Angelic Demons and Demonic Angels: Representations of Female Villains in Middle English Metrical Romances*

Meleksi Şeytanlar ve Şeytansı Melekler: Ortaçağ İngilizce Metrik Romanslarında Kötü Kadın Tasvirleri

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Abstract

Most medieval English verse romances provide readers with many examples of stereotypical and individualized representations of female villains. These characters, their motivations and their activities demonstrate to the romance audience how to recognize and survive potential villainy. Despite their fictionalit , romances are full of realistic details, especially in their representation of human relationships. Accordingly, this article on female villainy in medieval English metrical romances is concerned with questions such as, in the Middle Ages, what made a female a villain, how a female villain related to her victim, what were the reasons for and results of her villainy, and how society responded to female villainy. For reference and study, various anonymous and miscellaneous romances have been taken into account, and it is hoped that the article will encourage further research. Among the main points focused on in the article are representations of domestic villains such as mother-in-law, stepmother, mother, daughter, and other villains from outside the victims' immediate family. In view of the textual sources, villains are grouped as *pure* villains who are inherently evil, *justified* villains who have a stated reason to be evil, and *good* villains who are unintended villains. Grouping villains according to gender and place in society (domestic/stranger) in addition to *pure*, *justified* and *good* villainy, reveals anxieties that relate to different categories of villainy. At the end of each grouping, the fates of villains (divine punishment, physical and psychological punishment, no punishment, possibility of redemption) are studied in terms of poetic and divine justice. Moreover, encounters with the angelic demons and the demonic angels are discussed as didactic experiences.

Keywords: Middle English metrical romance, female villain, the Middle Ages

Öz

Orta İngilizce metrik romansları okuyucularına pek çok basmakalıp ve bireysel kötü kadın tasviri sunmaktadır. Bu karakterler, onları harekete geçiren nedenler ve eylemleri romansın hedef kitlesine olası kötülükler karşısında yaşamlarını nasıl sürdürebileceklerini örneklemektedir. Kurgu olmalarına rağmen, romanslar özellikle insan ilişkilerinin sunumunda gerçekçi tasvirlerle doludur. Bu bağlamda, Orta İngilizce metrik romanslarındaki kadınların kötülüklerini konu alan bu makale Ortaçağ'da bir kadını neyin kötü yaptığı, kötü kadının kurbanı ile ilişkisinin nasıl olduğu, kötülüğünün nedenleri ve sonuçlarının neler olduğu ve toplumun kadının kötülüğüne nasıl tepki gösterdiği ile ilgili sorularla ilgilidir. Örnekleme ve çalışma için yazarı bilinmeyen muhtelif romanslar dikkate

alınmakta ve bu makalenin ileriki araştırmaları teşvik etmesi beklenmektedir. Makalenin odaklandığı ana konular arasında, kayınvalide, üvey anne, anne, kız gibi aile içindeki kötüler ve kurbanın yakın çevresinden olmayan diğer kötüler bulunmaktadır. Kaynak metinler ışığında, kötüler doğası gereği kötü olan *saf* kötüler, kötülük yapmak için nedeni olan *gerekçeli* kötüler ve kasıtsız olarak kötülük yapan *iyi* kötüler olarak gruplandırılmaktadır. Kötü karakterlerin *saf*, *gerekçeli* ve *iyi* kötü olmaları yanında toplumsal rolleri ve toplumdaki yerlerine (aile içi/aile dışı) göre sınıflandırılma arı kötülüğün farklı alanlarıyla ilgili kaygıları ortaya koymaktadır. Her bir sınıflandırmanın sonunda kötü karakterlerin akıbetleri (ilahi adalet, bedensel ve ruhsal cezalandırma, cezasız kalma, günahtan arınma olasılığı) şiirsel ve ilahi adalet açısından incelenmektedir. Ayrıca, meleksi şeytanlar ve şeytansı melekler ile karşılaşmalar öğretici tecrübeler olarak tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Orta İngilizce metrik romans, kötü kadın, Ortaçağ

Introduction

The study of medieval romances has proved increasingly popular in recent times, and especially there is a great interest in the study of gender issues in romances. However, in most studies the subject of female villainy *per se* has been given very little attention. As Joanne A. Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell suggest, romance "is not a genre of simple-minded adherence to a chivalric *ethos* but rather one that allows slipperiness and an intense recognition of accepted values and gendered roles" (2009, p. 99). By examining, and expanding on this definition, this article, which is based upon a review of representations of female villainy within the corpus of the anonymous metrical romances, provides a detailed study of female villains in order to demonstrate in what sense they are presented as types or as individual characters. Villains are grouped as domestic villains, including villainous mothers-in-law, stepmothers, mothers, daughters, and other villains such as persons formerly unknown to the protagonists. Meanwhile, comparisons are made to classify the reasons for villainy and to differentiate between *pure* villains, who are inherently evil and *justified* villains, who have reason to be evil, and those who are unintended or *good* villains. In this classification, the term "pure" is used to stress that the villains of this type are inherently evil, and their villainy is their only distinctive characteristic, which also implies that their function within the story is restricted purely to villainy. On the other hand, despite their angelic pretensions, villainous women in the household are demonic and more dangerous than other villains. They are mothers, stepmothers, daughters, wives and mostly mothers-in-law, who pretend innocence until their villainy is revealed. They are stereotypically presented as jealous, uncaring, false accusers, adulterous, blinded with desire for power, pretending innocence. They are outsiders inside the family whose villainy remains unrevealed until the very end of the story, when they are mostly punished.

When considered in their totality, there are various kinds of topical material in romances, often of a very moral character, such as topics drawn from English history, secular legends or even extended anecdotes. For instance, there are several romances in the romance corpus derived from English history, especially from the Anglo-Norman history, such as *Romance of Horn*, *Gui de Warewic*, *Amis e Amilun*, *Lai d' Haveloc*, *Boeve*, *Amadas* named as 'ancestral romances', the hero of which is often a landless bachelor who struggles to win back his rightful place in society. These romances are mostly concerned with the earlier, traditional, Anglo-Norman heroes like Horn, Havelok, Beves of Hamptoun, Guy of Warwick, Richard the Lionheart, Athelston, and Gamelyn (Creek, 1911, p. 429; Speed, 1994, p. 145; Rouse, 2005, p. 52) and they lack strong pious tones, whilst foregrounding themes of love and family (Field, 1999, pp. 152-161). Such romances are different from the homiletic

romances which take their plots from the Far East or saints' legends, such as *Flores and Blancheflour*, *The Seven Sages of Rome*, *Robert of Sicily* (Ker, 1999, pp. 285-6), *King of Tars*, *Le Bone Florence of Rome Roland and Vernagu*, *Sir Amadas* and *Sir Cleges* which are presented as romances with pietistic tone and hagiographical material (Pearsall, 1988, pp. 29-31). Anglo-Norman romances were written for a provincial audience rather than a royal court one, as they have local references; and "the heroes of these romances from the thirteenth century onward refer repeatedly to their Englishness: a growing pride in nationality distinguishes these narratives" (Weiss, 2004, pp. 40-41). Moreover, the range seems to have widened steadily towards the end of the thirteenth century and included stories that were not primarily concerned with chivalric themes at all (Mehl, 1968, p. 15).

This variety in subject matter and characterization is also apparent in the representations of villains. Romance heroes and heroines are mostly victims of these villains, so the villains are not generally the protagonists or anti-heroes in the romances. Their characters are not developed in detail, and their existence is presented as a means of initiating the suffering of the protagonists, whose psychological and physical pains and suffering become the main focus of the stories. In all the categories of villainy, male villains predominantly are higher in type and number than female villains. Yet, surprisingly the number of domestic pure female villains exceeds the number of pure male villains.

In this study of female villainy, Arthurian medieval verse romances have been excluded since they form a very distinctive group in itself with sub-corpuses. Also, the romances written by individual authors like John Gower, John Lydgate and Geoffrey Chaucer have been left out due to the fact that each author has a recognizably distinctive corpus of work.

Pure female domestic villains

All the pure female domestic villains in medieval metrical romances are depicted as noble Christian women who desire power either for themselves or for their children, and they achieve it by disempowering, through false accusations, their husbands, stepchildren or daughters-in-law. The villainous mother-in-law figures, who were in fact borrowed and developed from folk tales (Ramsey, 1983, p. 183; Ward, 2006, p. 42), and whose role appears to be that of a protective mother figure, turn into the victimizers of their innocent daughters-in-law and subvert the social and political positions of their grandchildren (Florschuetz, 2008, 248). Hence, the concept of motherhood becomes highly controversial through the undermined image of loving, caring and gentle mother (Neal, 2009, p. 205). The evil mothers-in-law manipulate the innocence and weakness of their family members, break the trust between them, and abuse husbands, stepchildren or daughters-in-law by pretending innocence but destroying them. Stepmothers break fathers' trust in their children, mothers-in-law break the trust of their sons in their wives, and once the tie of trust is broken their victim is vulnerable not only to the villain's victimization but also that of others in whom he trusts. The villains abuse en/trusted and protective people as co-victimizers, in order to victimize their main victims more easily and to make them suffer more, as the victim is left without protection and trust. They use 'mediator victims' rather than acting effectively on their own. Some of them function as 'catalysts', because they initiate suffering for the victim at the beginning of the romances and then disappear or are rarely mentioned, reappearing towards the very end of the story, when their villainy is revealed, and in most cases, they are suitably punished.

In stories such as *Octovian, Emaré*, and *Cheuelere Assigne*, having a suitable heir makes it easier for the wicked mothers-in-law to accuse their daughters-in-law, by involving their sons in the victimization of their wives, and "the more active the mother's part, at least in the initiation of events, the more likely she is to be in some degree the villain" (Fellows 1996, pp. 43-44). The Empress's mother-in-law in *Octovian*, represented in contrast with the innocent Empress who has no will of her own and who submits to misfortunes patiently, is evil because she has "a will of her own" (Salter, 2002, p. 50). Her active involvement in events for her self-interest makes her not only a powerful, but a villainous woman, and in one respect, the one is the other in terms of medieval hegemony. In the wider context of this survey, this type of villain has the effect of 'closing down' the debate and emphasizing the good/evil dichotomy, and what is interesting about these romances is that the villains are not innocent at all.

The subversion of the caring mother figure into a jealous and dangerous victimizer leaves the daughters-in-law lonely, unsupported and vulnerable to the false accusations of their mothers-in-law. In *Octovian*, the mother-in-law makes use of adultery to accuse her daughter-in-law, claiming that her twin grandsons have been born as the result of an adulterous affair with a servant, which provides the mother-in-law with the opportunity to trick her own son into believing his wife's infidelit , resulting in the banishment of the Empress with her twin sons. Similarly, the mother-in-law in *Emaré*, who is "mirroring the wicked father and also providing the figure of the missing dysfunctional parent" (Osborn, 1998, p. 29) substitutes for Emaré's dead mother; yet, the mother-in-law is purely villainous in her attempt to victimize Emaré. Despite Emaré's father Sir Artyus's repentance of his incestuous desire after Emaré's exile, the wicked mother-in-law has no remorse for her villainy (Laskaya, 1998, p. 108). As pointed out by Ross G. Arthur:

> good and the evil characters in the story reveal their natures and even pass judgement
> on themselves by their responses to Emaré's beauty. The good see it as an outward
> sign of her inward personal worth … the bad see it as a thing in itself, and respond
> with either sinful love or sinful hate. (1989, p. 84)

Accordingly, the mother-in-law's inner villainy exposes a hatred, which actually is already present in her; therefore, she treats Emaré cruelly, and when she cannot avoid her son's marriage to Emaré:

> Another lettur she lette make,
> That men sholde the lady take,
> And lede her out of towne,
> And putte her into the see,
> In that robe of ryche ble,
> The lytyll chylde her wyth; (Mills, 1973, p. 62)

Her using a forged letter in her son's name to separate the couple by falsely accusing Emaré of giving birth to a monstrous child, and then pretending that her son has ordered Emaré's exile victimizes not only her daughter-in-law but also her own son by separating him from his family. Like Emaré's mother-in-law, the mother-in-law Matabryne in *Cheuelere Assigne* falsely accuses her daughter-in-law Beatrice of giving birth to whelps because of her jealousy of Beatrice's children's

establishment in the family succession; therefore, she urges her son to burn his wife, and sends her servant Marcus to drown her grandchildren:

> And seyde, 'þou moste kepe counselle & helpe what þou may:
> The fyrste grymme watur þat þou to comeste,
> Looke þou caste hem þer-In & lete hym forthe slyppe (Gibbs, 1868, p. 3)

Matabryne, like the other mother-in-law figures in these romances, chooses villainy by her own free will, as if making an alliance with the devil (Speed, 1996, p. 149).

In all three romances, the mothers-in-law pretend that their daughters-in-law are outsiders within the family, and they accuse the children of their daughters-in-law of being the products of monstrous births; hence, they cleverly make use of the false accusation of adultery and the concept of a monstrous birth, presenting it as a 'monstrous' invasion of the family. Their so-called concern about the birth of their grandchildren originates from the idea of conception in the Middle Ages, basing on the belief that only children born during the marriage counted as potential heirs (Ward, 2006, p. 45). For this reason, the birth of more than one child made people suspicious of the conception of the children and of their possible illegitimacy, that a lover might have been involved in the conception apart from the husband (Schlauch, 1969, p. 89). In such cases, the romance writers concede the view that more than one child may be conceived on the same occasion, troubling the claimed hegemony of the former belief. Hence, the wicked mothers-in-law make use of the argument that the purity of the bloodline would be contaminated if an illegitimate heir succeeded to the throne since "the offspring fails to conform to elite social expectations" (Blamires, 2004, p. 50), in order to victimize their daughters-in-law, by stating falsely that the children born in that union must be destroyed, along with the mother.

The easiest way of victimizing, putting a false accusation on the daughters-in-law, is also made use of by stepmothers. Contrary to the personal empowerment of mothers-in-law, the reason for stepmothers' villainy is to empower their own children. Even if their intention of protecting their own children's interest makes them good parents, the stepmothers are bad examples for society (Menuge, 2000, p. 103) due to the fact that their maternal concern pretends to be innocent; yet, their means of achieving it is villainous. The step mothers abuse their husbands while accusing their stepsons by breaking the trust between the fathers and the sons, apart from leaving their stepsons lonely, vulnerable and defenceless by pretending that they are the stepsons' victims. For instance, in *Generydes*, Auferius's wife Serenydes, pretending being hurt by Auferius's son Generydes when she fails to seduce him, is not only unfaithful to her husband but also a liar:

> 'It is,' quod she, that fals Generydes,
> Be cause he myght not haue his will of me;
> ffor by noo prayour he wold neuer sese,
> But thus he hath arayed me as ye se.' (Wright, 1878, p. 17)

Similarly, the Empress in *The Seven Sages of Rome* falsely accuses her stepson Florentyne of attempting to ravish her, and of committing treason against his father, since she is jealous of the son's wisdom and his future succession to the throne after his father's death:

> For j me drad, sayde she,
> That [h]e shulde dystrye me
> Whenne that he to age come,
> And take fro me the Emperice of Rome;
> Therefore hit was alle in my thought
> Hym to dethe ha[u]e jbrought. (Brunner, 1933, p. 189)

In addition to accusing him falsely, the Empress traps Florentyne in between silence and death by casting a week-long spell on Florentyne which will kill him if he speaks; and furthermore, she makes judicial use of his muteness to accuse him, since "in cases of high treason, standing mute resulted of itself in a judgement of guilty and a death sentence" (Kratins, 1966, pp. 675-676). On the other hand, while the seven sages struggle to avoid Florentyne's execution by his father through telling their tales during Florentyne's silence, the Empress makes use of her persuasive verbal skill and tells contrary tales full of descriptions of villainous sons. Several critics have already drawn attention to the fact that her tales are full of linguistic puzzles, negative portrayals of women and figures of emperors, which reflect the malign counsel and treachery of the Empress herself (Ho, 1992, p. 93)[1] that has been unexposed for awhile since she pretends that not only the Emperor, but she herself will be the sufferer if Florentyne is not killed. Apart from this, she likens herself to a dishonoured woman because of the alleged rape, claiming she will suffer if Florentyne is not slain because she will be hanged after he is enthroned, and she pretends to suffer because her husband ignores her warnings and thus prepares his and her future suffering.

Actually, the Empress' casting a spell on her stepson in *The Seven Sages of Rome*, and Queen Braunden's making use of enchantment alone to prevent her stepson's enthronement in *William of Palerne* indicates "the helplessness of mothers and stepmothers as second wives in feudal society" (Mengue, 2000, pp. 94-95). However, although it is Queen Braunden's helplessness that makes her a victim, her victimizing an innocent boy so that her own son would not suffer makes her a villain instead of a victim. Queen Braunden, pondering upon Alphonse's being the heir after his father the King of Spain, enchants Alphonse and changes him into a werewolf to make her own son the heir to the throne. She thinks:

> I haue þe gretli a-gelt to god ich am a-knowe,
> for redili þe to reue þi riȝt eritage;
> þat þis man min owne sone miȝt it haue hadde
> feiþli after þi fader ich forschop þe þanne
> In þise wise to a werwolf and wend þe to spille; (Skeat, 1898, p. 140)

Despite her pretended innocence, jealousy, driving her to separate her stepson from his father and make him look a villain, is the main motivation for Queen Braunden's villainy. Besides, her jealousy also presents a social reality in relation to marriage. As Menuge points out:

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1   See also Skow-Obenaus, K. (2001). The whole is the sum of its parts: misogyny as a unifying factor in *Die Sieben Wisen Meister. Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 26: 169-182, and Lumiansky, R. M. (1957). Thematic antifeminism in the middle English *The Seven Sages of Rome. Tulane Studies in English*, 7: 5-16.

> The werewolf himself is a maltreated stepson who is turned into a werewolf by his wicked stepmother in an attempt to gain his inheritance for her first-born. This echoes quite strongly the apparent concern medieval lawyers had with the safety of the custody of wards upon the remarriage of the surviving parent. (1999, p. 40)

The father's failing in his role as the protector of his child provides the wicked stepmother with an opportunity to abuse the father/son relationship in order to empower herself. These villainous mothers-in-law and stepmothers display the Seven Deadly Sins in the course of realizing their wicked plans, and they thus turn into sinners as well as villains. Doryjane Birrer's questioning "when a werewolf can be a compassionate and humane friend, and a parent can be a malevolent and inhumane enemy, how can 'humanity' be identified or persuasively characterized within bodies that would be recognizably 'human'?" (2007, p. 218) reminds the audience of the role of humanity as the victimizer of itself, which is explored in all romances through human villains. Such contextualization undermines humanity as a civilized and peaceful unity and rather presents it as full of deceit, highlighting the inhumanity of humans who victimize each other.

In common, mothers-in-law and stepmothers are greedy for power, lustful as they attempt to ravish their stepsons, envious of their establishment within the succession, proud of their pretended innocence, full of wrath when their wicked plans are revealed and gluttonous for their husbands' trust in them. However, it is wrong to assume that they are pure villains as they are not the *real* mothers of their victims, since a real mother who is a villain is described as being far worse than a stepmother or mother-in-law in *Beves of Hamptoun*. The Countess, the victimizer of her son Beves and also of her husband, the Earl of Southampton, does not misuse them to victimize each other; instead, she makes her lover Devoun kill her husband as she is not happy in her marriage to an elderly man, then orders Saber to kill her son Beves, when Beves accuses her of his father's murder. Immediately afterwards, she sells Beves to merchants; thus, she not only "oversteps her boundaries and makes decisions that affect a child's inheritance and future" (Lim, 2011, p. 37) but also provides Beves with a focus on revenge (Djordjević, 2005, p. 13). Additionally, she is depicted as a threat to patriarchal values (Fellows, 1996, pp. 52-53) and Christian morals. As Corinne J. Saunders states:

> [t]he supposedly Christian princess is rapidly revealed to be evil, betraying both husband and son, and perverting the ideals of chaste wife and loving, nurturing mother that are so central to romance, and more generally to Western cultural mores and understanding of gender (2008, p. 163).

However, it is not her overstepping of the gender roles or of Christian morals, but her blindness to her husband and son's suffering in return for the satisfaction of her personal pleasure, which de *facto* brings out the villain in her. Menuge points out that, "[a]s soon as she expresses intent to murder, she becomes all the things evil in womanhood, in motherhood" (2000, p. 86). The Countess sacrifices her husband -to whom she should owe her ultimate loyalty before God- and son for the sake of her personal pleasure, and disregards her role as a wife and mother, which Amiloun's wife in Amis and Amiloun also does by ignoring her role as a wife and as a good Christian, and dismissing her husband from home when he becomes a leper, in order to avoid taking care of him. Nevertheless, Amiloun's

wife can also be accepted as a justified villain because she has a reason to dismiss her husband from his court: "she regards her husband guilty of killing the steward who is innocent in her perspective, she interprets Amiloun's subsequent contraction of leprosy as a divine punishment for his wrongdoing" (Yoon, 2010, p. 40). Besides, the romance author also stresses her justifiable villainy when she blames her husband for ignoring a divine warning and fighting against the steward

> So wicked and schrewed was his wiif,
> Sche brac his hert withouten kniif,
> With wordes harde and kene,
> And seyd to him, 'Thou wreche chaitif,
> With wrong the steward les his liif,
> And that is on the sene;
> Therfore, bi Seyn Denis of Fraunce,
> The is bitid this hard chaunce,
> Dathet who the bimene!' (Foster, 2007, p. 45)

Hence, her support of Christian ideas of righteousness over and above her duty to her male relatives may, indeed, be said to exonerate her in this case.

Ambiguous Villainies

Villainy in order to achieve personal power, which may also be justified as in the case of Amiloun's wife, is possibly introduced not only by wives and mothers but also by daughters in a family. Particularly, the Saracen daughters in medieval metrical romances are represented as merciless victimizers of their fathers and other Saracens, and their villainy is a dominant feature through the texts in which they appear. They are very dynamic and focused throughout all the incidents, and unlike other female villains, they achieve their goals by marrying their lovers, converting to Christianity and punishing their fathers. In *Sir Ferumbras* and *The Sowdone of Babylone*, which represent parallel versions of the same story, daughters called Floripas betray their father and their people by denying paternal authority, humiliating and verbally abusing their fathers whilst helping their enemy. Floripas, in both romances, commits murders in cold blood in order to destroy anyone whom she sees as a threat to her plan. Such villainous representation of Floripas in both romances serving to define the ideal Christian woman by contrasting her with the exotic and demonic one is functional since the Saracen princess has been described as the product of male fantasy, beautiful and available, unlike her Christian counterpart, who could not decently behave in such a way. Alternatively, she has been described as the product of "a fantasy of revolt against parental authority" (Weiss, 1991, p. 152), since she accepts conversion without enforcement, with a personal choice for a woman (Heng, 2003, p. 186), in a society where fathers determine the fate of their daughters. Hence, the attribution of villainy to the exotic and non-Christian women may be used to highlight the angelic qualities and behaviour of Christian women, since Floripas's behaviour signifies her Saracen identity, which is demonized or masculinised (Cohen, 2001, p. 121), apart from being "a dangerous combination of masculine and feminine qualities … neither wholly Saracen nor wholly Christian" (Akbari, 2009, p. 175).

In *Sir Ferumbras*, Floripas kills the gaoler, who prevents her from visiting the imprisoned French knights, in cold blood:

> As sche wolde þe dore to-breke sche gan þo hebbe & pynge:
> þe iayler þan þyderward gan to reke to letten hur of þat þynge;
> Sche lefte þe dore & wend him ner & lifte vp þ^e staf with mayne,
> & so on þe heued sche set him þer þat out sterte al is brayne. (Herrtage, 1903, p. 46)

Similarly, in *The Sowdone of Babylone*, Floripas throws her mistress Maragounde out of the window when she refuses to help her provide food for the imprisoned French knights. In both romances, she wants the French to behead her father, who rejects conversion. The reason for Floripas' taking sides with the Christians is controversial. Whilst William Barron asserts that Floripas' assistance to the French knights and her victimization of the Saracens in her father's castle is for "showing herself worthy of a Christian company" (1987, p. 102); Jacqueline de Weever, on the other hand, states that Floripas's conversion is not mainly for a religious reason, since she does not convert because she is fully convinced by the Christian faith, but because she is in love with a Christian man (1998, p. xvii). Following this argument, it is apparent that Floripas is on the side of Christians well before her conversion, and that her taking the side of the Christians results from her love for the French knight Guy, rather than from her desire to be a Christian. Her victimization of the Saracens even before her conversion proves that her main motivation for villainy is not her devotion to the Christian faith. However, her alliance with the Christians justifies her villainy and exempts her from guilt and punishment, which might otherwise be meted out to a powerful, ruthless, female warrior and patricide.

de Weever suggests that the Saracen woman's conversion is "a journey from darkness to light" and her baptism serves "as entrance into a new life" (1998, p. 40). However, Floripas's conversion does not change her into a merciful Christian from a demonic Saracen, because she never feels mercy for her father and the Saracens when they reject conversion. Her conversion, which is insufficient to erase her inward villainy, puts her under the control of a Christian husband who will disempower and tame her with her implied consent, in other words, with her being in love. On the other hand, it makes her a justified villain rather than a pure villain because all Saracens, including her father, are 'others' for her after her conversion and they all deserve suffering because of their heretical faith; thus, Floripas turns into a model for conversion to Christianity, who is able to absorb her energy, resourcefulness and vigour, on the understanding that it will be both controlled and rerouted into the promotion of the militant/evangelical Christian faith. Within these parameters, loyalty to the new faith is perceived as more moral than loyalty to family bonds, which justifies her villain .

Compared to the very large number of males, there are only a few justified female villains in romances, such as the Jewish mother in *The Siege of Jerusalem* who eats her infant child to survive starvation[2] when the town is under siege by Christians:

> þan saiþ þat worþi wif in a wode hunger,
> 'Myn owen barn haue I brad and þe bones gnawen,
> Ʒit haue I saued ʒou som', and + a side feccheþ
> Of þe barn þat ʒo bare, and alle hire blode chaungeþ. (Hanna and Lawton, 2003, p. 74)

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2   The story of the mother who eats her child in order to survive is not uncommon in sermon literature.

Like the purely villainous domestic Christian females, the Jewish mother, depicted as an 'anti-Mary' and an anti-Christian mother lacking love for her child, is "the parody of Virgin Mary" who sacrificed "her son to nourishing others" (Akbari, 2005, p. 42) since, unlike Mary, she sacrificed him to feed herself.

The anti-Christian representation of the Jewish mother, originating from the prejudices and assumptions about the Jews in the Middle Ages, bases on the belief that the Saracens and the Jews were "putatively demonic, bestial subhumans" (Hemg, 2003, p. 95), and they were accused by some Christians of "well- and food-poisoning in attempts to end Christendom" (Cohn, 2007, p. 13). Moreover, "cannibalism and the use of human blood (the 'blood libel') were also accusations often levelled against Jews" (Bildhauer, 2003, p. 80). Therefore, violence against the Jews was not uncommon in the Middle Ages, in addition to the negative representations of the Jews in medieval literature. Even if Elisa Narin van Court believes that the romance author is sympathetic to the suffering of the Jews in *The Siege of Jerusalem* (2002, p. 167), it is apparent that there is a "cheerfully sanctified violence" (Hanna, 1992, p. 111) against the Jews in the romance. Although her being an 'other' for the Christians because of her Jewish blood may be the reason for her villainy, it is apparent that the Jewish mother is forced to eat her child by the Christians keeping the town under siege and leaving the Jews to starve. As Christine Chism points out, the siege is a means of destroying and exploiting the Jews to disperse them from Jerusalem (2002, p. 155); hence, the Jewish mother, though she is an 'other', is not purely evil but provoked to villainy by Christian invaders. In addition to this, "[t]he mother's bond with her child is figured in the maternal body, and this blood is imagined as a dangerous blood, a polluting blood, even a sinful blood" (McCracken, 2002, p. 74); therefore, different from the fathers who victimize their daughters for a better good to keep their lineage safe, a mother's victimizing her child is presented as monstrous owing to the assumption that "[t]he blood shed by the mother is maternal blood, and a mother's murder of her child can be explained as a demonic act" (McCracken, 2002, p. 74). Accordingly, her association with evil because of her Jewish faith makes her a justified, or at least an 'explained' villain as she is not Christian; therefore, she has no motivation to be patient in suffering or merciful to the powerless, although her villainy is tinged with the demonic act of infanticide, which is still a deadly and sinful crime.

Similar to the ambiguity of the Jewish mother's villainy, it is unclear whether the mother advocating the death of her son in *The Romans of Partenay* is also a justified villain or a pure villain. Melusine advises her husband Raymond to kill their son Horrible to prevent the suffering he may bring into their family if he survives, which Celia M. Lewis calls "the most dramatic lesson" given by a mother (2011, p. 19) in order to stress Melusine's 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, brings her closer to justified villainy than pure villainy. However, neither of the females is punished for victimizing their children, which also brings them closer to justified villains. Furthermore, Freine's mother in *Lay le Freine*, who wants to destroy her infant daughter in order to escape from the accusation of adultery after she gives birth to twins, is another ambiguous representation in terms of pure or justified villainy. The lady is a pure villain since she sacrifices her daughter to save herself; however, her repentance of having accused her neighbour, who also gave birth to twins, of adultery, her desperation and consent to her maid's offer to abandon the child at a convent instead of killing her makes her pitiable, and a justified villain who is trapped between keeping her child and being accused of adultery. Nevertheless, her compassion for Freine, when her twin sister is about to marry

Freine's lover Sir Guroun, also reveals that the lady is sympathetic rather than villainous, which not only spares her from punishment, but also rewards by reunion with her daughter Freine.

Good Villains

Good villains, in other words unintended villains, whose getting away with punishment depends on the level of goodness of their intention, are another group of villains who are spared from punishment. They are mostly lovers or other family members who have no intent for villainy, but they inflict suffering unknowingly on their victim. In contrast to their pure villainous counterparts, good villains are sympathetic and their victimizations are not meant to inflict suffering, but rather to prevent it. Thus, they are not only foils to pure female domestic villains who victimize or enchant to inflict suffering, but also the means to mollify the idea that the household might all be mischievous or malicious. Their victimizing their beloved ones unknowingly while trying to relieve them or prevent their suffering exempts them from punishment, since the main motivations of maternal love and care, and passionate love for a male make them unintentional victimizers.

For instance, the mother desiring to protect her child in *Partonope of Blois* is a good villain, since she is the victimizer of her son Partonope unintentionally when she is worried about Partonope's being enchanted by a fairy. Having learned about his lover Melior's forbidding Partonope to see her for a year and a half, the mother makes Partonope drink an enchanted wine to make him fall in love with the king's niece and forget Melior; yet, when she fails, she gives him an enchanted lantern to reveal Melior's wickedness, which ends with Melior's accusing Partonope of distrusting her. This leads to the separation of the lovers for a while during which Melior's sister Urike acts like a good villain by victimizing her sister, so that Melior can realize that she is making her lover suffer. Whilst Melior helps Partonope because she sees that he has suffered greatly and he is truly repentant; Urike, on the contrary, torments Melior emotionally so that Melior will realize Partonope's suffering, so that Partonope and Melior will then be reminded that they are mistaken in distrusting one another. Hence, neither Partonope's mother nor Melior's sister are intentionally villainous or malevolent, since their attempts make the lovers suffer to have a good outcome; the end, or the intention, justifies the means. Another couple that fails to realize that their love is mutual and hence victimize each other is Lady Fere and Ipomadon in *Ipomadon*. Lady Fere, humiliating Ipomadon as a coward because of his refraining from chivalric deeds to prove himself as the best knight on earth, is so proud that she thinks she is peerless:

> Fro she come to here above,
> That may wax so provde of love,
> Her thought no prynce her pere.
> Yf she were semelyeste vnder schrovde
> Of other poyntys, she was namyd prowde
> But of love to lere. (Purdie, 2001, pp. 5-6)

In return for her humiliation, Ipomadon punishes Lady Fere by forsaking her for a long time, although he is always around her in disguise, until he reveals his identity and she reveals her love for him. In addition to these unintentional villains, in *The Squire of Low Degree*, the King of Hungary's daughter urging her lover, the Squire, to quest for seven years in order to prove that he is worthy of

her hand is not intentionally villainous either, because she wants him to prove his chivalric excellence and nobility; yet, she is unaware that her lover will be abused, imprisoned and then sent on quest by her father.

Punishment of the Villains

In medieval English metrical romances, stranger villains are all males, except for Queen Guenevere in *Sir Launfal* who is represented as a temptress, a false accuser, a trickster and a promiscuous wife who cuckolds her husband King Arthur. Sir Launfal leaves King Arthur's court to escape from her victimization (he has also been deprived of his wealth); yet, she revenges herself on Sir Launfal for rejecting her love and boasting of his fairy lover Lady Tryamour, by abusing her husband King Arthur's authority to put Sir Launfal to trial and execution. However, romances have a thematic and structural pattern in which there is "a moral pattern, a strong sense of poetic justice. The good are rewarded and the bad punished. Even the hero, if he commits a sin, must suffer for it" (Hume, 1963, p. 27). Similar to one's pronouncing sentence on oneself for his or her own-wrong doing, a common folk tale motif foretelling the means of punishment and suffering for the villain (Martin, 1966, p. 208), Guenevere is blinded by Lady Tryamour's breath in return for her false accusation against Sir Launfal, as it has already been suggested by Guenevere before her villainy is revealed. Apart from that, Guenevere's punishment by Lady Tryamour "dislocates the story from the domain of fantasy and inscribes it in a real social space" since it provides a moral justificatio by punishing the corruption in family and court (Horvath, 2003, p. 177).[3]

In the thirteenth century there was a tendency to punish rebellions and treason severely by the penalties of drawing, hanging, disembowelling, burning, beheading and quartering (Bellamy, 2004, p. 23). The distinction between petty and high treason became clear only after the statute of 1352; therefore, it has been suggested that romances do not reflect this legal development of the concept of treason (Kratins, 1966, pp. 669-670). However, even if their historical correctness is dubious, there is evidence of different types and levels of punishment for treason and betrayal in romances such as the dominant domestic justice for the punishment of domestic villains either by their son, grandchild or husband. In the Middle Ages, burning, which was a manner of execution both in life and in romance if a woman involved in adultery or seduction (Kratins, 1966, p. 686), was "the biblical penalty for bestiality and for incest" (Korpiola, 2005, p. 108). Burning is specifically a punishment for women in romances (Reinhard, 1941, p. 199), and their punishment is "left to private revenge, or to the jurisdiction of the family; the husband or the father of the offending wife was allowed to put her to death" (Reinhard, 1941, p. 194). Even if she has been "coerced into an abusive situation, killed her husband as a last resort, she would still be burnt at the stake" (Salisbury, 2002, p. 22). In romances, most of the pure female domestic villains are punished when their villainies are revealed at the very end of the romances, except for the daughters whose villainy is justified by their conversion to Christianity, who are rewarded with marriage to their lovers and becoming queens. In both *Sir Ferumbras* and *The Sowdone of Babylone*, the villainous Saracen princesses named Floripas, after their conversions to Christianity, are rewarded with marriage to their French lover (Guy), and they become Queen of Spain. On the other hand, whilst the mother-in-law in *Emaré* is spared from burning but is stripped of her possessions by her son before she is exiled, Matabryne in *Cheuelere Assigne*

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3   See also Stokes, Myra (2000). *Lanval* to *Sir Launfal*: a story becomes popular. In A. Putter and J. Gilbert (Eds.), *The spirit of medieval English popular romance* (pp. 56-77). Harlow: Longman.

is burnt when her treason is disclosed by her grandson. Similarly, the false accuser mother-in-law in *Octovian* and the stepmother in *The Seven Sages of Rome* are punished by burning, while Amiloun's disloyal wife is put into a stone lodge to die, where she is given only bread and water, in return for dismissing her leprous husband. Contrary to domestic punishments, the Countess who is the wicked natural mother and disloyal wife in *Beves of Hamptoun* is punished by God when she falls from the top of the castle and breaks her neck, demonstrating that domestic wickedness is also a deadly sin.

On the contrary, the good villains, whose repentance is the main factor in determining their being punished or forgiven, are spared punishment because they actually do not deserve it. In two out of three romances with wicked stepmothers, their villainy is forgiven after their repentance; although one of them is still punished by her husband. In *The Seven Sages of Rome*, the Empress is sentenced to burning by the Emperor after her false accusation against her stepson Florentyne is revealed, although in *Generydes*, Generydes forgives his wicked stepmother Serenydes after she tears her hair in repentance, and asks Generydes to kill her to end her pain, since she has well deserved it:

> 'I yow requere for goddis loue,' quod she,
> 'haue here this swerd, and make an ende of me
> Now or ye goo, and bryng me owt of payn,
> ffor I haue well deseruyd it for certayn.' (Wright, 1878, p. 210)

Likewise, in *William of Palerne*, the idea of mercy is praised through the depictions of the sufferers as forgivers rather than tyrants, and repentance is presented as a means of avoiding punishment. Hence, Alphonse's enchantress stepmother's life is spared and she goes unpunished because she repents of having enchanted Alphonse, confesses that she has sinned, and begs for forgiveness.

Didacticism of Villainy

The villains in romances attempt to break the bond of trust between their victims and the justified villains they abuse, while victimizing their victims. They embody evil in human beings, and represent non-ideal stereotypes, while on the other hand they reveal the weaknesses of human beings by the suffering they initiate. Even if the villains victimize others so that they themselves do not suffer and they ignore the suffering of their victims, they are blind to their own desperation. They seem to survive, even to thrive, when they victimize, because they feel themselves powerful and masterful; yet, they are lonely and disempowered by their solitude, power and greed. They do not realize that what they think of as power is actually their weakness, since their cunning and opportunism help them to survive only for a while. Although, unlike their victims, they know exactly what they want and they think before they act, they cannot avoid punishment in the end, because they turn into victims of their own sinful desires. By depicting them as sinners because of their greed, lust, pride, envy and gluttony, romances give moral/religious messages, teaching the audience how to survive on earth, in a secular and a spiritual sense, by warning them against becoming victims. Hence, the romances offer advice on how to spot potential villains, the situations in which they might arise, how to identify them by their characters and actions, how not to be deluded by them, and ultimately also warn against the temptations to villainy by highlighting the self-destructiveness of the sins they commit.

Dividing the villains in accordance with their intention under titles of pure villains, justified villains and good villains provides us with a moral analysis of villains, which evaluates them according to their sinfulness, so that their punishments can be defined in relation to the category of their villainy. Although the category of villainy changes, the suffering experiences of the victims remain the same, and more importantly, the victims encounter their foils within the representations of the villains. Villains in each category, both domestic and stranger, remind the victims that neither the familiar nor the unfamiliar person is necessarily reliable since they are either potentially threatening or has potential for disguised villainy. All villainies provide the villains with temporary empowerment which they gain through dominating their victims; yet, this temporary superiority runs out when they are punished for their villainy and turn into victims. Indeed, becoming a villain and a victim is a vicious circle in romances, and the change in the status of being a victim or a villain reminds the audience that power obtained through villainy is doomed to failure, eventually leading to punishment and victimization of the victimizer. Despite their villainies, all villains unintentionally contribute to the physical and psychological growth of their victims, as they become the means of teaching the victim worldly wisdom in dealing with other people, and how to survive in ordeals. Therefore, encounters with the angelic demons and the demonic angels are didactic experiences as they make the victims know their enemies and submit weakly or resist boldly.

Conclusion

It is apparent from these varied representations of villains that females are victimizers of one another and the males both within the household and outside the family. The domestic female villains, victimizing mostly their daughters-in-law or stepsons, are generally pure villains who empower themselves in their households, and they have an unrestrainable desire for unjustifiable revenge. The good villains, although they are very rare in romances; unintentionally introduce suffering while trying to prevent it, and all are exempt from punishment. The pure female villains are almost always close to the family, which provides them with a better opportunity to victimize family members, because they know their victims' weaknesses and vulnerabilities very well. While villains seek to obtain social prestige in general in addition to personal power, they try to get it through victimizing an individual, and even if they achieve great power temporarily, most of them lose it by becoming victims and being punished in the end.

Punishment of the villains is necessary to preserve the social order. Philippa Maddern explains the significance of violence for medieval English people as an instrument and a sign of social order, remarking that "[s]ermons, moral literature, vernacular poetry and personal reflections assumed that God's care for humankind involved the use of direct and effective violence, to punish the wicked, to protect the righteous" (2002, p. 38). In addition to this, grouping villains according to their place in society (domestic/stranger) in addition to pure, justified and good villainy reveals anxieties which relate to different categories of villainy. Whilst there are plenty of noble women who are purely evil because of their desiring power in their domestic arena, there are no female villains who interfere in the empowerment or victimization of Saracens (except Floripas), because while female villains are entrapped in their household, war and politics, as well as the public sphere in general, are kept as male areas for practising villainy. A man may legitimately seek to empower himself, but when a

woman does this, it is usually sin, or villainy, unless she is being passive under threat or in exceptional circumstances. In these cases, she reverts to societal norms when the threat is removed. Mothers-in-law and stepmothers, despite victimizing their daughters-in-law and stepsons, are not as strong as they are represented, because their empowerment is possible only by victimizing another woman in their family. They are not strong enough to effectively challenge a man in order to empower themselves; hence, they remain the weaker sex physically and socially, even in their household. Nonetheless, they compensate for their lack of physical power by practising verbal power including the clandestine manipulation of the written word, legitimately the preserve of men. Eventually, their cunning and persuasive speech makes them convincing and helps them abuse sons or husbands, in order to victimize their wives or children. The false accusation of monstrous birth, which the mothers-in-law make use of in accusing their daughters-in-law, *de facto* mirrors their own monstrosity by means of which they seek to empower themselves. Although the romances do not directly depict women as monstrous, they present powerful and ambitious women as villainous, contrary to the heroic representation of powerful and ambitious males who use their power and ambition to victimize those who deserve it. Their making use of enchantments to victimize their stepchildren, on the other hand, reveals their inability to empower themselves by natural, or non-supernatural, means.

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