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‘The Devil Made Me Do It’: The Dark Side of the Carnivalesque in Sendebar (1253)

Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us that time alters humor and generations lose context. The purpose of this article’s ‘re-reading’ of Sendebar (1253), a thirteenth-century translation from Arabic to Castilian, is to unveil a form of laughter that often goes unnoticed, as audiences struggle to meaningfully contextualize how a framed-tale collection of situations and characters from the East was understood in thirteenth-century Iberia. Bakhtin considers laughter to be fundamentally philosophical, resulting in a confrontation between the truth of the world and its parts. An example of this comedic aspect can be found in Sendebar. My study posits that the devils’ function in two tales primarily entertains readers, in spite of the stated purpose of the translator to instruct his audience through misogynistic storytelling. Finally, this study will close with a brief comparison of the Castilian translation and the older Arabic texts in order to contend that Sendebar’s translators were conscious of the comedic impact their *diablos* (devils) had on their target audience. The devil provides an early example of what Bakhtin conceptualizes as the laughter of the grotesque, low-bodily stratum, in the overarching context of the woman/step-mother’s embodiment of a corruption to power in Sendebar.

Keywords: carnivalesque; devil; grotesque body; laughter; Medieval Iberia; Sendebar; translation

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Меня заставил дьявол: темная сторона карнавала в сборнике «Sendebar» (1253)

Михаил Бахтин отмечал, что юмор меняется со временем, поэтому от новых поколений подчас ускользает контекст шуток их предшественников. В этой статье мы пытаемся по-новому прочесть «Sendebar», перевод с арабского на кастильский язык, выполненный в XIII веке, чтобы обнажить ту форму смеха, которая часто ускользает от современных читателей, которые слишком много сил тратят на реконструкцию того, как в Иберии XIII века понимали эту историю, насыщенную «восточными» ситуациями и персонажами. Бахтин считает смех фундаментально философским по своей природе явлением, провоцирующим противопоставление между истиной мира и его частями. Пример такого комедийного проявления можно найти в «Сендебаре».

Настоящее исследование демонстрирует, что функция дьявола в двух сказках в первую очередь заключается в том, чтобы развлечь читателей, хотя переводчик и обещает «наставлять свою аудиторию посредством женоненавистнического повествования». Наконец, в конце данного исследования будет проведено краткое сравнение кастильского перевода и более древних арабских текстов, демонстрирующее, что переводчики «Сендебара» осознавали, какое комическое воздействие оказывают их дьяволы на целевую аудиторию.

Дьявол представляет собой ранний пример того, что Бахтин называл смехом гротеска, низкого телесного слоя, воплощенного в «Сендебаре» женщиной/мачехой, развращенной властью.

Ключевые слова: ‘Sendebar’; гротескное тело; дьявол; карнавал; перевод; смех; Средневековая Испания

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‘The Devil Made Me Do It’: The Dark Side of the Carnivalesque in *Sendebar* (1253)

Critics of *Sendebar* (1253), a thirteenth-century translation from Arabic to Castilian by the compiler and patron Prince Fadrique (1223-1277) have, for the most part, agreed that the purpose of this misogynistic text is to instruct men on how to correctly decipher women’s trickery.[1] There is, however, another side to this analytical coin. As José Escobar has argued in his study on the function of humor and comedy in *Sendebar*, ‘if any tale could be made to support a moral, then its value to instruct could be increased if it could also recreate, for a work that could lay claim to a didactic or edifying purpose would naturally do so to gain more acceptance’.[2] In other words, stories are more apt to influence their readers if they also entertain. One method of entertainment included in these stories that has yet to receive adequate exploration is the figure of the devil specifically where it appears to embody the dark side of the carnivalesque. The devil, in my opinion, assists and adds comedic value to the stories where it serves as an antagonist. Critics of *Sendebar* have tended to overlook the role of these characters in what, I will argue, is a potential relief from the work’s supposed didactic agenda.[3] Suggested here is the devil’s *function* in the Castilian text as primarily a form of festive, carnivalesque image and, at the same time, an exhibition of the darker side of the carnival. We will also observe how these figures provide an early example of what Mikhail Bakhtin conceptualized as the *laughter of the grotesque body*.[4] This current study will move beyond the strictly historical and philological questions that have shed light on the origins of *Sendebar* — although, these points will also be discussed below

1. See: Sendebar / ed. María Jesús Lacarra. Madrid: Cátedra, 2005. P. 31; and, *Walde Moheno L. von der.* El discurso inapropiado: la voz femenina en *Sendebar* // Studia in Honorem Germán Orduna / ed. L. Funes and J.L. Moure. Madrid, 2001. P. 623–29.

2. *Escobar J.* Recreational and Ludic Elements in the *Libro de los engaños e asayamientos de las mugeres* // Estudios alfonsinos y otros escritos en homenaje a John Esten Keller y a Anibal A. Biglieri / ed. Nicolás Toscano Liria. New York, 1991. P. 52.

3. In her preliminary study of medieval texts, Lacarra notes that didactic texts ‘have suffered a process of *selection* and *adaptation*, in which perhaps the most marvelous, comical, etc., have been discarded’ (‘han sufrido un proceso de *selección* y de *adaptación*, en el que quizá los más maravillosos, cómicos, etc., han sido desechados’); see: *Lacarra M.J.* Cuentística medieval en España. Zaragoza, 1979. P. 10. This seems to be the case in *Sendebar* as it has been adapted and translated into many different languages, as will be later discussed. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

4. See Klaus-Peter Koepping for an explanation on the theme of laughter as a subject of the grotesque body through the figure of the trickster (*Koepping K.P.* Absurdity and Hidden Truth: Cunning Intelligence and Grotesque Body Images as Manifestations of the Trickster // History of Religion. 1985. Vol. 24 (3). P. 191–214).

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to compare the comical significance of the devil between the Arabic text and the Spanish adaptation — to consider an overlooked aspect of its reception in the cultural context of thirteenth-century Spain (and, by extension, elsewhere in medieval Europe).

The intercalated stories of *Stringes* and *Fontes* will be the main focus of the next few pages and not the text as a whole. With this said, I do not intend to infer that *Sendebar* should be read as simply a 'funny' collection of medieval stories. As stated by Andreea Weisl-Shaw, 'a text does not need to be removed from the didactic tradition simply because it has recreational qualities'.[5] It is important to expand our understanding of the multitude of perspectives in which a text can be read and understood.[6] By decoding their actions and language used to narrate the tales, I sustain that the devils hold dark comedic and risible values while still maintaining their purpose: forcing the king to kill his son for trying to rape one of the king's ninety wives. In these two narrations, humor carries significant and important weight that should be first examined.

The main story of *Sendebar* opens with the anticipated birth of King Alcos of Judaea's heir, and with it a dark omen predicted by an astrologer. Fifteen years after the young prince's naissance, the king calls on his councilor, Çendubete or Sendebar, to teach the young prince how to read and write.[7] The king agrees to give Sendebar six months to educate his pupil. However, Sendebar prohibits the prince from speaking for seven days before he was due to return back to court. Since the cause of the prince's silence remained hidden and Sendebar had gone missing, one of the king's wives offers to speak with the boy and, in another turn of events, tries to convince the young prince to kill his father and marry her so that they could rule the kingdom together. The enraged prince speaks and curses his step-mother, who then accuses him of trying to rape her. The wife begs the king to kill his son while the prince recommits to his vow of silence. The remaining pages of the narrative centers on a war of seemingly didactic stories between the step-mother, who wants the prince dead so her plan remains a secret, and the king's counselors, who oppose her. After seven days, the prince is able to speak, informs the king

5. *Weisl-Shaw A.* The Comedy of Didacticism and the Didactism of Comedy in *Calila e Dmina* and *Sendebar* // The Modern Language Review. 2010. Vol. 105 (3). P. 738. The critic later goes on to claim that the humor found in the tales does make the reader 'regard even the most apparently serious moral pronouncements as tongue-in-cheek' (*Weisl-Shaw A.* The Comedy of Didacticism… P. 740).

6. John Esten Keller believes that *Sendebar* has lost all of its didactic character of a 'wisdom book' and should be celebrated solely for its comedic value 'of the kind which impart joy' (*Keller J. E.* The Literature of Recreation: *El libro de los engaños* // Hispanic Medieval Studies in Honour of Samuel G. Armistead / ed. E. M. Gerli and H. L. Sharrer. Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1992. P. 193).

7. In her edition of *Sendebar*, María Jesús Lacarra states that the name *Sendebar* has been reserved for all the translations of this text 'just as, or with slight variants, is named the wise man in charge of instructing the prince (our Çendubete)' ['pues así, o con ligeras varientes, se llama el sabio encargado de instruir al príncipe (nuestro Çendubete)'] (Sendebar, P. 13). In order to remain consistent throughout this study I will use the name Sendebar to refer to this wise man.

of his wife's plan of assassination, and proves his intelligence by narrating his own didactic stories. In the end, the king condemns his wife to be burned 'at the stake'.[8]

While at first this plotline does not seem to provoke laughter, the antics of the devils in two of stories within this 'novella-frama' *('novella-marco')* or 'story-frame' *(historia-marco)*, as termed by María Jesús Lacarra[9], narrated by the step-mother, do introduce the notion of *Sendebar* as a 'funny book' and at the same time hold dark features — questioning Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo's assertion that the sole purpose of the tales told by the wise men was to illuminate the deception, astuteness and the perversity of women 'just as the harem servants had done and the degradation of Oriental customs'.[10] Lacarra suggests that *Sendebar*'s narration served to entertain during trips, to alleviate a long wait, or to make a long jail sentence more enjoyable.[11] In a way, this text might not have been read in one sitting and the audience easily picked it up, read any tale, and then placed the book back down: there was no chronology to the reading.

Mikhail Bakhtin claims that medieval humor does not always resonate with modern readers for 'we often lose the sense of parody and would doubtless have to reread many a text of world literature to hear its tone in another key'.[12] The purpose of this 're-reading' unveils a form of laughter that contemporary audiences may be prone to ignore. At stake is a process that Aron Gurevich memorably described as readers coming to 'understand their place in the consciousness of an age so distant from us'.[13] Bakhtin has further considered laughter to be the result of a philosophical confrontation between perceptions of the truth of the world and its parts at a given time, i.e. 'history and man'.[14] What must not be forgotten is that in *Sendebar* humor is present throughout each story but while the step-mother is attempting to tell her stories in the hopes of influencing the king to kill his son, the counselors' tales 'serve the serious purpose of preserving the Prince's life'.[15] In essence, humor is encircled by the real potential of infanticide. Both in the main plot and, as we will see, in the tales in which the devil is present, the audience is confronted with princes whose lives are put in danger and later saved.

8. 'En una caldera en seco' (Sendebar P. 155).

9. 'Tal como la habían hecho la servidumbre del harén y la degradación de las costumbres orientales' (*Lacarra M.J.* Cuentística… P. 53).

10. *Menéndez Pelayo M.* Orígenes de la novel. Santander, 1943. 4 vols. Vol. 1. P. 45.

11. Sendebar P. 25.

12. *Bakhtin M.* Rabelais and His World / transl. by H. Iswolsky. Bloomington, 1984. P. 135–136.

13. *Gurevich A.* Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception / transl. by J.M. Bak and P.A. Hollingsworth. Cambridge, 1990. P. 177.

14. Social reality, according to this scholar, hides itself behind literary humor, see: *Bakhtin M.* Rabelais and His World… P. 66.

15. *Weisl-Shaw A.* The Comedy of Didacticism… P. 739.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin exposes a jovial Middle Ages in which carnivals are celebrated at specific times of the year. During these festive events, the world, as it were, is turned upside-down: beggars are kings, prostitutes become queens, and the monarchy is made into fools. Fat Tuesday (*Mardi Gras*) epitomizes the overindulgence of the senses: gluttony and laughter rule over the known world. There is, however, another aspect of the Bakhtinian carnival atmosphere that he disregards. A number of scholars have argued against the unlikely subversive world that Bakhtin illustrates in his quintessential work. Umberto Eco maintains that rules are still respected during carnival and people must recognize those laws in order to later break them: 'In this sense, comedy and carnival are not instances of real transgressions: on the contrary, they represent paramount examples of law reinforcement. They remind us of the existence of the rule'.[16] The purpose of humor, for Eco, is to prompt a memory of a certain law that is still maintained at carnival just in a different way. If beggars are kings, for example, then 'commoners' continue to respect them as they would a monarch any other non-festive day. Michael D. Bristol contends that Bakhtin's view of the carnival is somewhat misguided as medieval people were not always 'unfailingly generous, hopeful and continually oriented to a better life in the future'.[17] Peter Stallysbrass and Allon White highlight the role transgression plays in Bakhtin's carnival world: 'given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, [carnival] may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*'.[18] This all creates a 'public spectacle in order to censure and punish nonconformists by turning them into laughing stocks'.[19] Laughter does not lose its value through these new interpretations. Rules are maintained yet the players and the participants switch positions (i.e. criminals become judges and vice versa).[20] As we will see in *Sendebar*, it is the *privados* (counselors) of the king — the people that are supposed to keep the peace in the kingdom and properly advise the monarch — who, in the tales told by one of King Alcos of Judaea's ninety wives, abuse their duties. They do not represent the norm of faithful royal ministers. Much like the carnival, they break from the law: instead of counselors they are represented as tricksters.

16. *Eco U.* The Frames of Comic 'Freedom' // Carnival! / ed. Thomas A. Sebeok. New York, 1984. P. 6.

17. *Bristol M. D.* Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England. New York, 1985. P 23. Bristol also argues that Bakhtin should have discussed the drama of the time to amplify his point (*Bristol M. D.* Carnival and Theatre… P. 24).

18. *Stallysbrass P., White A.* The Politics and Poetics of Transgression. London: Methuen, 1986. P. 14 (*their emphasis*).

19. *Giles R. D.* The Laughter of the Saints: Parodies of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain. Toronto, 2009. P. 5.

20. See Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino for other interpretations of Bakhtin's carnivalesque humour.

The devils in these tales personify the bottom-most depth of the material body 'sphere' of grotesque realism. This fits well with Bahktin's stance on humor as a 'light amusement or a form of salutary social punishment of corrupt and low persons'.[21] According to Robert Muchembled, during the twelfth century the medieval concept of the devil 'really took shape among churchmen and the upper ranks of the laity in the form of terrifying images which bore little resemblance to the popular concept of a devil who was almost human, and who might be duped and vanquished, as humans were'.[22] Jeffrey Burton Russell, on the other hand, points out that as time went on the devil 'became more ridiculous and comic in sermons, art, exempla, and popular literature *from the end of the thirteenth century*, perhaps a logical result of reducing his theological significance while increasing the sense of his immediacy'.[23] Vernacular literature appears to have shifted the role of the devil from the official realm of the Church and its solemn warnings against sin, to the comedic, imaginative realm of popular writers — a place where the devil could emerge as, in the words of Bakhtin, a 'gay ambivalent figure expressing the unofficial point of view, the material bodily stratum. There is nothing frightening or alien in him'.[24] While these perspectives seem to oppose one another, they in fact work in tandem in *Sendebar*, as devils are portrayed as both haunting creatures and objects of festive scorn.

In the sixth tale, *Striges*, the reader finds the first representation of the devil narrated by the step-mother. The story questions the trustworthiness of counselors as a prince goes hunting with one of the king's favorites, gets lost after being encouraged by the *privado* to chase a deer, and finds a girl in the forest in a similar predicament. He decides to help her and both enter a deserted village where the girl is let off the horse and promises to shortly return to find him. The prince uncovers that the girl is, in fact, a she-devil in disguise who, together with her relatives, plans to capture him. When the girl returns, she notices that the young boy is shivering because he worries over his father's favorite: 'I am frightened of my companion, for I fear that he will bring me evil'.[25] She advises him to pray to God to help fight this minister. The boy instead cries out against the demon and the devil-girl immediately

21. *Bakhtin M.* Rabelais and His World… P. 67.

22. *Muchembled R.* A History of the Devil: From the Middle Ages to the Present / transl. Jean Birrell. Cambridge, 2003. P. 6–7.

23. *Burke J. F.* Desire Against the Law: The Juxtaposition of Contraries in Early Medieval Spanish Literature. Stanford, 1998. P. 161 (*emphasis added*). Comic, for Eco, is almost impossible to define. He believes that it is 'an umbrella term […] that gathers together a disturbing ensemble of diverse and not completely homogeneous phenomena, such as humor, comedy, grotesque, parody, satire, wit, and so on'.

24. *Bakhtin M.* Rabelais and His World… P. 41. James F. Burke has proven that 'the official was willing to tolerate, and probably even expected within the confines of the same construct, the negative example as well as the positive one' (*Burke J. F.* Desire Against the Law… P. 12). Ryan D. Giles has furthermore noted that the Spanish Church allowed and 'participated in irreverent celebrations' (*Giles R. D.* The Laughter of the Saints… P. 6). In other words, the official culture was not completely opposed to the surrounding carnivalesque performed by what Bahktin sets apart as the 'folk'.

25. 'Espántome de mi conpañero, que he miedo que me verná d'él mal' (Sendebar… P. 97).

falls off the horse and starts to roll around in mud while the prince successfully escapes. In the end, the ostensible moral of the story is that the king must not confide in his servants.

After the prince decides to take the young damsel with him, they find themselves in an abandoned village. The devil in disguise says to the prince: 'Let me down here because I need it, and I will soon return to you'.[26] Elena Ivanova has interpreted the child's descent as a necessary act for the girl to 'relieve herself'[27] or, in other words, urinate. The meaning of this strikingly uncouth action can be further clarified by turning to Bakhtin:

> Images of feces and urine are ambivalent, as are all the images of the material bodily lower stratum; they debase, destroy, regenerate, and renew simultaneously. They are blessing and humiliating at the same time. Death and death throes, labor, and childbirth are intimately interwoven. On the other hand, these images are closely linked to laughter [...] these images are indissolubly linked with the underworld.[28]

Although this scene takes place before the reader discovers that the girl is a devil, the results are the same: the suggested act of urination introduces ambivalence in which 'official' didactic authority is subverted by the laughter of the 'lower body sphere'. The descent in this way foreshadows the eventual unveiling of the girl's actual persona. If the reader is to interpret the devil's excuse to get off the horse, much like Ivanova does, to 'relieve herself' then this scene is intrinsically linked with a descent into the humor of inversion — her unsavory identity is then revealed to the prince and medieval Christian readers familiar with festive culture and discourse.

It is degrading to insinuate that a young princess urinates yet if there is laughter, it is not liberating. This is what I refer to when I use the term 'dark side' of the carnival. Sergei Averintsev argues that laughter is liberating — since one is incapable of controlling when one laughs — but, at the same time, this kind of liberation brings with it 'an element of a new unfreedom' since, at times, one cannot even control the outburst.[29] Averintsev illustrates this

26. 'Desçéndeme aquí que lo he menester, e venirme he luego para ti' (Sendebar… P. 97).

27. *Ivanova E.* Who is Afraid of Demonic Women? Textual Deformity and Magical Transformation in *Sendebar* // La Corónica. 2005. Vol. 34 (1). P. 43.

28. *Bakhtin M.* Rabelais and His World… P. 151.

29. *Averintsev S.* Bakhtin, Laughter, and Christian Culture // Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith / ed. S.M. Felch, P.J. Contino. Evanston, 2001. P. 81.

claim by pointing to examples of Christian martyrs that laugh when they are being tortured 'to put shame, discredit, and annihilate the power of fear'.[30] In the case of the present tale, the urination of the princess is humorous but it remains a humiliating scene, the kind that transgresses the social norm as princesses are rarely, if ever, shown in this manner (unless they are in a carnival, and even at that point they may be representing the behavior of disorderly commoners). The devil in this tale is the representative *par excellence* of the worldly and hellish lower parts or what Bahktin has termed 'the underworld,' and urine is associated with this nether region.

30. Ibid. P. 82.

The devil in *Striges* has come to symbolize the Bakhtinian upside down world: the world of the carnival, and a transgressive one at that. Elena Ivanova further suggests that, as a damsel, the princess-devil is a participant of a royal family that has been accidentally lost, yet, as a devil, she inhabits and controls the inverted social world devoid of order and goods: the abandoned village where she speaks to the rest of her family.[31] The inverted social world is similar to the world that Bakhtin sees as holding comedic value through an ambivalence that brings together ironically incompatible elements of meaning: the carnival world. As Ivanova has indicated, this village is a place where social order has been swapped by a form of disorder that creates popular and controlled laughter, and playful entertainment. In other words, this village represents an area where carnival flourishes and laws are exploited. While it is unknown whether or not the medieval reader of the text read this particular excerpt of the abandoned village and laughed, the remnants of chaos and unlawfulness are undoubtedly present in the minds of those holding the story.

31. *Ivanova E.* Who is Afraid... P. 46.

In one of the last scenes of *Striges*, the devil-girl realizes that the prince is trembling and suggests that he pray to God, and once he does this she falls: 'the devil fell off, and started to roll around in mud, and wanted to get up but could not'.[32] The medieval audience was conscious that calling God or one of his disciples in the presence of a demon or devil would miraculously save the devotee.[33] María Jesús Lacarra asserts that the story has a surprising ending

32. 'Cayó el diablo detrás, e començó enbarduñar en tierra, e queriése levantar e non podié' (Sendebar... P. 98).

33. See Johan Huizinga for more information on different incidents when God, the Virgin Mary and/or angels help the believer against demonic presence or situations. Also, the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* written by Gonzalo de Berceo gives many examples of how the Virgin Mary quickly comes to the aid of her followers if they prayed for her.

as 'the same attacker will involuntarily fulfill the function of the defender'.[34] By trying to be helpful, the she-devil herself becomes a victim of her own demise. Not only has she fallen from a high place (the horse) to a low and dirty one (the mud) symbolizing a total debasement, but what takes place after this fall is also part of the overall sense of carnivalesque dethronement as she rolls around in the mud without being able to get up. In this case, the bedeviled child is an image of medieval laughter more than fear of the demonic and makes the 'moral' more palatable. The she-devil is the source of her own downfall and is humiliated completely, morally and physically. In the end, this laughter controls and silences the devil. Her possible reason for descent (urination), while liberating, fully mortifies and possibly un-frees her — a sentiment that mirrors Sergei Averintsev's analysis of Bakhtin. *Striges* closes with the king sentencing his son to die as the step-mother's story convinces him that his counselors should not be trusted, yet it takes many more tales before a final judgment is rendered.

María Jesús Lacarra furthermore observes an important similarity between *Striges* and the subsequent story, *Fontes*: 'The woman, in this tale as in the eighth one [*Fontes*], pretends to advise against bad counselors, without her interventions being very convincing'.[35] The narrations are so similar that in the Hebrew text these two stories formed just one (*Sendebar* 103–04).[36] It is important to highlight that both tales are recounted by the king's wife so that her sex becomes associated with the narration of demonic subject matter. Elena Ivanova adds that women are the perfect narrators of these tales as *Sendebar* is a text with a misogynistic agenda that warns men of the evils of women.[37] Similarly, Andreea Weisl-Shaw argues that the message of the stories narrated by the step-mother is unimportant but what gives her narrative *veritas* is the mere fact that she speaks: 'The power of the woman's words resides not in their content but rather in their very utterance, or even in their silence, and by extension that the power of woman herself resides in her ascribed status as an agent of destruction or a troublesome and uncontainable element'.[38] John Linsky postulates that, in the next tale, the devil 'highlights in their eternal punishment': the pains of childbirth to become what he terms

34. 'El mismo agresor cumplirá involuntariamente las funciones de auxiliar' (Sendebar... P. 99). Andreea Wiesl-Shaw, however, sees a different kind of correlation in this tale: 'the she-devil who attempts to deceive the young prince and to make him stray from the right path can be seen to remind us much more of the bad wife herself, and of her attempt at seducing her stepson and plotting the King's death' (*Weisl-Shaw A.* The Power of Woman's Words, the Power of Woman's Silence: How the *madrastra* speaks in the Thirteenth-Century Castilian *Sendebar* // The Modern Language Review. 2010. Vol. 109 (1). P. 114).

35. 'La mujer, tanto en este cuento como en el octavo [*Fontes*], pretende advertir contra los malos consejeros, sin que sus intervenciones resulten muy convincentes' (Sendebar, P. 96, n. 1).

36. For a helpful overview on how this text reached Europe see María D. Bollo-Panadero (*Bollo-Panadero M.D.* La redacción catalana de la historia del *Sendebar*: El *Llibre dels Set Savis de Roma* // eHumanista 2006. Vol. 7. P. 86–94 (specifically P. 86–87)).

37. *Ivanova E.* Who is Afraid ... P. 34–35.

38. *Weisl-Shaw, A.* The Power of Woman's Words... P. 110.

a *virgen diablesa* (deviled virgin) who becomes pregnant.[39] In my opinion, parallels between *Striges* and *Fontes* suggest that the figure of the devil adds to the similarities as it was composed as a means of entertaining the reader through the kind of literary grotesque realism that Bakhtin applies to representations of female sexuality and bodily procreation during this period.[40]

In the storyline of *Fontes*, another prince is sent with a *privado* to marry a princess from another kingdom. On their way, the servant knowingly leaves the young prince near a fountain that alters the sex of the prince after he drinks from it. Suddenly, a devil appears and takes pity on the transformed 'princess.' The demon thus proposes that they change sexes and return in four months to convert back to their original sex at the consent of the prince. A pregnant devil reappears at the due date and worries the prince, as the pact clearly demanded that 'I will turn into a damsel, as you are, and in four months *I will turn back to how I was*'.[41] Since the devil is in an altered state, the prince fears that if they once again change sex, he himself will become pregnant. The devil decides to bring in a jury who settles in the prince's favor. The prince remains a male, tells his father his story and the servant is killed for being deceitful.

Here, the step-mother recounts a tale that focuses specifically on the mischievous and pregnant devil. The conflict of *Fontes* arises because the devil reappears altered and, therefore, does not keep his word. Returning to Bakhtin, the idea of impregnation correlates with his discussion of exaggerated portrayals of the stomach: 'the body and bodily life are cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized […] this is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable'.[42] In other words, the impregnated human body represents the hyperbolic fertility of a collective 'folk', a site from which the carnivalesque can burst forth, a symbolic giving birth of the world and the flesh.[43] This exaggerated body is not used as a solemn warning, but a source of humor or what Bakhtin envisions as 'gay matter,' ambivalent in its forms, functioning as a uterus or a tomb.[44] Textually, the prince does not mention

39. 'Hace hincapié en su castigo eterno: los duelos del parto' (*Linsky J.* La imagen serpentina en *Sendebar*, *Celestina* y *Lazarillo de Tormes* // Gaceta hispánica de Madrid. 2006. Vol. 4. P. 6–7).

40. Ruth Ginsburg has interpreted Bakhtin's assessment of the female as misogynistic. She believes that 'the material-maternal is used and appropriated by Bakhtin in a gesture analogous to Rabelais's positioning of mothers in his text: they are used as vehicles, killed as persons, abstracted as principles. Pregnancy may indeed be the epitome of the death-life ambivalence…death befalls the female so that life can be secured for the male' (*Ginsburg R.* The Pregnant Text. Bakhtin's Ur-Chronotope: The Womb // Bakhtin Carnival and Other Subjects: Selected Papers from the Fifth International Bakhtin Conference University of Manchester, July 1991 / ed. D. Shepherd. Amsterdam, 1993. P. 168); Wayne C. Booth finds it offensive that, for Bakhtin, women are usually the cause of men's laughter (*Booth W.C.* Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism // Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work / ed. G.S. Morson. Chicago, 1986. P. 163).

One must also remember that these alleged misogynist elements are not projections of Bakhtin, but were part of festive culture itself — and still are. See David Gilmore's discussion of grotesque carnival transvestites in Spain, specifically the fourth chapter 'Woman Degraded: Chirigota Satires' (*Gilmore D.D.* Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol and Status in Spain. New Haven, 1998).

41. 'Tornarme he yo dueña, commo tú eres, e a cabo de quatro meses *tornarme he commo dantes era*' (Sendebar… P. 103). *emphasis added.* Federico Bravo's investigation discusses the reason why the prince decides to return to the fountain after four months. He explains that 'in effect, the legal institution of homage is both a promise to servitude and obligation to loyalty: if the prince does not flee from the forest it is because he is held by a promise — word made action — to which the moral dignity of his rank

the size of the devil's stomach. Regardless of this fact, I would argue that if there appeared to be no indication of any sign of pregnancy then there would not have been such a concern demonstrated by the prince in the first place. The fact that the demon returns as a 'pregnant woman' *muger preñada*, even though she would only be four months pregnant, indicates that her stomach is protruding and, therefore, appears somewhat exaggerated. That being said, the volume of the abdomen is not important yet the figure of the pregnant woman is without a doubt carnivalesque.

Presenting pregnancy and the lower body stratum in *Fontes* in this way takes the form of a carnivalesque hell which represents:

> the earth which swallows up and gives birth, it is often transformed into a cornucopia; the monster, death, becomes pregnant. Various deformities, such as protruding bellies, enormous noses, or humps, are symptoms of pregnancy or of procreative power. Victory over fear is not its abstract elimination; it is a simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay transformation.[45]

This comedic scene does not so much question how the devil became pregnant but rather the way in which this devil adopts an exaggerated female bodily form.[46] Eloísa Palafox in her study of food in *Sendebar* maintains that in *Fontes* the contaminated water that turns the prince into a woman results in a comedic happy ending.[47] In her view, this finale substantiates the prince's intelligence and virility: 'who not only manages to outwit a demon, but also leaves him pregnant, giving us an example of his intelligence, related here with a well-resolved problem of survival'.[48] In any case, what is most striking is that the devil once again serves as a fool, provoking the reader to laugh at their festive misfortunes.

Furthermore, the devil sees no breach of the agreed 'contract' as she is willing to return to their normal form upon their return after the allocated time. In the end, the devil is thoughtless as while trying to fool the prince, she is the one that pays the price for not abiding by her own rules. It is her, in other words, that is comically punished and silenced for not keeping her own oath and expecting no repercussions.

and the integrity of his being prohibit him from breaking' ['[e]n efecto, la institución jurídica del homenaje es a la vez promesa de servidumbre y obligación de lealtad: si el infante no huye del bosque es porque está sujeto por una promesa — palabra hecha acción — a la que la dignidad moral de su rango y la probidad de su persona le prohíben faltar'] (*Bravo F.* El tríptico del diablo: En torno al libro de *Sendebar* // Bulletin hispanique 1997. Vol. 99 (2). P. 357).

42. *Bakhtin M.* Rabelais and His World… P. 19.

43. See Michael Camille for a brief explanation of carnivalesque impregnation represented as drawings on the margins of medieval texts, specifically pp. 48–55 (*Camille M.* Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992).

44. *Bakhtin M.* Rabelais and His World… P. 195.

45. *Ibid.* P. 91.

46. In his edition of *Sendebar*, José Fradejas Lebrero observes that there is no explanation given on how the she-devil became pregnant: 'How is it possible that the prince and the devil are women, the latter gets pregnant?' ['¿Cómo es posible que siendo el príncipe y el diablo mujeres, éste quede preñada?'] (Sendebar o Libro de los engaños de las mujeres/ ed. J. Fradejas Lebrero. Madrid, 1990. P. 87).

47. See Aureliano M. Espinosa for a deeper study on the magical fountain in the Middle Ages (*Espinosa A.M.* Cuentos españoles recogidos de la tradición de España. Madrid, 1946. Vol. III. P. 104).

48. 'Quien no sólo logra burlar a un demonio, sino que además lo deja preñado, dando con esto una muestra de su inteligencia, relacionada aquí con un problema bien resuelto de supervivencia' (*Palafox E.* 'E yo tomava aquella masa en escuso e fazíala pan': el lugar de la comida en el *exemplum* medieval, el caso del *Sendebar* castellano // Memorabilia. 2008. Vol. 11. P. 76).

If we take the two narratives in *Sendebar* discussed here, we notice that they are consistently structured on the basis of an ironic inversion of the high and the low. As Federico Bravo has pointed out:

> the prince from *Fontes*, turned into a defenseless damsel, corresponds not with the prince from *Striges* but with the defenseless girl lost in the forest and that the devil from *Fontes* that takes pity on the prince (…*he pitied him*) has as correlative not the devil from *Striges* but the very prince that takes pity on the she-devil (…*he had sorrow for her*).[49]

This difference is not only lucid but forms part of a complex carnivalesque representation. These two stories are remarkably similar in their design, yet in a sense represent the mirror opposite of each other. The high (prince) of one story is treated similarly to the low (devil) of the other.[50] Their mirroring structure of festive inversion creates another level of irony that links the two narratives, and speaks to how the relationship between tales in the *Sendebar* collection might have been received by medieval audiences: the reader would have hopefully perceived its comedic value since the stories are only separated by one tale and they are the only substantial narratives dictated by the step-mother.

This kind of humorous and dark interpretation resonates beyond the expectations of strictly Castilian and Latin readers in thirteenth-century Iberia. In the prologue to the work it is said that Prince Fadrique 'begged and believed that this book [should be translated] from Arabic to Castilian in order to warn against the trickery and astuteness of women'.[51] María Jesús Lacarra attests that this Arabic source for the Castilian version had been at some point translated and adapted from an earlier version in another language. She stresses that the most distant edition from which the Spanish translation of *Sendebar* is based on was first written in Sanskrit, later translated into Pahlevi and then into Arabic between the eighth and tenth centuries. However, these original Sanskrit, Pahlevi and Arabic versions have been lost.[52] John Esten Keller suspects that the stories of *Sendebar* 'date back to a very

49. 'El infante de *Fontes*, convertido en indefensa doncella, se corresponde no con el infante de *Striges* sino con la indefensa niña perdida en el bosque y que el diablo de *Fontes* que se apiada del infante (…*ovo piedad d'él*) tiene como correlato no al diablo de *Striges* sino al propio infante que se apiada de la diablesa (…*ovo duelo d'ella*)' (*Bravo F.* El tríptico del diablo… P. 351).

50. This may also be a callback to the high-low dichotomy discussed through the fall of the princess in *Striges*.

51. '[P]logo e tovo por bien que aqueste libro [fuese trasladado] de arávigo en castellano para aperçebir a los engañados e los asayamientos de las mugeres' (Sendebar… P. 64). José Fradejas describes Fadrique as 'courageous, great horseman and lover of administer justice, good huntsman and he had a split lip caused by a hunting accident' ['valiente, gran jinete y amante de administrar justicia, buen cazador y tenía un labio partido por un accidente de caza'] (Sendebar o Libro de los engaños de las mujeres… P. 8). Throughout his life prince Fadrique fought to inherit an important position in the Spanish court. *Sendebar* can represent an attempt to receive some type of reward via a high seat in the medieval Spanish monarchy.

52. *Lacarra M.J.* Cuentística… P. 22.

ancient oral tradition, and that as folktales they entertained and helped to instruct the primitive Aryan tribes who wandered across Europe and Asia'.[53] On the other hand, Ben Edwing Perry denies the theory that the manuscripts of the text have any Indian ancestry, but instead contends that it was of Persian origin and was written in Pahlevi between 579 and 650.[54] Whatever the case, critics agree that the Spanish text is the product of a long history that stretches across continents from East to West.[55] It is therefore important to keep in mind that *Sendebar* would have accumulated cultural references that were assimilated, modified, and redirected at new audiences as the work made its way to the Iberian Peninsula. What we presently hold and read is most likely different than the original text. Lacarra understands that the multicultural make up of medieval Spain led to 'tales of varied Oriental origin [that] would orally circulate among Christians, coming to engross our folklore, as is proven by their sporadic reappearance in the most diverse authors' *(cuentos de variada procedencia oriental [que] circularían oralmente entre los cristianos, pasando a engrosar nuestro folklore, como lo prueba la reaparición esporádica en los más diversos autores — a context that will now be discussed)*.[56]

The source material for the collection originated in a library somewhere on the Peninsula or North Africa, from where Prince Fadrique learned the language and adopted the culture. This kind of insight would have been very helpful when endeavoring to successfully introduce a translated Arabic text to a Castilian audience. While no existing Arabic collection of the same stories date from this period, it is revealing to compare a later Arabic version (circa fourteenth-century) that has been translated as *Book of Sindibad; or, The Story of the King, His Son, the Damsel, and the Seven Vazïrs,* as it sheds light on how non-Christian readers in Spain might have perceived the early version of *Striges* and its humor.

The *Striges* tale is translated as the *Story of the Prince and the Ghūl* and follows the same storyline with few alterations. For example, the prince begs the king to let him go hunting but from the onset the father has doubts as 'the chase is an evil thing' (51).[57] The king chooses one of his best ministers to take the young prince to the desert of Rūdān 'as it was infested with ghūls' or wild

53. *Keller J.E.* The Literature of Recreation... P. 1.

54. *Perry B.E.* The Origin of the Book of Sindibad // Fabula. 1959–1960. Vol. 3. P. 93.

55. Lacarra, in another study, has further described the text as having provided 'the most disseminated model of narrative framework: counting serves to impede the fulfillment of any action; the inserted tales pause the action in the wait of something that substantially modifies the events' ['el modelo más difundido de marco narrativo: contar sirve para impedir el cumplimento de una acción cualquiera; los relatos insertados suspenden la acción en la espera de algo que modifique sustancialmente los hechos'] (*Lacarra M.J.* Cuentos de la Edad Media. Madrid, 1987. P. 21). Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo similarly believed that the work remains as 'an almost unique representative of the most pure and ancient form of such a famous story' ['representante casi único de la forma más pura y antigua de tan célebre novela'] (*Menéndez Pelayo M.* Orígenes de la novela... Vol. 1. P. 42). María D. Bollo-Panadero cites Ignasi de Janer when reiterating that, next to the Bible, *Sendebar* was the most translated text of its time: *Bollo-Panadero M.D.* La redacción catalana... P. 87. Along with the Old Testament that was read by Christian theologians, Eloísa Palafox maintains that those that used Medieval tales 'with exemplary ending also associated them with this Christian view of the world and human life as a process whose final end was Salvation' ['con fines ejemplares también los asociaban con esa visión cristiana del mundo y de la vida humana como un proceso cuyo fin último era la Salvación'] (*Palafox E.* Las éticas del exemplum. Los Castigos del rey don Sancho IV, El conde Lucanor y el Libro de buen amor / México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998. P. 27–28). In other words, both the explicitly religious tales and books like *Sendebar* were useful in instructing readers how to be good Christians so that they could enjoy their afterlife. It is, therefore, important to note that this work seems to have been

asses.[58] On their way to the hunt, another jealous minister gives the prince some wine before he rests. The prince, then, hears the scream of a wild ass, chases it but instead finds a lady and instantly notices her beauty. Unlike the Spanish tale, the damsel is not lost but actually leads the prince to take her home. Black *ghūls* emerge from her dwelling and the prince's horse fleas out of fear. The damsel chases after the prince but, according to W.A. Clouston — who notes that the story's conclusion is missing from the collection — he then utters a prayer and 'the damsel falls powerless on the ground'.[59]

Absent from the Arabic story is the devil disguised as a princess and the setting of an uninhabited village. There is, however, a devil-like presence embodied by the *ghūls*. W.A. Clouton defines these creatures as 'a species of demons, believed by Muslims to feed on human flesh, and to have the power of assuming any form they choose, to decoy unwary travelers [sp]'.[60] This distinctly relates back to the Spanish translation as the double transformation in the Arabic version can be linked to that of the devil-princess in *Sendebar*. The Arabic rendition of the story features a beautiful lady who turns into a monstrous, shape-shifting *ghūl*. Also, similar to the version in *Sendebar*, the prince frees himself from this *ghūl* by praying to God. But the key detail that identifies the dark carnivalesque nature of the tale is missing: the princess' need to descend from a horse that leads to her 'relief.' The most striking difference in the Castilian translation and reinterpretation is its emphasis on the kind of grotesque, festive humor essential to medieval laughter.

In addition, the second Arabic tale that would be the equivalent version of *Fontes* 'is wanting in the manuscript'.[61] In Scott's *The Story of the King, his Son, the Damsel, and the Seven Vazïrs*, yet another previous rendition of the Castilian *Sendebar*, the story is entitled 'The Changed Sex.' The reader of this Eastern version that circulated in Arabic is met with a *vazïr* or minister of a sultan who is a kind of *alcahuete* or go-between. A young man bribes the minister to put a stop to the marriage between the sultan's son and a princess so that he can marry her instead. The minister takes the prince to a 'White Fountain', which has the same sex-changing capabilities as the one found in *Fontes*. Having been

widely read and known not only in Spain but in the rest of the known world. Claude Bremond and Jacques Le Goff observe that one of the characteristics of the *exemplum* is its relation with a pedagogy that points towards the ends of man, which converts him into a kind of eschatological device (*Bremond C., J. Le Goff and J.C. Schmitt*. L'exemplum. Louvaine: Typologie des sources du Môyen Age Occidental, 1982. P. 37).

56. *Lacarra M.J.* Cuentos… P. 11.

57. Book of Sindibad or, The Story of the King, His Son, the Damsel, and the Seven Vazïrs/ ed. W.A. Clouston and transl. by J. Scott. Glasgow, 1884. P. 51.

58. Ibid. P. 52.

59. Ibid. P. 56.

60. Ibid. P. 55 n. 2. In her edition of *Sendebar*, Lacarra mentions that this *diablesa* or she-devil is in fact an *efrit*: 'intermediate being of Islam that usually took the feminine appearance' ['genio intermedio del Islam que solía tomar la apariencia femenina'] (Sendebar… P. 99). She adds that this figure would not have been strange to the medieval reader that was accustomed to finding female devils in the *exempla*.

61. Book of Sindibad… P. 80.

transformed into a woman, the prince is confronted by a *jinnī* who pities him and takes him to a 'Black Region', that is 'governed by a prince of the jinn, without whose permission no one dare enter'.[62] Once the *jinnī* returns, the female prince is taken to a stream called the 'Fountain of Women' that turns a woman into a man. The prince stays with the *jinnī* for a few nights to celebrate his returned manhood and is later taken to the princess' land by an '*Ifrīt* (a kind of monster) where he gets married and lives happily ever after.

Jinn, *jinnī* or *djinn* can be defined as 'airy or fiery bodies (*adjsām*), intelligent, imperceptible, capable of appearing under different forms and of carrying out heavy labours'.[63] They are used in magic, like in 'The Changed Sex', and are roughly translated as devils or *diablos* but should not be confused with the Devil or demons of Christianity, which were distinctly interpreted by theologians as fallen, biblical beings, occupants of Hell, and popularly seen as festive personae.[64] The *djinn* of the tale does not appear as trying to fool the prince, as is the case in the medieval Spanish version. In both collections, the devils restore the prince to his original sex, but through very different avenues: in the Arabic text there is no deal between the devil and the prince as is found in the Castilian translation, nor is there a pregnancy of the *djinn* — in contrast to *Sendebar*'s grotesque vision of the lower body stratum bursting forth in this story, in keeping with the added urination scene. While the earlier connotations of *ghūl* and *djinn* were not completely alien to thirteenth-century Iberian audiences, especially for Prince Fadrique, the kind of humor that Bakhtin associates with medieval carnival is, of course, the product of the cultural context through which the collection has been reinterpreted. In other words, the festive *diablos* in the Spanish tales can be partly understood as an attempt to culturally Christianize the stories of *Sendebar*. Prince Fadrique, having spent many years in Tunis, ordered the translation to be remade for a Christian audience keen on assimilating, at least partially, Eastern tales. The term *diablo*, with all of its attendant meanings, was evidently chosen as the best possible alternative or replacement for *ghūl* and *jinnī*, creatures that would have been known only to the Muslim population of thirteenth-century Iberia.[65]

62. *Ibid*… P. 160.

63. Djinn // E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam 1913–1936 / ed. M.Th. Houtsma et al. Leiden and New York, 1987. Vol. 2. P. 1045.

64. On the devil in religion see: *Messadié G.* A History of the Devil / transl. by Mare Romano. New York, 1996.

65. This is, of course, only the case if these two words were actually used in the original Arabic text.

It is not surprising that *Sendebar* reinterprets earlier material by, in effect, Christianizing such elements. It was the duty of the medieval translator not to engage in a faithful translation, but a form of *interpretatio* that Rita Copelands describes as 'a process of resignification, from the author's intention to his structural arrangement and stylistic procedure to particular verbal usage'.[66] By calling them *diablos* the translators of *Sendebar* are culturally 'interpreting' an Arabic word and investing it with dark comedic, festive connotations of the kind that concerned Bahktin and other critics.

66. *Copeland R.* Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts. Cambridge, 1991. P. 80.

It should be noted, as a final point, that the gender of the narrator of these translated devil stories in *Sendebar*, the earlier-mentioned step-mother, can be correlated with the female, devilish characters. The material bodies of these women cannot be controlled and are untamable, as in the spectacle of the urinating princess, and they can physically alter their form through carnivalesque pregnancy. Both devils are associated with female characters and narration as ambivalent manifestations of the Bakhtinian *material bodily lower stratum*: 'She is the incarnation of this stratum that degrades and regenerates simultaneously. She is ambivalent. She debases, brings down to earth, lends a bodily substance to things, and destroys; but, first of all, she is the principle that gives birth. She is the womb'.[67] Barbara F. Weissberger believes that female prostitutes, along with homosexuals and the Jews, represent the grotesque: they are 'non-productive parasites on the social body'.[68] While her study analyzes the *Cancionero de obras burlas provocantes a risa*, most of what she states can also be applicable to *Sendebar*: the female body has become an illness that society must rid itself of, therefore it is unsurprising that the step-mother dies at the end of the main story for her treachery. The female characters in the tales of *Sendebar* studied here embody these parasitical devils that the princes must successfully avoid. In the culturally prescribed antifeminism of the book, the female and the demonic are invested with a corporal potential to degrade and regenerate, to dethrone and bring down to earth. The she-devil accomplishes this directly *in* the narration; the woman does it indirectly *through* her narration. In essence, the devil and

67. *Bakhtin, M. Rabelais*… P. 240.

68. *Weissberger B. F.* Grotesque Bodies: Insulting *Conversos* and Women in the *Cancionero de obras burlas provocantes a risa* // La Corónica. 2009. Vol. 38 (1) P. 279. She believes that the representation of the grotesque bodies of the Jews and prostitutes rely on each other: 'the denigration of the grotesque body of the Jew hidden within the *converso* actually *depends* on that body's proximity to the grotesque body of the whore hidden within the lady, and vice versa' (*Weissberger B. F.* Grotesque Bodies… P. 263).

the woman narrator were a perfect match in the Castilian story sprinkled with bodily humor.[69]

In light of Bakhtin's view of grotesque realism, the characterization of devils in these tales cannot be seen as primarily didactic — especially as the step-mother is found guilty and ordered to be killed. I have argued that the purpose of her storytelling is to point to her own deceitful nature, while at the same time entertaining readers with humorous scenes of carnivalesque devilry. She, much like the devil, does not get the last 'dark' laugh. The demonic characters that she uses in her stories attempt to trick others into falling for their traps but they instead are the ones that in the end are fooled. The step-mother also tries to warn against the influence of *privados* and her narration unsuccessfully highlights possible inversions and transgressions of these royal advisors. The devils in *Sendebar* cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration how they would have been interpreted by medieval Christian audiences, immersed as they were in a festive culture that is no longer accessible to modern readers.[70] They are dangerous, deceitful and untrustworthy creatures yet, at the same time, embody Bakhtinian humor, laughter and the carnivalesque.

69. While not directly discussing the present tales, Jacob Ornstein has studied the question of misogyny versus pro-feminism in Spanish literature and finds that the feminine in *Sendebar* does not appear to be 'of flesh and blood: better yet it is a kind of she-devil, the human embodiment of evil' ['de sangre y hueso; más bien es una especie de diablesa, la concreción humana del mal'] (*Ornstein J.* La misoginia y el profeminismo en la literatura castellana // Revista de filología hispánica. 1942. Vol. 3. P. 219). In my view the step-mother implicitly personifies the bodily humor of female characters in these diabolical *exempla*.

70. Building on the groundbreaking work of Caro Baroja, Giles has pointed out that during carnival and other festive occasions like the feast of St. Blaise, for example, celebrants dressed up as 'dancing devils', among them women (*Giles R.D.* The Laughter of the Saints… P. 4).

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