St George as Romance Hero

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The close relationship and interaction between romance and hagiography have, over the past few decades, become a commonplace of the criticism of medieval narrative literature.[1] Whereas most discussions of this topic deal with the growth of religious idealism in romance, here I shall concentrate rather on the development of hagiography in the direction of romance in the specific case of the legend of St George.

In a classic series of articles published in the early years of this century, J.E. Matzke documented the development of this legend from its earliest known forms to its 'romanticization' in the work of Richard Johnson at the end of the sixteenth century.[2] What I wish to do here is to consider in more detail some later forms of the story (from the introduction of the dragon-fight onwards) and, in particular, to reassess the nature of the relationship between the story of St George in Johnson's *Seven Champions of Christendom* and the Middle English romance of *Sir Bevis of Hampton*. I hope thereby to demonstrate that a radical 'romanticization' of the George legend was probably current in England at a much earlier date than has commonly been supposed hitherto.

As G.H. Gerould pointed out long ago,[3] two main factors determine the constitution of a saint's legend: documentary evidence and popular imagination. The bare historical facts as to the acts and passions of the martyrs and other saints of the early Christian Church underwent a steady and typical process of accretion. Even, or perhaps particularly, legends of the most dubious authenticity developed according to a recognizable sequence, certain miracles following one another in a traditional and almost necessary order; thereby becoming allied to folk-story, these legends acquired a similar power of self-perpetuation. Changes in detail occurred, sometimes in order to impart an air of historical verisimilitude to the legend, sometimes for the sake of increasing its miraculous nature or of underlining a specific doctrinal

point. Often this new or modified material won a spurious authority through its inclusion in what were otherwise would-be authentic accounts. By the early tenth century these tendencies had reached a point of culmination, and it had become common practice to use saints' legends as exempla either to supplement or to replace sermons.[4] Their effectiveness in this role would depend to a great extent upon how successfully form and doctrinal content were integrated within them; their materials were often, therefore, consciously selected to a specific aesthetic–moral end.

That Ælfric at least among the early English hagiographers did not consider himself absolutely bound by his sources is indicated in his preface to his *Lives of Saints* (late tenth-century):

> Unum cupio sciri hoc uolumen legentibus, quod nollem alicubi ponere duos imperatores siue cesares in hac narratione simul, sicut in latinitate legimus; sed unum imperatorem in persecutione martyrum ponimus ubique; Sicut gens nostra uni regi subditur, et usitata est de uno rege non de duobus loqui ... Hoc sciendum etiam quod prolixiores passiones breuiamus uerbis, non adeo sensu, ne fastidiosis ingeratur tedium si tanta prolixitas erit in propria lingua quanta est in latina; et non semper breuitas sermonem deturpat sed multotiens honestiorem reddit.
>
> [I desire that one point should be especially noted by them that read this book, viz. that I do not like in any passage to speak of two emperors or Cæsars in the story at the same time, as we read of in the Latin; but I everywhere speak of *one* emperor as being concerned in the persecution of the martyrs; just as our own nation is subject to *one* king, and is accustomed to speak of one king, and not of two ... It is to be further noted that I abridge the longer narratives of the Passions, not as regards the sense but in the language, in order that no tediousness may be inflicted on the fastidious, as might be the case if as much prolixity were used in our own language as occurs in the Latin; and we know that brevity does not always deprave speech but oftentimes makes it more charming.][5]

An element of deliberate editing – and not simply an inability to distinguish between the historically true and the spurious – thus helped to determine the forms of a legend transmitted to posterity; and if the 'truth' of a saint's legend is not held to be synonymous with factual accuracy, it can draw on the same stock of material as does romance to embody its moral preoccupations.[6] The legend of St Eustace, for example, can employ motifs already widespread in folktale and purely secular story in order to illustrate its theme of patient suffering for the Christian faith.[7] Such practice can result in fully fledged allegory (as, later, in the work of Spenser or Bunyan), but completely developed allegory is not characteristic of medieval hagiography, where one rather finds a partial symbolism, by means of which Christian virtues and the contingencies which evoke their practice are represented in extreme, almost archetypal, form – not among the trials of daily life but in terms of exaggerated physical conflict or endurance, the enemies of good often appearing in the form of monsters or of tyrants, such as are typical also of romance literature.

The use in saints' legends of a stock of narrative motifs upon which romance also draws gives rise to the danger of misinterpretation: through its associations with purely secular story, a motif can have as it were a 'devaluing' effect in a hagiographic context, its symbolic significance being lost to view in such a way that the saint's achievement becomes identical in quality and import to that of the romance hero. When a narrative element in hagiography thus becomes capable of being read as romance, it becomes possible for the saint's legend to import from romance further motifs which may bear no thematic relation to its original meaning, and thus to draw so near to romance proper as to be barely, if at all, distinguishable from it.

Much of what I have said is exemplified in the successive transformations of the legend of St George. (In the account which follows, I shall deal only very summarily with the history of the legend up to the introduction into it of the dragon-fight, since the earlier stages have been very fully documented elsewhere, particularly in the work of Matzke.)

The earliest clear evidence of a legend of St George occurs in a papal *pronunciamento* of AD 494,[8] but the legend of his martyrdom had already by this time developed in such a way that Pope Gelasius pronounced apocryphal the version of it then current, condemning it as the work of heretics.[9] That the story thus condemned had developed to a large extent along traditional lines and in accordance with certain

literary conventions seems to be indicated by the degree in which the Coptic Acts, which belong to this early apocryphal version, conform to a pattern typified by other Coptic lives of saints.[10]

The following resumé of the substance of the Latin Acts indicates the general character of this apocryphal form of the George legend:

> The devil urges Dacian, emperor of the Persians, to persecute the Church. At this time lived George of Cappadocia, a native of Melitena. Melitena is also the scene of his martyrdom. Here he lived with a holy widow. He was subjected to numerous tortures, such as the rack, iron pincers, fire, a sword-spiked wheel, shoes nailed to his feet; he was put into an iron box, set within with sharp nails, and flung down a precipice; he was beaten with sledge hammers, a pillar was laid on him, a heavy stone dashed on to his head; he was stretched on a red-hot iron bed, melted lead was poured over him; he was cast into a well, transfixed with forty long nails, shut into a brazen bull over a fire, and cast again into a well with a stone round his neck. Each time he returned from a torment, he was restored to full vigour. His tortures lasted seven years! His constancy and miracles were the means of converting 40,900 men, and the empress Alexandra. Dacian then ordered the execution of S. George and the empress; and as they died, a whirlwind of fire consumed and carried off the persecutor.[11]

In the light of Gelasius' strictures – in which the emphasis seems to have been as much on the legend's doctrinal unsoundness as on its dubious historicity – a canonical version of the saint's passion was prepared, with the intention that it should supersede the apocryphal; some attempt was here made to redress the balance between the marvellous and the credible and to eliminate such features as smacked of heresy.[12] The number of the saint's miracles and tortures was greatly reduced, and an air of historicity was imparted by the introduction of the name of Diocletian, whereby the death of George became connected with the tenth persecution of the Christians.[13]

The apocryphal version of the legend continued to flourish, however, modified both by the influence of the canonical and by changes in individual data. Sometimes these changes emphasized the

element of the miraculous, sometimes they were designed to give the story historical verisimilitude.[14]

The co-existence of the apocryphal and canonical versions of the George legend, and the hybrid forms which grew up as the result of their interaction,[15] placed a large body of material of more or less dubious historicity potentially at the disposal of later hagiographers. The way in which these selected and shaped their material according to their own particular moral preoccupations and to the doctrinal points they wished to make can be seen, for example, through a comparison of some of the earliest surviving treatments in English of the St George legend.

There are few omissions or additions of narrative substance in Ælfric's treatment of his Latin source,[16] but thematically the emphasis in his version of the George story is very much on the theological issues involved in the contention between George and Dacian. George's martyrdom is seen in terms of battle between opposing faiths: at the approach of death, the saint

> þancode ða gode eallra his godnyssa .
> þæt he hine gescylde wið þone swicolan deofol .
> and him sige forgeaf þurh soðne geleafan .
>
> [thanked God for all His mercies, / that He had shielded him against the deceitful devil, / and had given him victory through the true faith].[17]

In most versions of the late thirteenth-/early fourteenth-century *South English Legendary*,[18] on the other hand, all George's miracles and deeds of active witness are entirely omitted, attention being focused exclusively on the theme of his passive endurance for the Christian faith; while the writer of the later *Scottish Legendary* (early fifteenth century) stresses the value of George's witness as an instrument of conversion, using it to link thematically the account of his martyrdom and that of the dragon-fight, which is also here included.[19]

It is from the introduction of the dragon-fight into the George story that the most radical and far-reaching changes in the saint's legend result. The earliest extant version of this episode is that of Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14473 (s. xii),[20] and the earliest representation of it in England is on a twelfth-century tombstone at Conisborough in Yorkshire;[21] but the story owes its widespread

popularity to Jacopo de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, dating from the mid- to late thirteenth century.[22]

The precise nature of the influences that led to the connection with the figure of St George of this ancient narrative motif can only be surmised, but it would appear to be a reflection of contemporary changes in the concept of the nature of saintliness.[23] As Europe became predominantly Christian, and the opportunities for martyrdom became less, there was a movement towards the celebration of a more active and militant mode of Christian virtue, a movement to which Crusading propaganda gave an added impetus and which culminated in the concept of the *miles christianus*.[24] This movement may already have had its effect upon the popular medieval image of St George before he acquired his dragon; certainly during the Crusades he became the tutelary saint of the Christian armies, often appearing in order to give encouragement and aid in time of need.[25] It is at this period that he would have acquired the red cross on a white shield which was to become his distinctive symbol, this being already well established as the badge of the Crusading armies.[26] His most celebrated appearance was at the siege of Antioch during the First Crusade;[27] and later Richard I was to place his armies under the saint's protection.[28] As Matzke points out, he would be a natural choice for such a role, in that he had, according to certain versions of his legend, been a soldier during his lifetime.[29] Between the end of the Crusading era and the end of the fourteenth century he was increasingly identified with ideals of chivalry, and various chivalric orders, including that of the Garter, took him for their patron.[30] It may be that his elevation to the status of dragon-slayer can be interpreted as an attempt to crystallize this more militant aspect of his saintly nature in a single memorable image. In a sense it bridges the gap between George the martyr and George the warrior saint: while superficially, in its portrayal of armed combat against a flesh-and-blood enemy of good, it seems more closely related to the concept of the latter, at a more symbolic level it also reiterates the themes of triumph over death and evil implicit in the story of his martyrdom.

In the *Legenda Aurea* itself and in most subsequent medieval versions of the St George legend, the story of the saint's dragon-fight and that of his martyrdom are both included, but a gradual shift in emphasis, both narrative and thematic, can be observed in a comparison of some of these versions.

In the *Legenda Aurea*, attention is divided equally between the dragon-fight and the martyrdom of St George. The actual fight is described only very briefly,[31] but the seeds of romance are already present in de Voragine's treatment of the legend. Whereas in hagiography attention is characteristically focused almost exclusively on the central figure of the saint, the case here is already otherwise. In the account of the events leading up to the dragon-fight, the situation is seen almost entirely from the point of view of the king and citizens of Silena, and the emphasis is very much on the human element in the princess's plight,[32] so that it is difficult to see the episode simply as an allegory of the deliverance of the Church from error, as some later commentators have done.[33]

The emphasis in this version of the dragon episode is on victory as a means to conversion.[34] This is also true of those versions of the *South English Legendary* that treat of the dragon,[35] of the *Scottish Legendary* and, in particular, of a fourteenth-century French poem where the princess's conversion becomes a condition upon which her preservation is dependent:

> Saint George dist a la meschine:
> 'Fille, vous estes sarinzine,
> Mais se vous voulez en Dieu croire,
> Le serpent ne vous puet mal faire.'[36]

The value of St George's achievement in Christian terms has not yet, then, been lost to view.

In Mirk's *Festial* (later fourteenth century), attention is more exclusively concentrated on the figure of the saint than it is in the *Legenda Aurea* and is still fairly equally divided between dragon-fight and martyrdom, both stories being rather summarily treated. Mirk's dragon does, however, display more of a tendency than his rather passive predecessors to behave according to the best romantic traditions, 'spyttyng out fure, and profer[yng] batayll to George'.[37]

The fifteenth-century *Speculum Sacerdotale* shows a new shift in emphasis. George's martyrdom is presented only in the barest outline, and clearly did not engage the author's imagination to any considerable extent. The dragon-fight is treated much more fully and, rather illogically, follows the account of the martyrdom – perhaps because it was felt to be the true climax of the saint's career.[38]

The tendency to relegate George's martyrdom to second place is also evinced, to some extent, in Lydgate's 'Legend of St George', where, although the events of the martyrdom are recounted fairly fully and, in terms of sheer bulk, occupy a substantial part of the poem, the main emphasis falls upon St George as knight. Thus, for example, Lydgate's twofold exegesis of the saint's name, derived in essence from the *Legenda Aurea*, elaborates the second interpretation of George's name (as denoting 'knighthood and renoun') much more fully than does its source:

> Þis name George by Interpretacioun
> Is sayde of tweyne, þe first of hoolynesse,
> And þe secound of knighthood and renoun,
> As þat myñ Auctour lykeþe for to expresse,
> Þe feond venqwysshing of manhoode and prowesse,
> Þe worlde, þe flesshe, as Crystes owen knight,
> Wher-euer he roode in steel armed bright.[39]

As is evident from this passage, Lydgate keeps the symbolic significance of the conflict very clearly in view in his account of the dragon-fight. By contrast, Mantuan's version, in his *Georgius* of 1510,[40] is much romanticized. Explicit parallels are drawn to secular story (the princess, for example, 'Stabat ut Andromede monstris exposta marinis'),[41] and the actual battle is more prolonged and is described in the kind of detail that lends excitement and suspense to the narrative. Furthermore, as is invariably the case in the dragon-fights of romance, the monster is killed in battle, whereas in all the other versions of George's dragon-fight hitherto discussed it is merely subdued, and not killed until after the conversion of the people of Silena.[42]

Mantuan's works were enormously widely read, and continued to be reprinted steadily for some time during the sixteenth century.[43] The progressive 'romanticization' of the St George legend may, then, be largely attributable to him; his version of the George story would have achieved a still wider readership in England through its translation into English by Alexander Barclay, whose poem on the life of St George was printed by Richard Pynson in 1515.

Barclay's poem is a fairly close translation of Mantuan's Latin; and the 'oryson' with which it concludes shows that the poet was

imaginatively engaged by George the dragon-slayer and patron of soldiers far more than by George the martyr:

> Lyke as thou lyuynge gladly defendydest ryght
> Assystynge wretchys in care and mysery
> So for thy seruauntys be redy nowe to fyght
> Agaynste the olde serpente and auncyent enmy
> Graunt vs to vanquysshe this worlde transytory
> With all blynde fraudys and folyes of the same
> And that our soules may the vyle carkas tame ...
>
> Mars hath had honoure in many a regyon
> As god of batayle for actys excellent
> But this thy royalme the takyth for patron
> For thy bolde actys for god omnypotent
> Boldly abyden in purpose permanent
> Thou drad no tyrant dyenge for equyte
> Graunt all thy knyghtys of the same sect to be.[44]

Although, as this quotation shows, Barclay keeps his eye on the deeper significance of George's deeds of prowess, his actual account of them perpetuates the more romantic features of Mantuan's treatment of the legend; and, in as far as Mantuan's and Barclay's works and their evident popularity can be regarded as reflecting contemporary attitudes, it is clear that by the early sixteenth century George's martyrdom had assumed a secondary place and that the saint had come to be celebrated primarily for achievements which formed no part of his original legend.[45]

Perhaps it was the ability of the George legend to attract to itself motifs from other stories and thereby to develop towards romance that led Pope Clement VII, in the 1530s, to order the excision of the dragon-story from the office-books of the Church and to pronounce that George was thenceforth to be venerated for his martyrdom alone.[46] The Roman Church's official position on the subject, however, had little if any effect on the cult of St George in England. Clement's pronouncement was more or less contemporaneous with the English Church's break with Rome, and furthermore St George – whose popularity had grown since the Synod of Oxford had proclaimed his feast a general holiday in 1222, who figures prominently in the insignia of the Order of the Garter (established in the late 1340s), and

who had beeen elevated to the status of patron saint of England by the mid-fourteenth century[47] – was too widely celebrated as dragon-slayer both in literary and in sub-literary culture to be easily eradicated as such from popular imagination. Hence this part of his legend survived and, when the Protestant Church's reaction against the veneration of saints led to a decline in the cult of George the martyr, caused him to be remembered as a folk-hero long after the more truly saintly aspects of his story had been largely forgotten.[48] Thenceforth, apparently, almost any liberty could be taken with his story, as the work of Richard Johnson attests.

While far from being of the finest literary quality, Johnson's *Seven Champions of Christendom* was enormously widely read for some two centuries after the appearance of the first part in 1596.[49] Johnson borrowed extensively from a variety of sources, including the classics and Shakespeare,[50] but probably his greatest single debt (at least in that part of his work that treats of St George) is to the Middle English romance of *Sir Bevis of Hampton*.[51]

Apparently the first to recognize this debt was Thomas Percy, who in June 1762 wrote to Richard Farmer:

> I am convinced you are right with regard to the Æra of the 7 Champions: but I have to-day made a discovery with regard to that book: which is that the principal Features of St George's story are from the Old Romance in rhyme of Bevis of Southampton: Almost everything of consequence relating to the single story of St George is very literally copied from Bevis.[52]

He goes on to cite several examples of correspondence between *7Ch* and *Bevis*, and then continues: 'Beside the story of Sabra's being delivered of 3 Children in a lonely wood is evidently borrowed from the History of Bevis ... with some variations.'[53] The very striking verbal similarities between certain parts of the two works led Percy to write to Thomas Warton the younger later in the same year: 'The whole History of St George and the Fair Sabra, in the first part [of *7Ch*], is nothing more than the Old Romance of Bevis reduced to prose; and for the most part with little or no alteration of the expression.'[54] Percy's conclusions as to the relationship between Johnson's work and Bevis were incorporated in the introductory note to 'The Birth of St. George' in the third volume of his *Reliques of*

Ancient English Poetry (1765),[55] and thus became more generally known and accepted.

Both Percy, however, and more recently Matzke seem to me to have misapprehended the precise nature and extent of Johnson's debt to *Bevis*, through a failure fully to appreciate his methods. I wish to examine in particular Matzke's inference that it is possible to assume 'an early fusion of the Beves story with the George legend'[56] dating from the early fourteenth century. In so doing, I hope to throw some light on the manner and degree in which the legend of St George had already been 'romanticized' before Johnson wrote. I shall begin, however, by attempting to indicate the nature of Johnson's literary method and of what I take to be his own particular kind of originality.

Many episodes in Johnson's treatment of the story of St George are borrowed wholly or in part from *Bevis*, to which *7Ch* is also considerably indebted stylistically: just as, elsewhere, the language of Shakespeare is borrowed by Johnson for descriptive purposes,[57] so also the version of *Bevis* represented by the printed editions of the romance is quoted verbatim in such passages as the account of George's battle with the dragon, in the description of the palace at Damascus and in that of George and Sabra's reunion.[58] Though, however, several features of Johnson's narrative have been taken over wholesale from *Bevis*, with such lack of critical attention as in some cases to give rise to internal inconsistencies in his story,[59] other episodes in *7Ch*, while corresponding in general outline to episodes in *Bevis*, betray in differences of detail the operation of other influences.

The dragon-fight, as the Appendix below makes clear, owes a great deal to *Bevis* stylistically, and it also derives several of its narrative details thence. There are, however, substantial differences, and these appear to be due rather to Johnson's use of a number of different sources than to any marked degree of creative originality on his part: thus, the events leading up to the battle and the part played in them by the king's daughter are strongly reminiscent of the story of St George as found in the *Legenda Aurea*,[60] while the attempt made by Almidor to rob George of the glory of victory seems to owe as much to the Tristan story in its occurrence at this stage in the narrative and in its motivation as it does to *Bevis* in the form that it takes.[61]

The most striking difference between *Bevis* and *7Ch* in their respective accounts of their heroes' dragon-fights consists in the fact that the function fulfilled in *7Ch* by the orange tree is performed in *Bevis* by a well in which a virgin has bathed, and which protects the

hero from the dragon and heals his wounds.[62] Johnson's tree appears to be related to the Peridexion of the bestiaries:

> Fructus autem arboribus illius dulcis est totus ualde, et suauis. Columbe autem delectantur in fructu arboris illius: habitant autem in ea pascentes fructu eius. Inimicus est autem dracho columbis, timet autem arborem illam et umbram eius, in qua columbe demorantur: et non potest draco adpropiare columbis neque umbre eius.[63]
>
> [The fruit of those trees is indeed most sweet and agreeable. Doves delight in the fruit of that tree: they dwell in it, feeding on its fruit. Now the dragon is the doves' enemy, but it is afraid of the tree in which the doves dwell and of its shade: and the dragon cannot approach the doves or its shade.]

There are, however, several pieces of evidence, slight and inconclusive individually but perhaps significant collectively, that even its employment in a romance setting is not original with Johnson. Thus a misericord at St Mary, Beverley (Yorks.) appears to represent such a tree playing a similar part in a battle between man and dragon;[64] and the dragon episodes in the stories of Tristan, Guy of Warwick and Degaré all contain references to trees whose relevance to the action is so tenuous as to suggest that they may be vestigial reminiscences of a more fully developed motif in some earlier romance.[65] In view of the fact that both Johnson and Spenser, probably independently of each other, use the motif in connection with the figure of St George, it may even be that that saint was the subject of the lost source whose possible existence I have suggested.[66] Whether, however, Johnson was indeed following some other source at this point or whether he himself was responsible for adapting bestiary material to the purposes of romance, he borrowed here more than he created.

Hence, although the parallels between this part of Johnson's work and *Bevis* are perhaps, by reason of the close verbal similarities, more striking than are the correspondences of Johnson's account to other possible sources, it is clear that *Bevis* was not the only influence at work here. Johnson was not a highly creative writer by any means; but I see no reason to assume that the combination of elements from a wide variety of sources was not original with him.

Matzke seems to me to have overestimated in general Johnson's direct debt to *Bevis*, in which romance he, like Percy, sees the immediate source of that part of his story which concerns the birth of the heroine's children in the forest.[67] Both Josian in *Bevis* and Sabra in *7Ch* are delivered of more than one child in the forest; both have urged their husbands to absent themselves during the labour. In *7Ch* Proserpine acts as midwife. Following the delivery, Josian is carried off by Bevis's giant page, Ascopart, who has turned traitor; while Sabra has her children seized by wild animals. Despite certain parallels (which include verbal echoes), then, the differences are substantial; though *Bevis* must have suggested the *type* of episode to be used here, I hope to demonstrate that these differences can probably be attributed to Johnson's having drawn on an earlier romance tradition which was already associated with St George and which had developed independently of the influence of the Bevis story.

Matzke, apparently unprepared to recognize the possibility of Johnson's having been the first to combine the legend of St George with the Bevis romance, sees evidence of the early fusion of these two stories in a French manuscript of 1311 which contains, among a large number of other items, two poems which are both concerned in part with St George.[68]

One of these, published under the title of *Le Roman d'Auberon*,[69] constitutes a prologue to *Huon de Bordeaux* and deals largely with the birth and early career of Auberon, who is the son of Julius Caesar and Morgan le Fay and twin brother to St George, and who is later to play a large part in the story of Huon. That part of the poem (lines 1801–2137) which deals specifically with the fortunes of George is of great interest in its affinities with *Bevis* and *7Ch*.

At the time of Christ's Nativity and the Flight into Egypt George is in Persia, where he becomes the lover of the Sultan's daughter. When she reveals to him that she is pregnant, George and she flee together, eventually stopping to rest by a fountain on Mount Noiron. Here George encounters and finally kills a serpent, but the sight of his wounds causes the lady to faint and her labour to begin. She insists that George absent himself; and at this moment the Virgin Mary appears on the scene, in company with Joseph and the Infant Christ, and assists in the delivery of the child. She then washes Christ in the water of the fountain and bids George bathe in it; he does so and becomes 'plus sains que poissons qui noa' (1932). George now arms himself and rides into the forest in quest of food; after an altercation

with thirty-four brigands, he kills three of them and puts three more to flight. The three who have fled go to Mount Noiron, where they cut off Joseph's moustaches and take both his staff and George's child, but George, returning with food, meets and kills them and returns their spoils to their respective owners. Joseph's moustaches are miraculously restored by the Virgin, and George's zeal in the service of God is hereby strengthened (1998–2000).

The other (unpublished) poem,[70] which concerns the life of the Virgin and the *enfances* of Christ, is in large part a fairly faithful paraphrase of the first chapter of St Luke's Gospel, but it also reiterates much of the narrative material that I have just summarized, though from a rather different viewpoint.

The part of the poem with which I am here concerned[71] begins at the point at which the Holy Family, during the Flight into Egypt, comes upon St George and his consort, he lying wounded since his battle with the serpent, she suffering the pains of labour. After an account of the sufferings and lamentations of the pair, the poem goes on to tell how the Virgin brings about the lady's delivery (her child being St Mark the Evangelist) and George's recovery from his wounds:

> Notre dame, Sain te Marie,
> Le naure chevalier escrie,[72]
> & il i vint sanglans & mas.
> La sainte Verge prent les dras
> Dont ses biax enfes fu vestus.
> Quant il fu devestus tous nus,
> Dedens la fontainne est plongies,
> & S. Iorges si est baignies,
> Dont fu plus sains que nus poissons.

The subsequent arming of George is described at greater length than in *Le Roman d'Auberon*. The newborn son of George and the beard and staff of Joseph are later stolen by brigands, but before this a female ape carries off the Infant Christ to the top of a high tower. Needless to say, all is eventually satisfactorily resolved.

Both poems, then, contain narrative features which, in a general way, resemble certain episodes in *Bevis* and in *7Ch*: the killing of a serpent/dragon, the birth of children in the course of a journey, and the separation of mother and child through human or animal agency find parallels in both the later romances, while George's revival through the

waters of a fountain corresponds to Bevis's refreshment in the well during his dragon-fight, and the intervention of the Virgin as midwife to that of Proserpine in *7Ch.*

As far as *Bevis* is concerned, however, these correspondences are only of the most general kind: the circumstances surrounding the combat with the serpent/dragon are quite different; the fountain in the French poems plays no part in the battle itself; and in *Bevis*, after a confinement in which the Virgin Mary is only invoked for spiritual aid, it is the mother – not the children – who is forcibly carried away.[73] Far, therefore, from accepting Matzke's conclusions as to the influence of the Bevis story upon the French poems, I would agree with Jean Subrenat that 'on ne peut voir dans *Boeve de Hanstone* une source de l'épisode du *Roman d'Auberon* ... les différences sont trop importantes'.[74]

I would suggest, rather, that a romantic tradition, of which the Turin manuscript poems are representative, grew up around the figure of St George and, through its general correspondences with the romance of Bevis, facilitated the fusion of the stories of George and Bevis in, and not before, the work of Johnson. The agreements of Johnson's story with the French poems against *Bevis* – the intervention of a superhuman midwife, the carrying-off of newborn children by animals[75] and the prevalence of fantastic and miraculous elements - may be attributable to Johnson's having been acquainted with this romantic George tradition and, in accordance with his usual practice of narrative conflation, combined elements from it with material drawn from *Bevis.*

Earlier I outlined the gradual 'romanticization' of the George legend in Middle English devotional works; but the tradition represented by the French poems attests the existence of a much more radical 'romanticization' as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century. It seems probable that this tradition co-existed with the other in England – perhaps at a sub-literary level – and came into its own when the Reformation brought about a new freedom in the way in which the stories of saints could be regarded and handled. There is, indeed, evidence to suggest that such may have been the case: both the Taymouth and the Carew-Poyntz Horae, as well as the stained glass in St Neot's Church, Cornwall, represent 'Comment nostre dame resuscita saint jorge' and his subsequent arming;[76] and the frequent allusions in Middle English to St George as 'Our Lady's knight' may be in part referable to such a tradition.[77] Finally, there is in King's College

Chapel, Cambridge, a carving which represents the carrying-off of a newborn child by a wild animal, in association with the figure of St George. The scene affords an exact parallel to Johnson's treatment of the episode of childbirth in the forest – and to no other version of the incident known to me – in that it depicts three newborn children, one of which has been seized by a lion. Yet this carving – whose intimate connection with the Reformation is, as it were, symbolized by the intertwined monograms of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn that adorn the surmounting screen – antedates Johnson's work by some sixty years.[78]

It would seem therefore that, in some respects at least, Johnson was the heir of a long-standing tradition with regard to the George legend. The history of that legend demonstrates how, by using non-factual story as a means of expressing symbolic truths, the legends of saints become capable of being assimilated into the world of romance. That the stories of saints and those of the heroes of romance appealed in the same way to the same people is indicated by, for instance, those Books of Hours whose margins are peopled indiscriminately by figures from hagiography and from secular story.[79] The appeal of both genres is rooted ultimately in the human need to beautify life by the creation of ideals and of heroes who can embody those ideals. The danger exemplified by the legend of St George is that idealism can so easily degenerate into wish-fulfilment and the uplifting into the merely escapist.

NOTES

A version of this paper was read at the second meeting of the Society for the Study of Medieval Romance in April 1990. I am grateful for the comments and criticisms of those present on that occasion.

1 See, for example, T. Wolpers, *Die englische Heiligenlegende des Mittelalters* (Tübingen 1964), pp.259ff. *et passim*; Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London 1968), pp.17, 120-58; Kathryn Hume, 'Structure and perspective: romance and hagiographic features in the Amicus and Amelius story', *JEGP*, 69 (1970), 89-107; *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 6 (1975), *passim*; Margaret Hurley, 'Saints' lives and romance again: secularization of structure and motif', *Genre*, 8 (1975), 60-73; Diana T. Childress, 'Between romance and legend: "secular hagiography" in Middle English literature', *Philological Quarterly*, 57 (1978), 311-22; Margaret Bradstock, '*Sir Gowther:* secular hagiography or hagiographical romance or neither?', *AUMLA*, 59 (1983), 26-47; Susan Crane Dannenbaum, '*Guy of Warwick* and the question of exemplary romance', *Genre*, 17 (1984), 351-74.

2 J.E. Matzke, 'Contributions to the history of the legend of Saint George', *PMLA*, 17 (1902), 464-535; 18 (1903), 99-171; and 'The legend of Saint

George: its development into a *roman d'aventure*', *PMLA*, 19 (1904), 449-78.
3 G.H. Gerould, *Saints' Lives*, Types of English Literature (Boston & New York 1916), ch. ii.
4 *Ibid.*
5 *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, 2 vols, EETS, OS 76, 82, 94, 114 (London 1881-1900), I, 2-5; the translation is Skeat's (as are the italics).
6 Similarly, Christian concepts can be expressed in the terms of a non-Christian ethos: thus in the Old English *Andreas* the relationship between God and man is seen as a kind of *comitatus* bond: God is a *winedryhten* (919) and his disciples on earth *þeodnes þegnas* (3), while heaven is seen as an idealized version of the hall of an earthly lord (871-88); the relationship between Andreas and his followers is seen in like terms (405-14). Line references are to *Andreas, and The Fates of the Apostles*, ed. Kenneth R. Brooks (Oxford 1961).
7 See G.H. Gerould, 'Forerunners, congeners and derivatives of the Eustace legend', *PMLA*, 19 (1904), 335-448; Thomas J. Heffernan, 'An analysis of the narrative motifs in the legend of St. Eustace', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 6 (1975), 63-89.
8 Matzke, 'Contributions' (1902), p.464. An earlier reference in Eusebius may be to the George legend, though the saint is not named: see *The Lives of the Saints*, ed. S. Baring-Gould, new and rev. edn, 16 vols (London 1914), IV, 302n.; Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris 1909), p.70. In ch. iii of his work, Delehaye offers a survey of the early history of the George legend and assesses the story's historicity.
9 Matzke, 'Contributions' (1902), p.464.
10 *Ibid.*, p.479.
11 *Lives of the Saints*, ed. Baring-Gould, IV, 304.
12 Matzke, 'Contributions' (1902), p.481. Delehaye, however (*Les Légendes grecques*, p.46), disputes the canonical/apocryphal dichotomy.
13 Matzke, 'Contributions' (1902), p.481.
14 *Ibid.*, pp.487-91.
15 Matzke, 'Contributions' (1903), pp.99-106.
16 *Ibid.*, p.146.
17 Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. Skeat, pp.306-19 (lines 163-5); the translation is Skeat's.
18 *The South English Legendary*, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, 2 vols, EETS, OS 235, 236 (London 1956), I, 155-9. (This edition does not, however, take all manuscripts into account: cf. n.35 below.)
19 *Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. W.M. Metcalfe, 3 vols, The Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh & London 1888-96), III, 176-368 (lines 5-13, 311-14, 865-8). Lines 865-8 are not in the Scottish *Legendary*'s source: see *ibid.*, III, 367.
20 Matzke, 'Legend', p.450.
21 G.J. Marcus, *Saint George of England* (London 1929), p.71.
22 Matzke, 'Legend', p.451. See *Jacobi a Voragine Legenda Aurea vulgo Historia Lombardica dicta*, ed. Th. Graesse, 2nd edn (Leipzig 1850), pp.260-2.

[23] Cf. David N. Klausner, 'The nature and origins of didacticism in some Middle English romances' (unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1967), pp. 5-6.
[24] See R.R. Bolgar, 'Hero or anti-hero? The genesis and development of the *miles christianus*', in *Concepts of the Hero in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Norman T. Burns and Christopher Reagan (1975; repr. London, 1976), pp.120-46. The concept is, of course, adumbrated in the New Testament (Ephesians vi.11-17), but there the sense is still allegorical or symbolic rather than literal.
[25] Matzke, 'Contributions' (1903), pp.147-58, and 'Legend', pp.449-50; Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven & London 1984), p.47.
[26] Cornelia Steketee Hulst, *St George of Cappadocia in Legend and Historry* (London 1909), pp.53-4 and 61.
[27] Marcus, *Saint George of England*, p.39; Hulst, *St George of Cappadocia*, pp.51 and 58; Matzke, 'Contributions' (1903), pp.152-3.
[28] David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford 1978), p.166; cf. Hulst, *St George of Cappadocia*, p.66.
[29] Matzke, 'Contributions' (1903), p.150.
[30] See Hulst, *St George of Cappadocia*, ch. iv; cf. Keen, *Chivalry*, pp.182 and 189.
[31] *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Graesse, p.261.
[32] See *ibid.*, pp.260-1: 'Tunc rex videns, quod non posset filiam liberare, induit eam vestibus regalibus et amplexatus eam cum lacrymis dixit: heu me, filia mea dulcissima, de te filios in regali gremio nutrire credebam et nunc vadis, ut a dracone devoreris. Heu me, filia mea dulcissima, sperabam ad tuas nuptias principes invitare, palatium margaritis ornare, tympana et organa audire, et nunc vadis, ut a dracone devoreris. Et deosculans dimisit eam dicens: utinam, filia mea, ego ante te mortuus essem, quam te sic amisissem! Tunc illa procidit ad pedes patris petens ab eo benediction suam: quam cum pater cum lacrymis benedixisset, ad lacum processit.'
[33] Cf., for example, Hulst, *St George of Cappadocia*, p.12.
[34] Cf. n. 42 below.
[35] See R.E. Parker, 'A northern fragment of "The Life of St. George"', *Modern Language Notes*, 38, (1923), 97-101. The manuscript from which Parker's text is edited (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, MS Z.822, N.81) and London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 223 are the only *South English Legendary* manuscripts to contain the dragon story.
[36] Matzke, 'Contributions' (1903), pp.158-71 (lines 73-6).
[37] *Mirk's Festial*, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS, ES 96 (London 1905), p.133.
[38] *Speculum Sacerdotale*, ed. Edward H. Weatherly, EETS, OS 200 (London 1936), p.130.
[39] 'The Legend of St. George', in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, 2 vols, EETS, ES 107 and OS 192 (London 1911-34), I, 145-54 (lines 15-21). Cf. *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Graesse, p.259.
[40] The text of Mantuan's work is reproduced in the margins of *The Life of St. George* by Alexander Barclay, ed. William Nelson, EETS, OS 230 (London 1955).
[41] *Ibid.*, p.39.

[42] The *Legenda Aurea* indeed states: 'In aliquibus tamen libris legitur, quod, dum draco ad devorandam puellam pergeret, Georgius se cruce munivit et draconem aggrediens interfecit' (ed. Graesse, p.262). Since, however, Mantuan clearly used the *Legenda Aurea* (see *The Life of St. George by Alexander Barclay*, ed. Nelson, p.xix), he must have known the alternative version of the episode presented there; his choice of the less usual form of the motif would, then, be as much indicative of a 'romanticizing' tendency as would his creation of it.

[43] See *The Life of St. George by Alexander Barclay*, ed. Nelson, p.xvi; E.Ph. Goldschmidt, *Medieval Texts and their First Appearance in Print*, Supplement to the Bibliographical Society's Transactions, 16 (London 1943), p.44.

[44] *The Life of St. George by Alexander Barclay*, ed. Nelson, lines 2689-95 and 2703-9.

[45] Similarly, St Cecilia, originally celebrated as a martyr, owed her enduring popularity to associations which formed no part of her original legend, the associations in this case being with music: see Richard Luckett, 'The legend of St. Cecilia in English literature: a study' (unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1972).

[46] *Lives of the Saints*, ed. Baring-Gould, IV, 305.

[47] Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, p.166; Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context 1270-1350* (Woodbridge 1982), ch. v; Marcus, *Saint George of England*, p.55.

[48] There is evidence, however, that there were scenes of martyrdom in a sixteenth-century play of St George: see the reference to 'tormentors' axes' as properties, in Maragret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London 1981), p.229. It has also been pointed out that St George's martyrdom makes him particularly appropriate as protagonist in the Mummers' Play, which is essentially concerned with death and regeneration: see Alan Brody, *The English Mummers and their Plays: Traces of Ancient Mystery* (London 1970), p.125.

[49] Chapbook versions of *7Ch* were produced in the eighteenth century: see Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: the Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London 1964), p.30; and in some form or other Johnson's work was known to Wordsworth: see *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, ed. E. de Sélincourt, 2nd edn, rev. H. Darbishire (Oxford 1959), v .344.

References to *7Ch* are, unless otherwise stated, to *The Most Famous History of the Seauen Champions of Christendome* ... (London 1596) (= STC 14677).

[50] He alludes more than once, for example, to the story of Philomela and Procne (*The Famous History of the Seven Champions of Christendom* ..., 2 parts in 1 (London 1696), Part I, sig. [Q4]^{r}; Part II, sig. C2^{r}), though in at least one such passage his debt seems to be rather to *Titus Andronicus* than to the original legend); and in ch. xii of the third part of *7Ch* (1616) he borrows a descriptive passage from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (ed. Clifford Leech (London 1969), II.vii.25-30).

[51] All references will be to Jennifer Fellows, '*Sir Beves of Hampton*: study and edition' (unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1980), 5 vols (hereafter *Bevis*).
[52] *The Correspondence of Thomas Percy & Richard Farmer*, ed. Cleanth Brooks, The Percy Letters, ed. David Nichol Smith and Cleanth Brooks (Baton Rouge, La 1946), pp.3-4.
[53] *Ibid.*, p.4.
[54] *The Correspondence of Thomas Percy & Thomas Warton*, ed. M.G. Robinson and Leah Dennis, The Percy Letters, ed. David Nichol Smith and Cleanth Brooks (Baton Rouge, La 1951), p.39.
[55] Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 3 vols (London 1765), III, 214-15.
[56] Matzke, 'Legend', p. 468.
[57] See n. 50 above.
[58] *7Ch*, pp.15-17, 24, 109-15 (cf. *Bevis*, III, lines 2335-2454, 1153-76 and 1818-1958).
[59] Thus when George, after seven years' imprisonment, comes to the castle where Sabra is a queen, he overhears her soliloquizing about her intention to remain a virgin for his sake (*7Ch*, p.111), but later, in a passage which echoes *Bevis* closely (see *Bevis*, III, lines 1941-50), appears to be ignorant of the fact that she is still a virgin.
[60] *7Ch*, pp.14-15; cf. *Legenda Aurea*, pp.260-1.
[61] Cf. *Sir Tristrem*, ed. E. Kölbing, Die nordische und die englische Version der Tristan-Sage, 2 (Heilbronn 1882), lines 1492-8. Like Almidor, the steward in Tristrem is motivated by sexual jealousy; in *Bevis* the equivalent attack is made after the hero's boar-fight and has nothing to do with jealousy in love.
[62] *Bevis*, III, lines 2373-81.
[63] *Physiologus Latinus Versio Y*, ed. Francis J. Carmody, University of California Publications in Classical Philology, 12:7 (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1941), p.116.
[64] See G.L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (Oxford 1969), and compare the description of the fourth misericord from the west on the north side of St Mary, Beverley (p.177) to that in the corresponding position in Ripon Minster (p.182).
[65] *Sir Tristrem*, ed. Kölbing, lines 1459-60; *The Romance of Guy of Warwick. Edited from the Auchinleck MS. ... and from MS. 107 in Caius College, Cambridge*, EETS, ES 42, 48, 49 (London 1883-91), lines 7271ff.; *Sir Degaré*, in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, ed. W.H. French and C.B. Hale, 2 vols (New York 1930), I, 287-320 (line 361). Dr Judith Weiss has drawn my attention to the presence of both tree and fountain in the dragon-fight in *Fouke Fitz Warin: Roman du XIV^e siècle*, ed. Louis Brandin, Classiques français du moyen âge (Paris 1930), pp.65-6.
[66] It is extremely unlikely on chronological grounds that Johnson influenced Spenser; see also H.W. Willkomm, *Über Richard Johnsons Seven Champions of Christendom (1596)* (Berlin 1911), p.31. And in view of substantial differences in the handling of the tree motif, it seems unlikely that Johnson was drawing on *The Faerie Queene* (though Dr Marion Wynne-Davis has pointed out to me that 'impoysoned', used by Johnson, is a very Spenserian

locution). With regard to the association between the tree motif and St George, see Hulst, *St George of Cappadocia*, p.101; for a fuller discussion of Spenser's use of romance motifs in this part of *The Faerie Queene*, see *Bevis*, I, 134-6.

67 *7Ch*, pp.192-5; cf. Bevis, III, lines 3275-3300.

68 Matzke, 'Legend', p.472. The manuscript (Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, MS L.II.14) is described briefly in *Le Roman d'Auberon: prologue de 'Huon de Bordeaux'*, Textes littéraires français, 202 (Paris & Geneva 1973), pp.xiii-xv, and more fully in E.G. Wahlgren, 'Renseignements sur quelques manuscrits français de la Bibliothèque nationale de Turin', *Studier i Modern Språkvetenskap*, 12 (1934), 79-124, and in Edmund Stengel, *Mittheilungen aus französischen Handschriften der Turiner Üniversitäts-Bibliotek bereichert durch Auszüge aus Handschriften anderer Bibliotek, besonders der National-Bibliotek zu Paris* (Halle 1873), pp.11-38. The manuscript is largely devoted to the Huon cycle, to which *Le Roman d'Auberon* belongs; it also contains a text of the Continental French *Beuve de Hantone*. The similarities between the two French poems discussed here may perhaps suggest common derivation from a still earlier source.

69 See n. 68 above.

70 The poem occupies fols 25^{r}-47^{r} and 49^{r}-79^{r} of the manuscript, and is often extremely difficult, if not impossible, to read, owing to the manuscript's having been badly damaged by fire in January 1904. Brief extracts only are printed in Wahlgren, 'Renseignements', and in A. Graf, *I complementi della chanson d'Huon de Bordeaux ... I. Auberon* (Halle 1878), p.xvi. I am grateful to the librarian of the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria of Turin for allowing me to attempt to read the manuscript.

71 Fols 42^{ra}-43^{vb}.

72 The manuscript here reads *escrire*.

73 In some continental versions of the romance, one of the children is carried off with his mother: see C. Boje, *Über den altfranzösischen Roman von Beuve de Hamtone*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie, 19 (Halle 1909), p.39. However, neither this nor any other detail of any of the variant versions of the Bevis story seems to me to affect my argument materially at this point.

74 *Le Roman d'Auberon*, ed. Subrenat, p.lix.

75 This is, of course, a common motif: see the articles cited in n. 7 above; but an exact parallel to Johnson's form of it, also in association with St George, is afforded by the King's College carving described below.

76 Taymouth Horae (now London, British Library, MS Y.T.13, described in M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Second Series of Fifty Manuscripts (Nos. 51-100) in the Collection of Henry Yates Thompson* (Cambridge 1902), p.54), fols 153^{v}-154^{r}; Carew-Poyntz Horae (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 48, described in M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum* (Cambridge 1895), pp.100-20), fols. 151^{v}-153^{r}. See also Henry Grylls, *Descriptive Sketch of the Windows of St Neot Church, in Cornwall*, 3rd edn (Devonport 1844).

77 See Bevis, V, 119 (note to line 3575).

[78] See John Saltmarsh, *Carving in King's Chapel*, with photographs by Richard Tilbrook and Lettice Ramsey (Cambridge 1970), pp.18 and 33; Jennifer Fellows, 'On the iconography of a carving in King's College Chapel, Cambridge', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 39 (1976), 262.
[79] Scenes from *Bevis* and from *Guy of Warwick* as well as from hagiography are depicted, for example, in the Taymouth Horae, fols 8^{v}-16^{r} and 17^{r}. On these, see Linda Brownrigg, 'The Taymouth Hours and the romance of *Beves of Hampton*', *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700*, I (1989), 222-41.

APPENDIX

The following passage from *7Ch* is an unedited transcript from the first edition, though no attempt has been made to distinguish between gothic and roman type in the original. Italics and superscript letters are used to draw attention to parallels with following excerpts from *Bevis*. All punctuation in the *Bevis* passages is editorial.

a. The dragon-fight from *7Ch*, pp.14-18

[p.14; an ancient hermit is addressing George:] I sorrow for thy hard fortune that it is thy destenie to ariue in this our countrie of Egipt: Wherein is not left sufficient aliue to burie the dead, such is the distresse of this land, through a dangerous and tirrible Dragon now ranging vp and downe the countrie: which if hee bee not euery day appeased with a pure and true virgin, which he deuoureth downe his venemous bowels, but that day so neglected will he breath such a stench from his nostrels, whereof will grow a most grieuous plague and mortallity of allthinges, which vse hath beene obserued for these foure and twentie yeares, but now there is not left one true virgin but the Kings only daughter throughout Egipt, which Damsell to morrow must bee offered vp in Sacrifice to the Dragon: Therefore the King hath made Proclamation, that if any Knight dare proue so aduenterous as to combat with the Dragon, and [p.15] preserue his daughters life, shall in reward haue her to his wife, and the Crowne of Egipt after his discease.

This large proffer so incouraged the English Knight that hee vowde eyther to redeeme the Kinges Daughter, or els to loose his life in that honourable enterprise: So taking his repose and nightly rest in the olde mans Hermitage, till the chearefull Cocke beeing the true messenger of day, gaue him warning of the Sunnes vp-rise, which causd him to buckle on his Armour, and to furnish his Steed with strong habilliments of war, the which being done he tooke his iournie guided

onely by the olde Hermit to the valley where the kinges Daughter should bee offered vp in Sacrifice: But when he approched the sight of the valley, he espied a far off a most fair and beautifull Damsell, attired in pure Arabian silke going to sacrifice, guarded to the place of death onlie by sage & modest Matrons, which wofull sight so encouraged the English Knight to such a forwardnesse, that he thoght euery minnute a day til he had redeemed the Damsell from the Dragons tyrranie: So approching the Lady, gaue her comfort of deliuerie, and returnde her back to her Fathers Pallace againe.

After this the Noble Knight like a bold aduenterous Champion entred the valley, where the Dragon had his residence, *who no sooner had a sight of him, but hee gaue such a tirrable yell as though it had thundered in the ellements*,[a] the bignes of the Dragon was fearefull to behold, *for betwixt his shoulders and his tayle were fiftie foote in distance, his scales glistered brighter than siluer, but farre more harder than brasse, his belly of the coloure of gold, but more bigger than a Tun.*[b] *Thus weltred he from his hideous denne*,[c] and fiercely assailed the sturdie Champion with his burning winges, that at the first encounter, hee had almost felled him to the ground, but the Knight nimbly recouering him selfe, *gaue the Dragon such a thrust with his speare, that it shiuerd in a thousand peeces, whereat the furious Dragon so fiercely smote him with his venemous* [p.16] *tayle, that downe fell man and horse, in which fall two of Saint Georges ribs were sore brused*,[d] but yet stepping backward, it was his chaunce to leape vnder an Orringe tree, which tree had such pretious vertue, that no venemous worme darst come within the compasse of the braunches, nor within seauen foote thereof, where this valiant Knight rested himselfe vntill he had recouered his former strength: who no sooner feeling his spirits reuiued, but with an eger courage smote the burning Dragon vnder his yellow burnisht bellie with his trustie sworde Askalon, *whereout came such abundance of venome, that it sprinkled vpon the Champions Armour, whereby immediatly through the impoysoned strength of the venome his Armour burst in twaine, and the good Knight fell into a greeuous and dead sound, that for a time he lay breathles*:[e] but yet hauing that good memorie remayning, that he tumbled vnder the branches of the Orringe tree; in which place the Dragon could proffer him no further violence. The fruit of the tree was of such an excellent vertue, that whosoeuer tasted thereof should presently bee cured of all manner of diseases and infirmities whatsoeuer: So it was the Noble Champions good and happie fortune,

a little to recouer through the vertue of the tree, and to espie an Orringe which a little before had dropped downe wherwith he so refreshed himselfe, that *hee was in short time as sound as when hee first began the incounter*:[f] *Then kneeled hee downe and made his diuine supplication to heauen, that God would send him (for his deare sonnes sake) such strength and agillity of body as to slay the furious and tirrable monster*,[g] which beeing done, with a bold and couragious heart, *hee smote the Dragon vnder the wing, where it was tender without scale*,[h] wherby his good sworde Askalon with an easie passage *went to the verie hilts through both the Dragons heart, liuer, bone and blood*,[i] whereout issued such aboundance of purple gore, that it turned the grasse which grewe in the valley into a crimson colour, & the ground which before parrched through [p.17] the burning stinch of the Dragon, was now drenched with ouermuch moysture which voyded from his venemous bowels, where at last through want of blood, and long continuance in fight, the Dragon yeelded his vitall spirits to the mercy of the conquering Champion. The which beeing happely performed, the Noble Knight Saint George of England, first yeelding due honour to Almighty God for the victorie, then *with his good sword Askalon he cut off the Dragons head and pitcht it vpon the trunchion of a speare*,[j] which at the beginning of the battaile hee shiuered against the Dragons scalie backe: During this long and dangerous Combat, his trustie Steede lay altogether in a sounde without any moouing, which caused the English Champion with all speed to crush the ioyce of an Orringe into hys cold mouth: the vertue whereof presently expelled the venemous poysons, and recouered his former strength againe.

There was as then remayning in the Egiptian Court, one Almidor the blacke King of Moroco, who long had prosecuted (in the way of marriage) the Loue of Sabra the Kinges daughter, but by no pollicie, meanes, nor manhood, could hee accomplish what his hart desired: But now finding opportunitie to expresse his trecherous minde, intended to robbe and spoyle Saint George of his victorie, whereby he thought to attaine the gratious fauour, and singuler good liking of his Lady and Mistresse, who lothed his companie like the detested Crokadiles, but euen as the Wolfe though all in vaine barkes at the Moone: So this fantasticall and cowardly Almidor, through many rich gifts and faire promises, hired twelue Egiptian Knights to beset the valley where Saint George slue the burning Dragon, *& by force bereaue him of his conquest*:[k] But *when this magnanimious Champion of England came ryding in triumph from the valley*,[l] espected to haue

beene entertained like a Conquerour with Drums and Trumpets, or to haue heard the belles of Egipt rung a ioyfull sound of victorie, or to haue [p.18] haue seene the streetes beautified with bonefires: but contrary to his imagination *was he met with Troupes of Armed Knights*,[m] not to conduct him peacefullie to the Egiptian Court, *but by falshood and trechery to dispoyle him of his life and honour*:[n] For no sooner had he ridden past the entry of the valley, but he espied how the Egiptian Knights brandished their weapons, and deuided themselues to intercept him in his iournie to the Court: By which he knew them to be no faithfull friendes, but vowed enemies: *So tying his Horse to a Hathorne tree*,[o] he intended to try his fortune on foote for feare of disaduantage, *they beeing twelue to one*,[p] but in the skirmish Saint George so valiantly behaued himselfe with his trustie sword Askalon, *that at one stroke he slue three of the Egiptian Knights*,[q] and before the golden Diamond of heauen had wandred the zodiack the compasse of an houre: but some he dismembred of their heads: some had their limbes lopt off: some their bodies cut in twaine, & some their intrayles trayling downe, so that not one was left aliue to carrie news to Almidor the black King, which stood (during all the time of skirmish) a far off vpon a mountaine toppe, to behold the successe of his hired Champions.

b. Excerpts from the dragon-fight in William Copland's second edition (1565?) of *Bevis* (*Bevis*, III, lines 2335-2453)

And, whan that dragon that foule is
Had a sight of Syr Beuis,
He caste vp a loude crye,
As it had thondred in the skye.[a]
He turned his bely toward the sonn
It was greater than any tonne;
His scales was briter then þe glas,
And harder they were than ani bras;
Betwene his sholder and his tayle
War forty fote,[b] without fayle.
He waltred out of his denne;[c]
And Beuis pricked his stede then,
And to him a spere he thraste,
That all to shyuers it brast.
The dragon gan Beuis assayle,

And smote Syr Beuis with his tayle -
Then downe went horse and man;
And to rybbes of Beuis brused than[d] ...
The dragon was agreued sore,
And smote at Beuis more and more,
And gaue him many a great wound,
And felled him oft to the grounde:
What for wery and for faynte,
Sir Beuis was nere attaynte.
The dragon sewed on Beuis so hard
That, as he should haue fled bacward,
There was a well – so haue I wenne –
And Beuis stumbled right there-in.
Than was Beuis afrayde and wo
Leest the dragon should him slo
Or that he might away pas,
Whan he in that well was.
Than was the welle of suche vertu,
Through the might of Christ Iesu;
For some-time dwelled in that lond
A vyrgyn full of Christes sonde,
That had been bathed in that well,
That euer after – as men tell –
Myght no venemous worme come therin,
By that vertue of that virgyn –
Nyghe it seuen fote and more ...
Than was he glad, without fayle,
And rested a while for his auayle,
And dranke of that water his fyll;
And than he lept out with good will,
And with Morglay, his brande,
He assailed the dragon, I vnderstand:
On the dragon he smote so faste
Where that he hit the scales braste.
The dragon than faynted sore,
And cast a galon and more
Out of his mouth of venim stronge,
And on Syr Beuis it flonge.
Yt was venimous, ywis;
Than, whan it was on Syr Beuis,

All his armure brust in that stound,
And Beuis fell dead to the grounde:
There was no lyfe on him sene –
He lay as dead man on the grene.[e]
The dragone smote Beuis, w*i*th*o*ut faile,
That he turned top and tayll ...
He smote Beuis, as I you tell –
The dynt smote hym in-to the well ...
That well saued him that daye.
Whan Beuis felt him hole and light,
And knewe that wel of great might,
Than was he a ioyfull man –
He was fresshe as whan he begane.[f]
He kneled downe in that stede:
To Iesu Christe he bade his bede
That He would send him maine and might
To sle that dragon in that fight[g] ...
The dragon sawe that it might not auayle
Besyd the welle to holde batayle ...
He wolde a flowen then away;
And Beuis lept after with good Morglay:
And hit him vnder the winge,
As he was in his flienge,
There he was tender, without scale;[h]
And Beuis thought to be his bale.
He smote after, as I you say,
With his good sworde, Morglay,
Up to the hyltes Morglay yode,
Through hert, lyuer, bone and bloud![i]
To the grounde fell the dragon;
Great ioye Syr Beuis begon.
Under the skales, all on hight,
He smote of his head forth-right,
And put it on a speare.[j]

c. The events following the boar-fight in William Copland's second edition (1565?) of *Bevis* (*Bevis*, III, lines 670-94)

The bores head he of caste;
And on a tronchon of a spere

The head he sticked for to beare.[j]
That sawe the fosters of that forest
Howe Beuis had slaine þ*at* foule best:
They said, 'We haue great disdaine
That he hath this bore slayne:
Go we to him – *we shall him slo*,
And take the bores head him fro;
Than shall we haue all the honours,
Right as we were conquerours.'[kn]
As Beuis shoulde fro the forest ryde,[l]
They him beset on euery syde.[m]
The xii fosters were armed, *eche one*;
And Beuis was naked and all alone.[p]
Whan Beuis should hand on his sworde laye,
The scabert he founde – the sworde was away;
For he had left his s̀worde thore
Where he slewe the wilde bore:
Than had he noughe him [to] were
But the tronchon of a spere.
The fosters smote he downe
With a stroke of his tronchone:
Nyne he slewe at dintes thre;[q]
And other thre away gan flee.

[The following line (627) occurs before the account of the boar-fight:]

His horse he tied to a thorne.[o]