

Research Notes

Envy: An Insidious Emotion in Medieval Anglo-Norman Tradition of England

Haset: Ortaçağ'da İngiltere Anglo-Norman Geleneğinde Sinsi Duygu

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Abstract

There are two main categories of emotion theories: basic emotion and componential theories. While these theories are generally focused on the contemporary world, they may provide new perspectives on medieval literature. Roman de Horn and Boeve de Haumtone are Anglo-Norman romances that tell the stories of noble, handsome, and good-looking heroes who become courageous along their journeys. Although they somehow begin their journey with bad luck, they both triumph in the end. All these seemingly spectacular characteristics of the heroes naturally evoke envy among others. Envy occurs when someone's autonomy or closely identified persons/property is threatened. In both romances, the heroes battle against false accusations made by their enviers. In this respect, the major concern of this article is to explore how the philosophical and emotional significance of envy performs in medieval tradition.

Keywords: Middle Ages, literature, England, emotion, envy

Öz

Roman de Horn ve Boeve de Haumtone, yolculukları boyunca cesurlaşan asil, yakışıklı ve iyi görünümlü kahramanları anlatan Anglo-Norman romanslarıdır. Yolculuklarına bir şekilde şanssızlıkla başlasalar da sonunda ikisi de zafere ulaşmaktadır. Kahramanların görünüşteki muhteşem özellikleri, doğal olarak diğerleri arasında hasete neden olmaktadır. Her iki romansta da kahramanlar haset edilenler tarafından kendilerine iddia edilen iftiralara karşı savaşmaktadır. Bu çalışma, ortaçağ Anglo-Norman İngilteresindeki edebiyat geleneğinde hasetin nasıl ve neden önemli olduğunu felsefi ve duygusal bir perspektiften irdeleyecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ortaçağ, edebiyat, İngiltere, duygu, haset

Introduction

Emotions represent composite mental phenomena, appeal to everyone and are a fact of life. Seneca, the Roman philosopher refers to the Greco-Roman term *invidia* as "a powerful and harmful passion" (Balint, p. 42). Aristotle defines that envy is pain at the good fortune of others' (Honeycutt, p. 10). Aristotle also states that emotions are a mixture of pain and pleasure, and one is specifically primary in each; emotions like shame, pity, fear, and envy inflict pain, and the pain of envy is disturbing (King, p. 133). In medieval understanding, an emotion is not concretely recognized, but envy is considered one of the seven deadly sins in the Catholic tradition. In the Biblical text, the envier is inferior while not denied that it causes harm to the envied; the focus is more on the envier as the one who is to lose at the end (Balint, p. 44). While medieval thinkers unquestionably depict envy as mischievous, modern thinkers regard it in the same category as other emotions and focus on its function. It seems that a more humanistic understanding evolved from the medieval to our ages in

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the evaluation process of envy. In this respect, is envy portrayed to emphasize the power and marvelousness of the hero? This article aims to analyze envy from a philosophical perspective and to concentrate on how envy is understood as a sin and emotion in medieval tradition. *Boeve de Haumtone* and *Roman de Horn* explicitly contain an envious villain who provokes the hero's great features while allowing the reader to get more insight into the understanding of the concept of envy in medieval tradition.

In *Roman de Horn*, Horn is orphaned as the Saracens kill his father, King Aalof, and he sets off to Brittany with his fifteen boys who share a similar faith with him. In Brittany, he is protected and educated by King Rodmund. He grows to be a skilled knight, and he is capable of marrying princess Rigmel. However, on his way to achieving his goals, he comes across difficulties and struggles through his journey of exile and return (Düzgün, p. 84). The plot combines features from romance and chanson de geste, and usually exemplifies the exile and return type, concerning itself with the deeds of a knight (Düzgün, p. 84). During this journey, Horn faces with enviers. He is envied for he is the most powerful and the best looking. Horn is a magnificent hero with a stunning look and is heavenly. Fighting against the Saracens in three lengthy battles, struggling with exile and long journeys away from his lover, he is also dealing with a deceiver. Wikele, described as an evil traitor is a grandson of Denerez, who accused Aalof, Horn's father of the noble Silauf, and is now repeating the same with Horn. Wikele is slandering Horn to King Hunlaf, which results in his second exile. It seems that the motivation behind Wikele's accusation is introduced as pure "envy" since the author utters the phrase "envy never dies" the first time when telling this part of the story (Weiss, l. 1875).

Similarly, Boeve, the hero of *Boeve de Haumtone* is going on journeys to fulfill his quest. Boeve is inauspiciously orphaned by his mother. She kills her husband to marry a young emperor. Boeve is sold to the Saracens, and brought up under the control of king Hermin in Egypt. The plot continuous with love between Josiane and Boeve, and he proves himself a devoted fighter and a lover by defeating all enemies throughout his adventure from Egypt to Damascus and then to England. Boeve fights against the Saracens or giants, but on the other hand, is faced with envious men. Several knights of the king Hermin attack Boeve. English Boeve is more handsome, stronger, and well-formed than others in Egypt. He not only wins over the beautiful princess Josiane, but he also gets the appraisal and the love of Hermin. This arouses envy among the king's knights towards Boeve. Langum argues that envy is an emotion that is destructive for both the "envier" and the "envied" and puts forward the presentation of envy in the Bible (p. 105). It is one of the seven deadly sins rather than a natural emotion inherent in human beings. It seems to be categorized as evil compared to other emotions like anger or fear because of its destructive nature.

Both *Boeve de Haumtone* and *Roman de Horn* include a hero that displays courageous deeds throughout his journey of exile and return (Düzgün, p. 57). Boeve and Horn have unfortunate beginnings in their stories but later turn out to be excellent knights and lovers. Boeve faces with his father's death and his mother's betrayal. When Boeve tries to fight against them, he is sold to Saracens by his mother and then sold to Hermin, the king of Egypt:

The Saracen merchants brought the child, paying four times his weight in gold for him. When they had finished with their purchases, they made their boat ready and sailed over the sea for so long that they brought the ship to land in Egypt. (Weiss, pp. 358-63)

The fact that it is a four-time payment is particularly attention grabbing. Is it because he is a count's son, or has he high value because he has so many features? It foreshadows his superiority and why he will be the envied character. Boeve's story begins early on before

he goes away; his struggle with misfortune precedes his fight against the enemies. He has a cruel mother and is left all alone with his faith. Similarly, Horn and fifteen other children along with him are sent to Brittany from hometown Suddene after king Aalof dies: “the story of Horn, fatherless and brave, and his fate at the hands of the wicked Saracens. [...] He was the first to find Horn hidden in a garden, with fifteen other boys of his race” (Weiss, pp. 1-18). He is also taken care of by Herland, king Hunlaf’s Senechal, and dubbed a knight. The dominant feeling is pity towards both Boeve and Horn. However, as their journey begins and they get stronger and luckier, they encounter enviers in addition to their admirers. They are born noble; they are good-looking and they somehow radiate nobility, which allows them to get support from other nobles. Furthermore, kings offer their daughters to marry these heroes, and this causes even more envy around them. All these privileges frustrate some men and result in hostile attacks on them. Both heroes are envied for similar reasons. Throughout the romance, their nobility is praised many times and presented as if it’s idiosyncrasy. The African king Rodmund kills Horn’s father, wants to kill the “most notable kin” since he is scared that they may grow up and take revenge (Weiss, pp. 40-70). However, he “pitied the children so much that he could not bear them to perish in his presence,” instead he decides to send them on a boat to the high seas leaving them to death (Weiss, pp. 140-70). So from the first moment Horn’s luck helps him not to be brutally killed but to be sent to his fate to the sea. Later, he arrives in Brittany, home of Hunlaf “for God granted them good fortune, sending them a wind that blew from the northwest and landed them” (Weiss, pp. 191-114). Here, again luck is on their side. The moment they arrive, Horn stands out from the others, and when they arrive somewhere as total strangers, they don’t meet cruel people, but they are welcomed with “pity” and “mercy.” Among the other fifteen boys, Horn is treated differently and often praised: “Herland saw Horn before all the others” (Weiss, pp. 115-37), and he is most often compared to the others and portrayed as superior to them: “but Horn surpassed them all as the daystar eclipses the lesser stars nearby” (Weiss, pp. 195-217). As Langum puts it, “the nature of envy is connected to the feelings of injustice”, that is to say, if two individuals are in the same class, they expect to be treated equally, and any fortune or advantage of the other hurts our natural sentiments of equality (p. 83). Horn is superior and more fortunate than the others and his superiority provides the hints that he is in line for enviousness.

Likewise, in *Boeve de Haumtone*, Boeve is presented to the reader as a “handsome and capable boy” (Weiss, pp. 37-44). However he is unfortunate to be orphaned at a very young age. His mother is so cruel and sells him to Saracens. He weeps “loudly for his father’s death” (Weiss, pp. 207-12). Instead of going away, he comes back to fight his stepfather and his mother, but he is not yet strong to beat them out. His mother sells him to the merchants and the Saracen merchants take him by sea and go to Egypt where king Hermin lives with his beautiful daughter Josaine. Boeve expresses himself clearly, which is unexpected for a very young, unfortunate little boy, and “the king heard him and felt great pity” (Weiss, pp. 386-92). Both heroes start haplessly, but because they are noble, handsome, and self-confident, they can turn their luck around, and the king approves them. Once more, these unearned advantages are the root of envy soon evident in Hermin’s close men towards Boeve. In these romances, the heroes’ physical appearance is another reason to be envied. Not only Boeve and Horn are born noble and overcome any misfortunes thanks to the pity aroused in whoever sees them, but they are also honored many times and depicted as more skillful and better-looking than others. After Horn arrives in Brittany he is taken to the king and is recognized as “the most intelligent, the boldest of them all and the most nobly born” even before he introduces himself (Weiss, pp. 157-75). After Horn tells the king who he is and where he came from, the king promises him not to harm more than his son and be “carefully nurtured” (Weiss, pp. 326-45). King Hunlaf appoints each of his men to be responsible for

each child to take care of them. Horn is on Herland's hand and is "well placed and well educated" (Weiss, pp. 369-86). Horn is brought up by noblemen and treated kindly, because he is "clever and brave. He was prized above them all -deservedly because he was their lord and also because in all ways, he was most accomplished" (Weiss, pp. 387-407). Once more, not all children are appreciated under equal terms on many occasions, Horn is repeatedly presented as better than the others in many ways: "he had so many talents that no one was worthier than he" (Weiss, pp. 387-407). He is skillful and much better looking, he becomes famous for his "great cleverness and great beauty" and yet in no way he grows arrogant. He is very handsome but not vain expected from good-looking men. All these positive aspects gathered in the same person bring the possibility of any men around him feeling inferior and hostile.

While Boeve is sent to another country, abandoned by his mother and has been left fatherless, he goes to Egypt with the merchants. He is presented to the king courteously, and the king is very grateful to have the child. The king is immediately interested in the child and says: "I never saw a child as beautiful as you before" (Weiss, 380-92). This again suggests that the hero's good-looking lets fortune smile on him. Most of the time, Boeve is the sweet, fair and beloved son (Weiss, pp. 237-43), and he is Boeve the wise (Weiss, pp. 297-302, 411-15), the brave-hearted (Weiss, 561-96), he is Boeve the noble (Weiss, pp. 635-41), and the renowned fighter (Weiss, ll. 740-49), he is fierce-looking (Weiss, pp. 1069-87) and powerful (Weiss, pp. 903-27).

While Horn has good physical appearance and strong personality, Boeve reflects enviable courage and bravery. He is only a child when he tries to convince the porter to let him be in and attack his stepfather. He has self-confidence, promises to take back his land, speaks "boldly" in front of the emperor and calls him to account for killing his father (Weiss, pp. 282-88). He is weaponless and fights and beats ten foresters, which also impresses Josiane, and is even more fearless and martial once dubbed a knight. He again shows self-confidence while faces with a battle with Bradmund and his four hundred men. He says he will easily defeat them (Weiss, pp. 561-96). While trying to flee from Damascus where on exile, he even fights and kills "a strong and fierce giant" (Weiss, pp. 1286-1312). He sends "his soul to the devil" although he is tired and hungry (Weiss, pp. 1313-61). All these traits that make him stand out from others also make him the target of harm. These come from envious people, which is natural in such cases.

Boeve and Horn are envied because they are noble and attractive. Princesses fall in love with these heroes. These noble and beautiful ladies are the most desired by many other men. These are the reasons that heroes have enemies and rivals. For instance, Horn "was praised so much in the king's court that rosy-cheeked Rigmel, the daughter of good king Hunlaf, came to hear of it- indeed there was none fairer than her in all Christendom" (Weiss, pp. 387-407). He attracted the attention of the lady who was unprecedented "in sixty kingdoms" even before seen (Weiss, pp. 408-21). He fights, succeeds battles and proves his prowess. He is already loved and admired by the princess, and this causes envy among others. Furthermore, as he attends an annual feast, he is "admired by all; no lady seeing him was not deeply affected and troubled by the pains of love" (Weiss, pp. 437-54).

Not only by the princess, but Horn is also instantly noticed by all women. It is comprehensible that other men feel inferior, and they are envious. At the feast, the king orders Horn to serve him as a cupbearer, and "all the other boys shall follow him" (Weiss, pp. 455-70). It is clear that Horn has other boys with him at the feast, but Horn is the only one praised. The reader has no information on how the others feel. It proves that an environment available for envy arises especially considering they are still boys. During the feast, Rigmel attempts to reach Horn in several ways, and she sends messages and

endeavors to have him by her. She wants him so much and strives, and one can observe how it may be envious for the men witnessing everything. Rigmel is in love and so excited about Horn that she does many things and offers him valuable things like “gold, apparel, horses, and minted silver” (Weiss, pp. 538-56). In addition, after Horn is accused by the enviers, he defends himself by trying to convince the king that he is not guilty: “You should not, if you please, so foolishly believe this evil, jealous men who hear me so much envy: I have done them no harm, by St.Vincent!” (Weiss, pp. 1920-40). He leaves Brittany as he is on exile, arrives in Westir (Ireland). However, his charm attracts the attention of the princess here too. The daughter of the king named Lenburc notices the picturesqueness and elegance of Horn. Although he conceals his identity and uses another name in Westir, he is accepted and welcomed here too. As in the case of Rigmel, Lenburc takes the initiative and tries to convince Horn to be with her again by offering him valuables. Yet, she is refused by Horn and becomes very unhappy as Horn “had hopelessly ensnared her” (Weiss, pp. 2513-32). Lenburc loves Horn and she is envious. The phrase “envy never dies” occurs the second time (Weiss, pp. 2580-99). Men, who are powerful, successful, or in the foreground in any way are destined for envy. Horn attracts the attention of the most beautiful ladies in the country. It is beneficial in every aspect for a young man to have both the love of the best woman and the most financial power.

Boeve, as only an orphan coming from a foreign country, is in a short time so caressed by the king that he says: “my only heir in this world is a daughter, and I will give her to you along with my kingdom” (Weiss, pp. 393-98). His words are not just an arrangement though it is reciprocal Josiane, King Hunlaf’s daughter feels so much love for the young man that she cannot think of anything else. Her first impression is: “how dashing Boeve looks! Lucky the woman who could be his beloved! If I don’t have his love, I shall die” (Weiss, pp. 453-59). Boeve attracts the attention of Josiane. This exclusively beautiful woman deserves to be desired by men, so the event that follows the princess meeting Boeve is to face with ten foresters who “had all treacherously sworn to kill him” (Weiss, pp. 460-63).

Foster suggests that “envy is present when one person has something a second person would like to have” (p. 168). In this respect, it is not hard to understand why these heroes are envied. These men have everything that they desire. They are surrounded by others where “social comparison” is inevitable, and envy usually occurs (p. 68). The Biblical context also provides information about envy in the medieval tradition. According to Balint, death comes to the world with the fall of Lucifer when he becomes envious of humankind because they are created in God’s image (p. 45). Furthermore, many conflicts take part in Bible and are allocated to “anger or hatred” that is actually rooted in envy and often results in murder (Balint, p. 45). Envy is an emotion, is considered a sin in the Biblical context, and it naturally “penetrates to our innermost being”, and we feel distressed when we realize someone around us has something we would like to have (Foster, p. 169). What makes it a sin is when this emotion is not passive but active and turns into the destruction of the envied. Horn is the envied as a result of all the special features he has. The text explicitly presents the nature of envy and how it is inescapable when one is in the public eye and loved and distinguished:

And King Hunlaf loved him as if he had begotten him because through him he held his kingdom in such great tranquility that there was no neighbor to harass him, for they all feared Horn and his stubborn pride. [...] And nothing he asked for was refused him; he was everywhere both extolled and loved. But Fortune cannot remain stable. Because this man was so handsome and valiant, I tell you many envied him... (Weiss, pp. 1751-73)

Envy is the natural consequence of such a fortune to Thomas, the romancier of *Roman de Horn* (Weiss, pp. 1751-73). The underlying reasons why the envied Horn is handsome, valiant, is extolled and loved. While Horn is enjoying all the privileges, being supported by the king and saved, being admired and favored, he has to fight. His envier Wikele is a “close cousin and kinsman” (Weiss, pp. 1818-38). Envy occurs after Horn comes together with Rigmel. The tendency of envy is to destroy the envied object or the possessor or in cases when it is not possible to destroy the envied the feeling induces the envier to humiliate or disempowering the envied (Weiss, p. 26). This characteristic of the envier can be observed in both romances. Both in *Boeve* and *Horn*, the envier plays tricks on the heroes and they choose something that would take away the most meaningful possession. In Horn’s case, he is asked for a possession that is very precious for him or is not possible to be given. Both enviers chose the same ways when they want to harm the heroes, telling the king a lie about his daughter, and accusing the hero of deflowering the princess.

The reason for this lies in another characteristic of envy. As Foster points out, contrary to other emotions like anger, sorrow, or fear, it is observed that envy is not acted out directly as it is “destructive to our self-image” (p. 166). The envier is too proud to admit that he is attacking solely because he resents the envied. He is not even aware that the hatred felt toward the person is pure jealousy. Wikele, who denounces Horn, asks Horn to give him the white horse that Herland gives him. Horn explains that Herland gifts the horse to someone else as a Christmas present and promises to give him another one, but Wikele has made up his mind to create a conflict and so he renders his denial as “mortal hatred” (Weiss, pp. 1839-58). Before the romancier narrates the story he quotes the proverb “...the old saying is true: envy will never die”, pointing out the universality of envy and giving the message that it is present ever after (Weiss, pp. 1859-79). Wikele sets out angrily, after Horn's refusal, to find King Hunlaf and tells a lie:

When I was in your chamber, some days ago, I observed that Horn lay with Rigmel, which seemed to me a shameful deed. Afterward, he said, whenever he pleased, 'I shall never wed her, but make her my paramour for as long as I like. I'll seize the kingdom from that old fool and with that; I'll certainly reconquer my realm.' And when I heard that, sire, I rebuked him. (Weiss, pp. 1880-97)

Telling the king, not any other lie but a specific one about his daughter and that Horn is misusing him, is guaranteed to make the king hate Horn. Wikele is envious of these advantages that Horn has: the king’s love, his beautiful daughter Rigmel, and the kingdom. It is evident that Wikele is envious. While Horn owns everything, Wikele does not. A very similar occasion occurs in *Boeve*’s experience of being envied and being exposed to slander. Düzgün states that: “the intimacy, brotherly relations and respect between Hermin and Boeve become the source of the enmity and jealousy of the other Saracen knights who are under the authority of Hermin” (p. 568). She furthermore focuses on the father-son relationship they have and the value Hermin gives to Boeve since he is “very reluctant to punish a young man he feels genuine affection” (Düzgün, p. 568). Interestingly in *Boeve*, the envier tells a lie in the same way to the king: “my lord king, you have a right to be angry when that wicked, manifest slave, Boeve of Hampton, has slept with your daughter, that’s an outrage” (Weiss, pp. 765-94). The enviers give harm to the heroes, and they are wise enough not to do it in a way that would risk them, they do it shrewdly. The king is very sad and disappointed to hear the news and this is actually what the envious men aim to achieve.

Conclusion

Both Horn and Boeve have common features that cause them to be chosen as heroes however the same aspects make them victims of envious men. Both romances depict the journey of the heroes from orphanage to the chivalry (Düzgün, p. 57). *Roman de Horn* and

Boeve de Haumtone are filled with battles and struggles and in which they finally prove their heroism. While these heroes have to fight against many obstacles on their journey from boyhood to maturity, they have envious men around them. Envy in the medieval tradition is often considered one of the seven deadly sins however these romances depict envy as a natural emotion.

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