

Medieval Literary Representations of the Victimized Children in Middle English Metrical Romances

Orta İngilizce Metrik Romanlarında Mağdur Çocukların Edebi Tasvirleri

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Abstract

There are plenty of suffering children in Middle English metrical romances who are victimized by their birth parents, step parents or grandparents, either deliberately or unintentionally. By excluding the socially constructed stages and aspects of childhood, this article discusses the literary representations of the victimized children in Middle English metrical romances, the reasons for their suffering in their households and the children's reactions to these ordeals. As commonly represented, the male child victims are younger than the female ones and they are mostly exiled with their mothers when they are infants, while the female children victimized by their fathers are mature and old enough to have lovers, husbands and even children who are exiled with them. The victims' experience of suffering is theologically justified, because each suffering is followed by a relief, and all ordeals end with a final reward, enhancing the idea that these narratives question the reason for the sacrifice of the innocent and suggest that human suffering has redemptive value. Weakness, innocence, simplicity are associated with children and they give greater meaning to their victimization by evoking more compassion and pity. In addition to this, the victimized children reveal the failings of parents as responsible mothers and fathers which imply a social reality. Moreover, the children's being exempt from pollution of the Seven Deadly Sins which distinguishes them from the adults gives a good example to the Christian audience. Hence, through the depictions of the child victims, the metrical romances provide their audience with a sense of religious and social didacticism, in addition to the presentation of the societal facts in relation to the gender differences.

Keywords: Middle English metrical romance, child victims, suffering, Christianity, parenthood

Öz

Orta İngilizce metrik romanlarında ebeveynleri, üvey ebeveynleri ya da büyük ebeveynleri tarafından hem kasten hem de istemsizce zulmedilip çile çeken birçok çocuk vardır. Bu makale, çocukluk döneminin toplum tarafından belirlenmiş aşamaları ve bakış açılarını kapsam dışında bırakarak, orta İngilizce metrik romanlarındaki çocuk mağdurların edebi tasvirlerini, kendi evlerinde ıstırap çekme sebeplerini ve çocukların bu çileler karşısındaki tepkilerini tartışmaktadır. Genellikle tasvir edildiği üzere, erkek çocuk mağdurlar kız çocuklarına kıyasla daha gençtir ve çoğunlukla daha bebekken anneleriyle birlikte sürgün edilirken, babaları tarafından zulmedilen kız çocukları yetişkindir ve sevgili, koca ve hatta kendileriyle sürgün edilen çocuklara sahip olacak yaşadılar. Mağdurların çektikleri çileler her çilenin sonunda rahata erişildiği ve tüm zorlu sınanmaların sonunda ödül olduğu için ilahi olarak da mazur görülürken, bu anlatılar masumların feda edilmesinin nedeninin sorgulanması fikrini pekiştirir ve çekilen çilenin bir kefareti olduğu izlenimini uyandırır. Zayıflık, masumiyet, basitlik çocuklarla

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özdeşleştirilir ve çocukların çektikleri çileler için daha fazla acıma ve merhamet uyandırılarak daha büyük anlamlar yüklenir. Buna ilaveten, mağdur edilen çocuklar sosyal bir gerçeği de ima ederek kendilerinden sorumlu anne ve babaların başarısızlıklarını da gözler önüne sererler. Dahası, çocukların onları yetişkinlerden ayıran Yedi Ölümçül Günahın kirinden muaf olmaları Hıristiyan okuyucu kitlesine iyi bir örnek teşkil eder. Böylelikle, metrik romanslar çocuk mağdurların tasvirleriyle toplumsal cinsiyet rollerindeki farklılıklara ilişkin toplumsal gerçekleri sunmaları dışında, hedef kitlelerinde dini ve sosyal öğreticilik algısı yaratırlar.

Anahtar sözcükler: Orta İngilizce metrik romans, çocuk mağdurlar, çile, Hıristiyanlık, ebeveynlik

The difficulty with an exploration of the children's role in Middle English metrical romances is that scarcely any children make an appearance or figure centrally in the romances. Romances provide random glimpses of what the actual lives of the children in medieval families might have looked like; however, children appear prominently in many romances as objects of violence. They are kidnapped, they are abandoned at the sea, they are wounded by their father's enemies, and they are imprisoned with their father or must offer their own flesh for the sake of their father. Representation of child victims in Middle English romances raises a series of questions such as why children are represented as the object of such victimization, and to what social, ideological or textual purpose the violated child serve, what conditions give rise to this victimization and what are its eventual effects. Furthermore, social, economic, political and religious ideological forces shape a child's fate, leaving little room for his or her resistance. In most romances associated with morality and religion, children are symbolic figures manipulated for their weakness and innocence which causes their suffering. There are plenty of parents in romances who abuse the children for their own purposes, while in several metrical romances both fathers and mothers suffer from injury to or loss of children. The predominant representation of the relationship between parent and child focuses particularly on the sufferings of the Virgin Mary as she beholds her child on the Cross; thus, the most potent romance representation of the mother and child relationship mirrors the relationship between the Virgin Mary and Christ. On the other hand, the fathers are not entirely sympathetic figures because their children's sufferings are largely related to the fathers' own actions.

The stages of childhood in the Middle Ages, the care for infants and small children and typical children's activities have been extensively studied by the scholars;¹ however, the representations of the victimized children in their households are given little attention. By excluding the socially constructed stages and aspects of childhood, this article provides a study of the child victims in their household who are presented in Middle English metrical romances, discusses how the representations of the helpless and innocent children as subjects for pathos suggest the Christian context of redemptive suffering, intending to teach the romance audience the Christian concepts of mercy and forgiveness.

1 For some prominent studies on childhood in the Middle Ages, see Shahar, S. (1990). *Childhood in the middle ages*. New York: Routledge; Pallock, L. A. (1983). *Forgotten children: Parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Gavin, A. E., Ed. (2012). *The child in British literature: Literary constructions of childhood, medieval to contemporary*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, MacMillan; Classen, A., Ed., (2005). *Childhood in the middle ages and renaissance: The result of a paradigm shift in the history of mentality*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter; Boswell, J. (1988). *The kindness of strangers: The abandonment of children in western Europe from late antiquity to the renaissance*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; Orme, N. (2001). *Medieval children*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Wood, D., Ed. (1994). *The church and childhood*. Oxford: Blackwell; Heywood, C. (2001). *A history of childhood*. Malden: Blackwell; Hanawalt, B. A. (1993). *Growing up in medieval London: The experience of childhood in history*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Ariès, P. (1962). *Centuries of childhood: A social history of family life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf; Hanawalt, B. (2002). *Medievalists and the study of childhood*. *Speculum*, 77, 2: 440-460.

Furthermore, it expands the argument to the reasons for the victimization of the children, the role of the family members in the victimization and the outcomes of these victimizations.² It also questions the reasons for the different representations of the male and the female victims.

In general, the sufferings of children in romances are placed in the Christian context of redemptive suffering and sacrifice. They commemorate the Massacre of the Innocents and celebrate the sacrifice of the infant boys born near the time of Christ's birth with Herod's fear of the new born Christ.³ These children are associated with Christ since they have been sacrificed for his sake, and the account of the Massacre is utilized by the Church in order to arouse sympathy for the abused and suffering children (Auslander, 2005, pp. 121-122).⁴ The victimized child image and his or her innocence are manipulated to produce the pathos necessary to the affective piety of the romance, which is accomplished at the end of the romances with the final redemption of the villainous parent, sentencing of the unrepentant victimizer and the rewarding of the innocent sufferer.

Although children were used as characters in secular and religious writings in the Middle Ages, defining who was child was ambivalent in medieval society due to the fact that after infancy there was neither distinction of child or adolescent from adults, nor awareness of any differences between these age groups (Truscott, 1998, p. 29). Children became adults at a very early age (Shahar, 1991, pp. 134-136), and this blurs the distinction of their being a child or an adult. Regardless of being defined as children, children were featured in several fourteen and fifteenth century romances to evoke a detailed picture of noble family life. Especially the romances owned by gentry families were concerned with family and marriage (Hudson, 1989, p. 45) and were intended for family reading and instructing the children in households. They attracted children and adolescents and provided them with role models with whom they might identify themselves in order to learn through their experiences (Hardman, 2009, pp. 152-154; Orme, 1999, p. 230). Particularly, the figure of the victimized child raises questions about the attitudes of medieval parents to children, and it pictures children as passive and submissive to their authority. This dependence, particularly on parental authority, is apparent especially in romances portraying an exiled female child. In medieval understanding, a child is seen as innocent but also as the bearer of the Original Sin (Truscott, 1998, p. 30); therefore, children are descendants of the evil in the view of the Christian Church. However, the reason for the victimization of the exiled children is unrelated to their assumed sinful nature; it is rather viewed within the context of the absence and the presence of parents. Therefore, they exemplify that the presence of the victimizer parents causes abuse of children, while their absence causes neglect, both victimizing the child.

There are several reasons for a father's victimizing his child in his/her infancy and adolescence; however, a child's being victimized even before his/her birth is the most unmerciful one. As stressed

2 This article includes references to the fourteenth and the fifteenth century romances and Breton lays (short romances) *Amis and Amiloun*, *Athelston*, *Beves of Hamptoun*, *Cheuelere Assigne*, *Emarè*, *Floris and Blancheflour*, *Generydes*, *Lay le Freine*, *Octovian*, *Partonope of Blois*, *Sir Degarè*, *Sir Degrevant*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *Sir Tryamour*, *The Romans of Partenay*, *The Seven Sages of Rome*, *The Squire of Low Degree*, *Torrent of Portyngale* and *William of Palerne*, excluding the Arthurian corpus.

3 The Massacre of the Innocents is the Biblical recount of infanticide by Herod, the King of the Jews. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Herod ordered the execution of all young male children around Bethlehem, in order to avoid the loss of his throne to the newborn Christ whose birth had been announced to him by the Magi. For the details, see Matthew 2:16-18.

4 See also Classen, A. (2005). Ed. *Childhood in the middle ages and renaissance: The result of a paradigm shift in the history of mentality*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

in *Sir Tryamour* and *Athelston*, the main reason for a father's victimizing his child even before his/her birth is to avoid a possible shame or a threat to his authority as a husband and as a ruler. In *Sir Tryamour*, Queen Margaret is exiled by her husband King Arduus with their child in her womb after being falsely accused of adultery by Arduus' steward. The shame of the supposed cuckoldry which threatens his authority as a husband and presents him as a weak ruler not even capable of controlling his wife compels him to sacrifice his child for the sake of saving his name and fame, in addition to depriving him of his child's accompaniment. Ironically, the child grows up into a brave man and replaces his father's authority and saves him from defeat and shame. Similarly, in *Athelston*, King Athelston's willingness to execute his sworn brother Sir Egelond and his family with a trial by ordeal on account of a false accusation of treason makes his pregnant wife and their unborn child his victim, since his wife's attempt to prevent his misjudgement fails and ends with his kicking her. Sir Egelond's unborn child is also subjected to the ordeal by fire since his wife is put to trial with her child in her womb. "In herte he was ful woo" (Herzman, 1999, l. 252) is the only line which states the feeling of Athelston for the suffering of his victims; hence, the romance writer stresses Athelston's sadness in order to arouse sympathy for him, in that he is also the victim of the false accuser Sir Wymound, justifying the victimizer father as a victim, while disregarding the death of the unborn child.

In addition to these, the victimization of a child is closely related to the concern of the preservation of the bloodline, which is contextualized in several romances. For instance, in *Floris and Blancheflour*, Floris's father, the King of Spain, does not approve of his son Floris' affair with Blancheflour, a non-Christian slave girl; therefore, he sells her to merchants and pretends that she is dead, ignoring his son's suffering from lovesickness. Apart from the difference in social rank, the difference of race and faith is presented as a reason for rejection of the lovers' union, and implies the significance of keeping the bloodline pure. Hence, protecting the purity and continuity of the family's bloodline is not seen by the writers of romances to justify cruelty to the vulnerable; because this is in accordance with contemporary Christian teachings. The significance of bloodline lies beneath religious texts of Abraham's sacrificing Isaac for the sake of God. "When Abraham and God refer to Isaac as Abraham's 'blood,' the word 'blood' figuratively names a familial relationship, as in a way the genealogy is described as a bloodline" (McCracken, 2002, pp. 70-71), which is a proof of lineage and a father's authority over his child. Hence, daughters are sacrificed in favour of securing the bloodline, and they become vessels for family transmission instead of loved children, as in *The Squire of Low Degree*. The King of Hungary pretends that the Squire, whom his daughter loves, is dead because he does not want his daughter to marry a man of lower rank. As Anthony C. Spearing states, the father is cruel because "the daughter must undergo at her father's hands an extreme emotional and spiritual test" (1993, p. 192) before marrying her lover. The daughter's becoming a vessel for family transmission to secure her family replaces her happiness; hence, she is weakened by love against her father. The princess, mourning and keeping the dead body which her father says belongs to her lover—but is in fact that of the steward who is her lover's enemy— in her room for seven years, loses her joy of life and beauty:

She put him in a marble stone,
With quaynt gynnes many one,
And set hym at hir beddes head,
And every day she kyst that dead. (Kooper, 2006, p. 150)

Having isolated herself in her room, which is full of physical comfort but lacking in emotional consolation, she refrains from involving herself in any entertainments arranged by her father to cheer her up, and she decides to lead an anchoress's life in order to suffer more.

As Hudson points out, *The Squire of Low Degree* deals with matter of social advancement and the class-consciousness (1994, pp. 79-80). Nobility was mainly dependent on lineage and wealth; however, the penetration of the urban patriciate to the ranks of the privileged became the irrefutable evidence of social mobility in the Middle Ages (Herlihy, 1973, pp. 624-625). The social mobility of the Squire represents the fifteenth century concerns over social boundaries at the time when the romance was composed, and implies that nobility is not necessarily to be acquired through lineage and wealth. Therefore, the Squire differs from other romance protagonists in his claim for nobility, since while he is assigned the chivalric tasks to perform to prove his worthiness to become a family member in *The Squire of Low Degree*, the beloved slave girl is disposed of in *Floris and Blancheflour*. This double standard displays the fact that males are privileged to prove their value to become a part of the family bloodline, unlike the females, who are discarded without any such chances.

Similarly, the chance of becoming a part of the family is pretended to be given to the lover in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*; yet, Cristabell's father Sir Prynsmour merely pretends innocence when he assigns superhuman tasks for his daughter's lover Eglamour:

And sayde, 'Ther may no devell the slo,
 Be Mary, so I wene!
 Thow art abowte, I undirstande,
 To wynne all Artas of my honde
 And my dowghtyr schene!' (Hudson, 2006, p. 116)

These tasks are given in order to prevent their marriage; in other words, to victimize not only his daughter's lover but also his daughter who desires for an unsuitable match. Since she is exiled by her father on the sea after her giving birth to Eglamour's son, she is prevented to be together with her lover. In the Middle Ages, the sea was "an arbiter of justice or righteousness" (Reinhard, 1941, p. 67), and it was believed that "if God would, He might give the criminal his life" (Reinhard, 1941, p. 64); therefore, the daughters exiled on the sea in several romances are left to the judgement of God. Despite the physical and emotional suffering they experience during their exile, they survive because they are pious, as in *Emaré*. Emaré rejects her father's incestuous attempts by warning him that her submission would bring suffering and dishonour to their family:

'Nay syr, God of heven hyt forbede,
 That ever do so we shulde!
 Hyf hyt so betydde that ye me wedde
 And we shulde play togedur in bedde,
 Bothe we were forlorne! (Mills, 1973, pp. 52-53)

Even if Emaré resists this perversion, it makes her a victim of exile on the sea, because Sir Artysus' actions are motivated by "[a]nger at his daughter's stubbornness, fear lest she make public his proposal, and revenge" (Reinhard, 1941, p. 42). Dieter Mehl compares Emaré with the female martyrs since she "is not exiled in consequence of any unjust accusation, but because she refuses to trespass against God's law by committing incest. Her situation is that of a Christian martyr who suffers for her obedience to the laws of God" (1968, pp. 135-136). However, Mehl's comparison disregards the fact that her suffering is introduced by her father, and her final obedience after her resistance is not a test of her piety, but a punishment for resisting patriarchal authority. Even if her survival is not heroic since she overcomes sexual abuse and false accusation instead of physical ordeals, Emaré is forced into exile twice, the first alone but the second one on the sea with her son Segramor, after she is accused by her mother-in-law of being an evil spirit and giving birth to a monstrous child. On her second voyage, her son in his guiltless suffering illuminates the central Christian image of sacrifice and suggests that actual mothers suffer for their children as Mary did for Christ; hence, Mary's maternal feelings are parallel to the experience of ordinary mothers. Emaré's isolation and being exiled from her family twice make her think that she herself is the reason for her own misfortunes, initiating her submission to the chain of suffering she experiences. Emaré's maternal concern for the survival of her child not only presents her as a caring mother, but also as a helpless woman who has only prayers to help her survive. In this respect, although she has also displayed resistance to incest before her submission to exile, her experience exemplifies "the life to which the medieval woman saw herself condemned: [...] accepting what happened because there was no other choice" (Ramsey, 1983, p. 177).

Different from the weak and submissive daughters who yield to the ordeals inflicted by their fathers in the above mentioned romances, there are several contrary representations of daughters who stand firmly against their fathers who separate them from their lovers and disobey them by having affairs with their lovers. It is not only their love for their lovers but also their maternal concern which empowers them and drives them to resist their fathers, even if they have to endure the ordeals to reunite with their lovers. For instance, in *Sir Degrevant*, Melidor resists her father's disapproval of her marriage to Sir Degrevant, whose lands he has attacked unjustly, and she says she is ready to suffer or die for Degrevant's sake:

He is my love and my lorde,
Myn hele and my counforde.
Hyt is gode ye be acorde,
And yowre wyllus ware.
And giff ye holde us agret
Shall I never ete mete.' (Koooper, 2006, p. 102)

Similarly, in *Torrent of Portyngale*, the daughter's resistance against her father Calamond's disapproval of her relationship with her lover Torrent and her getting pregnant with her lover's children indicate that she is empowered against her father, since she acts according to her own free will. However, the temporality of this resistance becomes apparent, as it fades when Calamond sets Torrent dangerous trials in combat, and exiles Desonell on the sea in a boat with her children Leobertus and Antony. Meanwhile, Desonell experiments, as Hudson asks, "whether power may be wielded by

women in a patriarchal society” (1994, p. 77) and when she fails in wielding power, she turns to God. Her resistance to her father is replaced by her submission to suffering in exile, especially after her children are abducted by the beasts. Indeed, both fathers and mothers suffer from injury to or loss of their children, when the children are exiled or are abducted by beasts as the Empress’s twin sons abducted by a lioness and an ape in *Octovian*, Sir Eglamour’s son Degrebelle abducted by a griffin in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*. Separation from their children intensifies the victims’ suffering, making them more pathetic and arousing more audience sympathy.

Due to the fact that a father is believed to have authority over his child and he can establish his authority firmly in order to preserve his bloodline, his villainy to his child is somehow justifiable, since bloodline is vulnerable to invasion, and it must be kept secure by choosing a right and noble husband for the daughter. Likewise, the associations of the sufferings of mothers -who are also children of noble fathers- and their children with the stereotypical example of Mary and Christ are given richest expressions in several romances in which fathers may manipulate the lives of their children. In addition to these, there are plenty of romances in which children are subjected to the victimizations of their mothers, stepmothers or mothers-in-law, most of whom deliberately victimize their children, stepchildren or grandchildren either because of jealousy or in order to empower themselves. The unintentional victimization of a child is very exceptional in romances; however, despite lack of deliberate villainy, Partonope in *Partonope of Blois* suffers because of his mother’s over concern for his son. Partonope’s mother, suspecting her son’s lover’s being an evil spirit, enlists the help of magic to expose her nature by an enchanted lantern. Upon its failure and revelation of Melior’s being a mortal, Partonope blames himself for having betrayed his beloved, so he exiles himself in the wilderness to suffer until the lovers reconcile.

The victimization of the child may stem from societal concerns of the mother who is afraid of being victimized herself, as the King of Brittany’s daughter in *Sir Degaré* who suffers physically and emotionally after she is raped and impregnated by a fairy knight, and left with a child and the anxiety of concealing the truth about her pregnancy. In the Middle Ages, children born after rape were defined as illegitimate, without a family name, right of inheritance and family; therefore, several women murdered their children by cutting their throats, abandoning them in a field or leaving them in a ditch (Anderson and Zinsser, 1988, p. 139). Since she is afraid of being accused of incest, she hides herself as her womb grows and after giving birth to her son, the princess leaves the child at a hermitage. Similar societal concern causes the victimization of the daughter in *In Lay le Freine*. The lady’s being envious of the birth of her neighbour’s twin sons, her accusing her of adultery yet, in return, her giving birth to twin daughters entraps her in the dilemma of confessing that she has lied about her neighbour’s adultery, accepting her own involvement in an adulterous affair, or slaying one of her children. Since she may potentially be subjected to the same accusation she chooses to suffer personally instead of publicly, and decides to slay her child Freine rather than being blamed as a liar or an adulterous lady; however, the child is spared by the lady’s maid who leaves her at a convent to be cared of.

Surrendering children to the kindness of strangers was common even in early medieval society and several legislations were passed between 1195 and 1295 by at least thirteen councils in England on the abandonment of children, “particularly, whether or not to baptize abandoned children found without any indication of their baptismal status” (Boswell, 1998, p. 322). Besides, the sick or deformed children were abandoned in the forest with the expectation of a miraculous healing and healthy return,

or their death with the will of God (Boswell, 1998, p. 337). There were also children abandoned by their family to a monastery to be brought up by monks, known as oblation (Boswell, 1984, p. 17). The moral status of abandonment is questionable especially on the risk of incest rather than the abandoned child's death (Boswell, 1998, p. 334). Romances utilize abandonment for moral purposes, particularly for covering or avoiding the blame for illegitimate children born out of marriage and for distancing from resignation or embarrassment. Even if the children are punished for their parents' sin, it can be tolerated since it serves to a greater cause by punishing the parents with separation from their children. Abandonment cuts the ties of the child with his parents and leaves the foundling to the mercy of who finds him; therefore, obscures the fates of those children. However, similar to the experiences of the exiled or abducted children, the abandoned children are spared in romances, and they are generally fostered either by beasts or strangers until their identities are revealed, their social positions are regained and they reunite with their mothers, as in *Sir Degaré* and *Lay le Freine*.

Different from the romances mentioned above, a child's sacrifice is presented as a means of resistance against an unwanted husband and stresses a social reality about inheritance in *Beves of Hamptoun*. The Countess sacrifices her son Beves to victimize her husband, the Earl of Southampton, by making her lover Devoun kill her husband as she is not happy in her marriage to an elderly man. Then, she orders Saber to kill Beves when Beves accuses her of his father's murder; yet, upon Saber's saving Beves' life, she sells him to merchants. Disinheritance provides a means of putting Beves in the right for vengeance, because he has been disinherited by tyranny; hence, he reclaims the inheritance which has been misappropriated by his mother and her lover. After his victory over the Saracens, Beves returns to England to avenge his disinheritance and fights against the usurping Emperor, who is his mother's lover Devoun, and regains his status and inheritance.

The sacrifice of a child by his mother is not always for villainous purposes in romances, since it may rather be for preventing a family tragedy as in *The Romans of Partenay*, in which Melusine advises her husband Raymond to kill their son Horrible to prevent the suffering he may bring into their family if he survives. Celia M. Lewis calls Melusine's warning the most dramatic lesson given by a mother (2011, p. 19), to stress her suffering while giving her counsel. Her care for her family's suffering more than her child's life and making this the reason for victimizing her child bring her closer to a victim rather than a victimizer, which also makes her son a saviour more than a victim. A similar sacrifice of twin children is made by the mother in *Amis and Amiloun* in order to show gratitude to a sufferer who has previously suffered for her sake. When Amis is told in a dream by God that the only way to cure his sworn brother Amiloun's leprosy is his children's blood, Amis's wife Belisaunt consents to Amis's cutting their throats to cure Amiloun's leprosy, in gratitude for Amiloun's sacrifice, and for fighting against the steward to save her from burning. She is a model of integrity and perseverance while comforting her husband who hesitates to sacrifice their children. In this respect, her sacrifice may be construed as a sacrifice "for a higher good" (McCracken 2002, p. 56). Their father's virtues of *trouthe*, loyalty to friendship and modesty suggest the representation of children is a prototype of the Christian martyr.

The children in romances are not only victimized by the birth parents, since they may suffer because of the villainies of their stepmothers or the attempts of their grandmothers to victimize their daughters-in-law. For example, Generydes, in *Generydes*, is falsely accused by his stepmother Serenydes of seducing her when she fails to seduce him; therefore, he seeks safety from family hostility by exiling himself. Another failed false accusation of seduction on a stepson is exemplified

in *The Seven Sages of Rome*; yet, it is not the stepmother's lust for Florentyne but his wisdom and his probable future succession to the throne after his father's death which make his stepmother falsely accuse him of attempting to ravish her and of committing treason against his father. When she fails, she casts a spell on him that will kill him if he speaks in the next seven days, during which she attempts to persuade Florentyne's father to punish his traitor son, through telling tales full of descriptions of villainous sons. In the romance, the seven sages act *in loco parentis* for Florentyne's father as they defend Florentyne against his father's mistaken death sentence; yet, even if Florentyne is imprisoned because of his father's misjudgement and sentenced to death, when his innocence is revealed, he not only saves himself from execution but also saves his father, who is victimized by his treacherous wife. Hence, the father's protection of the child is replaced by the child's protection of the father, exchanging the roles of the child and the father in the family, which also empowers the child while weakens the father's dependability.

Another romance involving enchantment as a means of preventing a stepson's enthronement is *William of Palerne*. The possible succession of Alphonse to the Spanish throne after his father's death is a threat to Queen Braunden's own son; therefore, she changes Alphonse into a werewolf to make her own son the heir to the throne. Nevertheless, even if Alphonse's transformation into a werewolf deprives him of his human shape and identity, it is on the other hand protective for him since he is no more threatened by his stepmother. Meanwhile, he helps other people in need of help by abducting the infant William, helping him to avoid his being poisoned by his uncle. In return for Alphonse's help, William reveals Alphonse's identity and makes his stepmother disenchant him so that he can regain human shape.

Apart from sons and daughters victimized by their birth parents or stepparents, there are plenty of grandchildren who have become victims of their grandparents either because of their being potential threats as the successors of their parents or their inevitable involvement into their parents' ordeal, as in *Cheuelere Assigne*. Matabryne's grandchildren are accused of being the products of a monstrous birth; hence, being whelps, because she is jealous of her daughter-in-law Beatrice's children's establishment in the family succession and claims that the children must be destroyed, along with the mother. When the chains are removed on the necks of her grandchildren, they transform into swans, except for Enyas who is saved from the transformation. Enyas is well cared for by a hermit, and despite his being inexperienced in battle, is empowered by an angel's support by God's grace. The night before Beatrice is going to be burned, an angel appears to the hermit saying that Enyas, the child the hermit fosters (as a result of being forewarned), is spared by God's grace, and he is fated to end the suffering of his mother and his siblings, "And criste hath formeth þis chylde to fyzte for his moder." (Gibbs, 1868, p. 10)

It can be deduced after all these representations that masculine world of competition and vengeance causes the pathetic sufferings of children, especially in their household. The main reasons for a child's becoming an undeserved victim in the household are a father's desire to preserve his authority both as a husband and as a ruler, his attempt to keep his bloodline pure, his rejecting his intended groom since he is an unsuitable match to his daughter, his inclination to an incestuous relationship. Besides, the subversion of the mother image in the romances and the mother figure's turning into a victimizer of the child through false accusations and tricks for the sake of her own survival make it questionable whether the domestic arena is actually safe for a child as it is expected to be. Accordingly, home, although supposed to be the safest place for a child, is presented as a foil

to the outside world full of strangers to whom a child is to act with deliberation. Hence, a child is reminded that he shall become an individual, freeing himself from the dependency on his family and take his own guard against the potential victimizations he may experience.

There are both male and female child victims indicating that there is a gender spread of those who suffer in their households. However, the different representations of the male and female victims reflect the patriarchal societal facts since the males are always stronger compared to the females. At the beginning of the narrative, both the male or female victim are safe among his/her household until betrayed, falsely accused or expelled, isolated from the household. However, the male child victims enter the story from a very early age and they are mostly exiled with their mothers when they are infants; hence, they experience hardships earlier than the females and successfully overcome them. On the other hand, the females enter the story and experience their misfortunes later than the male children, and they exist always in relation to their father, lover or husband without any apparent social presence of their own. They are victimized by their fathers when they are old enough to have lovers, husbands and even have children who are exiled with them. The male children are courageous even if they are very young, separated from their households and deprived of their noble status. They are exiled or abducted by their family members; however, they grow into powerful children who avenge the suffering of their parents. On the other hand, female children suffer when they are older compared to the males, mostly exiled with their child by their father after a false accusation or forbidden love affair, and they accept that ordeal is their fate. Some of the female victims are strong, questioning their pain and suffering and resisting them; but most submit to suffering without questioning and accept them as divine punishments, or because they are helpless to resist. The female victims, despite their struggle to overcome suffering, are always pathetic as they are never strong enough to overcome suffering on their own, and they lack physical power to fight back physically, which is necessary for heroic representation.

Any victims' experience of suffering is theologically justified, because each suffering is followed by a relief/respite, and all ordeals end with a final reward. All sufferers, regardless of being resistant or submissive, are regarded as innocent, and they are rewarded after experiencing physical and emotional pains, and they happily reunite with their families, have families, restore their status and dignity or achieve the divine salvation which they seek. While male victims are rewarded with regaining or having status, wealth and families as well as achieving divine forgiveness, female sufferers prove their innocence of accusations, are reunited with their families or their lovers. The relationship between the idea of suffering and reward reminds the audience of the Church's teachings on experiencing suffering on earth to achieve salvation in the afterlife. Romances, through their earthly suffering and rewards, provide secular alternative narratives for discussing these religious ideas on suffering and reward, presenting them in a manner more attractive and accessible to their secular audience.

Middle English metrical romances draw from a tradition which elaborates the sufferings of children and particularly the moaning of mothers on the experience of having to watch the sufferings of their children. These narratives question the reason for the sacrifice of the innocent and suggest that human suffering has redemptive value. Children are appropriate and even essential since the most potent literary representation of the victimized children mirrors the Christian ideals of innocence, submission into ordeal, reward for the sufferer and redemption of the repentant, as well as alluding to the relationship between Mary and Christ. The helplessness and vulnerability of childhood are presented as a surrogate for the helpless Christians in general. Besides, children are exempt from

pollution of the Seven Deadly Sins which distinguishes them from the adults and give a good example to the Christian audience. The weakness, innocence, simplicity are associated with children and they give greater meaning to their victimization by evoking more compassion and pity. In addition to this, the victimized children reveal the failings of parents as responsible mothers and fathers implying a social reality. Commonly, a victimized child—though lost, threatened, exiled or abandoned—seeks or returns to his parents to establish his position or identity as an adult, and he is depicted as an example to the adults with his handling of the ordeals. Hence, through the depictions of the child victims, the metrical romances are shaped in a sense of didacticism.

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