

 

## The role and symbolism of the dragon in vernacular saints' legends, 1200-1500

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### Abstract

This thesis looks at the role and function of the dragon in the saint's encounter with the monster in texts, written primarily in the vernacular, 1200-1500. Those connotations accrued by the dragon relevant to this thesis are traced from the beginnings. Although by the middle ages the role of the dragon is reduced to one primary function, that of evil and significantly, the evil of the dragon never loses completely its ancient roots. They help to colour its function within the symbolic use of the dragon in vernacular texts, generally consistent, although allowing for didactic emphases. However, the two legends this thesis concentrates are those of St George and Caxton's Golden Legend and St Margaret and the Katherine Group. Each reveals tensions between the hagiographic and romance topoi when the dragon's role departs from the hagiographic topos. Firstly, the role of the dragon is identified by a comparison with the dragon in romance. Allowing for cross-fertilisation, this thesis focuses on the significance of the dragon fight and the saint's dragon encounter to the tension between the ethos of the romance and hagiographic genres respectively. Tensions are created in hagiographic text when the romance topoi of the dragon fight is used in conjunction with the hagiographic encounter, as in the legend of St George. In the legend of St Margaret, the dragon's appearance unbalances and unsettles the perspective of the hagiographic text when its role and function are deployed in the promulgation of virginity.

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