bible was being read in Late Antiquity and medieval times. This Christian re-purposing of Classical myth is revealed in the story of Michael with his flaming sword, battling Satan in the fall from Heaven, which is discussed in a following section.

The Colchian Dragon

The protective dragon which guarded the Golden Fleece at Colchis was reputed never to sleep. Jason on his quest to retrieve the fleece had fallen in love with Medea, a witch, and the daughter of King Aietes. Wishing to elope with Jason, Medea promises the Argonauts, 'I shall give you the golden fleece by putting to sleep the dragon which guards it.' As Jason and Medea approach the dragon, they hear 'its awful hissing resounded along the river bank' and it 'uncurled its vast coils …covered in hard, dry scales.'[46] Medea successfully bewitches the dragon to sleep, by the use of magic and drugs, and Jason is able to steal the fleece. However, years later, Jason has still not married Medea, despite fathering her two children. When he declares his intention to marry another, Medea commits several murders, including those of her own children, thus ensuring the end of Jason's family line. She escapes in Helios's dragon-drawn chariot, as previously described.[47]

Here we have a further example of the connection between immortals and dragons. Medea is the granddaughter of Helios, and who can both charm and summon dragons, and also command them. Although not a dragon-slayer, Medea is the first female figure to come to prominence in the tale of the dragon. Subduing and controlling the dragon by means of magic will resonate for women in the future. She may be the first, but she will not be the last, as will be seen in a later chapter.

The Chimera

This is another tripartite creature, gendered female, composed of the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a dragon. Apollonius attributes to Chimera the typical activities of a dragon: destruction, plunder and creating havoc. According to Ogden, the Chimera is the dragon 'that is most frequently and consistently associated with fire breathing.'[48] The Chimera was slain by the mortal, Bellerophon, a son of Poseidon. Bellerophon was assisted by Athena, who gave him Pegasus, the winged horse of the

[46] Apollonius p.132.

[47] See p.16 above.

[48] Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents and Slayers,* p.76.

gods. The Chimera was ironically killed by using her own best weapon of fire against her. Bellerophon coated his spear in lead and threw it straight into her mouth. The heat of the dragon-fire melted the lead, and the molten lead then killed the beast. Bellerophon became the first dragon slayer to be mounted, and this is a development which will continue.

Python

Together with the combat between Typhon and Zeus, the Python-Apollo battle is referred to by Joseph Fontenrose as 'the most momentous of all dragon combats'.[49] Python was the dragon that Apollo had to defeat in order to establish his oracle and temple at Delphi. Not only was the sovereignty of the gods at stake, but their very lives also. These battles continue the theme of gods versus dragons at the creation of the world.

There is more than one version of this combat. Homer's *Hymn to Apollo* tells how the god, searching for a suitable site to establish his oracular shrine, battled a she-dragon guarding a spring at Delphi. The mother of Typhon, '… was a monstrous creature, huge and savage, guilty of terrible violence against the people and the flocks of the land.' Apollo killed the she-dragon, with a poisoned arrow.[50] Homer does not name the beast, but Fontenrose states that 'in later literature it is called Delphyne'.[51] It is interesting to note that although in Homer's version, the dragon is female, Simonides refers to the dragon as male, and names it Python, but there appears to be no explanation for the gendering of the beast. This time the dragon is slain with one hundred arrows, perhaps an example of how difficult dragons are to kill. Zeus accused Apollo of a sacrilegious act, and therefore he must be purified of the blood pollution, which would then enable him to interact with others. Apollo established the Pythian Games in order to purify himself, and in repeated celebration of his victory over the dragon.

One significant difference in these tales of dragons is the variant of the Apollo myth, in which he is said to have killed a real man, a brigand named Python. This is a version told by Strabo, as recounted by Fontenrose. [52] Apollo had killed a brigand, Tityos, in a case of mistaken identity, having told by the Parnassians of another brigand, called Python or Drakōn. Apollo killed this second brigand also, and the Parnassians set fire to

[49] Fontenrose, pp 1-19.

[50] Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents and Slayers,* p.42.

[51] Fontenrose, pp.1-19.

[52] Strabo, a Greek geographer, c64 BCE – after 21 CE. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online. [accessed 27.02.16].

the tent where the brigand lived. The tent is representative of the cave of the dragon, and this symbolic burning became a ritualistic ceremony which was continued in the Delphic rites.

The myths of the Greeks, particularly those of Typhon and Python, are very similar to the Asiatic myths of the creation and the establishment of the supreme power of the gods. It is more than possible, argues Fontenrose, that they were derived from or influenced by them.

> Greece's neighbours to the east and south – the Hittites, Canaanites, Babylonians, and Egyptians – had important myths of combat between god and dragon or similar monstrous enemy…It is [therefore] reasonable to suppose that the Greeks received some myth plots from them. Indeed, scholars have asserted that the Python and Typhon myths were derived from the Asiatic combat myths or influenced by them.[53]

The oral tradition of tale telling was extremely powerful, and in a time when very few ordinary people could read, travellers would carry their tales wherever they went. In this way the myths were perpetuated and disseminated between cultures.

The dragon became a giant or a brigand in human form over the course of time and in other localities although the dragon form remained, in Delphian lore at least, the dominant form. In this way, the Python myth was blended with actual events, and became historicised as an actual being. Thus, a beast is rationalised into the form of a man, and in that form, perceived more acceptable as evil.[54] It is easier to believe in the shape of a man than the more frightening shape of an unseen dragon.

Myths or folktales, constantly moving in place and time, evolve and change endlessly. Each region and age add their own interpretation, thus creating a new version. Details are added, subtracted, or changed. When people and places are changed, a new variant is produced – the same story, but in a different setting with different heroes, be they gods or men. Local gods and/or heroes replace the original ones, but the core of the story remains the same. Roles are changed: hero replaces god, and the dragon evolves into either a serpent, a snake, or a man. However, it changes, the dragon remains central to the myth. The battle for supremacy over nature or foe, both represented by *drakōn*, and the establishing of order out of chaos, making sense of the world to cultures which were naturally becoming more sophisticated, remains the central theme.

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[53] Fontenrose, p2.

[54] Fontenrose, fn. 28, p1-19.

Dragon/Serpent Sires

One other important aspect of the continuation of the viability of the dragon/serpent theme is the belief that dragons/serpents sired some of the greatest Greek warriors: Alexander, Scipio, and Octavian. Ogden's anthology again provides much material on this subject, quoting the second-century Plutarch on the birth and conception of Alexander, 'And once too a dragon-snake (*drakōn)* was seen stretched out beside Olympias' body as she slept.' Olympias was known to keep giant serpents in her chambers, and to use them in the mystic rites and orgies in which she indulged.[55] She was known as snake handler, and after the snake was seen in her chamber, her husband, Philip of Macedon, is said generally to have never visited her bedchamber again. Olympias is also reputed to have told Alexander as he left on his great journey to Asia that his father was not Philip, but Zeus, who came to her as a mighty *drakōn.* In addition to Plutarch, Ptolemy son of Hephaestion also cites the snake-siring, and is summarised by Photius who says, 'Alexander's father was not Philip, but a person of the name of Drakōn, an Arcadian by birth, from whom there actually developed the myth about the dragon-snake (*drakōn*)'.[56] However Alexander was conceived, and by whom, the legend remains that he was indeed the son of the god Zeus, and therefore a demigod in his own right. Alexander's great battles against the dragons he meets from different cultures on his epic journey through Asia are often credited to the idea that he is the son of a god. The accounts of the encounters are very brief, with no specific detail of places or times, or indeed the dragons themselves.[57]

The siring of Octavian and Scipio, along with that of Alexander, is discussed by Ogden, in which he proposes that the myth may have originated 'with or for Octavian-Augustus.'[58] The *drakōn* is depicted as having sexual relations with human women. For this to happen, not only must the woman be compliant, but also unafraid of the beast. This

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[55] D.L. Wasson, (2013, June 01). Olympias. *World History Encyclopaedia*. Retrieved from https://www.worldhistory.org/Olympias/ Olympias of Macedonia c. 375 BCE – 316 BCE Wife of Philip of Macedonia and mother of Alexander the Great. She was known as a snake handler and worshipper. She claimed to be descended from Achilles.

[56] Ogden, *'Alexander's Snake Sire'*, in P. Wheatley and R, Hannah (ed.) *Alexander and his successors: Essays from the Antipodes.* (New York: Regina Books (2009), pp. 137-178.

[57] Jehan Wauquelin, *The Medieval Romance of Alexander,* trans. by Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2012), p.196, p.245.

[58] Ogden, 'Alexander, Scipio and Octavian: Serpent Siring in Macedon and Rome', *Syllecta Classica,* 20 (2009), 31-52 (p.32).

would add credence to the belief that the *drakōn* exerts some form of hypnotic power over humans, and perhaps suggests a source for the serpent's ability to convince Eve to accept the apple in the Garden of Eden. Quoting both Caius Oppius, a friend of Julius Caesar, and the Latin scholar and author Julius Hyginus in the Second Triumvirate age, Ogden tells how Atia, the barren wife of Publius Scipio, became pregnant after a 'huge snake was seen lying by her side in the bed…[afterwards] she purified herself as she would after the embrace of her husband.' Her body later developed 'a mark as of a painted serpent, and she could never expunge it.'[59] Atia gave birth to Publius Scipio who defeated Hannibal in the Second Punic War.

The Roman Emperor Octavian 63BCE -14CE was adopted by Julius Caesar. Octavian claimed after the victory at Actium in 31 BCE that he had divine parentage, being sired by Apollo in the form of a serpent. Earlier however, in the early third century CE, the historian Cassius Dio says his parentage was the reason Caesar adopted Octavian.[60] This would show that Octavian's claim would have preceded the adoption, and Caesar would no doubt be eager to have a child of a god as his own.

Three great human leaders and warriors, therefore, all claimed to be sired by serpents, to which they attributed their great power and divine parentage. Three strong and powerful men all perpetuated the myths of divinity and dragons, tales which are recorded for posterity by respected writers and historians. These leaders can intervene in others' lives and replicate the actions of the gods to some extent. In the ancient Greek world, when men believed that gods walked among them, delivering largesse, or meting out punishment and vengeance, *drakōn* thus represented might and power, sometimes benign, but always connected to divinity - a symbol of struggle and conflict, representative of creation and death, to be overcome or accepted, but always very real. The belief that *drakōn* is real persists.

Roman Dragons

Presumably the Romans would have heard the Greek dragon myths, and as there appear to be few original Roman dragon legends, except for the story of the Roman general Atilius Regulus at the battle of the River Bagrada in 255 BCE, it is feasible that the Romans adapted some of the mythology for their own. Regulus and his army met the Dragon of the River, the companion of the naiads, or water nymphs. The army eventually defeated

[59] Ibid., p.40.

[60] Ibid., p.46.

the dragon with their latest weapon technology, the ballistae, or giant catapults, which fired stone missiles. The beast was skinned, and the skin, which measured 120 feet long, was sent to the Senate in Rome, where it was put on display for one hundred years. The naiads were said to be furious at the death of their pet and cursed the army, 'taking revenge for the killing [of the *drakōn*] by ensuring the destruction of Regulus' army…[and] made vocal lament for the serpent's death.'[61]

Pliny the Elder, the Roman author and naturalist (23-79 BCE) wrote about dragons fighting with elephants in volume eight of his *Naturalis Historia:*

> But it is India that produces the largest [elephants] as well as the dragon, which is perpetually at war with[it], and is itself of so enormous a size, as easily to envelope the elephants with its folds, and encircle them in its coils. The contest is equally fatal to both; the elephant, vanquished, falls to the earth, and by its weight, crushes the dragon which is entwined around it. (Bk.viii, Ch.11).

Pliny also writes:

> Æthiopia produces dragons, not so large as those of India, but still, twenty cubits in length. The Æthiopians are known as the Asachæi, among whom they most abound; and we are told, that on those coasts four or five of them are found twisted and interlaced together like so many osiers in a hurdle, and thus setting sail, with their heads erect, they are borne along upon the waves, to find better sources of nourishment in Arabia.[62] (Bk. viii, Ch.13).

Pliny was a well-respected natural historian and his observations regarding dragons in India and Ethiopia not only substantiate the earlier accounts, but also reflect the belief in dragons as a reality into the first century of the new epoch. His information regarding natural history – and dragons – was commonly reproduced and available in the Middle Ages, and also in the Early Modern period. Thus, later authors had access to Pliny's accounts, which could have influenced their own ideas.

Although previous accounts of dragons have described aggressive and dangerous beasts, the dragon has been noted to have a benevolent bent. One of the sons of Apollo, Asclepius, who had his temple at Epidaurus, had the gift of healing. He is said by Ovid to have appeared before visiting Roman ambassadors in the 'form of a large and gracious dragon' and willingly boarded their ship in that guise to be taken to Rome to establish his

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[61] Ogden, *Dragons, Slayers and Serpents,* p.166.

[62] Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, trans, John Bostock, Ed. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff., *Perseus Digital Library*. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu [accessed March 8, 2016].

cult in that country.[63] Images for Asclepius usually show him with a staff, around which is entwined a large serpent, a form in which he liked to appear when travelling. This Rod of Asclepius is now the universally recognised sign for medicine and healing. It is often confused with the Caduceus, a two-winged staff with twin serpents twined around it, which was carried by Hermes, the winged messenger of the gods. In this way, the idea of drakōn as healer, and benign, was thriving in the Roman world. According to Ogden, the cult of Asclepius flourished into the second century CE, even in Asia Minor 'the Crucible of Christianity', where this pagan cult was still allowed to flourish.[64] In contrast to the very earliest dragons of Mesopotamia and the ancient Greek accounts, the dragon is given a different aspect, being associated with healing, and with divine business. Our dragon is still allied to the gods and can be a force for good as well as chaos.

Conclusion to the Classical Era

Themes merge and evolve. The dragon is almost always associated with water, be it salt or fresh, a spring or a lake, preventing access, guarding sacred places. The defeat of the dragon is symbolic of heroic achievement and attainment, as with Apollo, who can situate his shrine at Delphi once the dragon is defeated. The dragon's weapons are fire from both the eyes and mouth; the breath and the venom are both poisonous. It plunders and ravages, and lays waste to the land. The dragon also either drains rivers and lakes to slake its thirst, leaving none for the human population, or the humans are prevented from reaching the water by the blockade of the dragon. Dragons can beguile and hypnotize their opponents and appear indestructible. The dragon is usually only defeated by turning its own weapons of fire and venom against itself. Medea hypnotized the dragon at Colchis by magic and drugs, Herakles and Bellerophon used the dragons' own poison and fire against them. The dragon's opponent is a god or demi-god, and there is always divine assistance for the hero. There is the struggle for the 'beginning', a conflict for order out of chaos, the battle for survival. Although dragons are usually gendered male, when female dragons are specified, they are always associated with fertility and procreation. This was the theme that began with Ti âmat, the mother goddess of the *Enuma Elish,* the earliest Creation myth, and continued through the Classical age to Python, the mother of

[63] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* as quoted in Ogden. *Dragons, Serpents and Slayers*, p.10.

[64] Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents and Slayers.* p.147.

Typhon. The dragon-slayers, so far, are exclusively male; however, as we shall see in later chapters, there are some women who also take on the role of dragon-slayer.

The dragons and their opponents are equal in the ancient world, and although usually represented as antagonistic, it is the struggle for survival of a species - gods, men, or beasts -that is the focal point of the tales. These tales are carried forward from culture to culture, from age to age, as demonstrations of power and heroism, and the need to overcome obstacles. The stories are not only oral, but they have also been recorded as actual events in epic, myth, and natural history by respected authors such as Homer, Ovid, and Pliny respectively. Their influence carries forward into new cultures and technology. The dragon is alive and well and its tale continues.

Biblical Dragons from the Old and New Testaments

Although the classical and biblical eras overlap, the Bible offers a number of new dragons. Significantly, *drakōn* still exists in some of these writings, and indeed it brackets the stories of the Bible, being present in both the first and last books, Genesis, and Revelation. As our journey with the dragon moves into the ages of the Old and New Testaments, the dragon not only retains some of the characteristics of the ancient concepts but acquires new powers and new symbolism.

The confusion of emerging civilisations is reiterated in the biblical constructions of the events,[65] and there has been much discussion around how the creation conflict of Ti âmat and Marduk was adapted for the Canaanite and pre-exilic Israelite races, and indeed, about which of these two races had the story first. There are various theories as discussed by John Day, from several sources, which will be quoted when relevant in this section.[66] The Israelite version could well be an appropriation of the Babylonian myth of Marduk's victory over Ti âmat at the time of creation. According to Day, however, the Israelite culture was more concerned with the historical, rather than the celestial, origins of their world. The dragon-related references in the Old Testament are of Canaanite, not Babylonian origin.[67]

First let us look at the similarities between the two theories of creation emerging from chaos. The protagonists in the biblical tales are Yam, the Canaanite god of the rivers

[65] Genesis 1:1-7.

[66] John Day, *God's Conflict with the dragon and the sea: echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridgeshire, New York: Cambridge University Press,1985), p.4.

[67] Day, pp.9-12.

(whose name comes from the Semitic word for 'sea') and Baal the storm-god. Yam becomes tyrannical and is overcome by Baal, who is in turn, defeated by the desert god of infertility and death. Baal is rescued by his sister, so he can maintain the annual cycles of rain and drought.[68] Here the conflict is still between non-human foes, battling for supremacy over the elements, and the need for the provision of water for life.

Day cites Ugaritic[69] texts which also refer to the defeat of Leviathan by Yahweh, the god of the cosmos.[70] The physical appearance of Leviathan depends on the culture describing it. Whilst it is always a sea-creature of enormous size and has become the universally accepted term for a whale, Leviathan is also depicted as 'more of a dragon-like creature, covered in a body of scaly armour, with sharp claws, rows of razor-like teeth, with a thinner, more serpentine body. It also has the ability to breathe fire.'[71] The Ugaritic texts also say that Leviathan had seven heads, linking the mythology back to the seven-headed dragon as described by Brandon.[72] This feature recurs in the Book of Revelation, as will be shown.

Because the texts are fragmented and broken, with much material missing, Day questions that '…this Canaanite myth in which the conflict with the sea or the dragon is associated with the creation'. However, he maintains that '…in fact, the Old Testament does associate the conflict with chaos with ultimate origins', and furthermore these Old Testament passages 'contain a conflation of both Babylonian and Canaanite traditions, since the former, in *Enuma Elish,* do associate creation with the defeat of the chaos monster, Ti âmat'.[73] The 'original' myth has travelled West from Mesopotamia to Canaan and the Bible lands. This can only have happened in the oral tradition, and the story of Marduk and Ti âmat has been appropriated for the early Israelites into the defeat of Leviathan by Yaweh – via the conflation with the story of Yam and Baal. All these protagonists are representative of the elements, fire, water, wind, and earth. These are the components that humans need for survival, and therefore have to conquer.

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Texts which were discovered at the site of Ras Shamara in North West Syria in 1929 datable to the second millennium BCE, related to, but older than, West Semitic languages. Dennis Pardee, *Ugarit Ritual Texts*, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (2002), pp.1-2.

[70] Yaweh is also the god of the Israelites, and familiar from the Old Testament.

[71] http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index [accessed 123 March 2016].

[72] Brandon as before.

[73] Day, pp.10-11.

Although Day describes many arguments for and against the link with the creation theory, he states that any themes which exist in common 'must…be attributed to a common intellectual background'… and that it must be '…strongly emphasised…' that because the Old Testament frequently uses the imagery of the 'divine conflict with the dragon and the sea' linked to the creation theory, this leads to expectations that the themes were connected by the Canaanites.[74] Walter Brueggemann adds weight to this argument when he claims 'The materials in Genesis 1-11…constitute a brief theological "history of the world"… [however].. it is evident that [they] have been appropriated by Israel from older, well-developed cultures.'[75] The old stories which are so tenacious, have been adapted into a new era, but retain the same purpose. They are used to instil the idea of an all-powerful creative God, who can also be a vengeful God. This was the principle assigned to the early dragons. Conformity of worship must be maintained to ensure the survival of the world. The dragon is still required as an object onto which people can project their fear.

Snakes and Dragons in the Old Testament

The most widely known biblical *drakōn* is the serpent in the Garden of Eden. First mentioned in the Creation story, the serpent '…was more subtil than any of the beasts of the earth which the Lord God had made.'[76] Despite a direct instruction to Man not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Woman is beguiled into disobedience, flattered by the words of the serpent. In the same way that Olympia and Atia are compliant with the siring-serpents, Eve is compliant with the Edenic serpent, by eating the apple. This is a good example of the dragon-stealth, hypnotic and deceitful, leading to havoc. In this way then, Eve is the instrument of the serpent, itself being the architect of Adam's fall from grace. The innocence and peace of the Garden are destroyed, and Adam and Eve are driven out into the world, cursed to work the earth. She will bring forth her children in sorrow and pain and be forever ruled by her husband. The serpent is also cursed, condemned to crawl forever on its belly, eat dust and be the eternal enemy of the woman '…and between thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and

[74] Ibid., pp.12-17.

[75] Walter Brueggemann. *An introduction to the Old Testament: the canon and Christian imagination,* (Westminster: John Knox Press, Louisville, 2003), p.29.

[76] Genesis 3:1. *Douay-Rheims Bible Online.*

thou shalt lie in wait for her heel' (Genesis 3:15). This is a continuance of the already seen enmity between humans and the serpent/dragon.

Here however, is a very different attitude to the serpent. It is not destroyed or overthrown, as in previous conflicts with a deity, but cursed and reviled. God strangely does not destroy the serpent, which is responsible for the downfall of His perfect creation, but allows it to live, and be perpetually reviled. It is only after the couple are driven out of Eden that 'Adam knew Eve his wife; who conceived and brought forth Cain….' (Genesis 4:1). If this can be interpreted that Eve was a virgin when tempted by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit, this is a very early virgin/*drakōn* pairing, and could be the pattern for later dragon/virgin encounters. It also introduces the Satan/dragon enmity with Man. Although the serpent did not threaten to eat Eve, by its actions Eve's innocence was swallowed up. The breath of the serpent acted in the same way as that of the early dragons, in that her thoughts were poisoned by its venomous words, breathed into her ear. This was a deliberate, malicious action, intended to challenge the deity (God) and bring about the destruction of the perfect creation, for which the serpent will later be equated with Satan. The *drakōn* here does not lay waste to the land, but instead wreaks moral destruction. Adam and Eve are stripped of a life of ease and plenty - 'with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life' (Genesis 3:17). Gone is the idyllic existence eating freely from all the other the trees of the garden.

Why does *drakōn* not approach Adam, we should ask. After all, Adam was the first living creation, given God's instruction to 'rule over… all living creatures that move upon the earth' (Genesis 1:28). Instead, the serpent goes to Eve. Because of her encounter with *drakōn,* Eve [woman] is forever branded weak and treacherous. She is charged with bringing corruption and death into the ideal of perfect creation. The narrative of Genesis nevertheless gives no explanation why Adam is not approached. If indeed Man had been given dominion over all living creatures, he could have sent the serpent away. The perception of Eve as weak and wilful, which has persisted for centuries (and impacts on medieval and Early Modern constructs of women) was a suitable control instrument by which women could be castigated. As punishment for Eve's perceived sin, women were kept 'in their place' and made to be submissive to a patriarchal society, an attitude which would endure for centuries after the Bible was written – by men. Women in medieval and Early Modern texts to be considered in this thesis will bear this burden, and as punishment, some will be sacrificed to, and threatened by, dragons. In these Genesis-influenced fictions and legends, they will be saved by men,

and occasionally by themselves, but always through faith in a deity which originally punished them. Because of Eve's transgression, all human beings are deemed to carry the burden of this original sin.[77] In the reproduction below from the Furtmeyr Bible circa 1465,[78] the serpent has the face and long fair hair of a woman, mirroring the naked figure of Eve holding the apple. The juxtaposition of the two sides of woman's nature reveals the deceptive ability of the serpent, and the innocence of Eve. Not knowing at this point that she is 'woman' and naked, Eve cannot see that the serpent is differently made from herself. It also adds weight to the idea of woman/female being the duplicitous tempter and promotes the medieval tradition of representing evil as female.

From this point in the Old Testament, *drakōn* is used as a metaphor for poison, desolation and evil, a perception that continues in some literature to the modern day. In Deuteronomy 32:33 Moses warns his people that the wine of the enemy of the Israelites 'is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.' Isaiah makes several references to the dragon/leviathan: (13:22, 27:1, 51:9)[79]. Pfeiffer states that 'the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms were enigmatically named Leviathan and the dragon respectively (Isaiah 27:1) [as they] were the chief obstacle to Jewish independence.'[80]

The names are symbolic of the chaotic times that the Jewish people were living through. Isaiah foretells the coming of the Messiah as Saviour of his people. This is expressed in dragon symbolism: in Chapter 27:1 it is said that the Lord 'shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent, and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea'. The punishment will destroy the cities of Babylon and turn them into desolate, empty places. Isaiah 34:13 warns 'And thorns shall come up in her palaces…and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls.' Owls are

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[77] A state of corruption or sinfulness, or a tendency to evil, supposedly innate in all human beings and held to be inherited from Adam as a consequence of the Fall; (the concept of original sin was established by the writings of St Augustine of Hippo (354–430)). *OED On Line* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

[78] This manuscript adorned by the Regensburg Renaissance painter Berthold Furtmeyr (active 1460–1501) is a German Bible containing, from the Old Testament, the books from Genesis to Ruth. After illuminating the so-called London Bible, his oldest surviving masterpiece, Furtmeyr began decorating what is now known as the Furtmeyr Bible between 1465 and 1470. The manuscript came into the possession of Duke Albert IV of Bavaria and the Munich Court Library but was carried off in the Swedish invasion of Germany during the Thirty Years War (1618-48). The Furtmeyr Bible finally returned to the successor to its original home, the present-day Bavarian State Library, in 1960. (Word Digital Library). https://www.wdl.org/en/item/8924/manifest |Accessed 17th October 2017].

[79] 13:22 'And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces…' 27:1 'In that day the Lord…shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent…and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea' 51:9 '…Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon?'

[80] Robert Henry Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (London: A. and C. Black Ltd., 1952), p.442.

proscribed eating, as they consume raw flesh; Leviticus (11:18) and Deuteronomy (14:17-18) both forbid the eating of owls. Owls also belong to the night and darkness, and are therefore solitary creatures, as are dragons. In this context, owls are coupled with the dragon as metaphors for desolation and despondency.

The leitmotif of the dragon and desolation is carried through the Book of Jeremiah, which according to Brueggemann is 'a multi-voiced meditation of faith around the crisis of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE., and the ensuing crises of deportation and loss.'[81] As it was for the early Mesopotamians struggling to make sense of themselves in a new world, so it is for the Israelites who are facing terror and the destruction of their sacred places; a form has to be given to that terror, which humans can recognise and blame. The dragon, not only an unseen enemy, but one which can be imagined and visualised - fits the bill perfectly. Jeremiah repeatedly refers to desolation and destruction where cities will be left as 'dens for dragons' suffering from drought and unfit for human habitation. [82] Jeremiah 51:34 states that 'Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me…he hath swallowed me up like a dragon'. The Lord declares vengeance on Babylon in Jeremiah 51:37 'And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons…without an inhabitant.' *Drakōn* has become synonymous with destruction and is being perceived now as something to be feared, the consequence of not obeying the Law of the Torah, and the Word of Yaweh. The dragon is also relegated to abandoned, empty places where there are no men, on the outside of society. It is now a pariah.

Ezekiel 29:3 refers to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, as 'the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers' continuing the dragon/water connection. Ezekiel 29:9 -12 refers to how the Lord God will deal with Egypt, culminating in: 'And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries *that are* desolate…Thus Egypt 'the great dragon' will become as Babylon – desolate and empty.

Malachi also makes a reference to dragons in 1:3, by God referring to Esau 'And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the

[81] Brueggemann, p.177.

[82] Jeremiah 9:11 'And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons;' 10:22 '…to make the cities of Judah desolate, and a den of dragons'; 14:6 'And the wild asses…snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes did fail because there was no grass'; 49:33 'And Hazor shall be a dwelling for dragons, and a desolation for ever…' 51:37 'And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, and an hissing, without an inhabitant'.

wilderness'.[83] That both the prophets use the dragon as a symbol for waste and desolation cannot be overlooked. I would also say that the dragon is representative of sin in the Old Testament. Being sinful is to be outside the community, cast into the wasteland outside God's protection, and becoming desolate as a consequence. The implications are that non-believers, and those who disobey the law, will be abandoned in the wilderness of humanity, outside society and left alone to suffer the consequences, or punished and destroyed like the Babylonians and Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The Israelites viewed their enemies as outcasts from their society, and therefore they used the metaphor of the dragon as outcast and abandoned in desolate places.

The perception of the dragon has changed from being part of creation, to being symbolic of destruction. From the earliest myths which provided a means of understanding a developing society, the dragon has been symbolic of power, whether creative or destructive. The dragon is also still being written about as a factual creature, used now as a deterrent. Thus, the dragon begins to acquire a negative reputation within the Bible, a reputation which will be assimilated by readers/audiences, and which will continue as the general perception of dragons for many centuries.

The extended Book of Daniel has not only a lions' den, but also a dragon. '*The Idol, Bel and the Dragon'* tells how Daniel refused to worship the dragon as a god against the orders of the king. [84] Refusing to worship any but the Lord God, Daniel asks for permission to prove the dragon a false god, and so slay it. He fed the dragon with lumps of 'pitch, fat and hair' (27) until it burst open. It is after this that Daniel is thrown into the lions' den. Symbolically, the lion is compared with Christ 'in the bestiary tradition.'[85] The dragon is an allegorical allusion to the power of the Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar, who initiated the captivity of the Jewish population in Babylon.[86] Brueggemann pronounces Daniel 'a representative Jew' sustaining the Jewish identity in the presence of indifferent or hostile imperial power.[87] Daniel's wisdom and faith conquers the Gentile threat; he

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[83] Esau was the brother of Jacob, who was preferred (loved) by God.

[84] *King James Bible,* Apocrypha: *The History of the Destruction of Bel and the Dragon:* cut off from the end of Daniel, pp.177-178.

[85] Kara L. McShane, An Arthurian Bestiary 'Lion', *The Camelot Project*, 2003 pp. 1-3 (p.1). '… lion cubs are born dead and are guarded by their mothers for three days, after which their fathers breathe on them and they wake up. This resurrection after three days of death, then, mirrors Christ's resurrection.' <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/theme/lion>. Accessed 19th April 2020.

[86] Nebuchadnezzar II (605 BCE – 562 BCE) King of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He is attributed with destroying the Temple at Jerusalem and initiated the captivity of the Jewish population in Babylon.

[87] Brueggemann, p.351.

becomes trusted by the enemy and is rewarded by deliverance from the threats against his life. Daniel's God of Israel is thereby shown to be reliable and trustworthy if the Jews have faith whilst in adversity. He will reward the faith of his followers – he is all powerful and can conquer the dragon and the lion. The dragon (threat) is becoming less powerful, consequently it can be defeated by faith alone.[88] The power of faith is carried forward to other dragon-slayers in the New Testament.

The dragons of the Old Testament are fearsome and loathsome, in that they represent sin, destruction and abandonment. Their habitation is outside the society of believers and law-abiding people. To live without faith is to suffer spiritual death, and to face physical death without the love of God is to be abandoned in the spiritual wasteland. Whilst dragons are never the main focus of the biblical texts, they serve to underline the peril of not obeying the law and the word of God. The example of Daniel, armed with nothing but faith, emerging victorious from threats of certain death against a dragon, would serve as a shining illustration of the veracity of God's word.

The New Testament

It is in the New Testament that dragon is named Satan. Lucifer the bright one, the son of the morning (Isaiah 14:12) has fallen from grace and from heaven.[89] Luke tells how Christ 'said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightening fallen from heaven' (Luke 10:18). Angels have wings, and Lucifer with burning wings, falling from the heavens, creates an image of a fiery dragon, plunging to the bowels of the earth. The Book of Revelation tells of 'a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems' (Revelation 12:3). The seven-headed dragon is in the tradition of the seven-headed beast of the Akkadian era, shown on page 11 above, and of the seven-headed Leviathian of the Urguratic texts as seen previously. 'And the dragon gave him his own strength and great power' (13:2). The dragon is now a being of immense importance, fuelling and encouraging evil. The dragon stands before a pregnant woman, intending to devour her child 'who was to rule all nations with an iron rod'. (12:5). It is not the intention of this thesis to examine or explain this most complex book of the Bible, other than to make the connection between the dragon and the concept of evil. Revelation continues:

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[88] It is interesting to note that the name Nebuchadnezzar is Akkadian in origin, and springs from ancient Mesopotamian/Sumerian culture. It is also linked to Nobu the son of Marduk who slew Ti âmat and is the Babylonian deity of wisdom. See p.7 of this thesis.

[89] *The Bible with Apocrypha,* as before, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). This version is used throughout the thesis.

> And there was a great battle in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon: and the dragon fought and his angels. And they prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in Heaven. And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world. And he was cast unto the earth: and his angels were thrown down with him' (12:7-9).[90]

The dragon is now of the earth, evil incarnate, and an outcast who has the power to seduce others to evil. The seductive aspect of the dragon is a new departure and mirrors the serpent in the Garden of Eden. This being so, he persecutes the woman, attempting to drown her in a flood of his own creation, but being thwarted by the earth which '…opened her mouth, and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was angry against the woman: and went to make war with the rest of her seed…' (Rev. 12:16-17). A seven-headed beast appears from the sea and the people 'worshipped the dragon which gave power to the beast.' (13:4). Thus, the formula for future English literary dragon-tales is set. Humanity will be the prey of the dragon henceforth, and a woman will be sacrificed for the greater good, usually by those who profess to love her, as will be seen. Again, we see correspondence with the seven-headed beast of the early Mesopotamians. The legend and the fear have survived through the centuries.[91]

The dragon is named as the embodiment of evil and given an identity. From the early days of being part of the creation myth, and sometimes allied with the deities of the time, *drakōn* is now called Satan, who is a creature to be reviled and feared. He is given wings, the fiery wings of Lucifer, and is the sworn enemy of woman and her seed. Christianity has defined him as foul and bestial, deceptive, and dangerous. Images of Satan often show him with a dragon-like tail, claws, and horns. The fiery eyes are those of the dragons of the ancient world, and now he can fly. David Williams tells of the Judeo-Christian belief that '…angels copulated with the Daughters of Cain…' and the resulting progeny '…was distinguished by shining eyes, among other things…which denoted the unnatural mixing of angelic and human natures.'[92] Lucifer and the fallen angels have become monsters. Angels and dragons have wings – the dichotomous representatives now of Heaven and Hell, of Christ and Satan. A dangerous enemy to the

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[90] The analogy of Michael and Saint George will be discussed in a further chapter.

[91] The Norse tradition of dragon tales is also relevant to the English representation of dragons, but is beyond the scope of this thesis, and would distract from its purpose.

[92] David Williams, *Deformed Discourse. The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp.149-150.

Christian striving to live life according to God's law, the satanic dragon will always be nearby, to entice and trap the unwary into sin and corruption. Faith alone will not kill this dragon, as did the faith of Daniel. The heroes of the Middle Ages will require skills honed in combat, weapons, and courage combined with faith. This early material, which has covered so much of time, remains relevant and as will be shown, informs the medieval and Early Modern literary representations of the dragon.

Dragons in the Middle Ages

With the importance of Christian hagiography, the dragon loses its benign aspect and becomes solely an object of terror. There is a change in the interest of the dragon, which come from it being cast in the role of Satan's representation in order to seduce and deceive Christians away from their faith. The physical appearance of the beast remains, however, and is embellished by respective authors as the years progress. By the close of the fifteenth century, Alexander Barclay will vividly describe a dragon of huge proportion, which displays almost human characteristics whilst closing in on its victim.

Ramsey MacMullen claims that the dragon was portrayed 'in earlier centuries and still into Late Antiquity as a legend, an actor in myth, a symbol of evil or of the Devil: for instance, in patristic writings…' He accepts that dragons were said to be real, 'but only in the remotest reaches of India.' [93] However, he then states that '…around the turn of the fifth century they [dragons] appear as facts.'[94] This shows that the idea of and the belief in dragons was firmly entrenched in the psyche of medieval people. The oral tradition, incorporated into the developing written word, imposed the perception of the dragon as fearsome and dangerous, and very real. Stories were collected and reproduced in texts and manuscripts, and in this way, the conviction of the living (but scarcely witnessed) dragon was perpetuated.[95]

MacMullen points out that dragons were known to Augustine 'from both Christian and pagan writings'. [96]Augustine accords dragons, although rare in appearance, the same characteristics as did the early civilizations; living in caves, and with venomous

[93] Ramsay MacMullen, 'Cultural and Political Changes in the 4th and 5th Centuries', *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, 52.4 (2003), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4436705>. pp.465–95. [Accessed 13 September 2016].

[94] Ibid., p.476.

[95] These stories appear in texts such as hagiographies, legendaries, and surviving text collections such as the Auchinleck Manuscript, some of which will be discussed at length in the thesis.

[96] McMullen, p.477.

breath. An early Christian theologian, Augustine was the first to legitimately propose the idea that dragons had wings. He suggests that dragons are capable of flight by referring to Psalm 148:7, which he quotes as "Praise ye the Lord from heaven: dragons (dracones) and all abysses." Augustine first discusses how this relates to praising the Lord. He then continues: 'Dragons live about the water, come out from caverns, fly through the air; the air is set in motion by them: dragons are a huge kind of living creatures, greater there are not upon the earth.'[97] MacMullen also recounts several incidents of dragons encountered by Christians that were 'adapted into official church teaching: that paganism even in its darkest lairs could be confronted by a Christian hero and subdued.'[98] This statement helps us to understand the rise in popularity of stories of the dragon-defeating saints. It also links back to the story of Daniel and the power of his faith alone which defeated the dragon.[99] The dragon-myth became very popular in the fourth and fifth centuries, continues MacMullen, partly due to the 'upward migration' of the lower classes into society. Indeed, he goes further:

> All of a sudden, there are dragons everywhere: not only in Augustine, but in the fifth- century historians Socrates and Theodoret as well, reaching back into late-fourth-century settings, forward to sixth-century writers like Geoffrey of Tours, and so on to the seventh-century pope Gregory in a spreading tradition among many writers of the period and later.[100]

MacMullen refers to this expansion of 'upward migration' of ideas and superstitions and adds 'as a new aristocracy worked its way up from the "middle" classes or from still lower' it brought with it the lingering vestiges of paganism.[101] The affluent and influential classes rose alongside the rise of the Church, and the poorer, lower classes were left behind. Being uneducated and with only scanty attention from the ecclesiastical leaders, they [the lower classes] had been able to 'develop their own ideas in peace [with] no objection to practices they knew from birth.'[102] The pagan belief in dragons, manifested in earlier times, and passed on in the oral tradition, was still very much alive.

Ogden, however, is critical of MacMullen's view as he states 'the ancients never had made any sustainable, definitional or categorical distinction between their fantastical

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[97] Sierra Lopezalles. 'The Evolution of Dragons: From Living Serpents to Mythical Beasts' (California Institute of Technology, 2020), p.17.
[98] Ibid.
[99] See p. 27 of this thesis.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., p.476.
[102] Ibid., p.475.

drakontes and the large snakes of the real world…Nor indeed, is it self-evident that all hagiographers intended their dragon tales to be read fully literally: elaborate identifications of dragons with the Devil himself can suggest otherwise.'[103] Although the modern critical arguments about sources and influences go back and forth, it appears that the uneducated, the illiterate people of the Middle Ages, all of whom were devoutly Catholic, continued to believe in the reality of the dragon. The stories gain popularity, and the written word proves powerful in the spread of legends. Geoffrey of Monmouth writing in the twelfth century, told of the prophecies of Merlin, some of which are dragon-based, and which prophesy war and destruction.[104] One of the prophecies tells of dragons and their importance in the shaping of King Arthur's Britain, as previously mentioned. Geoffrey does not give his own views on the reality of dragons, however he felt the prophecies were important enough to be translated 'at the urging of people of my own generation' including Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, for whom he translated the prophecies 'from the British tongue into Latin.'[105]

The belief in the reality of the Devil and of the dragon as his embodiment flourished in early Christian England. To challenge such an adversary, heroes are still necessary. The dragon-slaying heroics of the early civilizations were carried forward into Christian Britain by means of tales of saints fighting dragons in the hagiographies. According to Ogden these hagiographies are 'the direct heirs of … pagan dragon-fight narratives, … [and] have their roots in the second century CE.'[106] Of course, hagiographies are very much focussed on the good works and lives of the saints, and of their martyrdom. They present saints as an exemplar of good behaviour for the population to follow. During the early of years Christianity, the stories of saints and their suffering were plentiful. The lives of saints were used by the Church to educate and provide examples of how to live a good, pious life, the object of which was to prepare for the shortest possible time in purgatory after death, and so obtain a place in Heaven all the

[103] Ogden, p. 399.

[104] Geoffrey of Monmouth, The Prophecies of Merlin in *The History of the Kings of Britain,* trans. Lewis Thorpe, London: Penguin Books,1966), pp.170-185. There is further discussion of these prophesies in *TFQ* chapter.

[105] Ibid., p.170.

[106] Ogden, *Drakōn,* p.383. *For further reading on dragon slayers of the early hagiographical tradition, see 'The Birth of the Christian Dragon' pp.383-417.

sooner. Saints would surmount difficulties and implausibility such as extreme torture, which will be discussed further in this chapter. The trials of the saints were beyond anything that a layperson would have to endure, and the lesson was that a true faith would withstand all trials and tribulations. As the gods of ancient times faded into antiquity, new heroes were needed to inspire and inform the people. Worship of false gods – that is the ancient pagan ones – was forbidden by the Church. Worship and adoration of saints, however, was allowed and encouraged. In this way, 'ordinary' people could be inspired to greater faith if they followed the examples of the saints. Some saints were martyred and died terrible deaths, yet showed a passive resistance to paganism by enduring torture. A few saints were more proactive, however, performing acts of bravery and skill, whilst maintaining their stance against paganism and prejudice. Some of these active saints became dragon-slayers, symbolically fighting paganism and renouncing the devil, whilst knowing that ultimately, they would suffer and die for their faith. Three of these saints appear in English texts which were popular and familiar in the medieval era, and these are the ones I have chosen to discuss in the following chapters. The legends of St. George, Saint Margaret of Antioch, and Saint Martha of Tarascon all contain significant encounters with a dragon. It is to these medieval works that the thesis now moves.

Saints versus Dragons – The Hero in the later Middle Ages

Where once dragons were defeated by gods and demi-gods, in the Christian world they are now opposed by mortal warriors and martyrs. Women will also have a role to play in what had been exclusively the province of men. However, it will be noted that these human beings of both sexes are later canonised and raised to Heaven. In this, they attain immortality as did the ancient heroes.

This chapter explores the different portrayals of Saint George in his confrontation with the dragon, as they have been depicted in a time span of over four hundred years, by hagiographers and poets. I examine a range of texts, from the thirteenth century *Legenda Aurea* of De Voragine;[107] the early fifteenth century poetry of John Lydgate and the *South English Legendary* through to Alexander Barclay who was interestingly writing on the cusp of the Medieval/Early Modern eras. Barclay's *Life of Saint George* moves the genre from medieval hagiography to a Humanist working as a romance/epic. It is important for

[107] De Voragine is the key medieval source for the inclusion of the girdle in the St. George hagiographies.

this study to note any variations in the dragon itself, and the effect they may have, if any, on the perception and understanding of the dragon.

CHAPTER 1.

Saint George, Dragon-Slayer most chivalrous

Traditionally, George is thought to come from Cappadocia in Asia Minor.[108] He was a knight in the Roman army who refused to offer a sacrifice to or worship the Roman gods, for which he was tortured and ultimately executed.[109] The story of Saint George was widespread in Europe during the Crusades, and it is likely to have been carried back to England by returning military. He was a popular figure throughout Western Europe, where he was associated mainly with agriculture.[110] The name George derives from the Greek *geos* and *ergon*, i.e., earth worker or farmer.[111] George's feast day was celebrated in early Spring 'in order to record advice about planting days through an oral tradition,'[112] and is still celebrated on April 23rd. Samantha Riches refers to evidence of St. George being 'venerated in Gaul from at least the sixth century'. [113] Quite when the tales of George began to circulate in England is not clear, but he is mentioned in several early medieval texts – by Bede in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* which was completed c.731 CE, and by Aelfric in his *Passion of St George* c.1000 – and a church in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, was dedicated to St. George in 1061, almost ten thousand years ago.[114] Many churches in the Middle Ages founded under the patronage of St. George still survive into our present day. According to the Church of England, there are 243 churches dedicated to St. George in England, [115] with three in Scotland and six in Wales,[116] whilst Northern Ireland has just one, in Belfast.[117] Stained glass windows and

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[108]Samantha Riches, *St. George. A Saint for All,* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2015) p.8.

[101]Samantha Riches, *St. George. Hero, Martyr and Myth,* (Stroud. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2005).

[109]Ibid., pp.2-3.

[110] Jonathan Good, *The Cult of Saint George in Medieval England*, (Woodbridge, UK ; Rochester, NY : Boydell Press, 2009). p.32.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Riches, 2015*l,* p.90.

[113] Riches, *St. George. Hero, Martyr and Myth.* p.16.

[114] Ibid., p.19.

[115] www.churchofengland.org. [Accessed July 29th, 2020.]

[116] parish.churchinwales.org.uk. [Accessed July29th 2020.]

[117] www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk. [Accessed July 29th, 2020.]

statuary commemorating Saint George are plentiful throughout medieval and contemporary English churches. St. Winnow's Church near Lostwithiel in Cornwall has a fifteenth century window depicting George and the dragon, just one example of many. Churches were re-dedicated to saints after the Reformation, particularly in the Victorian era, when previous dedications were restored.

Saint George continues the earlier tradition of the male dragon-slayer, challenging the dragon in single combat, armed with little more than his sword and his faith. From the time when George was taken up by the Church and his story introduced into the English consciousness around the middle of the fourteenth century, Saint George has been presented as heroic, devout and the epitome of chivalry. Indeed, so well was he received in England in the Middle Ages that when Edward I (1272-1307) marched his troops into battle against the Welsh, 'the infantry were issued with armbands bearing the cross of St George [and] his armies, when they advanced, marched behind St George's banner.'[118] Riches states that he was first 'explicitly named' as England's patron saint in 1351, [since when] 'the English nation … call upon [St George] as being their special patron, particularly in war'.[119]

It is a well-known story since medieval times that 'Saint George rescued a princess from a dragon', and thus he became the by-word for courage and gentlemanly behaviour, which English schoolboys were encouraged to emulate. At the close of the Middle Ages, Alexander Barclay (c.1484-1582) urged 'englysshe youth' to follow George's example as 'it is both synne and shame' to see such a pattern of 'manly doughtynes' and 'spende thy tyme/in thriftless game'[120] (322-325). However, despite the modern patriotism engendered by George, he was not English, his story is apocryphal, and he was much more than just a dragon slayer. Whilst the episode with the dragon is fundamental to this thesis, it is necessary to examine the background to this most metaphorically tortured and misunderstood of saints, and to discover why the dragon legend is so important.

Being a knight gives George higher social status; it also raises him to the level of a soldier of Christ, or *miles Christi*. He is almost always depicted in armour and is reputed

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[118] Marc Morris, *A Great and Terrible King: Edward I and the Forging of Britain* (London: Windmill Books, 2009), p.187.
[119] Riches, 2005, p.21.
[120] Alexander Barclay, *The Life of St. George*, ed. by William Nelson (Oxford: Oxford Universtiy Press, 1960), p22. All further references to this edition will be indicated by line/page number in the main text.

to have been resurrected and armed by the Virgin Mary herself, whose champion he is.[121] Samantha Riches claims that this concept grew as 'it afforded the pious an opportunity to unite their interest in this very popular saint with the ultimate female figure of devotional fervour.'[122]Thus, there was an opportunity for control of the population by the church - instilling the fear of the devil (dragon) alongside the worship of the Holy Mother, again, the dichotomy of good and evil.

George not only allegedly fought in a real war, but also in a moral war against his persecutors, the pagans. This duality is more in keeping with the demi-gods of old. There is also the added kudos of his chivalry that found expression through George's dedication to the Church, protection of women and children, and possession of infinite gallantry and *gentillesse.* These qualities ally George with the medieval mentality of the Knights of the Round Table; the nobility of King Arthur and the Court at Camelot. Romance texts were growing in popularity as the Middle Ages moved on. Sir Thomas Malory's (c.1415-1471) *Morte d'Arthur* (printed in 1485) told of courtly love and chivalry, knights, and a dragon killed by Lancelot.[123] Although faith was apparent, the romances were based mostly on earthly, secular love, but some also featured dragons. Saints' lives, however, whilst telling of great courage, also preached the lesson of faith, chastity, and the power of the love of Christ. The dragon survived in the tales of saints as an object to be defeated, representing as it did both the Devil and paganism. Poems, flowers, and music would win the heart of a lady fair, but courage, steadfastness, and faith in the face of danger, death and paganism would win a place in Heaven. Eleanor of Provence (c. 1233-1291), the mother of Edward I (1232-1707), is said by Marc Morris to have been an avid reader of the tales of King Arthur and his court.[124] These tales were amusing and didactic, proclaiming the virtues that aristocratic society adhered to. Courage, loyalty, honesty, and generosity as well as prowess in arms were to be attained and retained. Thus, although brought from France to England, the characterisation of George replicated the knight of the English romance tradition and acted as a role model for young noble gentlemen, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

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[121] Riches, 2005, p.21.

[122] Ibid., p.68.

[123]Sir Thomas Malory, *Complete Works* Ed. Eugène Vinaver, Second edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). p. 118, p.296, pp.513-600. The dragon is guarding a tomb, but there is no other explanation, it is simply there to be killed. It would seem to be an expected rite-of-passage detail for a knight to kill a dragon.

[124] Morris, p.9.

The values which were the core of the chivalric code were bravery, courtesy, honour, and gallantry towards women. Laura Ashe states this code of 'courtly love' or fin' amor – of behaviour of ladies and lovers – 'is believed to have originated in twelfth-century Aquitaine in France and practiced in the English courts from the 1300s to the 1500s.' [125] These values went further than the code of conduct in battle and were the strict rules of the behaviour of a knight. They were the values which were always associated with George, the purest of knights and the focus of this chapter. They were also qualities much to be desired in a King of England. The prologue to the Middle English hagiography the *South English Legendary* states: 'Men wilneth muche to hure telle of bataille of kynge/Mad of knightes that hardy were that muchdel is lesynge'[126] ['People greatly want to hear stories of kings and of knights who were bold and were not lies]. Martyrs and saints are 'hardy…and studevast in bataille'[strong, stout-hearted, and valiant and steadfast in conflict].[127] Thus the idealistic vision of English knightliness is transferred to George, together with the glory and sanctity of a holy martyr.

As well as bravery and chivalry, George was also the patron saint of agriculture, warfare, and crusading, all of which were closely connected with the way of life in medieval England. [128] Together with his knightly qualities, George was depicted as someone the people listening to/reading his story could relate to; especially as he is associated with agriculture, which was the lifeblood of medieval England. Martyred in the late-third or early-fourth century, George became the focus of devotion and his tomb in Palestine was said to have been seen, along with accompanying miracles, 'by pilgrims to the Holy Land [including] Theodosius, Antoninus and Epiphanius the Monk.'[129] If miracles were witnessed, then George was truly a saint.[130]

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[125] Laura Ashe, "Love and Chivalry in the Middle Ages." *The British Library*, The British Library, 17 January,2018, http://www.bl.uk/medieval-literature/articles/love-and-chivalry-in-the-middle-ages. [Accessed 18.04.22]. In the twelfth century, the French scholar Andreas Capellanus wrote widely on this subject, including a list of thirty-one rules to be followed in the pursuit of courtly love.

[126] The *South English Legendary* is a Middle English (13th to 14th-century) hagiographic collection, best preserved in BL Harley MS 2277 and Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 145, which contain 92 narrative lives, extremely varied in length, usually including one of two prologues and often including a life of Christ and/or temporal items.

[127] Heather Blurton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Rethinking the South English Legendaries* (Manchester; New York : Manchester University Press, 2011), pp.4-5.

[128] Jonathan Good, *The Cult of Saint George in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2009), pp.32-37.

[129] Ibid., p.21.

[130] It is highly possible that English pilgrims visited the tomb, but I can find no written record of this.

Undoubtedly, however, George is primarily remembered in English legend and literature as a heroic dragon-slayer. fighting in the defence of innocence and purity, in the name of Christianity.[131] George faces a dragon representing paganism. The dragon analogy is being manipulated to serve the ends of the scribes/authors and the Church, in order to instil in the audience/reader a sense of fear of adhering to a proscribed religion. Nevertheless, the dragon is still an object of fear and revulsion, and something that must be defeated. Whereas Homer (p.18 above) used the dragon/serpent as a symbol of power and protection, in the new religion the dragon is something to be protected against.

George was the subject of much interest throughout the Middle Ages, and was often depicted in art, statuary, and literature. From the many, I have selected four texts about George which span the Middle Ages from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, chosen to give a range of dates and perspectives. In this way I will demonstrate how the perception of George and the dragon episode changes over time. The texts are of different genres and also show a development in sophistication in terms of narrative and character development. The time span encompasses the first known textual reference to George in England through to the middle of the Tudor period. I am focussing solely on the encounter with the dragon for the purpose of my thesis; the subject of George's martyrdom is not encompassed by this discussion.

Jacobus de Voragine (c.1229-98) wrote the *Legenda Aurea (LA)* circa 1260. This contains the first textual reference – written in Latin but later available in Middle English – to Saint George in the literature of the European Middle Ages. It also introduces a dragon into the tale. The earlier Greek and Latin texts concentrated on his martyrdom, with no mention of a dragon. The *LA* was widely read and very popular in the medieval period. William Caxton (1415-91) translated it into English and Wynkyn de Worde printed it in 1512.[132] Secondly, John Lydgate (c.1370-c.1451) was commissioned by the London Armourers to write his *The Legend of St. George* to be represented onto a wall hanging for the main hall of the Guild of Armourers. [133] Thirdly, *The South English Legendary (SEL*) contains the poem *St. George and the Dragon* in the East Midland Revision, c.1400.[134] Finally Alexander Barclay wrote *The Life of Saint George* in

[131] The background to George and his standing as patron saint of England will be addressed in Appendix ii.
[132] Good, p.113.
[133] Henry Noble MacCracken, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate* ed. E.E.T.S. by K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., and by H. Frowde, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1911).
[134] Blurton and Wogan-Browne , p.4.

1515.[135] It is pertinent to this thesis to examine these four texts, using the *LA* as the original standard. In this way, the importance of the dragon episode to the texts can be seen, as well as what the dragon represents and how it was understood by the authors in relation to their perceived audience. The different genres and their impact on the audience/readers will be examined, leading to an analysis of what George and his dragon meant to different readers before the Reformation.

Most versions of the poem naturally have common themes: the virgin princess sacrifice, the girdle, the Church, the stream, and the baptism. Not all the texts include all of the themes, but it is relevant to examine the significance of these inclusions, before analysing each of the four texts in chronological sequence.

Sacrifices[136] were rituals invented by the earliest people, to appease the gods. Practised by ancient civilisations, including the Mesopotamians where this dragon trail begins, the sacrifice was thought to ensure benevolence and protection from the unknown. The earliest hero, Marduk, defeats Ti âmat in return for being made king, and he offers her divided body to the gods. It becomes the sky, holding back the gods, and separates the salt and fresh waters. This allows the land to be cultivated and calm is restored from chaos. Humans are created to be assistants to the gods, the crops grow, and civilization prospers.[137] The pagan concept persisted throughout the ages, however, as Robert Flaherty points out, 'blood sacrifice is linked to the cultivators, not the hunters.'[138] It is therefore a human decision to give a blood sacrifice, not one demanded by the gods/dragons. With the advent of the Judaeo-Christian religion, sacrifice becomes a vexed issue: God warns against the eating of blood in Leviticus 17:10. 'I will even set my face against the soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people'. The sacrifice to end all others is that of Christ, the 'lamb of God' slain to save humankind, a slaughter repeatedly celebrated in the Eucharist. The dragon, however, has no divine sanction, and reputedly takes – or is offered – a human sacrifice; this is a sign that the dragon is evil and outcast.

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[135] Alexander Barclay, *The Life of Saint George* ed. by William Nelson, (Oxford: E.E.T.S., Oxford University Press, 1960).

[136] *M.E.D. Online,* 1.(a) The act of offering a life (animal or human) to a deity as an act of propitiation or homage, a ritual slaughter, often followed by immolation of the victim.

[137] Brandon, p.9.

[138] Robert L. Flaherty, *Sacrifice* in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.) March 23, 2017.
< http://www.britannica.com/topic/sacrifice-religion> [Accessed 3 July 2017].

There is, however, a paradox here. The Christian martyrs St. George and St. Margaret eventually become willing sacrifices themselves; they are ultimately tortured and die for their faith. Margaret prays to see her enemy (p.70) and is immediately confronted by a dragon. She could be eaten, and is indeed swallowed by the beast, but is saved by God's Grace. After defeating the dragon/demon she suffers horrific torture and goes happily to her death, sure of her reception in Heaven. George likewise defeats a dragon and goes on his journey to willingly face his own torture and death. The martyrs are 'scapegoats'[139] for the hatred and fear of the pagan rulers they defy, fulfilling the role that will ultimately be accorded to the dragon itself. René Girard postulates that

> 'Apart from certain intense beliefs, the scapegoat no longer appears to be merely a passive receptacle for evil forces but is rather the mirage of an omnipotent manipulator shown by mythology to be sanctioned unanimously by society.'[140]

Whether George or Margaret can be viewed as 'passive receptacles' is debatable, as both show marked aggression towards their respective dragons. Their passivity towards their final punishment is in no doubt, but it is of course the Church which is the 'omnipotent manipulator' pursuing the theme of denouncing paganism, whilst at the same time extoling the self-sacrifice of the martyrs.

The act of sacrificing people to the dragon is itself a form of worship - the dragon is a false god but must still be appeased. When sacrifices to the hagiography dragon are mentioned, the animals are the first victims, and then when they fail to appease the beast, people, including innocent children are offered up. However, the dragon (Satan or paganism) will not go away. When the dragon has not been satisfied, the ultimate sacrifice for the pagan king is his virgin daughter. The princess in the Saint George legend is dressed as for her wedding, an anointed sacrifice, a bride of Satan instead of Christ. Women are bound to patriarchal obedience, so the virgin princess goes obediently, albeit sadly, to her fate.[141] The parallel of the ultimate pagan sacrifice (princess) with that of the ultimate Christian sacrifice (Christ) is hard to miss. Sacrificial victims must die to save the rest of the city or the world. As George saves the princess and she converts to Christianity, so Christians are saved by the ultimate sacrifice

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[139] *O.E.D. Online* **2.** One who is blamed or punished for the sins of others.

[140] René Girard, *The Scapegoat,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (London, The Athelone Press, 1986), p.46.

[141] Bonnie S. Anderson, and Judith. P. Zinsser, 'Traditions Subordinating Women' in *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present. Vol. I* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), pp.26-66 (p.33). The Chapter gives a wider discussion of the history of female subordination.

of Christ. It is also not unreasonable to suggest that to a listening audience, or to a reader, the threat to the pagan city and the timely intervention of St. George would be instrumental in dispelling any lingering traces of paganism and false gods, entertaining them whilst reinforcing the devotion of all Christians.

Another common theme in hagiographic dragon texts is the girdle. Princesses and St. Martha lead subdued dragons by their girdles. St. Margaret binds a demon with her wimple, which is also a signifier of chastity. To find the key medieval source of the relevance of the girdle, we go back to the *Legenda Aurea.* Jacobus de Voragine writes in *The Assumption of the Virgin* [142] that after her death, when the Virgin Mary ascended to Heaven, Thomas the disciple was late and did not see it happen. As proof to "doubting" Thomas, the Virgin dropped her girdle to him. The girdle thus became a symbol of proof of chastity and as a protection for women. It is doubtless from this source that the girdle assumes importance in dragon-slaying legends. The theme recurs in most versions of the Saint George legend, and also in the story of Saint Martha. Birthing girdles inscribed with prayers were common in medieval and Early Modern times and were used to petition Mary and Saint Margaret (of whom more later) to intervene against pain and death in childbirth, as they were believed to hold magical properties.[143] Thus the girdle is a powerful representation of the power and importance of their virginal owners, and of the redemptive might of Christianity. Chastity is the most powerful weapon against a dragon. It is this that subdues the dragon: it cannot rebel against the Mother of Christ, and God's chosen handmaiden.

There are other recurring themes in the different versions of the Saint George legend: the building of churches, magically appearing streams, and mass baptism. After the dragon is killed, George in every version lectures the citizens on the folly of paganism. He then performs a mass baptism, committing the city to the acceptance and worship of Christ. George orders the construction of a Church to be dedicated to the Virgin Mother, and from the foundation of the church springs a crystal stream or well of pure water. This of course is the very analogy of baptism and rebirth. Having examined the motifs which are common to all the versions of St. George, I will begin the analysis of my chosen texts, in chronological sequence.

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[142] *L.A.* pp.463-483, p.468.

[143] Joelle Mellon, *The Virgin Mary in the Perceptions of Women : Mother, Protector and Queen since the Middle Ages* (McFarland, North Carolina, 2008), p.93.

Saint George in the *Legenda Aurea (The Golden Legend)*

The *Legenda Aurea*, often referred to in English as *The Golden Legend*, is a collection of hagiographies by the Dominican Friar Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1229-98). Written in the mid-thirteenth century, 'its purpose was to foster piety among the faithful, in the view of West.'[144] It was widely read in Europe until the sixteenth century, and it is the source of all subsequent English texts about St. George. Offering a condensed version of George's life and martyrdom, it is also credited with the introduction of a dragon into the story.[145] The dragon appears in the Book of Revelation, and it is highly likely that de Voragine introduced the dragon as the recognisable enemy of Christ. There was also the added entertainment factor of the battle with the dragon, which would make the oral delivery of a friar or priest relating this saint's life more memorable. Previously there had been no dragon episode; George's apocryphal history was that of a martyred Roman soldier, supposedly in the army of the Emperor Diocletian (A.D.244 - A.D.311). Refusing to sacrifice to Roman gods, he was tortured repeatedly by dismemberment, boiling, poison and finally beheading. A gruesome end, but a powerful reinforcement of the message of faith, as George was magically restored from all his torture until the beheading, when he was taken up into Heaven, beloved of Christ. His refusal to submit was said to lead to many onlookers being converted to Christianity.[146] This mass baptism motif is present in every Saint George story.

The dragon is introduced by de Voragine as 'plague bearing' and with poisoned breath. The Book of Revelation says, 'And I saw from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs.'[147] This is the blasphemy against Christ which issues from the beast and the dragon. In early Christian times blasphemy is reported as 'plague' or venom, which would attempt to poison the Christian mind against Christ and the Church. Infections and plagues were rife in the medieval era, and it would take only a small suggestion to impress upon the medieval psyche the interpretation of plague as the work of the devil. The breathing of fire also links back to the pre-Christian fire-breathing dragons: Humbaba

[144] Delno C. West, 'The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History by Sherry L. Reames' (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 1985), in *The American Historical Review*, v.91.2 (1986), pp. 376-77.
[145] David Scott Fox, *The Saint With Three Faces,* (Berkshire: The Kensal Press, 1983), p.23.
[146] Riches, 2015*,* pp.2-3.
[147] Revelation 16:13.

in *The Legend of Gilgamesh,* the dragon defeated by Beowulf*,* and the dragons fought by Bellerophon and Herakles.

The dragon is gendered male, again from Revelation, '…he [the dragon] was cast unto the earth' (12:9). As with dragons of old, the dragon lives in water in 'a pond as large as a lake'. George 'happened to be passing by' as the virgin princess is heading for the lake. When George asks the reason for her tears, she begs him to leave her to her fate, or he too will die. George's response is that he will 'help her in the name of Christ.' At this point a dragon is introduced for the first time into the story of Saint George. Always renowned for his faith, here George demonstrates it by 'arming himself with the sign of the cross,' a public demonstration of Christianity before a city of pagans. The dragon fight is told in one very simple sentence: 'But George, mounting his horse and arming himself with the sign of the cross, set bravely upon the approaching dragon and, commending himself to God, brandished his lance, dealt the beast a grievous wound, and forced him to the ground'.[148] At his instruction, the princess wraps her girdle around the neck of the wounded dragon, which follows her 'like a little dog on a leash.'[149] The fearsome, terrorising beast of a dragon is thus diminished to the status of a pet, easily controlled by a young girl. The townspeople run away, but George directs them not to be afraid because 'The Lord has sent me to deliver you from the trouble this dragon has caused you.'[150] George then commands the king and all his people to be baptized, after which, he declares he will slay the dragon. This he does, not with his lance but with his sword.[151] The use of the sword reflects the tradition of earlier dragon slayers, for example Marduk. George – additionally as it is a saint's life – is destined for martyrdom and wields the sword of truth.

The death of the dragon, the final extinguishing of the 'plague bearing beast' is the reward the citizens gain for accepting Christ. Ryan states that 'On that day twenty thousand people were baptized, not counting the women and children.'[152] A great church was built to honour the Virgin Mary and Saint George, and a sacred spring flowed from the altar, 'whose waters cure all diseases.' Again, de Voragine draws on Revelation

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[148]William Granger Ryan and Eamon Duffy, eds., *The Legenda Aurea: Readings on the Saints,* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp.238-242 (p.239).

[149] loc. cit.

[150] loc. cit.

[151] Ibid., p.240.

[152] loc. cit.

(22:1): 'And he shewed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.' The crystal stream and the building of a Church dedicated to the Virgin Mary are recurring themes in the future tales. George refuses all reward and asks that the money is given to the poor. He also gives the king four instructions about how to live a good life for God: the king should take care of the church, honour the priests, assist with the devotions, and take care of the poor. A medieval literary tradition of instructions for princes is followed here, rendering the story didactic as well as a conversion narrative.[153] George then takes his leave, and the tale continues with George's torture and martyrdom at the hands of the pagan prefect Dacian.

The dragon episode is only a minor part of the tale. However, though brief, it is persuasive and frightening, used as a construct to demonstrate the power of God, and the wisdom of being baptised into his protection, rejecting paganism. It also shows George as humble, chivalrous, and brave, and being proven in his faith that God will protect him. It is a simple, didactic story glorifying God and Christianity. The dragon is gendered as male, lived in a 'pond as large as a lake' and its breath poisoned everyone who came within reach. These are the only characteristics and attributes described by Voragine, and they are quite clearly taken from the Book of Revelation.

These characteristics – male, associated with water, and breathing death – have survived through time from the very earliest description of dragons. What they (or the dragon) represent, however, has changed. Originally the dragon represented the struggle of primitive people to make sense of the world around them. It was a being to be revered and feared, sacrificed to, and appeased for the good of all. As Christianity took hold, the dragon developed into the symbol of evil, associated with Satan and his eviction from Heaven. If, indeed, this is the first mention of a dragon in the hero myth of George, the male gendering would be easy to associate with Lucifer. As Lucifer was cast out of Heaven, he became the embodiment of evil, known as Satan - the dragon as detailed in the Book of Revelation 'who is called the devil and Satan'[154] With the advent of Christianity, the dragon thus represents paganism, rebellion, and non-belief. Hagiographies and didactic texts preach of the importance of being a good Christian, and the dragon has been

[153] A genre of political writings from the early Middle Ages through to the Renaissance, which gave instructions for rulers on some aspects of governance and behaviour. One of the most well-known of these manuscripts is *Regiment of Princes* by Thomas Hoccleve, created 1411-1432, BL Arundel MS 38. The tradition was initiated by Aristotle (384-322 BCE) who advised his pupil Alexander [the Great] on aspects of ruling. George instructing and educating the king is in keeping with this tradition.
[154] Rev.12:9.

adapted for this new age. It is, however, still being used as a metaphorical means of controlling how people were to behave.

De Voragine feels no need to enhance the dragon in any way – it is simply symbolic of the horror of not belonging to the Christian faith. The author offers no explanation as to why George kills a beast that has already suffered 'a grievous wound and has been reduced to the status of a harmless captive, other than as a reward to the people for being baptized. It also replicates the actions expected of a hero, to kill the beast. The final destruction of the dragon with the sword can be construed as symbolic of how the sword of truth [God's word] will overcome the dragon [Satan]. The readers and the listening audience will perceive the evil nature of the dragon. They will be encouraged by George's courage as a Christian knight, taking on a fearsome enemy to save the maiden. The romance element of the damsel in distress will provide entertainment, whilst the chivalry and humility of George is an example to young men how to conduct themselves. Courage, prowess of arms, humility, *gentillesse* and faith were the tenets to live by for young gentlemen of breeding. Young women of the same classes were expected to be obedient, noble, courageous, have faith and chaste, and be protected by their menfolk.

John Lydgate, *The Legend of St. George*

Approximately two hundred years after the *Legenda Aurea* was written and had gained popularity throughout Europe, a newer version of the tale of Saint George and the dragon was produced. The author was John Lydgate (c.1370-c.1450), a monk of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds. A prolific writer, he produced 'more than 145,000 lines and wrote in almost every genre'.[155] Lydgate was greatly influenced by Geoffrey Chaucer and wrote in a similar narrative style. [156] He became closely connected with the royal court as an official poet and rhetorician who might be called upon to write for 'numerous official occasions.'[157] Lydgate was commissioned to write *The Legend of St. George* 'at the request /of tharmoriers of London for thonour of theyre brotherhood and theyre feest of Saint George'.[158] It is a reasonable assumption that armourers who would produce armour and weapons for the King and princes would have heard the name of Lydgate: when

[155] Daniel T. Klein ed. *The Medieval British Literature Handbook* (London: Continuum, 2009), p.69.
[156] Lois Ebin, *John Lydgate* (Boston: Boston : Twayne, 1985), pp.2-8.
[157] Ibid., p.8.
[158] MacCracken, p.145.

seeking a poet to write in honour of their Guild premises, a writer of the best calibre would be the one who had royal approval.

The Guild of St. George of the Armourers[159] was instituted in 1322, and since 1346 the Armourers' Hall has stood on the site of 'The Dragon and Five Shoppes' on the corner of Coleman Street and London Wall.[160] The Guild developed from an earlier craft fraternity of armour makers originally for social and religious interchange but increasingly for the protection and improvement of their craft'.[161] Jasmine Kilburn-Toppin explains the craftsmen:

> 'were bound together through …shared standards of respectability and dedication to a patron saint; usually a figure associated with their particular workshop practice. As one of the most revered warrior saints throughout Christendom…[George] was naturally favourite among armourers' guilds across Europe, and the London Armourers were no exception.'[162]

Members and patrons of the guilds often bequeathed valuable objects and commissioned statues, stained glass windows and the like to be held in their memory after death. 'In 1428, John Amflesh, who had been Master of the guild in the previous year, gifted to his guildsmen "the hallyngs to the high deysse [dais]", an impressive set of "steyned" or painted textiles…which combined a visual representation of St. George with celebratory textual verses by the poet John Lydgate.'[163] Unfortunately no records of the work carried out, or of the finished decorations survive.[164]

Lydgate wrote his poem at a time of increasing interest in Saint George. In 1384 Edward III founded the Order of the Garter in honour of Saint George. [165] In the same year Edward founded the College of St. George at Windsor. The existing chapel was then

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[159] Now known as 'The Worshipful Company of Armourers and Brasiers'.

[160] Lisa H Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown, *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, *The New Middle Ages*, 1st edn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.144.

[161] I am grateful to Peter Bateman, Clerk of the Armourers' Hall for this information regarding the origins of the Guild. Further information is from the website https://www.armourershall.co.uk.

[162] Jasmine Kilburn-Toppin, 'Material Memories of the Guildsmen. Crafting Identities in Early Modern London', in *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions,* v.176, E. Kuijpers, J. Pollman, J. Miller and J. van der Steen, eds. (Leiden:Brill, 2013), pp165-181, p.167.

[163] Ibid., p.175.

[164] Confirmation by the Clerk of the Armourers' Hall, Peter Bateman, that no useful records survive. 'There may be records in our archive at the London Metropolitan Archive of its commissioning and of the work carried out in the Hall but I doubt it. My experience of the early archives (and this would be really early) is that such things are rarely detailed. Moreover, what early archives we have are often smoke- and water-damaged and hence as good as useless.' Email dated 27 September 2017.

[165] Ian Mortimer, *The Perfect King : The Life of Edward III, Father of the English Nation*. (London: Vintage, 2008), p.263.

re-dedicated to 'the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Edward the Confessor and St. George the Martyr'. Edward III invoked the protection of the banner of St. George for his armies, as Edward I had done a hundred years earlier in his wars against the Welsh.[166] He promoted the valour, chivalry, and religious commitment of George, and was largely responsible for George being adopted as the patron saint of England. On 23 April 1349, Edward held a 'great tournament at Windsor during which he formally instituted his Order of twenty-six men who would joust and pray together once a year, and conduct themselves everywhere like proud Arthurian knights.'[167] The tradition of the Knights of the Order of the Garter meeting to worship on St. George's Day still exists. Lydgate refers to this founding of the Order in the second verse of *The Legend of St. George:*[168]

> In whos hounnour siþen goon ful y oore
> Þe thridde Edward of knighthood moost entire
> In his tyme, bassent at Wyndesore
> Founded þordre first & þe gartier,
> Of worþy knights ay frome yeere to yeere
> Foure and twenty cladde in oo lyueree
> Vpon his day kepte þer solempnytee. (8-14)

The popular belief is that Edward picked up a garter dropped by a lady at a ball, and tying around his own leg, pronounced '*honi soit qui mal y pense'* (shamed be the person who thinks bad of it) toward people who sniggered. This statement has been the motto of the Order of the Garter ever since.[169] Further building was carried out to St. George's Chapel by Edward VI and Henry VII, well into the Early Modern era, to house the ceremonies of the Order.[170]

The high status and the Order, and the strong association with St. George, were well established by the time that Lydgate wrote his poem. *The Legend of St. George* survives in four fifteenth-century manuscripts; the base text for Middle English Text Series edition is Trinity MS R.3.20 (1450–75), pp. 74–81 (*MP*, 1:145–54), collated by MacCracken with Trinity College Cambridge MS R.3.21 and Bodleian Library MS 2527 (Bodley 686).[171] Within a long poem of 245 lines presented in rhyme royal, also

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[166] Morris, p.187.

[167] Mortimer, p.26.

[168] Cooper and Denny-Brown, p.151.

[169] Mortimer, pp. 263-268.

[170] David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p.181. Farmer gives a detailed account of the cult of St. George.

[171] Robbins Library Digital Projects, University of Rochester Middle English Texts Series is the base text for Lydgate.

known as the Chaucerian stanza, (as first used by Chaucer in *Troilus and Creseyde*),[172] Lydgate devotes 147 lines to the dragon episode. The length of this section of the poem is probably due to the piece being originally for a wall hanging to decorate the dais of the Armourers' Guild Hall, as mentioned above. Positioned there, it would be visible to all in the room while attention was focussed on the speaker or activity taking place. Taken from the translation of the *Legenda Aurea*, the text also bestows on George the chivalry and virtues of the Knight. These are the defence of the church, widows, and virginity 'with swerd of equytee'[justice] (34). The dragon is introduced as 'A gret dragoun, with scales siluer sheene / Horryble, dreedful, and monstruous of sight / To-fore the Citee lay boothe day and night/' (40-42). The physical description, the 'siluer sheene', and the monstruous appearance are all Lydgate's own devising; he has embellished de Voragine's 'plague-bearing' dragon, perhaps to make it appear more realistic and frightening, and give inspiration to the artist.

Lydgate's choice of vocabulary here is striking. 'Gret' in medieval English was not only descriptive of large, powerful, and strong, but also of swollen and thick – thus 'gret' can be seen as both a positive and a negative adjective. The dragon has both aspects – great strength, but bloated and dense. The 'siluer sheene'[173] depicts the dragon as bright and shining; I have found no other dragon described in this way. Bright and shining is usually a description given to the appearance of George in his armour. This mirroring of the adversaries is interesting. Are both antagonists armoured, or is George facing a hidden part of himself who, despite his chastity, could be attracted to the princess? No further description of the dragon other than this exemplar of foulness occurs in the text. Instead, Lydgate gives close detail of the family of the princess, and their distress at the fate of their daughter. She will not live to marry and bear a grandson for the king, which means his line will die out. As the last gift a loving father can give, the princess is dressed as for her wedding, a theme which is repeated in all the versions of the legend.

> Hir fader wepte, hir moder, boothe tweyne,
> And al the cytee in teerys did so reyne.
> At hir oute goyng hir fader for the noones
> Arrayed her with al his ful might
> In cloothe of golde with gemys and with stoones,
> Whiche shoone ful sheene ageyne the sonne bright. (77-82)

[172]Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, *Oxford Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). It is a stanza consisting of seven 5-stress lines (iambic pentameter) format *ababbcc.*
[173] *MED Online.*

George arrived like a miracle: 'an armed knight / Sent from the lord as in her diffence / Ageynst the dragoun to make resistence' (82-84). The fight with the dragon is allocated only two lines, 'With his spere sharp and kene engrounde/Thoroughe the body he gaf the feonde a wownde' [174] (104-105). The use of 'feonde' is effective. The *MED* definition is 'an arch enemy of mankind, the devil. It is a Northern dialect word, also meaning evil spirit, demon, diabolical being and a grisly monster.' As in the *Legend,* the princess is commanded to lead the dragon back into the city by a band made of her girdle. Here we see the power of the girdle to subdue the beast, as discussed earlier. As if to show there is no physical or sexual attraction between them, George refers to the princess as 'myn owen doughter deer' (110), thus emphasizing his purity of body and spirit, and quite possibly his rejection of any physical attraction. The dragon is unable to resist the girdle and George beheads the dragon in front of the entire population, enhancing his reputation as a powerful representative of his God:

> 'And Saint George, to encresce his glorye
> Pulled out a swerde and smote of his hed
> Þe people alwey taking ful good heed
> How God þis martyr list to magnefye
> And him to enhaunce thoroughe his Chiuallerye' (122-126).

At the first reading, it is possible to interpret this passage as George 'showing off' somewhat in front of an adoring crowd. What is actually happening, however, is that George is increasing the awareness of the glory of God and showing that God has chosen to give him the honour of killing the dragon, thus defeating paganism. It is interesting that Lydgate writes of George beheading an already dead dragon. The dragon can be interpreted as representing the threat of sexual violence and domination – which will be shown in later discussions – and this in turn could allude to the possible pull of attraction that George may have felt for the princess. It is as though George is ensuring that any and all such feelings are well and truly quashed. As before, George then baptises the entire population of the city, turning them 'frome terrour by conyuersyoun' (131). He gives the same instructions for living a Christian life as in the text of the *LA*:

> First þat he shoulde aboue al oþer thing
> Crystes chirche haue euer in reuerence
> Worship priesthood with al his diligence
> Haue mynde on poore, and first his hert enclyne
> Frome day to day to here service devyne. (143-147).

[174] Ibid.

Once again, a church is raised ‘in honnour of Marye/ and in worship of Saint George hir knight’ (134-135). The crystal, healing stream is again present: ‘Amiddes of which þer sprang up anoon right /A plesaunt welle, with strremys cristallyne, / Whos drynk to sek was helthe and medecyne /’ (138-140). Genesis 2:6 reads ‘But a spring rose out of the earth, watering all the surface of the earth.’ The dragon is gone, it is time for a new genesis, a new beginning. The symbolic baptism is another recurrent theme in the George tales. Lydgate writes ‘He made hem tourne, þe kyng and þe cyte / And of oon hert baptysed for to be’ [George turned the king and the people away from paganism and baptised all of them] (132-133). The princess is not offered to George in marriage, and he rides away to his fate. The dragon is symbolic of non-Christian society, and George is winning souls for Christ and the Virgin Mary.

From this it can clearly be seen that Lydgate considered the dragon episode central to the poem and George’s route to eventual glory, as the poem only runs for a further 98 lines. The dragon is a tool to represent the horrors of not obeying God’s law, and to display the virtues of George. The dragon is ungendered, and therefore is simply an entity embodying the dangers of disobedience by either sex to the rules of Christianity. The danger it represents can befall both men and women equally. The dragon lives outside the city – outside the protection of Christ. Any person not living a Christian life will also be outcast, and not be admitted to Heaven. The desire to reach Heaven and spend one’s afterlife in the presence of Christ was the major motivation for the medieval populace. Being cast out, rebellious, pagan, was to be avoided at all costs. The threat and fear of this is projected into the form of the dragon. The pagan dragon is the symbolic outcast who threatens the city of God.

Lydgate gives more space to the slaying of the dragon than does de Voragine, which provides more material for an artistic interpretation. However, Lydgate is also more interested than de Voragine in George’s torture and ultimate martyrdom – which, translated into a mural or a wall hanging would also provide even more opportunity for illustration. Martyrsom is also a common trope in hagiographic narratives. There is little or no evidence that Lydgate’s poem was other than a specific commission, or that it was widely read outside the Armourers’ Guild. As with de Voragine, the purpose of the dragon is didactic. It is there to show how even the most terrible things can be overcome by faith and by adhering to God’s law.

Saint George in The South English Legendary (East Midland Revision) c.1400

I chose this text specifically because it contains the longest addition of the dragon episode of any of the other versions of the *SEL.*[175] The *SEL*, a large collection of saints' lives, was being copied and compiled about the same time as Lydgate was writing his *Legend of Saint George.* The textual history of the *SEL* is complex, consisting of 'over sixty manuscripts and some three hundred separate items in circulation in various textual combination and types of books.'[176] Texts were amended and copied in the vernacular of different regions, and the major manuscripts originated mainly from south of the Humber, across the southern regions of England. The initial collection dates from c.1270 and was most likely made by monks or nuns of the Benedictine Order, initially for teaching purposes. However – as indicated by the vernacular additions – it soon spread to a lay audience where it would be used for entertainment as well as preaching, which could explain the reason for the length of the dragon encounter.[177] This is in contrast to the Lydgate poem, which was a commercial enterprise, aimed solely at the commissioners.

St. George and the Dragon is a short poem of 130 lines presented in a seven-stress (septenary or heptameter) format in rhyming couplets, which as claimed by Blurton and Wogan-Brown 'is predominant, although not exclusive to texts of the *SEL'.*[178] This format is more rhythmic than the Lydgate poem. It would be easier to remember if used to teach, and not as daunting to younger or less educated audiences. The *SEL*, it has been suggested, 'was intended…either for individual reading or for reading in the chamber…[i.e. people being read to] for the same audience that consumed romance…for enjoyment, as well as for education.'[179] The rhythm carries the story along, and an audience would be carried along with it, especially if the orator had a sense of the dramatic.

The *SEL* proposes that God's seed of true faith, planted in harsh ground is watered with the life blood of Christ, and the blood of martyrs completes the cultivation:

> 'Nou blouweth the niwe frut that late bygan to sprynge
> That is to kunde eritage mankunne schal bringe…
> God him was the gardiner that gan ferst the sed souwe
> That was Jesus Godes sone that therefore alyghte louwe

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[175] Anne B Thompson E. Gordon Whatley Robert K. Upchurch, eds., *'St. George and the Dragon: Introduction St. George and the Dragon in the South English Legendary* East Midlands Revision, c. 1400, (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2004), pp.1–3.

[176] Blurton and Wogan-Browne, p.3.

[177] Manfred Gorlach, ed, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary,* (Leeds: University of Leeds, School of English, 1974), pp.313-319.

[178] Blurton and Wogan-Brown, pp.3-19.

[179] Ibid. p.9.

That he seuwe that sed himself so hard was mannes thought
That ar it were with reyn ysprenged hit ne mighte morie noght
With a swete reines deu he sprengde this harde more
With is swete herte blod and yaf his lyf therefore…
Tho bigan this nyuwe sed somdel to cacche more
Ac yute after this manyman his blod ssade thervore.' (I, 1, 1-16)

[Now the new fruit flourishes that recently began to grow and which will bring mankind to its true heritage…God was the gardener who first began to sow the seed, which was Jesus, God's son, who came down low for that purpose. Though God sowed the seed himself, man's mind was so hard that before it was moistened with rain it could not ripen. He sprinkled this hard root with his sweetheart's blood and gave his life to do so…Then this new seed began to take a little better, but even so, after this many a man shed his blood for it.][180]

The above passage is at the beginning of the *SEL* and gives an indication of the material contained in the text. God gave his Son as the first martyr, but mankind did not learn many lessons from the death of Christ. However, there were those who did understand, but they are still shedding their blood – being martyred – for the good of mankind and to spread the word of Christ. The use of the biblical metaphor of growing seed to represent the word of God would be easy to explain to an uneducated audience. [181] The blood shed by Christ, echoed by the blood shed by Christian martyrs, is giving life to Christianity. This could be one explanation for the celebratory and vivid accounts of the deaths of martyred saints – the gorier the martyrdom, the better for the growth of faith in Christianity. The imitation of the suffering of Christ was an accepted path to martyrdom. The gardener analogy, which originates in the parable of the sower, relates to George being the patron saint of gardeners, as previously mentioned. The *SEL* also 'metaphorically transforms' martyrs into knights of Christ, 'whose histories are contrasted with the 'lying stories' of secular romance.' [182] George is, in every text under discussion, depicted as a knight from the outset; his history proclaims him a military man, and his fame in life derives from his single-handed triumph in the fight against the dragon. Whilst in the modern age, most people would instantly recognise that George slew a dragon and saved a princess, only a small proportion of those people would know the remainder of his story, how he was tortured and martyred for his faith. The dragon has always been the best-known part of George's story, and why it has retained such

[180] Ibid., p.4.
[181] Luke, 8:4-15.
[182] Burton and Wogan-Browne, pp. 4-5.

popularity is because it is exciting, exotic, George is full of bravery and chivalry. This is what makes the episode so memorable.

The text analysed here is from a fragment of the Minnesota MS, and notes from the editors reproduced below reveal that is the only surviving fragment of that MS which details the dragon episode.[183] The *SEL* was written in the first half of the fifteenth century, in the South Yorkshire dialect,[184] and it is reasonable to suppose that the author had seen or heard the version of Saint George by Lydgate, adapted the tale into the Legendary, and embellished the dragon episode for entertainment purposes.

The dragon is introduced very early as 'a wonder fowle dragone. /He was both uggely and grete and so lothley to se' (10-11). I note that the dragon in the Minnesota fragment is male as in the *LA.*[185] As with ancient dragons, his breath is lethal: 'And with the wynd of hys mouth many a man he sloghe' (14) and he lives in water 'in the grevys of the banke...of a grete water.' (9) There are no further descriptive characteristics, no wings, and no fire; there is, however, the menace and the evil, and the sacrifice of flesh. The concept of the dragon has hardly progressed through the ages. Its habitat is still the same, and it bears the stamp of foulness and evil.

The focus of this short poem is on the agony of the king at the impending doom of his daughter, his only child. He has her dressed in 'rych qwenes clethynge' (62) as for her wedding, as in previous versions. He mourns for the sons she will never have, whom he would 'heve norischethe in my hall' (64). He tells how he would have given her a 'full ryall crowne' (69), but instead she 'gose sweloghede to be of a fowl dragone' [goes to be swallowed by a foul dragon] (70). This outpouring of emotion by the king against the fate of his daughter is only briefly referred to by Lydgate, but is in keeping with the preceding version in the *LA*. It brings humanity to the story, which in turn would make it more emotive to a listening audience. There is a long conversation between George and the princess, and, as in the *LA* and Lydgate versions, she begs him to flee for his life. The *SEL*

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[183] The fragmentary *SEL* episode of St. George and the Dragon, printed here, is found in University of Minnesota MS Z.822. N.81 (folios. 215v-216v), about whose medieval provenance little is known, except that it was written in the first half of the fifteenth century in the dialect of South Yorkshire (just north of Hull) … The longest addition of this kind, however, is the dragon episode in the legend of St. George, which has unfortunately been lost from Addit. 3039 (along with all the legends for March-April), but which is incompletely preserved in the Minnesota manuscript.

[184] E. Gordon Whatley, Anne B. Thompson, Robert K. Upchurch, eds., 'St. George and the Dragon: Introduction', in *Saints' Lives in Middle English Collections,* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2004). http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/whatley-saints-lives-in-middle-english-collections-st-george-and-the-dragon [Accessed 14 October 2014], University of Minnesota MS Z.822. N.81 fold. 215v-216v.

[185] I will address the gendering of the dragons in a further section.

version devotes sixteen lines to George's persuasive questioning, in which he tries to discover the reason for her appearance and her tears. The princess 'This maydyn tolde hym then hyr car ylke a dele.' [She told him all of her care and worry] (77-93). George's fight with the dragon is given just six lines:

> Bot George umstrode hys horse: agayn this beste rode he,
> Any hym betoke to Jhesu Cryste and blyssyde hym with hys hande.
> Agayne the dragon with herdy herte faste he come rydande,
> And a sper to hym sete and hytte hym full right,
> And to the erth ha bar hym down als a hardy knight.
> And gaf hym many a depe wonde and refte hy allhys might. (100-105)

This poem represents George as a knight in a joust, riding at his enemy the dragon in mortal combat. This is a very visual depiction, adding to the entertainment aspect, and would be instantly recognizable in medieval England. In this version, the dragon is dealt several deep wounds before he is led away. This is a more bloodthirsty portrayal than either the *LA* or Lydgate. To a lay audience who were being entertained by the reading, this would have added a further enjoyment, and one can imagine that any young men in the audience would have their imaginations fired by the knightly hero defeating such a foe. The 'action' part of the story is being developed with the retelling in the ancient oral tradition.

As in previous versions, the princess leads the dragon with her girdle, George declares that he has been sent by Christ 'to delyver yow iwys this fowl dragon' (118) and after demanding the baptism of the population, George despatches the dragon with his sword. The figure of twenty thousand men 'withouten wemen and chylder' (128) who were baptised into the church that day is directly taken from the *Legenda Aurea*. The poem 'ends fragmentarily'[186] possibly due to the fact that there is part of the Minnesota manuscript missing, with just two lines depicting the raising of 'a fair kyrke…Yn the honour of owr swete Lorde and Sayn George the knight.' (129-130). Interestingly, there is no mention of a dedication to the Virgin Mary, or of a healing stream, but again this could be because some of the manuscript is missing.

The emphasis of this section of the poem is on the anguish of the king, and of the forbearance of the sacrificial virgin in trying to turn George's help away. She is aware of her own fate but does not want a fine young man to die too. She has entered into a

[186] This comment from the editors of the TEAMS text is inserted after line 130.

contract that he has no part in. The princess is not aware the George has a 'contract' of his own, to protect and defend the week and helpless - the chivalric code. George's contract is with Christ and is therefore unbreakable by any other man or beast: 'For why my lorde Jhesus send me to this towne/To deliver ye iwys of this foule dragone' (117-118). George believes that he has been sent specifically to that town to save the population from Satan. The dragon, and even the conversion of the populace to Christianity, appear to be given only minor importance. It is the human element that is relevant, the loss of a child and the end of a royal line. However, the meaning is clear. The dragon represents being outside God's law, and that by rejecting and destroying paganism and turning to Christ, all souls will be saved.

Alexander Barclay, *The Life of Saint George*

A new translation of the Saint George story was made by the poet and priest, Alexander Barclay (c.1484-1552).[187] Barclay's first recorded appearance was in March/April 1508 when he was ordained deacon and priest at Exeter Cathedral. Educated to a 'high standard', Barclay was also a prolific translator who drew heavily on Italian humanist sources, particularly for his 1515 work, *Eclogues.* He published his translation of Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* in London in 1509.[188] Through it he attacked a range of contemporary social practices and groups, his social criticism reflecting some of the concerns of humanist writers in the early sixteenth century. Humanism turned away from medieval scholasticism and revived interest in Greek and Roman thought.[189] The humanist approach favoured a less pedantic and more unscholarly way of writing, in order to be more appealing to a wider, perhaps younger, audience. Joni Henry maintains this literary style 'attempted to combine the traditional religious genre of hagiography with humanist literary style.'[190] that is, writing in imitation of classical Latin literature. She further claims Barclay's translation had a 'pedagogical objective to provide young boys with access to correct Latin and, more importantly, with moral instruction' – an approach which is 'distinctly humanist.'[191] Barclay was a monk of the Benedictine Order of Ely

[187] *ODNB.* Alexander Barclay, Nicholas Orme, 2008.

[188] Ibid. Written in German and translated into English by Barclay, *Ship of Fools* was printed in London in December 1509 by Richard Pynson.

[189] Desiderius Erasmus, 1469- [1466?].

[190] Joni Henry, 'Humanist Hagiography in England c.1480- c.1520' *Literary Compass* 10/7 (2013), 535-543 (p.535).

[191] Ibid., p.541.

[Cathedral] Priory in 1513, but sometime between 1521 and 1528 he became a Franciscan friar, possibly at Canterbury. As a friar his life was less cloistered or constrained. He no longer wrote poetry, but gave his time to study, and in his final years after the Reformation, became a clergyman in the newly Protestant English church. [192]

In 1515, while at Ely, Alexander Barclay translated the *Life of Saint George*[193] from the earlier 1507 poem by Baptista Spagnuoli (1448-1516, also known as 'Mantuan')[194]'at commaundment of the right hyghe/and mighty Prince Thomas/duke of Norfolke/tresorer & Erle marchall of Englonde'.[195] Thomas Howard, second Duke of Norfolk (1443-1524) served at Court during the reigns of Edward IV, Richard III (of whom he was a staunch supporter), Henry VII, and Henry VIII. He was elected to the Order of the Garter by Richard in 1483. Despite being imprisoned in 1485 for his support of Richard, he regained favour with Henry VIII, and was appointed Lord Treasurer on 16 June 1501. Due to advancing years and failing health he withdrew from court in 1522. His upbringing had been chivalric in character and modelled on his father's career as a soldier and gentleman. He was a courageous soldier, a diplomat and a devout Catholic.[196] These are the qualities of George, and it is quite possible that Howard saw himself as a continuation of the tradition of George: patriotic, military, and devout.

If, as Barclay claims, Howard requested the translation of *The Life of Saint George* shortly after he was created Duke of Norfolk in 1513, it begs an important question: did Howard see himself reflected in the eponymous hero, defeating the danger of the Plantagenet in defence of the Tudor; or was it a source of flattery for Henry VIII, who constantly sought reassurance of his popularity? It is documented that Henry VIII loved pageants and liked disguising himself as various heroes, whose qualities he was sure he possessed.[197] It is highly likely therefore that Saint George would be among them.

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[192] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020)

[193] Alexander Barclay, *The Life of St. George,* ed. William Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

[194] An Italian humanist poet, his Latin version 'omits things which he thought were fantastic…[although] numerous classical references embellish his poem…ancient mythology created a serious problem' (William Nelson in Barclay, *Life*, xix). All further references are to this edition.

[195] Op.cit., p.3.

[196] *O.D.N.B.* as before.

[197] Henry's reign was characterised by lavish ceremonials and pageantry which all contributed to reinforcing the power of the King… Part of the pageantry harked back to earlier codes of chivalry such as those of the … Order of the Garter, which were honours bestowed on select individuals. Pageantry included 'revels' using fancy dress and disguises, jousting and tournaments. Heraldic devices on flags, streamers, banners, and shields were displayed on these occasions using coats of arms controlled by the College of Heralds. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/henryviii/power/.

Henry's vanity was well known, and an accomplished courtier could gain favour by presenting such a king with perhaps a printed copy of this work. Richard Pynson printed 'a quarto volume of sixty leaves not long after the date of its dedication, 3rd August 1515.' [198] Although there is no proof that Henry ever saw this work, it is a reasonable assumption to make that Howard might show it to the King, or let it be known that he had commissioned the translation.

According to Barclay's editor, Spagnuoli 'had compared the dragon which George spitted with a long list of similar monsters encountered by heroes of classical antiquity …to reinforce its historicity' and was also totally convinced of the actuality of the dragon's existence. Barclay, however, was not convinced and his Early Modern editor, William Nelson, states that Barclay 'felt a moral scruple about admitting pagan myth into a poem concerned with the life of England's patron saint.'[199] Indeed, Nelson refers to the authenticity of George's 'apocryphal tale', 'there are two kinds of apocrypha, those which deny Christian beliefs and must be rejected, and those which may be credited, but because the authors are unknown may not be taken as articles of faith'. [200] The story of George fits into neither category, according to Barclay. Spagnuoli, 'famous and unimpeachable' has written the poem. [201] Hence the story of George 'is not apocryphal, and no blame can attach to its translator'[202] and Barclay therefore accepts no responsibility for the veracity of it. Although Barclay considers the tale apocryphal, because of his admiration for the classics and Spagnuoli, he believes it may be credible. To clarify, Barclay is not convinced of the authenticity of the story of George and the dragon, despite having great respect for the integrity of Spagnuoli. The editor, Nelson, appears to be sitting on the fence – he allows that the tale could be apocryphal, but it may have some credibility. This is a very confusing issue, but what is clear is that Barclay was very much taken by the story of George as England's patron saint and delivered a very poetic and entertaining version of the legend.

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[198] *Introduction to Barclay*, pp.ix-x. It would appear that the MS held in Trinity College, Cambridge 'is a unique copy, apparently.' It is 'a quarto volume of sixty leaves which was printed by Richard Pynson not long after the date of its dedication, 3 August 1515.' I have found no records of any further printed editions, and the editor does not acknowledge any other editions in the Introduction. xxii.

[199] Barclay, p. xxii.

[200] Ibid., pp.i-xxii.

[201] Ibid., p.xxiii.

[202] Ibid.

Spagnuoli, and therefore Barclay, allude to pagan mythology in George's defeat of the dragon, and there are obvious comparisons with some of the ancient battles - Bellerophon and the Chimera, for example – as seen previously.[203] The heroism and courage of the two heroes is strikingly similar. Bellerophon is mounted on Pegasus and George is also mounted in his fight with the dragon, the only Christian saint so to be, and both kill their dragon through the mouth with a lance. Although other medieval texts have George mounted, none of the earlier medieval versions I have discussed describe this manner of the killing of the dragon. In addition, George's sword fails to kill the dragon, breaking on the beast yet failing to deliver the mortal blow. This can be seen as a metaphor for fighting the eternal struggle against evil; as is the extended fight in which both protagonists are shown to struggle, and exhibit bravery and determination. The fight against evil is neither easy, nor quick. George engages with the dragon, rather than despatching it with a single blow. Barclay owes no allegiance to the Armourers' Guild, in contrast to Lydgate, and extends the battle with the dragon, adding excitement and interest to the poem. For the Armourers, Lydgate writes of a single thrust with a lance, a nod perhaps to the quality of their workmanship, while Barclay increases the weapon power to two lances, and for the first time, George is given use of his sword other than for beheading an already dead dragon.

Far longer than any of the previous texts at 2715 lines, Barclay's poem is an epic, much more flamboyant in language and detailed in description than other versions. In this genre, the hero is usually descended from the gods, or is protected by them. Barclay's poem appears to be pulling together all the previous threads of earlier dragon tales. The link between the earliest demi-gods and the late medieval hero is thus continued. The previously mentioned *Gilgamesh* is an early example of epic poetry, and Barclay continues this tradition. Presented in stanzas of rhyme royal after the style of Lydgate, Barclay's description of George as a youth of beauty, valour, honour, and physical strength is reminiscent of the demi-gods and heroes of the ancient tales. The classical and ancient god-hero dragon-slayers are perfect and unblemished, and so is George. He is chaste, devout, and fearless, characteristics common to the ancient heroes and knights of romance. However, this epic poem is not a romance as there is no courtly love and indeed

[203] Barclay, p.24, p36.

George clearly refutes physical love by refusing the offer of marriage to the princess.[204] George is chivalrous and courteous, the perfect knight.

Barclay's poem is about the heroism and physical perfection of George. The description of George's supremacy amongst his peers could be applied to an Olympian athlete of ancient Greece. His prowess with weapons and his physical agility is more than any other; 'none erthly man was borne' (277) with the attributes of George. Barclay recites a list of names of ancient gods and heroes, including King Arthur, none of whom could compare to George,

> Let grece them boste / of Pollux and Castor[205]
> Let them of Fraunce / vaunte them of charlemayne
> Let Troyans / commende theyr Parys and Hector[206]
> And brytaynes exale / the boldness souerayne
> Of worthy Artour[207] /but to be true and playne
> No true hystorie of these / nor fayned fable
> Can make theyr name / to George comparable. (302 – 308)

Comparing George favourably to such Classical exemplar shows the influence of humanism on Barclay's writing. Mortal man is the true hero, not the gods. Barclay also appears to be making a statement of nationhood – English George is better by far than any other country's hero, real or in fable. Pure in thought, word, and deed, untouched by carnality and unmindful of wealth and possessions, George was set apart from other men as 'he was predestynate and chosen of God/in whome was all his love' (308-309). From the very beginning of the poem, the reader is aware that George is destined for greatness. His description is not unlike that of Sir Galahad in Malory's *The Tale of the Sankgreal.*[208] Malory describes Galahad as 'passing fayre and welle made…seemly and demure as a dove …never so fayre a forme of a man. [209] Galahad is totally without sin, a perfect man, virgin and pure – it is this perfection which allows him to succeed in his quest for the

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[204] Romance concentrates on courtly love, rather than heroism, although of course there are heroic knights.

[205] Twin sons of Leda in Greek mythology. Known for extreme bravery, they accompanied Jason on *The Argo.* Pollux was thought to be the son of Zeus, and therefore a demi-god. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Penguin, 2011), pp.206-208.

[206] Sons of King Priam and Queen Hecuba. Paris abducted Helen, the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. which was the cause of the Trojan War. Hector was courageous, noble, and courtly, and the fiercest warrior. Homer, *The Iliad,* trans. by Robert Eagles, Introduction and Notes by Bernard Knox. (Bath: The Bath Press, 1990).

[207] King Arthur, the legendary King of the Britons who was known for his fairness and justice, and sense of honour, even when betrayed by his wife Guinevere and his best friend, Sir Lancelot.

[208] pp. 515-593.

[209] Ibid., pp. 517.

Holy Grail. George exhibits the same characteristics which will ensure his own success. George faces dangers and temptations along his path, but as befits a Christian martyr, rejects them all. George knows that he will ultimately face death for his faith but is happy to do so. As Barclay is translating his version from the original Latin by Spagnuoli, it is clear that Spagnuoli did indeed draw on his knowledge of the classical and ancient gods and demi-gods defeating dragons in order to bestow the same qualities in George.

The dragon and its environs are introduced by Barclay at line 492: 'a depe dyche/ the water moche vnpure.' This is a breeding ground for serpents, adders, and all things 'foule and venmous' especially a 'great dragon odyous' (504). Barclay continues the tradition of placing the dragon in or near water which began with the very earliest appearance of Mummu-Ti âmat (p.9 above). Barclay genders the dragon as female, the only one of the selected poets in any of the chosen texts to do so. Riches concurs that the Barclay dragon 'is definitely referred to as female,' and is the only text to make this reference.[210] The original dragon in this thesis, Kur, is also female, the 'mother of all dragons.' Portraying the dragon as female incorporates the idea that the female is the original evildoer and producer of the evil seed, as was Eve who committed the 'original sin'. Riches suggests that by killing a female dragon, George slays 'his own sexual urges: he has overcome the temptations of the flesh'.[211] This is also reflected by George's refusal to accept the princess as his bride. She is young, beautiful, and willing, but George resists, courteously. He is maintaining the chastity which is necessary for his martyrdom. George is gentle in his refusal saying 'My mynde disposyd/is nat to maryage/But from all lust/to kepe my body fre' (1200-1201). This chivalrous rejection can cause no offence to the princess or her family.

The dragon has the characteristics and description that are in keeping with the monsters of the ancient tales. She has wings, scales – as does Lydgate's dragon – venomous breath that kills, a long neck, and a flaming bright throat. Compared to other poets who simply describe the dragon's appetite for flesh, Barclay clearly draws an image that brings this dragon alive. He gives a detailed account of how 'Hyr wombe infectyf' killed everything in the ground where she dragged her belly across it. The womb,

[210] Riches, 2005, p.175. Many of the illustrations in Riches' book *Hero, Myth and Martyr* quite clearly depict female genitalia on the dragon. The Chapter 'The Dragon Myth: Light Versus Dark' (pp.140-178) discusses the subject of the gender of the dragon in detail.
[211] Ibid., p.99.

normally the centre of protection and reproduction, is here vilified as an organ of death and destruction. Medieval opinion was that the womb was the centre for all problems in women, and in a female dragon this idea would be exacerbated to a great degree. Even the surrounding woodland and birds are destroyed and killed by the heat and poisonous breath which the dragon exudes. Indeed, Barclay compares this dragon unfavourably to the Hydra of Lerna[212] as being 'More ferefull / fell / and crueller,' and suggests that even Hercules would have trouble dealing with her (519-520).[213]

The sacrificial virgin princess is given much more depth and form by Barclay. She is not just a token sacrifice, for she has a name, Alcyone, and is likened to the ancient goddesses Helena and Andromeda (768-770).[214] Here the influences the Classics and of Geoffrey Chaucer are apparent, and Barclay's readers would have been aware of the connection. Ovid used the name 'Alcyone' for his tragic heroine in *The Metamorphoses.* [215] Chaucer, like Spagnuoli, drew on classical connections for *The Legend of Good Women,* where the name Alcyone also appears. Barclay's Alcyone is noble and regal, and it is she herself who grieves for the marriage and children she will never have. This makes a fictional character more human and would probably gain her even more sympathy amongst a listening audience, as well as engendering more fear at her terrible fate. In the other texts, it is the king who delivers this speech, rendering the princess almost incidental to the proceedings as the focus is on the male characters. Alcyone calls on her pagan gods to save her from her fate, through six stanzas of the poem (768 – 819). It is an interesting feature that the female counterparts face each other in a stand-off as the dragon is preparing to strike. The stance is reminiscent of Eve facing a female serpent in the Garden of Eden, as previously mentioned.

> Styll stode the monster / with iyen bright as fyre
> Maruaylynge in maner / of the ryche aray
> And of the fayre virgyns / precious attyre
> For the other were / put nakyd forth always

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[212] See page 18 above.

[213] Middle English Dictionary, ed. by Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn and Robert E. Lewis, 17 vols (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1952–) defines 'wombe' as 1(b) the stomach of an animal. However, Barclay's use of 'hyr' as a female possessive pronoun strongly indicates the dragon is female. My interpretation of 'wombe' as a reproductive centre is therefore viable.

[214] Alcyone was the name given by Geoffrey Chaucer to his grief-stricken queen in *The Book of the Duchess*, and it is also the name of the wife of Ceyx, who committed suicide due to her grief (also in *BotD). The Riverside Chaucer 3rd edn,* Larry D, Benson, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 329-346.

[215] Written in 8AD, it is a Latin Narrative poem tracing the creation of the world to the deification of Julius Caesar.

Yet by the bondys : she knewe it was hyr pray
Wherefore with Iawes / and throte displayed wyde
Fast to the virgyne : began she for to glyde. (834-840)

This victim is clothed, unlike the others, which denotes that she is someone of higher rank and importance. The dragon is also brightly arrayed, she has eyes as bright as the princess's clothes and jewels, and although the previous victims were naked, she recognises the princess as prey because of her bonds. The dragon can take her time, she approaches slowly, due to her great size, with her jaws wide open. Barclay's almost anthropomorphic description of the dragon eyeing up her prey, as a woman would examine a rival, gives an added terror to the scene:

Hyr mighty body: somewhat made slow hyr pace
So that hyr meuhynge / was slake as one might se
Hyr body semyd volt / or some great place
If on from farre / beheld her quantyte
Hyr tayle came after /with great prolyxyte
Leuynge the prent : behynde hyr in the way
Hyr wyges abroade / she drewe vnto hyr pray. (841-847)

The dragon's approach is slow and calculated, designed to cause the most distress to a helpless victim. With open wings as if to clasp the helpless princess in a deathly embrace, and the huge tail slowly following behind, the dragon evokes a horrific sight to contemplate.

Although resigned to her death, Alcyon is furious that no-one will help her, and calls on her gods to 'Declare your might / shewe forth your power nowe' (819). She is not a weeping, hapless maiden as are the princesses in the other versions. Although she is terrified, she is also brave, while the watchers on the walls 'For fere they quaked' (825). The pagan gods, however, do not answer, nor save her from certain death.

The dragon fight itself has much more detail and length than in the earlier texts. George is more heavily armed than in any of the previous versions, perhaps an indication of his prowess in battle. He has two spears in addition to his sword, and he has the ever-present spiritual protection of the cross he makes 'deuoutly on his brest' (853). Trusting in God more than his own prowess, George spears the dragon through her open mouth and 'thorough throte / into the wombe fast went' (871). Having made the dragon female, the poet then gives the hero the first strike into the womb, the reproductive centre, thus destroying not only her body, but her function as a female. This 'thrusting' into the womb

is an overtly sexual action, and again the question of George destroying any physical attraction to the princess can be raised. This destruction of the reproductive centre is a symbolic killing of any passion he may feel for the beautiful princess. Along with her body, he will destroy any chance of future dragon offspring. As dragons are evolved from and are kin to *drāko*, they are capable of giving birth to live offspring like vipers. In more recent times, they are depicted as egg-layers, like some snakes. It should be noted here that the spearing through the throat into the womb is a new detail provided by Barclay, as previous accounts have referred to a mighty thrust to the body. Barclay is the only author to specify a dragon with a womb, which could be interpreted as a misogynistic view by the poet, specifically targeting the womb as the source of evil.

George's horse shows more fear that the rider, but gathers courage from his master, who remains mounted through the fight. George draws his sword which, aided by Phebus (Apollo, the sun god) shines so brightly that it appears to be a sword of fire. He attacks the dragon with such vigour that the sword breaks in his hand:

> The valyaunt george : of courage was egall
> And drewe his sword / glasyd so clere and bryght
> That the flaming shadow /stroke on the cyte wall
> By Phebus aydyd : and strykyn with his light
> With suche weapen : the champyon bold and wyght
> All drede expulsed : the monster dyd withstande
> Tyll tyme his swerde : was broken to his hande. (890-896)

Barclay is drawing on classical imagery again with Phoebus Apollo, the Sun God, and also the biblical image of the cherub Uriel with a flaming sword, guarding the gates of Eden against Satan. George engages in such close fighting with the beast that their swords cannot withstand it. The other versions have George using his sword only after the dragon has been fatally wounded. To ensure the end of the dragon, George spears her again through the 'throte and herte', bursting the bowels, and leaving his spear in situ (895-904). George's final thrust of the spear can again be seen as a gross parody of penetration of the female dragon and male supremacy, or indeed of birth, bursting through the bowels and stomach.

In Barclay's version, the dragon is left in place to die. It is not bound by the princess with a girdle and is not led into the city to be ceremoniously despatched after George obtains the agreement to baptism. The threat has been negated, and after all the ceremonies to come, the people will deal with the body. George remains mounted as he accompanies Alcyon back into the city, and from this position of superiority and power he

berates the king and the population for their idolatry and paganism. He blames them for the presence of the dragon: 'My mynde is sure: so knowe ye certanely / The wicked fendes: whose temples ye honour / Had sende this dragon / your people to deuour' (1020-1023). George continues for eight stanzas to lecture the people on the error of their ways in turning away from the one true God and the love of Christ.

George is successful in persuading the inhabitants of the city to accept the baptism of repentance. Lines 1079 -1113 have been destroyed from the original Spagnuoli text, and bearing in mind the text surrounding this gap, one could speculate that the missing lines could depict George exhorting the population to accept baptism as the way to Christ. Following the mass baptism, George ordains ministers to teach the population and live amongst them. George teaches about the Nativity, the Circumcision, and the Epiphany, with instruction on how to keep these feasts correctly: 'He them infourmyd / in wrytynge playne and clere' (1141). After all the baptisms and instruction, the body of the dragon is burned, and the story of the fight 'Was portrayed on the wallys /and gate for a memory' (1148) and to ensure the immortality of George's name. In addition, a yearly play [which had been the practice since the Middle Ages] would be performed so that future generations would know of George's heroism, and of the conversion of the city to Christianity: 'They ordered playes / of all the hole hystory / …Whiche theyr ofsprynge / to keep it in memory' (1157-59). Dragons were built and used in performances from the early fifteenth century, their entertainment value appeared to be unfailing.[216] The poetic account of the painting on the walls [*ekphrasis*, from the Greek for description, a common epic device] mirrors the wall hangings of Lydgate's 'steyned halle' and Homer's description of Agamemnon's serpent-decorated armour; it is a device also often used by Chaucer, most notably in *The House of Fame* and *The Knight's Tale.*[217] In both texts, Chaucer uses vivid imagery of art and sculpture which tell tales of bravery and immortals. Barclay is evidently drawing on the influence of Lydgate, who in turn draws on Chaucer, with Homer underlying them all. The tale of St. George grows and changes with the shifting styles of literature in English. The admiration of a hero remains the same.

[216] Philip Butterworth, 'Late Medieval Performing Dragons', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 43 (2013), 318–42 <https://doi.org/10.5699/yearenglstud.43.2013.0318>.Accessed 12 August 2021. Mechanical dragons, some of which breathed fire, were used in performances from as early as the fifteenth century. 'The dragon even survived beyond the dissolution of the Guild [of St. George in Norwich] itself,' p.327.
[217] Chaucer, pp.37-56, pp. 347-374.

As the episode in Barclay's poem closes, a grateful king and queen offer their daughter in marriage, along with the kingdom and all it holds. George refuses all gifts and instead requests that a church be built to honour the Virgin Mary. As in the other versions of the story, a spring arises from the foundations of the Church, which heals not only the people, but all the earth which was befouled and ruined by the dragon. The power of Christianity is shown to defeat the heresy and expunge the evil of the dragon of paganism. George, also a patron saint of farmers and gardeners, directs the workmen to dig trenches so that the water will flow into the ravaged fields and woodlands. With another long admonishment to adhere to a good and faithful lifestyle to avoid any further catastrophes, George takes his leave, and rides away to his destiny of torture and martyrdom.

Barclay gives just ten verses – seventy lines – to the fight with the dragon. He concentrates more on the appearance and heroism of George, and how he is a shining example of a knight and a true Christian. After the dragon is slain and the city baptised, Barclay gives George seven pages of evangelism during which he gives orders on how the city and citizens are to continue on the new path of Christianity. The dragon episode, albeit full of energy and description, is merely a showcase for the prowess and virtue of George. The main focus is the virtue of Christianity, and the need to abide by the rules.

Medieval Treatments of St. George's fight with the dragon: 'Our ancient word of courage, fair Saint George/Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons'[218]

All four medieval texts about St. George have the intrinsic components of paganism and the hopeless despair which it creates, and of a city ravaged by death and fear of the dragon of non-belief and idolatry. The dragon is always outside the city walls, symbolic of being a pariah, outcast by being non-Christian. It is monstrous, non-human, and therefore non-civilised. George is the heroic knight, pure and beloved of God making him untouchable by the dragon. He is mortal, but Christian. He is protected by his faith, and therein lies his strength. This is how the demi-gods of ancient myths have evolved into medieval Christianity. They are now Christian, they must emulate Christ in their habits and unworldliness, and the love of God; therefore, they must appear to be superior human beings. Because George is mortal, he must suffer and die, like Christ, before he can be awarded the status of saint. Interestingly, it is only Barclay's translation of the humanist

[218] William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, Gen. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 2nd ed., (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008). Richard III. 5.6.80-81.

Spagnuoli's text in 1515, on the cusp of the Reformation [which saw the demotion of the Catholic saints] which does not refer to George as a saint, whilst heaping saintly qualities on the character. This is undoubtedly the influence of the humanism which they both embraced, breaking away from a narrow, scholastic approach to educate by poetry and rhetoric. By discounting the 'supernatural' and emphasising the 'ordinary', Barclay is allowing his audience to see the humanity of George. He is blessed and beloved of Christ, and marked as special, but he is still a human being. He is referred to as a knight and a godly man, and always as simply 'George' . During his fight with the dragon, he is still very much mortal, although protected by his faith.

The presence of a sacrificial virgin in Barclay's poetic translation is a recognition of the blood sacrifice of paganism. A virgin is clean and pure, and this innocence is thought to appease the gods [dragon] and deliver the people from their anger. To a listening audience – and in pageants and plays, a watching audience – a beautiful young person facing such a vile death would be an exhilarating, tense, and titillating spectacle. In all the texts except Barclay's – where the dragon is gendered female - sexual overtones of a powerful male dragon overcoming and consuming a defenceless young female would provide an outlet for the imagination. It would also drive home a strong lesson. Live a good life, behave, obey the lessons of the Church and you will be safe from the dragon/Devil/evil. This makes sense of the world in which the audience/listener live and gives a reason for conformity. Not only does the dragon represent paganism, but also the Devil in this Christian era. Believe in Christ, or when you die your soul will linger in Hell (the fiery belly of the dragon). The penalty of dying without grace was unthinkable. The dragon is rendered devoid of its will by the chastity of the princess. Virginity, and the symbolism of the Virgin Mary's girdle are powerful weapons in the anti-dragon armoury. The authors also reiterate George's chaste status, by writing his refusal of the hand of the princess and making references to her as his 'daughter dear'. The symbolic thrusting through the womb of the dragon in the Barclay text can also be interpreted as a rebuttal of any sexual or romantic attachment to the princess.

The allegory of the fountain springing from the newly built church is truly symbolic of rebirth by baptism. As a child is cleansed from original sin by baptism, so adults who turn to Christ are reborn by baptism; thus, the city ravaged by the dragon is reborn and revitalised by the baptism of the population. They and their city have been saved from Satan and turn to Christ. To quote Walter Christopher, 'The fact that the culminating point of the story, after the slaying of the dragon, is the conversion of all the

inhabitants of the city shows how adept Christians were at adapting an ancient literary genre to the requirements of their faith'.[219] There is also the parallel of clean, crystal waters as opposed to the foul waters where a dragon lives. The purity of George's miraculous streams obliterates the foulness of the dragon's lair.

The four texts examined, although based upon the same source, retell the same narrative, yet are different in their approaches to the dragon. Whilst only Barclay makes a major feature of the dragon encounter, all the versions depict the dragon as the embodiment of evil and the danger lurking outside the confines of the Church. The audiences would be in no doubt that security and safety were within the boundaries of prescribed religion. In the Tudor period, the area of religion was fraught and insecure. Any deviation from the religion of the day, be it Catholic or Protestant, could result in the loss of one's life. Living with such uncertainty, any form of guidance would be taken seriously. Barclay's version is the most entertaining from the point of view of storytelling: a heroic epic which would capture the imagination of his audience, keeping the meaning more memorable. The *SEL* and John Lydgate's versions are briefer and more didactic, but not as entertaining as the version by Alexander Barclay. Time has moved forward, and audiences are becoming more educated. More in the way of storytelling is required as a means of inspiring the imagination.

The pagan dragon was a perfect example of terror and fear. A dragon would burn, lay terrible waste to a city, and eat human flesh. In the Middle Ages, the dragon was an embodiment of the Devil, a metaphor for evil. Saints, many of them armed only with their faith, would defeat these terrible monsters. By overcoming and vanquishing Satan's representative, or Satan himself, they would achieve their objective and sole desire of dying for their faith and entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Christianity would defeat the dragon of paganism, and the saints would set the example of virtue and suffering as the means to do so. The weapons to defeat the dragon were their own attributes of faith, and their avowed chastity.

The dragon has not changed much in the legends of St. George – it is a beast representing paganism and is there to be killed by a Christian knight. Some of the descriptions are more elaborate than others, however I feel this is for the entertainment value rather than any other reason. Nevertheless, the perspective of a woman

[219] Christopher Walter, 'The Origins of the Cult of Sant George', *Revue Des Etudes Byzantines*, Vol. 53 (1995), pp.295-326 (p.322).

encountering the dragon in medieval hagiography is much different, as will be seen in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Medieval Female Dragon Slayers

This section of the thesis examines how the dragon is represented when it is confronted by a female saint. It looks at the differences between the situations and locality of the dragon compared to Saint George, and the reasons for these differences, if any. Again, the texts cover a large period – three hundred years – and are by poets, priests, and hagiographers. The focus of this chapter is on two particular dragon fighters. St. Margaret of Antioch and St. Martha of Tarascon.

There were many virgin saints in the *LA*, [220] but Margaret of Antioch was one of the most revered among women, due to her association with childbirth, and whose life was much copied in other manuscripts, as will be discussed. I have chosen to analyse the use of the dragon in the lives of Saint Margaret and Saint Martha – whose vita is also written in the *LA* – as they were two very different saints, although both encounter dragons. Whilst Margaret lived in the third century, Martha was contemporary with Christ and many details of her life appear in the Gospels. Like Margaret of Antioch, Martha was depicted as dealing with a dragon in medieval accounts of her life. The lives of these two female saints are the focus of the rest of this chapter.

Visits to shrines, prayers to saints, holy days, and naming children for saints would underpin and embellish devotion to a saint. Pamela King explains that 'Saints' cults played a vital role not only in the search for salvation, but as an agent of social cohesion in the Middle English period.'[221] There was community in a cult, which in turn would lead to an exchange of women's views, opinions, and prayers; women could gain knowledge from other women as well as the Church. Questions about marriage and childbirth for example, could be discussed safely and privately. Whilst women were according to King, generally 'excluded from reading devotional material in Latin,'[222] they were able and indeed encouraged to pray together and discuss vernacular devotional material. However, the subjugation that women were under, living in a patriarchal society, was reinforced by the treatment of some of the female saints. These tales of virgin

[220] *L.A.* pp.27-29; pp.154-157; pp. 67-69; pp.368-370.
[221] Pamela M. King, *Medieval Literature 1300-1500,* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p.113.
[222] Ibid., p.123.

martyrs encouraged women to 'internalise and perpetuate their own subjugation to the Latin over-culture.'[223] If the saints could suffer such torment for their faith and for the love of Christ, the challenges in the lives of mortal women could be endured.

In the medieval period, secular women with the most power were the widows, who had inherited money, property, and status; however, they still had no sanction authority in many areas of their lives. Stephen Rigby declares 'women suffered from the systemic social closure whereby they were excluded from the power and status derived from an involvement in the legal system and public life.'[224] Patronage of authors, therefore, was a power tool, enabling women of stature and wealth to have their voices heard influentially in certain areas, for example religion, politics, and the education of children. An example of one such woman is Anne Mortimer, Lady March, who requested John Lydgate to write of the life of Saint Margaret (as will be discussed later in this chapter). Female book owners exercised substantial power over literature as readers, literary patrons and as mothers in charge of the education of their children, according to Susan Groag Bell, [225] whilst Pamela Sheingorn asserts that literacy among women and girls in the beginning of the fourteenth century 'was necessary for them to function in their own "modern world".'[226] It is through such books that women would have access to the life stories of the saints Margaret and Martha, the subjects of this chapter.

The illustration Fig.17 is from a Book of Hours, a prayer book for the laity that developed in late medieval Europe, which was used for private devotion. These works were often personalized for individual patrons and illuminated with miniature paintings depicting the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and individual saints. These books were often passed from mother to daughter and gave precise instruction on how and when to pray, and to whom the prayers should be addressed. The formulaic retelling of saints' lives 'was seen as a form of actual contact with the saint' and saints were viewed as 'powerful

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[223] Ibid., p.122. Also see Anderson and Zinnser *'Traditions Subordinating Women,* pp.26-51.

[224] Stephen H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1995), p.257.

[225] Susan Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture." *Signs*, 7:4 (1982), pp. 742–68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173638.>

[226] Pamela Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother": The Image of Saint Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary" in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, *Women and Power in the Middle Ages,* ed. by Mary C Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp.105-134, (p.126).

intercessors' for the community.[227] The intercessory capacity will be clearly shown in the instance of St. Margaret of Antioch.

In summary, the narrative of St. Margaret is as follows: Margaret was murdered for her refusal to give up her virginity – an anathema in a male-dominated world – as well as her faith. It was her refusal of Olybrius and his sexual advances which drove him to fury, resulting in Margaret's torture and murder. The suffering and torture endured by the female saints mirrored that of their spiritual lover, Jesus Christ. The temptation of female saints took various forms. Generally, it was by the promise of riches and ease in life, made more attractive with the promise of marriage, to a pagan of great power and wealth. When the earthly offers were rejected, and the torture commenced, Satan would appear in one guise or another. The appearance of Satan as a dragon, representing a masculine, dangerous and threatening character, as will be shown in my later discussion of Olybrius.

Saint Margaret of Antioch

Margaret of Antioch was one of the most popular female Saints in the Middle Ages. Margaret is perhaps most commonly known as the patron-saint of childbirth, 'whose origin is lost in the mists of late Antiquity' according to Dresvina.[228] Margaret is well represented in manuscripts,[229] dedicated churches[230], images in stained glass, illuminated manuscripts, stone, paintings and every other medium which could be used. However, there is no evidence that she actually existed. Whereas Martha (John 12:1-8) is a biblical figure, and as such is afforded some credibility, Margaret's legend is largely fictional, not based on any known historical fact. Nevertheless, her story was incredibly popular in the Middle Ages, due to her connection with childbirth, as will be shown in this chapter, and has been preserved in many surviving medieval manuscripts.

Adhering to the common perception and literary portrayal of female saints, Margaret was very young, beautiful, a fervent Christian convert and a determined virgin.[231] Like the legend of St. George, her apocryphal story has its roots in Antioch and she appears to have been known through early Greek and Latin versions of her life from

[227] Wogan-Brown, Introduction, pp.xi'-xii.

[228] Dresvina, p.1.

[229] Including the Auchinleck Manuscript which will be discussed in a later section.

[230] The Church of England numbers 235 Churches dedicated to St. Margaret in the UK, many re-dedicated in the Victorian era. ACNY@churchofengland.org.

[231] An account of the full Legend will be given in Appendix iii.

around the fourth century.[232] With the lack of evidence of Margaret's existence, it is not unreasonable to assume that she was an invention of the Church, a story told to young women to serve as an example of obedience and devotion to Christ. A later addition by John Lydgate to the Margaret legend is her protection for women and children in childbirth. Miscarriage, infection, infant and maternal mortality were very common in the medieval era. Sarah Bryson explains 'Giving birth in the Middle Ages was a dangerous time for women and childbirth did not discriminate. Young mothers, older mothers, poor or rich mothers, all could die not only in childbirth but also due to complications afterwards. Sadly, more than one in three women died during their child-bearing years.'[233] Margaret was to be held in special reverence against these dangers, as will be shown.

The name 'Margaret' is derived from the Latin 'Margarita,' which in turn means 'clean,' or 'something very rare or precious,' a 'pearl'. The concept of Saint Margaret is a total representation of the meaning of her name. Although a typical virgin-martyr narrative (beautiful young girl, willing to die for her faith, wicked oppressor consumed with lust, virgin's death, and the conversion of bystanders) the life of St. Margaret features a dragon, and in addition there is a demon adding more vicarious terror and excitement to the story. Margaret's own behaviour is never meek or compliant when she defies the pagan ruler. Although Margaret was horribly tortured by her captors, my focus will be on the dragon episode and its context, as this was part of her torture.

The medieval texts under examination are: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Legenda Aurea*, which predates all other texts; John Lydgate, *The Lyfe of Seynt Margarete* (between 1415-1426) commissioned by Anne, Lady March (d.1432),[234] John Mirk, *Sermon on St. Margaret*, a dedicatory sermon written at the end of the fourteenth century;[235] and the *Stanzaic Life of Margaret,* based on a fifteenth-century copy (Cambridge University Library MS Addit, 4122). I have specifically chosen these texts to demonstrate how popular and enduring the legend of Margaret is. As before, I will use

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[232] For a full account, see Dresvina as above, f.110.

253 https://www.tudorsociety.com/childbirth-in-medieval-and-tudor-times-by-sarah-bryson/ [Accessed 16 June 2020].

[234] Lady Anne, Countess of Stafford, married Edmund Mortimer in 1415, and would reasonably be expecting to be involved in pregnancy and childbirth. Mortimer died in 1425, and Anne remarried in 1427. This union, to John Holland, the Second Duke of Exeter produced two children, both healthy. Anne died aged approximately thirty-four in 1432, cause unknown. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.*

[235] A short lesson to celebrate the Saint's Holy Day.

Jacobus de Voragine as the foundation text, and I will examine how other authors have described the dragon/demon episode, and the level of importance they have placed on it.

Theotimus and *the Old English Life of St. Margaret*

The meaning of Margaret's name is the opening to de Voragine's account of the story: '[It] is also the name of a precious jewel called *margarita*, pearl, which is shining, white, small, and powerful. The power of the pearl is said to work …against the passions of the heart, and to effect the strengthening of the spirit….She had power over the heart's passions, i.e., in conquering the demon's temptations, since she overcame the devil.'[236] De Voragine claims to be relating the legend as it was written by Thoetimus, 'a learned man'.[237] Imprisoned and tortured for days, Margaret refuses to concede her faith or her body, and is thrown back in her cell. She prays to the Lord 'to let her see the enemy who was fighting her, and a hideous dragon appeared, but when the beast comes at her to devour her, she makes the sign of the cross, and it vanishes' (p. 369). There is no description of the dragon, other than 'hideous'. Voragine ends his account of the dragon there, but continues:

> … as we read elsewhere, [238] the dragon opened its maw over her head, put out its tongue under her feet, and swallowed her in one gulp. But when it was trying to digest her, she shielded herself with the sign of the cross, and by the power of the cross the dragon burst open, and the virgin emerged unscathed.

De Voragine has no real faith in this version, however, and is at pains to let the reader know that he does not believe it: 'What is said here, however, about the beast swallowing the maiden and bursting asunder is considered apocryphal and not to be taken seriously' (p.369). De Voragine was not alone in this opinion. Sherry L. Reames states that 'As early as the tenth century there was concern about the most spectacular elements in the Margaret legend…'[239] due perhaps to growing scepticism about the reality of dragons. It can be supposed, then, that de Voragine included this episode as a form of entertainment whilst distancing himself from the authorship. Thus, he gets credit for writing the legend, but none of the censure for inventing it. What unites both accounts, however, is the sign

[236] *L.A.,* pp.368-370, p.368.
[237] Ibid., pp 368-370.
[238] Voragine does not define 'elsewhere'. This could be a literary device to distance himself as author from a story he has little faith in.
[239] Margaret of Antioch – Introduction. *METS.* (*University* of Rochester: 2003), pp.1-3 (p.1).

of the cross as the power to vanquish evil. De Voragine is careful to include this in both accounts. The cross had long been revered in the West as containing the power of the resurrected Christ, and thus became the most potent weapon against evil.[240]

The dragon can be interpreted as a visible manifestation of the threat of sexual power by Olybrius, whose desire is to possess Margaret by marriage or by making her a mistress. Margaret is determined to remain chaste for Christ. Her determination and faith are her armour and protection against unwelcome sexual advances. Margaret dismisses Olybrius's threats and desires as easily as she dismisses the dragon: 'The prefect: "Unless you yield to me, I will have your body torn to shreds!" Margaret: "Christ gave himself up to death for me, and therefore I want to die for Christ!"' (p.369). McFadden comments that 'Virginity as a virtuous substitute for martyrdom was encouraged in the fifth century and re-emphasized in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.'[241] Margaret was determined to embrace both estates.

Whilst the account of the dragon in the *LA* mainly concerns its action rather than its appearance, there is a very detailed description of the dragon in Theotimus's *Latina Passio S. Margaretae*. Although it is impossible to date this text, the editors suggest that 'it can be regarded as of interest in an Anglo-Saxon context, as it is known to have been in England in the eleventh century. [242] Theotimus describes the dragon as follows:

> [It is] …all adorned with different colours in its coat and with a gold-coloured beard. Its teeth seemed like the sharpest iron. Its eyes shone like the flame of fire, and from its nostrils issued fire and smoke; its tongue hung out panting over its neck, and a two-edged sword could be seen in its hand. It was fearsome and it caused a stench in the prison that fire which issued from the mouth of the dragon.[243]

This very early account of a dragon gives vivid detail. For the first time the dragon has different colours in its 'coat' – there is no mention of scales. The dragon has a beard, the only one we have seen so far, and although the dragon is not gendered, later it takes the appearance of a male demon. The dragon is possessed of fierce weapons: teeth that looked like iron, fire, and a sword. It is 'panting', presumably in its eagerness to devour

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[240] M.C. Ballingal, (1987). *The cult of the cross in the early Middle Ages.* Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/6848 Chapter 5.p.79-103. [Accessed 16 June 2020]

[241] McFadden, p.475.

[242] The Latin *Passio S. Margaretae* in Paris BN. Lat. 5574 Tenth Century. In *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* as before. Eds: Mary Clayton & Hugh Magennis, p.191.

[243] Ibid., p.205.

poor Margaret, and/or a parody of sexual desire. The fiery eyes and fire issuing from the nostrils are historic features of dragons, the image has hardly changed through the years. Fire, smoke, and stench are associated with hell, the home of the Devil.

It is interesting to note that this dragon, whilst retaining characteristics of early dragons, is, in addition, armed. In all the versions of the legend of St. Margaret, this is the only one which references a sword, or weapon of any kind. Despite the image being ambiguous, the two-edged sword can be interpreted as an allegorical expression of both paganism and sexual conquest, brandished by Satan, and the things which young women must avoid at all costs. Margaret is fighting for her virtue, as young women must be on their guard against the sin of lust. Margaret's defence is her faith, as the Bible states '…the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword…' (Hebrews 4:12).

At the moment when the dragon vanishes, another manifestation appears, taking on a man-like appearance: 'Again the devil, still trying to deceive Margaret, changed himself to look like a man'. Margaret prays, and then physically confronts the demon, grabs him by the head, pushes him to the ground and 'planted her right foot on his head'. The demon is humiliated by being beaten by a 'young and tender girl.' (p.369) Margaret remains unimpressed, 'lifted her foot and said: "Begone, wretch!" and the demon promptly vanished.' (p.370). Margaret is able to vanquish both the dragon and its alter-ego, the demon.

From this account, taken from the *Passio*, which is de Voragine's likely source,[244] it shows that de Voragine saw the dragon as incidental, and was less interested than the author of the earlier text in describing the appearance of the dragon. By the time of the *LA,* the dragon had become merely a recognisable manifestation of the devil. That Margaret is able to dismiss the dragon so easily is worthy of comment. She is a young girl, tenderly raised, and as such would be unused to using violence of any kind. Her faith was her strength, and it is that which gives her the ability to brush off the dragon as she would an annoying fly. De Voragine also casts doubt on the idea of Margaret being swallowed and bursting from the dragon unharmed.[245] There is much more emphasis on her dialogue with the demon, as he is in human form and the discourse between them is also very human. He has come, he says, 'to press her to obey the prefect's orders' (p.369).

[244] Ibid., p.369 'Her legend weas written by Theotimus, a learned man'.

[245] Ibid., p.369 'What is said here, however, about the beast swallowing the maiden and bursting asunder is considered apocryphal and not to be taken seriously'.

The devil is presented as weak, apologetic, and jealous: 'it was his nature to hate virtuous people, and that though he was often repulsed by them, he was plagued by desire to mislead them' (p.370). Virtue has long been used as a synonym for chastity,[246] and chastity is all-powerful against Satan. Hate, jealousy, and desire are traits which are synonymous with the devil, and Margaret is, through prayer and faith, very easily able to defeat the dragon and consign the devil back to hell. 'She had defeated the chief; she would certainly outdo his hireling' (p.370).

Margaret's physical torture continues, as is well documented in all the texts. She remains steadfast in her faith, and miracles occur that relieve her suffering. Five thousand men embrace Christianity at her delivery from her trials, but they are put to death en masse, in an attempt to stop the spread of Christianity. At Margaret's execution, she requests time to pray. It is from this prayer that Margaret becomes associated with pregnancy and childbirth. The allegory of Margaret bursting unharmed through the belly of the dragon is associated with the process of physical childbirth, and as Wendy M. Larson states, the image 'came to represent a mother's hope for a similar fate for her child.'[247] Margaret prays for her persecutors, for 'all who would honour her memory and invoke her' (p.370). She then adds a prayer 'that any woman who invoked her aid when faced with a difficult labour would give birth to a healthy child' (p.370). Margaret was then beheaded, and received the crown of martyrdom on the twentieth of July, which is still commemorated as her feast day.

The prayer for women in childbirth would appear to be an addition by de Voragine to the prayer as recorded by Theotimus. That version has Margaret requesting that: 'whoever builds a basilica in my name or from his labours furnishes a manuscript of my passion, fill him with your Holy Spirit,…and in his home let there not be born an infant lame or blind or dumb.'[248] It is highly possible that de Voragine had access to some of the earlier Latin texts of the legend which 'can be traced back as far as the late eighth century', one of which is the *Latin Passio S. Margaretae,* ascribed to Theotimus.[249] An eighth-century document would possibly be the earliest recorded text relating to

[246] *OED Online* 3rd ed., Dec.2013. (Oxford University Press, 2015). First use in Middle English: 'uertu' circa 1225.
[247] Wendy R. Larson, Who Is the Master of This Narrative? Maternal Patronage in the Cult of St. Margaret in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* as before, pp.94-104. (p.97).
[248] Clayton and Magennis, p.169.
[249] Ibid., Appendix 2. pp. 194-219, (p. 215).

Margaret.[250] Margaret bursting from the belly of the dragon is also symbolic of childbirth; as Margaret is unscathed, the prayer is that the delivering mother and her child would be safe too.

De Voragine's development of the prayer to include women in labour would affirm Margaret in the minds of women as someone specific to whom they could pray during a very dangerous and difficult time. It would make her a popular saint amongst women and increase her following as women passed on the prayers, artifacts and amulets used during childbirth to their own daughters and friends.[251]Providing a prayer, therefore, can be interpreted as De Voragine's version of dragon-slaying – a way of removing the fear. It was also a means of increasing the readership of his work.

The ease with which Margaret destroyed the dragon is more startling because she was a 'tender girl,' young in years and meek of manner – until she confronted the Devil in all his guises. Olybrius, the dragon, and the human-form demon may be interpreted as three different manifestations of Satan – an unholy trinity. They will each be defeated by the power of faith, which will ultimately be rewarded in Heaven. Young, impressionable girls hearing this legend would be inspired by the thought that they, too, could just as easily defeat the demons they encountered, and that they, too, would be protected by their faith. Their fears and concerns could be projected onto the dragon, which their saint had defeated by the power of prayer. Thus, the lessons of the power of Christian faith and chastity would be effectively delivered.

John Lydgate, *The Lyfe of Seynt Margarete*

John Lydgate was commissioned to write the poem of the life of St. Margaret by Anne Stafford, Countess of March (c.1398 -1432) sometime between 1415, the year she married Edmund Mortimer, and 1426.[252] Given that Lady March was likely to become pregnant in these years, with all the associated dangers of medieval pregnancy, it would be reasonable to assume that by commissioning this work she could be invoking the protection of Margaret. Lines 520 -526, as we will see, exhort women of all classes to pray to Margaret during labour. The Countess is the only woman to commission a text that is discussed in this thesis. As the text includes Lydgate's interpretation of Margaret's prayer, it is

[250] Ibid., p.191.

[251] Larson, as above.

[252] Sarah Salih, *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* (Woodbridge, UK : D.S. Brewer, 2006), p.65.

reasonable to suppose this is the motive behind the commission. There were, however, no children from that marriage. Mortimer died in 1425, and Anne remarried in 1427. This union, to John Holland, the Second Duke of Exeter produced two children, both healthy. Anne died aged approximately thirty-four in 1432, cause unknown.

Lydgate's *Lyfe* is a long work of eighteen stanzas, a 'Ballad Royal' with the rhyme scheme *ababacc*, written in iambic pentameter throughout. It is rhythmic and easy to read or hear, making it both a pleasurable and instructive work. There is a long, introductory prologue of seventy-seven lines, praising Margaret's virtue and martyrdom, and requesting her guidance in his work. Lines 66-77, 'My Lady Marche[253] I mene, which of entent/Gafe firste to me in commaundement', are an invocation to Margaret on behalf of his patron.

The dragon/demon episode covers eighteen stanzas. Margaret prays to see her enemy, who appears 'In the lykenesse of a felle [false, wicked][254] dragoun/The olde serpent, whiche called is Sathan' (286-7). This is the only description of the dragon, although Lydgate names him as Satan. He does, however, follow Theotimus's version more closely, as he describes the swallowing. 'With open mouth, the virgyne to devour, /First of alle, he swolwed in hir hede' (298-90). Margaret seals her body with the sign of the cross against the violation and destruction to come, and as soon as she did this, 'The horrible beste, in relees of hir peyene, /Brast assondre and partyd was on tweyne.' (294-5). The dragon is split in two, as we saw in the very early dragons. Margaret's body and soul belong to Christ, not to Olybrius or the devil. Margaret prays her thanks, and 'Under hir fete lyggyng the dragoun.' (302). As Margaret gives thanks for her deliverance from the dragon, the dead beast is beneath her feet, symbolically as well as literally vanquished. This is an echo of the punishment of the serpent in Eden, to be crushed beneath the woman's heel (Gen.3:15). The position of the dragon can also be interpreted as a form of flattery for his patron, by depicting a woman (Margaret) in a position of power. The demon then appears 'By gret disceit in lykenesse of a man' (298). Lydgate does not mention what happens to the body of the dragon. Lydgate then creates very detailed dialogue between Margaret and the demon of over one hundred lines (303-407) and refers to him as 'the serpent malicious and olde' (394). Margaret questions the devil and asks

[253] Lydgate's recognition of his patron, Anne, Countess of Stafford.

[254] *MED* online. 1.

him to explain why he is so evil. Margaret prays to God, at which point the demon approaches:

> The devil, venquysshed, toke hir by the honed
> Spake thes words, as I shal devyse:
> "Thou hast me bounde with invisible bonde,
> Whiche victorie ought ynogh suffice!
> Cese of thy power, and lat me now aryse,
> For I may not abiden thi constreynt,
> In this batayle thou has me made so feynt." (303-309)

The Devil is pleading defeat and weakness. The 'invisible bonde' is Margaret's chastity, faith, and surety of deliverance. She is not fooled by his pleas; the Devil is the master of trickery and lies. Margaret grasps him by the head 'And cast him doun…under hir fete' (313-4) – again we have the symbolism of crushing defeat. Margaret has total confidence that she will overcome the threat and danger offered by the demon. She will not allow 'this serpent' (315) to escape. The ancient connection between dragons and serpents is still relevant. Margaret refers to him as a fiend of 'malyse serpentine' (317), a recognition by Lydgate of the nature of both dragon and Devil, sharing the same characteristics and nature. She exhorts the Devil to remember that it was she, 'a clene [innocent, chaste, virgin] mayde' (319) who has overcome him, and the Devil agrees it is her innocence that has undone him. Lydgate again calls him 'the serpent' (324).

The Devil proceeds to explain that Margaret's parents were pagan and 'in there tyme friendly unto me' (341). This would suggest that the story of Margaret's parentage and adoption is, by now, very well known. Margaret demands to know the evil works he has done to men, and the Devil recounts years of malicious works, showing how easily he could tempt people into wrongdoing by trickery and lies. He envied people for their happiness, a state he could never attain, having been 'From hevene caste for my grete pryde' (369). This admission relates to the fall of Lucifer, being cast out of Heaven (see p.38 above). As Margaret has extracted confessions and pleadings of his evil ways from the 'serpent malicious and olde' (394), she lifts her foot and releases him 'And the dragoun upwards gan him dresse/Disapered, and forth his wey is goo' (399-400).

Rather than descriptive narrative from the author, the poem makes use of lengthy dialogue, giving Margaret a voice and focussing on her strength of faith and character. Again, Margaret is confrontational and aggressive, taking the fight to the Devil as she

does with Olybrius. '"The kynde of man, telle on anon," quod she, / "And be welle ware thou lye nat to me."' (350-351). The dragon and the demon are both representations of the threat of Olybrius. Having requested to see her enemy, she is determined to show how easily he can be vanquished. She is also vocally aggressive and scathing towards her captors, and welcomes her torture, as it leads her nearer to her goal of attaining martyrdom and Heaven.

Lydgate makes little of the dragon episode, and clearly sees the dragon and the demon as the same figure. Unlike in the de Voragine version, the demon does not say why he has appeared after the destruction of the dragon; he is just another manifestation of the beast. Lydgate, like de Voragine, belittles the threat of the dragon/demon. They may appear fearsome and terrible at first sight, but they are illusions of a kind, and can be dispelled through the power of prayer and the symbol of faith, the cross. Although Margaret is strong and vocal, it is the power of prayer which defeats the demon, and she takes him 'by the hede and cast him doun' (312-3). Faith in God is the most powerful weapon against the Devil and his works, and against paganism. Lydgate again refers to the demon as a serpent: 'And on this serpent for to do more wrake/Hir right fote she sette upon his bake' (315-6). Lydgate plays to popular culture and the recognisable image of Margaret escaping from the dragon: '…gan maken hir prayere. 'And as she lay in hir orisoun, /Under hit fete lygging the dragoun' (300-302). Depicted in books of hours and in religious paintings, Margaret is almost always shown with her cross and a defeated dragon. Illustrating Margaret in this way clearly demonstrates the power of chastity and faith and prayer. In Figs. 18-24, Margaret can be seen emerging from the body of the dragon, praying her thanks to Christ.

Margaret's torture continues. She consistently declares her faith and resists Olybrius. Lydgate has written in detail Margaret's final prayer for all who remember her:

> And specially to the I beseche
> To alle wymmen whiche of childe travayle,
> For my sake, oo Lorde, be thou her leche; [physician]
> Lat my prayer unto hem availe.
> Suffre no mischief tho wymmen, Lorde, assaile,
> That calle to me for helpe in their grevaunce, (464-469)
> But for my sake save hem fro myschanunce.
> Lat hem, Lorde, not perisshe in theire childynge;
> Be thou her conforte and consolacyoun,
> To be delivere thurgh grace of thyn helpynge;
> Socoure hem, Lorde, in their tribulacyoun… (470-473).

Margaret is delivered safely from the belly of the dragon, because of her steadfast belief that Christ will protect her from her persecutors. She now invokes that same protection for women and babies against the dragon of labour and birth. Lydgate omits the prayer for a healthy child, which is present in other versions of the *Life,* and relates Margaret praying only for the mother to have an easy labour, and to survive it. (462-473) This is possibly because his patron, Lady March, had not yet become pregnant. Lydgate cleverly absolves both himself as author and Margaret as protagonist from any subsequent infant mortality.

At the end of the *vita sancte Margarete*, Lydgate adds an epilogue, entitled 'Lenvoy' [l'envoi], consisting of three stanzas described by Reames as 'a direct address [in his own words] to the reader or hearer of the poem'.[255] Although the poem was commissioned by Lady March, Lydgate evidently realised that this could be an opportunity for further commissions, opening it up to a wider audience of women who were likely to become pregnant. 'Noble princesses and ladyes of estate/And gentilwomen lower of degré/…And alle wymmen that have necessité…' (520-3). Flattering his proposed readership or audience was no doubt commercially advantageous. Lydgate cleverly extends his potential market even further to include anyone who needs help to 'Pray this mayde in trouble and alle dissese/Yow to releve and to do yow ese' (532-3). Mary Beth Long, quoting Karen Winstead, states that "fifteenth- century authors such as Lydgate and Bokenham were writing for genteel readers who had a 'preoccupation with good breeding', but that Lydgate wanted his life of Margaret to "transcend class lines' and circulate among all women". [256] His final stanzas appear to attest to this.

It is clear then, that Lydgate, like de Voragine, one of his sources, places little focus on the dragon as an entity, combining dragon and demon into one foe. Instead, he places much more focus on Margaret's defiance of Olybrius and his sexual advances, on her steadfast faith, the power of prayer, and on her physical attack on the demon. Margaret is vociferous, feisty, and fierce. Thus, the threats of paganism, rape and Satan are overcome by faith and Margaret's own determined character, and the power of her

[255] Footnote from Sherry L. Reames, ed. *Introduction to* 'Margaret of Antioch, Introduction | Robbins Library Digital Projects' <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/reames-middle-english-legends-of-women-saints-margaret-of-antioch-introduction> [accessed 28 March 2018].

[256] Mary Beth Long, 'Corpora and Manuscripts, Authors and Audiences' ed. Sarah Salih, *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography.* Ed. Sarah Salih (Woodbridge, UK: Woodbridge, UK, 2006), pp.47-69 (p.65).

speech. As the dragon is an allegory of the Devil, this lesser focus diminishes the dragon, and the threat it offers. The power of the Devil is weakened, and Margaret's prayers, specifically and precisely targeting the apparitions, prove more powerful. It appears that the image of the dragon is losing some of its ferocity in the Middle Ages. The growing sophistication of audiences, especially at the level of society of Lydgate's readership/patrons, would reflect a more sceptical approach to mythical creatures such as dragons. The inclusion of dragons is now intended to be allegorical, not factual.

John Mirk, Sermon on Saint Margaret

An Augustinian canon and author, John Mirk (active c1382-1420) wrote a collection of 'instructions for feast days' for parish priests and clergy: ('and for this treti speketh alle of festis I wolle and pray that it be called a festial': (BL, Cotton MS Claudius A.ii, fol. 3*v*).[257] The edition I am using is a revision from the fifteenth century, itself based on a revision of the original thirteenth-century text.[258] This revision was written later than the Lydgate *Lfye*

, and it will be interesting to note any additions or omissions. I have included this text as it is a change of genre. By preaching Margaret's life as a sermon, the importance of virtue and faith in everyday life is reiterated, and how the image of Margaret as the epitome of these qualities perseveres.

This text was used as a sermon to be delivered to a church congregation, and Mirk writes in vernacular prose, not verse. Shorter than other versions, the sermon was didactic, instructing the congregation on the importance of virtue and resisting temptation. The dragon episode is given four or five lines only, out of a total of 97, and this short passage includes the swallowing of Margaret by the dragon. The focus of the sermon is Margaret's faith, and the sermon is a didactic technique to promote this. After Margaret prays to see her enemy as in previous versions, Mirk writes:

> 'Than anone com there oute of a herne of the prisoun a grete horrybul dragon and yonyd on hur, so that hys mowth was on her heved, and wolde han swallowed hyr, and hys tong laste doun to hur hele.[259] And whan he hadde hyr alle in hys mowth, Margrete made a syn of the cros, and anone the dragon braste on sondyr.' (38-42)

[257] *ODNB*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.bangor.ac.uk/> [accessed 9 February 2018].

[258] John Mirk, 'Sermon on St. Margaret.', in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. by Sherry L (Ed) Reames (METS. University of Rochester, 2003), pp. 1–5.

[259] This detail of the long tongue appears in de Voragine, p.369.

Despite his account of the dragon being so brief, Mirk acknowledges that 'Herefore where that Margrete is peyntyd oythur corvon, [painted or carved/wooden or sculpted statues] scheo hath a dragon undyr hur fette and a cros in hur hande, schewing how be the vertu of the Cros scheo gate the victory of the fende' (49-51). Margaret was usually depicted with a dragon and a cross; whichever medium was used. [260]

The demon then appears in Mirk's account. This time his hands are 'boundyn behind hym' (43). Mirk does not explain how the demon comes to be bound, but as Margaret has defeated the dragon, and the demon is the dragon in a different form, this suggests that he is already partly beaten. He is bound by the ties of defeat. His hands are tied, literally; and he cannot physically harm her. The demon bemoans that, whereas he has overcome 'many a byggar man and stronger., he has been beaten by 'a yong wenche' which draws directly upon de Voragine's account.[261] The reference to the difference in gender underlines how the perceived weaker female Margaret has the power, through faith, to defeat a stronger male foe. Upon questioning the demon about his lineage, the demon confesses that his father is Lucifer 'that was furst the fairest angel in Hevne, and now he is the fowlest fende in helle' (54-5). This refers to the battle in Heaven, described in the Book of Revelation, and the casting out of the fallen angels (pp. 40-41 above). The demon confesses his many evil deeds, although Mirk compresses these into just a few lines. Margaret 'prayed to God that thilke fende most synkon into helle…Than anone the erthe oponyd and swellowed hym into helle' (67-9). Her prayer is thus immediately answered. However, her torture continues, and before her death Margaret again prays for all who call on her, and 'uche woman that calleth to hyre in travayle of chylde, that scheo muste be delivered sounde and the chylde come to cristyndom' (91).

Although this text is very short and lacking in detailed description, it is important to this study because Mirk specifically points out that whenever Margaret is depicted, she is shown with the dragon. This is a sermon, written for Margaret's feast day, the twentieth of July, and he would expect his audience to be familiar with her story. For those who were not, it would serve to introduce them to the legend of a virtuous woman. The

[260] Sherry Reames states 'St. Margaret is also one of the most common subjects for wall paintings in England; some churches have her entire life…adorning their walls. When hearing the story of Margaret retold on her feast day many people could have followed along by looking at the images painted on the walls of their own church. 'Stanzaic Introduction, p.3.
[261] *L.A.,* as before, p.369.

original dragon in Christian lore is Lucifer, and Mirk develops the narrative of the dragon to emphasise his teaching, which is of far greater importance than the story itself. The lesson is to resist sin and temptation wherever and whenever you find it; the Devil is everywhere, and he is lustful, envious, and cowardly. The use of a dragon as a didactic tool is becoming more common and driving home the message of resisting temptation by being a good servant of Christ.

The Stanzaic Life of Margaret

This anonymous fifteenth-century revision of the Margaret's story is written in eighty-seven quatrain stanzas with an *aabb* rhyme scheme. [262] The ballad-form structure is easy to read, hear and memorise, and an audience would be entertained by it. The text has a formulaic beginning, asking for 'Olde and younge…[to] Lystenys. I wylle you tellen wordys fayre and swete' (1-3). The old folk tales and legends told around a fire began the same way, and the tradition of storytelling is continued. The audience know they are going to be entertained, albeit with the life of a saint. After detailing Margaret's early life, and her capture by Olybrius, the dragon episode is longer, more detailed and there is more description of the dragon (180-190).

The dragon is 'lothelye… brennynge as the black fyre', and Margaret 'wexed alle greene as the gresse in someres tyde' (183). [The dragon is hideous and loathsome, burning as the pale fire, and Margaret's face grew as green as summer grass]. The use of colour makes this a very visual text, and the imagination will draw its own illustrations. It is quite possible that the scribe drew on existing images of Margaret to describe this dragon. Interestingly, in the context of a ballad-like entertainment and narrative tension, this is the only text to make any reference to Margaret being *in fear* of the dragon. He breathes flames, and Margaret 'felle to the ground' as her bones rattled in fear. Listeners absorbed by the telling would perhaps feel this fear, too. This is a different Margaret: in the previous texts she has never shown fear but has prayed for protection and victory. However, in the *Stanzaic* text she is swallowed by the dragon, but 'Thorugh vertue of her he braste, that harme hadde sche noon' (184).[263] It is interesting that Margaret has not made the sign of the cross, nor has she prayed for deliverance; it is her virtue that the

[262] 'Stanzaic Life of Margaret', in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. by Sherry L Reames (METS, University of Rochester: River Campus Libraries, 2003), pp. 1–12.
[263] This bursting of the dragon has links back to Daniel as discussed previously.

dragon literally cannot stomach, and it is her chastity that splits him in two. She has however, been visited by a 'bryte angelle' who presents her with a cross sent by Christ, with which 'the foule dragon to qwelle' (169-70). She therefore has a physical cross, a weapon to wield against the beast. The weapon has come directly from Heaven and is notably powerful beyond measure. Olybrius likewise is angry that he cannot sexually possess Margaret as she refuses to give in to his physical demands, which is why she is tortured. The symbolic possession (rape) by the dragon, which is unsuccessful, is a lesson for all young women. They must not allow the sins of the flesh to corrupt them and can be successful in resisting them.

After her triumph over the dragon, Margaret approaches the second enemy, the demon, 'with the crosse in her honde By the virtue of Jhesu Cryste with her wymplle sche him bonde' (195-6) and a lengthy dialogue ensues. This is a very interesting addition to the usual interaction of Margaret with the Demon. She binds him with her head-dress, which parallels the submission of the dragon by the girdle of a virgin princess. Chastity is the weapon against which the Devil is powerless. Margaret's head-dress – or wimple – is a veil covering all of her head and neck: a wimple also forms part of the habit of a nun, which signifies chastity.[264] During the conversation, the demon, who is also metaphysically bound by the destruction of the dragon, claims that he and the dragon are brothers – 'Ruffyn that was my brother was the dragon that thou slowe' (207) and that he himself is Belsabub. The demon says his brother was Ruffinis [or *Rufo, Rufonis* in the standard Latin version of the legend]. Reames points out that 'the name, presumably derived from the word for "reddish" or "red-haired", is also used for a devil in the Chester Cycle'.[265] Belsabub had sent the dragon to break Margaret's resolve and make her renounce her Christian faith. Belsabub also brags that he visits pregnant women by flying on the wind:

> Thedyr wold I come believe, in childyng to do her harme
> If it were unblessed, I brake it foote or arme
> Or the woman herself in some wyse I dydde harme. (220-2).

Although the dragon and the demon are usually presented as two separate manifestations, they are both part of the evil confronted by Margaret, and my interpretation is that they

[264] *Middle English Dictionary on line,* 1(a) A woman's headdress covering the top, back, and sides of the head, including the cheeks and chin, and wrapped so as to cover the neck; also, a veil; also, a wimple as part of a nun's official garb, bestowed ceremonially. [Accessed 19.04.2022].
[265] Reames, p.9, n.207.

are indeed two manifestations of the same Devil. It is the Devil illustrating that he can appear as an unearthly beast, and also project himself as a human man – his own evil twin. In this version however, the Demon is given a definite separate identity, names itself as Belsabub and claims the dragon is his brother. In all the texts that I have examined, this is a unique occurrence.[266] Margaret silences the demon and prays that his power will be defeated by the Lord. Using an expressive but homely simile, the poet tells that the demon then 'sanke into helle as a stone dos into welle' (238).

Margaret's final prayer is much more detailed than in the previous texts. There is the prayer as previously described for all who ask for help, or pray using her name, and for women in childbirth. However, there is the addition of a prayer for a healthy child to be born, thus negating the harm the Belsabub tries to inflict:

> `Lord God, I praye thee, for Thi grete myghte,
> As Thou madeste sonne and moone here in erthe to geve a lyghte,
> So graunte her that her chylde be borne with alle the lymmes aryghte
> And not to be dumme, nor nothynge broken, nor blynde withouten syghte'.
> (315-8).

This prayer would be read out during labour, as a source of comfort and succour, invoking the protection of Margaret for both mother and child. At her death, Margaret is still defeating the dragon. The harm Belsabub has committed, she prays will not happen again.

Margaret the dragon-slayer: 'A precious gemme'

Apart from the *Stanzaic Life of Margaret,* the texts do not make as much of the dragon episode in the life of this 'precious gemme' as audiences might expect, given the imagery and legend around the saint. [267] This is surprising, given that it is her defeat of the dragon, and her prayer for pregnant women and new-born babies, which make her different from other virgin martyrs. All the chosen texts make much more of her dialogue with the demon, which is the dragon in another form. This could be because the dragon is immediately recognisable as dangerous and evil, whilst the demon takes the form of a man. In this manifestation, it is persuasive and subtle, mirroring the early advances of Olybrius, who tries to bribe Margaret into becoming his mistress. Young girls should

[266] The notes attached to the TEAMS text offer no explanation for this presentation.

[267] John Lydgate, from the Prologue to his '*Lyfe of Seynt Margerete'*, l.31.

take warning that a charming manner and sweet talk could be their downfall. As Mirk's *Sermon* is read on Margaret's feast-day, it would be a perfect time to reiterate the lesson.

Margaret is not a submissive female martyr. Although she does submit willingly to her torture – indeed she welcomes it as it brings her closer to Christ's passion – she is verbally aggressive to her captors, and confrontational with both the human and beastly monsters which assail her. Staunchly refusing Olybrius and his offer of marriage or concubinage, she asserts her lineage and her Christianity. It is the rejection of his physical advances that infuriates Olybrius initially, and when Margaret is visited by the dragon, it is representative of masculine power and sexual threat. As the virgin sacrifice in the tale of St. George can represent repression, forced marriage and unwanted sexual possession, the young women in an audience would recognise these same threats in the dragon of Margaret's story. Thoetimus urges his audience: 'All who have ears to hear, listen with your heart, and understand, men; women and maidens, imagine yourselves as tender girls in your hearts.'[268] Thoetimus loved Margaret as if he were her father and did not want to see her hurt, but he too was powerless against Olybrius.

Margaret's passion teaches an effective lesson: we will be beset on all sides by the devil and his works and must stay strong in our faith and be prepared to do battle. During the fifteenth century, the veneration of St. Margaret inspired the production of 'birthing rolls' which were pieces of membrane on which were written the names of, among others, the Virgin Mary and St. Margaret.[269] Pregnant women would often have Margaret's prayer inscribed onto one of these rolls. The roll would then be wrapped around their body whilst they were in labour, in the hope that Margaret would intervene to keep mother and child safe.[270] As Margaret was delivered safely from the dragon, so the mother prays to be delivered safely of her child. Sometimes the prayer would be read out loud during labour. The prayer was also to keep away the devil who, by his confession to Margaret, would prey on labouring women and new-born babies. Two such manuscript rolls survive in the Wellcome Library, which contain the life of St. Margaret written in French. Murray Jones and Olsen state:

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[268] Clayton and Magennis, as before. p.195.

[269] Sue Niebrzydowski, 'From Bedroom to Courtroom: Home and the Memory of Childbirth in a Fourteenth Century Marriage Dispute', *Home Cultures*, 6.2 (2009), 123–34 (p.128).

[270] Mellon, p.93.

> In both Anglo-Norman and English versions of Margaret's Life [as shown in Lydgate and the *Stanzaic Life*, for example] the saint prays that any house containing a copy of her passion (i.e., a manuscript of the Life) may have no deformed children in it, and that if a woman in labor calls on her, she may be safely delivered of a live and healthy child. If the book is read aloud to her during labour, it will serve the same purpose. The book itself thus becomes a protective amulet, whether as a physical presence or as the exemplar for a telling aloud of Margaret's Passion. There are surviving texts from France of Margaret's life written on scrolls or folded up as *brefs* that were clearly attached to the pregnant woman.[271]

These surviving rolls prove how widespread was the belief in St. Margaret, and her ability to intercede for mother and baby. The ownership of these rolls was often passed down from mother to daughter.

Margaret's story has reverberated through the centuries, as has St. George's. The dragon has been projected by the Church as the representative of the devil. The evidence of this is clear as the texts discussed were used for instruction of clergy and lay people. Mirk's *Sermon* in particular illustrates this point. In these surviving medieval narratives, Margaret's dragon represents paganism, non-belief, and danger to both the body and the soul. Although both Margaret and George are human, their faith in Christ gives them the ability to successfully defeat the dragon, and through their martyrdom – which they willingly accept – they attain their places in Heaven.

The allegory of the dragon as Satan and evil is clear, but to a young woman forced to endure an arranged marriage, often to a much older man, being subject to his whims and desires, the dragon could also represent sexual aggression, repression of her own wishes, and male domination. Being instructed through the teachings of the Church and by examples of the saintly women who also suffered (but kept their virginity) that faith would resolve all things, women could project their fear and resentment of forced marriage, leading to sexual and physical domination, onto the image of the dragon. The didactic tales of suffering and virtue would reassure them that their suffering in this world, if they did their duty, would be rewarded by Christ in the afterlife. Women could identify closely with female Saints and compare their own trials and sufferings to those of

[271] Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsen, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England 900-1500' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (2015), Fall; 89(3), 406-433.

the martyrs. '…Margaret became an immensely popular role model for women in [her] steadfast adherence to the faith.'[272]

The dragon is perceived as the representative of the Devil in these texts, and in the story of Saint Margaret, it is literally named so. Metaphorically, it represents the dangers of being outside the protection of the Church and non-conformity to religion. It is also representative of masculine domination and sexual threat. In none of the chosen texts is the dragon the focus of the story; it is merely a confrontation with the Devil to be dealt with by the protagonist, on the way to the greater glory of martyrdom. For both George and Margaret, their faith is total, and absolute. The defeat of the Devil gives them both the strength to face the torture that awaits them. The various genres – poetry, sermon, and prose – all have the effect of emphasising the importance of faith, the strength to be found in the circle of the church, and the power of prayer. Margaret's presence in this range of genres is significant in itself, as it emphasises how important she was, and how much she was revered. In all the chosen texts, the dragon episodes are relatively brief, and yet they have made an impact that has lasted for hundreds of years. Immediately on hearing 'Saint George or Saint Margaret,' the first mental image that would have been created in the mind of an early reader or listener would have been that of a dragon, as it still is for St. George today.

It is intriguing to note that both the legends originated in Cappadocia, and both contain a dragon. The returning Crusaders brought back tales of paganism from their travels, which would be countered with accounts of triumphant Christian victories over the Saracen. The Holy Land was a foreign, far-distant place, exotic and strange. It would be quite feasible that such a country would be the home of dragons, especially as they are present in the Bible. The dragons in the George and Margaret legends both serve the same purpose: they represent the devil, paganism, and sexual threat. Young women were expected to be chaste until marriage, which was mostly arranged by men, and very young women were married to older, experienced men, who prized their virginity. Fear of the unknown, of sexual relationships resulting in pregnancy and childbirth was very real for inexperienced, innocent girls. The Devil placed temptation in their path, and the

[272] Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript' in *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 108–41, (p.129).

manifestation of the Devil was the dragon. The example of Margaret, resisting at all costs the lust and temptations of Olybrius, defeating the dragon and repelling the demon would stand as a shining example of how to behave. Margaret's prayer for safe pregnancy and childbirth was well known, as is suggested by Lady March commissioning the poem from John Lydgate.

Paganism also had to be defeated, and the dragon in the dual role of lecher and pagan was confronted by George, who echoed the super-hero of ancient times, virtuous and strong in the face of opposition. Chaste himself, George defended the virgin princess, whilst defeating the threat of paganism. George was armed with a sword, representing the truth of God's word, whereas Margaret is armed with a Cross, either physically or metaphorically. Both sword and Cross represent the word of God. Although George's sword became broken, he never appeared to be under threat from the dragon. In some versions of her legend, Margaret was swallowed by the dragon, nevertheless she was able to burst forth from that danger. In both tales, their faith and chastity preserve them, and leave a legacy for the future. George instructed those churches be raised to the Virgin Mary, and that people were to be baptised, thus saving their souls. Margaret intervened with a prayer to save women's souls too, but specifically also to preserve their bodies and those of the children to whom they gave birth.

The Life of Saint Martha of Tarascon [also known as Saint Martha of Bethany]

The biblical narrative of Martha of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus, was not a dragon-tamer. Her hagiography was written in the medieval period as a legend, transforming her into Saint Martha of Tuscany, who became a dragon tamer. Martha is not a martyr saint but shows the same steadfast belief that her faith will protect her from harm. Martha of Bethany was an 'active' saint, in that she was proactive in her community, living amongst other people, and not closeted in a cell. She was an evangelist, a preacher, and lived among her peers. Martha was never associated with a male partner and has been described by M.M. Daas as 'a saint in the masculine tradition …and possessing in her woman's breast a man's spirit.'[273] Martha's power was her character, her ability to deal with situations in a man's world, strongly and decisively.

[273] Daas, p.9.

She was capable of organising her own affairs and those of her household, and it can be posited that Martha was celibate: Daas claims 'her celibacy is more in keeping with that of a monk or a hermit.'[274] She was called 'the hostess of Christ' because, according to the Gospel accounts, she received him into her home not once, but twice.[275] Recorded in two of the Gospels, Christ visited the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary in Bethany. Mary sits at Christ's feet and listens to him speaking, whilst Martha was busy with 'much serving' (Luke 10:38-42) – thus whilst Mary was depicted as the quiet, contemplative sister, Martha was the practical, active one. In a further visit, when their brother Lazarus died, the sisters asked Christ to visit. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and Martha hosted him in her home. She was the first person to whom Jesus proclaimed himself as the giver of eternal life, and she declared her faith in him, and offered him her service.

> Jesus said unto her [Martha], I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou are the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. (John 11:25-27).

Martha declared her belief in Christ as the Son of God, and that his promise is of eternal life after death for those who believe in him. This was the first time that the giving and receiving of such a promise and declaration of faith was mentioned in the Gospels. Christ visited again, 'six days before Passover…and Martha served' (John 12:1-2). Here again Martha was 'serving' – taking care of – Christ in her home, linking back to the Gospel of Luke. After receiving Christ twice into her home and declaring her belief in him, and 'serving' him in a housewifely way, Martha became known as Christ's first disciple.

The texts to be examined are firstly Jacobus de Voragine, *The Legenda Aurea.* I am returning to the *LA* as before, the foundation text, as it contains the hagiographies of all the saints in this thesis. The second text, Martha in *Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century* was recorded by an unknown scribe although it is 'sometimes attributed to John Barbour' (c.1320-1395), the first major figure to write in

[274] Ibid., p.8.

[275] Luke (10:38-42) and John (11:1-40, 12:2).

Scots. [Scottish Texts Society – translation my own.][276] This text shows how the story of Martha had spread up into Scotland. The third and final text is the fifteenth-century edition of *The Legenda Aurea, Lives of the Saints,* which was printed by William Caxton c. 1483-84, showing the longevity of her legend.

I have chosen these particular texts as they show how the legend of Martha has spread from the writings of de Voragine in the earliest instance, to being included in an important Scots manuscript a century later, and then later printed by Caxton. Saints' lives as a genre became subject matter embraced by the new technology of print, which gave wider, cheaper access to the lives of the saints. Print enabled the availability of multiple copies on paper, instead of costly parchment. The focus will be on the dragon episode in each text, not the life of Martha before or after her confrontation with the dragon. The analyses of my chosen texts begin as before, with the earliest version of her hagiography available in the British Isles, the *Legenda Aurea.*

Jacobus de Voragine, *The Legenda Aurea*

De Voragine relates that after Lazarus is raised from the dead, Martha 'the hostess of our Lord', her sister, Mary, and her brother Lazarus are put afloat 'without sail, oars or rudders, or food; but with the Lord as pilot…' (p.409) and landed in Marseilles, where they converted the people to Christianity. A man-eating dragon is reported nearby at a place named *Tarasconus* or *Taraque*, at Nerluc, near Avignon. In the *LA,* Voragine describes the beast in detail, and the similarities with the early dragons are still evident. The characteristics have changed little over time, and the ancient threat of a terrifying monster still remains. Voragine describes it as a beast that was 'half animal and half fish, with teeth as sharp as horns, and a pair of bucklers [wings] on either side of his body.'[277]

The polymorphic appearance of various forms – beast, serpent, bird, and fish – is outside nature, and so an offence against God. David Williams states 'the dragon in its monstrous combination of serpent, bird and fish points not only to the transgression of natural categories separating species but also to the dissolution of individuality into original oneness.'[278] There would be no doubt in the mind of a reader/listener that this

[276] *Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century.,* ed. W.M. Metcalfe, Scottish Texts Society (Edinburgh & London: Wm. Blackwood & Sons, 1896), pp.329-339. I have chosen to show my translation of this text as there are words in the Scots dialect which could be unfamiliar to some.
[277] *The Legenda Aurea.,* as before, .pp.409-412 (p.410).
[278] Williams, p.59.

creature was unholy and evil. The Devil personifies evil and transferring that personification to the beast strengthens that belief. This also signifies why a dragon is so often depicted outside a city, in the wilderness or deep forest. A dragon is outcast, on the outside of both the city and civilisation, occupying a liminal space. Disobedience of God's law makes outcasts of men. Both St. George and St. Martha face a dragon outside of a city. Daas states that the dragon is metaphorically a representation of 'a variety of evils: social ills, the dark side of humanity, the wilderness itself, un-Christian beliefs, and of course, the Devil.'[279]

Martha's dragon, which 'lurked in the river', was said by de Voragine to be 'begotten of Leviathan, an extremely ferocious water-serpent, and Onachus, an animal bred in the region of Galatia, which shoots its dung like darts at pursuers within the space of an acre: whatever this touches is burned up as if by fire'.[280] The Tarascon dragon has taken from its foul parents the historic traits of living on or near water, and the use of fire. The Onachus is in later texts also called 'Bonnacon', 'Bonasus', and is named by Caxton 'Bonacho' in his printed version[281]. Voragine took Pliny the Elder as his source for this, while Pliny himself quoted Aristotle. [282] The illustration Fig. 27 from a thirteenth-century bestiary is a possible source of Voragine's inspiration. The dragon has wings, it is very large, and exhibits a serpentine tail, the talons of a bird and the scales of a fish.

The links between the early *drakōn* and the biblical beasts are strongly in evidence here. Also substantiated is the place of origin of the beast. Galatia was the neighbour of Cappadocia, from where Saint George and St. Margaret are said to originate. As previously mentioned, this was also the area of the Crusades and the Holy Wars. The origin of the dragon has been traced back, as we have seen, to ancient Samaria, which is

[279] Daas, p.11.

[280] *LA.* p.410.

[281] Appears later under other names; a developed examination follows at the end of the discussion of St. Martha's texts.

[282] Pliny, Vol. VIII, Ch. 16 'It appears in Pæonia, it is said, there is a wild animal known as the bonasus; it has the mane of the horse, but is, in other respects, like the bull, with horns, however, so much bent inwards upon each other, as to be of no use for the purposes of combat. It has therefore to depend upon its flight, and, while in the act of flying, it sends forth its excrements, sometimes to a distance of even three jugera; the contact of which burns those who pursue the animal, just like a kind of fire.' Pliny's account is from Aristotle, Hist. Anim. B. ix. c. 45, but, as is often the case, with considerable exaggerations. Aristotle says that these animals eject their excrements to a distance of four feet, and that it is of so acrid a nature, as to cause the hair of the dog to fall off. The word jugerum is generally used as a measure of superficial surface. Trans. (Latin) (ed. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff) (English) (ed. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S., H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A.).

also in the same geographical area: the links to the ancient legends are still there. Leviathan is a descendant of Ti âmat, the great mother dragon (see p.9 above), refashioned for the Jewish scripture. The placing of the dragon outside the city also refers back to the Old Testament dragons being in spaces of desolation and having no place in civilised society.

According to de Voragine, at the request of the people, Martha 'went after the dragon' where she 'found him in the forest in the act of devouring a man, sprinkled him with blessed water and had a cross held up in front of him' (p.410). This mirrors the actions of St. Margaret, who also held up a cross to the dragon. The beast is so subdued that it 'stands like a sheep', and Martha is then able to lead it away to be killed by binding it with her girdle.[283] This is a recurrent theme as has been shown. The unnamed virgin princess, the embattled Margaret and now Martha are all able to bind a dragon with an item of clothing, either a girdle or a wimple.[284] So important is this dragon-slaying tale, that the area where it took place (Nerluc) was renamed *Tarascon,* and a Church was built in Saint Martha's name, where her tomb still exists today. Relics of Martha were hidden during the Saracen invasion, but rediscovered in 1187, when the church, Collégiate Sainte-Marthe 'was built on the place where she used to live.'[285] The city still holds a festival every year in celebration of Saint Martha, founded in 1469 by King René of Anjou and held annually on the second Sunday after Pentecost. Its original purpose was to ward off evil spirits and floods, reasserting the connection of dragons with water. [286]

St. Martha's binding of the dragon with a girdle is a repetition of the role of the woman in the Saint George legend, and, as we have seen, St. Margaret used her wimple, or headband, to the same effect. This methodology and the elements of subjugation of the dragon appear to be a direct link with the Saint George legend, as I have found no other instances of girdles being used to subdue or lead a dragon. As discussed on p.55 above, the power of chastity as denoted by the girdle has the ability to defeat the Devil. Since St. George, St. Margaret and St. Martha are chaste, as is the virgin in the St. George legend,

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[283] *L.A*, p.410.

[284] The girdle is a very womanly item of clothing that shows her virginal (i.e., non-pregnant) status, as she can wear a belt. *M.E.D. On line* 1 (c) fig. chastity; also, the Virgin Mary.

[285] https//thecatholictravelguide.com.

[286] Office Municipal de Tourisme de Tarascon - Le Panoramique - Avenue de la République - 13150 Tarascon. Tarascon is recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Martha has two feast days: the Latin church celebrates on the twenty-ninth of July, and the Orthodox Church on the fourth of June.

they can use this powerful symbol against the old adversary, reduce his power, and ultimately, he is defeated. Margaret and Martha, however, perform the binding acting on their own initiative, whilst George gives the instruction to the princess. This presumes some sort of inner knowledge – maybe divine inspiration – that is not given to those ordinary mortals not destined for sainthood.

The illustration (Fig, 24) is taken from the Book of Hours belonging to Henry VIII. The legend of Martha and the dragon had survived for at least two hundred years and was thought to be important enough to be included in a royal Book of Hours. The legend was seemingly a very popular one, as by the fourteenth century it had spread as far as Scotland, where it was reproduced in the Scottish dialect, in a text to which we now turn.

St. Martha in Scotland: *Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century.*

The manuscript of the *Legends* is now held at Cambridge University Library (Clg.II6). The handwriting is a fifteenth-century, Scottish type, and it is glossed with the Latin of the *LA.* It is highly likely, then, that the unnamed scribes, of whom there were several, used the *LA* as their source. The *Scottish Legends* is sometimes thought to be the work of John Barbour (c.1330-1395), an 'ecclesiastic and verse historian'.[287] The introduction to the work by W.M. Metcalfe tells us that the manuscript is written in 'mainly one hand, with two other principal hands "filling in what had not been put in by the principal copyist", and is mainly in the Lowland Scottish dialect, circa 1400'.[288] The account is difficult to translate, as Metcalfe goes on to explain:[289]

> The impression frequently produced by the manuscript, is that the scribe wrote from dictation, and being thoroughly indifferent to the uniformity of his spelling, put down what letters seemed to him at the moment to be best fitted to represent the sound. [290]

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[287] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,*

[288] 'Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century - Scottish Text Society Publications [Series 1] - Old Series - Publications by Scottish Clubs - National Library of Scotland', *Scottish Texts Society, S.1.* (William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London), 1896. Introduction by W.M. Metcalfe, ppviii-vix.(p.ix.p.xxxii).

[289] The story of Martha appears in the first of three volumes of full text versions of historical texts dating from the twelfth to the nineteenth century. It contains critical printed editions of manuscripts, including church records, state papers, correspondence, memoirs, diaries, legends, and literary texts. The story of Martha is No. 13 in a list of 50, where she is listed as 'Mathy,' which is a literal pronunciation of 'Martha' in dialect.

[290] Ibid., p.x.

The relevance of this is that although the basic story of Martha remains the same as in other accounts, there are omissions and alterations, which although not detracting from the essence of the tale, nevertheless put an individual scribe's own interpretation on it.

The Scottish dialect account of Martha – or 'Mathy' as she appears in this text – is a poem of three hundred and forty-four lines, only fifty-four of which are the description of the dragon and Martha's encounter of it. Although is quite difficult to determine a regular poetic pattern, it is written in rhyming couplets with lilting spoken rhythms. This would be easy to hear and read, particularly for those using the local dialect. As previously mentioned, the ballad-style texts were entertaining as well as instructive. Certain lines in particular would be easy to remember, for example 29-32 below, as they rhyme in dialect and use colloquial speech.

> A fel beste of þe kind of þai
> Þat ar gen*er*yt in asya;
> & quhene-euir hyme tho*ch*t gud
> As fysche wald he dwel i*n* þe flud.

The poet says that Martha 'fand a tovne, / þat nov is call it t*er*ascone'. (21-22). This could imply that Martha came across the town, or that she actually founded it. Of the origins of the dragon, the poet simply says it is 'of þe kind of þai/þat ar gen*er*yt in aysa' (29-30) [of the same as those that came from Asia]. This relates directly back to the earliest mention of dragons (Pages 9 and 10 above) and is an example of how the basic primary source is still retained. The male-gendered dragon was 'fers and fel' (25) [brutal and cruel], and lived in a wood 'be-twene arle and avynone]' (17).[291] The beast created havoc, killing, and eating people, and overturning boats:'& quhene-euir hyme tho*ch*tgud,/As fysche wad he dewl i*n* þe flud,' (31-32) [And any time he felt like it, he would live in the water like a fish].

The dragon still retains its original habitat of on or near water. The poet describes the dragon as follows:

> For his hevid was sa awful mad,
> Þat he twa tethe as swordis had,
> bathe lande & scharpe; for-þi my*ch*t nane
> Eschape, þat euire he has ourtane.
> & quha to flemad hyme faste,
> his foylze eft*ir* hyme cane he caste,
> Þe quhilk, quhat thinge It ourtuke,

[291] The translations in all instances are my own.

a[s] fyr gregois brynt at aluke
& þat swith he wald ger ga
eftyre ony, þat he wald sla,
of ame oxgange hale þe space,
þat twa hu*n*drth fet *in* lynth has
& twenty, and in bred alsa
sewyne schore of fute & na ma. (39-52).

[His head was so fearfully constructed that he had two teeth that were like swords, both long and sharp, that none may escape, whoever he had captured. And when he made himself flee [as in ran away] quickly, [when he was chased]. He cast his [filth] excrement behind him at everyone. And whatever it engulfed [the dragon's flames] as Greek fire burnt at a look [with a glance] and he would swiftly go after any, and he would slay them, up to the distance of thirteen acres, which is two hundred and twenty feet in length and in breadth also, seven score feet and no more].

The dragon was well armed, not only with long, sharp teeth, but also with the capacity to avoid capture by running away quickly. He chased, killed, and ate people. He cast his excrement behind him, another weapon, which burned anything it touched. The feature of casting excrement is particularly interesting, as it shows some knowledge of the *LA,* when de Voragine describes it. This is indicative of the Scots poet using it as the source for his text.

When Martha is approached by the people, where she is preaching, they 'prayt jer for godd*is* sake/quhais treuth shco gert þ*am* take/to safe þame, þat þai var no*ch*t tynt' (57-59) [beg her to save them for God's sake/ whose truth she caused them to take/to save them, that they were not damned.] Martha has evangelised the population, and they have asked her to save them in God's name. As described in the *LA*, Martha actively seeks the dragon, and finds the beast eating a man. In this Scottish version, Martha herself holds the cross: 'a crucifix sho w*ith* hyre had/& haly vater, þe preste had mad; (63-64). She quickly throws the holy water on him, which calms him.[292]

&al[s] þe croyce s[ch]ay thyme bath:
& as sconfyste [s]til he stud.
& scho fourth one til hy*m* zud,
& anerly be god*is* helpe,
about her hals scho put hyr belt,
& mekely led hyme as a schepe
tovart þe folk, þat hyme caInI kepe.
þane Ioyful, glad. And blyth[t]e,
þai slew þe ellone beste alswytht
with spere, & swerde, & caste of stane,
& mony vthire vapynes ane,

[292] Another instance of Martha being 'active'.

& lofyt god, and hyre alsa,
Þat þame deliu*r*it of þat fa. (66-78)

[And on him she quickly cast the water, and also, she showed him the cross as she bathed him. And as he stood defeated, as still as a stone, she moved forward until she stood alone by him, and also with God's help about his neck she put her girdle. She led him, meekly as a sheep, towards the people, so they can take notice of how she has subdued him. Then joyful, glad, and happy they slew that foul beast immediately with spear, and sword and the throwing of stones, and they loved God and her also, who delivered them from that foe].

The description of the dragon being as 'meek as a sheep' seems to be original to this text. It is possible that the area was farming country, or that the audience would have knowledge of sheep and recognise the extent to which the fearsome, ferocious beast had been subdued.

After taming the dragon, Martha then founded a town, of which the Scots poet says simply 'the wood 'be-twene arle and avynone, a place now of gret renovne'. Martha 'fand a tovne, /þat nov is call it t*er*ascone' (21-22). The reason for the renaming of the town is entirely omitted. If, as the Introduction states, 'the scribe [was] thoroughly indifferent', this can be judged to be purely laziness, a scribe copying for speed, not content or clarity. However, the abridged poem appears to overlook the compelling idea that the town was renamed specifically after a dragon. The fact that the town still exists and thrives to this day gives an element of veracity to the legend.

What the poem does demonstrate is how Martha harnessed the power of the water blessed by the priest, and the power of the girdle, symbolic of the Virgin Mary's girdle, together with her own chastity and her faith. This gives her an extremely powerful presence, enough to awe the dragon (Devil) into submission; his 'power' is reduced to nothing and is shown to be merely the power of other people's fear. Martha has used his own weapon against him, safe in her faith in God.

The Scots poet does not give the dragon wings. The weapons described are the two razor sharp teeth, 'like swords', his ability to escape quickly, and most notably the casting of the excrement. As this beast lives both in water and a wood, wings would prove an impediment to an escape. Although the monster does not breathe fire from its mouth, its behind is just as deadly, casting incendiary excrement towards any pursuers. The poet does, however, give a detailed description of how wide ranging this is (48-52). This scatological detail would very possibly cause a range of responses, from disgust or

awe to merriment. Just to imagine it would doubtless cause much discussion, especially if this tale were read to a younger audience, although there is no information on the demographic of the audience. Finally, however, the dragon meets the same fate as the dragon in the *LA,* being killed by the people. It is notable that a dragon which killed a male victim is defeated by a female saint. This significant gender reversal will be discussed further below.

St. Martha in William Caxton's *The Legenda Aurea*

William Caxton's translation of *The Legenda Aurea* was printed in 1483-84. His preface states that he has taken his translation from three sources: Latin, French and the English *Gilte Legende,* and – in a now familiar trope of modesty – that any mistakes are his own. He combined and adapted these earlier versions with many additions from other sources. His use of these texts is freely admitted and defended in the prologue:

> Against me here might some persons say that this legend hath been translated tofore, and truth it is; but forasmuch as I had by me a legend in French, another in Latin, and the third in English, which varied in many and divers places; and also many histories were comprised in the two other books which were not in the English book; therefore I have written one out of the said three books.[293]

Caxton's purpose is, therefore, to consolidate the three texts into one. His interpretation runs parallel to the de Voragine *LA,* as this is undoubtedly his source, until the description of the dragon. Caxton's description of the dragon is much more detailed than de Voragine, and it is important to note the differences,

> There was at that time upon the river of Rhine, in a certain wood between Arles and Avignon, a great dragon, half beast and half fish, greather than an ox, longer than a horse, having teeth sharp as a sword, and horned on either side, head like a lion, tail like a serpent, and defended him with two wings on either side, and could not be beaten with cast of stones ne with other armour, and was as strong as twelve lions or bears; which dragon lay in hiding and lurking in the river, and perished them that passed by and drowned ships. He came thither by sea from Galicia, and was engendered of Leviathan, which is a serpent of the water and is much wood, and of a beast called Bonacho, that is engendered in Galacia. And when he is pursued, he casts out of his belly behind his ordure, the space of an acre of land on them that follow him, and it is as bright as glass, and what it toucheth it burneth as fire.[294]

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[293] Caxton, William. Prologue to *The Legenda Aurea,* First Edition 1483.Special Collections Department, Library (University of Glasgow, Scotland).

[294] William Caxton (trans), *The Legenda Aurea : Lives of the Saints : Jacobus, de Voragine, Ca. 1229-1298 : Internet Archive*, ed. by S.J. O'Neill (London: Cambridge University Press, 1914), pp.35-39.

Caxton has, from the three sources, taken all the characteristics of the dragon which have been attributed to it since the earliest Mesopotamian dragons of Ti'âmat and Gilgamesh (pages 9 and 10 above), through the ancient Greek and Roman descriptions, and the biblical interpretations. In addition, and possibly in order to make the beast even more exotic and fantastical, he follows de Voragine in claiming it was 'engendered of Leviathan, which is a serpent of the water and is much wood, and of a beast called Bonacho, that is engendered in Galacia'. Differences now appear from the early printed edition. Caxton appears to have summarised all the known hypotheses of Martha's dragon, and of historical dragons, and consolidated them into one beast. Caxton appears to follow along with the *Scottish Dialect* version with the description of the dragon, and this could be one of the 'two other books that were not in the English book.' Caxton embellishes de Voragine's description of the beast, changing the 'bucklers' or shields into 'two wings on either side' and describes his invincibility; 'he could not be beaten with cast of stones ne with other armour, and was as strong as twelve lions or bears'. The addition of the wings appears to be Caxton's own. Winged dragons appeared in bestiaries and illustrated manuscripts, and the image of a winged dragon reflects the popular medieval conception, and a continuation of the ancient descriptions from the time of Aristotle and earlier. This suggests that the belief in dragons as real beasts persisted. The use of classical sources added gravitas and veracity to the medieval retelling of the dragon. Bestiaries and manuscripts of the era took delight in fantastical images of dragons, and an example of such is shown below. It is intriguing to see that one dragon has wings, whilst the other does not. The dragon at *59r* appears to be flying out of the text, however, closer examination shows the text has been written around the dragon.

Caxton's monster, being a chimera from Greek mythology (p. 9 above) having a 'head like a lion, tail like a serpent' with the addition of wings, being impervious to weapons, and possessed of superhuman strength, is intended to shock and entertain an audience. At the same time, Caxton delivers the hagiography of Martha, a proactive female evangelist and healer. As in other versions, Martha enters the wood and confronts the dragon, which is 'eating a man' (p.64). Caxton's version is very brief:

> And she cast on him holy water, and showed him the cross, which anon was overcome, and standing still as a sheep, she bound him with her own girdle, and then was slain with spears and glaives [swords] of the people. (p.64).

It will be noted that Caxton genders the dragon as male, as do Voragine and the Scots poet. Thus, the dragon represents the power, aggression, authority, and domination of the male, particularly over women. However, as is seen in all these texts, the woman is able to easily overcome the aggressor by means of faith and virtue.

Of the place where Martha encounters the dragon, Caxton follows the *LA* in that the wood is by the Rhone between Arles and Avignon, and that the inhabitants call the dragon *Tarasconus.* 'whereas in remembrance of him that place is called Tarasconus, which tofore was call Nerluc, and the Black Lake, because there be woods shadowous and black.'

Caxton's Tarascon dragon has the same aspects as the 'George' dragon. It is outside the city, in a shadowy area near water; it is pestilent, and it eats people. There is no doubt that it represents paganism, and the devil devouring the souls of non-Christians. Without a knight in armour, or a weapon of any kind, a simple woman of great faith is able to subdue the beast and bind it with the girdle of chastity. Martha 'cast on him holy water, and showed to him the cross' by which the beast was stunned into compliance, and was led away by Martha to be killed.

Reworkings of Martha, the Dragon Tamer

All three texts discussed, the *LA,* the Scots dialect poem and Caxton's printed text, show the same components of Martha's legend. However, the Scots scribe omits some finer details, such as the renaming of Tarascon. This is either a deliberate omission to make the narrative more relevant to everyone, or the scribe considered it irrelevant. The dragon episode in each text is very brief but descriptive and dynamic. The dragon is vicious and ruthless, with the ability to cast fiery excrement. Martha appears to be a combination of George and the sacrificial princess of his tale. She is not armed with a sword, but she has the same unshakeable faith that the dragon will be defeated. In addition, she is armed with the girdle of chastity. Martha is not involved with a male partner; she is self-sufficient and proactive. She is a preacher and a healer, as was Christ whom she hosted in Bethany. Her subjugation of the dragon is rapid. She approaches the male-gendered dragon, who is in the act of eating a man; quickly sprinkled it with holy water, rendering it instantly docile, and able to be bound by the girdle. Leading the dragon back to the people for slaughter, Martha demonstrates that Christ is all powerful, and with his help a chaste and unarmed woman will overcome the worst evil.

The gender specifications are interesting regarding the aspect of male strength and domination. The priest is male, the victim being consumed is male, and the dragon is male. The dragon is eating a Christian male, analogical of the Devil defeating Christianity. Accepting that the dragon is representative of paganism and the Devil, the swallowing of a Christian can be interpreted as being swallowed into the mouth of hell. This makes Martha even more remarkable, a supposedly weak woman – and the only woman in the story – defeating such a powerful adversary. Martha does not attempt to kill the dragon, but she subdues it, and binds it with the symbol of womanhood, her girdle. Caxton continues [the dragon] 'then was slain with spears and glaives of the people,' (p.64). Martha is not a violent woman, and the violence is, presumably, left to the men.

The polymorphism of the dragon puts it outside the social norm for God's creation. Hiding in a river or a wood, it is outcast from society in the same way that George's dragon is outside the city walls. Paganism and atheism are not to be tolerated in a Christian society, and practitioners will be cast out. They will also be excluded from Heaven after their death. No-one wants to be like a dragon, outcast and excluded.

A question must be considered here. Of all the women in the Bible, why is Martha the only one in her legendary subsequent life to become a dragon-slayer? Is it because she is an independent, proactive woman with 'a man's spirit' (p.96 above), or is it because she was the first witness to Jesus's declaration, and therefore had to be elevated above the norm? When Jesus came to visit her home in Bethany, 'Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him, but Mary sat still in the house.'[295] Martha is chaste and devout, but so are other biblical women. However, Martha, according to her legend, is exiled after the death of Christ.[296] In a foreign land, France, Martha continues the work of her house guest, Jesus. One of the ways to please Jesus is 'to fede God wiþ þe mete of goode werkes….' (25).[297] Martha fulfils these instructions admirably: 'Wherefore þe first is betokened bi Martha, þat was besy to fede oure lord, as he seiþ' (29).[298] She believes in the Resurrection, as she had made her own declaration of faith before she witnessed her own brother Lazarus raised from the dead. Martha therefore evangelises the people of her new land. Daas claims 'By leaving behind her old

[295] John 11:20.
[296] *LA*, p.64.
[297] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, ed. by W. Nelson Francis (London: London, Pub. for the Early English Text Society by H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1942), pp.220-225, (l.25).
[298] Ibid., l.29.

life, Martha enters a new phase: one that is defined by twelfth-century religiosity.'[299] The life of Martha is rendered culturally and historically proximate to that of her readers. As it states in her legend, Martha is exiled after the Crucifixion. It is reasonable to suggest that she is a mature woman, with the experience of life which gives the ability to be a teacher and a healer, and she also bears witness to the work of Christ. She is a very special, very powerful woman. To highlight this power, which comes from God, Martha is shown by authors to do something extraordinary. She will tame the dragon of paganism and non-belief in a foreign land, on the shores of Europe. The word will spread of a woman who tames a dragon. Now medieval women indeed have a spiritual hero of their own, but more importantly Martha is a proactive woman. Whilst the Church still exerted almost total control over women, a role model like Martha would inspire and empower women with the view that a woman can live in the community, take some responsibility for her own actions, and at the same time follow the teaching of Christ and the Church. Her very lifestyle is contradictory to the preaching of Saint Paul who 'suffered not a woman to teach…but to be in silence.'[300] Martha was not silent; the Bible tells how she spoke with Jesus, and her legend claims she was a healer and a teacher. She was also a dragon-tamer. Although it is difficult to ascertain how medieval women responded to Martha's story, women may well have been inspired by the legend of a woman taking control of her own situation. In addition, Martha was a stranger in a strange land. The dragon taming can also be interpreted as a way of Martha defeating the suspicions of the locals towards a foreigner who brings different ideas into an established community.

In all the versions I have examined, Martha approaches the dragon of paganism in a very matter-of-fact way. There is no sexual threat from this dragon; it simply eats people and creates havoc. Metaphorically the dragon is destroying souls. It is Martha's role to save souls from paganism, and to teach the word of God. Martha is, quite simply, doing her job.

Apart from a dragon, a further connection between all three saints' legends is the binding of the beast. All the women are virgins, and their girdles, proof of their chastity, render the dragons powerless. Although there is no evidence of sexual threat to Martha,

[299] Dass, as before, p.3.
[300] Timothy 1:12.

her celibacy is an important part of who she is. Margaret's demon is invisibly bound, except in the *Stanzaic Life* which explains how Margaret uses her head-dress. I would suggest that, in the other instances, although she has no girdle, it is Margaret's virtue and faith which bind the demon. All three beasts are made powerless by these most powerful of attributes, displayed by the women after the example of the Virgin Mary. Similarly, George orders the princess to subdue the dragon with her girdle as he knows what it represents, and that the power of the girdle comes, by association, from the Holy Virgin.

All three tales are of exorcism, getting rid of demons, although Margaret is the only one who performs a ritual in that she directly speaks with the demon. Dresvina claims there is a link between the binding of the demon and exorcism. 'All the components of exorcism are there... the prayer to see the enemy, the foot on the neck...the questioning …and the dismissal'[301] The defeat of the dragon, in all cases, is a cleansing. The dragon of St. George is about to devour a virgin princess, while St. Martha's dragon eats Christians. St. Margaret's dragon does swallow her but is forced to relinquish her. All these dragons represent the threat of violence and oppression. The threat is (in the instance of St. Margaret) to chastity and to the Christian faith and is the oppression of believers in the new religion. In all instances, the saints, by representing the power of chastity and Christianity, avert disaster and destroy the threat.

Whilst there are very few hagiographies in English literature that contain dragons, there is a clear preference amongst authors for women to face a dragon. George was protected by armour and a multitude of weapons, but Margaret and Martha were unarmed. They were not knights trained for war; Margaret was a very young girl who had no experience of life, and Martha was a housekeeper. The idea that women, the supposed weaker sex, could confront and control a dragon would be inspirational if the 'dragon' were explained in the context of everyday life. It could represent lust, loss of faith, and a desire not to conform to the conventional rules of behaviour – problems which still face some women today. The older woman, Martha, although non-conformist in her story (not silent, not passive – but proactive) faced exile and the difficulties of preaching in a foreign country. Margaret was pressured to concede her virginity and defied the social mores by refusing, whilst Martha was asked to go out alone to face a malignant, killer beast. Both

[301] Juliana Dresvina, 'The Significance of the Demonic Episode in the Legend of St. Margaret of Antioch', *Medium Aevum*, LXXXI.No.2 (2012), 189–209. (p.201).

'weaker' women succeeded in their personal struggles and achieved their desired goals. Margaret was martyred as she wished, and Martha was left in peace to preach and heal the sick.[302]

The dragon in the Margaret legend is presented quite differently from that of George. It is inside the prison, not out in the open. The dragon approaches Margaret, she is a small and unarmed female, not a knight with a sword and spear. She is consequently presented as less of a threat, and the dragon – representing masculine oppression – is not afraid to get near her. Her defeat and escape from the dragon, therefore, is in its own way more impressive than George and his sword. There is the added dimension of the Demon, who engages Margaret in conversation, before being despatched back to Hell. This anthropomorphic depiction allows the author to show – and therefore the audience to see – how evil the Devil is, and how the power of Christianity will defeat him. Martha's dragon is in the traditional area of 'outside the city' and she is also without masculine weapons. She almost gently subdues the dragon and leads it to destruction by men. The approach to the dragon with women in the story could not be more different from George. Although neither woman has any physical weapons, their faith and chastity prove just as effective in defeating the evil of paganism and the Devil. The lesson is that women should be gentle, but firmly resistant to the Devil and his ways. He is deceitful and persuasive but will be overcome. This is in complete contrast to the warlike George, and the knights in Medieval Romance, which follow in the next Chapter.

The dragon can be beaten by an unarmed virgin as we saw in Saint Margaret and subdued by the girdle of a virgin as seen in Saint George and Saint Martha. The idea that virginity and chastity have more power than weaponry has been consistent throughout the medieval period dragon encounters. It is the weapon used by the virgin martyrs against tyranny and sexual possession, both of which are represented by the dragon. St. George retained his chastity despite being offered a virgin princess as a bride. Margaret was tortured because she refused Olibrius's sexual demands as she insisted her body was dedicated to Christ. Staying chaste through choice was a way of obtaining heavenly grace. The Romances offer a different genre, moving from the didacticism of hagiography which contain protagonists who were believed to have lived, into a fictional, more entertaining category of texts, although maintain the message of the power of faith.

[302] The legend of Martha will be provided in Appendix iv.

CHAPTER 3: Dragons and Dragon Slayers in Medieval Romance

Introduction

Medieval Romance as we know it today contains narratives of chivalrous knights and their adventures, which arrived in the English court around the thirteenth century, after originating in France around the eleventh century, and the genre, according to Roberta L. Kreuger is 'a rich spectrum of narratives whose themes and issues interact with virtually every aspect of medieval social and cultural life.'[303] Similarly to hagiography, the romances contain many mutual elements; adventure, a conquest for the king, a religious crusade and the pursuit of a lady, occasionally a captive. However, unlike the didactic theme of hagiography, the medieval romances do not emphasise the element of the Church, although the faith in prayer and God and always present, and still effective in saving the day.

Medieval romance texts describe the adventures of legendary knights combating supernatural elements such as dragons and giants. The main sources of these texts are collections such as the Auchinleck manuscript and the British Library collections to name just two. They are written in verse or prose, and the form persists into the Early Modern period as will be discussed. Originating from the eleventh century onwards, medieval romance commends the style of behaviour expected from a knight, in addition to his prowess in warfare. Loyalty, honour, courtesy and chivalry, the attributes of *gentilesse,* made up the expected behaviour of a knight. Courtly love for his lady and bravery in battle were the required elements in romance. Early authors of the genre include Marie de France, (c. late twelfth century) and Chrètien de Troyes (1130-1191).[304] Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* written in 1485 showed the longevity of the romance throughout the Middle Ages. Romances were very popular forms of entertainment and would be read to an appreciative audience.

This Chapter examines the dragon in a role which is probably the most familiar after St. George, that of a beast in direct confrontation with a battle-hardened knight. The

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[303] Roberta L. Kreuger, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.2.

[304] *The Lais of Marie de France*: trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (Suffolk: Richard Clay Ltd.,1986). A series of twelve short narrative poems and were probably composed in the late twelfth century. The poems generally focus on glorifying the concept of courtly love by the adventures of their main characters. Chretien De Troyes: *Arthurian Romances* trans. William W. Kibler (England: Clays Ltd, St. Ives plc. 1991) . Romances around Arthurian knights, Lancelot, Percival, and the Grail quest amongst others.

Romances offer a different knight to St. George – not chaste or seeking martyrdom – but on adventures or pilgrimage, where defeating a dragon is part of the spiritual and physical journey they undertake. I will be looking at why the knights battle valiantly almost to the point of death against a seemingly undefeatable monster, and the purpose served by the telling of the tales. The manuscripts from the fourteenth century provide a rich source to work from. The main texts I will discuss are *Sir Guy of Warwick* and *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, both of which describe fearsome battles with a dragon. Although other minor texts will be included, they involve dragons to a lesser degree but demonstrate the popularity of a knight/dragon encounter in the era.

Given the popularity of the 'knight versus dragon' narrative, it is perhaps surprising that dragons do not feature significantly in this genre, and where they do, the episodes in which they appear are generally brief and cursory. These episodes are often described in just a few lines in romances of normally over a thousand lines and are usually presented as part of a trial of – or as a rite of passage in – the progress of a knight. *Sir Eglamour,* c.1350 is one of the early romances, and survives in five manuscripts from the fifteenth century, and a printed sixteenth-century edition.[305] Sir Eglamour slays a dragon as part of a trial to win the hand of his lady Cristabel, the only child of his lord. [306] There is a very brief description of the encounter, which nonetheless contains some of the formulaic elements of a dragon fight:

> The knyght arose and his scheld up sett,
> This wykked worme on hym bett
> Byttur dyntes and felle.
> He kest out mony fyre brondes thore,
> Evyr nere the nyght the more,
> As hyt walled owt of helle.
> Syr Eglamour, forsoth I sey,
> Half hys tonge he stroke away;
> The fend began to yelle.
> With the stump that hym was leved
> He stroke the knyght on the hed
> A depe wonde and a felle. (718-729)
>
> The knyght seyde, "Now am I schent!"
> Nere the wykked worme he went,

[305] Lincoln Cathedral MS 91, the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript (c. 1440), Cambridge University Library Ff. 2.38 (c. 1460), British Library MS Cotton Caligula A ii (second half of the 15th century), British Library MS Douce 261 (1564), British Museum Additional 27879, the Percy Folio (c. 1650).

[306] *Sir Eglamour of Artois* ed. Harriet Hudson, Robbins Library Digital Projects > TEAMS Middle English Texts.

Hys hed he stroke away.
And then so nere hym ys he gon
He cleves hym by the rygge bon.
The felde he wan that day. (730-735)

As can be seen from the above excerpt, only the bare minimum of detail is given: the knight is harmed but fights bravely on and takes the head of the dragon.[307] This is a formula which we will see repeated in the close examination of the main texts of this chapter. Eglamour is simply completing the third of three tasks he needs to accomplish in order to be with his wife. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c.1400) mentions in passing that Gawain fights with worms (dragons), wolves and trolls on his quest to find the Green Chapel. [308] In Thomas Malory's *Launcelot and Elaine* Sir Lancelot slays 'a fyendely dragon spyttynge wylde fyre', which is living in a tomb.[309] *Sir Torrent of Portingale*, a late fourteenth-century romance full of giants and quests, references dragons kept as pets by a giants.[310] Both giants and dragons are slain by Sir Torrent, but there are so many he loses count. Again, no details are given, other than that 'he slew them'. None of these encounters give any detail of the fights, or even the reasons for them, except for one, which describes a new feature for the dragon, and as such is worthy of discussion. In the *Sir Torrent* poem of 2,671 lines, a mere twenty-three lines are given to an encounter and fight with a dragon which appeared out of nowhere. A giant then also appeared, claiming the dragon was his pet. Sir Torrent first saw the dragon:

Downe in a depe valey,
Besyd a well strong.
A lytyll before mydnyght,
Of a dragon he had syght
That grysly wase to fyght.
He had hym nowght to were,
But hys schyld and hys spere,
That wase in hys squyers hond. (520-527)

Ase Torrent Jesu gan pray,
He herd the dragon, ther he lay,
Undyr-nethe a clough.

[307] Beheading was a form of punishment reserved for noble offenders, and the use of the sword was generally only for royalty. The poet appears to be regarding the dragon as a noble enemy.
[308] J.R.R. Tolkien, trans; ed. Christopher Tolkien. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo.* (London: HarperCollins,1995),pp.17-93 (p.38).
[309] Malory as before, pp.478-9. There is no further explanation of why the dragon is there, but Lancelot has a task to kill it.
[310] *Sir Torrent of Portingale* ed. James Wade. Robbins Library Digital Projects. TEAMS Middle English Texts. Lines 567 and 1593, (2017).

Off and on he wase stronge,
Hys tayle wase seven yerds long,
That aftyr hyme he drewe. (540 -545)

The sight and sound of a dragon with a tail seven yards long would be enough to strike fear into the heart of any man. Torrent, however, is a knight, courage and faith are embedded in his character, and even though he has very little protection, he has the power of prayer, as we have seen previously with the saintly dragon slayers.

Hys wynggs was long and wyght,
To the chyld he toke a flyght,
With a howge swowe.
Had he nether schyld ne spere,
But prayd to God he schold hyme were,
For he wase in dred i-nowthe. (546-551)

On the tayle an hed ther wase,
That byrnyd bryght as anny glase,
In fyer whan it was dyght.
Abowght the schyld he lappyd yt ther,
Torrent the bowght asondyr schere,
Thurrow the grace of God almyght. (552-557)

At the end of the tail there was another head, which shone like glass with fire (552). Of all the texts that I have read, and examined, this is the only mention I have encountered of a dragon with a head at both ends, although such creatures (*amphisbaena)* were depicted in medieval church carvings.[311] They were also known to the sixth century scholar Isidore of Seville, and are mentioned in the Apocalypse.[312] It also would appear that either the author, or the scribe, had forgotten that the poem states at line 525-7 that Torrent did not have his shield with him, and that he was unarmed.

[311]The study of depictions of this creature shows that the transformation of the Amphisbaena from the two-headed snake from the Greek myths, into a two-headed dragon-type creature, occurred during Medieval times, when the Amphisbaena became a formidable monster, often found in churches' carvings and paintings, as a punisher for the wicked. https://www.mythicalcreaturescatalogue.com/single-post/2016/05/07/. Accessed 29 August 2021.

[312] From the Robbins Digital Library notes: Dragons or serpents with heads at both ends (*amphisbaenae*) were known to medieval encyclopaedists and natural philosophers such as Isidore of Seville (trans. Barney et al., *Etymologies*, Book XII.iv.20). According to Collins (*Symbolism of Animals*, p. 162), such creatures were depicted in medieval church carvings, and with the particular representation of the dragon Torrent faces here (lines 552–63), they were likely responses to the imagery of Apocalypse in Revelation 9:18–19: "And by these three plagues was slain the third part of men, by the fire and by the smoke and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths, and in their tails. For, their tales are like to serpents, and have heads: and with them they hurt."

As the boke of Rome tellys,
Of hys taylle he cut four ells,
With hys sword so bryght.
Than cryed the lothely thyng,
That all the dall began to ryng,
That the gyant hard wyght. (558-563)

An ell is an archaic measure of forty-five inches. This would mean the tail was cut into pieces which added up to fifteen feet, from a tail which was seven yards, or twenty-one feet long. The 'shining sword' is common currency in dragon-slaying tales. For St. George it represents the truth of Christ, and for Sir Torrent, and due to his prayers, his sword is now imbued with the power of God's grace. Following on from this encounter, Torrent faces so many dragons that he slew 'Dragons two, other thre, /And giauntes meny one' (lines 2302-2303) – in other words, too many to count, and the poet has not described any of them enough to make them part of this discussion. This killing of dragons and giants appears to be so commonplace that the author seems to consider it not worth further discussion.

The dragons and the giants are incidental and form part of the fabric of the medieval romance, and the development of the romance hero. They are indicators of the expectations of the readership/audience that dragons will appear at some point in the tale. Medieval writers were responding to these expectations with a formulaic adventure story. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton et al present the view that the authors of Middle English romances alluded to current events and included 'the conquest of the deadliest Roman or English dragons as symbols of similar contemporary issues' which the readership would have recognised. [313] *Torrence* is set in Portugal, and the author in this instance – as stated by the Robbins Library *Introduction* – 'could have been attempting to tap into a current royal interest in the Iberian Peninsula. In 1386 England and Portugal strengthened already close ties by signing the Treaty of Windsor.'[314] John of Gaunt's daughter, Phillipa, became Queen of Portugal in 1387. The Editor further state that 'This "Portuguese connection" endured in England well into the fifteenth century, and it is entirely plausible that *Torrent* attempted to evoke a court setting that was at once foreign and familiar to

[313] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidi Hilm, & Linda Olsen, *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches,* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012), p.97.
[314] This was a protection against the alliance made between France and Castile, Portugal's nearest neighbour.

English-speaking royalty.'[315] The majority of surviving romance manuscripts do not take great issue with dragons per se, as the beasts are usually incidental to the main theme of medieval romances, that of the pursuit of love. This I feel, is an indicator that the dragon is now only used for entertainment purposes – still an enemy, but no longer representing a perceived real threat in any other area.

There is however, one manuscript - the Auchinleck Manuscript - from the medieval era, produced in the 1330s, that contains two absorbing and highly detailed dragon encounters, which form the main subject of this chapter. The Auchinleck Manuscript contains a large collection of Middle English works from a period from which relatively few literary texts survive. That is, 'it offers a rare snapshot of the kind of English literary texts which were in circulation in England in the period before Chaucer.'[316] Dated c.1331, the dialect and 'collaborative nature of the production' would indicate that it was compiled in London. [317] Thorlac Turville-Petre states that 'the compiler shows a particular interest in material that has a bearing on the state of England and its history'.[318] This would suggest it was compiled for the aristocracy and those with political power and or inclinations to such. Derek Pearsall however claims the appeal of the book was more general in that

> 'the audience for which the book was designed was one that wished to be both edified and entertained, one that relished familiar piety and instruction, but one that also desired access, in the native tongue, to the historical dignities and fashionable *haute monde* of romance…The taste that it is designed to appeal to is that of the aspirate middle-class citizen, perhaps a wealthy merchant.'[319]

The manuscript is now held in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, and contains among its forty-four items eighteen romances, which are grouped together at the centre of the manuscript. The remainder of the texts are pious, hagiographical, satirical, or historic in nature. A reader would be immersed in serious texts before coming to a section of amusing and entertaining ones. If the reader were simply looking to be entertained, they would be able to find that less weighty segment quite easily. This variety of genre

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[315] *Introduction to Sir Torrent,* ed. James Wade. (Robbins Library Digital Products TEAMS, 2017).

[316] *http://auchinleck.nls.uk/*.

[317] http://auchinleck.nls.uk/editorial/history.html. Ed. Alison Wiggins. [Accessed August 2020].

[318] Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'Englishness in the Auchinleck Manuscript' in *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity,* 1290-1340 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 108-141 (p.114).

[319] Derek Pearsall, The Auchinleck Manuscript Forty Years On, in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives,* ed. by Susanna Fein (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2016), pp.1-25 (p.13).

suggests to Cathy Hume that the Auchinleck contents, 'unified by vernacularity and a certain lack of sophistication suggest that it was a household or family manuscript.'[320] suitable for the varied needs of an entire family. This would dovetail with my earlier comments regarding female patronage and women readers educating their children, (p.68) and my assertions that the romances which include dragons are also suitable entertainment for children and families of a medieval household. Ten of the romances tell the story of English heroes, and two romances pertinent to this discussion are *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton*, both of which contain accounts of an English knight facing battle with a dragon.

Close examination of the texts reveals familiar characteristics and features of the dragon. These were no doubt drawn from earlier textual tradition such as the hagiographies discussed in the previous chapter, as well as early oral accounts, and continue the popular conception of the dragon. The texts from the *Legenda Aurea* (the hagiographies), and indeed descriptions from the earlier Classical texts all appear to have informed the description of the dragons in the Auchinleck Manuscript. In this way there is a remarkable continuity between genres and across eras. The romances are tales of adventure and moral or spiritual journeys, and the familiarity of the dragon is such that it need not be enhanced. The dragons are there for a purpose – to be slain as proof of prowess – and their characteristics are well known by this time.

In the previously examined medieval texts, the dragons exhibited many shared characteristics. Wings, scales, and dreadful breath are all common to the dragons encountered by Saints George, Margaret, and Martha. These features of the dragons in the Old English epic and the Middle English lives of the saints also appear in beasts faced by the knights in the two Auchinleck romances. However, unlike in the earlier hagiographies, the medieval romance contains no female dragon-slayers. Women in romances are wives and mothers, often abandoned for long periods of time whilst their husbands are away pursuing their quests. The female roles are minor and secondary to the protagonist. As Gail Ashton writes, 'women [are] articulated as full subjects only by becoming a wife and perpetuating the family name, and otherwise relegated to silence.'[321]Guy marries for love, makes his wife pregnant within two weeks, and

[320] Cathy Hume, "The Auchinleck Adam and Eve" in *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, pp.36-51, (p.36).

[321] Gail Ashton,'Genre and Intertextuality' in *Medieval English Romance in Context.* (London: Continuum, 2010), pp.37-69 (p.65).TEAMS.

immediately leaves on a holy pilgrimage. Guy's wife, Felice, is heartbroken but gives him a ring for a keepsake:

> Gret sorwe thai made at her parting
> And kist hem with eyghen wepeing,
> Bi the hond sche gan him reche
> "Leman," sche seyd, "have here this ring;
> For Jhesus love heven-king
> A word Y thee biseche:
> When thou ert in fer cuntré
> Loke heron and thenk on me
> And God Y thee biteche." (385-394)

Felice, although distraught, cannot ask her husband to stay. It is her role to wait for his return. Wives in Her token of a ring – signifying their marriage – and her prayers for his safe return are all she can give. The women face their own 'dragons' of adversity and abandonment with stoicism and expectation that their husbands will at some point return, although, of course, these women are not officially dragon-slayers.

The male heroes also exhibit virtues in common. Bravery, faith, and a determination to win are the common representations of the heroes in all the texts examined in this thesis. Every knight bears arms, which usually get damaged in the initial encounter with the dragon, and the *Guy* and *Bevis* authors maintain this tradition.[322] Armour and weapons are traditionally presented to a knight by his lord, and are usually blessed by the Church, bestowing an added protection to a knight. However, a dragon is no respecter of chivalric honour or status and is capable of great destruction of weapons and armour – disrespectful of both Church and blessings.

Both romances are episodic and are far-ranging in terms of geography. Sir Guy marries then undertakes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, whilst Sir Bevis is sold into Saracen slavery but retains his Christianity, before marrying and making his way back to England.[323] Both heroes travel extensively, but Guy's dragon is in Northumberland, whilst Bevis fights his outside Cologne. By the use of these geographical locations, dragon-slaying is placed very solidly as a tradition within English romance, whilst including the exotic 'other' of foreign countries real or imagined. The effect of this on the

[322] It will become clear that *Bevis* in particular can be seen as the inspiration for the character of the Red Cross Knight in Spenser's work *The Faerie Queene,* which is the subject of the next chapter. These parallels will be discussed fully in the analysis of *The Faerie Queene.*

[323] *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, ed. by Alison Wiggins, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004) <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/guywfrm.htm>.

romance audience would give validity to the tale – locations would be recognisable and plausibly real. It also replicates the image of St. George, who by the mid-fourteenth century was becoming known as the patron saint of England, and always depicted slaying a dragon.[324] George was so popular – 'the personification of the ideals of Christian chivalry'[325] – those other heroes were made in his image. The idea of a dragon-slaying knight was now embedded in the nationhood of England and in its romance tradition.

The Romances of Guy of Warwick

The earliest version of the tale of the heroic knight *Gui de Warewic* was, according to Kerby-Fulton, 'an Anglo-Norman ancestral tale written (by 1205) to celebrate the union of the houses of Warwick and d'Oilly.'[326] The story exists as the '*Speculum Guy de Warwick'* in several manuscripts, [327] but is different from the version in the Auchinleck Manuscript as it is shorter and Guy is 'moved from the world of romance into the orbit of devotional literature,'[328] with its focus on Guy's pilgrimage. John Lydgate also wrote a version of *Guy of Warwick* circa 1420.[329] However, neither the *Speculum* nor the Lydgate versions have any reference to a dragon; instead, they focus on Guy's intention of being a good Christian and are didactic, hence 'Speculum' – a mirror. The reader/audience would understand that they are being instructed to follow Guy's example and devote themselves to Christianity. Including a dragon would have changed the genre from history to romance, and potentially distracted the audience's attention from the importance of Guy's other achievements, in particular his pilgrimage. The majority of the Lydgate poem centres on this pilgrimage, and indeed a pilgrimage/penance is a characteristic of many medieval romances, as is love, loss, abandonment, a quest, chivalry, and piety. These themes appear in romances with or without a dragon. The appearance of a dragon is added drama and adventure.

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[324] Discussed on p.74 above.

[325] David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.181-2 (p.181).

[326] Kerby Fulton et al, The D'Oilly family were a powerful Norman family, descended from Robert D'Oilly, the first Norman governor of Oxford. p.102.

[327] BL Additional MS 36983, Cambridge U.L. MS Dd 1189, and BL Harley MS 525.

[328] Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field, *Guy of Warwick : Icon and Ancestor* (Woodbridge, UK:Woodbridge, UK, 2007), pp.81-93.

[329] Cambridge MA., MS Eng. 530 (HH), and London BL MS Harley 7333 (HR) (Robbins Library Digital Products).

At the beginning of Guy's story in all the versions, he is a steward's son who falls in love with Felice, the daughter of the Earl of Warwick. Felice rejects him due to his lowly status. Her father knights Guy but Felice insists that he prove himself worthy before she will accept him. He is mentored in knightly ways by Herhaud who becomes his companion. The poem is the story of Guy's personal and spiritual development as a knight. Eventually he regrets his 'previous lifestyle of fighting, fame-seeking and secular devotion to Felice'[330]on his journey and leaves a pregnant wife behind whilst he embarks on a pilgrimage of atonement. His wife is now facing her own dragons of loneliness, abandonment, and imminent motherhood.

As Kerby-Fulton suggests, a later English translation of the poem (c.1290-1330) may have served a similar purpose of consolidating power for the Beauchamp family who came to the earldom of Warwick through marriage in 1268.'[331] Although an apocryphal figure, the Guy of the popular legend in the Auchinleck Manuscript was adapted by the de Beauchamp family and appropriated into the family history. The portrayal of their ancestor, Guy, as an English hero – a brave, religious chivalrous man – anglicises the family after the Norman Conquest. Guy was depicted as the epitome of chivalry and is described by David Griffith 'England's other Arthur…elevated to the status of national hero.'[332] Claiming him as an ancestor made 'sound political sense…and helped secure the family into English culture; it gave kudos to their claim to Englishness and helped to aggrandize them as a family.'[333] Embedding Guy into the family history was, if not subtle, certainly effective in establishing the English credentials of this Norman family, cemented by the apocryphal Guy's love affair with Felice, a 'daughter of the Earl of Warwick'. Turville-Petre suggests that the Beauchamp family may have been amongst the earliest owners or readers of the Auchinleck manuscript as only a 'very rich family' would have been able to afford such a manuscript, and that it suggested a family with a

[330]Leila K. Norako, *Guy of Warwick*, Crusades Project, Robbins Library Digital Projects,.

[331] Kerby-Fulton et al, p.102.

[332] David Griffith 'The Visual History of Guy of Warwick' in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor.* Eds. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Fields. (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), p.120.

[333] The Earldom was created in 1088 and granted to the de Beaumont family. In 1268 the title passed via Margaret de Beaumont to her husband's family, de Beauchamp. The Earls of Warwick were very close to the throne, and immensely powerful in the political arena. Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick is perhaps better known as 'Warwick the Kingmaker' who changed sides during the Wars of the Roses and was responsible for the deposition of two kings. He was killed at the Battle of Barnet in 1471, whilst attempting to escape the field.

`long tradition of crusading, such as the Beauchamps and the Percies'.[334] If this was so, it would add considerable weight to the reason for the inclusion of apocryphal Guy into the family history, as Guy made a long pilgrimage to the Holy Land as penance for his past destructive life as a knight:

> 'Bot wer & wo ichaue don wrouȝt
> & mani a man to grounde ybrouȝt,
> Þat rewes me ful sare.
> To bote min sinnes ichil wende
> Barfot to mi liues ende. (7182-7187)

Guy expresses his regret for fighting and killing, and vows that he will walk barefoot – a traditional act of penance and pilgrimage – until he dies, as atonement for his prior actions.

It is not known who commissioned or compiled the Auchinleck Manuscript. However, it is highly likely that the commissioner of the manuscript chose the romance of Guy because it contains all the elements required for the archetypical hero: faith, chivalry, a spiritual quest, heroism, and monumental battles with both giants and dragons. Turville-Petre states that 'Guy is portrayed as a crusader, a pilgrim as the crusaders were officially recognised as pilgrims …' and this description would find favour with the prospective reader.[335] Although the later crusade movement was ineffective, the loyalty to the crusade was still very strong 'in England and elsewhere in Europe through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries' and beyond. [336] This being so, adventure-seeking young people – and very possibly those men who had taken part in a crusade – reading/hearing the poem would enjoy hearing of a pilgrim-crusader, fighting God's enemies. In 1305 a gift of books 'with a strong crusading flavour' was made to Bordesley Abbey by 'Guy de Beauchamp, presumably named after his putative forebear.'[337] The above statements all point to the de Beauchamp family having an interest in crusading to which the Auchinleck Manuscript bears witness, and indeed owning it at some point. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the Auchinleck manuscript was part of the gift to the Abbey.

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[334] Ibid., p.136.

[335] *ODNB.* Richard Beauchamp, Thirteenth Earl of Warwick, visited Rome and the Holy Land between 1408-1410. https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780192683120.013.1838.

[336] Ibid., p.120.

[337] Ibid., p.136.

The versions of the slaying of the dragon with which I am concerned are the stanzas from the Auchinleck Manuscript edited by Alison Wiggins as the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, [338] an early version written in England dating from c1220,[339] and the *Romance of Guy of Warwick*[340] written in the form of rhyming couplets.[341] Both these versions appear in the Auchinleck manuscript; however, they are two separate works with the related topic of Guy. As Wiggins explains in her *Introduction:* 'The stanzaic *Guy,* dealing as it does with the later years of Guy's life, is [thus] presented as a sequel to the couplet *Guy.* '[342] The *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*[343] makes only a passing reference to the dragon in just two lines of one stanza:

> Sethen he com into Ingolond
> And Athelston the king he fond
> That was both hende and fre.
> For his love ich understond
> He slough a dragoun in Nothumberlond
> Ful fer in the north cuntré' (19-24)[344]

This version from the *Stanzaic Guy* is short and to the point.[345] There was a dragon in Northumberland, and Guy slew it. The phrase 'ich understond' even implies that the story might not be reliable. There is no indication where the dragon came from or what it had done. It was simply there, and Guy killed it. This gives credence to the theory that the dragon is simply a device to showcase Guy's skill at arms as a knight.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has a reference to dragons over Northumberland in the year 793.[346] This could be the reason for the *Stanzaic* poet using that location to continue the belief in dragons and to give a sense of genuine location to Guy's arbitrary quest. However, there is no further link or reference to dragons in *The Stanzaic Guy of Warwick.* As there is only the one dragon in the story, the poet presumably felt it was not an important episode in Guy's Christian journey. The focus of the *Stanzaic Guy* is his

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[338] Stanza: generally, a group of four or more lines of verse, often with a repeating rhyming pattern.

[339] *'Stanzaic Guy of Warwick' Introduction* <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/guywfrm.htm>.

[340] *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, ed. by Julius Zupitza, *Notes and Queries*, (London: Elibron Classics, 2006), I–III <https://doi.org/10.1093/nq/s5-vi.140.199i>.

[341] A pair of rhyming verse lines, usually of the same length.

[342] Alison Wiggins, *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick: Introduction.*

[343] Robbins Library Digital Projects, TEAMS Middle English Texts, *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick.*

[344] This is mentioned in *Bevis of Hampton* 'And Gy a Warik. Ich understonde/Slough a dragoun in NorthHomberlonde' (2607-8) 'Bevis of Hampton', *Middle English Texts Series University of Rochester Ronald B. Herzman (Editor) , Graham Drake (Editor) , Eve Salisbury (Editor)*, 1997.

[345] I have chosen to deal with the *Stanzaic* dragon first, as it is so short and uneventful.

[346] See page 43 above.

pilgrimages and personal sacrifice, on which the dragon episode has no bearing. Modern critics such as Alison Wiggins and Rebecca Wilcox tend to make Guy's pilgrimages and penance the focus of their research.[347] There is no indication that the dragon represented anything other than itself, and Guy's defeat of it was merely to prove his prowess. There is also no evidence that the *Stanzaic* poem was generated or indeed owned in the Northumberland area; Wiggins is certain that the poem is of East Midlands composition.[348] This would suggest that the *Stanzaic* poet simply wanted to place Guy in a genuine geographical location. The Vikings and Norsemen invaded that area, bringing with them their dragon-boats and lore. This history would be very well known, and the poet has placed Guy in a region associated with the folklore of dragons.
Focussing now on the Auchinleck *Romance* version, this is how the dragon is introduced:

> Þer is comen upon þi lond
> A best þat bringeþ it al to schond.
> Out of Irlond it come:
> To miche harm it haþ y-don.
> It no leueþ man nor wiman non,
> Þat it no sleþ hem ichon. (7145-50)

This second version, written in rhyming couplets, goes into greater detail about the dragon. It came from Ireland, caused much destruction, and killed people. There is now a reason for Guy to kill the dragon, and it makes a fitting quest for a knight. There is more adventure and storytelling in the Auchinleck version, making it additionally entertaining for the reader/listener. The poem goes on to describe the dragon and the battle in greater depth and detail, and there is a real sense of danger for Guy whose wounds and fear are portrayed quite realistically.

The Romance version, however, is a different story from the *Stanzaic* in more ways than simply the dragon episode. Another copy of the Guy *Romance* is to be found in the Caius MS. 107/106, which was produced in the 1470s and is held at Cambridge University.[349] The two manuscripts offer very different versions of the dragon confrontation, and there are many redactions in Caius, as will be seen. Wiggins points out

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[347] Rebecca Wilcox, "Romancing the East: Greeks and Saracens in Guy of Warwick" in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp.21-235.
[348] *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* Introduction, p.5.
[349] Published for the Early English Texts Society in three volumes, the two manuscripts are displayed side by side in the original language.

that the Caius MS 'offers an airbrushed version, in which the hero and his exploits are partially modernized and sanitized…adjusted to meet the tastes of a later fifteenth-century readership.' [350] It is so 'sanitized' that the dragon fight is given very little emphasis in this later version of the *Romance*, and the possible reasons for this new view of the dragon will be discussed later in this chapter.

Produced almost one hundred and fifty years after the Auchinleck, the Caius manuscript, when seen side by side with the Auchinleck, clearly shows the omissions. It is intriguing to see how the Caius compares, and the effect the omissions have on the tale; however, my main focus at this point in my thesis is the Auchinleck version.

Guy's Encounter with the Dragon

Although both romances focus on the same character and events, the dragon episode is treated very differently, raising the question why this should be. Alison Wiggins' comment of the document 'being sanitized' is a likely explanation, another hypothesis is that it was for political reasons, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

In the Auchinleck *Romance*, Guy is at the court of King Athelstan when news is heard of a beast that has come over from Ireland, as discussed earlier (p. 142).[351] After lines introducing the dragon (cited and translated above), that report that it brought ruin and destruction, slaying people, and laying waste to the land (lines 7145-50), there follows a description of the beast:

> Grat heued it hap & gastelich to sene:
> His nek is greter pan a bole,
> His bodi is swarter pan ani cole.
> It is michel, & long, and griseliche,
> From pe nouel vpward vnschepliche. (7156-60)

[350] Alison Wiggins, 'A Makeover Story: The Caius Manuscript Copy of "Guy of Warwick"', *Studies in Philology*, 104.4 (2007), 471–500 p.471. Wiggins gives a detailed analysis of the Caius redactions in her article.

[351] There is a legend that an Ollipeist, - a mighty dragon - lived quietly and benignly in Ireland before St. Patrick threw him out. His story is emblematic of the changing impression of serpents and dragons in Irish Folklore and Legend with the integration of Christianity to the region.
http://www.blackdrago.com/copyright.htm.
Although the legend cannot be authenticated, it would account for the manuscript claiming a dragon came over from Ireland. The dragon has wings, so presumably the originators of the legend believed it could have flown across the sea. However, it lived in the water, so alternatively it could possibly have swum across from Ireland.

The dragon is described in terms of its huge size: the circumference of the neck is larger than a tree-trunk. No beast or animal in the physical world of the audience is this size, and the imagination would be stirred to envisage the beast. The blacker than coal body is too terrible to describe, there is no shape in nature that it can be compared to. It is a truly dreadful monster.

The dragon segment of the poem in the Auchinleck Manuscript consists of 162 lines but in the Caius, only 74, a redaction of 88 lines. The seven lines omitted from Caius (7156-7162) are the ones describing the size and appearance of the neck and body of the beast. The reader/listener of the Caius manuscript gains no real impression of the dreadful appearance of the dragon apart from 'Great heued it hath and grisely to sene.' (7156) There is no real sense of terror or awe of a massive beast. It simply has 'a big head and it was ugly.' The Auchinleck, by contrast, is much more specific, as detailed on the previous page. Mentally picturing this dragon would engage the audience and entice them into the story.

The dragon's description in the Auchinleck so far mirrors previous medieval dragons. It has a huge and very ugly head. The dragon which visits St. Margaret in her cell is ugly, with a mouth big enough to swallow her. St. George's dragon is 'loathly' and has a long neck. The poet is playing to the expectations of his audience/readers. The Auchinleck detail of an amorphous, shapeless appearance 'vnschepliche' is a new characteristic, however, and it almost certainly refers to the constant writhing and twisting of a great serpentine beast. The fact that the body cannot be described – because it is unrelated to anything familiar – adds to the terror of imagination.

> Þe smallest scale þat on him is
> No wepen may atame, y-wis.
> As a somer it is brested before in the brede
> & swifter ernend þan ani stede.
> He haþ claws also a lyoun.
> Men sayeþ þat it is a dragoun. (7161-6)

The scaly appearance is common to all the previous dragons. The comparison with recognisable creatures – the large, muscular packhorse, and the exotic lion, foreign to England – render the dragon comprehensible. That the beast is far larger than the familiar animals allows the imagination of the audience/reader to envisage something even more terrible. Caroline Walker Bynum describes a hybrid as 'a double being, an entity of parts,

…It is an inherently visual form.'[352] It is the ability to visualise through comparison with known animals and objects that, for an audience/reader, add fear to the depiction of the dragon. The description of Humbaba in Chapter One states that he was covered in scales and had the paws of a lion. Many of the beasts from the classical era were also hybrids. A fusion of the real and the imagined is stimulus for the imagination and adds to the drama of a tale and was clearly understood as an example of monstrosity. As Williams comments, '…the Middle Ages continued to elaborate the monstrous figure of the dragon […] and deformity was so frequently the preferred aesthetic expression.'[353]The Caius MS omits the scales and the protection they provide, but retains the size, claws, and identification of the beast. It could be that fifteenth-century readers were so familiar with a dragon having scales that the later poet or scribe felt it unnecessary to mention them.

The appearance of the dragon is revealed by the *Romance* poet piece by piece, adding to the suspense and the drama of the situation. The combination so far of the massive head and chest, the scales and the claws confirm the medieval concept of a dragon. The poet proceeds to embellish this nightmare beast even further, combining familiar characteristics, wings, and long tail, with the addition of the kind of strength possessed by the dragon:

> Gret wenges he haþ wiþ to fle;
> His schaft to telle alle ne mow we.
> Þe bodi is gret toward þe teyle,
> Swiche a best nas neuer saunfeyle.
> Þe teyle is gret & wel long.
> In þe warld nis man so strong,
> & were y-armed neuer so,
> & he wiþ þe teyle smot him to,
> Þat he no worþ ded anon;
> No schuld he neuer ride no go[n]. (7167-7176)

The style of writing, seeming almost conversational, gives credibility to the description. The poet appears to be saying that the dragon, despite it being so terrible, is something to be marvelled at, and that people would want to see it. To not go near is the sort of instruction a parent would give to a child – the tone is caring and normal and delivers a warning in a familiar way. The overriding image here though, is still one of terror. The dragon is now revealed in its awful entirety. It is a beast with a monstrous

[352] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity.* (New York: Zone Books, Oxford University Press, 2001), p.30.
[353] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, p.17.

appearance: serpentine and scaly, with a giant head, thick neck, wings, claws, and a tail that will kill. Guy, however, does go near the beast, and survives, as will be shown. The Caius MS omits lines 7167-70, the first four lines of the above description focused on the wings and the size of the body, although the length and strength of the tail is related as in the Auchinleck. The Caius description is more like that of a giant serpent, without scales or wings. Perhaps unintentionally, the scribe of the later Caius manuscript has revived the *drāko* of ancient times. Likening the image to a huge serpent rather than a dragon would possibly be more acceptable to a fifteenth-century readership, as a serpent would be more recognizable, and not as threatening. In addition, all we learn from Caius is that 'Guy slew the dragon', which means that the beast does not have to be shown as so terrible or menacing and would perhaps be easier to kill than an unknown creature covered in scales. This would be consistent with Wiggins' comment about the Caius manuscript being sanitized; by removing offensive or undesirable features, the beast would be more recognisable – less fabulous – to an audience/reader. By the fifteenth century, however, the period of the Caius MS, illustrated bestiaries were fairly widely available, by which the reader/listener could therefore have been familiar with images of non-native animals. The illustration Fig.27 is from a fifteenth-century Italian herbal which advocates cooking dragon flesh 'as a cure for old age' in humans. [354] Although none of my examined texts mention a dragon in this context, it is apparent from the illustration that the image of the dragon has seldom changed over the centuries. The description of the dragon Guy encounters fits perfectly with this Italian image, proof that the idea of the beast was as familiar in other countries as it was in England.

In the romance, Guy tells the King he will go to Northumberland to fight the beast with God's help. Guy says he will go alone, refusing to put people at risk 'for a best onlepi' [for a single beast].

> Gij' quaþ þe king 'schaltow nouȝt so;
> No wille ich þat þou alon go.
> An hundred kniȝtes schul wende wiþ þe
> Þat þou may þe sikerer be.'
> Gij answerd anonriȝt,

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[354] *In the Middle Ages, old age was recognised as a major cause for physical and mental impairment. The Franciscan friar Roger Bacon (c. 1214-c.1294) compiled all existing remedies against the 'accidents of old age' and thus produced the ultimate medieval guide to prevent and cure old age. Intriguingly, one of his remedies involved cooked dragon flesh. Source: Thijs Porck, "How to cook your dragon and a medieval cure for old age" (blog) January 9, 2017.* https://thijsporock.com/2017/01/09/how-t0-cook-your-dragon/ *(*First, catch your dragon!) Permission granted.*

‘Nold neuer God ful of miȝt
Þat for a best onlepi
Schuld so miche folk traueli.’ (7187-7194).

The king is more concerned than Guy for the knight’s safety, yet Guy is quite dismissive of the danger, as there is just one dragon, and Guy appears to think it will be easy to despatch it. The reader/listener, however, will perhaps anticipate that there will be a lot of trouble and danger ahead. It is difficult to understand why the Caius scribe omitted these eight lines. If the idea of Guy as ‘England’s other Arthur’ is integral to his reputation as the epitome of chivalry, then surely including this passage would prove his bravery in adversity. His selflessness in insisting on facing the dragon alone is a typical act of chivalry, refusing to put others in danger. It is highly possible that the Caius scribes were working from a damaged MS, [355] yet this seems to be a deliberate omission, as the poem continues logically without it. There is no interruption to the narrative flow, and this would suggest that the redactor is adroit in excising material without destroying or disrupting the narration. Placing the Caius manuscript in its historical context, the omissions could be socio-political, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Having turned down the offered help of additional men, Guy sets out accompanied only by his mentor and companion, Herhaud, and two armed knights. Finding the dragon’s lair, Guy dons his armour and forbids his companions to go any further. The dragon-slayer must face the beast alone. This is a common trait which has been carried down through the ages. Demi-gods, saints, martyrs and now knights must face their fate single handed, with the help of their God, as we have seen. Marduk, Herakles, and Saint George all relied on their prowess with weapons and their faith. Saints Margaret and Martha had only their faith, but again each was alone in their confrontation with their dragon. The dragon, physical or metaphorical, is a test of prowess, bravery, and faith. Not allowing their companion – or anyone else – to engage in battle shows heroism, valour and courage, all elements required in the pursuit of chivalry. In the hagiographies, it is a testament to their faith in Christ. In the instances of the Christian dragon-slayers, they are also leading the way in instructing the faithful to follow their lead and trust in Christ.

[355]Maldwyn Mills as quoted in Wiggins, *Icon*, p.473.

On first catching sight of the dragon, they saw that he is indeed an ugly beast. Guy donned his arms and, forbidding any of his companions to follow him, attacked the huge beast alone:

Þo Gij him seye so griseli
Of him no was he nouȝt al trusti.
Wiþ þe spere he him smot smertliche
Þat was kerueand scharpeliche
Þat al to schiueres it tofleye;
Ac þe bodi com it nouȝt neye. (7209-7214)

The shattering of the spear is a mirroring of St. George's first contact with his dragon. The theme reoccurs time and again in dragon encounters. It is at this point in the poem that the Caius transcription breaks off, returning to the fight only when Sir Guy makes the killing stroke. The lines 7214-7280 which deal in detail with the fight between Guy and the dragon are completely absent. By contrast, the fight between Guy and the dragon is described in detail in the Auchinleck, as follows:

Þo he hadde smiten þat best so,
Wel heye he bar his heued þo,
Wiþwent him & lepe him to.
Him & his stede he feld bo.
Gij of þat strok astounded is;
Neuer hadde he non swiche, ywis. (7215-7220)

Guy is a powerful knight, but his most severe blow has not hurt the dragon. By contrast, the dragon has dealt Guy a much more forceful blow, which knocked him from his horse. The beast is more formidable than Guy had expected. Unseated, Guy has to fight on foot, placing him at a disadvantage, but also putting him on a par with other dragon slayers with the exception of St. George, who was able to remain mounted, although his horse was terrified. The dragon's immense head is now above Guy, increasing his vulnerability. He begins to realise that this is an enemy which will not be easily defeated.

Vp he stirt anonriȝt
'God' he seyd 'fader almiȝt
Þat made þe day & niȝt also
& for ous sinful þoldest wo
& heldest Daniel fram þe lyoun
Saue me fram þis foule dragoun.' (7221-7226)

Guy has absolute faith that if he speaks directly to God his prayer will be answered and he will be saved. The personal connection with God is a crucial element of faith, and for Christian dragon-slayers this faith never wavers. We have seen this with St. George, St.

Margaret and St. Martha who placed their absolute trust in God. Guy has no doubt that the saviour of Daniel will also save him. Daniel not only defeated a dragon and proved it a false idol, but he was also saved, unharmed, from the lions' den, by his staunch faith that God would not allow him to be harmed.[356] A medieval knight would be aware of the story, and the author has very cleverly given Guy this awareness, whilst he is fighting for his life against the dragon. Calling on God would be a completely reasonable prayer for Guy.

His swerd he drouȝ anonriȝt,
To him he lepe wiþ gret miȝt,
& smot him in þe heued schod
A wel gret strok wiþouten abod, (7226-7230)

Guy's blow does no harm to the dragon at all, except to anger it further. St. George did manage to wound his dragons with a sword thrust; that Guy fails at this stage is perhaps the author's way of demonstrating that a mortal romance hero has to work a little harder than an epic hero or saint to achieve his goal:

Ac no þing sen þan was his dent.
Gij him held þan al schent
Þat he no miȝt him deri nouȝt
Wiþ no wepen of stiel ywrouȝt. (7231-7234)

A knight's honour was all important. Failing to deal a death blow to the dragon at this juncture causes Guy to feel great shame in his own lack of prowess. [357] His reputation and self-esteem have suffered more damage than the dragon. He is now convinced that man-made weaponry alone is useless against this beast. The anticipation of the reader/listener would be growing and the uncertainty of whether Guy would find a way to kill the dragon no doubt added to the excitement and drama of the poem:

Bitvene hem was strong bateyle.
Aiþer gan oþer for to aseyle,
At asaut wiþ Gyes partinge
Þat wers he hadde at þat wendinge.
Þe best him neyed & smot him
Wiþ his vpcoming so fel & grim
Þat he a lappe rent out anon
Of his brini þat alle his trust was on. (7235-7242)

[356] (Daniel 6 1:28).

[357] The matter of a knight's shame is also a crucial feature of *TFQ* and will be discussed in the following chapter.

Like his weapons, man-made armour is also no use against the abnormal armour and strength of the dragon. This description of the dragon as cunning and angry is characteristic of all dragons that have been discussed so far. 'Fel' can also be interpreted as: shrewd, subtle, clever, also as fierce in combat and formidable.[358] Sly, devious, and untrustworthy is the genetic makeup of *drāko* from the earliest recordings. They are also unrelenting opponents. The serpent which tempts Eve is devious and guileful.[359] The dragon which appeared to St. Margaret in the guise of a demon pleaded defeat and weakness in an attempt to destroy her. [360] The dragons/serpents which are faced by Eve and St. Margaret use the power of words to trap their victims. Although St. Margaret is swallowed, she is unharmed. The dragon tamed by Martha is violent and dangerous – but not to her: she brings it under control with holy water and a girdle. The female dragon slayers face danger, but not violence. Although the dragons in romance do not speak (they are not manifestations of Satan) they are treacherous and tricky in keeping with their serpent-like bodies and huge size. This dragon has no particular body shape and would appear like a massive serpent – keeping alive the original idea of *drāko.* The shapeless, shifting mass makes it impossible for Guy to strike. However, unlike the other dragons in the previous texts this dragon has caused damage very close to the body. Guy's mail coat is damaged, and beneath that is his skin. This dragon is the most dangerous so far.

Now haþ Gij michel to done,
To a tre he went him sone;
Þer he wille bateyle abide
Of þat best what schaunce so bitide.
Þat best bisides him it went
& wiþ his teyle a strok him sent,
On þe scheld he smot him an heye
Þat euen ato it to-fleye
Also it were wiþ a swerd broun. (7245-7251)

In this way another layer of protection is taken from the knight. Now without mail and shield, and armed with only a sword, dazed, and weakened, Guy appears to be powerless against the dragon. The dragon is using its own weapon– the deadly tail – to great effect.

Wel neye Gij him fel adoun.
Wiþ his taile he bigirt sir Gij
& him þrest so strongli

[358] *M.E.D.* (1,2 and 3).
[359] P.37 above.
[360] P.32 above.

Þat þre ribbes he brac atvo, (7252-7255)

Here as previously we see the use of the tail as a weapon, crushing in the same way a boa constrictor will kill its prey. The poet is building the suspense and drama with emotive use of description. The hero appears to be in a potentially fatal situation. He is lying on the ground; his armour is damaged, and he is grievously wounded. He will be in great pain; the broken ribs will affect his movements and his breathing. He is extremely vulnerable. The reader/audience will wonder if the knight's arms are trapped under the tail; if so, how will Guy survive if he cannot raise his sword? His ribs are broken – a lesser man would surely die? This is a significant event in the story of dragon fighters. For the first time, a man is wounded in a manner other than by burning. There is a real danger that the protagonist will be defeated by the dragon he has come to kill:

& Gij wiþ strengþe smot him þo….
Bi þe nauel he carf him ato…
Þat fram þe nauel vpward so
No slouȝ him man neuer mo.
Þo þat best hirt him feled
Swiþe loude he grad & ȝeled
Þat alle þat cuntre dined þere (7256-7267)

Miraculously, Guy can wield his sword to save himself. He has prayed for God's help, and it seems his prayer has been answered. The faith of the knight has been rewarded and a lesson delivered: put your trust in God when all seems lost. Guy has seen that despite the armour of scales, the dragon was vulnerable in the soft underbelly, and open to attack. It shows him that even in the seemingly most impossible situation, with strength and courage he can find a way to win.

To a tre þan drouȝt him sir Gij
& werd him wele for þe maistri.
His hauberk was to-rent tofore
As a clout þat were al to-tore. (7271-7274)

Guy resting beside the tree gives him a temporary respite. Although the dragon is capable of destroying the tree with his tail, he does not do so. The tree symbolizes the trees in the Garden of Eden, God's holy place, where the dragon has no power and cannot enter. Although he has broken ribs, Guy's faith is unbroken, and his head is high. In medieval and Early Modern times, the head was thought to have been placed above the body 'in

order to 'reflect the superiority of the intellectual over the physical'[361] and Guy takes time to ponder how he can overcome this purely physical beast. He is a man, a knight, and God is on his side. He has fought as well as he can, and now he must trust in God. The battle is now entering its third day. On the third day after his death, Christ rose from the tomb. Symbolically, the battle with the dragon is modelled on Jesus's defeat of death. This is a motif that the Caius MS includes, and one that will be repeated both in *Bevis of Hampton* and *The Faerie Queene.*

**Bineþen þe wenge he him smot[362]
Þurth þat bodi þat swerd bot;
Þurth þe bodi he him carf atvo.
Ded he fel to grounde þo; (7281-7284)

Having severely wounded the dragon in the belly, Guy has exposed the area under the wing, and is able to reach it. Stabbed through this area, a blade will pierce the heart and kill the dragon. By destroying the dead body, Guy is making sure that the amorphous beast does not change shape and revive. The symbolism of paganism is not overt in the slaying of this dragon as it is within the hagiographies. Guy's reasons are altruistic, he needs to ensure his own safety and that of others. Although he has stabbed it through the heart, he needs to be certain the beast is dead. If it is wounded, no matter how badly, it can still strike him. After a long, drawn-out battle, and suffering severe wounds, Guy has achieved his objective of killing the dragon, and fulfilled his obligation to his king as a knight. He can now move forward to the next stage of his journey, both physical and spiritual.

The Auchinleck MS provided the material for such a detailed review, whilst by contrast the Caius scribe has noted only the salient points of the battle with the dragon – the beginning and the end. He describes the first blow that shatters the spear, and the next noted incident is when Guy strikes the dragon beneath the wing, ready for the killing. Wiggins argues this shortening is a 'long-standing tradition of romance translation.'[363] The contraction of the original poem, 'omitting digressions, lengthy descriptions and material not directly relevant to the moving forward of the immediate story' allows the

[361] Williams, p.126.

[362] ** It is at this point that the Caius MS picks up the narrative again, presumably because the death of the dragon is the focus of the section, not the fight. However, it is still the Auchinleck manuscript which is being discussed.

[363] Wiggins, *A Makeover Story*, pp.480-481.

emphasis to be placed elsewhere.[364] In the Caius manuscript, the focus is on Guy's spiritual quest, his pilgrimage and penance. The dragon episode appears to be worthy of only minor mention.

By omitting the more exciting and imaginary stimulating detail of the dragon and the ensuing battle, the Caius redactor is adding a different dimension. The dragon is disempowered by the omissions. It is not such a threat to a strong knight, and Guy's prowess is the more dominant attraction in the poem. The Caius scribe is refocussing on the narrative of the poem, and Guy's onward progress. By the fifteenth century, in romance tradition, the dragon had become less symbolic of paganism and more associated with myth and legend. A dragon-fight is part of the adventure of medieval romance. The details of the battle with a diminished dragon were not necessary, since it was the end result that was important. Guy's bravery as a knight has been showcased and recognised by the scribe.

As stated earlier, the Caius MS was produced in the 1470s, during the fluctuating reign of Edward IV, 'the mightiest warrior in Europe.'[365] Whilst the Warwick family were thought to be among the original owners of the older Auchinleck MS, and therefore likely to emphasise the heroic aspect of Guy's encounter with the dragon, the political motivations of the owners/producers of the Caius MS probably led to their abridging the poem. After the death of the turncoat Earl of Warwick, the erstwhile 'Kingmaker' in 1471, taking some of the focus off the Warwick family's 'adoption' of Guy may have been a discretionary action. It would have not been politic to hold even an apocryphal member of the Warwick family to be a greater hero than the King.

The two manuscripts continue with the aftermath of the killing of the dragon, where they are almost identical, with the exception of lines 7290-1, which are omitted from Caius.

He grad & ȝelled swiþe loude
Þat it schilled into þe cloude.
Gij wiþdrouȝ him þerfro anon
For stink þat of þe bodi come,
Neye þat bodi he no durste. (7285-7289)

This 'dragon-stink' is also a recognised trait of a dragon. It is the stench of corruption and evil. The dragon which appeared to Saint Margaret in her cell emitted a stench as from

[364] Ibid. p.48.

[365] Paul Murray Kendall, *The Yorkist Age. Daily Life during the Wars of the Roses* (Bath: Penguin Books., 1962), p.480.

the mouth of hell, and it has featured in almost every dragon tale. St. George's dragon also emitted a foul stench, and St. Martha's dragon ejected fire and stench from its rear end. Foulness and filth are common to dragons: it is the stench of evil and of Hell. The stench is also a defence mechanism. The stink keeps away most enemies, as they cannot breathe the foul air.

> After þat he ȝede him to reste.
> When þat best þer ded lay,
> For soþe, y ȝou telle may,
> Þritti fote meten it was
> Þer it lay in þat plas.
> Þe folk of þe cuntre it mette (7290 -7295)

Describing the length of the dragon stimulates the imagination. Few, if any, living things in the sphere of the average medieval person will have this enormous size. The dead dragon is strange and mysterious, and now that the danger is past, the people will come out to stare and wonder at this grotesque but marvellous beast. For the Caius scribe, this was far more interesting than Guy resting after the fight. Guy has beaten the beast, and as a result he is no longer alone:

> Þer it lay wonderliche grete.
> Þat heued he bar þe bodi fro
> & wiþ þat Gij forþ went þo.
> He come to his feren apliȝt
> Þat for him bad to God almiȝt. (7296-7300)

Removing the head from the body is very significant. The head is the most important part of the beast; according to Williams, the medieval belief was that 'the nature of an animal could be figured by the sign of its head wherein its soul is somehow thought to reside'.[366] To remove the head is to destroy the soul – if indeed a dragon had a soul – and beheading the dragon ensures there is no further repository for its soul. Now, suddenly there are sightseers and his companions to welcome him back into society. As we saw with Saint George, the battle with the dragon takes place outside the city/community. Dragons dwell outside civilised society as they are evil and antisocial. The dragon must be fought at its lair. It follows then that the act of killing the dragon is also outside the bounds of civility

[366] Williams, p.127. The discussion continues '…It is not surprising…that of all the body parts, the head is most often deformed in order to represent monstrous concepts'. Humbaba was described with a deformed monstrous head, and Medusa had a head full of snakes.

and this places the dragon-slayer in the same locality. Now the threat is removed, the hero can regain his place in the community:

> To Warwike he is ywent
> Wiþ þat heued he made þe king present.
> Þe king was bliþe & of glad chere
> For þat he seye Gij hole & fere.
> At Warwik þai henge þe heued anon,
> Mani man wondred þerapon. (7301-7306)

As the repository for the soul of the beast, the head is shown now to be empty. It is also a trophy and an emblem of Guy's success. The threat has flown, along with the soul of the dragon. The head is displayed as a source of wonder and a testament to Guy's prowess. The world is safe again.

At the beginning of the section of the poem containing the dragon fight, Guy rides out armed and armoured. However, when he begins his battle, Guy's spear and armour are damaged, and he is unhorsed. He is then forced to face the dragon armed with just a sword.[367] Although being on his feet and armed with only a sword makes him even more vulnerable, Guy has an additional weapon, his faith in God. Guy and George are Christian knights, protected by their faith, and live to fight another day. Margaret and Martha are also under God's protection. Although ultimately George and Margaret die a martyr's death, it is their faith, and God, that enables them to defeat their dragons.

Guy of Warwick is a romance, and the emphasis is on bravery and chivalry. Refusing the company of other knights shows that Guy has both these qualities, and chivalry is a key component in the Christian life and purpose of a knight. Guy prays for God to save him from the dragon. (7226) This shows that Guy has absolute faith in God to protect him. Psalm 17:6 says 'I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me…' A requisite for saints and chivalric knights alike is this staunch faith, which will be tested time and time again. Has his faith been repaid, and his prayer answered? In the genre of medieval romance, the answer is definitely yes. The audience will expect and anticipate that God will answer prayers and that Guy will receive the help he asks for. A chivalric knight had a duty to protect the innocent and serve God, and God would reward such service by giving aid to a supplicant .

[367] St. George fights with both spear and sword.

When Guy's ribs are broken by the dragon's tail, Guy finds the formidable strength to stab the dragon in the only vulnerable part, under the wing and into the heart.[368]The inherent duality of dragons is shown here, as the dragon is invulnerable from above, but underneath this unassailability there is softness and weakness. The physical construction of the winged dragon rules out scales in the 'armpit' area; armour there would make it impossible for the wings to function. Because Guy is unmounted, he has to attack from ground level, and by contrast, whilst under the shadow of the dragon's wing, he can attack and cannot be seen by the foe. Unlike St. George who can thrust his spear from atop his horse through the dragon's mouth into its heart, Guy does not have that advantage. Instead, he is positioned to reach the only vulnerable point of the body that is otherwise covered by scales. This can be seen as God's will, answering Guy's plea for help.

Although the dragon sequence is merely one episode in the very long Auchinleck *Romance* poem, it typifies the strength and faith of Guy, and his prowess as a knight. In addition, it helps to develop the idea of 'England's other Arthur.' Guy still has a long way to travel, and much to overcome. However, his credentials are now established, and he can continue his Christian journey. If the dragon is representative of Guy's past misdemeanours, his single-handed-fighting and his defeat of the dragon are to help with the development of the character of Guy, and indeed to demonstrate his 'extraordinary prowess.' Defeating a dragon is a 'rite of passage' for a chivalrous knight in medieval romance. The taking of a trophy has been a common occurrence since time immemorial. In the hagiographies, the pagan souls converted to Christianity were the trophies gathered by the saints. In all cultures across the world taking trophies is a practice that lives on to present day (although dragon heads are currently in short supply). The illustrator of Fig.28 has obviously not read the poem, as at no point does Guy pierce the dragon's throat with his spear. This is more than likely a stock 'knight killing dragon in jousting style' image of the era. St. George kills his dragon whilst on horseback, and this particular illustration is a medieval generalised interpretation of how a dragon can be killed.

[368]This is how Red Cross will eventually slay his dragon, in Spenser's *Faerie Queene.*

Bevis of Hampton's Encounter with a Dragon

The second of the medieval romances engaged with dragons in the Auchinleck manuscript is *Bevis of Hampton*.[369] The poem was written in c.1324 and consists of 4620 lines, 290 of which are concerned with a dragon. The text contained in the Auchinleck manuscript (ff.176ra-201ra) is one of six surviving texts of the poem and is the one edited by METS since, as the editors explain, 'this manuscript is recognized as the most complete and also, as scholarly consensus suggests, the best. Nonetheless, it is important to be forthright in acknowledging that what we have done is present "a" version of *Bevis* rather than "the" definitive version.'[370] The dragon episode, they inform us, 'does not appear in the Anglo-Norman version.'[371] The story of *Guy* precedes that of *Bevis* in the Auchinleck Manuscript. As the text of Guy precedes Bevis by some hundred years or so, it can reasonably be assumed that the Bevis poet was aware of the Guy poem, and there are indeed some similarities which will be discussed. As previously stated, the compiler has grouped the romances together in the middle of the manuscript, so that all the adventure comes at once, maintaining the excitement and interest.

As with the couplet *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis* is an epic, episodic romance containing all the elements typical of this medieval genre. An anonymous, metrical, stanzaic romance, it has a rhyme scheme of *aabccb,* and is a poem full of adventure, danger, and chivalry. The romance was most likely written for entertainment, as although it bears a Christian message of faith, it is, in essence a love story. There is, however, a violent encounter with a dragon, taxing both knight and horse, which is the subject of this chapter. It is also clear that this encounter was used as a template by Edmund Spenser for his Red Cross Knight in Book I of *The Faerie Queen.* This opinion is corroborated by Kenneth Hodges,[372] as will be examined in chapter 5.

Bevis is the young son of Guy, the Count of Hampton (Southampton). When Guy was seven, his mother sold him into slavery, and he eventually arrived in Muslim Armenia. Although Christian, he was allowed to keep his religion. Due to his prowess

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[369] *'Bevis of Hampton'*. Middle English Texts Series University of Rochester Ronald B. Herzman (Editor), Graham Drake (Editor), Eve Salisbury (Editor), 1997. It is this version which will be used throughout. Also known as *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*.

[370] Introduction, as above.

[371] This could be because in this version, Bevis is likened to St. George, the patron saint of England

[372] Kenneth Hodges, 'Reformed Dragons: "Bevis of Hampton", Sir Thomas Malory's "Le Morte Darthur", and Spenser's Faerie Queen.', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language.*, 54.1, 22. Spring 2012 pp,110-131.

with arms, he was knighted in battle by the Armenian king, Ermin, who gifted him with both a special sword and a horse that is exceptional in that no-one else could ride it.[373] Bevis and Josian, the king's daughter fell in love and Josian agreed to be baptised as a Christian. Denounced by a jealous rival and sent from court, leaving his wife, horse, and sword behind, Bevis is deprived of his weapons, and left vulnerable.[374] Bevis travels to Damascus, where he is captured and cast into a deep pit for seven years.[375] This echoes the punishment of Daniel being cast into the lions' den, and Joseph being placed in a pit before he is sold into slavery; Psalm 55, too, speaks of 'the pit of destruction'.[376] The medieval Christian would be very aware of pits being used as prisons and punishment. Whilst in the pit, Bevis is attacked by a venomous flying serpent which bites him on the forehead, leaving him permanently scarred. This incident is to have repercussions for Bevis in his encounter with the dragon. Saint Margaret was also imprisoned and attacked, and although she was wounded, her wounds were healed by divine intervention, leaving no scarring. Bevis is not a martyr or a saint. He is human and therefore will bear the scar of the viper. Bevis prays for help in escaping the pit, which is granted. Divine help is forthcoming, and Bevis finds arms and a horse. He escapes with his wife Josian from Armenia to Christian Europe, on his way home to England. On their journey Bevis and Josian travel to Cologne, where she is baptised. Besides its economic and political significance Cologne also became an important centre of medieval pilgrimage, when Cologne's archbishop, Rainald of Dassel, gave the relics of the Three Wise Men to Cologne's cathedral in 1164 (after they, in fact, had been taken from Milan). It would be pertinent for the poet to place Josian's baptism here. [377]

Here the poet immediately introduces the theme of the dragon. Several dragon-slaying heroes are referenced, including Guy of Warwick. There appears to be no valid

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[373] The poet does not explain why the sword is special. Magic artefacts are a common theme in romance, however. For a discussion of magic in romance, see Corrine Saunders, Gen. Ed. '' in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance,*(Boydell & Brewer, Suffolk, 2010), pp.108-124.

[374] It is fortuitous that Bevis loses his magical possessions when undertaking a journey back to a Christian land with a newly baptised wife as 'early Christianity believed that all aspects of magic were allied to demons and paganism'. (Saunders, p. 109).

[375] Red Cross in *FQ* is hastily knighted and horsed, although his arms and mount are of poor quality. He falls victim to seduction and the pleasures of the flesh. He is captured and flung into a dungeon by the giant Orgoglio where he remains until he is freed by Prince Arthur.

[376] The Bible, *Apocrypha* pp.177-8, Genesis 27:34, Psalm 55:23.

[377] Joseph P. Huffman, *Family, Commerce and Religion in London and Cologne: Anglo-German Emigrants, c.1000-c.1300 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought Fourth Series 39)* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).pp. 9-22.

reason to suddenly mention dragons, other than as an indicator that Bevis will be undertaking a 'right-of-passage' for a medieval knight, and confronting the beast:

> After Josian is cristing
> Beves dede a gret fighting,
> Swich bataile dede never non
> Cristene man of flesch ne bon,
> Of a dragoun ther be side,
> That Beves slough ther in that tide,
> Save Sire Launcelet de Lake,
> He faught with a fur drake
> And Wade dede also, [378]
> And never knightes boute thai to,
> And Gy a Warwik, ich understonde,
> Slough a dragoun in NorthHomberlonde. (2597-2608)

The intertextual references to Malory appear to show that the *Bevis* poet was fully aware of the chivalric romance tradition and had claimed a place for Bevis within the ranks of literary heroes. The poem is a story that would be familiar to readers of the genre, and thus the success of his work would be almost guaranteed.

Bevis hears of two dragons fighting nearby. The beasts are former kings who have been feuding for many years, and have been magically transformed by a necromancer into dragons, due to their past sins.[379] One dragon flies to Rome where every seven years it raises a stench so vile it sickens the population:

> And everi seve yer ones,
> Whan the dragoun moweth is bones,
> Than cometh a roke and a stink
> Out of the water under the brink,
> That men ther-of taketh the fevere,
> That never after mai he kevere; (2645-2650)

As we have seen in relation to Guy, the foul air keeps away potential enemies. The dragon is living in water, a traditional habitat. Our earliest dragon, Mummu-Ti âmet was living in water, and St. George's dragon was bred in a 'deep dytch'. Water and caves have always been home to dragons; Echidna, 'the mother of monsters' lived in a cave. Similarly, the other dragon in Cologne takes refuge under a cliff in a cave-like setting:

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[378]Karl P. Wentersdorf, "Chaucer and the Lost Tale of Wade." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 65, no. 2, University of Illinois Press, 1966, pp. 274–86. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27714841. [Accessed 21 September 2021.] 'The tale of Wade was well known in Chaucer's day and apparently lived on to the end of the sixteenth century.' Chaucer refers to Wade in *Troilus and Criseyde III:614* and *The Merchant's Tale:1423.*

[379] There is a necromancer in *TFQ,* Archimago, who is capable of changing his own shape and that of others.

At Coloyne under a clive.
His eren were rowe and ek long,
His frount before hard and strong;
Eighte toskes at is mouth stod out,
The leste was seventene ench about. (2660-2664)

Already the dragon is exhibiting fearsome features – rough long ears and huge tusks. Boars' tusks were a common sight, but the exaggerated length and number of the dragon's tusks were a thing unknown, and much to be feared. Tusks are a new feature and have not been seen before. It suggests that the poet was making the dragon as dangerous and ugly as possible:

The her, the cholle under the chin,
He was bothe leith and grim;
A was imaned ase a stede;
The heved a bar with meche pride,
Betwene the scholder and the taile
Foure and twenti fot, saunfaile. (2665-2670)

Sir Guy's dragon was described as being wider in the breast than a packhorse. For the average person of the Middle Ages, a very large horse would be the largest animal they would encounter. Comparing the beast with familiar animals gives credence to the description. What on earth could be as wide as a carthorse across the shoulders? What on earth could measure twenty-four feet in the body? It is obvious to the reader/audience that this is no normal animal, but something strange and exotic. The poet here is mirroring the *Guy* poet with the size of the beast, as described previously. In addition, this dragon displays a hairy – or bristly – throat. This is a departure from the norm, as dragons are usually protected by scales. It is possible that the poet is trying to give the beast some recognisable features; it is also a feature of the dragon which attacked Saint Margaret as described by Theotimus in the *Latina Passio.* This suggests that the *Bevis* poet may have been familiar with the St. Margaret text, but he could also just be adventurous with his description:

His taile was of gret stringethe,
Sextene fot a was a lingthe;
His bodi ase a wintonne.
Whan hit schon the brighte sonne,
His wingges schon so the glas.

His sides wer hard ase eni bras.
His brest was hard ase eni ston;
A foulere thing nas never non. (2671-2678)

There is no natural animal with a tail so long. The imagery of the body as large as a huge barrel is frightening and strange. A barrel is not only made from the stoutest oak wood but banded with iron hoops for added strength. The hardest of materials are described in the composition of the body: glass, brass, stone. Truly this is the foulest and strangest beast ever seen. The poet disseminates information to the audience/reader by the clever rhetorical build-up of the similes in the three lines of parallel structure, before denouncing the dragon as foul. There is another meaning to 'foulere' however, that of craftiness.[380] The poet is ascribing that characteristic to the dragon too, as we have seen in the story of Saint Margaret.

The beast is instantly recognizable as a dragon in the historic tradition. All the elements are there: the great size, the strength and impenetrability, the wings, and the protruding teeth. It is ugly and fearsome. As in the romance of *Guy*, comparing the beast with known items: a wine-barrel, a carthorse, stone, brass, allows the reader to measure the enormity of the terror and the dread. Illustrating the narrative by comparing familiar objects of comfortable practicality – horse, barrel – and hard materials used in construction – stone and glass – gives dimension to the depiction of the dragon. It is bigger, harder, and more indestructible than any other animal that has ever been encountered. Having multiple tusks and wings will add a flavour of the exotic to the medieval imagination. The dragon in total is an unknown quantity, huge, menacing and equipped with strange features.

Bevis decides to fight the beast but dreams beforehand that it attacks him and covers him in venom, making his flesh swollen and rotten. Herakles killed the Hydra of Lerna using her own venom. Bevis bears the mental and physical scar from being bitten by the poisonous serpent; he knows the pain caused by venom. He is so disturbed by the dream and by the memory of the serpent that he asks his companion, the giant Ascopard to fight with him.[381] This is a departure from the norm, as the dragon-slayer, although

[380] *M.E.D.* 1b. 'When used in proverbs, as a symbol of craftiness.'

[381] A giant is another mythical creature, and in romance tales is usually an enemy. This paradox of a foe being a companion to a hero adds a somewhat whimsical element before the seriousness of the confrontation with the dragon.

travelling in company, generally goes into battle alone. Being with a companion gives Bevis more confidence. Their conversation is:

"Ascopard," a seide, "whar ertow?"
"Icham her; what wilte now?"
"Wile we to the dragoun gon?
Thourgh Godes help we scholle him slo!"
"Ya, sire, so mot I the,
Bletheliche wile I wende with thee!" (2721-2726)

Ascopard willingly agrees to go with Bevis to find the beast, and with God's help, slay it. His willingness is important to note at this point in the poem.

Beves armede him ful wel,
Bothe in yrene and in stel,
And gerte him with a gode bronde
And tok a spere in is honde.
Out ate gate he gan ride,
And Ascopard be his side. (2727-2732)

The hero and his sole companion are a standard feature in dragon narratives, as seen previously in *Guy*. However, normally the hero insists on his companion staying behind out of danger, but Bevis is so shaken by his dream that he desires company. He feels that the dream he had of being covered in venom could be prophetic, and will take comfort from not being alone:

Alse hii wente in here pleghing,
Hii speke of mani selkouth thing.
That dragoun lai in is den
And segh come the twei men;
A made a cri and a wonder,
Ase hit were a dent of thonder. (2733-2738)

The dragon, on the approach of Bevis and Ascopard, roared out a warning or a challenge to them. Only in *Sir Torrent* (see p.132) is a dragon heard before it is seen. The dragon which Sir Guy encounters roars in pain after being wounded. It is interesting to note that the *Bevis* poet chooses the same verb 'cri' as the earlier authors to describe the sound the dragon makes.[382] None of the very early or historical dragons have been ascribed this now characteristic sound:

[382] This all-encompassing verb is described in the MEC as 1(a) A shout, call, cry; outcry, noise, tumult; 2(a) The cry of a bird or beast; 3(a) A cry of distress, weeping, wailing, lamentation. In this instance, it is reasonable to suggest that the dragon is issuing a warning shout to the intruders to his space.

Ascopard was adrad so sore,
Forther dorste he go namore;
A seide to Beves, that was is fere:
"A wonderthing ye mai here!"
Beves saide: "Have thow no doute,
The dragoun lith her aboute; (2739-2744)

It is unusual for the companion of the dragon-slayer to pronounce their fear. In previous texts, Guy commanded Herhaud to stay away from the fight. Bevis tries to encourage Ascopard with the thoughts of reward:

Hadde we the dragoun wonne,
We hadde the feireste pris under sonne! (2745-2746)

Bevis looks forward to the challenge. In his mind he has already beaten the dragon and is thinking of the acclaim they will receive. This may be the poet's device to show that Bevis is perhaps too proud and over-confident of beating the dragon:

Ascopard swor, be Sein Jon,
A fot ne dorste he forther gon.
a knight, courageous and bold.
A swor, alse he moste then,
He nolde him neither hire ne sen:
"Icham weri, ich mot have reste:
Go now forth and do the beste!" (2753-2756)

Once again, unusually, the poet details Ascopard's fear, whilst Bevis cannot understand it. This is rare way of depicting the bravery of the knight. Whilst Ascopard is not a coward – he is described as a 'giant' and as being very brave – he is afraid of the unknown. Bevis is also afraid after his dream, but the dragon is too great a challenge to turn away from. He is a knight, and his courage would be in question if he were to turn back – and so the hero typically faces the beast in single combat after all – thus the tradition is continued. Bevis begins his attack:

Thani seide Beves this wordes fre:
"Schame hit is, to terne aghe."
A smot his stede be the side,
Aghen the dragoun he gan ride,
The dragoun segh, that he came
Yenande aghenes him anan,
Yenande and gapande on him so,
Ase he wolde him swolwe tho. (2757-2764)

Bevis is showing the aspect of a knight who relishes a challenge, and gallops his horse towards the dragon, which has its mouth agape as if to swallow him. Margaret of Antioch, as we have seen, was swallowed whole by the dragon in her cell. This could be another indication that the poet was aware of the story of Margaret and has adapted the incident to demonstrate the size of the dragon Bevis is facing. Alternatively, it could simply be the poet adding to the drama of the situation - a knight bravely riding at a gallop into the massive open jaws of the dragon:

> Whan Beves segh that ilche sight,
> The dragoun of so meche might,
> Hadde therthe opnede anon,
> For drede a wolde ther in han gon;
> A spere he let to him glide
> And smot the dragoun on the side;
> The spere sterte aghen anon,
> So the hail upon the ston,
> And to-barst on pices five. (2767-2773)

Having avoided being swallowed, Bevis attacks the dragon with his spear, which breaks. Both George and Guy suffer from broken spears – it is a recurring hazard for knights. Ultimately, they will have to rely not only on physical weapons, but also on their own faith and ability. The first encounter always proves that the dragon is not easy prey, and man-made weapons are puny and ineffective against the scales of the dragon. It has to be sword-in-hand combat. This brings the knight into closer proximity to the dragon – and the dragon-slayer's impending death.

> His swerd he drough alse blive;
> Tho thai foughte, alse I yow sai,
> Til it was high noun of the dai.
> The dragoun was atened stronge,
> That o man him scholde stonde so longe; (2774-2778)
>
> The dragoun harde him gan asaile
> And smot his hors with the taile
> Right amideward the hed,
> That he fel to grounde ded.
> Now is Beves to grounde brought,
> Helpe him God, that alle thing wrought! (2779-2784)

In typical dragon style, the 'tail-weapon' is employed and strikes the horse between the ears so hard that the horse is killed beneath Bevis, who also falls to the ground. The dragon's tail is an additional threat: Guy has his ribs broken by the dragon's tail, as we

have seen. In a confined space, such as a cave or under an overhanging cliff, the dragon's tail would be its most useful weapon if it cannot swallow its enemy.

Beves was hardi and of gode hert,
Aghen the dragoun anon a stert
And harde him a gan asaile,
And he aghen with strong bataile;
So betwene hem leste that fight
Til it was the therke night.
Beves hadde thanne swich thrast,
Him thoughte his herte to-brast; (2785-2792)

Bevis discovers that his adversary was no easy despatch. Despite his strength and bravery, he can find no way to injure or kill the beast. A small human matched against such a monster as described by the poet would certainly gain the support and admiration of the reader. It is easy to imagine young people desperate for adventure, hanging on to every word.

Thanne segh he a water him beside,
So hit mighte wel betide,
Fain a wolde theder flen,
He ne dorste fro the dragoun ten;
The dragoun asailede him fot hot,
With is taile on his scheld a smot,
That hit clevede hevene ato,
His left scholder dede also. (2793-2800)

The prolonged fight follows the same pattern as the fight in *Guy of Warwick,* whose shield was also cloven in two by the dragon's tail. The two knights face the same drawn-out battles, the same exhaustion and lack of progress. It is logical to assume that the compiler of Bevis was familiar with the Guy poem. As we have seen from previous encounters, this is a formula which has been repeated. There are features generic to dragon fights, which have survived since the earliest oral renditions. Even St. George, although not wounded, had his weapons damaged which extended the fight with the dragon. There is no clean kill, suggesting the dragon is a formidable adversary. The eventual victory proves the bravery and tenacity of the knight, together with his skill and all-encompassing faith. Although the Bevis story is embellished in other parts of the poem, the battle with the dragon is very similar to the dragon fight in *Guy.* The seemingly hopeless task, the damaged armour and sustained wounds are familiar motifs for a dragon fight. However, although Bevis is injured, he has no broken bones, unlike Guy. Guy is in

closer contact with his dragon, which enables it to wrap the tail around him, breaking his ribs. Guy has no water to revive him, and rests beside a tree. Both knights have their shields split – which means neither of them have anything to hide behind whilst defending themselves. They are out in the open, with only their swords.

Beves was hardi and of gode hert,
Into the welle anon a stert.
Lordinges, herkneth to me now:
The welle was of swich vertu:
A virgine wonede in that londe,
Hadde bathede in, ich understonde;
That water was so holi,
That the dragoun, sikerli,
Ne dorste neghe the welle aboute
Be fourti fote, saundoute. (2801-2810)

Here the poet/narrator, recalling the oral tradition, is relating the folklore of the well which is deemed sacred because legend said a virgin had bathed in it. This made the water holy, and the dragon was so afraid of the holy well that it did not dare approach closer than forty feet.[383]

Once again, chastity is a powerful weapon against a dragon, the one thing it fears. Melissa Hofman explains: 'Following the teachings of Paul, chastity was promoted in order that one might emulate Christ and the Virgin Mary, and thus virgins and widows were thought to have a special connection to God.'[384]

Whan Beves parsevede this,
Wel glad a was in hertte, iwis;
A dede of is helm of stel
And colede him ther in fraiche wel,
And of is helm a drank thore
A large galon other more.
A nemenede Sein Gorge, our levedi knight, (2811-2817)

Bevis is reprieved by the dragon's fear of the well and its powers of holiness created by the virgin's body. He removes his helmet and cools himself with the precious water. The helmet has links with the Red Cross knight and King Arthur in *TFQ* as will be discussed

[383] A holy well is also present in *TFQ* and plays a significant part in Red Cross's battle with his dragon. In *TFQ* XI. 49:3-4 the dragon is also unable to approach the holy well, as will be shown.

[384] Melissa Hofman, 'Virginity and Chastity in Late Antiquity, Anglo-Saxon England, and Late Medieval England: On the Continuity of Ideas', *TCNJ Journal of Student Scholarship*, Vol IX.April (2007), pp.1-10 (p.1).

in the following chapter. Bevis drinks from his helmet and calls on Saint George (2817) for strength. Importantly, this confirms that the unknown poet was aware of the Saint George story. In popular legend St. George is known as the ultimate dragon-slayer. This fascinating small 'homage' to St. George shows that the poet is acknowledging that Bevis is now part of the dragon-slaying tradition of England. It is also a further link in the chain of texts discussed in this thesis.

> And sete on his helm, that was bright;
> And Beves with eger mode
> Out of the welle sone a yode;
> The dragoun harde him asaile gan,
> He him defendeth ase a man.
> So betwene hem leste the fight,
> Til hit sprong the dai light, (2818-2824)

Refreshed and strengthened, Bevis replaces his helmet and renews his attack on the dragon. The fight lasts through the night until dawn. This is the second day of the fight. Bevis takes refreshment from the holy water of the well, regains his strength, and bravely fights through the dark until daylight breaks. The symbolism of fighting terror and evil alone in the dark is obvious.

> Whan Beves mighte aboute sen,
> Blithe he gan thanne ben;
> Beves on the dragoun hew,
> The dragoun on him venim threw; (2825-2828)

Although Bevis is eager and able to continue the fight, attacking with a will, his dream of being covered in venom was prophetic. The audience will remember how disturbed Bevis was by his dream, and the poet is ramping up the tension. Not only is the fight going on for much longer than Bevis anticipated, but his nightmare has become a reality. Will he die, what will happen? The suspense of Bevis's situation would grip an audience, who would be eager to discover what happens next.

> Al ferde Beves bodi there
> A foule mesel alse yif a were;
> Thar the venim on him felle,
> His flesch gan ranclen and tebelle,
> Thar the venim was icast,
> His armes gan al to-brast;
> Al to-brosten is ventaile,

And of his hauberk a thosend maile.
Thanne Beves, sone an highe
Wel loude he gan to Jesu criye:
"Lord, that rerede the Lazaroun,
Dilivre me fro this fend dragoun!" (2829-2840)

Bevis now realises that his dream was indeed prophetic. He has been already marked by the serpent in his prison, he had dreamed of this terrible venom, and now it had happened in reality. Bevis is in great pain, his body burning as though an army of lepers were passing through him where the venom lands on him, and in danger of death as there nothing deadlier than dragon venom. [385] In his agony he cries out for divine help in a desperate, dramatic, moment, to Christ the deliverer of life. Bevis is close to death, and the great Saviour who performed the greatest miracle and raised Lazarus from the dead is now the only person who can save him. Bevis realises that only a miracle would save him now. The images created by the language of the poem, of Bevis's body swollen to the point where it burst his armour into a 'thosend maile' – a thousand pieces the size of a small coin – are horrific to contemplate. The venom burning his flesh, the pain, and the fear he is enduring that causes him to scream to the heavens are dramatically depicted by the poet. The reader/listener would possibly be praying for his salvation too.

Tho he segh his hauberk toren,
"Lord!" a seide, "That I was boren!"
That seide Beves, thar a stod,
And leide on, ase he wer wod;
The dragoun harde him gan asaile
And smot on the helm with is taile,
That his helm clevede ato,
And his bacinet dede also.
Tweies a ros and tweis a fel,
The thredde tim overthrew in the wel; (2842-2850)

The damage to Bevis's armour mirrors that done by the dragon to Guy's chain mail. Again, as with Guy, the great tail is used as a powerful, damaging weapon. Bevis is now bareheaded – vulnerable against the beast's massive head and tail, as was Guy. He

[385] This is a strange analogy, as leprosy does not cause a burning feeling. The nerves become deadened, and there is a loss of sensation. Presumably, the poet was unaware of the symptoms and used the worst illness he could think of for a comparison. In addition, Lazarus was known as 'Simon the Leper'. Bevis calling on the saviour of Lazarus would give a possible reason for the comparison of leprosy with the burning sensation.

stands and falls twice. The third time, the dragon's tail providentially throws him into the holy well. The relevance of the use of the number three will be discussed at a later point.

Bevis is safe in the well as the dragon will not go near the water in which the legendary virgin bathed. The rise and fall of the battle closely resemble that of Guy, running into several days with little respite. It is interesting that the dragons do not attack when the knights are at their weakest. This indicates that there is some unseen protection around the knights. The trees (for Guy) and the well (for Bevis) are safe refuges in a desperate situation. Whatever a Christian chivalric knight faces, he will, by divine providence, be given the means to overcome his adversity. There is also the unmissable comparison of the resurrection when Jesus emerged from a dark tomb after three days. [386]

Thar-inne a lai up right;
A neste, whather hit was dai other night.
Whan overgon was his smerte
And rekevred was of is hertte,
Beves sette him up anon;
The venim was awei igon;
He was ase hol a man
Ase he was whan he theder cam. (2851-2858)

The venom is washed away by the 'holy water' of the well and Bevis's skin and heart are made whole. This is indeed the miracle Bevis prayed for. It is also an allegorical baptism, when sins and hurts are washed away, fitting the Christian for entry into the Church. Bevis is once again as strong and fit as when he first arrived to face the dragon, thanks to the power of prayer.

On is knes he gan to falle,
To Jesu Crist he gan to calle:
"Help," a seide, "Godes sone,
That this dragoun wer overcome!
Boute ich mowe the dragoun slon
Er than ich hennes gon,
Schel hit never aslawe be
For no man in Cristenté!"
To God he made his praiere
And to Marie, his moder dere; (2859-2868)

[386] Both the Guy and Bevis poets frequently use the 'three' motif, a theme which will be used several times by Spenser in *TFQ* and will be discussed at a later point.

This time Bevis prays not only to Jesus but to the Virgin Mary, who is an anathema to dragons: her purity, chastity, and her position as Christ's Mother strike fear into a dragon's heart. Her girdle represents her acknowledged chastity, as we have seen. The Virgin Mary also defeats the devil, and as the dragon represents Satan, the beast would be very afraid of her intervention. After the seduction of Eve by the Serpent, God declared that woman and the serpent would always be enemies, pronouncing 'I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.' (Genesis 3:15). The power and authority of the Virgin Mother would greatly diminish the power of the dragon and give added strength to the knight.

That herde the dragoun, ther a stod,
And flegh awei, ase he wer wod.
Beves ran after, withouten faile,
And the dragoun he gan asaile;
With is swerd, that he out braide,
On the dragoun wel hard a laide,
And so harde a hew him than,
A karf ato his heved pan,
And hondred dentes a smot that stonde, (2869-2877)

The great beast is undone by the persistence of the knight who is sustained by the power of faith and chastity. This leaves the monster vulnerable to massive blows from a powerfully wielded sword. The dragon in Margaret's cell is likewise easily vanquished by her devoutness and her purity. Margaret, Martha, and George all draw their strength from their faith and trust in Christ, and their faith is rewarded as they fight their dragons. The poet gives Bevis the certainty that a direct prayer for God's intervention would not be ignored.

Er he mighte kerven a wonder,
A hitte him so on the cholle
And karf ato the throte bolle.
The dragoun lai on is side,
On him a yenede swithe wide.
Beves thanne with strokes smerte
Smot the dragoun to the herte, (2878-2884)

Bevis chops into the Adam's apple (2880). Because the dragon is so well armoured by its scales, the only way Bevis can reach the heart is through this open wound in the throat. The dragon finally falls, and Bevis strikes it through the heart via the throat.

Symbolically, striking through the throat would prevent the power of speech, and although the dragon does not speak, it was once human, and a king. Chopping into the Adam's apple, a very human feature, strikes at the centre of what the dragon was. It is not unreasonable here to make a connection to original sin and Eve being tempted by a smaller version of a dragon/serpent in Eden. The action also opens the throat to allow access for the killing blow to the heart. St. George and Guy killed their respective dragons by piercing the heart through the throat. By chopping into the throat, Bevis is destroying not only the dragon, but the last vestiges of a transformed human being. In this way, he is ridding the world of two manifestations of evil in one form. The open throat was the dragon's first weapon, when it roared and opened its mouth wide at Bevis. It has proved to be its undoing.

> An hondred dentes a smot in on,
> Er the heved wolde fro the bodi gon,
> And the gode knight Bevoun
> The tonge karf of the dragoun;
> Upon the tronsoun of is spere
> The tonge a stikede for to bere.
> A wented tho withouten ensoine
> Toward the toun of Coloine (2885-2892)

Removing the tongue is again symbolic of removing the power of speech. Although dragon is mute, before the enchantment its human form would not have been. The king/dragon has been reduced to a silent corpse. Margaret's dragon has a very long tongue which is thrown over her head, or laps under her feet (p.93). The tongue is a trophy, but it is also symbolic of the silencing and defeat of evil. The tongue is also covered in venom, so Bevis needs to be careful to keep it away from his body. Carrying it on the point of his spear is by far the safest way to transport it. As Bevis leaves for Cologne, there is no mention of Ascopard or the other two companions. The focus is on Bevis and his achievement.

There are many similarities between the formulaic romances of Sir Guy and Sir Bevis. According to Ashton, this intertextuality is 'both a result of medieval material culture *and* a result of romance's formulaic structures – themselves a hangover from oral performance.'[387] The same criteria apply to the relating of saints' lives, and the ongoing tale of the dragon. Stories passed on by oral tradition are embellished and 'improved'. By

[387] Ashton, as before. p.27.

the time they come to be written down, many versions are conflated. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the heroes suffer the same kind of wounds and setbacks: damaged armour, grievous wounds and being in single combat without the help of a companion. The tradition of single combat has survived from the very earliest legend of Marduk. Both Guy and Bevis are Christian knights, upholders of chivalry and with an unshakeable faith. When they are at the very end of their strength, injured and facing death, they pray for help, fully expecting that they will receive it. Prayers for divine help are answered, and the dragons cannot stand in the face of grace, in whatever form it appears: a stand of trees, or a holy well. This resonates with the Christian martyrs and saints, all of whom are granted such help when they are at the end of their strength. The power of prayer is demonstrated throughout the literature of the medieval era, across a range of genres, as we have seen. The dragon fights are in three sections: the preparation, the events leading to the fight, and the fight itself. That both Guy and Bevis undergo testing battles for three days, and overcome their difficulties, parallels Christ and his three days in the tomb, overcoming death. The battles of both knights correspond with that of Saint George. This would indicate that the poets were familiar with the legend and had invoked the power of George for their own eponymous heroes, as when Bevis calls on Saint George for strength. The comparisons also reveal that the Bevis poet was aware of the Guy of Warwick poem. It also gives the sense of building a tradition of English dragon-slayers.

The dragons are shown to be full of noise and menace and are indeed dangerous. However, they are cowardly, just like Margaret's demon. They can withstand blows from fierce weapons without any harm to their scaled bodies, but they cannot withstand the power of prayer or of chastity. When the prayers are addressed directly to Christ and/or the Holy Virgin, the dragons flee in terror. Chastity proves the vital force against the might of the dragon.

Although the dragon itself represents a complex range of ideas from its earliest appearance, its presence in medieval romance is usually to display the 'extraordinary power of the hero.'[388] rather than representing a particular menace, for example paganism or Satan. The traditional dragon characteristics are fully present in medieval romance, with one noticeable exception. Neither Guy's nor Bevis's dragon breathes fire. They emit the foul stench, and they spew poisoned venom, they have prodigiously strong tails, and scales aplenty, but no fire. The pre-biblical dragons in Greek mythology and earlier

[388] *'Bevis of Hampton'*, TEAMS Middle English Texts.p.79.

were fire-breathers, yet neither the dragons in the saints' lives nor the medieval romance dragons have this feature. It is highly probable that the Guy poem is based on the de Voragine story of St. George in the *Legenda Aurea*. As that dragon did not breathe fire, then it is pertinent that the romance poets would not include it. It is logical, to assume, therefore that the Bevis poet based his poem on the tales of both Saint George and Guy. The dragon in romance does not necessarily represent Satan, although it is representative of evil. The role of the knight as a dragon-slayer is also evidence of the life of a saint being remoulded to fit the genre of medieval romance. Although the knight romances are a secular genre, they accentuate the power of prayer and faith, as do the hagiographies.

The romances repeat from previous texts the habitat of the dragon, secluded in caves outside the city. The features of the dragons are the same: scales, wings, monstrous size, and vile stench just as in the hagiographical texts. The Bevis dragon also has the fear of chastity (the virgin's well) paralleling the subjugation of the dragon with a virgin's girdle in the saints' lives. Unlike the hagiographic dragons, the romance dragons inflict real and severe injuries upon their opponents, and the battles last much longer. Both Guy and Bevis battle their dragons for three days. The knights' lives are in peril from the dragons, whereas the saints know the dragon cannot hurt them. They are already covered by God's protection and are assured of answers to their prayers. Whilst the saints have lived unblemished lives, the knights are worldly and have sinned previously in their lives, particularly by killing. Thus, they have to pay penance and earn the protection and intervention they pray for. Only when they have come to the end of their strength are the knights' prayers answered. I would also suggest that for these two knights, defeating the dragon is a cathartic experience. They have both killed other men, and Guy in particular has actively sought confrontation. The dragon encounters, situated where they are in the romances, function as turning points, and the means of gaining redemption for their past actions. The dragon is their guilt, and the destruction of it leaves both Guy and Bevis free to continue on their spiritual journeys. After many adventures – none of which involve dragons – both Guy and Bevis live long lives and die at the same time as their wives. Both knight and wife are buried together, their journeys completed. The lives of the saints continue after death, as they are taken to Heaven and sit with God – the pinnacle of their aspirations.

In both the romances, the cathartic fight with the dragon is placed approximately two thirds of the way through the poem. Both knights have suffered many trials, fallen in love, lost or abandoned their lady and are making their way back to the land of their birth.

Thus, the dragon fight is not only a rite of passage for the knights, but also symbolic of a growing maturity and awareness of themselves. In both romances, although the hero still has many tasks to perform, it is also his spiritual journey that is depicted. The slaying of the dragon is the redemption they seek. They can then go forward in the certain knowledge that God has forgiven them for previous misdeeds.

The dragons in the romances are much bigger and more aggressive than those in the hagiographies. Those dragons represented Satan and were easily overcome by saints and faith – depicting perhaps that the threat of the Devil was smaller than he believed. The stories the romance dragons inhabit are for entertainment rather than didacticism, and their purpose is to be defeated by knights, in an analogy of defeating their own demons. The larger and more terrifying the dragon, the bigger the excitement and entertainment. The one exception is the dragon described by Alexander Barclay, but as has already been stated, Barclay is on the cusp of both the Medieval and Early Modern periods, writing from a Humanist – not religious – standpoint. The bigger and more complex dragon is carried forward into the Early Modern era and significantly influences the work of Edmund Spenser, as can be seem in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Edmund Spenser and Dragons in the Early Modern Period.

> ***'The shapes mankind gives, in terror, to what they cannot make into reason'***
> Marion Zimmer Bradley. *The Mists of Avalon.* [389]

This final Chapter looks at how the idea of the dragon has survived in to the sixteenth century. There appears to be a persistent desire to believe in the existence of the dragon, as indicated in a pamphlet printed in 1614 which contained a reported sighting of such a beast, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Previous chapters have addressed the dragon as the representation of Satan – or as in the Romances – a personal atonement for previous wrongs committed by the protagonist. However, the most significant literary tradition dragon of the age is that produced by Edmund Spenser, in which he focusses on the division between the Church of England and the Catholic religion, and Elizabeth I's right to rule. Bringing into play real political and religious differences, Spenser creates a polymorphic dragon, which presents as different aspects of itself. I will examine the dragon from Spenser's strong anti-Catholic perspective which, I believe, is a new approach from any previous discussion of the beast in *TFQ.*

Introduction: A Moment of Cultural Change

As the medieval era transformed into what is now referred to as the Early Modern period, the transition was gradual, but the key moment of cultural change has to be located around the Reformation. The Reformation in Europe brought many changes – political, social and, most importantly, religious – to the British Isles. The Tudor dynasty ushered in a new ruling family, which meant sweeping changes to England. The ascendancy brought new rulers, laws, and taxes, and ultimately, a new approach to religion. Different concepts in education were to produce writers who radically altered ideas of the Christian faith and viewed worship in totally different ways. This thesis cannot address this revolution in any depth, other than to consider its impact from the point of view of our dragon: the literary portrayal and concept of the dragon, the representation of it, and the genres in which it is used. In discussing these, I will also examine contrasts and continuities of dragons and their characteristics from the earlier periods discussed.

[389] Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon.* (London: Sphere Books, 1982), p.459.

The Reformation, a spiritual, political, and cultural movement which began in Northern Europe, resulted in religious fragmentation. New ideas, given expression by Martin Luther in the early sixteenth century and later by Calvin in Geneva, led to the establishment of Protestantism as the dominant form of Christianity in some European countries, including England. From the death of Henry VIII until Elizabeth acceded the throne in 1558, England was in a state of religious flux. The succession of Elizabeth saw a swing back to Protestantism which Elizabeth embraced, as it had been the religion of her mother, Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth established a Church of England which helped to shape the national identity, and which remains in place to this day.[390]

In this new era there is a paucity of literary works in which dragons appear. The climate of religious fluctuation in the period was undoubtably a large contributor to the lack of dragon-based texts. Beginning with Henry VIII and the break from Rome in 1533, the firm Protestant stance of Edward VI's advisors, and the bloody and violent return to Catholicism under Mary, it was a precarious, uncertain time. As has been demonstrated, the dragon was a key figure in medieval saints' lives and medieval Catholicism more widely. It can be argued that the dragon was exiled along with Catholicism in Early Modern England. However, I contend that this is not straightforwardly the case, and as a result, the key questions to be addressed in this section of the thesis are: what happened to the concept of the dragon and its functions, how did the perception of it change in the new context, and what did it come to represent in the literature of a period of monumental change? I will also consider the genres in which the dragon features. The only significant dragon texts from the period are Edmund Spenser's epic poem, *The Faerie Queene* (1590), Christopher Marlowe's tragedy *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1590) and Marie Catherine d'Aulnoy's *The Green Serpent* (1698), a French fairy tale.[391] In *Faustus* the dragons have a passing mention of drawing a chariot through the heavens in order for Faustus to learn the secrets of astronomy. As we saw in Greek mythology Medea escaped in a dragon-drawn chariot.[392] There is no further mention nor any description of dragons in the play. *The Green Serpent* is a late seventeenth-century fairy tale in which a king is transformed into a dragon, as is the dragon fought by *Sir Bevis*.

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[390]L. Baldwin Smith, *Elizabeth I: The Golden Reign of Gloriana*, *The English Historical Review* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.46-51.

[391] Translated by James Robinson Planché (1796-1880) a bilingual playwright and herald. *Oxford Dictionary of national Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22351.*

[392] Medea and Helios, previously in this thesis.

My central concern in this chapter will be the most significant of these texts, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene.* This magnificently epic poem will allow an examination of what happens to the dragon in romance, a genre that has continued, like the dragon, and is transformed in the Early Modern period. The dragon becomes regenerated into something quite monumental, coloured by Spenser's own religious and political views. It is important to acknowledge the polemical context which provided the religious and political backdrop for Spenser's epic poem.

Polemical Writing and Wonderous Dragons

Jesse M. Lander tells that in 'the period of robust disagreement...ferment and innovation… the printing press and the Reformation produced polemic.'[393] Polemic is a speech or text that strongly attacks or defends a person, opinion, idea or set of beliefs. Lander further states that although 'strenuous argument and violent invective are ubiquitous in the sixteenth century, such arguments and invectives are not christened as *polemic* until the 1630s'.[394] However, despite Lander's credible claim that the use of the word 'polemic' for religious and political pamphlets does not really take hold until the 1630s, the phenomenon of polemical writing has in fact been an aspect of many of the medieval dragon texts with which this thesis has dealt so far. Polemical objectives influenced the representation of St. George's defeat of the dragon as it showed Christianity defeating paganism. St. Margaret's dragon was not only Satan; it also represented paganism and the subjugation of women by sexual possession. Polemical purposes also determined the inclusion (or exclusion) of certain passages in the romance of *Guy of Warwick* for political reasons, as previously discussed. The omission of some of the stanzas in the Caius Manuscript of Guy was possibly a deliberate act to further the political and social aspirations of the owners of the Manuscript. This context of polemical writing is, in my view, the best way in which to approach and understand the use of the dragon in Spenser's epic poem.

An example of the polemic abundant at the time of Spenser, and which he in all probability would have been aware of, is John Martiall's *Treatise of the Cross* printed in 1564. Martiall was a religious controversialist who wrote his *Treatise* in defence of the

[393] Jesse M. Lander, *Inventing Polemic:Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England.* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.1.
[394] Ibid., p.1.

honour paid by Catholics to the Cross, and which he dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I.[395] James Calfhill, a Church of England clergyman, launched his attack on the work when he, in turn, published *An Answer to John Martiall's Treatise of the Cross Volume II* in 1565. Calfhill argued that ceremonies which had no scriptural authority should be severely restricted.[396] Post-reformation Protestantism set great store by the power of word, both of God and his interpreters. The ability to read the scriptures in English as opposed to Latin, combined with the rise of print, ensured a wider audience for many texts. Being aware of this, and believing that the *Treatise* called the Scriptures into question, Calfhill launched a vitriolic attack on the integrity of Martiall:

> ...God's rule and conscience is excluded from you:, and being so deep in your popish divinity, you have forgotten all Christian humanity….and sure a pitiful piece of work it is, when Papists in honesty shall contend with them who ye call Protestants. A slender point of defence it is when you give such a prick as makes yourselves to bleed.

Calfhill is implying that to be Papists is to be almost outside the realm of Christianity, and that the *Treatise* had in fact done more harm than good to the image of the Catholic religion. During this late sixteenth century period, religion and politics were inseparable, in both poetry and polemic. Calfhill also castigates Martiall for dedicating his book to the Queen, and is not reticent about bringing her into the discussion:

> But ye may not be touched, ye think you have dedicate your book to the Queen's highness: ye craftily come with a fair view, commending her Majesty in appearance; but, in effect, with a false proffer, (to your shame and confusion be it spoken,) ye condemn her. Thus traitorously ye seek for defence at her hands, whose person ye flee, whose doings ye impugn. You have received from your Jove of the Capitol a Pandora's box, to present (and God will,) to our Prometheus. But she, (God be thanked,) is too wise to credit you. Ye may seek for some other popish Epimetheus, that accepting your offer, may set aside your mischiefs.[397]

'Jove on the Capitol' is a reference to the Pope in Rome, and 'Pandora's Box', which when opened unleashed evils into the world, is the *Treatise* itself, dedicated to the Protestant Queen. Prometheus (Elizabeth I) was the intelligent giver of civilisation to humankind, whose name meant 'forethought'. Epimetheus was the twin brother of Prometheus, whose name meant hindsight. He was foolish and thoughtless and was given

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[395] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.*

[396] Ibid.

[397] James Calfhill D.D., *An Answer to John Martiall's Treatise of the Cross*, edited for the Parker Society by Gibbings, Rev. Richard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1851), pp.1-5 (p.5).

Pandora to be his spouse. Calfhill is saying that the *Treatise*, although approved by the Pope, is utterly unsuitable to be dedicated to the Protestant Queen due to its stoutly Catholic stance. The Queen however is too intelligent to be deceived by it; she is no Epimetheus, and Martiall should find some other person who may be taken in by the content. The use of ancient Greek was a very fashionable way of entering into debate, and thus polemical writing could be satirical and sophisticated, drawing on the classical knowledge of both the writer and the reader. Different sides of an argument were presented as erudite and scholarly, when actually the protagonists were disagreeing to the point of insult. Edmund Spenser utilises this fashion, giving some of his characters Greek names, which reveal their character traits: 'Thyamis' is passionate, 'Labryde' is turbulent and greedy, and so on. The main female character in *TFQ* is 'Una,' meaning 'oneness'.

Foxe's Book of Martyrs, originally published in 1563 as the *Actes and Monuments,* is a polemical account of the atrocities and punishments meted out to Protestants by the Catholic church in the mid-sixteenth century. John N. King states that the book 'not only encouraged the development in England of a sharply defined Protestant identity', but it also 'strongly influenced the nationalistic association between Roman Catholicism and foreign political domination'.[398] None of these texts contain dragons or indeed reference to dragons. What they do is reflect the religious tensions and polemical atmosphere which generates the Early Modern dragon. John Foxe (1516/17 – 1587) grew up and was educated in turbulent religious times, during the reign of Henry VIII and Edward VI, but when Mary came to the throne, Foxe and his family took refuge on the Continent. He lived variously in Strasbourg, Frankfurt, and Basel in the company of resolute Protestant reformers. Upon returning to England when Elizabeth took the throne, Foxe and the Protestant publisher John Day worked closely together to publish the *Book of Martyrs* as a 'Monument' to the recent Reformation martyrs and a damning indictment of the Catholic persecution of Protestants. [399] He denigrated Catholics as 'superstitious persecutors' and published harrowing accounts of the burnings and tortures which took place. Among these accounts were the deaths of Anne Askew, a writer and poet who was tortured and burned for her belief that transubstantiation was a falsity, and Thomas Cranmer, the author/compiler of the *Book of Common Prayer.* Whilst burning, Cranmer

[398] *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ed. by John N King (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2009). p.i.
[399] Ibid., p.32.

famously thrust into the flame the hand with which he had signed his recantation. Foxe's account of Cranmer's death closes:

> And thus have you the full story concerning the life and death of this reverend Archbishop and martyr of God, Thomas Cranmer, and also of diverse other the learned sort of Christ's martyrs burned in Queen Mary's time…and almost the very middle man of all the martyrs which were burned in all her reign besides.[400]

His reference to 'middleman' is to set Cranmer in the centre of the purge by Mary, showing that as many people were burned before as after him, whilst she was on the throne. The eye- witness accounts recorded and published by Fox show how polemic can be used to condemn and criticize an existing religion and regime. As Joad Raymond points out, 'during the reign of Mary, a propaganda war broke out in England…This included anti-Catholic writing, surreptitious, anti-government polemic.' Despite the consequences, religious unrest and agitation was rife, and the printed word being so easily accessible fuelled the antagonism, allowing critics of either religion greater freedom. Raymond continues: '…a clear pattern emerges of the introduction of printed propaganda across Europe between 1500 and 1700: religious controversy brought printed propaganda which helped to create readerships who subsequently turned to secular media.' [401]

The above examples are as indication of the polemical ferment of Elizabethan England. Anti-Catholic feelings were prevalent, and authors were able to express themselves in the very strongest terms, in print as well as vocally. As Anne Lake-Prescott writes, there are many polemical and satirical works which cover such traits as 'Catholic disloyalty and ecclesiastical corruption, but also puritan pride, stinginess, or loquacity.' It is an indicator of the popularity of the new-found weapon of polemic that so many writers felt able to criticise the world they lived in. She adds: 'Sex and scatology figure, as do greed and the diversity of what fools and villains affirm or produce.'[402] The printed word, so vital to the Protestant cause, was hugely impactful in the sixteenth century. In this climate, Spenser would have been confident in writing *The Faerie Queene,* which is, in

[400] Ibid, p.196.

[401] Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, UK : Cambridge, 2003), p.15.

[402] Anne Lake Prescott, 'Satire and Polemic' in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, *Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, eds. Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox, (Oxford, United Kingdom : Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 223-242 (p.228).

effect, a very long piece of polemic against Catholicism, and a confirmation of England's identity under Elizabeth.

In addition to the context of Elizabethan political and religious polemical writings, other cultural influences were at work on Spenser when he was writing. As a result of Early Modern humanist education, he imitated the style of the classical Greek writers, utilising their phrasing and sweeping description. He was also clearly influenced by the medieval romances and the archaic language therein, as will be seen. The influences from early literature; *Beowulf,* Saint George and particularly Sir Bevis are all present in his poetry. Spenser produced an epic of such magnitude; that close examination of the text will prove a rich source to continue my trail of the literary tale of the dragon. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, (hereafter, *TFQ*) an unfinished work, the first part of which was published in 1590, includes representations of dragons, serpents, and Satan. Spenser describes an encounter with a dragon which parallels that in *Beowulf* in the unquestionable need for the protagonist to defeat the beast. Beowulf is standing against the last bastion of paganism, and Red Cross, the hero-knight of Book I of the *FQ,* is battling Catholicism. Although my research has not been able to reveal any evidence that Spenser had read *Beowulf,* either in the original Old English or in translation, it is known that the manuscript was bound into the *Nowell Codex* owned by Laurence Nowell in the mid-sixteenth century.[403]Such a document would have been of great interest to a scholar such as Spenser. Although I have no evidence that Spenser read the *Codex,* it is reasonable to assume that Spenser was aware of the text. I hope to demonstrate that this sixteenth-century revisiting of an early medieval symbol of evil shows the importance and longevity of the dragon in later medieval and Early Modern literature.

The influences on Spenser's depiction of dragons were social as well as literary and polemical. There was still, among the populace, a belief in the reality of dragons beyond Spenser's own day. A pamphlet entitled *True and Wonderfull. A Discourse Relating a Strange and Monstrous Serpent Or Dragon Lately Discovered, and Yet Living in Sussex ... in St. Leonard's Forrest ... With the True Generation of Serpents*, dated August 1614, for example, reports that near Horsham, in Sussex, there had been a sighting

[403] Laurence Nowell (1530–*c.* 1570), antiquary. By early 1563 at the latest he was residing at Sir William Cecil's house in the Strand, London, where he made a transcription (BL, Add. MS 43703) of several Anglo-Saxon texts, including the Old English Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. He also owned what is now BL, Cotton MS Vitellius A.xv in the British Library, the collection of Anglo-Saxon writings sometimes known as the Nowell codex, which contains the only surviving text of *Beowulf.* OED online, as before.

of a serpent, or dragon, by three witnesses. This beast exhibits all the features of the dragons that have previously been discussed. It is nine feet or more in length, with a body shaped almost like the 'axletree of a cart', thicker in the middle than at the ends. The forepart, like a neck, has a white ring of scales around it, and is an ell long (1.15 metres or 1.25 yards). It leaves a 'glutinous and slimy' trail, which emits an offensive stench.[404] It has 'blackish' scales upon its back and has a red underbelly. It was said to have 'large feet' but 'the eye may be there deceaved' as serpents are said to 'glide upon certain ribs and scales…which defend them from the upper part of their throat unto the lower part of their belly.' It also has on either side 'two bunches so big as a large football…will in time grow into wings.' It can cast venom 'four rods' in length – (equal to twenty-two yards or twenty metres). This is reminiscent of St. Martha's dragon, which cast fire behind it. It has poisoned people and killed dogs which chased it. The dogs were not eaten however, as the beast's food 'for the main part' is coney (rabbit) in a warren it much frequents. The statement is signed as a true record by three witnesses. It is clear from this that the 'witnesses' had supposedly seen something resembling the conventional idea of a dragon; what is certain is that the author has certainly borrowed from earlier tales, such as the medieval romances, to add credibility to the 'sighting' – and no doubt boost circulation of the pamphlet. Such texts were cheap to produce and were readily accessible to a much wider readership, the ones who were looking for entertainment rather than enlightenment.

The pamphlet (Ill. 25) plays into the Early Modern fascination with tales of the weird and wonderful, Lady Eleanor Davies, a poet and prophetess, published in prophetic mode *A Warning to the Dragon and all his* Angels' in 1625.[405] Addressed to King Charles I, it is a warning that the world is coming to an end, and she juxtaposes the pope, the devil, and the dragon. Although this publication is slightly later than the *FQ,* it is proof positive that even in the seventeenth century, the dragon was still seen as a real – if metaphysical – entity and symbolised the threat to Protestantism. Here, prophecy and polemic combine. Fig. 31 of the illustrations shows how Lady Eleanor recounted the dragon, and the very real struggle to come. Discussing the war in Heaven, she clearly defines 'Heaven' as 'the Church of God' – the Protestant church – and suggests the Archangel Michael is

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[404] *True and Wonderfull. A Discourse Relating a Strange and Monstrous Serpent Or Dragon Lately Discovered, and Yet Living in Sussex ... in St. Leonard's Forrest ... With the True Generation of Serpents*, 1614. Printed at London, by John Trundle. 1614. Early English Books Online. pp.1-19 (p.12).

[405] Eleanor, Lady Davies, *A Warning to the Dragon And All His Angels.* B. Alsop (London, 1625), pp1-57 (p.55).

representative of King James. Davies further defines 'The Dragon needs little exposition, it is the Pope'. The Sea of Rome is likened to 'Satan's seat, and warns 'the Pope, the Dragon, the Divell is amongst you…knowing he hath but a short time…' This is a direct polemical condemnation of the Pope personally. Instead of being Christ's representative on Earth, Davies totally reverses his role, denouncing him as Satan himself. She also prophesies that the Catholic religion has but a 'short time' to run, indicating that it will be swept away by Protestantism. These are just two examples: one to show the Early Modern susceptibility to reports of dragon sightings, and the other how it can be used for sensational or polemical impact. Word of mouth reporting is the successor to the earlier oral histories, which predate the written word. Stories around the fire, in mead halls and by travelling poets have transposed into printed texts with eye-catching first-hand reports and apocalyptic visionary scenes. Texts once read aloud in the medieval period have also been assimilated into this new genre of print. The dragon has survived the leap in education and cultural change from the medieval to the Early Modern period, and still retains most of its early characteristics, as will be demonstrated in this chapter.

The dragon had been integral to saints' lives in the medieval era in that it signified a satanic opponent to be defeated. It represented paganism, lust, and the desolation of Christian souls. If a person was not a believer in Christ, their very soul was in peril, destined never to be reunited with Christ in Heaven. As a result of the sixteenth-century Reformation, with its dissolution of the monasteries and attacks on the veneration of saints, the dragon as a representation of evil/Satan had to take on a new role and be defeated in some other context. As we have seen, the symbolism of the dragon had also changed through the periods of time. In the medieval period it stood as a representation of the threat of paganism to Christianity, then as the threat of the Devil from within Christianity. Now in the Early Modern period, it is the threat of Catholicism to the new Protestantism. The dragon has metamorphosized from monster to Satan to the Roman church. Also, the concept of the dragon as a literal creature has changed to an understanding that it is now symbolic of unseen danger. The dragon in Spenser's time is still a powerful metaphorical representation of the shape of terror, but now in the form of the papists, the perceived enemies of Protestantism and the state. It embodies the hidden fears of the unknown, and of choosing the wrong path. It is this fear and his own loathing of Catholicism that Spenser harnessed and shaped into his poem, giving the dragon a variety of features and symbolisms, each one offering a different form of terror.

Each of these threats represent one of the human inner failings of Spenser's protagonist, and must be overcome by him, in order that he may be – as the poet wrote to Raleigh – 'perfected in the twelve private morall vertues' and be a model for '…a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline'.[406] Lust, pride and vanity are just some of the 'dragons' the hero must overcome.

As with all polemic, Spenser's *FQ* has a clear purpose which is both didactic and partisan.

Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

Spenser was born in 1552 during the Protestant reign of Edward VI. A year later Mary acceded to the throne, and the country became Catholic again. Although Spenser was a small child when Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558, he would have grown up with an awareness of the uncertainty of the religious climate of the time. It was the humanist revival of classical learning and wisdom that influenced Edmund Spenser in the creation of *The Faerie Queene.* His education at the Merchant Taylors' School from 1561 before entering Cambridge University in 1569 would have introduced him to the humanist 'appetite for classical texts; a philological concern to correct them and ascertain their meaning; and a desire to imitate them.'[407] Spenser wrote and translated Greek and French texts at Pembroke Hall, and according to Andrew Hadfield was 'an established literary name 'by the time he obtained his B.A. in 1573. [408]

The reach and power of the Roman Church was long and tenacious. Philip of Spain regarded Elizabeth as an illegitimate heretic and was allegedly supportive of plots with Mary Queen of Scots to remove Elizabeth from the throne and Protestantism from the country. The Spanish were defeated by Drake in 1585, when he famously 'singed the King of Spain's beard' by setting fire to the Armada at Cadiz, thus delaying the proposed invasion of England by more than a year. When the Armada did attack from Calais in 1588, the wind in the Channel turned and blew the fleet northwards, thereby enabling the English fleet to engage and defeat the enemy. The National Archives entry states 'God blew, and they were scattered.' After the execution of Mary (1587) and the defeat of the

[406]Edmund Spenser. *A Letter to Raleigh* in *The Faerie Queene* ed. A.C. Hamilton (Harlow, Pearson Education, 2001), pp.714-718 (p.716). All quotations taken from this edition.
[407]Nicholas Mann, "The Origins of Humanism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye, (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.1-19 (p.7).
[408] Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser : A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.82.

Spanish Armada in 1588, the threat of Catholic invasion was greatly reduced, but Elizabeth I remained excommunicated, recusancy was still treason, and Catholic interventions for the re-conversion of England continued. It was during this time that Spenser was in Ireland, writing the first version of the *FQ.* Writing the poem in a Catholic country, against a background of religious unrest would intensify Spenser's sense of the clash of denomination.

Spenser was sent to Ireland to act as Secretary to Lord Grey, possibly due to the expertise he gained in civil law whilst acting as Secretary to John Young, the Bishop of Rochester. He witnessed the rebellions, uprisings, and slaughter of the Irish during his tenure, but chose to stay on after the recall of his employer and in 1582 was able to lease New Abbey in County Kildare, a substantial disposed estate from the crown. After Lord Grey was recalled to London, Spenser was a man of means, and the 'acquisition of a significant estate…afforded him the status of a gentleman…and the freedom to write with fewer restrictions.'[409] It was during the following six years, in what Hadfield calls a 'frenetic outpouring of writing',[410] that Spenser wrote Part I of *The Faerie Queene*, Books I-III, which appeared in 1590. Dedicated to Elizabeth I, the poem found such royal favour that Spenser was granted a pension of fifty pounds per year,[411] although there is no proof that Elizabeth actually read the work. However, the royal patronage was enough to ensure the success of the poem, and in 1596 the *FQ* was republished together with the second part, Books IV-VII. Over time, so popular and important to literature was Spenser's epic work, that Kathleen Curtin states it was '…one of the few books that Charles I had with him in his prison in the months leading up to his execution'.[412] It is possible that the King mirrored his own journey with that of Red Cross, the mistakes and failures, but leading ultimately – he hoped – to redemption and grace.

The trials and tribulations of the Red Cross Knight can be read as the struggles of Elizabeth against the Catholic church to remove her from the throne.[413] Likewise, the

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[409] Hadfield, *A Life,* p.185.

[410] Ibid., p. 185.

[411] Ibid., p. 235.

[412] Jackson C. Boswell, 'Spenser Allusions: In the Sixteenth and Seventeeth Centuries Addenda', *Studies in Philology*, 109.2 (2012), i–xiii, 353–583 (Preface, p.vii).

[413] In 1570 Pope Pius V issued the bull *Regnans in Excelsis*, which excommunicated Queen Elizabeth I, deprived her of her right to rule, and released her subjects from obedience to her. It also actively encouraged

coils of the dragons and serpentine beasts represent the gripping tentacles of the Church of Rome, from which Red Cross (later revealed as Saint George) has to free not only himself, but the country of Una, who is representative of the Protestant Church of England. This links back to the earlier chapter on St. George, who originally was portrayed as the means of showing the perils of paganism. Spenser has taken the qualities and virtues of a formerly Catholic saint, and re-written George as a Protestant hero. Book I of the *FQ*, also called '*The Booke of Holinesse'*, gives an overview of the virtues required for good Protestants which have remained unchanged from the earlier saints. Chasity, faith, and courage are still as important, although Spenser does give his hero a little room for manoeuvre, as will be discussed. Moreover, it is representing the journey of every Christian towards holiness. Red Cross is a Christian everyman, and he contends with adversity, temptation, and defeat before proving himself in his final battle. Indeed, he is comparable to the '*Everyman'* of the fifteenth century morality play in which the protagonist represents all men – the 'universal hero… who encounters various allegorical figures representing worldly and spiritual values.'[414] We can compare the journey of Red Cross to that of Everyman in that we see Red Cross slowly slipping from grace and then struggling to redeem himself. The final confrontation with the dragon could result in the death of the knight, and he must be spiritually prepared, as must Everyman who is facing his end. When death comes, as it must, it is only our good deeds that will help justify us before God. Nothing else will be considered in the final reckoning. The importance of Book I as a post-Reformation guide for ordinary Christians cannot be ignored.

The influences of the ancient Greek poets are very much in evidence in *The Faerie Queene.* Spenser, of course, brings his own interpretation of the dragon and what it represents to him, whilst drawing heavily on the classical poets for style and rhetoric. Indeed, Spenser reveals in his letter to Raleigh, placed at the end of Book III of the *FQ,* how he has 'followed all the antique Poets historicall'.[415] Spenser's biographer, Andrew Hadfield, states that Spenser had access to the library of his friend Gabriel Harvey,[416] and this is possibly how Spenser gained access to Barclay's work. Zurcher asserts that

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plots against her. This eventually led to the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, and the war with Spain, 'Translating Christianity', *Studies in Church History ,* Vol.53 (2017), pp. 210 – 222.

[414] Introduction to *Everyman* in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. by Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2020), pp.281-297 (p.281).

[415] *TFQ* p.715.

[416] Hadfield, *A Life,* p.97.

Spenser 'seems to have assimilated some details of the St George narrative from the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, and others from Mantuan's Georgius (translated into English in about 1515 by Alexander Barclay)'.[417] As we have seen, dragons featured in these texts, and if Spenser was writing an epic poem, he required an epic hero. He needed to create someone who could fight dragons but also who exhibited very human qualities as opposed to saintliness; a humble, flawed character to whom the reader could relate. The 'gentleman or noble person' to whom the poem was directed, who dreamed of fighting a dragon and completing a glorious quest for the love of a lady would be revived by Spenser.

The link back to the classical past is demonstrated by Spenser's deliberate use of archaic language, giants, fantastic beasts, and heroic encounters, all of which are to be found in Homer, Virgil and later in Barclay. Spenser has absorbed these influences and reproduced them together with his own unique approach and form, resulting in a poem which simulates Homer's style, but on closer reading is distinctly Early Modern in the tale it tells. Spenser uses the topical background of religious turmoil in the same way as does Barclay. The devil must be defeated. Another work which greatly influenced the writing of *FQ* was Ludovico Ariosto's Italian epic poem, *Orlando Furioso,* published in 1532. Gabriel Harvey, in a letter to Spenser, quotes the poet himself as saying that he 'needes seeme to emulate and hope to ouergo' *Orlando Furioso.*[418] The influence of Barclay is also seen in his *FQ.* Spenser's epic poetry, his high, rhetorical style and grand scale allegory reflect the flavour and power of Homer and Virgil. This mirrors Barclay's own imitation of the language of the Greek poets.

TFQ is – by Spenser's own admission – a didactic poem, akin to a sermon. Sermons were didactic and formal, often quite lengthy, and could be very pedantic. Preachers would often take a single passage or verse from the Bible and dissect it to find the central meaning. This labouring of a point for a long time would not always hold the attention of a congregation. Jeanne Shami maintains that 'Sermons…commonly castigate auditors' frailties…wandering thoughts, sloth, sleepiness, preferences for alehouses or

[417] Andrew Zurcher, *Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene. A Reading Guide,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p.170.
[418] Hadfield, *A Life*, p.98. One of the major plotlines in Aristo's poem concerns the hero being lured away from his duty by love, and further plot has a protagonist being captured and imprisoned by a sorceress and her magic. Both of these storylines appear in the *FQ.*

adulterous assignations, indifference, and bad manners.'[419] Not all congregations were like this of course, and some would go quickly home and make notes on the sermon just delivered.[420] A congregation used to listening to, and taking notes on sermons, would be alert to a long poem with an exciting narrative.

By contrast, the genre of poetry – songs, chants, odes, lyrics, epigrams, elegies, pastorals, and epics – has structures and patterns of rhythm and rhyme that make them memorable and linger in the consciousness of the listener. Children are taught 'nursery rhymes' – a simple form of poetry that both informs and entertains. Even before children can speak, they can recognise the repetitive rhythm and the sound of the rhyme. This impacts on the infant memory, and the process of learning. Using the medium of poetry allows the author more freedom to draw on all the rhetorical resources of verse: variation in syntax, the linking and echoing effects of rhyme, the imaginative power of figurative language, and the freedom of allegory.

There are other influences which can be detected in the poem. The Book of Revelation has the seven-headed dragon, Geoffrey of Monmouth supplies the source for Prince Arthur and Sir Thomas Malory's romance all clearly had an effect on Spenser. It has also been recognized that Spenser drew heavily on the medieval romance *Bevis of Hampton* which was discussed in chapter 4. Hodges reveals that Spenser's printer Thomas East 'published editions of *Le Morte Darthur* (1582) and *Syr Bevis of Hampton* (1585).' [421] This information is interesting as Spenser may have had access to and read the romance of Bevis at his printer's establishment. What is clear is that however he discovered the romance, he was obviously greatly influenced by it, and included many of the features from it in his own work, as will be shown. The combination of these influences and Spenser's own strongly held views merge in an epic of great magnitude containing many modes of writing: romance, quest, epic, allegory – Spenser uses them all in this heroic poem. The inclusion of the dragon, particularly the heroic battle at the end of Book I, is a continued link to previous tales of heroism and danger. The historic quest of a knight, his human frailties and shortcomings, his failures and downfalls set against the unwavering love of his beautiful lady; the meaning of faith and loyalty, and a

[419] Jeanne Shami, '*The Sermon'* in *The Oxford Handbook,* pp.185-206 (p.195).
[420] Ibid., p.204.
[421] Hodges, p.112.

tremendous struggle to overcome his faults are the building blocks of the epic tradition and the romance genre. All these elements and more are present in the *FQ.* The core of the work, however, is religious polemic, and the dragon – the sum of the struggles and pitfalls endured by the protagonist – is the mortal threat involved to Spenser's world. It is representative of sin, failure, infidelity, and loss of faith. The knight's defeat of the dragon represents the triumph of Protestantism.

Red Crosse and the Dragon in Book I of the *Faerie Queene*

A combination of romance, heroism and a quest, the poem is deeply embedded with religious and didactic allegory, symbolism, and fairy tale, complete with dragons and giants. It is also a Christian journey of self-discovery and redemption. It is didactic in that it is, in Spenser's own words 'a mirror for gentleman.'[422] It is also a condemnation of Catholicism, and all it represents; a political, polemic denunciation of the Church of Rome and its dangerous machinations and ostentation. Spenser grew up and was educated in a strongly Calvinistic era; however, in his *Letter to Raleigh.*[423] Spenser makes no specific reference to religious doctrine, instead stating that 'the general end is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline.' This statement is comparable to Barclay's wish that English youth would emulate the lifestyle of Saint George, not waste their time on frivolous pursuits, but be virtuous, upstanding, honest, and true.[424] The representation of the dragon in both Barclay and Spenser shows the beast as a direct contrast and challenge to these values.

Although the Faerie Queene is comprised of six books (instead of the projected twelve), and the 'Mutablitie Cantos' of Bk.7, it was originally intended to be in twelve books, and so is only slightly more than half of its potential length. [425] Despite this, it is a long, narrative poem, with a series of heroes and heroines and their moral concerns.[426] However, this thesis is focussed solely on *Book I, The Legend of the Knight of the Red*

[422] Spenser's '*Letter to Raleigh'* see fn below.
[423] Placed at the end of the 1590 Bk III of the *Faerie Queen,* 'allowing the reader to stand back from the poem' in order to gain a better understanding of it. pp.714-718 (p.714), *FQ* as before.
[424] Barclay p.22.
[425] Judith Dundas, '"The Faerie Queene": The Incomplete Poem and the Whole Meaning', *Modern Philology*, 71.3 (1974), 257–65.
[426] Bk.II. Guyon: *Temperance.* Bk.III, Britomart: *Chastity.* Bk.IV. Amoretta: *Friendship.* Bk.V. Artegall : *Justice.* Bk. V1. Calidore: *Courtesy.*

Crosse, or Of Holinesse. This is where we find the dragon episodes of the poem, of which there are several. The hero of Book I, Red Cross Knight, with whom I am mainly concerned, is protected by his faith, and his victory will save his world. He is, however, a very human hero. He exhibits all the failings of man. He is lured away from his quest by false paths and promises. He falls victim to his bodily lust, and he loses his way by losing sight of his faith and his goal. The struggles he endures, and the lessons he learns from his failings all make him a better man and help him on his physical and spiritual journey to holiness. His final confrontation with the dragon is his glory and redemption; it regains him his honour and wins the hand of his lady. Spenser's mode of writing – including his knights and dragons – is fundamentally allegorical. Allegory is also a useful tool, as it allows the author more artistic freedom and licence to refer ambiguously to persons and events without having to explain or go into more detail. Spenser explains his use of allegory in his *Letter to Raleigh,* describing it as a 'dark conceit' and commenting that poetry, rather than the sermon, is 'delightful and pleasing to commune sense.' He claims to be a 'Poet historical' who 'thrusteth into the middest [of a tale or history] ever where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the things forpaste, and divining of things to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all'.[427] The imagery conjured by poetry is longer lasting and therefore makes for a more abiding retention of the moral and features of the story. It is also, in an age of fierce polemic, a safer way of writing about controversial matters, as exemplified by *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (p.174).

The dragon still has great importance in the Early Modern period, in which it has moved from legend to allegory. Spenser's dragons are allegorical representations of the Catholic Church and faith: they rise up like the rebellious Irish in the religious wars which Spenser observed and present a dark threat to the Protestant rule of Elizabeth. Paradoxically, in my chosen text, *The Faerie Queene,* the dragon comes to represent both the devil and the national identity of England, and how this evolves will be discussed during analysis of the text. The dragon is allegorical, metaphysical representation of evil, and Spenser's sustained use of allegory throughout the poem leaves the reader in no doubt whatsoever that for Spenser, the greatest evil of all is Catholicism.

Although Saint George was initially represented by earlier authors as a Catholic martyr/saint fighting Paganism, Spenser re-casts him as the Protestant defender of

[427] *TFQ.,* p.176.

England. This re-identification gives more status to the reformed religion, and possibly a subliminal message that Saint George is now a worthy hero for the age in which Spenser was writing. Immediately before Red Cross faces the dragon, Una prophetically tells him that he is destined for Heaven and

> '…a blessed end:
> For thou amongst those Saints, whom thou doest see,
> Shall be a Saint and thine own nations frend
> And Patrone: thou Saint *George* shalt called bee,
> *Saint George* of mery England, the signe of victoree' (I.x.61:5-9)

Despite the dissolution of the monasteries and the outlawing of saints in 1536,[428] Saint George still remained in the national consciousness as the foremost representative saint of England. Elizabeth I was head of the Order of the Garter, of which George is the patron saint. It was beneficial for Spenser to retain Saint George and work him into the poem – and to this end, Spenser exercises poetic licence and now has him fighting for the Protestant Church.

The prefatory stanza to Book I *The Legend of the Knight of the Red Crosse, or Holinesse* is a neat summation of the twelve Cantos:[429]

> Lo I the man, whose Muse whylome did maske,
> As time her taught, in lowly Shephards weeds,
> Am now enforst a far vnfitter taske,
> For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds,
> And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds;
> Whose praises having slept in silence long,
> Me, all too meane, the sacred Muse areeds
> To blazon broade emongst her learned throng:
> Fierce warres and faithfull loues shall moralize my song. Proem. Stanza 1.

In this preface, Spenser is alluding to his previous work *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579). He refers to 'lowly Shephards weeds,' and 'oaten reeds' give way to 'trumpets sterne' as he moves up the scale from pastoral to heroic epic. Lines 5-6 recall romances of times past, which have 'slept in silence long'. Spenser is intending to revive the genre,

[428] Eamon. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (Yale University Press, 2005), p.407: 'These Injunctions outlawed…manifestations of the cult of the saints.'
[429] *The Faerie Queene* ed. A.C. Hamilton (Harlow, Pearson Education, 2001), p.29. This edition used throughout.

albeit in the context of religious polemic, hence his 'sacred Muse' and 'moralized song.' His concern is 'Fierce warres and faithfull loues' in a spiritual context.

The *FQ* is written in Spenser's individual and unique form, subsequently known as the 'Spenserian Stanza' which comprises nine lines, eight of iambic pentameter, with the ninth line being iambic hexameter, an Alexandrine. The rhyme scheme *is ababbcbcc*. The use of hexameter shows the influences of the classic poets, Homer and Virgil, with whom Spenser was familiar. Other poets have attempted to imitate his style, but in the opinion of William Blissett, 'the Spenserian stanza is Spenser's invention, it remains his property.'[430]

The first stanza of Canto I shows the expressiveness and flexibility of the form and displaying the language of the romance poets. On the first reading it is a pleasant enough description, however the last line holds a deeper meaning, indicating that the first impression of a knight is not necessarily to be believed.

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,
Y cladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
The cruell markes of many' a bloudy fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield:
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:
Full iolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt. (I.i.1)

The effect of this stanza form is that it moves the poem along in such a way that the eight pentameter lines set the scene, whilst the ninth line contains an image which is a conclusion to the stanza, (a kind of underlining) but also an indicator of what is to come in the following stanza. In introducing his 'Gentle Knight' Spenser gives an overall impression of a typical knight resplendent in armour, but on closer examination the armour is found to be old and battered. The armour has been given to the youth by the Lady he is to serve, and it is 'the armour of a Christian man' that is to say, God's

[430] William Blissett, 'The Spenserian Stanza' in *The Spenserian Encyclopaedia* as before. pp. 671-673, (pp.672, 673).

armour.[431]We discover that the knight has never been in battle, and his horse is angry and reluctant to be controlled. The knight is not all he appears to be. He is new and 'jolly' but wears seasoned armour and cannot control his mount.

Similarly, in the second verse, Spenser is describing the young knight:

> Upon a great adventure he was bond
> That greatest Gloriana to him gave,
> That greatest Glorious Queene of *Faery* lond,
> To winne him worshippe, and her grace to have,
> Which of all earthly thinges he most did crave;
> And ever as he rode, his hart did earne
> To prove his puissance in battell brave
> Upon his foe, and his new force to learne;
> Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne. (I.i.3)

The young, untried knight known as 'Red Cross' because of the emblem on his shield, has pleaded for – and been granted – a quest from his Queen. He is eager to win her approval and prove his prowess in battle. However, the last two lines show that he is a novice in the wearing of armour and the wielding of weapons. His adversary is a fierce, dreadful dragon – a force he has never encountered, and he is unaware of the danger he faces. He is accompanying Una, a beautiful princess whose parents are the captives of the fearsome dragon in their homeland. The reader will become aware before Red Cross does that the dragon will appear in many guises, each one presenting both a physical and moral threat to the knight. Each manifestation will need to be defeated before the final confrontation. Red Cross, initially, is blissfully unaware of the dangers that await him. Una is the representation of Elizabeth I as 'the one Supreme Governor of the Church of England,' but she is also the personification of truth and innocence.[432]It is incumbent on Red Cross to defend her person and what she stands for, upholding the chivalric code of a knight for his lady.

The need to defeat of the dragon and the releasing of Una's parents are the reason for Red Cross's quest. Una also has a dwarf as a companion, a common motif in medieval romance.[433] Spenser's Dwarfe represents common sense and caution. He

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[431] Specified by Spenser in the *Letter to Raleigh,* The *FQ*, p.717. A biblical origin of the idea, 'Put on the whole armour of God…' Ephesians 6:10-18.

[432] Elizabeth Heale, *The Faerie Queene: A Reader's Guide Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.26.

[433] Dwarves appear in Malory as a companion to Gareth, Malory, pp.177-226, and in Chretien de Troyes as a helper to Lancelot in "The Knight of the Cart" in *Arthurian Romances,* trans. William W. Kibler and Carelton W. Carroll (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 207-294.

carries Una's 'needments', which Kathryn Walls claims are 'ornaments…necessary to the ceremonial that is vital to the survival of the Church.'[434] The purity of Una, and her devotion to the Church is enforced by these 'needments' as wherever she is, Una has the means of her worship to hand. The implication here is that a Protestant can celebrate their religion anywhere, without need of a Church. Una's unease and knowledge of the area bids Red Cross beware, there is danger here; she knows of this area and is fearful for her young unsophisticated Knight and his soul. Spenser gives the Dwarfe no such prevarication. He delivers a stark warning to Red Cross to fly for his life as all he will encounter here is death.

Presently the naive Red Cross knight approaches the lair of Errour, a vile serpent-like creature. Una warns him that all is not well, as does the Dwarf:

> Yea but (quoth she) the perill of this place
> I better wot then you, though nowe too late
> To wish you backe returne with fowle disgrace,
> Yet wisedome warnes, whilest foot is in the gate,
> To stay the steppe, ere forced to retrate.
> This is the wandring wood, this *Errours den*,
> A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:
> Therefore I read beware. Fly (quoth then
> The fearefull Dwarfe:) this is no place for liuing men. (I.i.13)

These episodes within *Book I* are integral to the poem's understanding of spiritual danger, since the dragon is Spenser's representation of the Catholic Church. The dragon occurrences can also be seen as arising from Spenser's experience of religious unrest during his time in Ireland, with the dragon as the threat of the Irish uprisings, potentially bringing about the resurgence of Catholicism. Spenser had described the Irish people and culture as 'savage and uncivilised', a statement which indicates 'the degree of cultural and racial prejudice which might be extended by sixteenth-century Europeans even towards other Europeans…'[435] From this aspect we get a better understanding of Spenser's heroes: a meeting of the physical and metaphysical to stand against an enemy, both physical and spiritual.

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[434] Kathryn Walls, "Spenser's Adiaphoric Dwarf," *Spenser Studies* No. 25 (2010). 53-78.

[435] *Culture and Belief in Europe 1450-1600. An Anthology of Sources.*, ed. by Rosemary O'Day & W.R. Owens David Englander, Diana Norman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990), p.272.

The dragon episodes occur in Book I in the following order: (i) Errour, I: i 14-26, (ii) Lucifera in the House of Pride, I: iv 1-18 (x), (iii) Orgoglio, I: viii 2-24, the dragon-crested helmet, as worn by Prince Arthur I: vii 31 (iv), Red Cross Knight and the ultimate dragon fight, I: xi 1-55. I will address them in order in which they appear in the poem, as they chart the stages in the worldly and spiritual progression of Red Cross. With each encounter, Red Cross gains awareness of the dangers which surround him, and of the consequences which result from ignoring the warnings and teachings of the Church of England. Spenser gives us a battle with a dragon in the style of Saint George as shall be demonstrated, and in keeping with other heroic battles already discussed.

The Malleability of the Dragon in Bk. I of *The Faerie Queene*

Errour, I: i. 14-26

A young, untried man in borrowed armour, Red Cross Knight has a quest to free Una's parents from 'a Dragon horrible and stearne' (I.i.3:9) which has them imprisoned in a tower, and laid waste to their land. Unlike the dragon in the Saint George encounter, there is no mention of a besieged city or other victims. This is a twist in the generally accepted dragon narrative, as it is usually the princess who is in danger from the dragon, and not her parents. The allegory is relatively clear here. Una represents both Elizabeth and the Protestant Church and is at ease roaming the land. She is also the person who will free her people (parents) from captivity (false religion). The dragon is the Church of Rome, and some of Elizabeth's subjects are still imprisoned by the 'false religion'. The quest has been granted to Red Cross by the Faerie Queene, who is Gloriana, Elizabeth I herself. Una is her representative – royal, beautiful, pure, and innocent – and Red Cross is desperate to win her approval and acclaim, and ultimately, her love. Accompanied by Una's dwarf, their journey takes them through pleasant landscapes, until the onset of a sudden storm forces them to take shelter in 'a shadie grove' surrounded by many trees. It seems the grove offers 'faire harbour' (I.i.6:9); however, they become embroiled in twisting paths, deceptive and labyrinthine, which lead them further into the forest. The labyrinth of twisting, misleading paths is symbolic of human error and of losing the way forward. Deceived by appearances, the foolhardy will follow the path of the Roman Church, and the false 'fair harbour' of the grove is the deceptive promise of salvation in the Catholic tradition. The appealing beauty of the grove is a misrepresentation of the

Christian faith in Spenser's Calvinistic view, as are the idolatry of the Saints and the images of the statues so beloved of the Church of Rome.

Finding a dark, hollow cave, the 'youthfull' Red Cross knight, despite warnings from Una and her Dwarf, enters the cave. As has been shown earlier, dragons are known cave-dwellers. In the cave of ignorance and false knowledge, Red Cross encounters the monstrosity of 'Errour'. Spenser's choice of name is significant. The knight has been warned and yet makes a deliberate choice to enter a place of potential danger. This is an error indeed, of which the reader will be aware, even as the protagonist is not. The only light that the knight has is from his 'glistring armor'. This is the armour of God, [436] and still gives enlightenment even in a place of darkness. Red Cross should take notice of the danger being shown to him, but fails to do so:

> By which he saw the ugly monster plaine
> Half like a serpent horribly displaide
> But the other halfe did womans shape retaine,
> Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine'. (I.i.14:6-9).

Spenser is at his most enigmatic here. It is unclear if he is describing the entire monster as loathsome, or if he is referring specifically to the female appearance. The ugliness of Errour is in direct contrast to the beauty of Una.

> And as she lay vpon the durtie ground,
> Her huge long taile her den all ouerspred,
> Yet was in knots and many boughtes vpwound,
> Poined with mortall sting. Of her there bred,
> A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
> Sucking vpon her poisound dugs, each one
> Of sundrie shapes, yet all ill favoured:
> Soone as that uncouth light vpon them shone,
> Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone. (I.i.15)

Spenser's Errour is a serpent-woman hybrid, as is the monster Echidna, described by Hesiod in his *Theogony* (p.19 above). The classical influences are clearly evident, and the link back to serpents and dragons of ancient times begins to be reveal itself: Error has 'a thousand yong' – she breeds monsters, as did Echidna, who gave birth to, among

[436] Ephesians 6:11-16. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the whiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, take the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

others, Hydra and Ladon, as mentioned in chapter 1. Echidna also lived in a cave under a hollow rock. The self-perpetuation of female monsters has been a motif which writers have returned to throughout the centuries, beginning with Mummu -Ti âmat of the *Enuma Elish.*(p.9)

It is possible that this gendering comes from a lingering fear of the female of any species being able to reproduce and giving birth to monsters. Before the biology was understood, reproduction and childbirth were viewed as mysterious, and across the world many deities were associated with fertility. Alexander the Great was conceived when his mother was seduced by a great snake (see p.25), after which she was shunned by her husband and held in fear by the people. With the onset of Judaism came woman's association with original sin, which turned the whole thing around and placed women in a different position socially. [437] Where the dragon is female, we can ask whether male authors are projecting a primeval fear that males are not required, and that single females who reproduce are capable of great evil and therefore must be constrained and defeated.

As with Barclay, Spenser has gendered his first 'dragon' manifestation as female. The Roman Catholic refer to their Church as the 'Holy Mother Church,' and Spenser has illustrated the foolishness and danger of following the path to what he considers a false Church. The young serpents, all different but resembling their parent, can be seen as representative of the priests, who, if found, will disappear back into the mouth of the Roman Church, and hide. Michael Questier states that 'Catholicism was actually hardier than its supposedly victorious Protestant rival.' He goes further, by saying that in the remoter areas of the country, 'the dark corners of the land' ...Catholicism was naturally strongest.[438] Spenser is illustrating this by his description of the young serpents fleeing back into darkness. This hiding in the dark will enable the priests to perpetuate the teachings of the Church and create new Catholics through baptism. Spenser is strengthening his argument that Catholic doctrine is itself error, and consequently error breeds error.

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[437] Genesis 2-3. Adam's wife is tempted by the serpent and eats of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, then gives the fruit to her Adam, who also eats. God's command was given to Adam, before Eve was made. Eve is given the blame by Adam, and this is how woman became the bearer of original sin and gained the reputation of being a temptress.

[438] M.C. Questier, 'What Happened to English Catholicism after the English Reformation?', *History*, 85.277, 28–47 p.29.

Red Cross and Errour engage in battle, she 'hurling her hideous taile/About her cursed head' and he like 'Lyon fierce..with trenchand blade…' (I.i.16-17). She raises her 'speckled taile' to attack him with the sting. The tail as a weapon is characteristic of a dragon, as serpents on the whole assault by biting and stinging. Red Cross fails to sever the head from the body, and suddenly finds himself and his shield wrapped in the coils of Errour's tail. The tail is a mighty weapon; as reported by Pliny and the medieval bestiary, a dragon's tail can strangle an elephant (see above, p27). I have demonstrated the lethal use of the tail as shown in the romance tales of Sir Guy and Sir Bevis. Catholicism fights back against Protestantism, and appears to be winning,

> …and her huge traine
> All suddenly about his body wound
> That hand a foot to stir he stroue in vain:
> God helpe the man so wrapt in Errour's endless train. (I.i.18:6-9).

Again, the last line of the stanza delivers a stark warning, and a change of mode from warning to exclamation, with the invocation typical of a prayer. Una calls on Red Cross to remember his faith:

> .. Now, now Sir knight, shew what ye bee,
> Add faith unto your force, and be not faint
> Strangle her, els she sure will strangle thee… (I.i.19:2-4).

Spenser presents Una as the representation of the true church – the Church of England. By reminding Red Cross where his strength comes from, she enables him to wield his sword of truth and free his shield of faith. As Saint George gathered his courage 'And drewe his swored/glasyd so clere and bright' [439] so too does Red Cross. They both arm themselves with faith and truth. The parallels between Red Cross and Barclay's Saint George, and with classical warrior heroes of romance, cannot be ignored. The explicitly biblical parallels of the armour of God are also evident here, and in Red Cross's predecessors.

Errour spews forth vile poison onto the Knight – undigested food, books and papers, and frogs and toads. The frogs and toads are an echo of Revelation 16:13: 'And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.' Spenser has combined all three in Errour. If the reader is being manoeuvred to view Errour as the Roman Church,

[439] Barclay, p.82.

she is beast, dragon, and false prophet all in one entity, a parody of the Holy Trinity. The 'books and pages' are an allusion to the new technology of printing or to anti-Protestant propaganda which has been spewed out by the Catholic Church. As shown above (p.172) polemical writing was proving to be a popular form of political, social, and religious criticism.

Una's urging of Red Cross to remember his faith spurs the knight on to greater effort, and victory. Struggling within the entanglement of Errour's tentacles, Red Cross takes heart from Una's direction, and grips Errour by the throat:

> And knitting all his force got one hand free
> And werewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine.
> That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine (I.19:7-9)

> Thus ill bestedd, and fearefull more of shame,
> Then of the certeine perill he stood in,
> Halfe furious unto his foe he came,
> Resolv'd in minde all suddenly to win,
> Or soone to lose, before he once would lin
> And strooke at her with more then manly force,
> That from her body full of filthie sin
> He raft her hatefull head without remorse;
> A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed from her corse. (I.24:1-9)

In a grave situation, and more ashamed than afraid, Red Cross is determined to win or lose rather than give in. This mirrors Bevis (p.106) who would not leave the dragon alive but would rather die in the struggle. Red Cross grabs Errour by her 'gorge' – effectively silencing any false dogma that she would convey. The gorge is the throat, but can also mean the contents of the stomach, or to eat greedily. Errour is 'gorged with false propaganda, with Catholic lies. Grabbing the monster by the throat effectively silences her before she is killed. Red Cross attacks again 'with more than manly force' – his human strength is aided by his faith. This increase of strength by the addition of faith as a motif is present in all the texts that have been examined, and enforces the tenet that with faith, anything is possible. Red Cross strikes Errour's head from the body, and black blood gushes forth. After Red Cross slays Errour, her young gather around the corpse, and gorge on her blood until they burst. This could be an allusion to the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation, in which the bread and wine consumed at a Catholic Mass are said to be transformed into the blood and body of Christ. The Church of England was very much opposed to this belief, seeing the Eucharist as a commemoration rather than a

sacrifice. The eating of Errour also refers to a legend …' that vipers eat through their mother's womb during the birth process, killing her, but giving themselves life.[440] A further aspect of this allegory is that it presents a monstrous parody of birth, linking back to the reproduction by a female without a male as an evil to be feared. Pliny recorded this process of vipers giving birth in his *Natural History*, another indication of the influence of the Classical writers on Spenser, and the longevity of the subject.[441]

Medieval dragons were beautifully imagined and visualised in bestiaries and manuscripts of the day, as we have seen in previous illustrations. By the Tudor period, however, the bestiaries were more encyclopaedic and sophisticated. The image of a dragon (Fig.32) reproduced in the *Tudor Pattern Book 1500* (a manuscript study of plants, a few animals and graphics produced in East Anglia around 1520) is the only sixteenth-century image I have found which is anything like the former dragons.[442] This dragon is wingless, and hornless, no smoke is issuing from the nostrils, and it looks like a cross between a friendly horse and a fat snake. It is possible to deduce from this that the dragon had indeed lost credibility as a fearsome monster and was being relegated to the status of mere amusement. As is being revealed, Spenser raised the stakes once again and revived the dragon as a beast to be feared, by transforming it to symbolise the Catholic threat.

Having defeated the female hybrid Errour, Red Cross is buoyed by his victory, not realising that his character has been changed by the encounter, as will be revealed. 'So forward on his way (with God to frend)/He passed forth, and new adventure sought' (I.i.28:7-8). Joan Larson Klein tells us that 'Satan and the temptress, more largely pride and lust, were emblematically represented throughout the Middle Ages by figures of serpent-dragons and biform sirens, and these are the two kinds of figures which exemplify malignant evil most forcibly in Book I of *The Faerie Queene.'*[443] Jubilant and unaware,

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[440] *TFQ.* p.37 Am *2* alludes to the legend that the viper in giving birth to itself by eating through its mother's womb kills her.

[441] 'The male viper thrusts its head into the mouth of the female, which gnaws it in the transports of its passion. This, too, is the only one among the terrestrial animals that lays eggs within its body—of one colour, and soft, like those of fishes. On the third day it hatches its young in the uterus, and then excludes them, one every day, and generally twenty in number; the last ones become so impatient of their confinement, that they force a passage through the sides of their parent, and so kill her.' Pliny, as before, 10.82. In the Tudor period, this work had been reprinted, and was still being used as a reference tool.

[442] *'The Tudor Pattern Book',* Bodleian Library MS, Ashmole 1504.

[443] Joan Larsen Klein, 'From Errour to Acrasia', *Huntington Library Quarterly:* 41.3, (May 1978), 173-199 (p.175).

the knight is riding into danger, both physical and moral. Red Cross is naïve and untried, and therefore should be an easy victim of lust. In order to progress on his quest, Red Cross must be tested, tried, and be able to overcome all manner of temptation. Dragons are also emblems of hypnotism and mesmerisation (see p.7) and each manifestation the Red Cross encounters exerts this kind of influence over him. There is, however, hope for him, as at each encounter with a serpentine beast/dragon throughout the poem, Spenser allows the youth to acquire more knowledge, more resolution, and more experience. This is reflecting life's journey, and the ultimate goal of being noble, virtuous and of gentle discipline. Each victorious encounter with a dragon is a step further on the road to manhood and a reflection of the journey of a warrior Knight of Christ in his battle with the devil and evil. The acquisition of knowledge and self-awareness is also the way to holiness.

We have seen in previous chapters how dragons are defeated, not only by weapons and faith, but mainly by purity. The virgin princesses and their girdles, the virgin saints George, Margaret of Antioch, and Martha, control and/or defeat dragons by their chastity. Red Cross has defeated Errour, but he has been entangled in the coils of her tail, and spattered by her vile vomit, in which

> Her fruitfull cursed spawne of serpents small,
> Deformed monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke,
> Which swarming all about his legs did crall,
> And him encumbered sore, but could not hurt at all. (I.i.22:6-9)

Spenser has allowed the purity of Red Cross to be tainted, and he has been touched by evil. As this was painless but insidious, he is unaware of the danger he is in. The effects of this are shown later in the poem, when Red Cross is seduced by Duessa. Although he has defeated Errour, he still has a lot to learn. The lesson here is he should have listened to the advice given by Una and the Dwarfe, and not gone down the path to the cave – he should have turned away from the darkness. Red Cross is now not so pure; touched by the evil of Errour (resulting from his own mistake) he is vulnerable to further advances of evil. The armour he wears shows 'the dints of deep woundes' and Red Cross himself now carries unseen wounds to his shield of faith. The damages to the inherited armour are those of St. George, and of Christ who had been there before him, and defeated the dragon of death itself.

The knight and his lady prepare to ride away, their path now unencumbered and plain to see. Una is full of praise, deeming Red Cross 'well worthie' to bear the armour he wears, and is hopeful that after a successful first adventure, '.many such I pray,/And henceforth ever wish / that like succeed it may,' (I.i.27:8-9) Una is seemingly unaware of the damage done to Red Cross by his encounter with Errour.

Red Cross and Una proceed along their journey, where the evidence of the Knight's contamination with Errour is revealed. He is tricked by an enchanter, Archimago,[444] whose intention is to divide the pair. To this end dual images are seen in the poem; the deceiver creates dreams for Red Cross in which Una appears to be engaged in copulation with a young knight. Red Cross, in a torment of shattered faith in his lady, leaves her. Una represents the truth, and Archimago hates her [truth] 'as the hissing snake' (I.ii.9:8). He can project himself in many different guises, including 'like a dragon fell' (I.ii.10:6). This is the same description of a dragon (foul, evil) as that applied to the dragon which appeared to Saint Margaret of Antioch in her cell. Here again, Spenser promotes the biblical image of the dragon and snakes as evil, linking them to deception.[445] To add to the doubling and duplicity, Archimago appears as Red Cross. Truth and Faith are thus divided. Red Cross encounters Duessa – the evil 'double' of Una – a beautiful young woman, dressed after the fashion of the Whore from Revelation: 'And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.' (Rev.17:4). Beneath her disguise, Duessa is a very ancient, wrinkled old witch whose objective is to seduce Red Cross away from Una, both physically and morally. On Una's instructions, Duessa is disrobed to reveal her true self.

So as she bad, that witch they disaraid,
And robd of roiall robes, and purple pall,
And ornaments that richly were displaid:
Ne spared they to strip her naked all.
Then when they had despoiled her tire and call,
Such as she was, their eies might her behold,
That her misshaped parts did them appall,
A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill fauoured, old,
Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told. (I.viii.46)

[444] The *OED* defines 'arch' when used as a prefix as, amongst others, (5) 'chief, superior' in usage from 1541. Archimago is a superior deceiver and is presenting the first of his disguises to Red Cross.

[445] And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world, (Revelation 12:9).

Spenser continues in this vein for a further two stanzas; he appears to revel in the humiliation and degradation of Duessa, attacking her female features with particular venom. In addition to being dried up, bald and wrinkled, she has a filthy fox's tail, and one eagle claw and one bear paw for feet. The seven-headed beast from the sea had feet like a bear (Rev13:2) which Leviticus calls 'unclean.'[446] It is said of Duessa that 'More vgly shape yet neuer living creature saw' (I.viii.48:9) Here again is evidence of Spenser's anti-Catholic polemical writing in the descriptions of Archimago and Duessa. Roman Catholics refer to 'the Mother Church', therefore any evil emanating from that Church has been gendered female by Spenser as a reverse image. Although the 'real' Duessa exhibits no specific dragon-like features, she has wrinkled, sagging breasts which ooze 'filthy matter' as Barclay's dragon did from her womb; her skin is 'wrizled' and 'rough' – as would be a dragon's hide. One of her feet is a claw. It is also possible that Spenser is parodying the excessive cult of the adoration of the Virgin Mary, that most revered of Catholic Saints and the epitome of chaste womanhood. The Catholic Church deceives and traps the unwary; the beautiful images of saints are false idols. Deluded by her false beauty and trickery, Red Cross is led even further down the path of error and danger, ignoring warnings about Duessa along the way. His ignorance eventually allows Duessa to lead him to the House of Pride.

Lucifera in the House of Pride. I. iv.1-18

Pride is the foremost of the seven deadly sins. It is thought to be the sin of Pride that separates the soul from grace; named as 'the father of all sins' Pride represents the very essence of evil. [447] It remains one of the greatest pitfalls, even to the present day. Ignorance of one's true nature, a lack of proper humility, and above all, ingratitude toward God are, amongst other things, components of the sin of Pride. It was Lucifer's pride that led to him being evicted from Heaven and becoming Satan – depicted as a dragon. Red Cross has allowed himself to be deceived and has been lured by Duessa into the House of

[446] Lev. 11:27 And whatsoever goeth upon his paws…those are unclean unto you.

[447] The seven deadly sins are a group of vices which go against Christian teaching. Also known as the 'cardinal sins', they comprise of Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy and Pride. Pride is considered the most serious, and original of the sins. It is Pride that caused the fall of Lucifer from Heaven, and Pride which caused Eve to present the apple to Adam, and which possibly caused Adam to eat it. The seven sins are present in the play *'Everyman'* – of whom Red Cross is also representative – and pride is the downfall of *Doctor Faustus.*

Pride, where he is beguiled and dazzled by false images and illusions. The warning for Red Cross is issued by the narrator in v. 1 of the Canto:

> Young knight, what euer that dost armes professe,
> And through long labours huntest after fame,
> Beware of fraud, beware of ficklenesses,
> In choice and change of thy deare loued Dame.
> Least thou of her belieue too lightly blame.
> And rash misweening doe thy hart remoue:
> For vnto knight there is no greater shame,
> Than lightnesse and inconsistancie in loue;
> That doth this *Redcrosse* knight ensample plainly proue. (I.iv.1)

Lucifera is the ruler of the House of Pride, where she is the antithesis of Queen Elizabeth I. The biblical origins of dragons are reflected in Lucifera's name: Spenser has invented her as the feminine form of Lucifer[448] (p.38 above) and has thus gendered this incarnation of the dragon as female. Spenser introduces another dragon here: Lucifera is seated on a high throne and 'Lo vnder neath her scornefull feete, was layne/A dreadfull Dragon with an hideous trayne' (I.vi.10:5-6). This links back to the dragon episode in Lydgate's *Lyfe of St. Margaret* where he depicts the dragon lying under Margaret's feet in her prison cell (p.95). In Revelation 17:3 the Whore of Babylon is seen riding a seven-headed dragon: '… a woman sits upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns'. A procession sees Lucifera in coach drawn by 'six vnequall beasts/On which her six sage Counsellor's did ride' (I.iv.18:1-2) each of which represents one of the deadly sins.[449] Lucifera represents worldly pride, and Red Cross, under the influence of Duessa, is revelling in his defeat of Errour, so is full of the worldly pride which Lucifera embodies. He is seduced by the false glamour of the House of Pride. Having been lured into Errour's lair, and despatched the monster, he is easily seduced by lust and pride, and falls willingly under Duessa's spell.

Although there is no combat with a dragon at this stage, Lucifera apparently using a dragon - a beast that he has vowed to destroy - as a footstool further disorientates Red Cross. The dragon has long represented Satan, and Lucifera trampling the dragon under her feet shows how powerful she is. In St. Luke 10. 18-19, Christ tells his disciples '…I beheld Satan as lightning falling from Heaven: Behold, I give you power to tread on

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[448] meaning 'light bearer', in this instance false light, mocking Christ who said, 'I am the light'. John 8:12. Then spake Jesus again to them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

[449] *TFQ* p.65 n7.

serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you'. Spenser has allocated to Lucifera the power and protection from Satan which Christ gave to his disciples. If Lucifera is identified as representing the Church of Rome, then Catholicism still has the power to control its enemies and must be defeated. Spenser gives Lucifera control of the enemy. She apparently has more power than her brother Satan. Another interpretation of this scene is that of a 'parody of Elizabeth as head of the Order of the Garter, which had dragon-killing George as its patron saint.'[450] Lucifera is more powerful than Saint George, as she can control the dragon/Satan, and make it obedient to her will. As there is evidence that Spenser had access to de Voragine and the *Legenda Aurea,* as shown in his depiction of Red Cross/Saint George, it is reasonable to assume that he read other lives of the saints in the same volume. As discussed previously, Saint Margaret of Antioch is well documented for defeating a dragon, and its brother, and – like Lucifera – trampling them underfoot. As also discussed earlier, Juliana Dresvina argues that the foot on the neck of a dragon is a signifier of exorcism, the casting out of demons.[451] Lucifera has no need to banish Satan since she is at ease with him. As she is the counterpart of Lucifer, then the dragon can be interpreted as her alter ego. It would be very astute and politically advantageous for Spenser to replace a Catholic Saint with an interpretation of the Whore of Babylon and belittle two of the Catholic faith's best loved saints, the Virgin Mary and Saint George. It intensified Spenser's bold attack on Catholicism and emphasised the *FQ* as a work of protestant polemic.

In this Canto, the dragon itself appears quite insignificant, but subtly referred to in the shape of the procession. The main focus of the Canto is Lucifera, the people she surrounds herself with, and the instability of her House of Pride. Spenser again refers back to the classics, with the description of the beast on which Lucifera rides, with the representatives of sin accompanying her; bringing up the rear is Satan with a whip, 'And after all vpon the wagon beame/Rode *Sathan,* with a smarting whip in hand, / With which he forward lasht the last teme, (I.iv.36:1-3). Even Satan follows Lucifera, his female namesake.

[450] *The Spenser Encyclopaedia,* p.440.
[451] Dresvina, page 124.

Red Cross is lured away by Duessa in the guise of Una. She seduces him into copulation, and his downfall is almost complete. Red Cross is destroyed by his pride, as Lucifera leads him into the captivity of her lover Geaunt. Red Cross is thrown into a dungeon, and Geaunt rewards her for her deception by 'Giving her 'gold and purple...and triple crown'. (1.vii.16:3-4).[452] He also presents her with a 'monstrous beast' as her mount. Verses 17-18 of Canto vii describe in detail the Beast, and it clearly shows that Spenser has fused together both classical and biblical characteristics in his portrayal.

Such one it was, as that renowmed Snake
Which great Alcides in Stremona slew,
Long fostered in the filth of Lerna lake,
Whose many heads out budding euer new,
Did breed him endless labour to subdew:
But this same Monster much more vgly was;
For seuen heads out of his body grew.
And yron brest, and back of scaly bras,
And all embrewd in blood, his eyes did shine as glas. (I.vii:17)

Spenser has stressed the 'filth' 'ugliness' and 'blood' to describe a fearsome and alien beast clad in iron and bred in stagnant water. The dragon which St. George slew lived in 'water moche vnpure' (page 79 above). Spenser is drawing from earlier sources such as de Voragine and Barclay, from the classical myths, from biblical and medieval description to describe Lucifera's beast. It is above all, the beast of Revelation. It is 'embrewd' or stained and defiled with blood, and yet Lucifera is proud to sit atop such a beast and lead the procession. It is, along with its rider, evil personified.

His tayle was stretched out in wonderous length,
That to the hous of heuenly gods it raught,
And with exorted power, and borrow'd strength,
The euerburning lamps from thence it braught,
And prowdly threw to ground, as things of naught;
And vnderneath his filthy feet did tread,
The sacred things, and holy heastes foretaught.
Vpon this dreadfull Beast with seuenfold head
He set the false Duessa, for more aw and dread. (I.vii:18)

Spenser gives great detail about the tail of the beast. It is long enough that it reached (raught) up to the home of the heavenly gods – again, the reference is to ancient Greece where the gods dwelt on Mount Olympus The tail destroys the 'euerburning lamps' of the gods, [the stars] and eradicates them with indifference. The gods mean nothing to this beast, he can and does destroy their works with impunity. The 'exorted power and

[452] Mocking royalty and the triple crown of the Pope.

borrow'd strength' are said by Hadfield to show 'power wrongfully obtained, implying that papal tyranny usurps civil power'.[453] Spenser appears to be claiming that the preference of the people will be disregarded by the Catholic religion. Once again Red Cross is devoid of his weapons and armour and is defenceless in the face of evil. The Dwarf, who is a witness to his downfall, retrieves the arms:

> And valiant knight became a caytive thrall,
> When all was past, tooke vp his forlorne weed,
> His mightie Armour, missing most at need;
> His silver shield, now idle maisterless;
> His poynant speare, that many made to bleed,
> The rufull moniments of heauinesse,
> And with them all departes, to tell his great distresse. (I.vii.19:2-8)

Satan has tricked the young man into falling into the sin of Pride, and now he has nothing left.

In the above cantos Spenser has quite openly used the Hydra of Lerna slain by Herakles (p.19 above), the multi-headed monster of classical mythology, and the seven-headed Beast of Revelation. This poetic combination would suggest that Spenser expects his readers to be conversant with both classical literature and the Bible, and that their reading will be enriched by these intertextual echoes. In addition, there is the conventional, popular image of a dragon: the 'yron brest, and back of scaly bras,' and bloody eyes that shone 'like glas.' The Beast treads underfoot the holy commands that have been previously taught, a reference to the consequences of Catholicism should it return as the dominant church in England. The dragon imagery is rich and explicit, the focus of the two stanzas, and gives a terrifying warning of the power of evil. The inclusion of classical references and medieval description links back through time and texts, revealing that the popular image of a 'fell beaste' has changed very little from the very earliest accounts of the description of a dragon. Spenser also uses the term 'snake,' which is how dragons have also been described in older texts. Spenser tells how 'Full many knights adventurous and stout/Have enterprized the Monster to subdew' (I.vii.45) from all over the world but were unable to defeat the beast.

> Yet neuer any could that girlond win
> But all still shronke, and still he greater grew:
> All they for want of faith, or guilt of sin,
> The piteous pray of his fiers cruelty have bin. (I.vii.45:6-9)

[453] *TFQ* as before, fn. p 95.

The Catholic church grows bigger and more cruel, feeding on the false faith of its members from all the known world.

With this thought in mind, Lucifera can be also seen as a representation of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots who was executed only three years before Spenser began writing the *FQ*. It is quite easy, therefore, to conjecture that some of Spenser's contemporary readers would have made the association of Mary Stuart with Lucifera. The dragon under her feet is representative of the threat of Catholicism, just waiting to be released. The false beauty of Duessa is the beauty of the Scottish queen, who used her looks and charm in an attempt to beguile her goalers' servants into assisting her bids for freedom. By using this analogy, Spenser is reinforcing the rightful rule of Elizabeth, and the perceived falsehood of the Roman Church. When the *FQ* was first published in 1590, Elizabeth was aged fifty-six, still unmarried, and had not produced an heir. It is possible that Spenser was subtly warning of the danger to the country and monarchy of the ever-present threat of Catholicism should Elizabeth die without issue. Seduced by Duessa, Red Cross is unaware of the danger he is in. His fall from grace, blinded by lust, and his imagined betrayal by Una, make him unwary, and he is captured by Orgoglio [the Italian word for 'Pride']. He is thrown into a dungeon, whilst Duessa becomes the mistress of the 'Gyaunt huge and tall' (I.vii.51:2). In order to lie with Duessa, Red Cross has willingly removed his armour, which, unbeknown to him, is God's protection from evil. It can also be interpreted allegorically as the protector of his virtue. He is naked and vulnerable, he has forsaken his lady, and relinquished his chastity and virtue for the sake of the pleasures of the flesh. He is no longer worthy to continue his quest.

Prince Arthur's Dragon Helmet I.vii. 29-34

Una, meanwhile, has been looking for a champion in the absence of her knight. Her Dwarfe [representing common sense] has now taken position in front of her, rather than bringing up the rear, and points out the way ahead. Although she is devastated at the loss of her Knight, Una realises the importance of the quest and puts aside her feelings for Red Cross as she needs to find a way forward, so that her parents can be rescued.

> At last when fervent sorrow slaked was,
> She up arose, resoluing him to find
> Aliue or dead: and forward forth doth pas,
> All as the Dwarfe the way to her assynd: (1.vii.28:1-4)

Una by chance meets 'a goodly knight…together with his Squyre' (I.vii.29) who is on a quest for the Fairy Queen, and who, in true chivalric tradition, defers to assist a lady in distress. The knight is Prince Arthur, and he is arrayed in the most wonderful, 'glitterand' [light-giving] armour. Here in Spenser's description of the armour of the knight, the influences of both Lydgate and Barclay are keenly felt. Their descriptions of Saint George, his armour and his weaponry are echoed, enhanced, and magnified by Spenser, who devotes seven stanzas to his construction of the 'goodly knight' Arthur, the embodiment of chivalry and national pride. The focus of interest for this study, however, are stanzas 31 and 32, which detail the helmet, and must be considered in full here. Preceding Lydgate and Barclay and their depictions of St. George is Geoffrey of Monmouth, focussing on Arthur when writing *The History of the Kings of Britain* in the early twelfth century. Monmouth gives this foundation for Arthur's dragon helm. In Winchester, after the murder of Aurelius Ambrosius, the King of Britain:

> '…there was seen a star of great magnitude and brilliance, with a single beam shining from it. '…At the end of this beam was a ball of fire, spread out in the shape of a dragon. From the dragon's mouth stretched out two rays of light, one of which seemed to extend its length beyond the latitude of Gaul… [Uther Pendragon, the King's brother, asks his advisor Merlin to interpret the omen and Merlin said to Uther] …The star signifies you in person, and so does the fiery dragon beneath the star. The beam of light, which stretches towards the shore of Gaul, signifies your son, who will be a most powerful man. His dominion shall extend over all the kingdoms which the beam covers. [454]

As shown in the following stanzas, the dragon of Merlyn's prophecy is transformed into the helmet protecting Uther's son, Arthur, splendidly conveyed by Spenser's description:

> His haughtie helmet, horrid all with gold,
> Both glorious brightnesse, and great terrour bred;
> For all the crest a Dragon did enfold
> With greedie pawes, and over all did spredd
> His golden wings: his dreadfull hideous hed
> Close couched on the beuer, seem'd to throw
> From flaming mouth bright sparckles fiery redd,
> That suddeine horrour to faint harts did show;
> And scaly tayle was stretcht adowne his backe full low. (I.vii.31)

Spenser describes Arthur's helmet as 'haughtie,' which nominally means high and lofty, grand, even arrogant. However, another reading of this is 'of exalted character, style, or

[454] Geoffrey of Monmouth, pp.200-202.

rank; elevated, lofty, eminent; high-minded, aspiring; of exalted courage or bravery'.[455] These are characteristics which can be applied to the persona of Arthur himself. It is only fitting that his armour should reflect the person it protects. The helmet is 'horrid all with gold', the term 'horrid' to mean bristling, [456]and the gold dragon is both a device to create terror in enemies, and also to extend protection to Arthur. The 'greedie pawes' both cover and covet the crest, as though the dragon wishes to possess as well as protect him. The dragon is winged, and appears to shoot flames from its mouth, again to instil fear into an enemy. The tail is scaly and long, stretching all the way down Arthur's back. This not only protects him from an attack from the rear but gives the appearance of Arthur as a golden dragon. Arthur's father Uther is named by Geoffrey of Monmouth as 'Pendragon' meaning 'the head of the dragon.'[457] Arthur is carrying his father's protection and lineage with him.

The wings, fire and scales are all archaic characteristics of the dragon, and Spenser has utilised them to turn the dragon into a creature both to be feared and revered, as it protects the Prince. The early dragons, custodians of primitive civilisation, have been resurrected by Spenser and recreated into the helmet as a symbol of protection in the sixteenth century. The dragon featured on the standard of Henry VII, Elizabeth's grandfather, and is also present on the great seal of Owain Glyndŵr, who was Prince of Wales nearly two hundred years before the *FQ* was published. Spenser is subtly underlining the Welsh Elizabeth Tudor's right to the throne of England. Spenser has created a powerful impact with the image of Arthur's helmet, and he

> Vpon the top of all his loftie crest,
> A bounce of heares discolourd diuersly,
> With sprincled pearle, and gold full richly drest,
> Did shake, and seemd to daunce for jollity,
> Like to an Almond tree ymounted hye
> On top of greene Selinis all alone,
> With blossoms braue bedecked daintily;
> Whose tender locks do tremble euery one
> At euerie little breath, that vnder heauen is blowne. (I.vii.32)

Atop Arthur's helmet is many-coloured plume, the sign of a knight. Arthur's is richly decorated with pearls, the precious stones associated with purity and cleanliness. The

[455] *OED Online*. Haughtie (2). Evidence of this usage dates from 1563-1805.
[456] Ibid, 1. 1590-1845.
[457] Geoffrey of Monmouth, p.151. It can also mean the leader of the tribe or army, a warlord.

pearl, as we have seen, was associated with Margaret of Antioch, a dragon-slayer who was the embodiment of chastity. St. Matthew reports how Christ used the pearl as a simile for the Kingdom of Heaven.[458] Spenser likens the pearls to an almond tree in blossom at Selinis, 'the town of the victor's palm' from Virgil.[459] The symbolism of the almond blossom is that it is represents a sign that a man is chosen by God.[460] The rest of Arthur's armour is bejewelled and gorgeous: his shield is fashioned from a 'diamond perfect pure and cleene' (I.vii.33:5) and his entire appearance is shining and beautiful. Spenser's Arthur is the epitome of English beauty, chastity and power, protected by both pagan and Christian symbols. Prepared and eager to face any enemy, safe in the knowledge that he will be victorious, Spenser's Arthur is a literary reincarnation of the medieval knight, chivalrous, brave, beautiful, and chaste. Instead of conquering a dragon, he is protected by one. In addition, if the dragon is used by Spenser to represent Catholicism, then Arthur, the true King of England, has defeated the dragon so completely that it no longer presents a threat.

Spenser shows confident duplicity here, as he is usually focussed on the dragon as the embodiment of evil (Catholicism) and yet he has taken this same symbol and used it as a positive force. On the one hand a dragon can destroy, yet it can also protect. The early dragon symbols of the ancients also had this dual role, of destruction and nurture.[461]

Arthur's armour is truly resplendent, shining and glittering with precious stones, and on his shield a stone '…of wondrous worth …shapt like a Ladies head…' which represents the Faerie Queene, and offers protection to her knight. Monmouth's Arthur carries a picture of the Virgin Mary on his shield for the same purpose. Elizabeth I was seen in some circles as 'a second Virgin Mary', and indeed some sources suggested 'a profound and harmonious theological relationship between the two women'.[462] Both the Catholic and the Protestant Arthur share the same belief in the protection of a Virgin, whilst Monmouth's Arthur also has a Golden Dragon as his personal standard.[463] Spenser has cleverly combined the 'two Arthurs' into a hero for both religions, one who also has a

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[458] Matthew 13:45. 'Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls.'

[459] Andrew Hadfield, note to I.i.32 in Spenser, *TFQ,* p.98.

[460] Numbers 17:5-9. 'And it shall come to pass that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom…And the rod of Aaron…bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.'

[461] The early dragon, Ti âmet attempted to destroy the gods, but her body became the barrier between the land and the sea, allowing the land to be cultivated. (Page 9 of this thesis).

[462] Peter McClure and Robin Headlam Wells, *Elizabeth I as a Second Virgin Mary*, *Renaissance Studies*, Vol.4.1.(1990), pp.38-70 (p.1).

[463] Monmouth, *History*, p.248.

literary provenance. The ekphrastic description of Arthur's armour would have invoked wonder and admiration in Spenser's readership/audience, stimulating the imagination and a sense of awe of the power radiated by Arthur. The reader/listener will be convinced of Arthur's invincibility. Spenser is replicating Homer's description of Agamemnon's armour in *The Iliad*, as described on pp.18/19 above, where dragons also protect the warrior. Paradoxically, such linking back to prominent predecessors keeps the tale of the dragon moving forward.

Una tells Arthur of the dragon which for four years has held her parents and their country prisoner:

> Till that their cruell cursed enemy,
> An huge great Dragon horrible in sight,
> Bred in the loathly lakes of Tartary,
> With murdrous ravine, and devouring might
> Their kingdoms spoild, and countrey wasted quight:
> Themselves, for feare into his jawes to fall,
> He forst to castle strong to take their flight,
> Where fast embard in mighty brasen wall,
> He has them now foure yeres besiegd to make them thrall. (I.vii.44)

'Tartary' refers to Tartarus, a region of the Underworld in Greek mythology, lower than Hades and the place where ferocious monsters and criminals were banished.[464] This dragon was literally bred in the waters of hell. Una's parents' fear has imprisoned them within their own walls, whilst the dragon is rampaging outside them, laying waste to the country. Apparent in the telling are the traits and signifiers of the dragons which have been present for so many centuries, and particularly prevalent in the pagan dragons. Bred in the foul waters of hell, laying waste to the country, living outside the walls, creating fear, this dragon is the descendant of the earlier, medieval dragons.

Una laments that many brave warriors from around the world have faced the dragon, but none have been successful:

> Full many knights adventurous and stout
> Have enterpriz'd that Monster to subdew;
> From every coast that heaven walks about,
> Have thither come the noble Martiall crew,
> That famous hard atchievements still pursew;
> Yet never any could that girlond win,

[464] *OED Online,* Tartary a) The infernal regions of ancient Greek and Roman mythology, or the lowest part of them; hence sometimes used for hell. Ruled by King Tartarus. Usage dates from 1508 [Accessed 01.04.2022].

But all still shronke, and still he greater grew:
All they for want of faith, or guilt of sin,
The pitteous pray of his fierce crueltie have bin. (I.vii.45)

The many challengers who fought the dragon have been vanquished. The dragon has grown in power and stature as the knights' lack of faith, or their guilt of past sins ensures their defeat. 'But all still shronke, and still he greater grew:/All they for want of faith, or guilt of sin' (l.vii.45.7-8).

Una tells Arthur of her meeting with Red Cross and how he has agreed to take on the quest of killing the dragon and freeing her parents. She explains how she came to be separated from Red Cross and of his capture by the Gyaunt.:

And now in darksome dungeon, wretched thrall,
Remedilesse, for aie he doth him hold;
This is my cause of grief, more great, then may be told.' (I.vii.51. 7-9).

Una becomes distraught at the prospect of being alone, but Arthur comforts her and tells her that he will help her find her hapless knight. Red Cross, meanwhile, remains imprisoned by Gyaunt, and the parallels with Sir Bevis are obvious. Sir Bevis was captured and thrown into a dungeon, where he was bitten by the venomous serpent. Red Cross and Bevis share the same experience of being imprisoned, abandoned and alone. For Bevis it was the jealousy of a rival which saw him incarcerated, and so it is with Red Cross. His captor is the lover of Duessa, and was driven with jealousy because Red Cross had lain with her.

When Arthur and his companions arrive at the castle of the Gyaunt Orgoglio, a challenge is issued and accepted. In the fight, Arthur chops off one of Orgoglio's arms, at which point Duessa, mounted on her seven-headed beast, rides to the defence of her champion:[465]

That when his deare Duessa heard, and saw
The euill stowned, that daungred her estate,
Vnto his aide she hastily did draw
Her dreadfull beast, who swolne with blood of late
Came ramping forth with proud presumptuous gate,
And threatened all his heads like flaming brandes.
But him the Squire made quickly to retrate
Encountring fiers with single sword in hand,
And twixt him and his Lord did like a bulwarke stand. (I.viii.12)

[465] See 'Lucifera in the House of Pride' above.

The Squire making a stand with only his sword in hand is a classic dragon-slaying motif, which has been repeated throughout the literature. From the earliest confrontation between Marduk and Ti âmat, Saint George and the dragon, Sir Guy and Sir Bevis, warriors have faced their dragons in single combat armed with a single blade. On the other hand, although Duessa rides a dragon and has one under her feet, she cannot be termed as 'dragon tamer' in the same way as the Saints Martha and Margaret. The saintly female dragon tamers were armed with their virtue and their courage and defeated their dragons. Duessa is not virtuous, and the dragon she rides is not only akin to the Beast from Revelation, but also her servant.[466] Duessa herself is representative of Satan, as is the beast she rides. There is no need for her to tame something of which she is a part, and which she controls.

In attempting to assist Arthur, Red Cross is defeated by Duessa, who sprinkles him with evil magic from her golden cup, thereby quelling his 'sturdie corage' and filling him with dread and dismay. The cup is a parody of the cup used during the Eucharist, and also a vile mockery of the Grail. Spenser's profound love of allegory is used to much advantage as the pride, lust, and debauchery of Duessa and Orgoglio are defeated by Arthur, especially when his shield is unveiled in all its glory. No evil or sin can survive against the clear light of God's truth unveiled. Arthur is the epitome of a warrior of Christ, standing against evil and sin. He is a shining example to Red Cross of what a Knight should be in his defence of the word of God. He reveals the truth as a bright shining light reflected from his shield – the shield of faith. It is this steadfastness of faith that Red Cross should aspire to in his quest. Spenser's readers would make the connection with faith in Protestantism, standing firm against Catholicism.

Orgoglio is slain and the beast is wounded, Duessa is stripped of her finery and revealed as a toothless, wrinkled old hag who can no longer be a threat. The Roman Church is discredited, shown to give false promise, decked in finery that hides the ugliness beneath. Duessa was outwardly beautiful and gorgeously dressed and jewelled:

> A goodly Lady clad in scarlot red,
> Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay,
> And like a *Persian mitre* on her hed
> She wore, with crownes and owches garnished (I.ii.13:2-5).

[466] Revelation 12:3 as before.

The Catholic Churches were full of beautiful, gorgeously dressed statuary and sumptuous altars. Spenser's polemical point is that, when the outer layer was stripped away from Duessa by Arthur as it was from the from the churches during the English Reformation, they were both revealed as ordinary, old, and ugly. Red Cross is forgiven by Una and welcomed back into her heart. Una is beautiful without being ostentatious, as is – by implication – the Protestant Church. There are no fancy statues [false idols] or expensive gaudy trappings. The Protestant Church is about faith and steadfastness; however, Spenser's allegory suggests that those who stray from the truth but realise the error of their ways are welcomed back into the Protestant church. Red Cross has begun his path to redemption.

Recovered from the fight with Pride, Una and her entourage continue their journey to find the dragon which is keeping her parents prisoner and despoiling their lands. Along the way, Red Cross battles with, and overcomes, frailty and uncertainty. Una berates him for his lack of self-belief and faith '…Fie, faint hearted knight/What meanest thou by this reproachfull strife?' (I.ix.52: 6-7). Red Cross rallies, and together they continue their journey. His faith renewed, Red Cross has been given by Una the tools to repair his faith and his courage. He is her Champion and will do his duty. Along the way, as Spenser declares in his 'Argument' to the tenth Canto of the poem, Red Cross *'is taught repentaunce, and the way to heuenly blesse.'*[467] These are among the qualities he needs to fulfil his quest and his ultimate goal of salvation.

Refreshed and invigorated, reminded of his faith and his pledge, Red Cross has come to terms with his human shortcomings. Aware that he is forgiven by Una and accepted now for who he is, the 'gentle knight' of the beginning of the poem has grown into manhood. He has overcome his personal flaws and is finally worthy to meet his biggest challenge yet, the dragon itself.

Red Crosse: The Final Battle with the Dragon

The dragon of Canto xi is the representation of the Catholic church and religion, the enemy that is both a visible and an unseen threat to the Protestantism that has taken root in England. This threat must be counteracted, and the journey to destroy the dragon is the main focus of Book I of *The Faerie Queene.* As Red Cross has developed from an

[467] *FQ:* 'Argument' p.125.

untried, guileless youth into a champion worthy of his hire, he has fallen prey to, and overcome, mistakes of judgement, envy, lust, and despair. With the help of Una (the Protestant Church) and of Prince Arthur (the model of chivalry and goodness), Red Cross has fought his way to this, the pinnacle of his ambition and of his duty. He is comparable to the Crusader knights who also embarked as young, untried men on a quest for Christianity, and returned home as hardened warriors. These are the knights who brought back the legends of Cappadocia and Antioch, giving St. George and St. Margaret a place in English hagiography.

Spenser gives us, as the climax of Book I of his poem, a dragon different from romance dragons and from the dragons described in earlier pages. Spenser's dragon is 'dreadfull' and seemingly undefeatable. There are no crowds watching the contest, and no sacrificial virgins. This will be a fight to the death with no frills and no divine intervention as there was for the Catholic saints. The reader has known from the very beginning that this is Red Cross's main task. Fight the dragon, free the land, and win the hand of the princess. This is the romance element of the dragon fight, but underlying the romance is the knowledge that Red Cross is fighting for so much more. The anticipation of this fight has been building throughout the poem. Red Cross has been shown to have very human failings, to which readers can relate. He has overcome them one by one, and by this slow awakening he has become a worthy champion.

At this point in the poem, the reader is more aware than Red Cross of his real identity. We have seen his pride as he ignores advice in the fight with Errour, during which he became embroiled and tainted. We have seen his fall from grace into debauchery as he allows himself to be seduced into the weakness of the flesh by Duessa because, blinded by lust, he is unable to see the truth behind the mask. We have seen his despair when, physically and morally exhausted, he is captured by Orgoglio. He had forgotten his faith and the power of prayer. We have also seen how he has been forgiven by Una, and how he was refreshed and strengthened by her love and protection [offered by the Protestant Church.] Theirs is a chaste and pure love, untainted by the lure of the flesh. He has struggled with his very human shortcomings and is now at the point where he is ready to complete his quest. He is totally unaware of his origins and his only perceived destiny is to beat the dragon in deadly combat. His renewed chastity together with his love for Una and his God now give him parity with other dragon slayers, St. George, St. Margaret, and St. Martha. Red Cross is slowly becoming the incarnation of

Saint George. The astute reader is aware of this, although the truth will not be revealed to Red Cross for some time.

Una and Red Cross approach the tower in which her parents are imprisoned 'for dread of that huge feend'. (I.xi.3:3) Spenser can be using the term 'dread' not only to express their extreme fear, but also as an indication of 'deep awe or reverence; apprehension or anxiety as to future events.'[468] Like English Protestants in the sixteenth century, Una's parents would obviously be anxious for their future after changing their religion. They are imprisoned by their own fear, manifested in the metaphorical dragon.

> With that they heard a roaring hideous sownd,
> That all the ayre with terror filled wyde,
> And seemed vneath to shake the stedfast ground.
> Eftsoones that dreadfull Dragon they espyde,
> Where stretcht he lay vpon the sunny side,
> Of a great hill, himself like a great hill.
> But all so soone, as he from far descryde
> Those glistering armes, the heuen with light did fill,
> He roused himself fuyll blyth, and hastened them vntill. (I.xi.4)

The dragon is gendered male, as in most previous incarnations, and is heard before he is seen. This echoes the account in the tale of Sir Bevis, whose companion is frightened by the noise and will go no further.[469] The male gender is associated with supremacy, power, and strength in the natural order of Spenser's world. This dragon represents the previous supremacy of the Catholic Church and the Catholic kingdoms of Europe. Had the dragon been female it would perhaps have been more in keeping with 'the mother church' but would then have had to present some female characteristics. Barclay's dragon for example had 'a wombe infectyf'[470] and is vulnerable there, as are human women. Saint George strikes first at the womb through the throat with his lance in a direct assault, thus rendering her incapable of reproducing. By contrast, Spenser's dragon has no apparent vulnerable areas. The male gendering immediately gives an impression of might, and the audible warning indicates size. He is indeed huge, 'like a great hill' and is 'full blyth'- full of glee - as he hastens towards his enemy. This is a very astute psychological observation on Spenser's part. The church seems to take pleasure in eradicating enemies,

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[468] *OED Online*. 'Dread' (1), the usage dates from 1508.

[469] See page 166 above.

[470] See page 85 above.

be they pagan, Protestant or Catholic. Whether the eradication is physical or spiritual, there has always been something triumphant in the elimination of the opposition.

This is the largest dragon we have encountered throughout all the literature. He is larger than the dragons encountered by Merlin, George, Martha, and Margaret. In addition, he is airborne. Previous dragons have had wings, but not employed them in this manner. This dragon is the ultimate, the combination of all the other dragons that Red Cross has faced. Throughout Red Cross's journey, he has encountered polymorphic depictions of this dragon, all of which are now focussed into one almighty adversary. As Spenser imbued the naked Duessa with all his revulsion of Catholicism, here in the final confrontation he acknowledges how well the Church has protected itself; its strength and ferocity are delineated in his dreadful dragon.

> By this the dreadfull Beast drew nigh to hand,
> Halfe flying, and halfe footing in his haste,
> That with his largenesse measured much land,
> And made wide shadow vnder the huge waste;
> As mountaine doth the valley ouercaste.
> Approaching nigh, he reared high afore
> His body monstrous, horrible, and vaste,
> Which to increase his wondrous greatnes more,
> Was swoln with wrath, and poison, and with bloody gore. (I.xi.8)

Spenser makes much of the size of the dragon; his shadow is the size of a mountain, and his vast body is made even larger by the 'wrath, and poison, and... bloody gore' that it contains. The 'wrath' of the dragon can be interpreted as 'vehement or violent anger; intense exasperation or resentment; deep indignation.'[471] The resentment is that of the Catholic church against the break from Rome and the emergence of the Church of England, and the deep indignation at the affront and insult to the previous supremacy of Catholicism. Spenser is holding nothing back and the dragon is the epitome of all his religious intensity and polemical zeal. None of the earlier dragons are described as being swollen. This one is representative of the swollen body of the Roman church, eager to swallow up more victims, and infect them with the poison of what Spenser considers to be a betrayal of the true Christian church. The Catholic church is bloated and voracious, feeding on the fear of eternal damnation. In the same way, Errour was swollen and bloated as a parody of the church. The shadow cast across the land is the spread of the

[471] *OED Online.* Wrath (1) usage dates from c.950.

Catholic religion. If Red Cross defeats the dragon, the darkness will be banished, and the country will be saved.

Spenser describes the dragon's defences in warlike terms; this is a beast armed and ready for war. The body is armour-plated, just like a knight going into battle.

> And ouer, alle with brazen scales was armd,
> Like plated cote of steele, so couched neare,
> That nought more perce, ne might his corse bee harmd
> With dint of swerd, nor push of pointed speare,
> Which as an Eagle, seeing pray appeare,
> His aery plumes doth rouze, full rudely dight,
> So shaked he, that horror was to heare,
> For as the clashing of an Armor bright,
> Such noyse his roused scales did send vnto the knight. (I.xi.9)

The dragon is closely covered all over its body by brazen scales. They are hard and impenetrable. The dragon appears invincible, impervious to sword or spear: 'nought more perce, ne might his corse bee harmed' (Lines 3-4). The dragon is likened to an eagle, another hunter, introduced here because of its sharpness of sight – it is said to be able to stare into the sun.[472] The dreadful sound of its scales, like clashing armour, strikes fear into Red Cross, a warning of the impending battle and horror to come.

> His flaggy wings when forth he did display,
> Were like two sayles, in which the hollow wynd
> Is gathered full, and worketh speedy way:
> And eke the pennes, that did his pineons bynd,
> Were like mayne-yards, with flying canuas lynd,
> The clowdes before him fled for terror great,
> And all the heuens stood still amazed with his threat. (I.xi.10)

The wings are described in naval terms, likened to 'sayles' filled with wind, the 'pennes' [ribs of the wings] are like 'mayne-yards' which are rods on which the 'canuas' [canvas] sails are extended. It is difficult not to make the comparison of the dragon with the mighty fleet of the Spanish Armada which was defeated by Drake in both 1585 and 1588. However, closer examination of 'flaggy' reveals a further meaning, as described in the *OED*: 'Hanging down limply or lankly, drooping, pendulous.'[473] From this description, the dragon has all-enveloping wings, hanging down in a potentially suffocating way,

[472] Although the eagle is said in the medieval Bestiary and many other medieval sources to be able to rejuvenate itself by staring into the sun, in this instance Spenser is using the eagle's remarkable eyesight to compare the dragon as a hunter.

[473] *OED*. Flaggy (1) usage dates from 1576.

perhaps an allegory of the cassock and vestments worn by Catholic priests. Another interpretation of the drooping wings involves overtones of deception and disguise. As Sarah Johanesen states:

> 'the concept of Catholics and especially priests operating like spies in the shadows, hidden by their clothing, became strongly bound to the widespread metaphorical use of 'cloak'. To hide 'vnder the cloake of good intent,' to 'cloake' one's sins, and the 'cloak of religion,' used the physicality of the clothing item to not only suggest intentional concealment, but the darkness which lay beneath it. The darkness was sinister, a 'thick cloud and fogge of superstitions and forgeries; wherein they enwrap themselues and would ensnare vs'; a cover under which Catholics might breach the Protestant country's security.[474]

This accords with Spenser's view of the Catholic priesthood, suggested by the 'flaggy wings' but revealed throughout the poem. The priests are duplicitous, deceitful, and wicked. His characterisation particularly of Archimago in his disguises as a caring and honest man make this quite clear.

The last extended last line of each stanza contains a summing up and, here, a warning, even the heavens are 'amazed' by the threat of the dragon. We are made aware that the dragon has huge wings like canvas sails full of wind, speeding him along. The pressure of his wings has made the very air stand still and pushed away the clouds. Now that the dragon is in sight, his immense size is becoming visible. Slowly his weapons are being revealed to Red Cross as this enemy is closing in. Spenser is drawing out the description and adding to the mysterious power of the dragon piece by piece. This imparts a growing feeling of dread and fear to the reader, playing on the imagination and creating a shape of terror, a technique that we also saw in the romance of Sir Guy.

Spenser gives the dragon's tail an enormous amount of detail, with an additional component, that of two deadly stings.

> His huge long tayle wownd vp in hundred foldes,
> Does ouerspred his long bras-scaly back,
> Whose wreathed boughtes when euer he vnfoldes,
> And thick entangled knots adown does slack,
> Bespotted as with shieldes of red and blacke,
> It sweepeth all the behind him farre,
> And of three furlongs does but little lacke;
> And at the point two stinges in fixed are,
> Both deadly sharp, that sharpest steele exceeden farr. (I.xi.11)

[474] Sarah Johanesen, 'That Silken Priest: Catholic Disguise and Anti-Popery on the English Mission (1560-1640)', *Historical Research*, 93.259, February 2020. 38–51 (pp.39-41).

The long tail wound in 'foldes' or coils reminds the reader of the coils of Errour in which Red Cross was entangled during his first confrontation. The Dragon's tail is almost half a mile long (almost three furlongs) and contains two deadly stings sharper than the 'sharpest steele.' It is spotted with red and black scales, which were 'the prominent colours of Philip II's arms'[475] – a clear indication that this is a direct association with the leading Catholic monarch in Europe – and is a link with the 'flaggy wings...like two sails' as it links with the reading of the wings as vestments. Fig. 35 shows a heraldic tabard with the full arms of Philip II of Spain, with the predominant colours being red, black, and gold.

These colours are associated with the Catholic rulers of Spain, the 'Reyes Catolicos', and Spenser's colouring of the tail in this way is no accident. The dragon is flying the flag of Catholic Spain as a clear indication of intent and identity. As we have seen previously, the tail of the dragon is a weapon to be feared. It harms both Guy and Bevis, damaging their protective armour and breaking bones, and Bevis's horse is killed by the dragon's tail. Spenser's dragon has the additional advantage of being airborne, and able to make use of its tail, wings, and claws. The next three stanzas add to the horror and hellish associations. The dragon has 'rauenous pawes' and a hideous head with 'deep deuouring jawes / Wyde gaped like the grisly mouth of hell' which descend into a 'darke abysse' and swallow all his victims. (I.xi.12.4-9)

> And that more wonderous was, in either iaw
> Three ranckes of yron teeth enraunged were,
> In which yet trickling blood and gobbets raw
> Of late deuoured bodies did appeare,
> That sight thereof bredd cold congealed feare:
> Which to increase, and all atonce to kill,
> A cloud of smothering smoke and sulphure seare
> Out of his stinking gorge forth steemed still,
> That all the ayre about with smoke and stench did fill. (I.xi.13)

The three ranks of 'yron teeth' drip deadly poison or venom as did Barclay's dragon. As the 'venom' of paganism was removed by the onset of Christianity (p.65 above), so the poison of Catholicism must be removed by turning to Protestantism. The Leviathan of Job and the Psalms, and the monstrous dragon of Revelation are both present in the Spenserian dragon. The noun 'leviathan' is used to depict something very large or

[475] According to Hamilton, two stings may be representative of the 'want of faith, or guilt of sin' or of 'death and despair' carried in Duessa's cup. *FQ* as before, fn. p139.

powerful, and the dragon from Revelation is the embodiment of Satan. Spenser wants his audience to understand the depth of peril that Red Cross Knight, and by implication the first readers of the *FQ* face.

Spenser then moves the focus to the eyes of the dragon, which emit such a burning, wrathful light, that there appears to be no way to escape their gaze.

> His blazing eyes, like two bright shining shieldes,
> Did burne with wrath, and sparkled liuing fyre;
> As two broad Beacons, sett in open fieldes,
> Sent forth their flames far off to euery shyre,
> And warning giue, that enimies conspyere,
> With fire and sword the region to inuade;
> So flam'd his eyne with rage and rancorous yre:
> But far within as in a hollow glade,
> Those gleaming lampes were sett, that made a dreadfull shade. (I.xi.14)

The 'dreadfull shade' from the 'lamps' of the flaming eyes suggests the red of hell fires, casting a bloody red glow over the terrified onlookers. However, the eyes are compared to 'shining shieldes' – they are both attack and defence weapons: the ferocity of the dragon's glare will keep any attackers at bay. Again, there is the analogy with war, of warning beacons and invasion: '…two broad Beacons…and warning giue that enimies conspyre to invade' (lines 3-5). Red Cross has a war to fight, alone and unaided except by God. Una can be of no help now, other than by prayer. The lone stance follows the pattern that has been repeated since the days of Marduk, via the saintly dragon-slayers, the romance heroes and so to Red Cross. When everything is said and done, the Champion fights alone.

Spenser has revealed the full atrocious horror of the dragon, the fury and the weaponry, the danger and destructive capability. The characteristics of the dragon as it has been depicted through the ages remain constant. Lydgate and Barclay have doubtless influenced Spenser's vision of the terror. Spenser's dragon however is vast: much bigger than the dragon from which Margaret of Antioch escaped, bigger than Martha's dragon which she subdued and led by her girdle, and bigger than George's dragon, which he could attack from horseback. Spenser's enormous dragon is representative of the Catholic church and its spread throughout the Western world, and therefore it must be shown to be huge and threatening.

In the late sixteenth century, there was always the threat of invasion, particularly from Spain. It is reasonable to suggest therefore that Spenser's dragon not only represents the threat of Catholicism, but also the ever-present threat of war. The dragon is seemingly

undefeatable, and truly represents contemporary warfare at sea and the threat of land invasion. The scales are still there, but are specifically described as 'brasen...like cote of steele', forming a seemingly impenetrable armour. The Catholic church was all-powerful and seemingly impossible to defeat. The power of Spenser's dragon is suggested by its huge wings, like sails. In addition to the comparison with the clothing of the Catholic priesthood, there is the simile of a ship or galleon (I.xi.10) which can be seen as representative of the Spanish Armada. Spain's anger and need for vengeance against two humiliating defeats by the English navy, and by the resurgence of Protestantism under Elizabeth I, would also account for the body of the dragon being 'swoln with wrath.' (I.xi.8:9).

The twin stings in the dragon's tail and the claws on its feet indicate the 'want of faith or guilt of sin.'(I.vii.45.9) The dragon will kill mercilessly, for it has no conscience. From the Protestant point of view, the Catholic church also killed mercilessly, not only under Mary I in Britain but also in the form of the Spanish Inquisition which ruthlessly pursued Protestants from 1478-1700. In Valladolid in Spain, for example, fourteen Protestants were burned at the stake for their faith in 1559.[476] Their victims died for what the Catholic authorities also deemed 'want of faith' of the Catholic religion. Spenser would have been very aware of the methods of torture and burning employed by the Inquisition, and of the events of the reign of Queen Mary made notorious by Foxe's Book of Martyrs, the *Actes and Monuments*, as discussed on p.184.

Spenser's mighty dragon is by far the biggest and most fearsome we have encountered in our tale of the dragon. His tail is of enormous length and the shadow cast is vast and dark. The head is huge and has a gaping, avaricious mouth filled with iron teeth, scooping up helpless victims. The blazing fiery eyes are the probing eyes of Catholicism, seeking out Protestants and consigning them to the flames: 'His blazing eyes, like two bright shining shieldes,/Did burne with wrath, and sparkled liuing fyre'(I.vii.14:1-2). There is 'smoothering smoke and sulphur seare'(I.xi.13:7) around Spenser's dragon, all of which have been present around dragons since the earliest times, suggesting the mouth of hell, into which Lucifer fell after his fall from Heaven. Spenser's tongue 'trembles to tell' of the horror that is the head of the dragon: its jaws 'Wyde gaped, like the grisly mouth of hell, /Through which into his darke abysse all rauin fell'

[476] John Edwards, 'The Spanish Inquisition Refashioned: The Experience of Mary I's England and the Valladolid Tribunal, 1559', *Hispanic Research Journal 13(1):41-54 · February 2012*, 13.1 (2012), 41–54.

(I.xi.12:5-8). It is highly likely that Spenser would have seen medieval illustrations depicting the mouth of hell in parish churches similar to the one in the illustration shown as Fig. 36. David Williams says 'Although the medieval hell-mouth is an overt reference to Satan and the lost souls… it is also an allusion to… the state of spiritual existence, albeit damned.'[477] In the Protestant polemical world view, to die embracing Catholicism would mean to be damned in Hell forever.

As we have seen, therefore, the earliest form of the dragon has survived and been resurrected by Spenser in his polemical epic. Bigger, uglier, and more of threat than ever before, this is the dragon that Red Cross, with all his human failings, must fight and defeat. He must battle against fire, smoke, poison, seemingly invulnerable armour, claws, stings, teeth, wings like sails and a powerful long far-reaching tail. In the world of the *Faerie Queene*, it is vital that he should prevail, and England must stand against, and defeat, Rome. If Red Cross is defeated, the Queen, the Church of England, and the country will be lost.

Both the dragon and the knight prepare for battle. The dragon appears to be eager for the fight, displaying and parading like a bird of prey.

> So dreadfully he towards him did pas
> Forelifting vp a loft his speckled brest
> And often bounding on the brused gras,
> As for gret ioyance of his newcome guest.
> Eftsoones he gan aduaunce his haughty crest,
> As chauffed Bore his bristles doth vpreare,
> And shoke his scales to battaile ready drest;
> That made the Redcrosse knight quake for feare
> As bidding bold defyaunce to his foeman neare. (I.vii.15)

Spenser gives his readers an image of a beast pacing eagerly with pride and grandeur to meet its enemy. The 'speckled brest' is puffed out and raised in challenge, and the dragon appears to meet Red Cross with 'great joy' – eagerly anticipating the defeat of his small enemy. The crest is raised, proudly and haughtily, and underlying the description there is the image of a bird of prey strutting and challenging its opponent. The dragon also appears as a 'chauffed Bore', an angry boar, bristling with rage. 'Chauffed' from the verb 'chafe' has multiple definitions: it means to heat or warm, to rub or abrade, to ruffle or excite in temper, to vex or irritate.[478] The dragon encompasses all of these definitions;

[477] Williams, *Deformed Discourse,* p.145.

[478] *OED.* 'Chauffed' (2) Usage dates from 1330-1816.

it is angry and irritated at being confronted, it is excited for the coming fight, and there is internal heat and fire. In addition, it shakes the scales on its body, making Red Cross himself quake and shake with fear as he prepares to do battle at last.

Red Cross attacks the dragon, as he would attack an opponent in the joust, with spear at the ready, but this is no human adversary.

> The knight gan fayrely couch his steady speare,
> And fiersely ran at him with rigourous might:
> The pointed steele arriuving rudely there theare,
> His harder hyde would nether perce, nor bight,
> But glauncing by foorth passed forward right;
> Yet sore amoued with so pouissant push,
> The wrathfull beast about him turned light,
> And him so rudely passing by, did brush
> With his long tayle, that horse and man to ground did rush. (I.vii.16)

Red Cross attacks first with his spear 'couched' or lowered rigidly and firmly into the attack position, as in a joust. Although he makes a powerful thrust, there is a marked difference from his previous dragon encounters. This one has a hide that would not be pierced or bent – 'bight' – by the sharp spear. The spear glances off the body of the dragon, which turns swiftly and with a brush of the tail, knocks both Red Cross and his horse to the ground. The first encounter is discouraging.

Previously, the dragons encountered by the saints have been quite easily overcome, with the exception of St. George's dragon, which put up a proper fight. However, George was able to damage the dragon with spear and sword each time he attacked. Spenser's dragon is a more dangerous beast and appears impervious to weapons. Red Cross's initial encounter is rebuffed, and he is punished for it. Red Cross tries in vain to wound the beast and succeeds only in enraging it further. Although the dragon has defeated 'many a puissant knight', its 'imperceable brest' had never felt 'so wondrous force' (I.17:7-9). The strength of this new enemy is being felt, although the assault has not penetrated the dragon's hide, and the beast is with 'exceeding rage enflam'd' (I.vii.17:5) Taking to the air, the dragon seizes both horse and rider and carries them off into the distance.

It appears that the dragon is winning the battle; Red Cross has no defence in the air, despite 'struggling strong'. However, the weight of horse and rider prove too much, and the dragon is forced to set them down, Red Cross is reprieved to fight again. Is this Spenser's way of illustrating the resurgence of the Church of England after the death of Bloody Mary? Protestantism was removed under Mary I with great force and violence,

only to recover and re-emerge under Elizabeth I. With the strength of three men, an allegory perhaps of the Holy Trinity, Red Cross thrusts his spear under the left wing of the dragon, causing a great wound.[479] This additional, divinely inspired intervention gives power to the young knight. Historically, dragons can only be killed through either the soft underwing area or by being stabbed through the mouth into the vital organs, as shown by Saint George.[480]

Spenser makes liberal use of metaphor and pathetic fallacy to describe the fury and pain of the dragon after being wounded, describing it an almost apocalyptic terms:

> He cryde, as raging seas are wont to roar,
> When wintry storme his wrathful wreck does threat,
> The rolling billows beat the ragged shore,
> As they the earth would shoulder from her seat,
> And greedy gulfe does gape, as he would eat
> His neighbour element in his reuenge:
> Then gin the blustering brethren boldly threat,
> To moue the world from off his stedfast henge,
> And boystrous battaile make, each other to avenge. (I.xi.21)

Spenser is again using language connected to the sea and also to the elements. He uses alliteration freely: 'rage/roar', 'wintry/wrathful/wreck', 'billows/beat', 'greedy/gulf/gape' and 'blustering/brethren/boldly/boystrous/battaile'. The effect of this, coupled with the marine allegory of stormy weather, is to illustrate how much the pain the wound inflicted on the dragon has enraged him. The very elements are at war with each other. The dragon has long been associated with water (lives near it), with the earth (caves), and with the air (flight). Spenser is using all the historic associations to emphasise the earth-shattering rage of the beast.

Now, in its pain and fury, the dragon will take its revenge:

> The steely head stuck fast still in his flesh,
> Till with his cruell claws he snatcht the wood,
> And quite a sunder broke. Forth flowed fresh
> A gushing riuer of blacke gory blood,
> That drowned all the land, whereon he stood;
> The streame thereof would driue a water-mill.
> Trebly augmented was his furious mood
> With bitter sense of his deepe rooted ill,

[479] Once again, the number three is mentioned in a heroic struggle with a dragon. Guy's battle lasted three days, as did Bevis's. Three times the heroes rose up from dreadful hurt and injury to defeat their enemy. The Apostle Peter denied any knowledge of Christ three times, and the Resurrection occurred three days after the Crucifixion. Three is the Holy Trinity, and Spenser is using the powerful allegory of three to afford strength and victory to Red Cross.

[480] This is how both Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton slew their respective dragons.

That flames of fire he threw forth from his large nosethril. (I.xi.22)

Spenser once more employs alliteration in Stanza 22 to describe how the tightly the spearhead is lodged in the flesh of the dragon and its ensuing rage: fast in flesh/ cruell claws/flames of fire. He uses caesura in line 3 and a full stop at the end of line 6, an unusual departure in a Spenserian stanza. This gives an added sense of drama to an already dramatic episode and emphasises the breaking of the spear. Lines 3-5 'Forth flowed fresh/a gushing riuer of blacke gory blood/That drowned all the land…' is vividly suggestive of the five years' reign of Mary Tudor. The colour black suggests the black robes of the priests and the 'gory blood' that of persecuted Protestants which 'drowned the land.' The last line, where the dragon blasts fire, (the fourth element associated with dragons) from his nostrils, it is indicative of the fire of Protestants being burned at the stake. The 'deep rooted ill' is not only the dragon's fury at being wounded, but the bitterness of Rome when Henry VIII broke away from their Church.

Spenser is giving free reign to his hatred of Catholicism, bringing all the despised elements together in the dragon: the priests, the fire and brimstone of hell, the blood of the murdered Protestants and the insidious and tenacious hold it had over the country. England had been briefly held in its grip once again during the reign of Mary but had been freed by her death and the accession of Elizabeth. As Red Cross has escaped the dragon's clutch, so had England escaped the clutches of Catholicism.

Red Cross is unseated and continues his fight on foot. This is where Spenser deviates from the legend of St. George, who fought and killed his dragon whilst on horseback, using his unbroken spear.[481] Instead, he is repeating the actions of Sir Guy and Sir Bevis who also fought their dragons on foot, armed only with a sword. Once again Spenser is reaching back into earlier dragon lore and resurrecting the character of what we might call the superhero. Red Cross is unable to inflict any further damage, but the dragon is unable to take flight due to the wound under his wing, so unleashes 'A flake[spark] of fire' (26:4) which envelops Red Cross's face and body through his armour. Red Cross burning inside his armour mirrors Sir Bevis being burned by the venom of the dragon which caused his armour to burst. Red Cross again removes his armour, which is God's protection, (p.174) just as he did earlier in order to lie with Duessa. Once again, Red Cross is left exposed and vulnerable to the forces of evil.

[481] This is no way diminishes the heroism of St. George – his horse was afraid, not him, and he controlled its fear to remain seated.

It has been suggested by Carole V. Kaske that 'Disarming would in Red Cross's present situation be a cessation of struggle, a surrender to sin, and the final stage of consent…' [482] as she associates the fight against the dragon with Red Cross fighting against concupiscence, or lust. I would argue that her focus is too narrow and centres on Red Cross's only previous encounter with lust when he lay with Duessa. The knight has moved beyond this fall from grace and is now fighting the culmination of all his previous demons: error, pride, lust, lack of faith. He is proving himself in the fire, not being consumed by it as he was with lust. Kaske claims that fire is the punishment for the lust Red Cross felt for Duessa; alternatively, it is possible to take the view that fire is also cleansing. He is a being tempered by the fire, hardened, and strengthened as of steel. Spenser is allowing Red Cross to be cleansed of all former transgressions. The knight will be restored to the point of moral cleanliness where he is fit to be Christ's soldier, and fight for the deliverance of his country. He will be toughened up for the continued battle. In this way, the dragon's attack will be turned into a defensive tool.

The fight continues and Red Cross is despairing. 'Death better were, death did he oft desire' (28:4) when once again he is knocked to the ground. This time he falls backwards into a 'springing well…full of great vertues and for med'cine good' (29:5) where he appears to die. The dragon 'clapt his yron wings' in victory (31:9) but the knight is restored by grace as a result of Una's prayers. Red Cross emerges from the well, which is the Well of Life (29:9) on the second day 'new-borne' and to battell new did rise' (34:9). This is both an echo of the resurrection of Christ, and a reference to baptism and rebirth. Here Spenser is again mirroring Bevis, who falls into the holy well where the virgin bathed. Bevis also appears dead, but is revitalised and energised by the waters, and his hurts are eradicated.[483]

The renewed Red Cross strikes the dragon with his 'bright dew-burning blade' (35:6) which is now doused in the water from the holy well. Holy water is not only used in ritual cleansing and baptism, but also for driving out demons, and Red Cross is fighting his own demons as well as those of the church. Facing the dragon on foot with just his sword mirrors the episode when Red Cross confronts Orgoglio 'with single sword in

[482] Carol V Kaske, 'The Dragon's Spark and Sting and the Structure of Red Cross's Dragon-Fight: The Faerie Queene, I.Xi-Xii', *Studies in Philology*, 1969, 609–38 (p.624).
[483] See *Sir Bevis*, page 161 above.

hand' (p.220 above) and Arthur's attack on Duessa's beast 'with his blood-thirstie blade.' He deals the dragon 'a yawning wound' to the skull with this blessed blade. This is the first serious blow delivered by Red Cross in close contact by the sword. Previously the dragon has grown in strength and power by overcoming other knights and absorbing their fear, on which it thrives, but now for the first time it has suffered serious injury. Red Cross is proving to be stronger than any previous adversaries that the dragon has faced. He may be afraid, but he is no coward and takes the fight to the dragon. Protestantism is standing firm and the power of the attack is taking the Catholic church by surprise. Incensed by pain and rage, the dragon descends from above and attacks Red Cross again.

> The same aduancing high above his head
> With sharpe intended sting so rude him smott,
> That to the earth him droue, as stricken dead.
> Ne liuing wight would have him life behott:
> The mortall sting his angry needle shott
> Quite through his shield, and in his shoulder seased,
> Where faste it stucke, ne would thereout be gott:
> The griefe thereof him wondrous sore diseasd,
> Ne might his rankling paine with patience be appeased. (I.xi.38)

Red Cross once more appears dead, pierced through the shield and into his shoulder by one of the dragon's mighty claws. 'Rude' signifies in this instance as 'violent, of an act, especially a blow, assault, etc., Sometimes with the implication of suddenness or unexpectedness.[484] Both these meanings are appropriate. The piercing of the shield and shoulder is sudden and unexpected, and although Red Cross would be heartened by having wounded the dragon, he cannot be complacent, and neither can the dragon, who has also had a rude awakening. The pain Red Cross suffers from this 'rancling' or festering pain cannot be waited out; it must be dealt with immediately. The dragon is now caught by the claw and cannot free itself. Both the dragon and Red Cross are suffering pain, and both are striving to free themselves from their opponent.

Red Cross rises from the earth and with his 'raging blade' (39:6) slices off five joints of the dragon's tail. It is here that Spenser gives us a dragon in all its traditional grandeur as it screams its desire for revenge.

> Hart cannot thinke, what outrage, and what cries,
> With fowle enfouldred smoke and flashing fire,
> The hell-bred beast threw forth vnto the skies,
> That all was couered with darkness dire:

[484] *OED* 'Rude' 2a. adj., c.1350.

Then fraught with rancour, and engorged yre,
He cast at once him to avenge for all,
And gathering up himself out of the mire,
With his vneuen wings did fiercely fall,
Vpon his sunne-bright shield, and grypt it fast withall. (I.xi.40)

The characteristics of the dragons we have read of through previous encounters are all here. The smoke and flames of hell where the beast was bred, the fury, the wings, the desire for revenge and to wreak havoc are all embedded in this one stanza. The beast if 'fraught with rancour and engorged ire' outraged and out for revenge. It also reflects the battle for the changing state of religion in England throughout Tudor times: the small victories of Red Cross, which are the small advances by Henry and Edward into early Protestantism, and the vicious return of Catholicism under Mary, spearing the country with death and destruction. The dragon has attacked with all its weapons: fire which burned through the protective armour, the tail which unseated the knight from his horse, and the claw which stabbed the knight's shoulder through the shield, inflicting a terrible wound. The next attack is on that very shield, the last defence of Red Cross, the 'shield of faith' as being part of 'the armour of God'. (Ephesians 6:16).

The dragon grasps the shield but is forced to relinquish its hold under an onslaught of blows from Red Cross, one of which severs the claw, leaving it in the shield. This demonstrates the tenacious hold of the Catholic religion. The dragon again belches out flames, smoke, and brimstone, unleashing the horrors of hell on the hapless knight. Stepping backward from the heat, Red Cross slips again in the mire, and falls to the ground, '…with dread of shame sore terrified.'(I.xi 45:9). He is mindful of his knightly duty and does not want to be shamed by being unable to keep his feet. This is a common thread from the romances; Guy was ashamed because he could not instantly dispatch his dragon, and Bevis would have been ashamed to turn away from the beast without a fight. Honour is the code of the knight; to be shamed would bring dishonour.

This time Red Cross falls beside the Tree of Life (I.xi.46:9). The dragon will not approach the tree, which is an asserting life-force, for a dragon is a death-bringer, 'And al that life preserued, did detest:/Yet he it of aduntur'd to inuade' (I.xi.49:3-4). Despite hating all that is good and life-giving, the dragon will assay against it when he can. In this, we are reminded of the demon which approached Margaret of Antioch in her cell

(p.97 above). The demon was terrified of Margaret's purity and yet was compelled to let her approach and consign him back to hell. Red Cross is stunned and senseless. He cannot eat the fruit of the Tree of Life but the tree itself releases a healing balm:

> And deadly wounds could heale and reare againe
> The senceless corse appointed for the graue.
> Into that same he fell: which did from death him saue.' (I.xi.48:7-9)

Red Cross arises healed and strengthened by the balm from the Tree, and by the grace of further prayers by Una. In a reversal of the norm of dragon tale tradition, in this instance the virgin, instead of being offered for sacrifice and rescued by the hero, is the source of grace and strength for the weakened dragon-slayer. The dragon approaches for the kill with the intention of swallowing Red Cross, which is a mirroring of the dramatic incident in Margaret of Antioch. However, Red Cross is armed and ready:

> …The weapon bright
> Taking aduantage of his open jaw,
> Ran through the mouth wide so importune might,
> That deepe emperst his darksome hollow maw,
> And back retyred, his life blood forth with all did draw. (I.xi.53:5-9)

After all the struggles, wounds and despair, Red Cross has slain the dragon in the historically traditional way. He has pierced it through the mouth, into the vitals and killed it. This is how Saint George killed his dragon. Spenser is ambiguous about the weapon used to kill the dragon. He simply states, 'the weapon bright.' As the spear was broken on the first skirmish, we must assume that it is the sword which is used. This would fit with Spenser's polemic, as the 'sword of truth' of Protestantism finally slays the dragon of Catholicism. Saint George wielded the sword of Christian truth to slay the dragon of paganism (p.56), and Spenser finally reveals that Red Cross is indeed Saint George, the saviour of England.

The fall of the dragon is as dramatic as it is fulfilling. None of the other dragons we have read about have such an explicitly detailed end, and Spenser does it justice, representing as it does the removal of the Catholic threat and the unhindered return to Protestantism.

> So downe he fell, and forth his life did breth,
> That vanish into smoke and cloudes swift;
> So downe he fell, that th'earth him vnderneath
> Did grone, as feeble so great load to lift;
> Whose false foundacion waues haue washt away,
> With dreadfull poyse is from the mayneland rift.
> And rolling downe, great Neptune doth dismay;

So downe he fell, and like a heaped mountaine lay. (I.xi.54)

Three times Spenser uses 'down he fell.' This use of repetition or *anaphora* is linked to the three elements which are the natural habitat of the dragon. His life's breath vanishes into the air, he falls so heavily to the ground that the very earth groans, and finally he rolls from the land into the sea, to the 'dismay' of Neptune. As Hamilton points out, this heralds the end of time as in Rev 21:1: 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.' The beast is dead, Satan has fallen, and the new heaven and new earth of a Protestant England have emerged. The 'false foundacion' of Catholicism has been washed away, and a 'dreadful poyse' [great weight] has been torn away from the land.

The monumental battle with the dragon lasts for three days, and it is easy to make the comparison with Red Cross and Christ arising three days after his death, as other critics have done.[485] However, I think this comparison, though evidently accurate, is only one aspect of Spenser's rich and complex attack on Catholicism as represented by the dragon. Three is the magic number for Spenser, and he uses it throughout the poem. The number three is also present in the romances of Guy and Bevis – each of their battles also lasts for three days. Red Cross fights three battles: Errour, Duessa and the Old Dragon – so named as he represents Satan – the oldest dragon of all in Christian belief. Red Cross meets three human enemies: Sanjoy, Archimago and Orgoglio. From each of these encounters he emerges more self-aware, and more mature. Red Cross – or Saint George, the saviour and patron of England – is fighting in the tradition of other Christian hero dragon-slayers, who themselves are fighting in the tradition of Christ. Spenser rewrites the legend of Saint George for the Early Modern era. He is a mortal man, flawed and naïve, and representative of the collective people of the country. Like Guy and Bevis, he has to atone for previous misdemeanours before he can attain his desired state of Holiness. Red Cross arises fresh and healed each morning after suffering heavy blows and injuries. He is also aided by 'three men's strength' (I.xi.20:4)[486] a trinity which turns the battle in his favour. Spenser's repetition of 'three' can be read as the Trinity being the constant unseen companion of Red Cross on his quest. The knight is also characterised by a trinity of qualities: self-awareness, faith, and heroism. The number three is found

[485] Linwood E. Orange, 'Spenser's Old Dragon', *Modern Language Notes.*Vol.74:8 (Dec. 1959), pp.679-681 (p.680).

[486]Hadfield, *F.Q.*.. p.140. 'marking the greatest human strength, signified by the spear's third thrust.

seeded throughout the Bible: and includes – significantly for the very human Red Cross knight – the three denials of Peter, as well as Christ rising on the third day. The use of the number is a very powerful tool for Spenser, suggesting as it does that Red Cross is on a holy mission to rid his world of the greatest evil. Alastair Fowler discusses 'the astonishingly complex web of interlocking numerical patterns' in the *F.Q.,* and, although he does not specifically discuss the number three, his proposals can easily be applied to that number, and Spenser's use of numerology.[487]

Spenser's Dragons: a conclusion

As previous ancient dragons – for example Ti-âmat and Leviathan – represented the chaos of emerging civilisations, and the attempt to make sense of them, so Spenser's dragons serve the same purpose. The religious and political turmoil and uncertainty of the later Tudor reign brought chaos to the population of England. Spenser's dragons represent the defeated Roman Church, and the suppression of the power it held over sovereign and nation. Red Cross represents the constant vigilance needed by Protestants against any incursion by the Catholic religion. Elizabeth was the first non-Catholic child born to a ruler of England, the 'symbol of a new era' and Spenser was asserting her power and sovereignty to the fullest in the *FQ.*

Spenser presents the reader with fictional dragons both familiar and different. Errour has the characteristics of the Echidna of ancient Greek mythology, combined with the human trait of hubris, swollen and tenacious. Red Cross falls into the sin of pride by refusing to take advice. The next beast he faces is Lucifera's seven-headed dragon. Not recreated in medieval texts, this is clearly the Beast from Revelation, but it has retained some known dragon characteristics, such as the long dreadful tail and the sinewy neck, scales, and wallowing in filth - the dragon gathers 'himself vp out of the mire – for the renewed attack on Red Cross's shield. (I.xi.40:7) There is also a dragon of more familiar appearance tamed by Lucifera. Red Cross, having given up his chastity in the pursuit of lust with the false Duessa, is weighed down by sin and captured by the giant Orgoglio. Lucifera's beast is slain instead by the pure and shining Prince Arthur, resplendent in dragon armour. Dragon defeats dragon, and the moral of purity defeating depravity is told in a romantic and exciting manner. Finally, there is the culminating battle with the most

[487] Alastair Fowler, 'Numerical Composition in The Faerie Queene', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 25.3/4 (1962), pp.199-239. (p.1).

familiar form of dragon. Monstrous, winged, with a deadly tail, eyes gleaming with fire, breathing smoke and brimstone sulphurous and thick like the mouth of hell, and having fire as its ultimate weapon, this is a dragon instantly recognisable to Spenser's readers. This final dragon represents everything threatening and evil but, more significantly for Spenser's work, it is the representation of the Catholic church as seen from the perspective of a militant Protestant vision of England. I suggest that Spenser's depiction goes back much further than Queen Mary, to the time before the break from Rome. Through this poem in Book I, Spenser is underlining Elizabeth's right to rule as a Protestant Queen. Her legitimacy was placed in question by her own father, but her mother's Protestant credentials stood her in good stead. Imprisoned and under constant threat of death by her sister and her husband, Philip I of Spain, Elizabeth survived it all. Red Cross's journey to the dragon can be viewed as a reflection of Elizabeth's journey to the throne. Beset on all sides, Elizabeth nevertheless survived and reigned. She brought the country together in the Church of England. However, there were still skirmishes to be dealt with, and the talon of the Old Dragon lodged in Red Cross's shield is representative of continuing recusants and the constant Catholic threat.

Spenser uses the previously Catholic saint George in a most innovative way. Always presented in hagiography as a paragon of virtue and chastity, representing Christianity in its purest form, in *TFQ* he is Red Cross, untried, unnamed, and very fallible. He falls victim to pride, lust, self-doubt, and loss of faith during his journey to face the dragon. This depiction of George is in complete contrast to the saint of the hagiographies. This is a Protestant knight, human and flawed, not a stainless Catholic saint. Here again, Spenser is showing his contempt for Catholicism. The dragon represents the combination of all the pitfalls encountered by Red Cross on his journey, and during his battle with the dragon he faces some of them again. He falls again, twice. He feels despair and doubts his ability to defeat the beast. He is wounded and desperate but gains the courage through grace to continue the battle. In Canto *x* stanzas 65-66, both the reader and Red Cross himself have discovered that he is descended from Saxon kings, kidnapped, hidden in Fairyland, and raised as a ploughman's son. In this inserted narrative, it is revealed that his name was 'Georgos', which means a tiller of the earth; Spenser is going back to both the classics and the legend of Saint George for the origins of the name. After defeating the dragon and completing his quest, Red Cross is revealed as Saint George himself, the true defender of England, and so George has been

transformed into a Protestant, reborn and now a worthy representative of his country in its newly reformed state.

We can conclude, therefore, that Spenser's paradoxical dragons may be viewed from more than one perspective. As is fitting in such an allegorical epic, they not only represent physical threat, but also present moral and spiritual danger. The innocent Red Cross is led down labyrinthine paths and contaminated by pride. He is deceived and beguiled into lust and sins of the flesh. He is imprisoned by self-doubt and despair, and his life and soul are in danger during the confrontation with the Old Dragon (Satan).[488] Each of these dragons have a part to play in the mental, physical, and spiritual development of Red Cross, the representative 'Everyman' Christian. After his rescue from Orgoglio, he rests and relearns what and who he is, and where he is bound on his journey. Spenser is giving spiritual and moral advice via his dragons and related monsters, reinforcing all the hidden messages conveyed through his allegory.

The folly of celebrating the wrong kind of faith, and the horror of the consequences to which it could lead, was visualised and skilfully given a fearful form by Spenser. Since the earliest emergent civilizations attempting to make sense of the world around them, the dragon has been the focus of fear and terror. It is the perfect example of 'the shapes mankind gives, in terror, to what they cannot make into reason.'[489] The dragon is of a shape that is vaguely familiar from serpents, combined with the qualities of the imagined realm of Hell. Lucifer with his fiery wings has also been assimilated into Spenser's image of the dragon. His portrayal of the dragon of Roman Catholicism leaves no doubt that the poem is a polemical attack on a religion for which he had a deep, abiding hatred and mistrust. The reader is left in no doubt that this is satanic evil, destructive to body and soul. The dragon-slayer is finally given the role of the demi-god superhero, aided and strengthened by a higher power; the grace granted through the prayers of Una. Each separate encounter with a dragon in *The Faerie Queene, Book I,* was a polemical statement by Spenser to diminish and denigrate Catholicism, and to demonstrate the power, validity, and grace of the new reformed faith.

[488] Page 228 above.
[489] Bradley, p.459.

As can be seen from the analysis of *TFQ*, Spenser's dragon has tremendous importance. This is the first time that the dragon in the poem has been looked at as an individual entity, and Spenser has created a dragon as an allegory of the Catholic religion which he so clearly despised. He has also used the dragon to emphasise the 'Englishness' of Elizabeth I and Saint George, her right to rule, and the patriotism which runs through the first book of the poem.

CONCLUSION

The dragon has represented, variously: creation (allowing examination of society and its structure), the survival of the gods, Paganism, Catholicism, religious conflict, sexual threat, and lechery. Dragons are afraid of chastity, and the acceptance of a sacrificial virgin confirms their desire to punish and destroy those who are chaste. The arrival of a champion at the crucial moment, however, proves that chastity also has the power to provide an escape, as has been shown in the examination of the hagiographies.

We have followed the tale of the dragon from the earliest mention right through until the Early Modern era, and it is now time to draw together the analyses of the thesis. The first question to be investigated in this thesis was where the concept of the dragon originated, and why it was necessary. The ancient Sumerian texts discussed by Brandon (Thesis Introduction p.7) reveal the name of the first dragon, but there is no description of this creature known as 'Kur'. What all the surviving early texts – from Mesopotamia, the *Enuma-Elish,* from Assyria and Babylon – have in common is water as the source of creation. From the very earliest times then, beginning with the oral tradition of word-of-mouth and storytelling, the dragon has always been associated with water. Sometimes the dragon jealously and selfishly guarded water, at other times it was the guardian of the water for the people living nearby. The body of Ti-âmat, the first recorded breeder of serpents and dragons, is split in two to form the sky and a barrier for salt water. She was destroyed by Marmuk, a god. Ever afterwards, for centuries only another god would be able to defeat the monsters. Out of chaos caused by a dragon, comes order, effected by the death of the dragon. This is the basic principle that has endured and informs every single dragon myth through the centuries; defeat the dragon, and order will be restored. Thus, emerging civilisations were able to use the idea of the dragon to invoke an unseen but threatening presence, in order to establish control and create rules to live by. To keep the dragon at bay, offerings were made, and blood was shed. The concept of sacrifice was established.

As the centuries progressed, the dragon remained constant in folk lore and local myths (see Blust, Introduction, p.6). These tales were carried from community to community, and no doubt embellished by the individual poet to add drama and popularity, and this way he ensured his livelihood. Storytelling would provide the orator with food and a bed, until it was time to move on to the next area. Always larger than life, gods and their opponents had to be presented in a recognisable form. Giant humanoids and animal

forms were spoken of as reality and retained in the collective consciousness of early people. It is clear from the works of Daniel Ogden that giant serpents and snakes were the basis for the dragon. Diodorus wrote a very graphic description in the third century BCE of the serpent captured by Ptolemy II, (Thesis Introduction, p.10), and the Greek authors were much engaged with descriptions of various types of dragons and dragon/serpent hybrids. These monsters were again defeated by other gods, but a new element was introduced. Mortals who were the offspring of gods, or demi-gods, now were capable of killing dragons. Although the skill of writing was being developed, very few people could read and write. The oral tradition continued to promote the idea of the fearsome dragon or beast which had to be defeated to maintain order. A dragon did not have to be seen to be believed.

From the pre-history age to the Classical era, the tale of the dragon crossed the world from East to West, gaining features such as scales, wings, and fire. Attributes such as poisonous venom and breath were accorded to the beast, as well as the ability to mesmerise and hypnotize potential victims, human or animal. The advance of religion saw the dragon given a new role, seductive and totally evil. In the time of the Old Testament. after the war in Heaven, Lucifer and the renegade angels were cast down into Hell, and he was named Satan, the dragon. Leviathan, the monster serpent of the deep in early Ugaritic texts was fully scaled, with razor sharp claws and teeth, and breathed fire (see Biblical dragons, p.22). Leviathan was engaged in a titanic battle with Yahweh and had to be defeated to maintain order.

Paganism and nature worship were slowly eradicated by Christianity, and the dragon took on a whole new persona. According to Jewish and Christian belief, it was a serpent which tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden to eat the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Pamela Norris proposes that 'the serpent took on the stature of an angel who dared to challenge God – the great dragon of Revelation. "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world"' (Rev. 12:9).[490] Satan was jealous of God's perfect creation, and wished to destroy and sully the purity of the innocence of Adam and Eve. Medieval dragon/virgin encounters would show that chastity was the most powerful weapon against a dragon, it was the one thing it feared the most. However,

[490] Pamela Norris, 'Angelic Lust, Divine Envy' in *The Story of Eve* (London: Papermac, 1998), pp.84-110 (p.85).

the serpent in the Garden of Eden was not afraid to approach Eve. As Eve was the wife of Adam and had lain with him, although innocent (naïve) she was not a virgin. Dragon/serpents have the ability to hypnotise and beguile. Satan may have hypnotised Eve, and his beguiling tongue convince her she was doing no harm. As Amelia Lanyer was to note, much later in her defence of Eve, If this were the case, should women really have been held responsible for visiting original sin onto the world?[491]

The changes which religion wrought altered the face of society. In the medieval era the dragon/Satan came to represent Paganism. To bring Christian order from pagan chaos, the Church needed something which would be associated with the idea of evil. Re-enter the dragon. I refer back to Robert Blust (Introduction, p.7) and his theory that the idea of dragons, and the pervasiveness of dragon myths in the folk legends of many cultures is probably no accident (p.8). Already owning a bad reputation as a frightening and vengeful beast, the dragon was tailor-made to become the embodiment of the perils of subscribing to paganism. The long-enjoyed and embellished folk stories were adapted by the Church for the new era.[492] The gods to be placated were all contained in the concept of the dragon. The sacrifices made by early men became young, beautiful virgins. The stories of Christian virgin martyrs began to circulate from the East, where the dragon myths had originated many years before. The legend of St. Margaret 'begins its narrative in AD 290' according to Dresvina[493], whilst Riches avers that a version of St. George's narrative was written by Aelfric in 1000 CE, albeit without a dragon episode.[494] These stories were copied by scribes and adapted into religious works and sermons. In this way they became part of English tradition; particularly the legend of Saint George, who became the byword for valour, courage, and purity. Medieval dragons retained all the characteristics of the ancient dragons: scales, claws, teeth, plus the addition of wings. Lucifer the fallen angel had wings, and so satanic dragons absorbed the feature.

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[491] Aemilia Lanyer. *Eve's Apologie in defense of Women* in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, 1611. 'But surely Adam cannot be excus'd, / Her fault, though great, yet he was most too blame; / What Weaknesse offred Strength might haue refus'd, / Being Lord of all the greater was his shame'. British Library Shelf No. C.71.h.15.

[492] One example demonstrating this is the tale of Bellerophon and the Chimera described on p.16 of this thesis. The similarities between Bellerophon and Saint George are clear.

[493] Dresvina as before, p.13.

[494] Riches, 2005, p.2.

In addition to religious texts, 'romances' featuring courtly love, knights and battles featured dragons. The dragons of the oral tradition remained, and their more dramatic elements were retained for the new medium. The belief in the existence of dragons still persisted, and as they were mentioned in the scriptures, it was perfectly acceptable to maintain that belief. In romances battles were fought for the love and honour of a fair lady, and it was not unusual for a knight to encounter a dragon. Sir Torrence, Sir Guy and Sir Bevis all have encounters with dragons, as we have seen.

The dragon was there, seemingly with no other purpose than to prove the prowess of the knight. The appearance of these romance dragons, however, was spectacular, and enthusiastically described by the author. Two of the most widely read romances, *Sir Guy of Warwick,* and *Sir Bevis of Hampton* both contain heavily armoured dragons and vicious, long-lasting battles between the beast and the eponymous hero. The dragons have scales, razor sharp teeth and claws. The description is very similar to the description of Leviathan: medieval authors took their inspiration from the early dragons, and added their own elements of size, temperament, and description. Romance dragons also have venomous breath, and the one fought by Sir Bevis breathes fire. It is notable however, that although the romances were not religious texts per se, neither knight could defeat their dragon with appealing to God for divine intervention, as would be expected by their audience/readers.

With the invention of printing in the late fifteenth century, texts and books became more available, literacy was becoming widespread, and reading for both instruction and pleasure became more commonplace. R.A. Houston declares that 'the range of available books expanded enormously between 1500-1800.'[495] The last major text in this thesis to feature a dragon is *The Faerie Queene,* written by Edmund Spenser, and published in 1590. After this, the dragon seems to have fallen out of favour, the tale of St. George became a children's story, and the belief in dragons as a reality died out. St. George has been commandeered by the politically far right, which occasionally casts a shameful shadow on his proud history.

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[495] R.A. Houston, *Literacy in early modern Europe : culture and education, 1500- 1800* (London; New York, Longman, 1988), Introduction, p6. Houston further claims 'the struggle between Reformed Faiths and the Roman Catholic Church created a powerful incentive for both religions to provide education and insist on basic literacy and religious knowledge for their adherents'. Introduction, p.7.

The second – and most important question underlying this thesis – concerned the ways in which dragons are depicted in texts, and the function that they fulfilled for medieval and Early Modern writers. The oral traditions of tales of demi-gods and heroes battling terrible beasts offered a rich vein of material which could be developed and used as both instruction, as in the hagiographies, and entertainment in the romance genre. Edmund Spenser combined all of these with polemical statement, offering a truly spectacular dragon and hero. The symbolic dragon endured across the centuries, presenting writers with a gift that keeps on giving.

In the hagiographies I have discussed, the dragons play a vital role in challenging the faith of the Christian martyrs. The dragons all appear as the manifestation of paganism, and in the legend of St. Margaret of Antioch, the dragon represents the threat of both sexual possession and masculine domination over the young female. Margaret is imprisoned and tortured initially because she will not submit to the lust of her captor. Desirous of becoming a bride of Christ, Margaret is determined that nothing will prevent her attaining her goal. She is then punished further for her absolute resolution not to deny her faith. The dragon which appears to Margaret in her cell is in response to her prayer for her enemy to be visible. The dragon, and a further manifestation of a demon (who confesses that he is Satan) are easily despatched by Margaret. Another virgin, Saint Martha of Tarascon, tames a dragon which represents paganism. She is an evangelist, preaching the word of God far from her native soil. The man-eating dragon is subdued by Martha wielding Holy water and a cross, and she binds it with her girdle, leading it to men, so it can be killed. The dragon killed by St. George is also clearly representative of paganism. In each version of his story, after saving the sacrificial virgin from being a dragon's dinner, George converts the entire population of the town to Christianity. He then rides away to complete his destiny of becoming a sacrifice himself, as a Christian martyr. In all three saints' lives, the dragon is there as a challenge to faith, as a pariah that has to be dismissed, before the protagonists can achieve their goal. In no instance is the dragon the main focus of the text. The focus is the martyrdom of Margaret and George; for Martha it is proof that God is more powerful than the Devil (which is the same in all the texts) and she can continue her evangelism without hinderance.

The virgin sacrifice itself poses a very interesting question. Presented with a young woman to feed on, the dragon appears to show no fear. This is a strange and somehow puzzling change of character. If chastity literally puts the 'fear of God' into the pagan dragons, as detailed on p.40 of this thesis, so that they cannot go near a chaste

woman, or even a pool that one has bathed in, (p.136) how would they get near enough to eat her? The answer to this anomaly of course, is the Church's teaching that chastity is the desired state for women, and the Devil (dragon) is waiting to pounce on the soul of anyone who deviates from that. Obedience is all, disobey the Church and its teachings, and your soul will be lost to the Devil. In the same way that ancient peoples invented a deity which had to be appeased in order for society to flourish, in Christian times the deity became a dragon, and the inclusion of a dragon in a didactic text or a sermon would guarantee the attention of the audience. They can fear a dragon, even if they cannot see one. To avoid a dragon, maintain the good behaviour demanded by the church.

In the medieval romances, the dragons have no purpose that impacts on the reminder of the stories. The encounters appear early in both *Guy* and *Bevis*, and there is a very long continuation of the story after the dragon-slaying. These romances are a prelude to Thomas Malory, who told of Merlin's prophecy of the red and white dragons (p.178) and referenced one proof-of-courage dragon encounter for Lancelot in his tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, (p.36). In all instances, the dragons are seemingly just there to be killed; a rite-of-passage for knights, and to add drama and excitement to a story.

Edmund Spenser, however, appears to combine every element of every dragon and every encounter. Clearly informed by early classical texts, and directly influenced by *Sir Bevis*, as discussed in the Chapter above, Spenser has modelled the fight between Red Cross and the dragon on Sir Bevis. The damaged skin, the ruined armour, the magic pool, the prayer for deliverance and the three days of combat all have parallels with Sir Bevis. Spenser makes his fearsome, vengeful dragon both the *raison d'étre* and the climax of Book I of *The Faerie Queene.*

The Spenserian dragon represents both the Catholic Church and Spenser's hatred of that religion. Book I gives several different representations of the dragon, from many-tentacled Errour, serpentine and deadly, smaller dragons held in thrall, the dragon of Revelation, to the recognisable dragon of literary tradition: winged, armoured, fire-breathing and seemingly unbeatable. The protagonist, Red Cross, goes through many trials and pitfalls until he is ready, armed with the sword of truth (Protestantism) to take on the deadly foe in a fight to the death. The world that Spenser knows and inhabits depends on the outcome of the battle. Spenser also gives an alternative dragon, in the

form of Prince Arthur's golden helmet. In this presentation, the dragon is a symbol of an adversary conquered, now offering protection and power to the conqueror. High and haughty, the golden dragon defends both Arthur's head and covers his back, and the front aspect is intimidating to his foes. Is this Spenser's acknowledgement of the dragons of earlier days when they were not portrayed as all bad? Arthur's name 'Pendragon' means head warrior in Welsh, and such a helmet is befitting for a warrior prince.[496]

The final question concerned the effect of the genre in which the dragon is used, and the ways in which the conventions of the chosen genre impact on the representation of the dragon(s). The lives of the Saints were didactic, read to or by an audience as instruction on how to live a Christian life, and prepare for a death that would lead to Heaven. For both men and women, the priority was to be a good Christian, to believe in the power of prayer, and not to give in to temptation. The dragon in all the hagiographies examined was there as a tempter, and a challenge to faith that had to be overcome. It was used to represent the worst fate for a non-believer, eternal damnation in the bowels of Hell. Saints were prepared to die for their faith; the least an ordinary mortal should do was follow the path of righteousness, and live the best life, free from sin and temptation. There was still a belief in dragons and using such metaphor for the devil was almost certain to convince the audience to be on their guard against sin.

The dragons in medieval romance are there mainly to add interest and drama to the narrative. Romances were written to entertain, and the inclusion of a dragon would add to the popularity and circulation of a text. The focus of both Guy and Bevis is the spiritual and moral growth of the knights. Guy and Bevis are not saints, but flawed, very human knights and in keeping with the conventions of romance texts, were expected to slay dragons. Calling for divine help would be expected and applauded by the reader/listener and served as a reminder that nothing could be achieved without God's help. The dragon encounters are thrilling and exciting and provide a steppingstone in the spiritual and worldly development of the knight. Guy is atoning for his sins – he has killed men whilst he was a knight. Once he is a pilgrim, he has to expunge his previous actions before he can continue his Christian journey.

> 'Bot wer & wo ichaue don wrouȝt
> & mani a man to grounde ybrouȝt,
> Þat rewes me ful sare.
> To bote min sinnes ichil wende

[496] Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru, University of Wales Press, Vol III, 1994, p. 2726-2739, "pen", "pendragon"; Vol I, 1963 p. 1081, "dragon".

Barfot to mi liues ende. (7182-7187)

His dragon therefore represents his previous sins. Guy must accept his guilt and kill his past before he can go forward. Bevis is escaping from captivity in a pagan land and has been poisoned by a serpent's venom. He fights a dragon that frees him once and for all from that captivity, and although he is covered in venom again, a well of Holy water heals him and he can continue to fight and kill the dragon; it represents his captivity and time spent in a pagan country. Bevis is once again in a Christian land and has been re-baptised into the Christian faith. Like Guy, he can now continue his journey back to his homeland, sure of the protection of God.

The *FQ* is a much more complex narrative. The genre is epic poetry, featuring allegory, whilst celebrating and supporting the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. At the same time, the poem is a work of polemic, openly condemning the Catholic Church. The influence of the classic poets, the imitation of medieval romance, and a quest to kill a dragon whilst on a journey of self-discovery were a guarantee of success. The Spenserian dragon is represented in several guises, and each one has to be defeated before the hero can continue on to the next stage of his journey to self-awareness. However, as Spenser's poem is also a polemical attack on Catholicism, each of the manifestations represents a facet of the Catholic church – priests dressed in black, misleading printed tracts and books, false idols, enemies of the country, and deception are everywhere in the work. The tone of the poem changes subtly from Canto to Canto – as Red Cross overcomes each obstacle, the light-hearted air of the first stanzas is overtaken by a darker, more ominous atmosphere. Spenser gives in the final confrontation an epic battle, raging for days, which is in turn exciting and terrifying, firing the imagination, with the life of the hero being threatened at every turn. The anthropomorphism of the dragon – its jealous rage, its rancour, the need for revenge – lifts the poem from the realm of romance almost into battle poetry. Romance tends towards enchantment, of which there is much evidence in Bk. I of *TFQ,* whereas battle poetry illustrates episodes from real war as evidenced in Anglo Saxon poetry. Red Cross's desperate fight with the dragon, and Spenser's use of descriptive language, lift the poem into a different dimension. Red Cross is unmistakably fighting a war. The reader is totally engrossed in the fight for survival of both the combatants, as Spenser's vivid descriptions continue to stimulate the imagination. The fall of the dragon is almost an anti-climax, as Spenser takes the reader back into the realm

of romance, as Red Cross is finally betrothed to Una. There is no doubt that Spenser's dragon is the focus for all his passionate dislike of Catholicism. As with the very earliest dragons, it represents fear; his fear for his Queen and his country, should Protestantism be overturned again.

The earliest texts, and most of the classical texts, portray the dragon as something to be defeated, but with honour. Ti âmat, the first mother of all foul things, after her defeat became the protector of the living, her cloven body aiding the survival of men. The dragon was a manifestation of the gods, and a worthy adversary, beaten only by another god or demi-god, giving them equal rank. The onset of Christianity however, changed that viewpoint. The dragon became the embodiment of evil, Satan in visible form. No longer noble, the dragon was outcast, reviled, and worthy only of rapid despatch by a sword-wielding knight, or a young girl wielding her faith. After the Reformation and the establishment of Protestantism the biggest difference is the work of Spenser. His dragon is an emblem of the struggle against religious bondage, misrepresentation, and calumny. Not until the very end of Book I is the threat revealed as a superbly powerful, enlarged version of the dragon encountered in the earlier works. The dragon's defensive weapons become more defensive, the dragon's tail becomes longer, its body larger, it has talons and huge wings. This bad reputation has been associated with the dragon ever since, until the twentieth century revival in the realms of popular fantasy novels and films.

The gendering of the dragon has been an interesting feature brought to the fore on this historical trail. Some of the classical dragons are female, the Hydra and Echidna for example. In particular, gender affects the way in which a dragon is defeated. The female Ti âmat is split in two, and in Barclay's poem St. George spears the female dragon through the womb, the core of her reproductive system. The iconography of Saint George as discussed by Riches shows many fifteenth and sixteenth century depictions of clearly female dragons. As the Serpent in Eden is usually depicted as female, both of these incarnations have a misogynistic slant. The sexualised female is bestial, in contrast to the chaste victim of sacrifice. In *TFQ,* the female Errour is choked and decapitated**.** It would appear that the females of the species cannot be killed cleanly, they must also be mutilated, and attacked in the site of their reproductive ability The Barclay version genders the dragon female, and it is stabbed through the 'womb infectyf' which prevents reproduction. George also completes the killing of the dragon by spearing her through the mouth, as Bellerophon did the Chimera, and Marduk did Ti âmat. All three are female dragon manifestations. Not only are they prevented from reproducing, but their ability to

speak and spit forth venom is removed too. This again reflects the anti-female attitude of the medieval mind. The male dragons of Guy and Bevis, and finally of Red Cross, are stabbed through the only vulnerable part they have, under the wing and into the heart.

My concluding observation is a mention of how the dragon was depicted artistically. In the illustrations I have provided for this thesis, the authors have described the dragon variously as huge, massive, of great length. The artistic interpretations in manuscripts and bestiaries however have shown very small dragons to scale in the texts in which they feature. St. Margaret is bursting out of a dragon so tiny that she towers above it even on her knees, and Martha is taller than the dragon she tames. St. George, on his horse is much bigger than the dragon, and in the illustration at Fig. 38, the dragon trampled beneath Elizabeth's horse is very small indeed. My interpretation of this is that the artists have deliberately diminished the dragon, to show how easily it can be defeated by a worthy adversary. Visually, then, the dragon can be shown to be an inferior enemy, when the scene can be taken in at once, and the outcome is obvious. However, when relating a story verbally, the imagination has to be fed with mental images. Depicting the dragon in superlative language creates mental images and adds a frisson of terror and excitement to the adventure. Barclay describes the dragon's body and 'myghty' and as a great 'volt' [vault]. Sir Guy's dragon is 'wider than a packhorse' and has a bristly throat. The dragon encountered by Red Cross is armoured by scales, it is vast in size, with iron teeth, massive wings like sails, burning eyes, claws, and stings in the 'huge long tayle.' It has the strength to lift both a horse and its armoured rider into the air.

In answer to the question of the role of the dragon in late medieval and early modern English literature, the purpose of the dragon is to be a scapegoat towards which all one's fear could be projected. The fear of not being able to survive the elements, the fear of being outcast, the wrong kind of worship, and a hatred of a different religion have all – in their turn – been encapsulated into the dragon. The dragon is also a representation of Christianity's darkest fear: Satan himself. The dragon is responsible in its various guises for the fall of mankind from the Grace of God. The dragon is, quite simply, a scapegoat, something which can be easily blamed for ill fortune when it is not possible to blame oneself.

It is only in the early twentieth century that writers became interested in the dragon again, and as the century progressed, the literature became more prevalent. The modern dragon leaves religion and polemic behind, and now inhabits the world of fiction

and make-believe, frequently for children. In its guise in children's literature, the once ferocious beast has become tamed and a worthy ally. For a more adult readership, the dragon becomes a sophisticated, self-governing entity, inhabiting is own world and co-existing with human counterparts. Despite this, the inclusion of a dragon will still guarantee entertainment.

Appendix i Time Line for Classical Section

The Hydra's changes.

Alceus (c. 600 B.C.) 9 heads

Simonides (c. 500 B.C.) 50 heads

Euripides (c. 400 B.C.) 100 heads.

Apollonius of Rhodes 'Argonautica' – 3rd C. B.C. Jason and the sleepless dragon of Colchis

Ladon – fought by Herakles.

First appears in Hesiod's *Theogony* 8th C. B.C.

Described by Aeschylus (525-546 B.C.) as the offspring of Ceto and Phorys – 'a terrible snake'

Described later by Sophocles (495-406 B.C.) and Euripides (480-406) as 'drākon'

7th or 6th C. Pherecydes of Syros – Ladon is the offspring of Typhon and Echidna.

Images of Ladon in his tree survive from c. 550 B.C.

Ladon is the guardian of Hera's Golden Apples.

Alexander the Great 3546 B.C. – 324 B.C. Plutarch of Chaeronia (46 A.D. – 125 A.D)

Roman Authors who referred to dragons

Livy 59 B.C. – 17 A.D.

Ovid 43 B.C. – 18 A.D.

Pliny the Elder 23-79 A.D.

Appendix ii. The Legend of Saint George

Of S. George, Martyr, and first the interpretation of his name.

George is said of geos, which is as much to say as earth, and orge that is tilling. So George is to say as tilling the earth, that is his flesh. And S. Austin saith, in libro de Trinitate that, good earth is in the height of the mountains, in the temperance of the valleys, and in the plain of the fields. The first is good for herbs being green, the second to vines, and the third to wheat and corn. Thus the blessed George was high in despising low things, and therefore he had verdure in himself, he was attemperate by discretion, and therefore he had wine of gladness, and within he was plane of humility, and thereby put he forth wheat of good works. Or George may be said of gerar, that is holy, and of gyon, that is a wrestler, that is an holy wrestler, for he wrestled with the dragon. Or George is said of gero, that is a pilgrim, and gir, that is detrenched out, and ys, that is a councillor. He was a pilgrim in the sight of the world, and he was cut and detrenched by the crown of martyrdom, and he was a good councillor in preaching. And his legend is numbered among other scriptures apocryphal in the council of Nicene, because his martyrdom hath no certain relation. For in the calendar of Bede it is said that he suffered martyrdom in Persia in the city of Diaspolin, and in other places it is read that he resteth in the city of Diaspolin which tofore was called Lidda, which is by the city of Joppa or Japh. And in another place it is said that he suffered death under Diocletian and Maximian, which that time were emperors. And in another place under Diocletian emperor of Persia, being present seventy kings of his empire. And it is said here that he suffered death under Dacian the provost, then Diocletian and Maximian being emperors.

Here followeth the Life of S. George Martyr.

S. George was a knight and born in Cappadocia. On a time he came in to the province of Libya, to a city which is said Silene. And by this city was a stagne or a pond like a sea, wherein was a dragon which envenomed all the country. And on a time the people were assembled for to slay him, and when they saw him they fled. And when he came nigh the city he venomed the people with his breath, and therefore the people of the city gave to him every day two sheep for to feed him, because he should do no harm to the people, and when the sheep failed there was taken a man and a sheep. Then was an ordinance made in the town that there should be taken the children and young people of them of the town by lot, and every each one as it fell, were he gentle or poor, should be delivered when the lot fell on him or her. So it happed that many of them of the town were then delivered, insomuch that the lot fell upon the king's daughter, whereof the king was sorry, and said unto the people: For the love of the gods take gold and silver and all that I have, and let me have my daughter. They said: How sir! ye have made and ordained the law, and our children be now dead, and ye would do the contrary. Your daughter shall be given, or else we shall burn you and your house.

When the king saw he might no more do, he began to weep, and said to his daughter: Now shall I never see thine espousals. Then returned he to the people and demanded eight days' respite, and they granted it to him. And when the eight days were passed they came to him and said: Thou seest that the city perisheth: Then did the king do array his daughter like as she should be wedded, and embraced her, kissed her and gave her his benediction, and after, led her to the place where the dragon was.

When she was there S. George passed by, and when he saw the lady he demanded the lady what she made there and she said: Go ye your way fair young man, that ye perish not also. Then said he: Tell to me what have ye and why weep ye, and doubt ye of nothing. When she saw that he would know, she said to him how she was delivered to the dragon. Then said S. George: Fair daughter, doubt ye no thing hereof for I shall help thee in the name of Jesu Christ. She said: For God's sake, good knight, go your way, and abide not with me, for ye may not deliver me. Thus as they spake together the dragon appeared and came running to them, and S. George was upon his horse, and drew out his sword and garnished him with the sign of the cross, and rode hardily against the dragon which came towards him, and smote him with his spear and hurt him sore and threw him to the ground. And after said to the maid: Deliver to me your girdle, and bind it about the neck of the dragon and be not afeard. When she had done so the dragon followed her as it had been a meek beast and debonair. Then she led him into the city, and the people fled by mountains and valleys, and said: Alas! alas! we shall be all dead. Then S. George said to them: Ne doubt ye no thing, without more, believe ye in God, Jesu Christ, and do ye to be baptized and I shall slay the dragon. Then the king was baptized and all his people, and S. George slew the dragon and smote off his head, and commanded that he should be thrown in the fields, and they took four carts with oxen that drew him out of the city.

Then were there well fifteen thousand men baptized, without women and children, and the king did do make a church there of our Lady and of S. George, in the which yet sourdeth a fountain of living water, which healeth sick people that drink thereof. After this the king offered to S. George as much money as there might be numbered, but he refused all and commanded that it should be given to poor people for God's sake; and enjoined the king four things, that is, that he should have charge of the churches, and that he should honour the priests and hear their service diligently, and that he should have pity on the poor people, and after, kissed the king and departed.

Now it happed that in the time of Diocletian and Maximian, which were emperors, was so great persecution of christian men that within a month were martyred well twenty-two thousand, and therefore they had so great dread that some renied and forsook God and did sacrifice to the idols. When S. George saw this, he left the habit of a knight and sold all that he had, and gave it to the poor, and took the habit of a christian man, and went into the middle of the paynims and began to cry: All the gods of the paynims and gentiles be devils, my God made the heavens and is very God. Then said the provost to him: Of what presumption cometh this to thee, that thou sayest that our gods be devils? And say to us what thou art and what is thy name. He answered anon and said: I am named George, I am a gentleman, a knight of Cappadocia, and have left all for to serve the God of heaven. Then the provost enforced himself to draw him unto his faith by fair words, and when he might not bring him thereto he did do raise him on a gibbet; and so much beat him with great staves and broches of iron, that his body was all tobroken in pieces. And after he did do take brands of iron and join them to his sides, and his bowels which then appeared he did do frot with salt, and so sent him into prison, but our Lord appeared to him the of same night with great light and comforted him much sweetly. And by this great consolation he took to him so good heart that he doubted no torment that they might make him suffer. Then, when Dacian the provost saw that he might not surmount him, he called his enchanter and said to him: I see that these christian people doubt not our torments. The enchanter bound himself, upon his head to be smitten off, if he overcame not his crafts. Then he did take strong venom and meddled it with wine, and made invocation of the names of his false gods, and gave it to S.

George to drink. S. George took it and made the sign of the cross on it, and anon drank it without grieving him any thing. Then the enchanter made it more stronger than it was tofore of venom, and gave it him to drink, and it grieved him nothing. When the enchanter saw that, he kneeled down at the feet of S. George and prayed him that he would make him christian. And when Dacian knew that he was become christian he made to smite off his head. And after, on the morn, he made S. George to be set between two wheels, which were full of swords, sharp and cutting on both sides, but anon the wheels were broken and S. George escaped without hurt. And then commanded Dacian that they should put him in a caldron full of molten lead, and when S. George entered therein, by the virtue of our Lord it seemed that he was in a bath well at ease. Then Dacian seeing this began to assuage his ire, and to flatter him by fair words, and said to him: George, the patience of our gods is over great unto thee which hast blasphemed them, and done to them great despite, then fair, and right sweet son, I pray thee that thou return to our law and make sacrifice to the idols, and leave thy folly, and I shall enhance thee to great honour and worship. Then began S. George to smile, and said to him: Wherefore saidst thou not to me thus at the beginning? I am ready to do as thou sayest. Then was Dacian glad and made to cry over all the town that all the people should assemble for to see George make sacrifice which so much had striven there against. Then was the city arrayed and feast kept throughout all the town, and all came to the temple for to see him.

When S. George was on his knees, and they supposed that he would have worshipped the idols, he prayed our Lord God of heaven that he would destroy the temple and the idol in the honour of his name, for to make the people to be converted. And anon the fire descended from heaven and burnt the temple, and the idols, and their priests, and sith the earth opened and swallowed all the cinders and ashes that were left. Then Dacian made him to be brought tofore him, and said to him: What be the evil deeds that thou hast done and also great untruth? Then said to him S. George: Ah, sir, believe it not, but come with me and see how I shall sacrifice. Then said Dacian to him: I see well thy fraud and thy barat, thou wilt make the earth to swallow me, like as thou hast the temple and my gods. Then said S. George: O caitiff, tell me how may thy gods help thee when they may not help themselves! Then was Dacian so angry that he said to his wife: I shall die for anger if I may not surmount and overcome this man. Then said she to him: Evil and cruel tyrant! ne seest thou not the great virtue of the christian people? I said to thee well that thou shouldst not do to them any harm, for their God fighteth for them, and know thou well that I will become christian. Then was Dacian much abashed and said to her: Wilt thou be christian? Then he took her by the hair, and did do beat her cruelly. Then demanded she of S. George: What may I become because I am not christened? Then answered the blessed George: Doubt thee nothing, fair daughter, for thou shalt be baptized in thy blood. Then began she to worship our Lord Jesu Christ, and so she died and went to heaven. On the morn Dacian gave his sentence that S. George should be drawn through all the city, and after, his head should be smitten off. Then made he his prayer to our Lord that all they that desired any boon might get it of our Lord God in his name, and a voice came from heaven which said that it which he had desired was granted; and after he had made his orison his head was smitten off, about the year of our Lord two hundred and eighty-seven. When Dacian went homeward from the place where he was beheaded towards his palace, fire fell down from heaven upon him and burnt him and all his servants.

Gregory of Tours telleth that there were some that bare certain relics of S. George, and came into a certain oratory in a hospital, and on the morning when they should depart they could not move the door till they had left there part of their relics. It is also found in the history of Antioch,

that when the christian men went over sea to conquer Jerusalem, that one, a right fair young man, appeared to a priest of the host and counselled him that he should bear with him a little of the relics of S. George. for he was conductor of the battle, and so he did so much that he had some. And when it was so that they had assieged Jerusalem and durst not mount ne go up on the walls for the quarrels and defence of the Saracens, they saw appertly S. George which had white arms with a red cross, that went up tofore them on the walls, and they followed him, and so was Jerusalem taken by his help. And between Jerusalem and port Jaffa, by a town called Ramys, is a chapel of S. George which is now desolate and uncovered, and therein dwell christian Greeks. And in the said chapel lieth the body of S. George, but not the head. And there lie his father and mother and his uncle, not in the chapel but under the wall of the chapel; and the keepers will not suffer pilgrims to come therein, but if they pay two ducats, and therefore come but few therein, but offer without the chapel at an altar. And there is seven years and seven lents of pardon; and the body of S. George lieth in the middle of the quire or choir of the said chapel, and in his tomb is an hole that a man may put in his hand. And when a Saracen, being mad, is brought thither, and if he put his head in the hole he shall anon be made perfectly whole, and have his wit again.

This blessed and holy martyr S. George is patron of this realm of England and the cry of men of war. In the worship of whom is founded the noble order of the garter, and also a noble college in the castle of Windsor by kings of England, in which college is the heart of S. George, which Sigismund, the emperor of Almayne, brought and gave for a great and a precious relique to King Harry the fifth. And also the said Sigismund was a brother of the said garter, and also there is a piece of his head, which college is nobly endowed to the honour and worship of Almighty God and his blessed martyr S. George. Then let us pray unto him that he be special protector and defender of this realm.

Source.

The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints. Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275. First Edition Published 1470. Englished by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 1900 (Reprinted 1922, 1931.)

Scanned by Robert Blackmon. bob_blackmon@mindspring.com.

Appendix iii. The Legend of Saint Margaret of Antioch

Here followeth the glorious Life and passion of the Blessed Virgin and Martyr S. Margaret, and first of her name.

Margaret is said of a precious gem, or ouche, that is named a margaret. Which gem is white, little and virtuous. So the blessed Margaret was white by virginity, little by humility, and virtuous by operation of miracles. The virtue of this stone is said to be against effusion of blood, against passion of the heart, and to confortation of the spirit. In like wise the blessed Margaret had virtue against shedding of her blood by constancy, for in her martyrdom she was most constant, and also against the passion of the heare, that is to say, temptation of the devil. For she overcame the devil by victory, and to the confortation of the spirit by doctrine, for by her doctrine she comforted much people, and converted to the faith of Christ. Theoteinus, a learned man, wrote her legend.

The holy S. Margaret was of the city of Antioch, daughter of Theodosius, patriarch and prince of the idols of paynims. And she was delivered to a nurse for to be kept. And when she came to perfect age she was baptized, wherefor she was in great hate of her father.

On a certain day, when she was fifteen years of age, and kept the sheep of her nurse with other maidens, the provost Olybrius passed by the way whereas she was, and considered in her so great beauty and fairness, that anon he burned in her love, and sent his servants and bade them take her and bring her to him. For if she be free I shall take her to my wife, and if she be bond, I shall make her my concubine. And when she was presented tofore him he demanded her of her lineage, name and religion. And she answered that she was of noble lineage, and for her name Margaret, and christian in religion. To whom the provost said: The two first things be convenient to thee, that is that thou art noble, and art called Margaret which is a most fair name, but the third appertaineth nothing to thee, that so fair a maid and so noble should have a God crucified. To whom she said: How knowest thou that Christ was crucified? He answered: By the books of christian men. To whom Margaret said: O what shame is it to you, when you read the pain of Christ and the glory, and believe one thing and deny another. And she said and affirmed him to be crucified by his will for our redemption, and now liveth ever in bliss. And then the provost, being wroth, commanded her to be put in prison. And the next day following commanded that she should be brought to him, and then said to her: O good maid, have pity on thy beauty, and worship our gods, that thou mayest be well. To whom she said: I worship him that maketh the earth to tremble, whom the sea dreadeth and the winds and creatures obey. To whom the provost said: But if thou consent to me I shall make thy body to be all to-torn. To whom Margaret said: Christ gave himself over to the death for me, and I desire gladly to die for Christ. Then the provost commanded her to be hanged in an instrument to torment the people, and to be cruelly first beaten with rods, and with iron combs to rend and draw her flesh to the bones, insomuch that the blood ran about out of her body, like as a stream runneth out of a fresh springing well. They that were there wept, and said: O Margaret, verily we be sorry for thee, which see thy body so foul, and so cruelly torn and rent. O how thy most beauty hast thou lost for thy incredulity and misbelief. Now believe, and thou shalt live. Then said she to them: 0 evil counsellors, depart ye, and go from me, this cruel torment of my flesh is salvation of my soul. Then she said to the provost: Thou shameless hound and insatiable lion, thou hast power over my flesh, but Christ reserveth my soul. The provost covered his face with his mantle, for he might not see so much

effusion of blood, and then commanded that she should be taken down, and to shut her fast in prison, and there was seen a marvellous brightness in the prison, of the keepers.

And whilst she was in prison, she prayed our Lord that the fiend that had fought with her, he would visibly show him unto her. And then appeared a horrible dragon and assailed her, and would have devoured her, but she made the sign of the cross, and anon he vanished away. And in another place it is said that he swallowed her into his belly, she making the sign of the cross. And the belly brake asunder, and so she issued out all whole and sound.

This swallowing and breaking of the belly of the dragon is said that it is apocryphal.

After this the devil appeared to her in likeness of a man for to deceive her. And when she saw him, she went to prayer and after arose, and the fiend came to her, and took her by the hand and said: It sufficeth to thee that thou hast done, but now cease as to my person. She caught him by the head and threw him to the ground, and set her right foot on his neck saying: Lie still, thou fiend, under the feet of a woman. The devil then cried: O blessed Margaret, I am overcome. If a young man had overcome me I had not recked, but alas! I am overcome of a tender virgin; wherefore I make the more sorrow, for thy father and mother have been my good friends. She then constrained him to tell why he came to her, and he answered, that he came to her to counsel her for to obey the desire and request of the provost. Then she constrained him to say wherefore he tempted so much and so often christian people. To whom he answered that naturally he hated virtuous men, and though we be oft put aback from them, yet our desire is much to exclude them from the felicity that they fell from, for we may never obtain ne recover our bliss that we have lost. And she then demanded what he was, and he answered: I am Veltis, one of them whom Solomon closed in a vessel of brass. And after his death it happed that they of Babylon found this vessel; and supposed to have founden great treasure therein, and brake the vessel, and then a great multitude of us devils flew out and filled full the air alway, awaiting and espying where we may assail rightful men. And when he had said thus, she took off her foot and said to him: Flee hence, thou wretched fiend. And anon the earth opened, and the fiend sank in. Then she was sure, for when she had overcome the master, she might lightly overcome the minister.

Then the next day following, when all the people was assembled, she was presented tofore the judge. And she not doing sacrifice to their false gods, was cast into the fire, and her body broiled with burning brands, in such wise that the people marvelled that so tender a maid might suffer so many torments. And after that, they put her in a great vessel full of water, fast bounden, that by changing of the torments, the sorrow and feeling of the pain should be the more. But suddenly the earth trembled, and the air was hideous, and the blessed virgin without any hurt issued out of the water, saying to our Lord: I beseech thee, my Lord, that this water may be to me the font of baptism to everlasting life. And anon there was heard great thunder, and a dove descended from heaven, and set a golden crown on her head. Then five thousand men believed in our Lord, and for Christ's love they all were beheaded by the commandment of the provost Olybrius, that time in Campolymeath the city of Aurelia. Then Olybrius, seeing the faith of the holy Margaret immoveable, and also fearing that others should be converted to the christian faith by her, gave sentence and commanded that she should be beheaded. Then she prayed to one Malchus that should behead her, that she might have space to pray. And that got, she prayed to our Lord, saying: Father Almighty, I yield to thee thankings that thou hast suffered me to come to this glory, beseeching thee to pardon them that pursue me. And I beseech thee, good Lord, that of thy abundant grace, thou wilt grant unto all them that write my passion, read it or hear, and to them

that remember me, that they may deserve to have plain remission and forgiveness of all their sins. And also, good Lord, if any woman with child travailing in any place, call on me that thou wilt keep her from peril, and that the child may be delivered from her belly without any hurt of his members. And when she had finished her prayer there was a voice heard from heaven saying, that her prayers were heard and granted, and that the gates of heaven were open and abode for her, and bade her come into the country of everlasting rest. Then she, thanking our Lord, arose up, and bade the hangman accomplish the commandment of the provost. To whom the hangman said: God forbid that I should slay thee, virgin of Christ. To whom she said: If thou do it not thou mayest have no part with me. Then he being afraid and trembling smote off her head, and he, falling down at her feet, gave up the ghost.

Then Theotinus took up the holy body, and bare it into Antioch, and buried it in the house of a noble woman and widow named Sincletia. And thus this blessed and holy virgin, S. Margaret, suffered death, and received the crown of martyrdom the thirteenth kalends of August, as is founden in her story; and it is read in another place that it was the third ides of July. Of this virgin writeth an holy man and saith: The holy and blessed Margaret was full of the dread of God, sad, stable, and worshipful in religion, arrayed with compunction, laudable in honesty, and singular in patience, and nothing was found in her contrary to christian religion, hateful to her father, and beloved of our Lord Jesu Christ. Then let us remember this holy virgin that she pray for us in our needs, etc.

Source.

The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints. Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275. First Edition Published 1470. Englished by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 1900 (Reprinted 1922, 1931.)

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Appendix iv. The Legend of St. Martha

Here followeth the Life of S. Martha.

S. Martha, hostess of our Lord Jesu Christ, was born of a royal kindred. Her father was named Syro and her mother Encharia. The father of her was duke of Syria and places maritime, and Martha with her sister possessed by the heritage of their mother three places, that was, the castle Magdalen, and Bethany and a part of Jerusalem. It is nowhere read that Martha had ever any husband ne fellowship of man, but she as a noble hostess ministered and served our Lord, and would also that her sister should serve him and help her, for she thought that all the world was not sufficient to serve such a guest. After the ascension of our Lord, when the disciples were departed, she with her brother Lazarus and her sister Mary, also S. Maximin which baptized them, and to whom they were committed of the Holy Ghost, and many others, were put into a ship without sail, oars, or rudder governail, of the paynims, which by the conduct of our Lord they came all to Marseilles, and after came to the territory of Aquense or Aix, and there converted the people to the faith. Martha was right facound of speech, and courteous and gracious to the sight of the people.

There was that time upon the river of Rhone, in a certain wood between Arles and Avignon, a great dragon, half beast and half fish, greater than an ox, longer than an horse, having teeth sharp as a sword, and horned on either side, head like a lion, tail like a serpent, and defended him with two wings on either side, and could not be beaten with cast of stones ne with other armour, and was as strong as twelve lions or bears; which dragon lay hiding and lurking in the river, and perished them that passed by and drowned ships. He came thither by sea from Galicia, and was engendered of Leviathan, which is a serpent of the water and is much wood, and of a beast called Bonacho, that is engendered in Galicia. And when he is pursued he casts out of his belly behind, his ordure, the space of an acre of land on them that follow him, and it is bright as glass, and what it toucheth it burneth as fire. To whom Martha, at the prayer of the people, came into the wood, and found him eating a man. And she cast on him holy water, and showed to him the cross, which anon was overcome, and standing still as a sheep, she bound him with her own girdle, and then was slain with spears and glaives of the people. The dragon was called of them that dwelled in the country Tarasconus, whereof, in remembrance of him that place is called Tarasconus, which tofore was called Nerluc, and the Black Lake, because there be woods shadowous and black. And there the blessed Martha, by licence of Maximin her master, and of her sister, dwelled and abode in the same place after, and daily occupied in prayers and in fastings, and thereafter assembled and were gathered together a great convent of sisters, and builded a fair church at the honour of the blessed Mary virgin, where she led a hard and a sharp life. She eschewed flesh and all fat meat, eggs, cheese and wine; she ate but once a day. An hundred times a day and an hundred times a night she kneeled down and bowed her knees.

On a time, at Avignon, when she preached between the town and the river of Rhone, there was a young man on that other side of the river desiring to hear her words, and had no boat to pass over. He began to swim naked, but he was suddenly taken by the strength of the water, and anon suffocate and drowned, whose body unnethe was found the next day. And when it was taken up, it was presented at the feet of Martha for to be raised to life. She then, in manner of a cross, fell

down to the ground and prayed in this manner: O Adonay, Lord Jesu Christ, which raisedst sometime my well-beloved brother, behold my most dear guest to the faith of them that stand here, and raise this child. And she took him by the hand, and forthwith he arose living and received the holy baptism.

Eusebius telleth in the book of the Historia Ecclesiastica that a woman named Emorissa, after that she was healed of our Lord, she made in her court an image like unto Jesu Christ, with cloth and hem, like as she saw him when she was healed, and worshipped him much devoutly. The herbs that grew under the image tofore that she had touched the hem, were of no virtue, but, after that she had touched it, they were of so much virtue that many sick people by them were healed. That woman Emorissa, whom our Lord healed, Ambrose saith that it was Martha. S. Jerome saith, and it is had in Historia Tripartita, that Julianus Apostata took away that image that Emorissa made, and set his own there, which, with the stroke of thunder, was all tobroken. Our Lord came to her a year tofore her death, and showed to her that she should depart out of this world, and all that year she was sick and laboured in the fevers, and eight days tofore her death she heard the heavenly fellowship of angels bearing her sister's soul into heaven, and anon did do come all the convent of brethren and of sisters, and said to them: My friends and most sweet fellows, I pray you to rejoice and enjoy with me, for I see the fellowship of angels bear the soul of my sister Mary unto heaven. O most fair and sweet sister, thou livest now with thy master and my guest in the blessed seat in heaven. And then anon Martha said to them that were present, that her death was nigh, and bade to light the tapers about her, and that they should wake unto her death. And about midnight tofore the day of her death, they that should watch her were heavy of sleep and slept, and there came a great wind and extinguished and did out the lights. She then, seeing a great tourbe of wicked spirits, began to pray and said: My father Eli, my dear guest, these deceivers be gathered for to devour me, bringing written, all the evil deeds that ever I did. O blessed Eli be not withdrawn from me, but intend in to mine help; and forthwith she saw her sister coming to her, holding a brand in her hand, and lighted the tapers and lamps, and as each of them called other by their name, Christ came to them saying: Come, my well-beloved hostess, for where I am thou shalt be with me. Thou hast received me in thine harbour and I shall receive thee in mine heaven, and all them that call upon thee, I shall hear them for thy love. Then the hour of her death approaching, she commanded that she should be borne out of the house that she might behold and look up into heaven, and to lay her on the earth, and to hold the sign of the cross tofore her, and saying these words, she prayed: My sweet guest, I beseech thee to keep me, thy poor creature, and like as thou hast vouchsafed to be lodged with me, so I beseech thee to receive me into thine heavenly harbour. And then she bade that the passion after Luke should be read tofore her, and when this was said: Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum, she gave up her spirit and died in our Lord. The next day following, that was the Sunday, whiles they said lauds about her body, and did her obsequies, and about the hour of tierce, at Petrogoricke, our Lord appeared to the blessed Frontonius singing mass, which after the epistle slept in his chair, and said to him: My wellbeloved Frontonius, if thou wilt fulfil that thou behightest long sith to my hostess Martha, arise anon and follow me. Whose commandment he obeyed, and suddenly both came to Tarascona, and singing the office about the body and the other answering, they with their own hands laid the body into the sepulchre. And troth it was that at Petrogoricke, when they had sung in the choir and the deacon should go read the gospel and receive the benediction, they awoke the bishop, demanding the benediction. Then the bishop awoke and said: Why have ye awakened me, my brethren? Our Lord Jesu Christ hath led me to his hostess Martha, and we have laid her in her sepulchre. Now send thither messengers for to fetch our ring of gold and our gloves, which

whiles I made me ready to bury her, I delivered them to the sexton, and I have forgotten them there because ye awoke me so soon. Then were messengers sent forth, and as the bishop said, they found his ring and one glove which they brought again, and that other the sexton retained for a witness and memory. And the blessed Frontonius added thereto, saying that after her sepulture, a brother of the same place, a learned man in the law, demanded of our Lord what was his name? To whom he answered not, but showed a book open in his hand in which was written this versicle: In everlasting memory shall be my rightful hostess, and she shall dread none evil in the last day; and when he should turn the leaves of the book, in every leaf he found that same written, where afterward many miracles were showed and done at her tomb. Then Clovis, king of France, was after this made a christian man, and baptized of S. Remigius, and suffering great pain in his reins, came to her tomb and there received very health. For which cause he enriched that place, and the space of three miles way about on both sides of the river of Rhone, as well towns as castles, he gave to the same place, and that place he made free. Martilla, her servant, wrote her life, which afterward went into Sclavonia, and there preached the gospel of Christ, and after ten years, from the death of Martha, she rested in our Lord. Then let us pray to this blessed Martha, hostess of our Lord, that after this short life we may be harboured in heaven with our blessed Lord Jesu Christ, to whom be given joy, laud and praising, world without end. Amen.

Source.

The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints. Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275. First Edition Published 1470. Englished by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 1900 (Reprinted 1922, 1931.)

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List of Abbreviations.

BL	British Library
LA	*Legenda Aurea (The Golden Legend)*
MED	Middle English Dictionary
METS	Middle English Texts Society
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OMD	Online Medieval Dictionary
SEL	South English Legendary
TFQ	*The Faerie Queene*

Fig. 1. Dragon Egg Sculpture circa 2002. Created at Chester Masonry by Gabriel.

Fig 2. The Enuma-Elish. Neo-Assyrian period, 7th century BCE.

Fig. 3. From an Akkadian cylinder seal. Two deities fighting a seven-headed dragon – circa 2200 BC.497 Illustration from Brandon, 'Creation Legends of the Near East', facing page 5. Cylinder seals were a small, carved stone cylinder that was used **to** make an impression in wet clay. When rolled on the wet clay, the seal left an impression that could prove ownership or identity.
https://www.historyonthenet.com/mesopotamian-cylinder-seals Accessed 28 July 2021.

Fig. 4a. Humbaba © Michael Lubowski, 2015

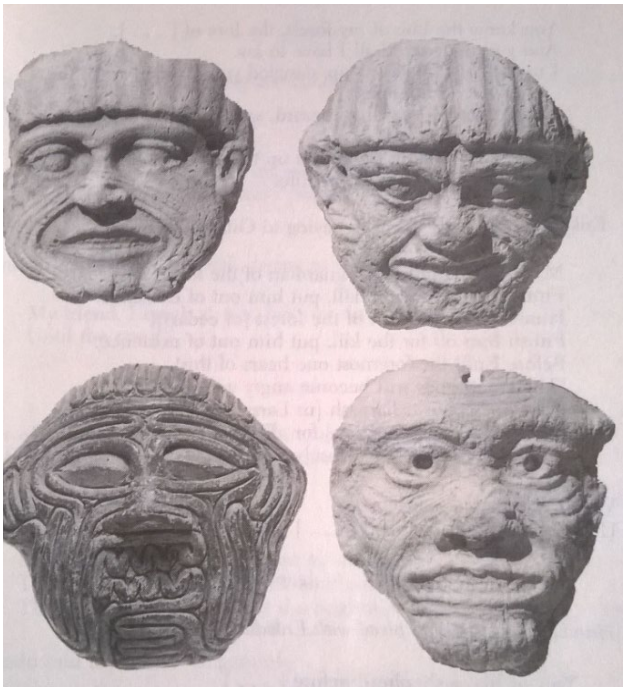


Fig. 4b. How the Mesopotamians imagined Humbaba.
©Yale Babylonian Collection

Fig. 5a. Minoan Statue circa 1,600 B.C.
Public Domain courtesy of Wikipedia

Fig. 5b. Dryad, dancing circa 460-450

Fig. 5c. Aka Gorgoneion Medusa - Tête de Méduse, by Rubens (c. 1618)
Public Domain. Courtesy of Wikipedia

Fig. 6. Serpent-footed Typhoeus,
Chalcidian black-figure hydria (three-handled vase) B.C. Antikensammlungen, Munich

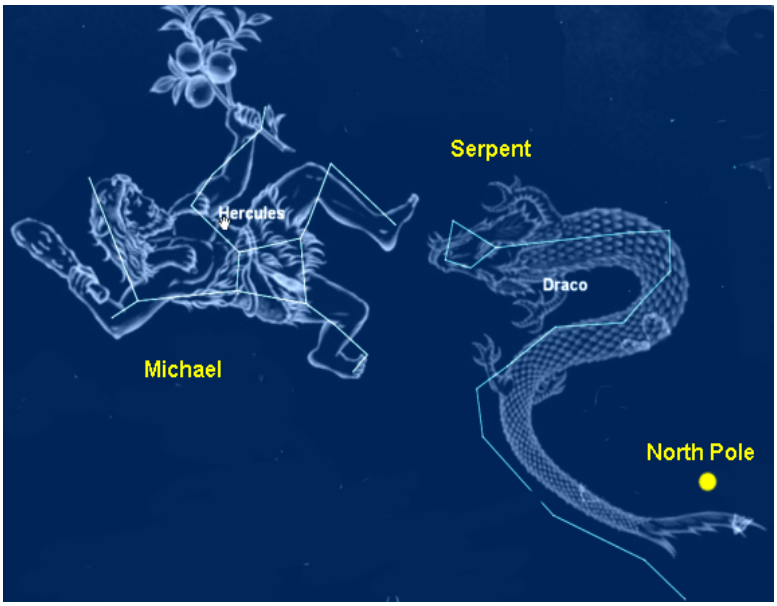


Fig.7. The Constellations of Hercules and Draco, as they appear in late September on Michaelmas Eve. Hercules in this position is also called Michael, for the Angel who threw the Serpent out of Eden.[498]

Fig. 8. Dragon attacking an Elephant.
c.1225-1250. MS. Bodley 764 Bodleian Library.

[498] There is no evidence that the Serpent was thrown out of Eden – the interpretation should more correctly read Lucifer (Dragon) against whom Michael fought in the War in Heaven.

Fig. 9a. Rod of Asclepius

Fig. 9b.. A Caduceus

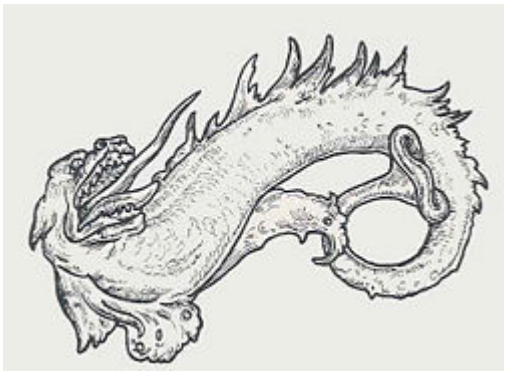


Fig. 10. Leviathan with a dragon-like head and tail

Fig. 11. Eve and the Serpent
The Furtmeyr Bible, Berthold Furtmeyr c.1465 Bavarian State Library.

Fig. 12. St. Michael defeats the dragon and rescues a soul from its mouth.
From the Prayer-book of Archbishop Arnulph II of Milan (998-1018)
Egerton MS 3763,f.104v. British Library.

Fig.13. Merlin showing King Vortigern (5th Century CE) the dragons beneath his castle.
From the Vulgate Cycle Ms (1316 CE). British Library.

Fig.14. Assumption of the Virgin - Nicola Filotesio. 1515.
The Holy Girdle being caught by Doubting Thomas.
Close- up detail from larger painting.

Fig. 15. Miniature from a 13th-century Passio Sancti Georgii (Verona)

Fig.16. Medieval Woodcut circa 1515 – Frontispiece to Barclay's Life of St. George.
Trinity College Cambridge, Pr. Bk. VI.I.13. AI. In the above frontispiece illustration from

Barclay's poem, St. George is seen in full armour, spearing the dragon through the throat. The princess is on her knees praying, and by her side is a lamb, a reference to the lambs that have been previously sacrificed to the dragon. Her parents can be seen looking on from the city walls. There are bones in the foreground, and a skull that looks human.

Fig.17. Folios 48v-49r:
Flanders: c.1460 Sp. Coll MS Euing 3
The Annunciation (Matins) Book of Hours.

Fig.18. St. Margaret of Antioch escaping from the belly of the dragon

Fig 19. Detail of a bas-de-page scene of St Margaret being thrown into prison, and escaping from the belly of the dragon, from the Taymouth Hours, England, 2nd quarter of the 14th century, Yates Thompson MS 13*, f. 86v.*

Figure 20. B.L. Harley MS 2985 f. 37v C12569-03. God, the Father, can be seen blessing the Saint from the Heavens.

Fig. 21. Folio 66r - the dragon, continued. De basilisco; Of the basilisk.
From the Aberdeen Bestiary. Circa 1200 A.D.

Fig 22a. – the reliquary of Sainte-Marthe. Collégiate Sainte-Marthe. Tarascon

Fig 22b – a close-up of the reliquary of Sante-Marthe. Collégiate Sainte-Marthe. Tarascon.

Fig. 23. St. Martha's fourth century sarcophagus in a third century crypt
in the Collegiate Sainte-Marthe, Tarascon.

Fig 24.. Martha Taming the Tarasque . Border: Martha Preaching. Hours of Henry VIII, in Latin. Illuminated by Jean Poyer, France, Tours. c.1500. The Morgan Library & Museum.

Fig. 25. Bonnacon, Bonasus, 'Vile kow'. (A beast like a bull, that uses its dung as a weapon) Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen Gl. kgl. S. 1633 4º, Folio 10r 499

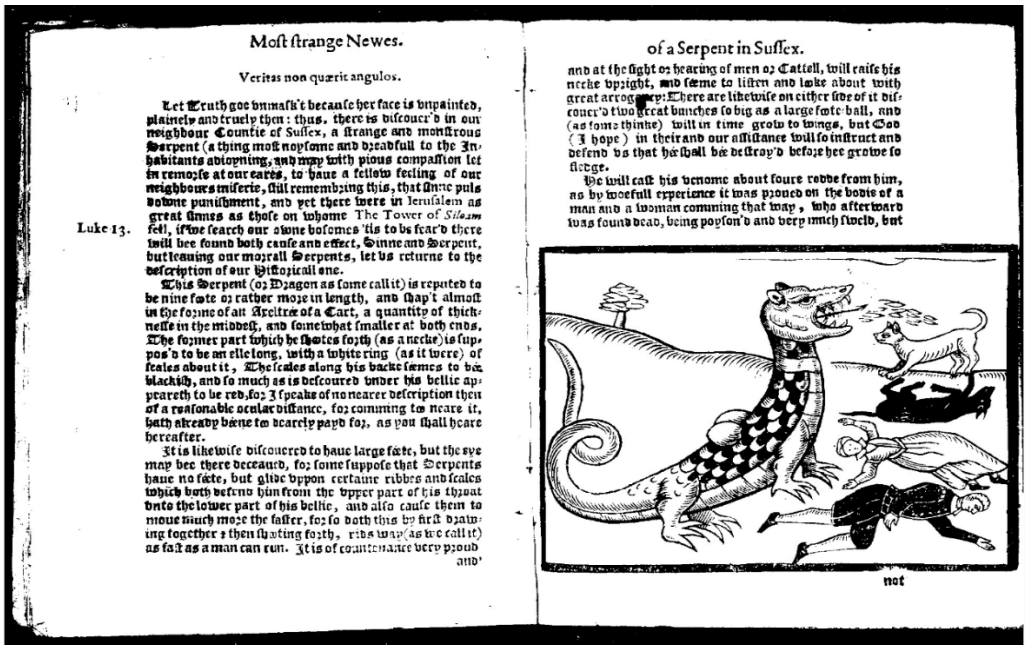
[309] *Bestiarius* - Bestiary of Anne Walshe Location: Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen, Denmark. The Bestiary of Anne Walshe (Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek Gl. kgl. Saml. 1633 4°) is a Latin bestiary of English origin, produced circa 1400-25. It is now in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, Denmark, and has been made available as an electronic facsimile which has been published on the Web. David Badke A Paper for Medieval Studies 452 *: The Illustrated Book in the Later Middle Ages* (University of Victoria, Dr C. Harding, 2001). [Accessed 16 August 2018]. It is not known who Anne Walshe is, or if she owned the book. From scribbles in the margins she would appear 'to be a child practising her handwriting'. There is no further information on the English ownership.

Fig.26. Illustrated MS. British Library, Harley MS 3244, 58v-59
Bestiary 1236c – 1250. British Library Collections.
Miniatures of bees collecting pollen from flowering plants, and below, of doves nesting in the peridens tree. A dragon waits below the peridens' branches, hoping to have an opportunity to catch one of its enemies, the dove, according to the text. On the opposite page, a snake is depicted in the upper miniature, and a dragon below.

Fig, 27. Dragon in fifteenth-century Italian herbal. © The British Library, Sloane 4016, f. 38

Fig. 28.. Guy of Warwick. Taymouth Hours f.14r
BL Yates Thompson MS 13 c.1325-1340

Fig. 29.. Bevis of Hampton. M S19.2.1 Auchinleck Manuscript.
National Library of Scotland.



Most ſtrange Newes.

Veritas non quærit angulos.

Let Truth goe vnmaſk't becauſe her face is vnpainted, plainely and truely then: thus, there is diſcouer'd in our neighbour Countie of Suſſex, a ſtrange and monſtrous Serpent (a thing moſt noyſome and dreadfull to the Inhabitants adioyning, and may with pious compaſſion let in remorſe at our eares, to haue a fellow feeling of our neighbours miſerie, ſtill remembring this, that ſinne puls downe punishment, and yet there were in Ieruſalem as great ſinnes as thoſe on whome The Tower of *Siloam* Luke 13. fell, if we ſearch our owne boſomes 'tis to be fear'd there will bee found both cauſe and effect, Sinne and Serpent, but leauing our morall Serpents, let vs returne to the deſcription of our Hiſtoricall one.

This Serpent (or Dragon as ſome call it) is reputed to be nine foote or rather more in length, and shap't almoſt in the forme of an Axeltree of a Cart, a quantity of thickneſſe in the middeſt, and ſomewhat ſmaller at both ends. The former part which he ſhotes forth (as a necke) is ſuppos'd to be an elle long, with a whitering (as it were) of ſcales about it. The ſcales along his backe ſeemes to be blackiſh, and ſo much as is diſcouered vnder his bellie appeareth to be red, for I ſpeake of no nearer deſcription then of a reaſonable ocular diſtance, for comming to neare it, hath already beene too dearely payd for, as you ſhall heare hereafter.

It is likewiſe diſcouered to haue large feete, but the eye may bee there deceaued, for ſome ſuppoſe that Serpents haue no feete, but glide vppon certaine ribbes and ſcales which both defend him from the vpper part of his throat vnto the lower part of his bellie, and alſo cauſe them to moue much more the ſafter, for ſo doth this by firſt drawing together & then ſhooting forth, ribs wap (as we call it) as faſt as a man can run. It is of countenance very proud and

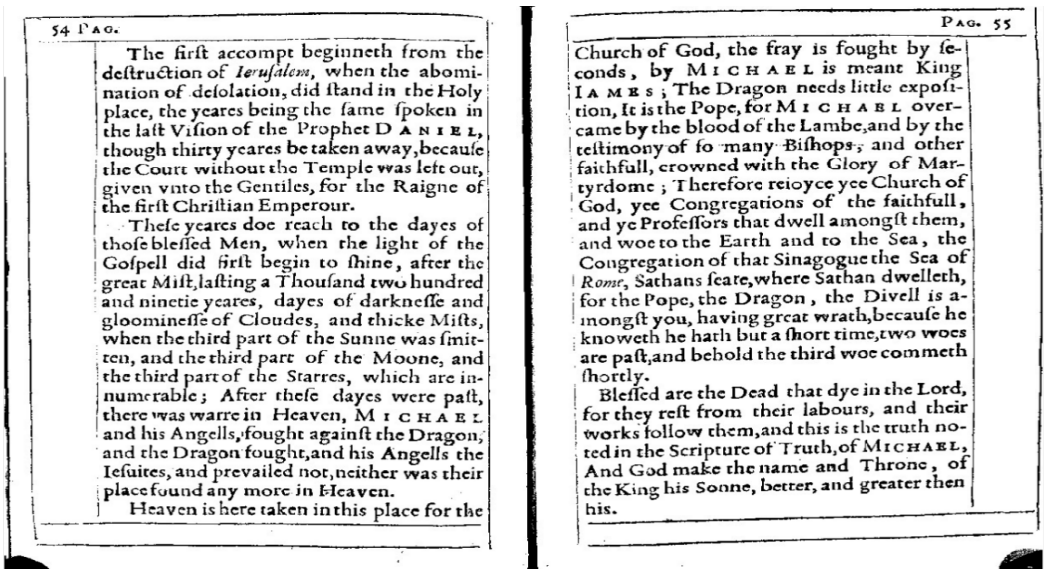
of a Serpent in Suſſex.

and at the ſight or hearing of men or Cattell, will raiſe his necke vpright, and ſeeme to liſten and looke about with great arrogancy: There are likewiſe on either ſide of it diſcouer'd two great bunches ſo big as a large foote-ball, and (as ſome thinke) will in time grow to wings, but God (I hope) in their and our aſſiſtance will ſo inſtruct and defend vs that he ſhall bee deſtroy'd before hee growe ſo ſtrong.

He will caſt his venome about foure rodde from him, as by woefull experience it was proued on the bodie of a man and a woman comming that way, who afterward was found dead, being poyſon'd and very much ſwolne, but

not

Fig. 30. 'True And Wonderfull', August 1614. Pp12-13 Early English Books Online.



54 PAG.

The firſt accompt beginneth from the deſtruction of *Ieruſalem*, when the abomination of deſolation, did ſtand in the Holy place, the yeares being the ſame ſpoken in the laſt Viſion of the Prophet DANIEL, though thirty yeares be taken away, becauſe the Court without the Temple was left out, given vnto the Gentiles, for the Raigne of the firſt Chriſtian Emperour.

Theſe yeares doe reach to the dayes of thoſe bleſſed Men, when the light of the Goſpell did firſt begin to ſhine, after the great Miſt, laſting a Thouſand two hundred and ninetie yeares, dayes of darkneſſe and gloomineſſe of Cloudes, and thicke Miſts, when the third part of the Sunne was ſmitten, and the third part of the Moone, and the third part of the Starres, which are innumerable; After theſe dayes were paſt, there was warre in Heaven, MICHAEL and his Angells, fought againſt the Dragon, and the Dragon fought, and his Angells the Ieſuites, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in Heaven.

Heaven is here taken in this place for the

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Church of God, the fray is fought by ſeconds, by MICHAEL is meant King IAMES; The Dragon needs little expoſition, It is the Pope, for MICHAEL overcame by the blood of the Lambe, and by the teſtimony of ſo many Biſhops, and other faithfull, crowned with the Glory of Martyrdome; Therefore reioyce yee Church of God, yee Congregations of the faithfull, and ye Profeſſors that dwell amongſt them, and woe to the Earth and to the Sea, the Congregation of that Sinagogue the Sea of *Rome*, Sathans ſeate, where Sathan dwelleth, for the Pope, the Dragon, the Divell is amongſt you, having great wrath, becauſe he knoweth he hath but a ſhort time, two woes are paſt, and behold the third woe commeth ſhortly.

Bleſſed are the Dead that dye in the Lord, for they reſt from their labours, and their works follow them, and this is the truth noted in the Scripture of Truth, of MICHAEL, And God make the name and Throne, of the King his Sonne, better, and greater then his.

Fig. 31. A Warning to the Dragon and All His Angels. EEBO 1625.

Fig, 32. The Tudor Pattern Book. Fol. 033r Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 1504

Fig 33. The Whore of Babylon on her beast in a coloured woodcut (created in the workshop of Lucas Cranach) from Martin Luther's translation of Revelation 17 (1534)

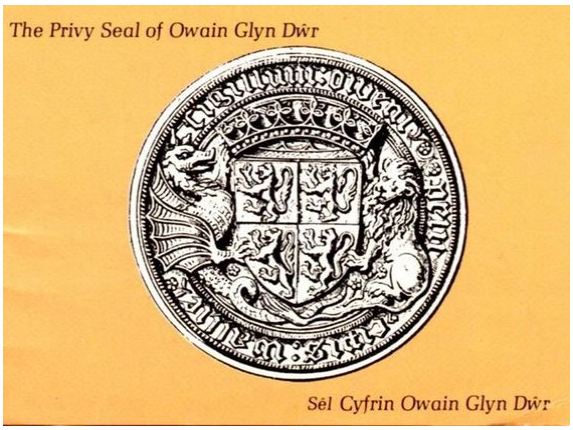

Fig. 34. The Privy Seal of Owain Glyndwr, showing a dragon on the left.

Fig.35. Heraldic tabard with the Arms of Philip II of Spa
Image from The Heraldry Society.

Fig. 36. . The Mouth of Hell. Circa 1500.
St. Mary the Virgin Church, Fairford, Gloucestershire, England.

Fig.37. The ‘Armada Portrait’ depicting Elizabeth I as Gloriana.
Unknown English Artist. 1588. Woburn Abbey.

Fig. 38. Portrait of Queen Elizabeth seated on horseback cross-saddle; under her feet a dragon and in the background the Armada and the army at Tilbury. c.1625 Print made by: Thomas Cecill 1625-1640 Published by: Peter Stent.