# Jewish Suffering in Medieval Christian Drama

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For Catherine Sider Hamilton

—a great scholar, a brave soul, and the best of all possible mothers.

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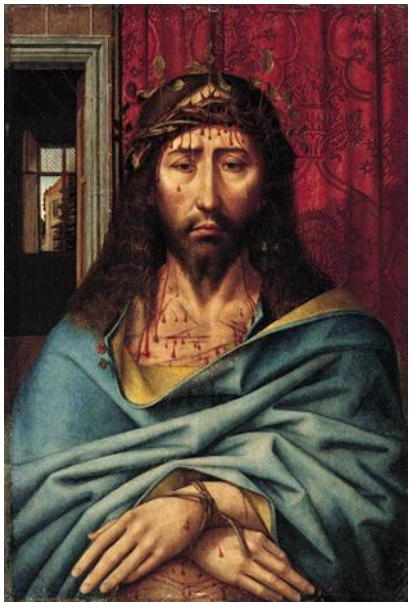
# INTRODUCTION



*Colijn der Coter, "Christ as the Man of Sorrows" c. 1500*

At the climax of the York *Crucifixion,* the crucified Christ—who has been silent for so long that an audience may well have forgotten that he, too, is a character in this drama—is invited to speak: "Say sir, howe likis you nowe, / This werke that we haue wrought?" (249-250).[1] To this mocking query, Jesus responds with a colloquial, Middle English verse translation of the Holy Saturday responsory *O vos omnes* (Beckwith, *Signifying God* 66):

> Al men that walkis by waye or strete,
>
> Takes tente yoe schalle no trauayle tyne.
>
> Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
>
> And fully feele nowe, or yoe fyne,
>
> Yf any mournyng may be meete,
>
> Or myscheue mesured vnto myne. (253-258)

[1] This and all subsequent quotations from the York *Crucifixion* are from Beagle's edition.

Jesus' use of the *O vos omnes* establishes an unbridgeable distance between speaker and audience. His question is rhetorical: there is no one whose mourning is like his—not among the audience, safely enjoying a play, and certainly not among the soldiers who have made such rough work of his crucifixion. Jesus' fundamental otherness asserts itself on every level, from his prolonged silences to his liturgical speech patterns to his stripped, bleeding body.

In another Middle English drama, the Jew Jonathas who, along with an entourage of fellow Jews, has been torturing a contraband Host, finds that his hand has adhered to the holy wafer. His friends, who had been deriving a fiendish enjoyment from their violent pastime, soon find themselves working in earnest to remove the Host from Jonathas' hand. As they do, the scene devolves into an impromptu crucifixion—with Jonathas in the place of Christ:

> JASDON. Here is an hamer and naylys thre, I s[e]ye;
> Lyffte vp hys armys, felawe, [o]n hey,
> Whyll I dryue þes nayles, I yow praye,
> With strong strokys fast. (508-511)[2]

When an image of the abused Christ at last appears from the oven into which the Host has been thrust, he has much the same thing to say as his York counterpart: "*O mirabiles Judei, attendite et videte* / *Si est dolor sicut dolor meus"* (717-718). Yet this time, Jesus' rebuke is not directed at *omnes* but at the *mirabiles Judei*—and it is not entirely clear that his question is rhetorical. It would seem that Jonathas' sorrow *is* like Jesus'.

This juxtaposition of Christ and Jonathas, the latter bleeding from the stump where his hand used to be, prompts a line of inquiry that leads into the heart of medieval drama. Did medieval audiences see Christ in the figure of Jonathas? When confronted with a dramatic representation of Christ, did they ever see a Jew? This study will look at moments in medieval

[2] This and all subsequent quotations from the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* are from Davis' edition.

plays that, I argue, invite such double sight, pushing back against the antisemitic norms of medieval culture—and, often, their own source material (as in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament,* a play based on the Host desecration libel). The catalysts for these moments of revelation are portrayals of Jewish suffering, which recall both a deep theological history and a contemporary medieval situation in which the persecution of Jews was an all too common phenomenon. In staging Jewish suffering, these plays confront their own shaping influences, laying bare the consequences of an antisemitic cultural ideology and revealing alternatives that were not chosen, but that might have been.

The theological crossover between Christ and Jonathas can be traced to Jesus himself, who made a point of coding his suffering and death as paradigmatically Jewish. Matthew and Mark record the crucified Jesus crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ("Eloi Eloi lama sabachtani?"),[3] a verse from Psalm 22—one that, devastating enough in its original context, is even starker in Matthew and Mark's stripped-down quotation. At the moment of his death, Jesus situates himself within one of the darkest places in the Hebrew Scriptures, suggesting—as he had throughout his ministry—that these Scriptures refer to him, and especially to his Passion. Jesus makes this point more explicitly after his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus: "'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

[3] This is Mark's version, in Aramaic (Mark 15:34). Matthew keeps most of the Aramaic but replaces "Eloi" with the Hebrew "Eli" (Matt. 27:46) (Lenski 1117). Jesus would have spoken Aramaic; however, he would have heard and read the Tanakh in Hebrew. His use of Aramaic here (there are some grounds for believing that it is *his* use, as the evangelists record phrases in Aramaic only rarely) may reflect his personalizing of the psalm (my thanks to Catherine Sider Hamilton for this suggestion).

Later Christian theologians embraced the interconnectedness of Jesus' suffering with those passages in the Hebrew Bible that seemed to predict it. The preeminent method of explaining these connections, however, gave a clear precedence to the man foretold over the tradition that foretold him. Within the typological schema of allegoresis, Christ did not so much echo the Hebrew Scriptures as fulfill them, such that (in spite of a supposed harmony between typological and literal interpretation) Jesus became the primary referent of certain key passages in what had become, for Christians, the "Old Testament."[4] So it was with Isaiah's Man of Sorrows:

> He was despised and rejected by mankind,
> a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
> Like one from whom people hide their faces
> he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. (Isa. 53:3)

For medieval Christians this poem described the thorn-crowned Christ, who was so portrayed—blood streaming down his forehead and exposed chest, "like one from whom people hide their faces"—in much medieval art. Thus the Hebrew Scriptures helped to furnish the devotional imagination of medieval Christendom, while at the same time the "type" upon whom this imagination depended—Israel herself—was relegated to the shadowy sidelines of Christianity's "literal" history.

Not so for medieval Jews, for whom Isaiah's Suffering Servant was not Jesus, but the people of Israel enduring captivity and oppression under the Gentiles. Rashi comments, "[s]o is the custom of this prophet: he mentions all Israel as one man, e.g., (44:2), 'Fear not, My servant Jacob'; (44:1) 'And now, hearken, Jacob, My servant.' Here too (52:13), 'Behold My servant

[4] On the senses of scripture, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis.* I discuss allegoresis at greater length in my first chapter.

shall prosper,' he said concerning the house of Jacob" (Commentary on Isaiah 53:3). According to Jewish exegesis, Israel is united in affliction to the extent that it is as one man, whose suffering is redemptive; but that man is not Christ. Rather, it is Israel, who—in spite of the vanishing act of Christian typology—had not ceased to exist after Christ had allegedly made the "old" covenant obsolete. As the evangelists claimed of Jesus' Passion, Israel's suffering is here inextricably connected to its election and ultimate vindication by God: "Therefore, I will allot him a portion in public, and with the strong he shall share plunder, because he poured out his soul to death, and with transgressors he was counted; and he bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12).

The centrality of suffering to the Jewish covenant can be traced to Judaism's foundational narratives. Esther Benbassa argues that in the *Akedah,* Abraham's binding of his son Isaac, Scripture establishes a fundamental connection between suffering and election:

> Suffering…was at the foundations of Judaism, which concluded an alliance with God by consenting to a sacrifice: Abraham proved willing to sacrifice his son Isaac in an act of obedience to God. Thus a father suffered unjustly in order to submit to God… Indeed, acceptance of suffering here leads on to the enduring existence of the Jewish people and its election by God. (*Suffering as Identity* 3)

The individual experience of suffering—that is, the suffering of the faithful Jewish person in relationship with God—is explored in various places in the Scriptures, particularly in Job and the Psalms, where the most anguished depths of doubt and despair find expression: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22). On a communal level, the most devastating events in Judaism's early history are commemorated on *Tisha B'Av:* the destruction of the First

and Second Temples, the defeat of Bar Kochba's revolt, and the "ploughing under" of the soil of Jerusalem (Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity* 23).

For medieval Jews, these foundational events and perspectives were not merely historical, but rather formed a living pattern within which their experiences might be framed.[5] Jewish chroniclers of the massacres of the first and second Crusades repeatedly invoke the *Akedah* in describing the martyrdom of the Rhineland Jews:

> Let the ears hearing this and its like be seared, for who has heard or seen the likes of it? Inquire and seek: was there ever such a mass sacrificial offering since the time of Adam? Did it ever occur that there were one thousand and one hundred offerings on one single day—all of them comparable to the sacrifice of Isaac, the son of Abraham? [6] ("Chronicle of Solomon Bar Simpson," Eidelberg 33)

As Benbassa remarks, "For the survivors, this web of allusions not only forges a link in the chain binding them to the founding Covenant of Judaism, but also confers meaning on the suffering of the moment. They have suffered and continue to suffer because they are Jews" (*Suffering as Identity* 34). Similarly, it did not escape the notice of Jewish observers that the expulsion from England (like the later expulsions from France and Spain) occurred on *Tisha B'Av* (Roth, "England and the Ninth of Ab" 63-67)*;* was it not fitting that these disasters should happen on the day of the year set aside for the commemoration of the worst calamities to befall the Jewish people?[7] Within this framework, the traumas that recurred all too predictably throughout

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[5] See Jacob Neusner's account of contemporary Judaism: "To practise the religion of Judaism means to take the ancient tale personally. To be a Jew who practices Judaism is to tell concerning oneself and one's own family the story that Judaism tells, beginning with the Jewish Scripture... The story Judaism tells brings the past into the present and imposes upon the present the pattern of the past" (1).

[6] For a discussion of the Hebrew chroniclers' use of the *Akedah,* see Eidelberg's introduction to his translation, 13; and Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity,* 34.

[7] See, for instance, Don Isaac Abrabanel's commentary on Jeremiah 2:24 (qtd. in Roth, "England and the Ninth of Ab" 65).

medieval Jewish history took on a particular significance for the sufferers—paradoxically, confirming the sovereignty of God and Israel's special relationship with Him.[8]

In spite of Christianity's typological appropriation of Israel's historical tribulations, the ongoing reality of Jewish suffering, and its potential significance, was not entirely lost on medieval Christians. Peter Abelard, in his *Collationes*—an imagined dialogue between a "philosopher" (i.e. a pagan), a Christian, and a Jew—evinces an understanding of the covenantal quality of the past and present trials of the Jews:

> [*Iudeus:*] Crudelissimum astruit Deum esse quisquis huius zeli nostri perseuerantiam tanta sustinentem a mercede uacuam censet. Nulla quippe gens umquam tanta pro Deo pertulisse noscitur aut etiam creditur, quanta nos iugiter pro ipso sustinemus; nullaque rubigo peccati esse potest, quam non consumere fornacem huius afflictionis concedi debeat. (18)
>
> Whoever thinks that we shall receive no reward for continuing to bear so much suffering through our loyalty to God must imagine that God is extremely cruel. Indeed, there is no people which has ever been known or even believed to have suffered so much for God—we have borne so much for him without cease, and it should be granted that there can be no rust of sin which is not burnt up in the furnace of this affliction. (Marenbon 19)

Here, the contemporary suffering of Jews is so evident, and so scandalous, that Christians are morally obligated to recognize its salvific qualities. Similarly, Andrew of St. Victor—who, like his master Hugh, consulted Jewish rabbis as preparation for his own works of exegesis—read the Man of Sorrows, not as Christ, but as Israel (Smalley 164). The consequences of such a reading

[8] This is not to suggest that suffering was or is the only, or the definitive, component of Jewish life; Salo Baron's famous critique of the "lachrymose conception of history," and Esther Benbassa's more recent application of that critique to Zionist philosophies, are valuable correctives to this still-current tendency (see Baron, "Newer Emphases in Jewish History" and Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity).*

go beyond an acknowledgment of Isaiah's "literal"—that is, historical—context; they open up the possibility of a theology of Jewish suffering akin to the Christian theology of Jesus' suffering, one that invites the viewer to see abjection as a paradoxical sign of God's favor.

If minority voices recognized this disquieting parallel between Jewish suffering and the suffering of Jesus, however, majority opinion was firm in the Christian West: contemporary Jews suffered because they deserved to.[9] As Christ rebukes the dismembered Jonathas in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, "For thyn hurt þou mayest thiselfe blame, / Thow woldyst preve thy powre me to oppresse" (772-773). The principal crime with which medieval Jews were charged was the crucifixion;[10] but myths and libels developed throughout the patristic period and the Middle Ages to multiply and elaborate on various, hideous forms of Jewish criminality, from desecration of the Host to well-poisoning to ritual murder. These stories inspired, or at least provided *post hoc* justification for, the breakouts of anti-Jewish violence that characterize the Middle Ages: the massacres, the riots, the expulsions.

The artistic production of the medieval Christian West bears a heavy burden of responsibility for the propagation of these antisemitic myths, and hence the violence they occasioned. The Host desecration libel was kept alive through images, poems, and plays (Rubin 132-189); the "martyr" William of Norwich is commemorated on a number of rood screens, including one that vividly portrays his alleged crucifixion by Jews; Hugh of Lincoln, "slayn also / With cursed Jews" (684-685) according to Chaucer's Prioress, stars in an Anglo-Norman ballad

[9] To be sure, the concept of suffering as a form of punishment for sin was (and is) not foreign to Jewish theology. See Lang 283, and Benbassa, who calls the interpretation of suffering as punishment "[t]he classic response" within Judaism, but also notes that "[t]his position is, nonetheless, not affirmed with the same constancy everywhere" (*Suffering as Identity* 8).

[10] See Abelard, *Collationes:* "the Christians seem to have greater cause for persecuting us, since (as they say) we killed their God" (21).

(as well as, it should be noted, ballads composed and preserved much later) (Langmuir 460).[11] These works preserve their culture's worst tendencies for future generations—so it is in the *Canterbury Tales* that many modern readers encounter the myth of ritual murder, and in the great cathedrals of Europe that tourists may observe the figure of the blind Synagoga.[12] Inseparable from the beauty of medieval art and the richness of medieval literature is the ugliness of medieval antisemitism.

Critical opinion has long accorded to medieval drama a prominent role in this cultural promotion of antisemitism. Stephen Spector opines that "[t]he mystery plays comprise, in fact, one of the most vehemently anti-Jewish genres in the history of English literature" ("Anti-Semitism and the English Mystery Plays" 3). Jody Enders has suggested that the dramatic genre's particular aptitude for promulgating a culture of antisemitism lies in its embodied, communal nature, as in the French *Mistere de la Sainte Hostie* in which, she claims, the gathered audience "reenacted a drama that demanded that [the Host-torturing Jew] Jacob's effort to disembody the embodiment of Christ be avenged by the disembodiment of the Jews" (*Death by Drama* 120). Similarly, Michael Mark Chemers argues that antisemitic belief structures "encompass the core functions of the medieval stage, a space of torture and trauma that... works to link Christian unity with anti-Semitic violence" (36). More than the demonized depictions of Jews in medieval art or their emphatic condemnation in medieval poetry and prose, it was in the staging of Jews that medieval antisemitism reached its nadir.

Yet surely theater invites other possibilities—surely dramatic embodiment and community might produce a compassionate, rather than a hateful, ideology. The question is,

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[11] The later ballad tradition, in which many of the details of the medieval libel have been changed (but the antisemitic tenor has not) appears in at least one twentieth-century anthology (*English Poetry I: From Chaucer to Gray*, published in 1909).

[12] For instance, the Cathedrals of Strasbourg and Notre-Dame de Paris. I discuss the blindfolded Synagoga in my second chapter.

were these possibilities ever realized in the medieval period? Over the course of this study, I hope to show that the answer is yes—that, in spite of the overwhelming prevalence of antisemitism in medieval drama, the dramatic genre proved as capable of issuing challenges to the dominant medieval worldview as it was adept at promoting it. In order to understand how this could be, we must be able to account for the particular contours of medieval drama: its investment in, and necessary revision of, biblical exegesis, the topic of my first chapter; its symbolic and dialectical nature, the topic of my second; its embodiment of contemporary history, which I explore in all three.

I locate a recurrent site of dialectical challenge to the reigning medieval antisemitic ideology in dramatic portrayals of Jewish suffering. In these moments, the Christian theory of "just punishment" for the Jews finds its fulfilment; yet this fulfilment introduces another interpretive strain, one never wholly absent from Christian theology: that of Israel as the Man of Sorrows, suffering unjustly and as a paradoxical sign of covenant. This tense dialectic is made possible—even inevitable—by the dramatic medium, which must make its rhetorical arguments with inherently multivalent signs and persons. With such volatile materials the slightest shift in perspective changes everything: Jonathas' punishment seems fitting until it lines up with Christ's; the slaughtered infants of Bethlehem are Christian martyrs until, lamented by their mother Rachel as the "flower of Judaea," they are Jews. The revelation of Jewish suffering as a cause for Christian mourning—or at least disquiet—requires no arcane analysis, but only the removal of a thin veil covering simple truths: that Jesus was a Jew; that his suffering, the occasion for contemplation and devotion throughout the Christian world, was the suffering of a Jew; and that he was neither the first, nor the last, to suffer in this manner.

These moments of revelation derive their power not only from the biblical sources in which they discover a central and enduring place for the Jewish people, but from the contemporary situation they mirror. When staging a spectacle of anti-Jewish violence, medieval theater was often echoing what had recently been "staged" in its own community. While the prevalent critical narrative has held that these echoes reinforced antisemitic norms—that Christian audiences "gathered together in the old familiar places of theater to designate Jews as evil and to self-designate their fellowship as virtuous" (Enders, *Death by Drama* 120)—in the plays I examine, anti-Jewish violence manifests rather as a form of nightmarish *déja vu*, revealed in its tragedy and hideousness and, above all, its irreversibility. In these moments, theater becomes a different sort of "old familiar place": it becomes the contemporary world, stripped of its myths and excuses.

In striving to understand medieval plays that portray Jews, therefore, I attempt first to understand the world these plays mirror, using both a wide-angle and a close-up lens. This study ranges from France to the Germanic territories to England, over the course of several centuries; in this sense I am departing from a trend, as exemplified (for instance) by the REED project, of situating medieval drama primarily within a local framework. What I hope to recover with this wide-angle picture is the interconnectivity of the disparate communities that produced the plays I examine—a sustained pan-European character to medieval drama as remarkable as each locality's particular manifestation of that character. This interconnectivity is due largely to the effect of a common Christian culture that came with a common language (Latin), common international endeavors (monastic and mendicant movements; the Crusades; universities), and above all, common stories. Medieval drama reiterates these stories across centuries and regions—stories from the Bible, but also spin-off legends (such as that of Antichrist) and loosely

religious myths (such as the Host desecration narrative). The Fleury playbook contains a *Slaughter of the Innocents* and a *Conversion of St. Paul*—as does the Digby manuscript, composed of plays written across the English Channel some three hundred years later; similarly, Antichrist rears his proud head in twelfth-century Bavaria and in sixteenth-century Chester; Host desecration plays crop up in Italy, France, Spain, the Netherlands, and England.

These parallels, however, should not distract from the equal distinctiveness of the regional histories that gave rise to a particular Antichrist play, or a particular *Slaughter of the Innocents.* My exploration of these more localized histories begins with the climate of scholarly exchange in twelfth-century northern France; in my second chapter I turn to the mixture of responses to the Rhineland massacres of the first two Crusades; and I conclude with the ongoing presence of Jewish converts to Christianity in post-Expulsion England. These narratives complicate the picture of a homogenous Middle Ages marked by an unvaried and unrelieved antisemitism, and they demonstrate the force of local accident as well as international culture in determining the course of a region's history. Yet, for all of the variety that emerges in my accounts of French, German, and English medieval interactions with Jewish suffering, I hope that the parallels between these histories remain apparent: the countervailing pressures of attraction and repulsion as Christians strove to work out their religion's indebtedness to Judaism and Jews; the ever-present threat of violence, and the presence of those who opposed it; above all, the power of drama to legitimate, to mirror, and simultaneously to reveal as tragic its contemporary situation.

By embodying this dialectic, medieval drama not only reiterates history but crystallizes it, expressing with painful clarity what was chosen, and what was possible, at a given historical moment. The possible turns out to have been broader and more humane than most critics of

medieval drama have allowed themselves to believe. As Miri Rubin writes of medieval Christians who chose not to act violently toward Jews, "[i]n order to discover such voices one has to believe that choice is possible at all, and thus see in violence not the inevitable, spontaneous and culturally 'expected' reaction, but a choice which favoured *some* rather than *other* manners of self-representation, self-fashioning" (5). Medieval drama give us the *some* and the *other* voices, frozen in contention—unable to resolve their inherent contradictions, yet unyielding.

This stalemate might seem a picture of futility, given the course of medieval history with its endless reiterations of antisemitic violence—violence that, as we know too well, would not be contained within the medieval period. Yet, if medieval drama crystallized its present moment, its preservation of the lesser of two voices also gives it an orientation toward the future, when this lesser voice might at last triumph over the greater; when St. Paul, the (unwitting) source of much mischief toward Jews in the Middle Ages, would be employed instead in their defense: "To the Jews 'belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ,' 'for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* pgph. 839). So at last says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* quoting from *Romans* to affirm what the Church, and Christian society, had for too long avoided. Yet if we look closely, this affirmation was, if overshadowed, never wholly absent—not in Paul, not in subsequent theology, and not in the medieval plays that placed Jews, and their suffering, at center stage.

WHO ARE RACHEL'S CHILDREN?
EXEGESIS, IDENTITY, AND SUFFERING IN THE FLEURY *INTERFECTIO PUERORUM*

"Rachel Weeping for her Children." Fresco, Marko's Monastery, Macedonia. 14th C.

"I meant to speak of the suffering of mankind generally, but we had better confine ourselves to the sufferings of the children."

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

*Introduction*

The cult of the Holy Innocents, those unfortunate infants murdered by Herod in Matthew's nativity narrative, enjoyed an upsurge of popularity in twelfth-century France. Portrayals of the gruesome story adorn three-quarters of twelfth-century French cloisters, as well as many cathedrals, and the sanctity of the Innocents was preached by such prominent figures as Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux (Rose 214-215). Particularly influential was royal patronage of the cult under King Louis VII, and later his son, Philip Augustus. The latter's devotion to the Holy Innocents would shape the very architecture of Paris: Philip rebuilt the Church of *les Innocents* and installed a new fountain on its exterior, erected a shrine in the center of the adjacent cemetery, and installed new gates, walls, and paving in the environs (Rose 223-226). The odd and uncomfortable story of infants born in the wrong place and at the wrong time had become a centerpiece of medieval French theology, art, and architecture.

Interwoven with the growing popularity of the Holy Innocents was the emergence of another cult—that of Richard of Pontoise, allegedly abducted and crucified by Jews. Philip Augustus had Richard buried in the cemetery of *les Innocents,* and used the "martyr's" story as a pretext for the expulsion of the Jews from France in 1182 (Rose 221; Benbassa, *The Jews of France* 15). In linking Richard to the infants slaughtered by King Herod, Philip was drawing on a preexistent tradition that associated the story of the Holy Innocents with the ritual murder accusation. These associations were "implicit and explicit," implied (for instance) in the placement of art depicting alleged child martyrs such as William of Norwich amid portrayals of the Nativity story (Rose 219), and stated outright in such influential texts as the *Glossa Ordinaria* (Tinkle 212). This strain of interpretation required, as E.M. Rose puts it, a "dramatic inversion" (216), which Theresa Tinkle spells out: "[l]iterally, of course, the Innocents are

Jewish boys, and the story is about Jewish suffering during an oppressive Roman occupation. Exegesis transforms this narrative into an allegory of Christian origins, with its central conflict no longer between the Jews and Romans but between 'wicked,' 'impious' Judean murderers and child saints" (219).

There is every reason to anticipate that the Fleury *Interfectio Puerorum*, a highly exegetical drama composed in the Benedictine abbey of Fleury at the close of the twelfth century, would participate in this antisemitic inversion of the story's literal meaning. Tinkle has argued that this is indeed the case, suggesting that the Fleury play "turns subtle [antisemitic] exegetical themes into public images" (219). Similarly, Rose includes the Fleury *Interfectio Puerorum* in a group of plays that she believes would have been fused with the ritual murder accusation in the popular imagination: "[i]n viewing performances of the Slaughter of the Innocents, Christians 'saw' dramatized Jews murdering young children on account of their hatred of Christ, exactly as was alleged in the contemporary ritual murder accusation" (217). In addition to the cultural prevalence of the association between the Holy Innocents and the ritual murder accusation, the Fleury play's Benedictine origin is another strike against it—as Rose notes, the Benedictines had historical ties to the ritual murder accusation (Rose 218; Despres 34).

The strongest internal argument for the Fleury *Interfectio'*s antisemitism, however, is its heavy investment in exegesis. This aspect of the play has long attracted critical attention: Karl Young describes the Fleury *Slaughter of the Innocents* as "a mosaic of passages from the service-books and the Vulgate, in the midst of which appear certain passages of original verse" (116). Similarly, Clifford Flannigan notes that for the monks who produced the Fleury play, "creating a biblical drama clearly required a transformation of both the literal and non-literal dimensions of a text. Connotation was as important as denotation" ("Rachel and Her Children"

39); Susan Boynton describes the drama as "a form of exegesis in song" ("Performative Exegesis" 41). Crucially, one of the exegetical levels dramatized by the Fleury *Interfectio* locates the slaughtered Innocents in heaven, dressed in white and following Christ as the lamb—a strong indication that these are Christian martyrs.

Yet there are elements in the Fleury *Interfectio* that are at odds with the popular allegory. For one thing, Herod is not in any obvious way portrayed as Jewish. On the contrary, he delivers the only classical allusion in the play, a quotation of Catiline as recorded by Sallust, at the moment of his attempted suicide: "Incendium meum ruina restinguam!" ("Let me quench my burning vehemence by destroying myself!"; 68).[1] While Tinkle interprets this line as representing Jewish self-destruction, this seems to be stretching its exegetical possibilities to breaking-point. The convergence of a public suicide attempt—which would have suggested a Roman context to a medieval audience[2]—with a direct quotation from a Roman source seems to point unequivocally to a portrayal of Herod as a Roman tyrant. Perhaps even more remarkable, however, is the play's assertion of the Innocents' Jewish identities: their mother, Rachel, refers to them as the *florem Judaeae*—the flower of Judaea. This appellation is all the more striking in light of the more conventional title applied to the Innocents, *flores martyrum* or flowers of the (Christian) martyrs. *Florem Judaeae* recalls this conventional phrase, only to subvert its usual meaning with a jarring reminder that these martyrs are Jews.

How, given the prevalence of the antisemitic reading of the Holy Innocents, is one to account for this strikingly counter-cultural return to the story's literal content? In order to

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are Bevington's. On Herod's classical connections, see also Boynton, who reads Herod, as I do, as a representation of secular power ("Performative Exegesis" 48-49).
[2] The word "suicide" was coined in the twelfth century by Walter of St. Victor in an attack on Abelard and three others; Walter uses the word to mock Seneca and, by extension, his Roman peers, for believing that suicide could be honorable: "you do not imagine, do you, that he has a place in Heaven with the suicides Nero, Socrates, and Cato?" (Murray 38).

understand the Fleury *Interfectio Puerorum,* we must explore another side of the French twelfth century—and another side of Christian exegesis. If the twelfth century was marked by the rise of the ritual murder accusation, it was also a time of intellectual exploration and cultural exchange. Key to what would later be identified as the "twelfth-century renaissance" was a renewed Christian interest in Jewish theology, which was flourishing in the wake of the great Rashi. Christian theologians such as Peter Abelard, Hugh of St. Victor, and Andrew of St. Victor consulted rabbis in preparation for their works of exegesis; the *Hebraica Veritas* and authentic Jewish strains of interpretation had not been so sought-after and valued since Jerome. If one faction of French society was invested in promulgating an image of the Jews as criminal and fearful "others," some French theologians were getting to know these "others" from the inside.

This reacquaintance with Jewish theology involved more than the discovery of a trove of particular Jewish interpretations; it led to a revaluation of the literal sense, as we see in Hugh of St. Victor:

> Teste namque Apostolo, *quod carnale est, prius est, deinde quod spirituale* (I Cor. XV) ...Noli igitur in verbo Dei despicere humilitatem, quia per humilitatem, illuminaris ad divinitatem. Quasi lutum tibi videtur totum hoc quod verbum Dei foris habet, et ideo forte pedibus conculcas, quia lutum est, et contemnis quod corporaliter et visibiliter gestum littera narrat. Sed audi: luto isto quod pedibus tuis conculcatur, caeci oculus ad videndum illuminatur (Joan. IX) Lege ergo Scripturam, et disce primum diligenter quae corporaliter narrat. (PL 175:13)
>
> As the Apostle says: *That was first which is fleshly, afterwards that which is spiritual* [1 Cor. xv.46]... Do not despise what is lowly in God's word, for by lowliness you will be enlightened to divinity. The outward form of God's word seems to you, perhaps, like

> dirt, so you trample it underfoot, like dirt, and despise what the letter tells you was done physically and visibly. But hear! that dirt, which you trample, opened the eyes of the blind. Read Scripture then, and first learn carefully what it tells you was done in the flesh. (Smalley 93-94)

Christian theology had a long tradition of associating the Jews with a blind, "fleshly" literalism—an inability to transcend the animal realm and, thus, to recognize the spiritual mystery of the divinity of Christ (Cohen, *Living Letters* 13; Boyarin 13). Yet here, the "dirt" of literalism is transformed into the mysterious, if humble, material with which Jesus made a paste to cure a blind man (John 9:6); like this dirt, the literal sense can bring enlightenment.

In this schema, the literal sense—that which "was done in the flesh," which Hugh and his contemporaries associated with *historia*—still attached to the Jews. But here, the associations were positive: the Jews were the historical actors of the story of salvation, not only in the "Old Testament" but in the New. This recognition, however, came at a cost: in identifying the Jews as the primary actors of the Christian story, Gentile Christians were acknowledging their own secondary status as "wild olive shoot[s]" that had been "grafted" onto the tree of Israel (Rom. 11:17). For many Christians, this was an unacceptable state of affairs. In this chapter I explore the backlash, learned and popular, to the affirmation of the primacy of Jewish identity that came with a renewed appreciation of the literal sense. I trace this reaction in the accusation of "judaizing"—a term that, going back to Paul, was tied to a fraught discourse on identity. This discourse, which extends to the very roots of Christianity, was more fundamental to medieval antisemitism than melodramatic stories of ritual murder: the Jews were not most frightening insofar as they were criminal "others," but insofar as they were Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mary, and the disciples—the Chosen People of God.

The story of the Slaughter of the Innocents shows, however, that if Jewish identity was threatening to a Christian sense of belonging, it was also inseparable from the justice of God. This connection emerges in theodical readings of the Slaughter of the Innocents, interpretations that in their implicit or explicit logic of substitution (the infants are martyrs because they died "for" Christ) require that the Jewish infants of Bethlehem be, in fact, Jews. Those theologians who attempted to overwrite this part of the story, using allegory to turn the slaughtered Jews into martyred Christians, not only effaced the infants' identities but obscured the historical narrative of suffering and covenant to which those identities were inextricably bound. Literal interpretation—the humble "dirt" that had been rejected by so many in favor of a fanciful, antisemitic reading—is the only way out of this trap.

The Fleury *Interfectio Puerorum* gives such a literal reading, in spite of its apocalyptic opening: at the core of the drama, Rachel emerges not as a metaphor but as a Jewish person, relating her own history and the history of her people, in which the death of the infants of Bethlehem is another tragic link. If this literalism recovers a Jewish identity for the Holy Innocents, however, it also expands the limits of that identity, as Rachel's motherhood is shown to consist not only in her genealogical role but in her charity. The universal aspect of Rachel's motherhood, which paradoxically depends upon her Jewish particularity, bespeaks the "dialectical tension" with which Daniel Boyarin has argued that "Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity" (244). Nowhere is that paradoxical identity so apparent, or so important, as in moments of inconsolable suffering.

# I

The Fleury Playbook was compiled towards the close of the twelfth century in northern France, and so sprang out of one of the most intellectually exciting periods of medieval history.[3] The twelfth century is often styled a "renaissance" for the radical advances in literacy, architecture, theology, vernacular poetry, and the structure of public learning that took place in France and across Europe—advances that were not limited to Christian communities. Following in the wake of Rashi of Troyes,[4] eminent schools of Jewish scholarship sprang up, attracting practitioners from all over the world. This renaissance of Jewish scholarship had a profound effect on Christian theology: the advent of the open university gave Christian theologians a new incentive to pursue Jewish learning as they strove to attract students, and a healthy mercantile economy across France, as well as the urban structure of Paris, gave these distinct scholarly worlds easy access to one another (Grabois 619). As Beryl Smalley has documented in *Biblical Interpretation in the Middle Ages,* the School of St. Victor in particular saw the development of a style of scholarship that embraced Jewish learning: from the detached curiosity of Hugh to the full-blown enthusiasm of Andrew, the scholars of the Victorine school demonstrate a sustained engagement with the Jewish intellectual world of the twelfth century (83).

Against this trend of positive encounters between Jewish scholars and Christian theologians, however, a current of fear and repudiation of the Jews runs through the twelfth century, one that finds its culmination in their expulsion from France in 1182. King Philip

[3] Boynton dates the Fleury playbook to the late twelfth century ("Performative Exegesis" 39); Tinkle notes that it was in the Fleury library by the thirteenth century, which provides a *terminus ad quem* (211, n. 2). Tinkle also summarizes the ongoing debate concerning the book's place of composition: the most likely candidate seems still to be the Benedictine monastery of Fleury at Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire (near Orléans), though St. Laumer at Blois has also been suggested (211, footnote 2).

[4] The rabbi known to posterity by his acronym, RASHI— RAbbi SHlomo Itzhaki—was born in Troyes in 1041 (Grossman 12). The literal or rational style of exegesis that he pioneered would flourish in the twelfth century in the capable hands of his grandsons and other giants of Jewish exegesis, such as Samuel ben Meir or Rashbam, Eliezer of Beaugency, Joseph Bekhor Shor of Orléans, and Joseph Kara (Smalley 150-151).

Augustus had, it would seem, primarily financial reasons for this expulsion—just as, ten years later, it would be financial considerations that would prompt him to invite the Jews to return[5]—but these practical motives were all too easily attached to the surge of anti-Jewish sentiment that had been growing in France throughout the twelfth century. This sentiment expressed itself partly in the cult of saints such as Richard of Paris and other children allegedly crucified by Jews, as Tinkle and others have traced.[6] In his official biography of Philip Augustus, the monk Rigord claims that it was these crimes that compelled the pious young king to expel the Jews from France (*Gesta Philippi Augusti* 24-27): so King Philip and his biographer were able to make a popular success out of a financially advantageous policy. Yet for all his practicality, it is not impossible or even unlikely that Philip believed the tales of his own pious motivations; in fact, in his youth he had a particular devotion to Richard of Paris (Tinkle 215; Jordan 18-19). The current of vehement anti-Jewish feeling, then, was as real as the trend of scholarly encounters, and it extended to the country's policy makers.

At first glance, these contrary currents of intellectual curiosity and popular rejection seem to have little to do with one another: it is tempting to separate the political and popular sentiments of Christian France toward its Jewish population from the more nuanced opinions of the Victorine scholars.[7] Yet there is an important point of contact between the two, signaled by the shadowy term "judaize"—a word that occurs both in Rigord's account of the expulsion and in Richard of St. Victor's *De Emmanuele.* For Richard, his fellow Victorine Andrew—who gives "the Jewish opinion… as though it were not so much the Jews' as his own, and as though it

[5] In the ongoing struggles between the young French monarch (Philip was only fifteen at the time of his coronation) and his powerful nobles, the Jews became a valuable pawn (Benbassa 15).
[6] Tinkle 214-215; see also Rose, Poliakov 56-64, and Jordan.
[7] And others, such as Peter Abelard, who was deeply interested in Jewish scholarship and tradition, and who wrote a dialogue between a Christian, a "Philosopher" (pagan), and a Jew (*Collationes*). Another major figure in this movement is Herbert of Bosham (see Goodwin's recent study).

were true" ("[i]n multis namque scripturae illius locis ponitur Judaeorum sententia quasi sit non tam Judaeorum quam propria, et velut vera"; PL 196:601; Smalley 158)—is a "judaizer." And he is not the only one: Richard takes it as his task, first, "arguere caecitatem Judaeorum" ("to censure the blindness of the Jews"), and second, "rumpere surditatem judaizantium" ("to burst the deafness of the judaizers"). Smalley argues that "[i]t is not Andrew's consultation with Jews that shocks [Richard], but the acceptance of their view when it undermines the whole Christian interpretation of the Old Testament and endangers the faith of simple folk" (110). Yet the line between Jews and "judaizers" would seem to be thin enough that fraternizing with the former could very well turn one into the latter—Jewish "blindness" leading to Christian "deafness."

This fear of the apparently contagious condition of "judaizing" emerges in Rigord's account of the expulsion:

> Eo tempore multitudo maxima Judeorum in Francia habitabat, que a longis retroactis temporibus de diversis mundi partibus, ob pacis diuturnitatem et Francigenarum liberalitatem, ibi convenerat. Audierant enim Judei strenuitatem regum Francorum contra inimicos, et pietatem magnam erga subditos; et ideo majores eorum et sapientiores in lege Moysis, qui ab ipsis Judeis didascali vocabantur, Parisius venire decreverunt: ubi longam habentes conversationem in tantum ditati sunt, quod fere medietatem totius civitatis sibi vindicaverant, et (quod contra Dei decretum est et institutionem ecclesiasticam) christianos in servos et ancillas in domibus suis habebant, qui, a fide Jesu Christi manifeste recedentes, cum ipsis Judeis judaïzabant. (24)
>
> At this time a great multitude of Jews had been dwelling in France for a long time past, for they had flocked thither from divers parts of the world, because peace abode among the French, and liberality; for the Jews had heard how the kings of the French were

> prompt to act against their enemies, and were very merciful toward their subjects. And therefore their elders and men wise in the law of Moses, who were called by the Jews *didascali*, made resolve to come to Paris.
>
> When they had made a long sojourn there, they grew so rich that they claimed as their own almost half of the whole city, and (which was contrary to the decree of God and the law of the Church) had Christians in their houses as menservants and maidservants, who were open backsliders from the faith of Jesus Christ, and *judaized* with the Jews. (Marcus [translation slightly altered]).

It is not entirely clear what Rigord means by his use of the term "judaize," which he employs as though it will be instantly recognizable as something fearful and abhorrent. Did these menservants and maidservants convert to Judaism? Or did they simply adopt certain Jewish practices, such as resting on the Jewish Sabbath and eating kosher foods, that might well naturally occur if one were working in a Jewish home?[8] Whatever the reality of the situation, Rigord's wording points to a frightening loss of identity: the only identity marker these (presumably poor, property-less) men and maidservants have is that of "Christians," and it is this that they lose by living with, and becoming like, Jews.

The ambiguity of this term, "judaize," and its association with a kind of shameful, liminal identity, is instructive in the way it mirrors the varied and complex feelings of twelfth-century French Christians towards the Jews in their midst. "Judaizing," which could mean anything from converting to Judaism to practicing Jewish customs to simply *thinking* like a Jew, occurs as the result of an attraction, and it is this that makes the possibility so threatening. What Rigord attempts to sequester within strictly commercial bounds—the Jews are "rich," and so (Rigord

[8] Many early occurrences of the word "judaize" show up in conjunction with prohibitions against keeping the Jewish Sabbath; see p. 31, below.

insinuates) they are able to buy the faith and identities of their servants—Gilbert Dahan describes as a kind of fascination:

> Je crois bien, en effet, que le judaïsme vécu par les juifs médiévaux *fascine* les chrétiens—les intellectuels et les autres aussi, sans doute: ces contemporains du Christ sont toujours présents; leur pratique rituelle est celle que le Christ observait. Comment une religion ou un système de pensée religieux, que précisément la venue du Christ abolissait, rendait vain, est-il toujours vivant? Et la fidélité des juifs à leurs textes, leur zèle studieux parvenait parfois à faire oublier leur *perfidia* et la vanité de leurs efforts. (229)
>
> I believe, indeed, that the Judaism lived by medieval Jews *fascinates* the Christians—the intellectuals and others too, without doubt: these contemporaries of Christ are still present: their ritual practice is that which Christ observed. How could a religion or a system of religious thought, which precisely the coming of Christ abolished, rendered futile, still be living? And the fidelity of the Jews to their texts, their studious zeal managed sometimes to make one forget their *perfidia* and the vanity of their efforts. (my trans.)

Here, it is not situational coincidence—being hired by a Jew—that causes "judaizing"; rather, it is a stirring of curiosity that arises out of the perennial situation in Europe: the Jews, in whatever confined or persecuted state, are "still present." I propose that the root of the *fascination* described by Dahan lies, not in the ritual practices or even the scholarly fidelity of the Jews—the imitable, "outward signs" of Judaism—but rather in the inner condition that cannot be attained by imitation: Jewish identity. The twelfth-century usage of the term "judaize" reveals an

underlying fear that Christian identity is, on its own, insufficient; that it is only by possessing a Jewish identity that one can live an authentically Christian life.

This issue goes back to Christianity's very beginnings, and is perhaps most clearly delineated in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, where Paul first uses "judaize" (Ἰουδαΐζειν) as a term denoting the Christian practice of Jewish customs:

> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews (Ἰουδαΐζειν)?" (Gal. 2: 11-14)

Paul borrows this word from the Septuagint rendering of Esther 8:17, where the Greek Ἰουδαΐζειν, translating the Hebrew mi̱tyahăḏīm, means simply "to convert to Judaism"—though it is interesting to note that even in this context the word is associated with fear of the Jews: "And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them" (Esther 8:17). In his use of the word in the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul gives it a more subtle and specific sense: to *behave like a Jew*—that is, to live according to the dictates of Mosaic law—when one is a Christian.

The context for Paul's accusation is the "circumcision controversy": should Gentile converts to Christianity be required to undergo circumcision? That is, does a Gentile need to

become Jewish in order to truly be a follower of Christ?[9] Paul's answer seems, at first glance, to be a resounding "no." "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? …Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?" (Gal. 3:1-3). Paul's dichotomizing of "Spirit" and "flesh" seems at first to suggest that he considers one's ethnic background—Jewish or Gentile—of little import. In the same letter he will baldly state, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28; see also Col. 3:11). Statements of this nature, which pepper Paul's letters, lend support to Daniel Boyarin's thesis that Paul's theology "is founded on a binary opposition in which the meaning as a disembodied substance exists prior to its incarnation in language—that is, in a dualistic system in which spirit precedes and is primary over body" (14).[10]

A closer look at Galatians, however, and at the rest of the Pauline corpus, reveals that Paul's emphasis is on the second part of his formulation: "*for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* Paul's assertion that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, is meant to shock—for elsewhere, Paul makes it very clear that there is an innate and insuperable difference between Jews and Gentiles: Gentile converts are shoots of a "wild olive" who, in receiving baptism, are "grafted" into the "cultivated olive tree" of Israel (Rom. 11:17-24). Gentile converts, although they have in many cases replaced the "natural branches"—that is, Israelites—should not therefore rest easy in their new, grafted state: "So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you" (Rom. 11:20-

[9] The designation "Christian" is likely anachronistic for this early period: see Lieu.
[10] Boyarin is careful to qualify this statement: "Paul's dualism... *does not radically devalue the body but nevertheless presupposes a hierarchy of spirit and body"* (15).

21). What "judaizing" betrays, according to Paul, is an anxiety about the effectiveness of God's grafting program. Yet it is no wonder if Gentile converts felt such anxiety, for even the radically inclusive Paul never allows the Gentiles to lose sight of their "natural" inferiority.[11]

What Paul adopts in counterbalance to this statement of natural and innate difference between Jews and Gentiles—a difference in the blood, as the stock of a wild tree differs from that of a cultivated olive—is an allegorical approach to Scripture.[12] In this way, as Boyarin argues, "hermeneutics becomes anthropology" (13), splitting flesh from spirit, Jews from Christians, and the literal from the allegorical in one clean blow:

> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. (Gal 4:22-26)

By associating "the flesh" with slavery, and both of these with Judaism, Paul turns the natural Jewish advantage—literal heredity from Abraham, to whom God made his promises—into a disadvantage. Who needs literal heredity, when one can have *spiritual*—that is, allegorical—heredity?[13] This, Paul argues, is what the Christian faith offers to Gentile converts: "Just as

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[11] See, e.g. Galatians 2:15: "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners."

[12] Allegory was first employed in a text by Theagenes of Rhegium (6th century BC), who applied it to the Iliad; it was then used commonly in the Hellenic world. In the first century, the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria applied the allegorical method to the Pentateuch (Terezis 130); Boyarin points out the numerous affinities between the exegetical approaches of Philo and Paul (13-14). According to Henri de Lubac, "in word and in deed, Christian allegory comes from Saint Paul" (vol. 2, p. 4).

[13] See Boyarin's extended analysis at 32-36.

Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham" (Gal. 3:6-7).

As deft and rhetorically effective as Paul's new mode of reading may be, however, his "allegorical" story of Sarah and Hagar reinforces the very anxieties about Christian identity it attempts to allay. Any reader with some knowledge of the "literal" story of Sarah and Hagar would be aware of the violence Paul has inflicted on that story in fashioning his allegory: both Genesis and later Rabbinic tradition insist that Sarah, and *not* Hagar, is one of the four matriarchs of the Jewish people. Although Hagar's son, Ishmael, is also blessed by God with a great nation of descendants, these descendants are understood by Rabbinic theology to be the Arab and Bedouin tribes (Noort 33-44).[14] It is Sarah who bears the long-awaited Isaac, and it is Isaac whose wife Rebecca bears Jacob—the man who will be renamed "Israel." If these "fleshly" details of genealogy seem as though they would be outside of the purview of Christian concerns, one need only think of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which both open with lengthy genealogies, or of Christ's title, cited by Paul, "Son of David" (Rom. 1:3). In associating Hagar with Israel, therefore, Paul implicitly requires that his readers forcibly repress their knowledge of the literal—we might say, the genetic—content of the story.

In Paul's letters, then, the literal and allegorical exist in tension, the latter partaking as much of paradox or riddle as it does of "fulfillment" in any obvious sense. However, for the subsequent generations of Christian interpreters who would wholeheartedly adopt Paul's allegorical approach to Scripture, the live sense of this tension between the literal and the allegorical seems to have been lost. The adversarial relationship implied by "flesh" and "spirit" in the binary of the allegorical and the literal dissipated over the course of the patristic period, as these modes of reading expanded into the four-fold method of exegesis so familiar to scholars of

[14] Muslims claim Ishmael as their ancestor (Noort 3).

the Middle Ages. These four modes were generally regarded—like the four Evangelists, the four beasts of the Apocalypse, and other symmetrical groupings formulated by Christian theology—to be in harmony, together constituting the fullness of the meaning of Scripture (Lubac, vol. 1, pp. 1-4). Godfrey of St. Victor, for instance, provides in his *Fons philosophiae* the memorable image of a stream with four sections of various depth and current, some more accessible than others but all a part of the same body of water (Lubac, vol. 1, p. 2; Synan 225-226).

This sense of harmony was in part made possible by the increasingly Gentile composition of the Church. At the time Paul was writing his Epistle to the Galatians, the movement of Christ-following was still, to all appearances, a movement situated within Judaism.[15] Partly due to the efforts of Paul, however, who styles himself "the Apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13), the Gentile presence in the early Church expanded quickly until ethnic Jews were in the minority. As Rosemary Ruether argues, the evangelical character of the early Church led to a double-edged exegetical tradition that sought to condemn "official" Judaism, which rejected its messianic claims, as it developed and spread its Christology (64-65). By the second century, the so-called "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity was well underway, such that Jews could be represented—and condemned—as an identifiable "other," as we see in the writings of Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, and Tertullian, to name a few.[16]

The shift from a Jewish to a Gentile Church can be traced in the evolution of the word "judaize." For Paul, the word means two different things to two different audiences. To Peter, it means roughly "continuing to live as you used to," that is, as a law-abiding Jew; to the Galatians,

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[15] The status of the movement of Christ-following within, or outside of, Judaism in the first centuries of its existence is a matter of continued debate. See Holmberg 1, as well as the other essay in this volume, particularly Anders Runesson's contribution (59-92); and Lieu.

[16] Justin Martyr, *The Dialogue with Trypho;* Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos;* for Ignatius of Antioch and the larger matter of the "parting of the ways," see Robinson. Robinson argues that the "parting of the ways" model is a useful one, and that early Christian identity formation involved the establishment of "boundaries" between Jews and Christians. The "parting" model is still a matter of significant debate, however. See Dunn, and Shanks.

it means "adopting the practices of the majority of the Church, which is Jewish." In patristic usage, from Tertullian to the canons of the Council of Laodicea in 383, the word is closely linked to another, more specific verb, "sabbatizare," to keep the Jewish Sabbath: "Quod non oportet Christianos judaizare, & in Sabbato otiari; sed eo die operari: diem autem dominicum praeferentes otiari, si modo possint, ut Christianos. Quod si inventi fuerint judaizare, sint anathema a Christo" ("Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ"; Canon XXIX, Beveridge 425; Percival 148). The radical reduction of this word's scope to a single Jewish practice reflects the changing situation of the Church. In Laodicea and throughout Asia Minor, the Jewish presence in the fourth century was considerable, and there is evidence of Christians and Jews living side-by-side (Bodens 79-80). The threat of "judaizing," however, was at this stage primarily *external:* the attraction to Judaism existed not within the Church, but in the Synagogues that were situated, in some cases, next door to Christian shops (80).

When the word "judaize" crops up again in the writings of twelfth-century Frenchmen—Rigord, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Abelard, Richard of St. Victor—it is coming from a part of the world in which the Church had always been predominantly Gentile. At first glance, the innovative uses for "judaize" that appear in the twelfth century are what one might expect from a situation in which, forgetting or temporarily repressing the origins of their religion in Judaism, Christian writers could characterize Jews as fundamentally "other"—prone to behaviors inherently abhorrent to Christian sensibilities and morals.[17] Thus, for Bernard of Clairvaux, to "judaize" is to practice usury (though, as Abelard points out, this is a practice for which Christian

[17] See Nelson, *The Idea of Usury* xxi-xxii.

strictures are largely responsible).[18] Like Rigord's ambiguous use of "judaize," Bernard's is reflective of a very different social climate from that of the early Church—a climate in which to be Jewish is inherently undesirable. As a reader of Abelard's *Collationes* will write in response to Abelard's text, "Ipsum audite potius quam paganum philosophantem vel Hebraeum judaizantem" ("Hear him [i.e. Christ] rather than a pagan philosophizing and a Hebrew Judaizing!"; *Exoratio Magistri,* PL 178:1683C; Marenbon xc). Jews were perceived as so wholly "other" that to "judaize" had become, simply, "to do whatever Jews do."

In the writings of Peter Abelard and Richard of St. Victor, however, "judaize" has a more specific meaning that reflects the nuances of the twelfth-century context, and simultaneously returns the word to its Pauline roots in the Epistle to the Galatians. For these scholars, to "judaize" means "to read literally."[19] Smalley argues that the literal style of Jewish exegesis was in fact an innovation of Rashi's, and that therefore Andrew of St. Victor's (and, we might add, Richard's and Abelard's) association of the Jews and the Letter was fundamentally mistaken: "Had he [Andrew] gone a hundred years earlier, he would have found no connection between 'literalism' and Jewish exegesis. He would have found that the Jews were just as devoted to allegory and fancy as the Christians were. Then perhaps he might have realized that there was a mistake somewhere" (171). However, Smalley's sense of the newness of Rashi's exegetical method is exaggerated. As Menahem Banitt explains, "[a]ll the aspects of [Rashi's] exegesis *ad*

[18] "Vnde nobis precipue superest lucrum ut alienigenis fenerantes hinc miseram sustentemus uitam; quod nos quidem maxime ipsis efficit inuidiosos, qui se in hoc plurimum arbitrantur grauatos" ("And so the main way which remains for us to earn an income to support our wretched lives is by lending out money at interest to those of other races; and this, indeed, makes us especially hated by those who consider that they are put under a great burden by it"; *Collationes* 20; Marenbon 21).

[19] The association of Jews with a hard-headed literalism is not original to Abelard or to Richard, but runs through the Church Fathers and persists throughout the Middle Ages, as Jeremy Cohen has traced: "[The Jew's] failure [to embrace Christianity]…had a chiefly hermeneutical basis; it derived from a deficient reading of the biblical covenant that God has revealed to him, an inability to discern the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New" (*Living Letters of the Law* 13). The flip side of this equation, however—the notion that a Christian could become a "judaizer" by reading too literally—points to a unique situation in which Christian theologians were seeking out Jewish approaches to reading the Bible.

*litteram* had already been applied of old. The modalities of this kind of investigation have been codified among the *Thirteen Principles* attributed to that great master of the *Aggadah,* Rabbi Ishmael and later incorporated in the *Mishnah of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yosi Hagalili* or *Midrash of Thirty-Two Hermeneutic Rules*" (70).

There is a more fundamental sense in which the twelfth-century association of the Jews and the Letter was not as mistaken as Smalley suggests. The Jews possessed the "literal" sense of Scripture, not because of Rashi's recent innovation of literal or rational exegesis, but because the Jews *were* the literal sense of Scripture—that is, the subjects of biblical history. A literal reading, therefore, led inevitably back to the Jewish people just as, for Stephen Harding in the eleventh century, it had led back to the Hebrew language.[20] This realization that the Jews possessed exclusively a literal—that is, a "fleshly"—inheritance of Biblical history, would prove deeply uncomfortable for some Christian theologians. This discomfort is at the root of Richard of St. Victor's attack on his fellow Victorine Andrew.

The bone of contention between Andrew and Richard is a verse from the Book of Isaiah containing an important prophecy for the Christian tradition, one usually interpreted by Christian theologians as referring to the virgin birth of Christ: "Behold, a young girl shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7.14). The stakes involved in the interpretation of this passage, as with all passages of prophecy, are high. If, as Andrew and Richard's master Hugh argues, a sound understanding of the literal leads to a better understanding of the spiritual, which follows from it (*De Scripturis* 5, PL 175:14c),[21] then this prophecy can be interpreted as a clear link between the Old Testament and the New, showing that, whatever else it might contain, the Old Testament is *about* Christ. If, on the other hand, the

[20] For the search for the *Hebraica Veritas,* beginning with Stephen Harding's quest to produce the new, more accurate Bible of Cïteaux, see Grabois 618.
[21] See Van Zwieten 330.

literal and the allegorical cannot be made to agree, then the fissure between Jesus' ancestors and his followers becomes an unbridgeable gap. This seems to be the case in Andrew's literal interpretation. The problem is not that Andrew omits the Christological interpretation of the passage; in fact, he gives this reading as well. The problem is that Andrew gives the "literal," Jewish account of the passage in such depth, and with such conviction, that its inability to coexist with the allegorical, Christian interpretation is unavoidably clear (Van Zwieten 332).

What Andrew's plumbing of the literal depths of Scriptural interpretation, informed by his discussions with contemporary Jewish scholars, lays bare is the basic contradiction between the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture, returning these two modes to their Pauline antagonism. In this case, however, the contradiction between "letter" and "spirit" is not as immediately obvious as it was in the story of Sarah and Hagar. For one thing, the genealogical issues are not as fraught. The Jewish scholars cited by Andrew interpret the child, named "God is with us," to be Isaiah's son (Van Zwieten 328)[22]—a figure whose later lineage is of little importance. Rather, his significance consists in the way that, at the moment of impending destruction for Israel, he confirms God's promise that God is, in fact, with his people. Second, the passage in question is undeniably a prophecy of some kind; and this means, for both Jewish and Christian exegetes, that even a "literal" exposition will involve some creative liberties. For instance, the child whom Rashi reads as fulfilling this prophecy—whose birth is related a mere chapter later, in Isaiah 8:3—is not called Immanuel, but Maher-shalal-hash-baz, a discrepancy that Rashi explains by having the child's mother call him Immanuel, and his father, Isaiah, call him Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Commentary on Isaiah 7:14, 8:3).

If reading literally does not preclude expanding on the Biblical text, what makes it "literal"? Hugh of St. Victor, following in a venerable tradition that includes Augustine, finds

[22] Blenkinsopp notes that this interpretation is made by Ibn Ezra, followed by Rashi (233).

the root meaning of literal exegesis in the concept of "historia" (Van Zwieten 329), and it is precisely a sense of history that characterizes the Jewish interpretations of Isaiah 7.14 cited by Andrew. On the one hand, "historia" means the context of historical events that occasion Isaiah's prophecy—namely, the immediate threat presented to Judah by the Assyrians (328). It also, and more importantly, however, means the context of the prophecy's original audience. Andrew makes clear the importance of this facet of historical context in his paraphrase of the prophecy: "Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet. Juvenculae vel absconditae partus et conceptus, quando eum videritis, significabit vobis quod a praedicto metu liberabimini, et vocabis tu domus Juda, vel quae concepisti, Emmanuel" ("*Behold, a virgin shall conceive.* The birth and conception in a young woman, when you see it, will mean to you that you will be delivered from fear. *And you shall call him [Immanuel]*. You, house of Judah, or you, who have conceived"; PL 196:604A; Van Zwieten 328). As Jan Van Zwieten notes, Andrew's paraphrase retains the second person of the original prophecy (328). What makes the interpretation of Isaiah 7.14 such a divisive exercise for Jewish and Christian exegetes is not only the identity of the mother and the child, but also the identity of the "you," and by extension, the identity of the "us." For whom were Isaiah's words—and hence, God's words—intended? Who can claim, "God is with us"?

It is this question that troubles Richard of St. Victor, and that explains his copious writing on the subject. It is this, too, that accounts for his vehement use of the slur "judaizer" to characterize Andrew. For this fundamental instability—who is the recipient of God's promises?—is not restricted to a single verse of the "Old Testament"; it characterizes the entire project of the New Testament, erupting in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. When the infant Christ appears in the world, he appears to two distinct audiences, recipients of the same Christ but in different ways, and perhaps even to differing degrees, as a larger cup can hold more than a

smaller one. Christ is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles"; but for "[his] people Israel," he has come to give "glory" (Luke 2:32). As Mary declares in the *Magnificat,* itself an echo of the Song of Hannah, God's coming is the fulfillment of a promise made to a particular people:

> He has helped his servant Israel,
> in remembrance of his mercy,
> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
> to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Luke 1: 54-55)

This "forever" is unequivocal. As the Catholic Church has since recognized, "To the Jews 'belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ,' 'for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable'" (*Catechism* pgph. 839).

## II

*When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:*

> *"A voice is heard in Ramah,*
> *weeping and great mourning,*
> *Rachel weeping for her children*
> *and refusing to be comforted,*
> *because they are no more." (Matt. 2:16-18)*

If the Jews' literal status as God's Chosen People was a source of chagrin to twelfth-century Christians, it nonetheless remained integral to the Christian story. The importance of Jewish identity to the Gospels emerges, perhaps surprisingly, in the story of the Slaughter of the Innocents, in which the question of the infants' identity as Jews or as Christians is inextricably bound up with the matter of their suffering. The contentious term used in patristic and medieval theology at once to solve the story's theodical problems and, in its more allegorical applications, to appropriate the infants' Jewish identities, is that of "martyr," a word taken from the Greek μάρτυρ, or witness ("Martyr," *OED*). These infants are supposed to be witnesses even as they die a seemingly futile death—but witnesses to what, exactly? According to Prudentius, they are "Christ's first offerings," their lives given, like those of all Christian martyrs, for Jesus, who died for them.[23] Yet in age and time the Innocents are not prepared to make such an offering in the usual sense, and in Matthew's narrative they are most immediately associated with a Jewish past of paradigmatic suffering. Paradoxically, it is only through a literal reading of the Innocents, not merely acknowledging but hinging upon their Jewish identities, that the Christian theodical problem of the Slaughter of the Innocents can be addressed.

Tradition surrounding the Holy Innocents sprang up at a time when the Latin Church was struggling with questions of theodicy, and it is as theodicy that many patristic sermons on this topic can best be understood. The catalyst for an extended engagement with the episode was the challenge of Pelagius and his followers (Hayward 72). The Pelagians rejected the notion of hereditary sinfulness, and so held that unbaptized infants were saved by their innocence.[24] In arguing against this position, Augustine formulated his famous and influential doctrine of

[23] "Vos, prima Christi victima, / grex inmolatorum tener, / aram ante ipsam simplices / palma et coronis luditis" (*Cathemerinon*).
[24] The Pelagians, and in particular, Julian of Eclanum, accused Augustine of innovation and even Manicheism in his doctrine of original sin (Beatrice 3, 78).

original sin, which included the claim that unbaptized infants were consigned to Hell—hence the urgent necessity of infant baptism ("International Theological Commission," pgph 16).[25] If this seemed harsh to Augustine's opponents, the particular fate of the Innocents of the Christmas story must have seemed intolerably so, for they died in place of Christ. Had it not been for Christ's incarnation, the infants of Bethlehem might have lived to a ripe old age. There is a strong reaction in patristic and medieval sermons against this charge of cruelty, even cowardice, on Christ's part—fleeing to Egypt while his brothers are slain because of him. Peter Chrysologus sums it up eloquently: "quare deseruit quos sciebat quaerendos esse propter se, et propter se noverat occidendos?" ("[w]hy did He desert those whom He knew were being searched for because of Himself, and whom He knew would be killed for His sake?"; PL 52.606; Ganss 257).

As Paul Hayward argues, theologians of the early Latin Church found themselves in need of a special solution for the Innocents, one that could affirm both Augustine's position on the necessity of infant baptism and the goodness and justice of God. They found this solution in the argument, variously formulated, that the Innocents are "martyrs" (Hayward 74). This designation, ubiquitous in Latin patristic sermons on the topic, had calcified into an official feast day by the fifth century.[26] Interpreting the Innocents' deaths as martyrdom "solves" the problem of undeserved suffering, while avoiding the Pelagian answer of infant innocence, by implying that the unbaptized children would have gone to hell but for an act of God's grace. By God's

[25] See also Beatrice, and Sullivan.
[26] The precise date of the institution of the Feast of the Holy Innocents is unknown. It appears in the Leonine Sacramentary of 485, which provides a *terminus ad quem.* The *Catholic Encyclopedia* places it "not before the end of the fourth and not later than the end of the fifth century" (Holweck).

grace, however, they receive eternal happiness far in excess of the earthly suffering they experienced.[27]

As Thomas Aquinas would note in the thirteenth century, however, designating the Holy Innocents as martyrs creates a problem for the Church's understanding of martyrdom even as it solves the problem of infant suffering. The difficulty is that martyrdom, as an act of virtue, should under ordinary circumstances be voluntary:

> Videtur, quod martyrium non sit actus virtutis: omnis enim actus virtutis est voluntarius: sed martyrium quandoque non est voluntarium; ut patet de innocentibus pro Christo occisis, de quibus dicit Hilar. super Matth. *(can. I.)* quod in aeternitatis profectum per martyrii gloriam efferebantur; ergo martyrium non est actus virtutis. (*Summa,* Quaestio CXXIV: I, p. 844)
>
> It seems that martyrdom is not an act of virtue. For all acts of virtue are voluntary. But martyrdom is sometimes not voluntary, as in the case of the Innocents who were slain for Christ's sake, and of whom Hilary says (Super Matth. i) that "they attained the ripe age of eternity through the glory of martyrdom." Therefore martyrdom is not an act of virtue. (Fathers of the English Dominican Province 3121)

St. Thomas' reply to this objection is curious insofar as he rejects the simplest available answer—a miraculous and apparently popular account whereby the Innocents *do* act voluntarily. Instead he insists that in this special case, free will was not a necessary precondition for martyrdom:

> "[Q]uidam dixerunt, quod innocentibus acceleratus est miraculose liberi arbitrii usus, ita quod etiam voluntarie martyrium passi sunt: sed quia hoc per auctoritatem Scripturae non

[27] "Beati, qui labores in requiem, in refrigerium dolores, moerores in gaudium commutarunt" ("Blessed are they! ... They have changed their labors into rest, their sufferings into refreshment, their sorrows into joy"; Peter Chrysologus, "Sermo 152," PL 52.606; Ganss 258).

> comprobatur, ideo melius dicendum est, quod martyrii gloriam, quam in aliis voluntas meretur, illi parvuli occisi per Dei gratiam sunt assecuti: nam effusio sanguinis propter Christum vicem gerit baptismatis; unde sicut in pueris baptizatis per gratiam baptismalem meritum Christi operatur ad gloriam obtinendam: ita et in occisis propter Christum meritum martyrii Christi operatur ad palmam martyrii consequendam" (*Summa,* Quaestio CXXIV:I, p. 845)
>
> Some have said that in the case of the Innocents the use of their free will was miraculously accelerated, so that they suffered martyrdom even voluntarily. Since, however, Scripture contains no proof of this, it is better to say that these babes in being slain obtained by God's grace the glory of martyrdom which others acquire by their own will. For the shedding of one's blood for Christ's sake takes the place of Baptism. Wherefore just as in the case of baptized children the merit of Christ is conducive to the acquisition of glory through the baptismal grace, so in those who were slain for Christ's sake the merit of Christ's martyrdom is conducive to the acquisition of the martyr's palm. (Fathers of the Dominican Province 3121)

In this formulation St. Thomas, like his patristic predecessors, uses the story of the Innocents to confirm Augustine's doctrine of original sin and the necessity of baptism. Rather than presenting an exception to the rule that unbaptized babies go to Hell, they are an exception to the rule that an exercise of free will is required for martyrdom.

But if not by free will, by what mechanism do the infants earn the title of "martyrs"? According to St. Thomas, God's grace was bestowed upon them because they died "for Christ's sake." In making this claim, Thomas echoes patristic reasoning: Quoduultdeus of Carthage argues that "[p]raestitit eis Christus ut pro Christo morerentur, praestitit ut suo sanguine ab

originali peccato diluerentur" ("Christ granted to them that they might die for Christ, granted that they might be cleansed of original sin with their own blood"; 340; Gregory Hays). Peter Chrysologus similarly asserts that the infants "pro Christo merentur occidi" (were "worthy to die for Christ"; PL 52.606; Hayward 70). Pseudo-Augustine, neatly identifying the crux of the issue, writes, "Quam beata aetas, quae necdum Christum potest loqui, et jam pro Christo meretur occidi" ("Happy is their age, which could not yet acknowledge Christ, but which was worthy to die for him"; PL 39.2150; Hayward 72). Yet it would seem that this formulation begs the question. Dying "for" another seems to imply a degree of voluntary action, that is, dying with the intention of saving another, and it is just this intention that is problematically lacking in the death of the Innocents.

Both St. Thomas and the patristic authors from whom he draws are well aware that, lacking a fully developed will, the Innocents cannot be said to have died "for" Christ in the same way that the adult St. Stephen—recognized as the first (standard) martyr of the Church[28]—can. Some other meaning of dying "for the sake of Christ" is plainly intended, and it would seem to consist in a death *in place of* Christ. In an earlier part of his sermon, Peter Chrysologus uses "for the sake of" (*propter*)[29] in just this way: "quare deseruit quos sciebat quaerendos esse propter se, et propter se noverat occidendos?" ("[w]hy did He desert those whom He knew were being searched for because of Himself, and whom He knew would be killed for His sake?"; PL 52.606; Ganss 257). It is *because of* Christ—that is, because of their similarity to Christ—that the boys

[28] Stephen is venerated as Protomartyr in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, as well as in those Protestant denominations that venerate saints. The apparent contradiction in Stephen's "proto" status, when the infants (and Saint John the Baptist) died before him, is explained by the following schema: "Stephen the first martyr (martyr by will, love, and blood), John, the Disciple of Love (martyr by will and love), and these first flowers of the Church (martyrs by blood alone) accompany the Holy Child Jesus entering this world on Christmas day" (Holweck). The point of these distinctions is not to diminish the fullness of the infants' status as martyrs, but rather to note the strangeness of their temporal situation. As "flowers" they anticipate the Church's martyrs, the "fruit."

[29] "Propter"—like the English "for"—has a broad range of possible meanings, including "on account of, by reason of, from, for, because of" (Lewis and Short).

of Bethlehem are slaughtered. By interpreting this causal chain as a criterion for martyrdom, St. Thomas and the early Latin Doctors turn an accusation against Christ (that he allowed his brothers to die for him) into an affirmation of his grace (that through this substitution, Christ's brothers attained martyrdom without having to exercise free will).

But what is the content of this interchangeability? Is it merely accidental, or does it possess theological significance (as patristic and Thomistic interpretation would seem to suggest)? The fatal similarity that causes the infants of Bethlehem to die "for" Christ is an integral part of the Christmas story as Matthew recounts it. Herod, fearful that the infant Jesus might replace him on the throne, and lacking further information from the magi (who have "mocked" him by returning to their own country another way), decides to exterminate all those who fit the description culled from the magi. Herod's orders for the slaughter are succinct: "all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity... two years old and under" (Matt 2:16) are to be killed. This would seem to imply three categories into which the Innocents fit: categories of sex (male),[30] age (two years old and under), and geographic location (Bethlehem and its vicinity). However, there is a sense in which these are all accidental traits, for none of these are the reason that Herod wants Jesus dead. These superficial similarities give only the proximate cause for the killing of the infants (if Jesus had been five years old, Herod would have ordered the slaughter of five-year-olds). The ultimate cause of the slaughter is that the Innocents resemble one who could legitimately replace Herod on the throne of Israel—that is, Jesus, a Jew.

As Ambrose points out—and as Aquinas records in his *Catena Aurea*—the historical Herod had only a dubious claim to the title "King of the Jews," because he was an Idumean:

[30] The Vulgate reads "pueros," or boys; the Greek παῖδας is more ambiguous, as it can refer to male or female children, but is usually translated "boys" or "male children," likely due to the logical inference that Herod would not be worried about a girl replacing him on the throne.

> Fertur autem quod Idumaei latrones Ascalonem ingressi, Antipatrum inter alios adduxerunt captivum. Is igitur imbutus mysteriis Iudaeorum, Hircano Iudaeae regi amicitia copulatur, quem pro se ad Pompeium Hircanus direxit; et quia legationis fructu potitus est, per eam gratiam partem regni affectavit. Occiso autem Antipatro, filius eius Herodes sub Antonio senatus consulto Iudaeis regnare praeceptus est; in quo claret Herodem nulla affinitate gentis Iudaeorum regnum quaesisse. (*In Luc.*, iii, 41; *Catena Aurea*, in Matt. c.2 l.1)
>
> It is said, that some Idumaean robbers coming to Ascalon, brought with them among other prisoners Antipater. He was instructed in the law and customs of the Jews, and acquired the friendship of Hyrcanus, king of Judaea, who sent him as his deputy to Pompey. He succeeded so well in the object of his mission, that he laid claim to a share of the throne. He was put to death, but his son Herod was under Antony appointed king of Judaea, by a decree of the Senate; so it is clear that Herod sought the throne of Judaea without any connection or claim of birth. (Newman)

Variations on this story about Herod's lack of Jewish credentials are found in Africanus (259-261) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 14.2), and the story's import is crystallized by Pseudo-Chrysostom: "[e]t ideo turbatur audiens regem natum Iudaeis ex genere Iudaeorum, cum esset ipse genere Idumaeus, ne regno revoluto iterum ad Iudaeos, ipse a Iudaeis expelleretur, et semen eius post ipsum praecideretur a regno" ("Herod 'was troubled' when he heard that a King was born of Jewish lineage, lest, himself being an Idumaean, the kingdom should return again to native princes, and himself be expelled, and his seed after him"; *Catena Aurea*, in Matt. c. 2 l.2; Newman). Herod's fear of Christ, then, is integrally connected to his recognition of the infant's Jewishness—a trait he himself does not possess. The Innocents, too, who in their state of

infancy cannot reasonably be said to be a danger to Herod, threaten him by the simple fact of their Jewish heritage.

In addition to its narrative importance, the Jewishness of the Innocents is central to the theological content of Matthew's Gospel, because for Matthew, the Innocents' suffering recapitulates the historical sufferings of Israel.[31] The portion of the Gospel that marks the slaughter proper—for nowhere is the event actually described[32]—is a fulfillment quotation taken from the Book of Jeremiah: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (Matt. 2:18; Jer. 31:15). Matthew's Gospel is peppered with these fulfillment quotations, verses from the Hebrew Scriptures that he places in his narrative to suggest a typological connection between Israel's history and the life of Jesus.[33] They are one of the many ways in which Matthew shows his ongoing investment in the Jewish community from which he came.[34]

Matthew applies most of his fulfilment quotations directly to Jesus, as is the case with the verse that immediately precedes the Slaughter of the Innocents: "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matt. 2:15; Hosea 11:1). This quotation, which fits seamlessly into Matthew's narrative of Christ's infancy—the Holy Family has had to flee to Egypt because of Herod—is taken from the prophet Hosea. The "son" to whom Hosea refers, however, is not Jesus but Israel: "[w]hen Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1). Matthew's implication

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[31] My reading of Matthew builds upon a body of biblical scholarship that understands Matthew's use of Jeremiah primarily in relation to Israel's history of exile (and for some scholars, exile and return). See Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament* 211; Knowles 42; and Hamilton 11-12.

[32] Matthew does not actually state that the children are murdered, only that Herod had ordered that they should be. This fulfilment quotation, then, is not merely a footnote or interesting parallel; it *is* the story of the slaughter of the innocents.

[33] For a fuller discussion of Matthew's fulfillment quotations, see Kennedy.

[34] There is a high level of scholarly consensus that "Matthew," whoever he was, was a Greek-speaking Jew. Raymond Brown argues that the Jewish evangelist was writing in a Syrian context in the 80s "in a mixed community with converts of both Jewish and Gentile descent," and in which "dominance [was] now shifting over to the Gentile side"; thus, "Matthew is concerned to show that Jesus has always had meaning for both Jew and Gentile" (45, 47).

is that the infant Jesus, subject to persecution from his very birth, is re-living and redeeming the pattern of Israel's sufferings, in this case its sojourn in and exodus from Egypt (Knowles 48).[35] The fulfilment quotation that Matthew uses to describe the Slaughter of the Innocents, however, is unusual insofar as its subject is not Jesus but a group of anonymous Jewish infants. The cause of Rachel's weeping in the context of Jeremiah is Israel's exile in Babylon, one of the most tragic occurrences in biblical Jewish history.[36] The implication of Matthew's exegetical construction, then, is that the Innocents, like Jesus, recapitulate the historical sufferings of Israel in their persecution at the hands of Herod.

For Matthew, then, the interchangeability of Jesus and the Innocents—the similarity that causes them to die "for" him—is a paradigmatic Jewishness. Jesus and his anonymous Jewish brethren are subject to persecution from their very birth, just as the Jewish people have been subject to persecution throughout their history. Matthew's emphasis on heredity can also be seen in his substitution of the word τέκνα (which, according to Michael Knowles, "in Matthew's Gospel... often has the sense of 'posterity' or 'descendants'" [37]) for υἱοὶ ("sons") or παῖδες ("children"). For many biblical scholars, this substitution indicates a link between Matt 2:17 and Matt 27:25, "His blood is on us and on our children (τέκνα)."[37] Whatever else may be made of this parallel, semantically this repetition indicates that Rachel's τέκνα are her descendants, the

[35] This is a standard interpretation, found, for instance, in Saint Jerome: "Hoc autem testimonio utitur Evangelista, quia haec typice referuntur ad Christum. Notandum enim, quod in hoc propheta et in aliis ita de adventu Christi et de vocatione gentium praenuntiatur, ut radix historiae non penitus deseratur" ("The Evangelist cites this text because it refers to Christ typically. For it is to be observed, that in this Prophet and in others, the coming of Christ and the call of the Gentiles are foreshewn in such a manner, that the thread of history is never broken"; *In Osee* 11.2; qtd. in Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea* c.1 l.7; Newman).

[36] There is some ambiguity about which exile Jeremiah is referring to, and which Matthew had in mind (that of 587 or of 721 BC). Knowles argues that "Matthew could... have taken Jer. 31.15 as referring to either expulsion or, as is most likely, to both" (47).

[37] E.g. Knowles 37; Gundry, *Matthew* 34; Davies 1.266.

Jewish people. For better or for worse, this identity marker can be invoked at moments of crisis to point toward a shared history and a shared future.

Thus, in Matthew, the meaning of the Innocents' deaths cannot be separated from their identities as Jews,[38] which means that a Christian theodical response to the Slaughter of the Innocents should not, in theory, be separable from a reading of the infants of Bethlehem that not only acknowledges but also takes on the full import of their Jewish identities. Inevitably, however, patristic and medieval theologians *did* separate the infants' Jewishness from their martyrdom. This separation was made possible by a subtle disassociation of the literal from the figurative senses of Scripture. Matthew's account, to be sure, is not literal in a narrow sense—by harking back to Jeremiah, and through Jeremiah to Genesis, Matthew is participating in an inherently typological vision of history. In the matter of identity, however, Matthew's literal and extra-literal levels of meaning line up: this story, like the story of Rachel and the story of the exile, is about the Jews.

The Fleury *Interfectio Puerorum,* however, does not share Matthew's context. It was composed sometime around the dawn of the thirteenth century, and in the intervening time popular understanding of the Innocents' martyrdom had changed significantly. Along with a new emphasis on the inferiority and depravity of Jews—who, unlike in Matthew's time, could now be identified as distinctly "other" from Christians—the balance of the story's meaning had shifted from a primarily literal story with typological overtones to a primarily figurative story beneath which the literal was buried. Not all of the literal story vanishes in these

[38] In modern times, the canonization of Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) has excited controversy for just this reason: a Jew who converted to Catholicism and eventually joined a Discalced Carmelite order, Stein was taken from her convent by the Nazis and killed at Auschwitz. The ostensible cause of her martryrdom was her identity not as a Catholic but as a Jew, a fact Stein emphasized: "Why should I be spared? Is it not right that I should gain no advantage from my Baptism? If I cannot share the lot of my brothers and sisters, my life, in a certain sense, is destroyed" (John Paul II). My thanks to Father Bruno Shah, who drew my attention to this parallel.

interpretations—Herod, for instance, maintains a central place as a quasi-historical figure in patristic and medieval sermons. What disappears is the identity of the story's central characters, the slaughtered Innocents.

The twin phenomena of figurative reading and antisemitic interpretation can be observed in Bede's homily for the Feast of the Holy Innocents, a highly influential sermon during the Middle Ages due to its circulation, along with the homilies of (pseudo-)Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Peter Chrysologus, in the homiliary of Paul the Deacon (Hayward 69). Bede does give a "literal" reading of the story, closely following Jerome, whose characteristically literal readings of the Bible had led medieval exegetes to associate him with the literal sense (Lubac vol. 1, p. 4). Unlike Jerome, however, Bede is heavily invested in figurative approaches to reading Scripture. His literal reading, in fact, is a brief side note in an otherwise overwhelmingly figurative sermon. Bede begins his homily with myriad indications that the story of the Innocents symbolizes something other than itself: it "signifies" ([*significat*] "that through the merit of humility one comes to the glory of martyrdom"; Martin 96-97); it "shows" ([*ostendit*] "that "in all the regions of that same Church… persecution by those who lack faith would rage"); it "denote[s]" ([*indicant*] "the simple and ordinary people, who nevertheless have a faith which is not feigned").

Ultimately, Bede arrives at a figurative meaning for the Slaughter of the Innocents that directly contradicts the story's literal meaning. That the Innocents sprang from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah suggests an equation of Jews and martyrs, but later in his sermon, Bede asserts that it is the killers of martyrs who represent the Jews: "[o]ccisio parvulorum mortem humilium spiritu, quos fugato a se Christo Judaei peremere, designat" ("[t]he killing of little children designates the death of those humble in spirit whom the Jews deprived of life when they

had disposed of Christ"; 316; Martin 99). Bede goes further: the remainder of Matthew's infancy narrative, with Jesus' return to Israel, turns out to be an extended parable about the end times, in which "Judaei sopita modernae invidiae flamma, fidem veritatis accipient" ("the Jews will have received faith in the truth and the flame of their present-day envy will have been put to rest"; 316; Martin 99). This "envy" takes the shape, apparently, of the persecution of Christians. Bede describes "universali gentis illius caecitati, qua Christianos, in quantum valet, persequi non desistit" ("the universal blindness which is now [characteristic] of that nation, in virtue of which they do not stop persecuting Christians to the extent that they are able"; 316; Martin 100). The implications of this reading extend to the whole of Bede's sermon by setting up a dichotomy between Jews/persecutors and Christians/persecuted. This implicit paradigm leaves no room for Jewish martyrs, and so it leaves no room, ironically, for the Holy Innocents.

How, given Matthew's mention of Rachel—which Bede, following Jerome, acknowledges as literally referring to the Innocents' ancestry—does Bede manage to suppress the Innocents' Jewishness? Bede's solution is an allegory older and more pervasive than Jerome's literal reading: an interpretation of Rachel as the Church. This typological interpretation appears as early as the second century in Justin Martyr, and was developed at length by patristic authors such as Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, and Gregory of Nyssa (Strickert 38-40). The typological argument depends for its effectiveness upon the contrast between Rachel and her ill-favored sister Leah—a contrast that early Christian theologians saw reflected in those awkwardly parallel institutions, the Synagogue and the Church (Strickert 39-40). This interpretation was, of course, highly flattering to the Church: in the Genesis story, Jacob prefers Rachel to Leah, who has "weak eyes," and it is only by Laban's trickery that he ends up married to both sisters (Gen. 29:1-30). This reading also, however,

retains vestigial complications. Leah, after all, stays on as Jacob's wife, and it is Leah, not Rachel, who is the mother of Judah, the ancestor of Christ.

Bede makes no mention of Leah or the Synagogue in his homily. His focus is on Rachel, who "figuratively speaking…stands for the Church" ("Rachel... significat Ecclesiam"; 315; Martin 97). From this simple substitution flows the logic of Bede's entire argument: that the Innocents, as children of the Church, are "martyrs of Christ"; that the Jews are the persecutors of the Church and of its martyrs; that Rachel's tears find their resolution in Christ's heavenly kingdom as described in Revelation (313-315). In taking these figurative steps, Bede subtly shifts his argument from its patristic foundations. No longer is the infants' martyrdom a product of their unwitting blood sacrifice for a kinsman. The logic of Bede's sermon is aggressively figurative, such that Rachel represents the Church and the Innocents her children who, because they are slain, are therefore martyrs. The literal sense, though Bede dutifully includes it, has no relationship with this symbolic reasoning; the one negates the other.

By the twelfth century, Bede's figurative reading of the Slaughter of the Innocents was nearly ubiquitous, though earlier readings (such as Peter Chrysologus' and John Chrysostom's) enjoyed continued popularity. Thus, in twelfth-century homilies the literal and the allegorical continued their uneasy coexistence, but as we see in a sermon of Peter Abelard, the strain was beginning to show:

> Quod vero de completione prophetiae tunc facta dixit evangelista magis ad mysterium quam ad historiam referendum est. Illud quippe juxta historiam de persecutione Nabuchodonosor in Jeremia constat prophetasse; quae quia futuram
> Ecclesiae persecutionem quae hodie incoepit, figurabat in mysterio, et impletum quod in historia erat praedictum. Rachel quam post Liam Jacob accepit, Ecclesia est quae a

> tempore Joannis, Synagogae successit. Quae quidem, ab adventu Christi, crebris passionibus afflicta, primum in infantibus hodie est passa. (*Sermo XXXIV In Natali Innocentum,* PL 178.610)
>
> But what the evangelist said concerning the fulfillment of the prophecy that was at that time completed must be referred more to mystery than to history. It is clear that this prophecy in Jeremiah is, according to history, about the persecution of Nebuchadnezzar. Because that persecution prefigured in a mystery the future persecution of the Church which begins on this day, what had been predicted in history [has] also [been] fulfilled. Rachel, whom Jacob took after Leah, is the Church, which from the time of John has taken the place of the Synagogue. The Church, which indeed has, from the advent of Christ, been afflicted by frequent sufferings, suffered first in the persons of the infants today. (my trans.)[39]

Abelard has a keen sense of the importance of one literal phase of Israel's history—its suffering under the "persecution of Nebuchadnezzar"—but he will not grant that the New Testament continues that history. Rather, as soon as he crosses the boundary into Matthew's Gospel, Abelard switches to a rigorously allegorical mode of reading that allows for a substitution of the story's main actors: the suffering Rachel is no longer Israel but the Church. Yet, unlike Bede, Abelard displays self-consciousness about his sudden change in exegetical methods: "what the evangelist said concerning the fulfillment of the prophecy...must be referred more to mystery than to history."

Abelard finds himself at a juncture, of "Old" Testament and "New," "history" and "mystery"—and he chooses, as had his forebears, the familiar path, allowing "Old Testament"

[39] My thanks to Dr. Catherine Sider Hamilton, Sarah Hamilton, and Dr. Robert Sider for their help translating this sermon; and to Dr. Gregory Hays for his emendations.

Israel its share in the Christian story, but excluding the Jews from the time of fulfillment that was, for medieval Christians, both the age of the Gospels and the present. Yet this moment of decision in Abelard's homily reveals the availability of an alternative mode of reading, one that might pursue the literal—the "historical"—to its logical conclusion. Such a reading would recover the rich theological background of Matthew's account, the history of Jewish suffering that extends from Rachel to the Babylonian exile to the Slaughter of the Innocents, and in so doing would recover the subjects of that history, the Jews. This reading is invisible in twelfth-century homilies, but in a play—the Fleury *Interfectio Puerorum*—it comes to light.

## III

The Fleury *Interfectio Puerorum,* which begins in the heavenly court of Revelation, would seem to participate in the consoling, allegorical schema of interpretation found in medieval exegesis from Bede to Abelard—and so to erase the identities of its Jewish protagonists. At the center of the play, however, the matriarch Rachel states the story's theodical problems anew, explicitly rejecting the comfort of an allegorical reading and insisting simultaneously on her "literal" identity and that of her children. From this tension between the play's consoling framework and its stubbornly inconsolable protagonist arises a uniquely dramatic dialectic between literal and figurative modes of reading, in which Jewish identity emerges as the vital, paradoxical answer to unanswerable suffering.

The Fleury play opens in what seems to be squarely allegorical territory. A procession of white-robed choirboys (or novices)[40] winds around the church singing the antiphon of vespers for All Saints: "[O] quam gloriosum est regnum [in quo cum Christo gaudent omnes sancti

[40] See Bevington p. 67, footnote 1.

amicti stolis albis; sequuntur agnum quocumque ierit]" ("O how glorious is the kingdom [in which with Christ all the sanctified ones sing praises, clad in white stoles; they follow the lamb withersoever he may go]"; p. 67). The antiphon, which echoes Revelation 7:9-10,[41] is clearly intended to be self-referential: a moment later, the Lamb himself appears, and the white-robed choirboys follow him as he goes before them "huc et illuc" ("hither and thither"; p. 67). The exegetical gist of this scene is straightforward enough—these white-robed figures are, presumably, the Innocents, and since they are in heaven, following Christ in his guise as a lamb, they must be receiving their heavenly reward as Christian martyrs. The play has invoked allegory to solve its theodical problems before they even arise.

Yet when theodical problems do crop up in the Fleury *Interfectio Puerorum*—as occurs in very short order—this anticipatory answer proves insufficient. The theodical dilemma is stated by the Innocents themselves, who are commanded by an angel-cum-stage manager to express their perspective: "Vos qui in pulvere estis, expergiscimini et clamate" ("You who are in the dust, awaken and cry out"; 18). The Innocents reply with the theodical rebuke that appears in homilies from Augustine to Abelard: "Quare non defendis sanguinem nostrum, Deus noster?" ("Why do you not defend our blood, our God?"; 19). The force of this question, coming from the mouths of the slaughtered Innocents themselves and following immediately upon a reenactment of their murder, cannot be overstated. The Fleury play does not merely nod at the theodical awkwardness of its subject matter; it highlights the most controversial component of its story, God's lack of intervention in the Innocents' suffering.

[41] "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev. 7:9-10)

The angel gives what is ostensibly an answer to this charge: "Adhuc sustinete modicum tempus, donec impleatur numerus fratrum vestrorum" ("Endure this for a short while, until the number of your brethren is completed"; 20). This response echoes the theodical attempts found in Peter Chrysologus, in Bede, and in Abelard. The implication, given the mention of a "number," is that these are the first, but not all, of the 144,000 white-robed virgins of Revelation who "follow the lamb withersoever he may go"—which is precisely what these novices were doing when they first appeared. For patristic and medieval theologians, this answer was the end of the discussion. The image of a heaven in which "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev 21:4) closes the sermons of Bede and Abelard.[42] In the Fleury play, however, the angel's response is inadequate. As he finishes his speech, Rachel—as yet unidentified to the audience—appears onstage with two "consolatrices" ("comforters"); "et stans super pueros plangat, cadens aliquando..." ("and standing over the boys… mourn[s], falling at times to earth"; p. 69).

Rachel restates the problem of infant suffering in such a way as to exclude the angel's consolation, as well as any other theodical attempts to answer the problem of suffering with the promise of future happiness—including the play's happy opening. Rachel begins her lament by recapitulating the events of the slaughter, this time in vivid and brutal detail: "Heu, teneri partus, laceros quos cernimus artus! / Heu, dulces nati, sola rabie jugulati!" ("Alas, tender babes, we see how your limbs have been mangled! / Alas, sweet children, murdered in a single frenzied attack!"; 21-22). Rachel's language—the specificity of the infants' "limbs" (*artus*), and the graphic overtones of "mangled" (*laceros*)—adds to the dramatic representation of the infants'

[42] Bede cites this verse explicitly (*Homilies* 102). Abelard's reference is implicit but no less clear: "[t]unc ergo Rachel tempus habuit moeroris, sed nunc jam adepta tempus consolationis. Quae tunc flevit ad inferos descendentes, nunc super eos gaudeat cum Christo regnantes" ("Then, therefore, Rachel had a time of sorrow, but now already she has arrived at a time of consolation. She who then wept for those who were descending to the dead, now rejoices over them who reign with Christ"; *Sermo in Natali Innocentum;* my trans.).

slaughter what stage effects could not.[43] This alone unsettles the consoling tone set by the angel, but Rachel continues, stating in no uncertain terms that neither she nor the other mothers of Bethlehem will, or *can,* be consoled: "Heu, quia memores nostrosque levare dolores / Gaudia non possunt, nam dulcia pignora desunt!" ("Alas, because no joys can ease our memories and sorrow, / For the sweet children are gone!"; 26-27). Rachel's mention of "memories"[44] adds an unexpected element to her rejection of consolation by implying that, even if the tears *were* wiped from her eyes, the fact of her children's suffering—though in the past—would persist.

The Fleury play underlines Rachel's total rejection of consolation by introducing characters whose only role is to attempt to comfort her: the *consolatrices.* These comforters, like Job's friends, are resourceful and untiring in their efforts; and like Job's friends, they are utterly unsuccessful. When they assure Rachel, "Namque tui nati vivunt super astra beati" ("truly, your sons live blessed above the stars"; 31), Rachel rebuffs them: "Heu, heu, heu! / Quomodo gaudebo, dum mortua membra videbo; / Dum sic commota fuero per viscera tota?" ("Alas, alas, alas! / How shall I rejoice, while I see the lifeless limbs, / While thus I shall have been distressed to the depths of my heart?"; 32-34). Rachel's obstinate literalism is particularly effective in its dramatic context. The evidence for *her* reading of the situation—"the lifeless limbs"— lies in full view of the audience. Further efforts by the hapless comforters prove equally disastrous, provoking anguish rather than allaying it. To the comforters' final attempt, a return to the theme of eternal reward, Rachel does not even respond; she simply quotes the psalmist: "Anxiatus est in

[43] We do not know what special effects may have been enlisted in portraying the infants' slaughter, though their rising again at the close of the play, apparently in good health and spirits, would seem to indicate a minimalist approach. Whatever the effects, however, the fact remains that, without the aid of a verbal "close-up," an audience could not have discerned that the limbs of an actor lying on the ground were "mangled."

[44] The manuscript's "memores" may well be a scribal mistake for "merores" (sorrows)—my thanks to Dr. Gregory Hays for pointing this out. However, if the Fleury playbook was used as a performance text, this error would likely have been repeated in performances. "Memores" is possible, if awkward, if we understand it as an adjective modifying an implied "us" (lit., "Alas, because no joys can ease us, who are full of memories/us who remember"). See Gianpiero Tintori: "la versione *memores* del ms. è difendibile se si pensa di tradurre così il passo: i gaudi non possono sollevare (=confortare) noi che ricordiamo" (96, n. 281).

me spiritus meus; in me turbatum est cor meum" ("My soul is troubled within me; my heart is agitated within me"; 52; Ps. 142:4).[45]

Rachel's obstinate grief in the face of the angel's and the comforters' arguments functions as a comment on the theodical structure of the play as a whole. Initially, the *Interfectio* seems to suggest a tidy answer to the problem of suffering, but Rachel, when presented with this answer, explicitly rejects it. Placed at the very center of the play, her response to its events casts a shadow on all that precedes and follows her appearance. In this, Rachel is not only un-allegorical, but *anti*-allegorical. She refuses to recontextualize her situation, insisting instead on the brutal facts of the present and the legitimacy of her sorrow. Rachel's refusal to be comforted is simultaneously a refusal to be interpreted.

This reading contradicts what most critics have seen in Rachel—namely, a figure who requires interpretation, usually of an allegorical nature. The apparent necessity for extra-literal interpretation arises as a result of Rachel's unusual, multi-layered identity, which seems to encompass several lifetimes. Rachel's first persona is that of one of the anonymous mothers of Bethlehem, located in the Matthean present: "Heu, matres miserae, quae cogimur ista videre! / Heu, quid nunc agimus...?" ("Alas, wretched mothers, we who are compelled to see this! / Alas, what do we do now…?"; 24-25). Since she has not yet been named, Rachel fits seamlessly into the unfolding, first-century narrative. In the comforters' second reply, however, this straightforward identification is complicated by a series of references to Rachel's history as recounted in Genesis*:*

> Quid tu, virgo,
>
> mater Rachel, ploras Formosa,
>
> cuius vultus Jacob delectate

[45] This is also the second antiphon for Lauds on Good Friday ("Anxiatus").

Seu sororis agnicule

limpitudo eum juvat?[46]

Terge, mater, flentes oculos.

Quam te decent genarum rivuli? (39-45)

Why do you, young woman,

Mother Rachel, so beautiful, weep,

In whose visage Jacob takes delight?

Or do the tender and bleary eyes

Of your lamb-like sister please him?[47]

Mother, dry your weeping eyes.

How are streams of tears on your cheeks becoming to you? (39-45)

This passage defies a simplistic interpretation. Rachel is repeatedly described as "mother," but the comforters assume that she is upset because of Jacob's marriage to Leah, which would place her at an earlier stage of her life. Further complicating matters is Rachel's reply, which seems to refer to the (apparent) loss of her son Joseph.[48] These allusions, set in the midst of references to the Slaughter of the Innocents, render the adoption of a single temporal perspective impossible. The only element these myriad events have in common is the person of Rachel.

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[46] Wright emends the manuscript as follows: "Ceu sororis anniculae / lippitudo eum juvat!", which he translates, "As if the tender and bleary eyes / Of your babyish sister pleased him!". I have returned the text to what is found in the manuscript. Although "anniculae" may seem prefereable to the enigmatic "agnicule," it introduces new problems insofar as Leah is the elder, not the younger, sister. My thanks to Dr. Gregory Hays for pointing this out, and for his help translating these lines.

[47] I have altered Wright's translation to better match the manuscript; see footnote 46, above.

[48] "Heu, heu, heu! Quid me incusastis fletus incassum fudisse, / Cum sim orbata nato, paupertatem meam [qui solus] curaret, / Qui non hostibus cederet angustos terminos, quos mihi Jacob adquisivit, /Quique stolidis fratribus, quo[s] multos, pro[h] dolor, extuli, esset profuturus?" ("Alas, alas, alas! Why do you find fault with me for having poured forth tears uselessly, / When I have been deprived of my child, [who alone] would show concern for my poverty, / Who would not yield to enemies the narrow boundaries which Jacob acquired for me, / And who was going to be of benefit to his stolid brethren, of whom many, alas my sorrow, I have buried?"; 46-49). Of possible relevance to this enigmatic passage is a haggadic legend in which Joseph, en route to Egypt, stops and weeps by his mother's grave, prompting a response from the dead Rachel (Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* vol. 2, pp. 20-21).

Boynton solves these problems with an appeal to the Church-Synagogue allegory she believes is operative in the play: while acknowledging that the literal level is present, Boynton argues that the mention of Leah triggers an unavoidable connection to the (antisemitic) figurative reading ("Performative Exegesis" 54). Rachel, then, ceases to be really Rachel as soon as the comforters refer to her Genesis history. In one sense, this solution is appealing. It solves the temporal problem, so that the "literal" Rachel is one of the anonymous mothers of Bethelehem, but the Rachel whose sister was Leah is a figure of the Church, and so not really present on the scene. Thus, there is no need to harmonize the discordant elements introduced by the comforters, since we can take these as referring, not to Rachel's personal history, but to her allegorical signification. If Boynton's figurative reading solves the temporal problem, however, it does so at great cost. At the very moment of the play's deepest engagement with Rachel's suffering, Boynton flattens her into a Christian allegory: "*Rachel, id est Ecclesia*" ("Performative Exegesis" 44).

By contrast, a well-documented midrashic exposition of Rachel's weeping in the context of Jeremiah manages to hold together past and present without editing Rachel out of the picture. Rather, Rachel's role is expanded such that her identity as Jewish mother extends beyond her lifetime:

> The Midrash Aggadah states… that the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs went to appease the Holy One blessed be He concerning the sin of Manasseh who placed an image in the Temple but He was not appeased. Rachel entered and stated before Him "O Lord of the Universe, whose mercy is greater, Your mercy or the mercy of a flesh and blood person? You must admit that Your mercy is greater. Now did I not bring my rival into my house? For all the work that Jacob worked for my father he worked only for me. When I came to

> enter the nuptial canopy, they brought my sister, and it was not enough that I kept my silence, but I gave her my password. You, too, if Your children have brought Your rival into Your house, keep Your silence for them." He said to her, "You have defended them well. There is reward for your deed and for your righteousness, that you gave over your password to your sister. (Rashi, "Commentary" Jer. 31:15).

In this midrash, the explanation for Rachel's appearance in both Genesis and Jeremiah is at once supernatural and completely literal: it is the dead Rachel, now in the presence of the Holy One, who weeps for her children, the Israelites. Jeremiah's invocation of the Jewish matriarch is not merely a poetic flourish; rather, Rachel actually weeps, and by her tears alters the course of history.

James Kugel explains the unlikely literalism of early Jewish midrash by citing just such difficult moments as Jeremiah's mention of Rachel:

> Ancient exegetes tended to view the Bible as fundamentally elliptical: it said much in a few words and often omitted essentials, leaving the full meaning to be figured out by readers alert to the tiniest irregularities in the text. The process of fully understanding a biblical text thus consisted of bringing out all possible nuances implied in the precise wording of each and every sentence. With regard to biblical narrative, this often meant 'deducing' background details, conversations, or even whole incidents that were not openly stated in the narrative text, but only suggested by an unusual word, an apparently unnecessary repetition, an unusual grammatical form, and so forth. (4)

This approach to Scripture, though it often yielded explanations that Smalley might describe as "fanciful" (171), was not allegorical in its aims. Rather, its purpose in elaborating on the text was to make better sense of the literal meaning—to explain, by expansion, how Scripture *could*

be literal. As Boyarin puts it, an insistence "on the meaning of the actual material form, the shapes of letters and sounds of language" is what "leads to midrashic punning and seeking of significance in such very concrete, physical, material features of the Hebrew language" (37).

Paradoxically, the literal, midrashic interpretation of this passage broadens, rather than narrows, the boundaries of Jewish identity. Rachel's motherhood, in this story, is defined more by her actions than by her biology. She intercedes not only for her own children—Joseph and Benjamin—but for the descendants of her handmaid, of Leah's handmaid, and of Leah herself. Sexual jealousy dissipates in the heat of Rachel's love for her people—that is, for the whole Jewish people. What Rachel has in common with her "children," as it turns out, is not only genetics but a common relationship with God. She and they are subject to his punishments, but are also justified in asking him for deliverance, just as he has delivered them "in every generation," as the Passover saying goes:

> This is the promise that has stood by our forefathers and stands by us. For neither once, nor twice, nor three times was our destruction planned; in every generation they rise against us, and in every generation God delivers us from their hands into freedom, out of anguish into joy, out of mourning into festivity, out of darkness into light, out of bondage into redemption. (Neusner 14)

Jewish identity lies not only in biology, but in this relationship that is also a promise. In claiming this relationship before the throne of God with a demonstration of her love, Rachel shows herself to be a true mother to the whole people of Israel.

This conception of Jewish identity gestures toward a breadth and depth that are entirely absent in the fearful Christian characterizations of Jews and "judaizers" in the twelfth century. Rather than being limited to the sphere of incomprehensible and threatening otherness, Judaism

has a potentially universal reach because of its covenantal nature. Gentiles can join the Jewish family by conversion, as the story of Ruth, remembered at the festival of Shavuot, indicates: "The message of the Book of Ruth is, critically, that 'Israel' is defined by more than worldly ethnicity. A woman of ethnically dubious origin, from outside Israel-by-birth, by accepting the Torah, not only adheres to Israel but becomes ancestress of the prophesied Messiah" (Neusner 19). That Judaism has an inherent relevance beyond its genetic boundaries is implicit in God's original covenant with Abraham, which has two parts—the promise of biological descendants, and the promise that "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (Gen. 22:18). In this vision, Jewish identity is naturally generous, its covenantal priority ultimately geared toward the good of "all nations."

Yet this priority, and hence the specificity of Jewish identity, is the necessary foundation of the "broad" conception of Judaism, as Boyarin points out: "[t]o be sure... genealogy has been denaturalized in Judaism for thousands of years through the mechanism of conversion, but... such de-naturalization serves at the same time to reinforce the general symbol of genealogical connection through the ascription of it to the convert" (241). This ascription takes the form of a new name for the convert to Judaism: "ben Avraham" or "bas Avraham," son or daughter of Abraham (Boyarin 241). Although genealogy can be stretched almost to breaking point—across lifetimes, in the person of Rachel; across ethnicities, in the Gentile's conversion to Judaism—it is never abstracted. Rather, it is anchored by "a shared historical memory" (Boyarin 245) that is the essence of literalism, and of Jewish identity. In the Slaughter of the Innocents, as in the Babylonian exile, this shared memory is activated by unimaginable and inexplicable suffering.

We do not know whether the Fleury playwrights were aware of the commentary of Rashi and the haggadic legend he records about Rachel—though, given the live interest in Jewish

exegesis in the twelfth century, it is a tantalizing possibility. That the Fleury play gives Rachel both a similar specificity and latitude, however, is clear. This reading may seem unlikely, given that the *Interfectio Puerorum* begins by quoting a scene from Revelation—a quotation that seems, as Boynton and Tinkle suggest, to be a form of Christian allegory. Yet in Revelation, these martyrs, too, are Jews:

> Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.
>
> From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,
>
> from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Gad 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Asher 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Simeon 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Levi 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,
>
> from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000. (Rev. 7:4-8)

The biblical text leads insistently back to the Jewish identities of its protagonists by naming the tribes that are themselves shorthand for Israel's complicated, covenantal history. The Christian apocalyptic vision, like the Christian past, is populated by Jews whose particular, literal story, even in the dazzling brilliance of Revelation, resists abstraction.

As Jews, Rachel and her children remain largely beyond the bounds of Christian consolation. The answer Rachel awaits is not one that the Fleury play is equipped to give; thus, in her suffering, Rachel retains a certain distance from the surrounding Christian framework of the play. Boynton, Tinkle, and Flannigan are right to note that this framework is exegetical. Its referential layers buzzing with overtones from the liturgy and from an often antisemitic sermon and commentary tradition, it invites its audience to see the Slaughter of the Innocents through myriad Christian lenses of interpretation. Yet at its climax, the Fleury play allows Rachel to reassert a literal identity for herself and her children, and in so doing to resist the consoling—and effacing—effects of figurative exegesis.

SYNAGOGA'S VEIL: SIGNS AND SIGHT IN THE TEGERNSEE *LUDUS DE ANTICHRISTO*


Antichrist rides Leviathan. *Liber Floridus* of Lambert of St. Omer (1112-1121)

"[T]o imagine events not only as events but also as a semiotic system through which God narrates his mystery is to view lived history as so many rhetorical elements of some overarching story—subject, *qua* sign, to all the analytic joy of literary criticism..."
John Parker, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist*

"A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign!"
Matthew 12:39

## *Introduction*

The *Ludus de Antichristo,* a bizarre and unsettling twelfth-century play from the monastery of Tegernsee in Bavaria, culminates in a massacre of Jews. The Antichrist summons the Jews and the prophets Enoch and Elijah before him, having been informed by his Hypocrites (a designation that seems to lie somewhere between species classification and job description) that the Jews have defected from his camp due to the prophets' preaching. When neither Jews nor prophets will recant, the Antichrist orders their massacre: "Pereant penitus oves occisionis" ("As sheep for the slaughter let them die"; *Ludus de Antichristo* 397; Wright 397)[1]. His orders are instantly carried out, to the accompaniment of a refrain from the Song of Songs sung by the allegorical figure Ecclesia, who has been watching from the sidelines: "Fasciculus mirre dilectus meus mihi" ("A bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me"; 403; Wright 401; Song of Sg. 1:13).

This scene, which seems to portray the martyred Jews with some degree of sympathy, even admiration, comes at the climax of a drama that many scholars have read as unusually tolerant of Jews and Judaism. John Wright marvels that in the *Ludus de Antichristo* "Jewish doctrine... is presented with solemnity and respect" (58-59); Elizabeth Monroe similarly notes that "the playwright's relative tolerance towards the Jews is striking" (55); Markus Litz asserts that the play is "lacking any form of polemic or reduction of Jewry" (155). Hannes Möhring makes a compelling case for this common assessment, to which he also subscribes, by comparing the *Ludus de Antichristo* with its most immediate source, a *libellus* by the tenth-century monk Adso of Montier-en-Der, as well as with other traditional representations of the Antichrist. Möhring points out that the *Ludus,* contrary to tradition, does not indicate that the Antichrist

[1] Except where indicated, all translations are John Wright's. Since his lineation is for the most part identical to that of the Latin edition, from this point on I will only indicate his line numbers where they differ.

belongs to the Jewish people; nor are the Jews the first to be duped by the Antichrist, as in Adso, but rather the last; and most importantly, they are the only people to defy Antichrist, and as a result they become the play's only martyrs (182). Add to these source-alterations the apparent lack of caricature or ridicule in the characterization of Synagoga (and hence of the Jews) and you have a play that can pass as "aufgeschlossen... und vorurteilsfrei" ("open-minded and unprejudiced"; Litz 155).

These positive critical assessments are tempered, however, by an awareness of other, less sympathetic elements. Wright's observation of the play's "solemnity and respect" in its representation of Jewish doctrine is accompanied by the caveat that this doctrine is "of course attacked by a Christian author" (59); similarly, Möhring notes that while the *Ludusdichter* "zur Toleranz auffordert" ("urges tolerance") for the Jews, he does so "ohne jedoch Zweifel am Christentum als dem einzigen Weg zum Heil aufkommen zu lassen" ("without, however, casting doubt on Christianity as the only way to salvation"; 181). The *Ludus'*s attack on Judaism is apparent in its narrative arc, which culminates in the conversion of all the world's Jews to Christianity—the purpose of Enoch and Elijah's preaching having been not primarily to draw the Jews away from the Antichrist but to convince them of the truth of Christian dogma, in which aim the prophets prove wholly successful. Synagoga's final words before she is led to the slaughter are a shame-faced repudiation of her former beliefs: "Nos erroris penitet, / ad fidem convertimur. / Quicquid nobis inferet / persecutor, patimur" ("Our [Jewish] error shames us, but now our [Christian] faith is sure; / Despite all persecution we shall endure"; 399-402). As crucial to the play's action as Jewish heroism is Jewish error.

The irreconcilability of the *Ludus de Antichristo'*s divergent attitudes toward the Jews—on the one hand, sympathy; on the other, denigration—becomes even more pronounced when the

play is read in its historical context. Written around 1160, the *Ludus de Antichristo* postdates by a mere fifteen years the anti-Jewish Rhineland massacres of the Second Crusade, pogroms that were themselves an echo of the even deadlier violence of the First Crusade. Like the slaughter that marks the climax of the Tegernsee play, the Rhineland killings followed upon frustrated attempts at Jewish conversion; but while in the *Ludus de Antichristo* it is the Antichrist who tries to force the Jews to apostatize, in the historical theater it was Christian crusaders whose aim was to compel Jewish conversion to Christianity. The pro-conversion rhetoric of Synagoga's unblinding is contradicted by these contemporary resonances, which align Christian attempts to force Jewish conversion with the tactics of Antichrist.

The *Ludus de Antichristo* is thus composed of a tense dialectic between irreconcilable elements, at once fulfilling the Christian wish of eschatological Jewish conversion to Christianity and portraying that conversion as tragic. These narratives, however, do not exist on the same plane. The first depends for its meaning upon a system of second-order signs designed to integrate Jewish persons into a storyline of Christian vindication and eschatological triumph. The centerpiece of this symbolic narrative is Synagoga's veil, representing the blindness of the Jews and, in its removal at the moment of her conversion, the truth of Christianity. The second, closely linked to historical memory, is that of sight: in its vivid evocation of recent history, it invites a second look at events and persons too easily categorized and explained away. Paradoxically, this counternarrative is enabled by the advent of Antichrist, whose deceptive use of signs throws the play's semiotic structures into chaos.

This second narrative, like the first, culminates in the removal of Synagoga's veil, a gesture that reveals Synagoga to the world even as it restores her sight. Thus, the uncovering of Synagoga crystallizes the tragic effects of contemporary attitudes toward the Jews, attitudes

shaped by a Christian theological tradition traceable to Paul, via Augustine. The Rhineland massacres had already showcased the spectacular failure of this Pauline-Augustinian theology; the *Ludus de Antichristo* brings this failure into the present, forcing a confrontation between apparently incompatible pressures—the Christian desire for Jewish conversion, and the dictates of charity. The result is a play that is not tolerant, but apocalyptic: at once devastating and revelatory.

## I

The Rhineland massacres, not an officially sanctioned part of the first two Crusades but one of their many excesses, sent shockwaves throughout medieval Europe. The anti-Jewish violence of 1096 was unprecedented in the West, and has not been forgotten: Jonathan Riley-Smith notes that "dirges in honour of the German martyrs are recited in the synagogues to this day" (*First Crusade* 50). The first outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in the Germanic territories occurred in Speyer on the third of May, at the hands of the army of Count Emicho of Leiningen, an Antichrist-like figure with delusions of messianic grandeur (50; Kedar 195-6). Pogroms and forced conversions followed in Worms, Mainz, Cologne, Trier, Metz, Regensburg, Wessili and Prague (Riley-Smith, *First Crusade* 50-51; *Crusades* 24; Chazan, *In the Year 1096* 27-49). In these attacks entire Jewish communities, including that of Mainz—one of the largest in Europe—were annihilated (Riley-Smith, *Crusades* 24).

The anti-Jewish violence that preceded the Second Crusade, though less catastrophic than that of the first, had all the eerie qualities of *déjà vu*. To a great extent these qualities were engineered: the renegade monk Radulf, whose name, by uncanny coincidence, resembles the Hebrew verb *radof*, "to persecute," sought out the very towns where the massacres of the First

Crusade had taken place for his anti-Jewish preaching tour (J. Phillips 84). The Church, as well as secular authorities, both of which had condemned the pogroms of the First Crusade, considered Radulf a "menace," and Bernard of Clairvaux rushed to Germany from France partly to "silence" him—an effort which many historians credit with a mitigating effect on the violence that, nonetheless, broke out in 1146, beginning with isolated attacks but soon picking up momentum (80-85).

The contemporary resonances of the *Ludus de Antichristo* have long been recognized insofar as they relate to the papal politics of Frederick Barbarossa, but insofar as events in the play correspond to the anti-Jewish violence of 1096 and 1146, these resonances have been ignored.[2] Yet it is difficult to see how a twelfth-century audience could have avoided associating the play's climax with the Crusade massacres. Written some fifteen years after the pogroms of the Second Crusade, the *Ludus de Antichristo* presents a repetition of repetition, creating a dramatic *déjà vu* effect by representing events that already possessed this quality. Not only does the play stage a wholesale massacre of Jews as the result of a refusal to convert and believe in a specific messiah, but that (false) messiah has much in common with Count Emicho of Leiningen, who allegedly "concocted a tale that an apostle of the crucified one had come to him and made a sign on his flesh to inform him that when he arrived in Greek Italy [the crucified one] himself would appear and place a kingly crown upon his head, and Emich would vanquish his foes" (Eidelberg 28). As Riley-Smith notes, "[t]his is obviously a reference to the prophecy of the last

[2] Andrew Chrichton and John Wright, following in the interpretive tradition of E.K. Chambers and Karl Young, read the play as "a subtle vindication of the Empire against the papacy" (Crichton 63); see Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* II.64, Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* II.390, and Wright 39. Markus Litz mentions the Crusade massacres in his assessment of contemporary and Stauffer attitudes toward the Jews, but concludes that "[d]er LUDUS... sieht das jüdische volk und die Synagoge gelöst von allem zeitpolitischen Dekor und beschränkt sich einzig auf deren eschatologischer Bedeutung" ("[t]he *Ludus*... sees the Jewish people and the synagogue detached from contemporary themes and confines itself to their eschatological significance"; 156).

emperor, in whose reign, it was believed, the Jews would be converted to Christianity" (*First Crusade* 34).

That the *Ludus de Antichristo* was written with contemporary anti-Jewish violence in mind seems clear; but to what end does it create these resonances? Answering this question requires an understanding of contemporary Christian reactions to the Rhineland massacres—and here we find profound and bewildering ambivalences. Contrary to what one might expect, given that large numbers of Christians were involved in or supported the massacres, most Latin chronicles treat the pogroms with a range of negative responses from mild discomfort to outright condemnation. Yet these same sources are dismissive of the Jews at best, and vitriolic at worst. These mixed reactions point to a Pauline-Augustinian theology of Jewish conversion that allowed medieval Christians to affirm the eschatological value of the Jewish people, while denigrating contemporary Jews. Yet the shock produced by the apocalyptic spectacle of anti-Jewish violence, which can be glimpsed between the lines of even the most measured Christian responses, leaves open the possibility of a real encounter with the suffering of the other—and hence for the exercise of charity.

As Robert Chazan notes, the accounts on which historians typically rely for eyewitness information concerning the First Crusade do not mention the Rhineland massacres—probably because the authors of these accounts (the anonymous writer of the *Gesta Francorum*, Fulcher of Chartres, and Raymond of Aguilers) did not belong to the armies that perpetrated the violence (*In the Year 1096* xii). Our major sources of historical detail for the massacres are, rather, a collection of striking Hebrew accounts, of which we have three in a state of relative completion from the First Crusade, and one from the Second.[3] In their starkness of description and lyrical

[3] From the First Crusade, the *Chronicles* of Solomon Bar Simpson and Eliezer Bar Nathan, and *Mainz Anonymous;* from the Second Crusade, the *Sefer Zekhirah* ("Book of Remembrance") of Ephraim of Bonn (Eidelberg 8-9).

depth of lament, these accounts provide a vivid picture of how the massacres were experienced by those Jews who survived. That experience was one of deep trauma and communal tragedy: "Let all hear, for I cry out in anguish; the ears of all that hear me shall be seared: How has the staff of might been broken, the rod of glory—the sainted community comparable to fine gold, the community of Mainz!" ("Chronicle of Solomon Bar Simpson"; Eidelberg 26).

By contrast, the emotional palette of those Latin chronicles that mention the Rhineland massacres is far more muted, such that it can be difficult to tell what the chroniclers thought of the events they record. A careful analysis of these spare descriptions, however, reveals a deep discomfort with the crusaders' actions, as in the account of Sigebert of Gembloux: "primo Iudeos in urbibus, in quibus erant, aggressi, eos ad credendum Christi compellunt; credere nolentes bonis privant, trucidant aut urbibus eliminant" ("having first attacked the Jews in the cities in which they were, they compelled them to the belief of Christ; they deprived those unwilling to believe of [their] goods, butchering them or turning them out of [their] cities"; Kedar, "Forcible Baptisms" 187; my trans.). Two words stick out in this description: "compellunt" indicates that the crusaders forced baptism on the Jews, a practice contrary to canon law (Abulafia, "Continuity" 316); and "trucido," or "butcher," suggests an ignoble form of killing—in this case, the slaughter of unarmed civilians. The same elements appear in the account of Cosmas of Prague: "irruerunt super Iudeos et eos invitos baptizabant, contradicentes vero trucidabant" ("[the crusaders] threw themselves upon the Jews and baptized them against their will, and in truth butchered (*trucidabant*) those who objected"; Kedar, "Forcible Baptisms" 187; my trans., ed. Gregory Hays). Cosmas' reluctant "vero"—"in truth"—amplifies the phrase's subtle coloring, again indicating a distancing from the crusaders' actions.

The fuller accounts of Albert of Aachen and Ekkehard of Aura display both a more pointed condemnation of the "bad" crusaders (McGrath 40) who perpetrated the massacres, led by the "false prophets" Volkmar, Gottschalk, and Emicho (40), and a more confused attitude toward the Jews who suffered at their hands. Albert, who clearly disapproves of the pogroms, nonetheless finds it necessary to opine that in some ways the Jews were asking for it:

> Vnde nescio si uel Dei iudicio aut aliquo animi errore spiritu crudelitatis aduersus Iudeorum surrexerunt populum, per quascumque ciuitates dispersos, et crudelissimam in eos exercuerunt necem, et precipue in regno Lotharingie, asserentes id esse principium expeditionis sue, et obsequii contra hostes fidei Christiane... Hic manus Domini contra peregrinos esse creditur, qui nimiis inmundiciis et fornicario concubitu in conspectu eius peccauerunt, et exules Iudeos licet Christo contrarios, pecunie auaricia magis quam pro iusticia Dei graui cede mactauerant, cum iustus iudex Deus sit, et neminem inuitum aut coactum ad iugum fidei Catholice iubeat uenire. (50, 56-58)
>
> I do not know if it was because of a judgement of God or because of some delusion in their minds, but the pilgrims rose in a spirit of cruelty against the Jews who were scattered throughout all the cities, and they inflicted a most cruel slaughter on them, especially in the kingdom of Lotharingia, claiming that this was the beginning of their Crusade and service against the enemies of Christianity... In this the hand of God is believed to have been against the pilgrims, who had sinned in his eyes by excessive impurities and fornicating unions, and had punished the exiled Jews (who are admittedly hostile to Christ) with a great massacre, rather from greed for their money than for divine justice, since God is a just judge and commands no one to come to the yoke of the Catholic faith against his will or under compulsion. (Edgington 50, 56-58)

Albert's condemnations of the pilgrims and of the massacres they perpetrated are, as Kate McGrath has argued, of a piece: the anti-Jewish pogroms constitute yet another instance of the lawlessness of these "bad" crusaders (33-34). Yet, unlike some of the crusaders' other excesses, this particular episode brings in another group of people, one that Albert does not quite know how to account for, except in a series of contradictory sub-clauses and parentheticals.

Ekkehard of Aura knows what he thinks about the victims of the massacres: he calls them an "execrabilem... plebem" ("execrable people"). His account seems to be cheering on Emicho's crusaders who, he writes, "execrabilem Judaeorum quacumque repertam plebem, zelo Christianitatis etiam in hoc deservientes, aut omnino delere, aut etiam inter ecclesiae satagebant compellere sinum" ("occupied themselves with massacring or driving into the bosom of the Church that execrable people of the Jews wherever they could be found—a practice in which they displayed their Christian zeal"; 20; Straka 162).[4] As McGrath points out, however, elsewhere Ekkehard soundly denounces Emicho, and he does not always view "zelus" (zeal) as a virtue: "Sic nimirum, sic nostrae gentis homines zelum Dei sed non secundum scientiam Dei habentes" ("This is what happens to people of our nation who act with the zeal of God but not His wisdom"; 20; Straka 162). Ekkehard's strange description of the massacres seems, then, to be pulling in two opposite directions—the subtle sarcasm of "occupied themselves with massacring" and the oxymoronic overtones of "driving into the bosom of the Church" hint at contempt for the crusaders' clumsy version of "display[ing] their Christian zeal." The anti-Jewish slur, on the other hand, indicates that the crusaders' victims are equally contemptible in Ekkehard's eyes.

Understanding the tension in the Latin chronicles between a disapproval of the massacres' victims and an equal disapproval of the massacres requires taking a closer look at

[4] I have altered Straka's "race" to "people," which seems a more apt rendering of "plebem."

medieval Christian theology concerning the eschatological purpose of the Jews. Reading between the lines of this theology, we might say that the divided reactions of medieval Christians are in fact aimed at two different groups of people: the first at contemporary Jews, the other at a hypothetical group of people situated at the end of time—the eschatological Jews, who were ultimately to convert to Christianity. The first of these two groups was the subject of hatred and derision; the second had to be protected, for they were not only Jews but potential Christians.

The seeds of this eschatological outlook can be found in Paul's letter to the Romans, in which he struggles with the inherent tension between his belief that Jesus is the Christ, and his persistent conviction that the Jewish covenant is unalterable. If both of these are true, what is to be made of the fact that the majority of the Jewish people have not acknowledged Jesus?[5] Paul's conclusions, which twist and turn through chapters 9-11 of Romans, come to a head at the close of chapter 11: "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25-26). Paul's account gives a purpose to the Jews' continuing Judaism, one that is meant to benefit both Jews and Gentiles: on the one hand it permits "the full number of the Gentiles... [to] come in," and on the other it allows the Jews to receive God's mercy—"[f]or God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Rom. 11:32).

This view of history, which places the fulfillment of God's plan for the Jews at the end of time, leaves open a bewildering interim period in which there would be Jews whose existence had been left unaccounted for. In the future the Jews would, as Paul had assured his readers, become Christians; but the Jews of the present were not identical with the Jews of the future—and what to make of *these* Jews? The most influential voice on this matter would prove to be

[5] See Fitzmyer 539-543, and Matera 211-213.

Augustine's: as Jeremy Cohen has argued, the Augustinian doctrine of Jewish witness "has, in various ways, controlled the Western idea of the Jew ever since" (*Living Letters* 15). Augustine's most enduring formulation is his interpretation of Psalm 59, "slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law; scatter them in your might" (36). For Augustine, these words referred to the Jews and contained a double directive, both to spare the Jews—from death and from forced compliance to Christian customs—and to keep them in subjection. This was not for the sake of the Jews but for the sake of Christians, who were to profit from the paradoxical witness of the subjected Jews, a witness which Cohen summarizes as "living testimony... to God's original intentions for human life and to his future plans; to the Jews' own error and, by contrast, to the truth of the Christian faith" (64).

If Augustine's argument gave a theological justification for the presence of Jews in a Christian world, it did not answer an equally important question: how was Christian charity to be exercised toward this spared-but-subjected people? Augustine's lack of concern with what we might call the personal side of Jewish-Christian relations is unsurprising given the genesis of his theology. As Cohen has argued, Augustine's ideas of the Jews did not arise from "actual contacts that may have transpired between Augustine and the Jews of his day" but from "within the heart of Augustinian thought." Thus, "[t]he injunction to 'slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law,' presupposed a Jew very different from the Jews of the Roman Empire: a Jew who had remained stationary in useless antiquity, a Jew who, in fact, never was" (*Living Letters* 64). Not only was this imaginary construct, which Cohen calls the "hermeneutic Jew," not a real Jew, but he was not a real person: rather, he was a signifier, the content of his signification pre-determined by the unalterable course of salvation history.

The Jews who died in the Rhineland massacres were, by contrast, very real, and living elbow-to-elbow with their Christian neighbors, to whom they appealed for help in the unfolding events leading up to the First and Second Crusade. An edict issued by the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV to the Jews of Speyer and Worms in 1090—a mere six years prior to the massacres of the First Crusade—illustrates the uneasy co-dependence of Christians and Jews in the period. The edict grants several rights and protections to the Jews of these cities, including protection of life and property, freedom from forcible baptism, the right to hire Christian servants, freedom to trade, and exemption from tolls (Abulafia, "Continuity" 319).[6] These measures seem designed to allow Jews in the Holy Roman Empire relative latitude to live and do business, unmolested, as Jews. In its emphasis on freedom from forced conversion the edict reflects Augustinian policy, but the picture it paints is much more practical, detailing specific threats faced by contemporary Jews. It is also more immediate: to his privilege for Worms, Henry IV added a clause specifying that the Jews "ad cameram nostram attineant" ("pertain to our chamber"; Abulafia, "Continuity" 319). The intimacy of this phrase is suggestive of a contemporary situation in which the affairs of Jews and of Christians were, for better or for worse, closely intertwined.

Thus, in the massacres of the First and Second Crusade, Christian inhabitants of the Rhineland were faced with a moral dilemma that could not fully be addressed by means of received theology. Princes, prelates, and persons of learning all knew that the Jews were not to be killed—but when those same Jews were threatened by Christian factions of a less subtle theological bent, how were these more learned Christians to respond? For some, this question was forced to a point. At several moments in the course of the Crusade massacres, Jews appealed to their Christian neighbors for protection from the crusaders, fleeing to the bishop's palace or asking the city's burghers for help. As Anna Sapir Abulafia points out, these appeals

[6] See also Lotter, "Scope and Effectiveness."

show "how intimately the Jews in the Rhineland were connected to their host communities" ("Continuity" 321). Unfortunately, the Jews overestimated the force of both secular law and official Church doctrine. Although some bishops initially provided protection to the Jews who fled to their care, most ultimately capitulated to the crusaders' demands.[7]

According to Augustinian theology the Crusade massacres were a disastrous mistake, and churchmen and statesmen alike knew it; yet ultimately, neither Church nor State was able to prevent a repetition of the catastrophe. The letters of Bernard of Clairvaux, written in an attempt to counteract the preaching of Radulf, demonstrate why these attempts were ultimately ineffective. Bernard's letters display a commitment to Augustinian theology while they simultaneously reveal the limits of that theology. In a key passage in Letter 363, Bernard cites Augustine's interpretation of Psalm 59:

> Audivimus et gaudemus quod in vobis ferveat zelus Dei, sed oportet omnino temperamentum scientiae non deesse. Non sunt persequendi Iudaei, non sunt trucidandi, sed nec effugandi quidem. Interrogate eos qui divinas paginas norunt, quid in Psalmo legerint prophetatum de Iudaeis: DEUS, inquit Ecclesia, OSTENDIT MIHI SUPER INIMICOS MEOS NE OCCIDAS EOS, NEQUANDO OBLIVISCANTUR POPULI MEI. Vivi quidam apices nobis sunt, repraesentantes iugitur Dominicam passionem. Propter hoc et in omnes dispersi sunt regiones, ut dum iustas tanti facinoris poenas luunt ubique, testes sint nostrae redemptionis. Unde et addit in eodem Psalmo loquens Ecclesia: DISPERGE ILLOS IN VIRTUTE TUA, ET DEPONE EOS, PROTECTOR MEUS DOMINE. Ita factum est: dispersi sunt, depositi sunt; duram sustinent captivitatem sub

[7] Perhaps the most striking examples of this are the archbishops of Mainz and of Trier, who "began well, but weakened in the face of the mob, and...then tried to exploit the Jews' fears to convert them" (Riley-Smith, *First Crusade* 54).

> principibus christianis. CONVERTENTUR tamen AD VESPERAM, ET IN TEMPORE ERIT RESPECTUS EORUM. (*Opera* 316)
>
> We have heard and rejoiced that the zeal for God's glory burns among you; but wise moderation is still entirely appropriate. The Jews are not to be persecuted, killed, or even put to flight. Ask those who know the Sacred Scriptures what they read foretold of the Jews in the psalm. "God," says the Church, "instructs me concerning my enemies, 'Slay them not, so that my people should not forget.'" The Jews are indeed for us the living letters of Scripture, constantly representing the Lord's passion. They have been dispersed all over the world for this reason: so that in enduring just punishments for such a crime wherever they are, they may be the witnesses of our redemption. Hence the Church, speaking in the same psalm, adds, "only disperse them in thy power, and subjugate them, God my protector." And so it has been done: Dispersed and subjugated they are; under Christian princes they endure a harsh captivity. But 'they will be converted toward the end of time,' and 'it will be at the time of their redemption.' (Cohen, *Living Letters* 235-6)

Bernard follows Augustine closely in this interpretation, particularly in his reflexive blame: the Jews' dispersion is a "just punishment." Unlike Augustine, however, Bernard's invocation of the "slay them not" clause exhibits a sense of urgency: "[s]i Iudaei penitus atteruntur, unde iam sperabitur eorum in fine promissa salus, in fine futura conversio?" ("[i]f the Jews are utterly wiped out, how can one hope for their promised salvation, their eventual conversion at the end of time?"; *Opera* 316; Cohen, *Living Letters* 236). Prompted by the real possibility of a total annihilation of Jews, Bernard is not so concerned with the ongoing "witness" of the Jews as he is

with the simple necessity of their existence—an existence geared toward the final act of the Christian drama, the conversion of the Jews.

Yet a commitment to the conversion of the Jews was not, as it turns out, incompatible with the crusaders' mentality. Benjamin Kedar has powerfully argued that, in spite of a historiographical tradition that has tended to minimize the role of forcible baptisms in the massacres of the First Crusade, these were in fact the pogroms' most consistent and definitive element (189). As Latin and Hebrew chronicles alike attest, those Jews who were massacred were first offered the choice of conversion to Christianity, and many Jews killed themselves or their children to avoid what the Hebrew chronicles refer to as the "profane waters" of baptism ("Chronicle of Solomon Bar Simpson," Eidelberg 23)—their deaths echoing, ironically, the deaths of those early Christian martyrs who defied pagan attempts at conversion.[8] Riley-Smith recounts a telling anecdote: "during the persecution at Mörs, near Cologne, [the crusaders] covered their swords with the blood of animals to frighten the Jews into thinking that killings had already taken place" (*First Crusade* 53). This "terror tactic," as Riley-Smith calls it, suggests that the primary motivation, of these crusaders at least, was not annihilation but conversion. The crusaders, the Latin chroniclers, and Bernard of Clairvaux had, then, a common aim; the difference was in their sense of timing.

Eschatological timing was very important to Bernard (as it was for Paul); he suggests in his epistles that the slaughter of contemporary Jews indicates above all a lack of patience. "Nonne copiosius triumphat Ecclesia de Iudaeis per singulos dies vel convincens," Bernard writes, "vel convertens eos, quam si semel et simul consumeret eos in ore gladii?" ("Is it not

[8] Lives of early Christian martyrs were popular throughout the Middle Ages. See the first part of Duncan Robertson's *The Medieval Saints' Lives*, as well as Noble, *Soldiers of Christ.* Of course, Jewish history presented to the Hebrew chroniclers ample enough precedent for this type of martyrdom (i.e. as resistance to conversion): Eidelberg writes that "[f]or the Jews of Europe the Crusades represented the Continental re-emergence of an ancient pattern of oppression which was, henceforth, to continue unbroken in European history" (10).

more fruitful if the Church defeats the Jews over time, convicting or converting them, than if it eliminates them all with the sword at one and the same time?"; *Opera* 321; Cohen, *Living Letters* 234). The conversion of the Jews is to occur at the *end* of time, in the story's final chapter. Yet even here, the "bad" crusaders may not have been as far from the theologians as initially appears. As Paul Alphandéry has argued, Count Emicho's messianic pretensions cast him as the "king of the Last Days"—which, as Kedar notes, means that the anti-Jewish massacres would constitute "the first act of the apocalyptic drama" (196). Riley-Smith has challenged this line of interpretation as an overall explanation for the massacres, since he holds that it accounts for Emicho's motivations but no one else's ("Persecution" 61, 66-71); yet the widespread appeal of Emicho's apocalyptic posturing would suggest that he was preaching to an audience quite ready to believe that the end of the world was imminent.[9]

The difference of opinion between Bernard and the crusaders, then, is in some ways as slight as a variable reading of the apocalyptic clock. Both learned and popular thinkers wanted the Jews to convert, but one faction thought the time was now, and the other thought it was yet to come. The actions of the two camps—prayer and patience from Bernard, force and slaughter from the crusaders—might seem to indicate a more fundamental divide, but in fact Bernard's reasoning suggests an essential similarity: "[d]enique, cum introierit gentium plenitudo, tunc omnia Israel salvus erit, ait Apostolus. Interim sane qui moritur, MANET IN MORTE" ("at the time of the ingathering of all the nations, then all Israel shall be saved. But those who die in the interim will remain in death"; *Opera* 316; Cohen, *Living Letters* 236). For Bernard, to be Jewish in the time before the end of time is to be a placeholder for those Jews who would come after and become Christians. As placeholders, these Jews have no future—they will die and will "remain in death"—so their present existence is a mere shadow, important only insofar as it is necessary

[9] See Bredero 3-4 for medieval beliefs about the apocalypse.

to build a bridge to the eschaton. If Bernard does not support the killing of Jews, then, neither does he acknowledge the importance of Jewish lives; his dismissal is, as Stanley Cavell might express it, "as conclusive... as murdering them would be" (103).

## II

The Tegernsee *Ludus de Antichristo,* though it draws heavily from Adso's legend of Antichrist, begins quite differently, with a debate between three allegorical figures that do not appear in the tenth-century *libellus:* Gentilitas, Synagoga, and Ecclesia. This debate signals the play's preoccupation with the beliefs of other religions, resituating the legend of eschatological Jewish conversion, which in Adso is a mere side-note, at the center of the narrative. It also displays a seemingly radical perspective on this subject matter, in that the non-Christian arguments—both of which directly attack Christian doctrine—are presented with compelling lucidity. Gentilitas attacks the notion of a single omnipotent deity with a persuasive argument based on the contradictory phenomena (war, peace) of human experience: "Si enim unum credimus / qui prestit universis, / subiectum hunc concedimus / contrarie diversis" ("For if we say a single god / controls the universe, / We must admit the forces that /control him are diverse"; 9-12). Similarly, Synagoga's criticism of Christianity is pointed, insofar as she reads Christ's humanity—the subject of much medieval devotion—as a weak spot: "nulla vite spes in homine. / Error est in Christi nomine / spem salutis estimari" ("In man there is no hope for life. / To hope that we can ever gain / Salvation in the name of Christ is vain"; 34-36).

These songs form a large part of the basis for the critical assessment of the *Ludus de Antichristo'*s "tolerance." Of Synagoga's argument, Wright comments, "[t]hough of course the *Antichrist* playwright would disagree with the position put forth in this song, he has nevertheless

made it seem neither comic nor vicious" (59). Wright's description of Synagoga's words makes intuitive sense; what he fails to note, however, are the larger structures in which these words are embedded. Persuasive in itself, Synagoga's song is discredited by a theatrical system of signification that operates above her head—or rather, quite literally wrapped around her head in the form of a "velum" (veil). This veil is the key prop in a dramatic semiotics that subordinates Synagoga's utterances to a larger cultural narrative of Jewish blindness and eschatological conversion—the same narrative that shaped twelfth-century responses to the Crusade massacres.

That the *Ludus de Antichristo* is heavily invested in visual symbols is evident from its opening tableau:

> Templum domini et septem sedes regales primum collocentur in hunc modum: Ad orientem templum domini; huic collocantur sedes regis Hierosolimorum et sedes Sinagoge. Ad occidentem sedes imperatoris Romani; huic collocantur sedes regis Theotonicorum et sedes regis Francorum. Ad austrum sedes regis Grecorum. Ad meridiem sedes regis Babilonie et Gentilitas. (p. 4)[10]
>
> The Temple of the Lord and seven royal seats arranged in the following manner: to the east the Temple of the Lord; around it are arranged the seat of the King of Jerusalem and the seat of Synagoga. To the west the seat of the Emperor of the Romans; around it are arranged the seat of the King of the Teutons and the seat of the King of the Franks. To the south the seat of the King of the Greeks. To the south the seat of the King of Babylonia and of Gentilitas. (Wright p. 67)

These "sedes" ("seats") speak volumes before a single character has entered the arena: the *Ludus de Antichristo* is portraying a world that can be broken down into discrete and identifiable parts. As Wright notes, the characters who fill these seats do little to expand upon what we know of

[10] For stage directions I have provided the page number; for lines I have provided line numbers.

them from their titles: “in general, characters march through their roles like the majestic but indistinguishable figures on a Byzantine mosaic” (41). This subordination of person to symbolic role becomes even clearer as the three faiths enter, particularly Ecclesia, who is accompanied by “Misericordia cum oleo ad dextram et Justitia cum libra et gladio ad sinistram” (“Mercy, on the right, with oil, and Justice, on the left, with scales and a sword”; p. 6; Wright p. 69). Mercy and Justice do not have a single line between them, and the rubric does not name them again; they are not so much characters as props, their role simply to make visible Ecclesia’s attributes.

The dominance of a symbolic, visual language over the *logos* of characters’ arguments is underlined by the play’s use of repetition, which does not so much answer the arguments of Gentilitas and Synagoga as render them opaque within the new symbolic order. As Keir Elam has argued, contra Aristotle’s supposition, there is no particular reason why characters’ speeches (*lexis*) need be subordinate to the other elements of a play (136). A play can, however, deliberately force just such a subordination if it frames its utterances so as to rob them of their semantic content. As Jiri Veltrusky argues, this semantic emptying can be achieved in drama through the technique of “foregrounding” or *aktualisace,* which serves to “augment the material presence of the linguistic sign on stage” (Elam 19). This “material presence” is a kind of opacity, such that a word’s usual semantic content is diminished or obscured by its placement or usage in the drama. The most extreme form of this linguistic foregrounding is, as Keir Elam argues, “actual nonsense,” as we find, for instance, in Shakespeare: “Cargo, cargo, villianda par corbo, cargo” (Elam’s example, 19; *AWW* 4.1.71).

While the *Ludus de Antichristo* does not employ “actual nonsense,” its use of repetition has a similar effect on an audience’s ability to “see through” its linguistic signifiers to their usual semantic content. The play’s repetitions are frequent: the rubric notes after Gentilitas’ song,

"[q]uod etiam debet cantare per totum ludum in temporibus" (it "should be sung throughout the play from time to time"; p. 6; Wright p. 68), and similarly, of Synagoga: "[q]uod et ipsa cantabit in singulis temporibus" (she "will also sing this song from time to time"; p. 6; Wright p. 69). Once the play's action has shifted to the bevy of earthly monarchs, the same pattern prevails: after the King of the Greeks sings his acceptance of the Roman Emperor's overlordship, he repeats that same song as he traverses the stage to the Emperor's throne; the King of Jerusalem follows suit. So repetitious are these songs, in fact, that the manuscript does not record them in full, substituting "etc." for all lines after the first.[11]

It might seem that repetition of an utterance would serve to enhance or underline its semantic content. When repetition occurs in too wide a variety of contexts, however, it weakens rather than strengthens the word or phrase's meaning. Augustine's account of his acquisition of language may serve as a counter-example: reaching back into his impressive memory, Augustine claims that as a child, "[w]henever people named something, and used the same inflections when indicating that thing with their bodies, [he] would take note and store in memory the fact that they made the same sound when they wanted to indicate that thing" (11).[12] In order for words to acquire a stable semantic content, that is, Augustine had to witness their repetition with reference to the same objects, "used in their right way in different grammatical settings, and recurring over time" (11). What the *Ludus de Antichristo*'s repetitions achieve is just the opposite—rather than occurring in a series of equally appropriate contexts, the songs of the allegorical faiths occur haphazardly, even possibly at points determined by actor improvisation ("from time to time"). The semantic content of the characters' words are thus substantially weakened, and subordinated to the one stable context in which they occur: that is, that they are spoken by the same character.

[11] As Wright notes, p. 74, n. 24; he supplies the missing lines in his translation. See e.g. ll.116, 117, 118, 119...
[12] My thanks to Indu Ohri for pointing me to this episode.

As a result, *what* Synagoga says is not so important as the fact that it is Synagoga who is saying it.

Thus the monologic discourse of the *Ludus de Antichristo* is able to limit the potentially polyphonic utterances of its characters, such that what an audience "hears" is not the *logos* of Gentilitas or Synagoga but the larger, enfolding *logos* of the play's argument, which supports Ecclesia's claims to rightness and authority. This larger argument is wholly dramatic, composed of the play's visual signs and their arrangement in an overarching narrative. Framed by the opening dispute between Gentilitas, Synagoga, and Ecclesia, this narrative ultimately vindicates Ecclesia against her opponents by means of her successful resistance against the Antichrist. While Gentilitas is subdued by the forces of Antichrist and joins his ranks, and Synagoga eagerly accepts the pretender, believing him to be the Jews' long-awaited Messiah, Ecclesia withdraws from the action until Antichrist and his followers have been chased away by a clap of thunder, at which point she re-emerges to crow over his defeat: "Ecce homo qui non posuit deum adiutorem suum. / Ego autem sicut oliva fructifera in domo dei" ("Lo, this is the man who made not God his strength. / But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God"; 415-16).

The play's pro-Christian narrative is not only enabled, but in a sense predetermined by its symbolic language—and in particular, the sign of Synagoga's veil. While Ecclesia is clothed in breastplate and crown and accompanied by the clearly symbolically demarcated Mercy and Justice, not to mention the impressive retinue of Pope, Clergy, Emperor, and army, Synagoga wears the blindfold that marked her as wrong and inferior, the Leah to Ecclesia's Rachel, for much of early Christian history. This veil does not feature in Wright's analysis because he translates the play's climactic stage direction, "Tunc tollunt ei velum," as "Then they strip off

Antichrist's mask" (p. 95).[13] Aside from linguistic improbability ("persona" and "larva" mean "mask"; "velum" does not), Wright's translation ignores the medieval tradition, by the twelfth century commonplace, of representing Synagoga with her eyes blindfolded.

Synagoga's blindfold is closely linked to her development as an allegorical figure, though it both pre- and post-dates her first appearance. As Nancy Bishop has pointed out, Synagoga is first found not in the Bible but in patristic writings, and only in the mid-ninth century does she come into her own as an iconographical presence (23). Initially, she was not depicted wearing a blindfold, but rather as "patient, observant, and... largely ignored by the other figures" in the crucifixion scenes in which she often made her appearance (24). It was only over time that Synagoga began to take on additional, more negative attributes, including her blindfold (24). These attributes proved enduring: the blind Synagoga was literally set in stone in several cathedrals, including Notre-Dame de Paris and the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Strasbourg.[14] This visual portrayal has a strong correlative in medieval literature, as Margaret Schlauch has traced, even in such unlikely places as French romance (448-450).

Though arriving relatively late on the iconographic scene, Synagoga's veil had existed in prototypical form since Paul used it as a vivid metaphor in his Second Letter to the Corinthians:

> We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (2 Cor. 3:13-16)

[13] Wright notes the ambiguity of this stage direction, and the possibility that it could be referring to Synagoga's veil, in a footnote to this line.
[14] For analyses of these statues see Nina Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*.

This image was definitive for the early Christian understanding of the endurance of Judaism because it functioned as a commentary on and explanation of Paul's other famous pronouncement on the Jews, his promise in Romans of their eventual conversion. If the Jews' understanding were obstructed by some invisible mechanism, this explained why they, God's chosen people, had failed to "see" Christ; but it also explained how this situation might eventually be remedied.

The implications of Synagoga's veil in medieval iconography thus extend beyond a mere antisemitic flourish: they gesture to a Pauline narrative of human history, looking back to a past characterized by an "Old Covenant" in which Moses had to place a veil over his face, to a present in which that veil had, for reasons not totally apparent, remained over the eyes of the Jews, and forward to a future in which that veil would be removed. The sign of Synagoga's veil, that is, reaches toward the eschatological fulfillment longed for by Paul, and by Augustine, and by Bernard of Clairvaux; even by the lawless crusaders who carried out the Rhineland massacres. Within the dramatic fiction of the *Ludus de Antichristo* this wish, expressed by the iconography of Synagoga's veil, could be fulfilled: so at the climax of the play Synagoga is converted, and her veil is stripped away. In this moment the play's pro-Christian argument most strongly asserts itself: Synagoga, who disagreed with Ecclesia while she was blind, vindicates Ecclesia once she is able to see. Thus, the play's action and iconography unite in a single moment that folds Synagoga's dissenting voice into the triumphant creed of the Church: "Tibi gratias damus, Adonay rex glorie, / personarum trinitas eiusdem substantie. / Vere pater deus est, cuius unigenitus / deus est. Idem deus est amborum spiritus" ("We give Thee thanks, Adonai, glorious King, / Trinity of one Substance, Persons three. / The Father is God, as is His only Son; / Their Spirit, too, is God; and God is One"; 365-8).

## III

The medieval cultural narrative of Synagoga's blindness and the triumph of Christianity, enforced by a comprehensive system of theatrical signs, would constitute the unequivocal meaning of the *Ludus de Antichristo*—were it not for the Antichrist. This figure, who gives himself the evocative epithet "an unknown man," disrupts the monologic discourse of the play just as he disrupts its action, turning a triumphant narrative of Teutonic hegemony into a bewildering dissolution of the known world. This more subtle attack, the undermining of the play's structure, is a result of Antichrist's legendarily deceptive nature. The Antichrist contains within himself a paradox of perception: how does one know that Antichrist is Antichrist—rather than Christ? At first glance this distinction would seem to be easily made, since Antichrist is by definition the opposite of Christ in every way:

> Antichristus... Christo in cunctis contrarius erit et Christo contraria faciet. Christus uenit humilis, ille superbus. Christus peccatores et humiles iustificabit, ille peccatores et impios exaltabit semperque uitia, que uirtutibus contraria sunt, docebit. (98)
>
> [Antichrist] will be contrary to Christ in all things, that is, his actions will be contrary to Christ. Christ came as a humble man; he will come as a proud man. Christ came to raise up the lowly, to pass judgment on sinners; he, on the contrary, will cast down the lowly, glorify sinners, exalt the impious and always teach vices which are opposite to virtues. (Wright 102)

Hidden in this straightforward catalogue, however, is the subtle qualification: "that is, his actions will be contrary to Christ." Thus Adso leaves room for what is perhaps the most characteristic attribute of the Antichrist, as well as the most problematic: his appearance, which is not the opposite of but identical to Christ's.

The Antichrist's superficial resemblance to Christ is, from one perspective, of a piece with his thoroughly evil nature, because it enables him to work his deceits. Yet paradoxically, the more complete the Antichrist's deceptions, the more he comes to resemble his supposed opposite, or rather, as John Parker puts it, his "doppelgänger," Christ (2).[15] So deep does this similarity run that Antichrist can even perform miracles—not garden-variety miracles like those of Pharaoh's magicians, but miracles that one would have thought only Christ capable of performing. Adso goes so far as to assert that Antichrist "mortuos etiam in conspectu hominum suscitabit, ita ut in errorem inducantur, si in fieri potest, etiam electi" ("will even bring the dead to life in the sight of men, 'so that if it were possible, even the elect would be deceived'"; 133; Wright 104). Rather than trying to downplay this startling revelation of Antichrist's power, Adso expands upon the difficulties this will cause for even the best of us: "[n]am quando tanta ac talia signa uiderint etiam illi, qui perfecti et electi Dei sunt, dubitabunt, utrum sit ipse Christus, qui in fine mundi secundum Scripturas uenturus est, anon" ("For when they see so many great miracles, even those who are righteous and chosen by God will wonder whether or not he is the Christ who, according to the Scriptures, will come at the end of the world"; 133; Wright 104).

Adso's willingness to imagine the troubles caused by Antichrist at the eschaton may be a function of his removal from these conditions, which do not apply to his text. While Adso describes the deceits of Antichrist, he does not replicate them; rather, by naming Antichrist and identifying his frauds, Adso is able to keep this dangerous figure within strictly circumscribed bounds. When we move to the graphic arts, however, the paradox of Antichrist enters the medium itself. Images of the Antichrist participate in his deceptions since they, like him, convey not names but appearances, which conceal the Antichrist's true nature. Within the tradition of medieval illustrations that represent Antichrist as a man (rather than a beast), he is often

[15] On the parallels between Antichrist's deceptions and the deceptions of Christ/God, see Parker 2-3, 25-28.

handsome and regal, and sometimes adopts a pose iconographically similar to that of Christ the King, as in the *Liber Floridus* of Lambert of St. Omer, written between 1112 and 1121.[16] Of this image, which represents Antichrist riding Leviathan, Rosemary Muir Wright writes,

> The portrayal of Antichrist is shockingly familiar, even seated as he is on the tail of the dragon beast with monstrous tusk-like teeth, because his pose echoes that of a youthful secular prince, endowed with crown and sceptre and seated above the waters, like Christ above the heavens. There is nothing untoward about him unless attention is drawn to the downturned horns at the edges of his crown and the long pointed extensions to his shoes. (64)

The "shock" to which Muir Wright alludes is the double-take that results from identifying Christ—and then hastily un-identifying him. Those visual indices that would usually help to designate Christ here work against the viewer, creating a false impression that must be corrected by a second, closer look.

A second look is, however, possible. The illustrator of the *Liber Floridus* provides evidence on more than one level, and as Muir Wright points out, the contextual level of the book enables a viewer to identify the handsome seated king not as Christ, but as his opposite: "the contemporary reader," she notes, "had been prepared for the shock of this confrontation by the portrayal on the other side of the page, folio 62r, which illustrates the monster Behemoth being ridden by the Devil" (64). This figure, unlike the Antichrist, is immediately recognizable as an agent of evil: bestial and hideous, its naked form ending in claws and talons, it could be none other than the Devil himself. Its appearance thus heralds the Antichrist by suggesting the attributes concealed beneath the Antichrist's handsome veneer. The Leviathan upon which Antichrist is seated performs a similar function: snouted, tusked, and breathing fire, this dragon-

[16] This image is reproduced on the cover page of this chapter.

like creature situates Antichrist within the same demonic realm as the Devil of the previous page. If these hints (as well as the miniature horns and elongated shoes) were not enough, the page supplements its image with text: "Antichristus sedens super Leviathan serpentem diabolum signantem, bestiam crudelem in fine" ("Antichrist sitting on Leviathan, signifying the devil's serpent, the cruel beast of the last days"; Muir Wright 66). Thus, the manuscript tames its dangerously deceptive Antichrist by means of a system of signs that operates above his head, a rhetorical net in which he is enmeshed so that he can work no more mischief than the initial shock of his resemblance to Christ.

As I have suggested, the *Ludus de Antichristo* consists in part of just such a net, a carefully-constructed system of signification that trumps the potentially polyphonic utterances of its individual characters. But can this net hold the Antichrist? It is my final task in this chapter to demonstrate that it cannot. The problem that the *Ludus de Antichristo* encounters, which the *Liber Floridus* does not, is its dramatic form. The *Liber Floridus,* which engages the visual sense, can nonetheless limit Antichrist's power by trapping him within its frame; the immobile figure, handsome and compelling as he is, is ultimately little more than a specimen collected and pinned for a viewer's scrutiny. In the *Ludus de Antichristo,* however, the situation is reversed: Antichrist, no longer immobile but alive and dangerous, outwits the play's rhetorical manoeuvers. He does so, as he accomplishes all his deceits, by means of an insidious similarity: he, like the drama of which he is a part, trades in signs.

This is a problem not only for the *Ludus de Antichristo* but for all Christian drama: its stock and trade are also Antichrist's, an awkward fact to which our play alludes by calling Antichrist the "caput ypocritarum" ("prince of hypocrites"; 374) and his henchmen "Hypocrites,"

or—going back to the Greek root—"actors."[17] The play explores this side of Antichrist's personality from his first appearance onstage. The first act of the Antichrist's reign showcases his skill as a thespian as, together with his Hypocrites, he stages (much like Shakespeare's Richard III) an apparent rejection of the crown. Having announced his ambitions to the Hypocrites—"Me mundus adoret et non alium" ("I wish the world to adore / Myself alone forevermore"; 154; Wright 153-4)—such that an audience is aware of his intentions, the Antichrist pretends to refuse the offer of kingship that the Hypocrites have engineered: "Quomodo fiet hoc? Ego sum vir ignotus" ("How shall this be? I am an unknown man"; 177). This miniature play-within-a-play establishes the Antichrist as an expert actor and director, and so sets the scene for his self-consciously theatrical career.

What makes Antichrist more dangerous than Richard III and theater's other famous hypocrites, however, is his mastery of the same medium of which his play is composed: signs. As Czech theorist Jiri Veltrusky puts it, "All that is on the stage is a sign" (Elam 7). Veltrusky and other members of the Prague School argue that, because of the presumed intention behind the placement of every object, word and gesture on the stage, these take on a mode of signification that is primarily symbolic rather than utilitarian. Thus, a chair on the stage is not simply itself; it stands for Chair, the whole class of physical phenomena that we understand as having the shape and purpose of chairs. This means that a stage-chair need not have much in common with your average, utilitarian kitchen chair; it need only suggest "chair" such that an audience can pick up on its symbolic thrust (Elam 7-8). Theatrical communication depends upon this semiotic shorthand, the flexibility to separate the thing itself from its representation on the stage.

[17] See Parker 17.

This means that theatrical deceptions—that is, a deception that an audience is supposed to *know* is a deception—always have the potential to backfire. This can occur, for instance, when a character adopts a disguise midway through the action, as do Polixenes and Camillo in *The Winter's Tale.* Presumably, the audience is meant to recognize these disguised characters—but what is to prevent a well-meaning viewer from suspending her disbelief too far, and assuming that the false beards indicate entirely new roles? Similarly, when a dramatist attempts to put a miracle on the stage, he should be able to indicate that miracle by approximate, symbolic means—to show a person being healed of leprosy, for instance, no actual leprosy need appear on the actress's skin; she could simply signal, by means of her facial expression and gestures, that she is much happier about her skin after the healing has occurred. The problem of presenting a *fake* stage-miracle, then, is acute, because these same signs lose their symbolic value and come to possess no more and no less power than they would in the "real" world—they become a childish trick, as when a boy pretends to have lost his arm by hiding it in his sleeve.

The *Ludus de Antichristo* enters into this dangerous territory with its staging of Antichrist's "miracles." Antichrist's most devastating display of signs is prompted by a request of the King of the Teutons, the play's putative hero. In keeping with his role as the canniest of the world's monarchs, the King of the Teutons responds to Antichrist's claims of divinity with a healthy skepticism:

> Fraudis versutias compellor experiri,
> per quas nequitia vestra solet mentiri.
> Sub forma veritas virtutis putabatur;
> ostendit falsitas, quod forma mentiatur. (235-238)
> I am compelled to test these cunning frauds,

By means of which your wickedness is accustomed to lie.

Under the form of virtue, truth is supposed;

The falsehood shows itself, because the form lies. (my trans.)[18]

The King of the Teutons' optimistic pronouncement reflects a popular sentiment: "The truth will out." His choice of words, however, is ominous. How can a hidden truth "show" itself when all that is accessible to the senses—that is, the "form"—lies?

The answer is immediate, emphatic, and startling: it cannot. Unfazed by the King of the Teutons' challenge, the Antichrist obligingly performs a series of Christ-like miracles, which culminates in an apparent resurrection:

> Tunc ypocrite adducunt claudum coram Antichristo, quo sanato rex Teutonicorum hesitabit in fide. Tunc iterum adducunt leprosum, et illo sanato rex plus dubitabit. Ad ultimum important feretrum, in quo iacebit quidam simulans se in prelio occisum. Iubet itaque Antichristus ut surgat... (p. 34)
>
> Then the Hypocrites bring a lame man before Antichrist. When Antichrist heals him, the King of the Teutons wavers in his faith. Then they bring a leper; when he is made clean, the King doubts even more. Finally they carry in a coffin, in which a man lies pretending to have been killed in a battle. Antichrist commands him to rise... (Wright p. 89)

This sequence of increasingly impressive signs and wonders convinces the King of the Teutons of Antichrist's divinity—but he is not the only one for whom it is convincing. In this miracle work there is no daylight between the first-order deceptions of theater and the second-order deceptions of the Antichrist: the illusion Antichrist has created (a man rising from the dead) is the same illusion created for the play's audience.

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[18] Wright's translation is more elegant but brings in a couple of inaccuracies (e.g. for "form" ["forma"] Wright has "mask"—presumably to connect to his later translation of "velum" as mask, which I also believe to be mistaken).

This does not mean, of course, that an audience will be "fooled" in the same way that the King of the Teutons is taken in; having heard the Antichrist's Machiavellian plans, an audience possesses ironic knowledge that the play's characters do not. Nonetheless, the collapse of theological and theatrical deceptions that takes place in the performance of Antichrist's miracles causes a serious problem for the drama's semiotics. The Chester *Antichrist* suffers from the same difficulty, though here the text offers a very different solution: Enock and Helias trick Antichrist by having him summon the dead men he had raised, to command them to eat and drink. When Helias blesses the bread, however, the dead men are revulsed: "Alas, put that bread out of my sight!" (77).[19] Thus, the Chester play counters Antichrist's deceptive sign with another sign, one that reveals Antichrist's deception to have been incomplete. In this case, "the falsehood" does, with enough prodding, "show itself," and drama's first-order deceptions remain intact—an audience can still believe (or rather, suspend its disbelief of) the play's illusions.

Not so in the Tegernsee *Ludus de Antichristo,* where Antichrist's miracle is mitigated only by a struggling rubric: "a man... pretending to have been killed in battle." The very ambiguity of this stage direction is revealing: "pretending" could refer to a character whom an audience is supposed to believe alive, or a character whom an audience is supposed to believe dead; both are, *qua* actors, necessarily "pretending." The latter scenario involves all the pitfalls of theatrical deceit; as Wright remarks, "[i]t is difficult to see how it could have been shown dramatically that the man was *pretending* to have been killed" (89). Even if a skilled actor did, however, manage to convey these layers of pretense—perhaps by winking at the audience while supposedly dead[20]—this moment would still mark a breakdown in the play's semiotic system.

[19] Parker notes that this scene is "unique among Antichrist plays" (81). Parker's analysis of this scene (80-82) centers on its representation of the Eucharist (the bread by which the dead men are revulsed) as a "corrective insubordination" (82) of the real Eucharist, insofar as the play makes no claims beyond dramatic representation.
[20] My thanks to Mario Longtin for this suggestion.

When the relationship between sign and signified begins to fray—when a sign can, in fact, signify its opposite—a new mode of reading becomes necessary, something more akin to a hermeneutics of suspicion than the easy-going suspension of disbelief that allows a bucket to be a chair, or a crown to make a king, or a veil to stand for blindness.

That the play's semiotic breakdown is not confined to the fake miracle of the dead man is indicated by the advent of a new, chaotic system of signs. Those who are converted by the Antichrist (by the end of the play, nearly everyone) are painted with the "primam litteram nominis" ("the first letter of [Antichrist's] name"; p. 28; Wright p. 84).[21] Exactly what letter this is remains unclear: although we might assume it would be "A" for "Antichristus," a series of fourteenth-century stained glass windows portraying the life of Antichrist from the Marienkirche in Frankfurt an der Oder pictures the sign of Antichrist as a "T" ("Russia Returns").[22] This mark, as enigmatic as Hawthorne's scarlet letter, could mean any number of things (e.g. "Teufel" or "Tod"), but in this very abundance of possibilities lies a fundamental opacity. If it was, in fact, a "T," the sign of Antichrist would resemble a cross, and his converts would cover the stage like a crowd of Ash Wednesday penitents. This sign, then, spreads the semiotic chaos of Antichrist to the four corners of the stage: the play's carefully designed dialectical arena ("Mercy, on the right, with oil... Justice, on the left, with scales and a sword") becomes an illegible morass.

Semiotic chaos would seem unlikely to benefit a play. In the *Ludus de Antichristo*, however, in which signs contribute to the propagation of a culturally entrenched storyline of Jewish inferiority and Christian triumph, the Antichrist's subversions have a positive effect: they

[21] It is, I think, significant that the letter is referred to in this way rather than simply named (e.g. "marked with an A" or "marked with a T").
[22] These windows comprise the only extant stained-glass window cycle portraying the life of Antichrist ("Russia Returns").

leave room for a radical re-reading of the play's climactic scene, the removal of Synagoga's veil. According to the play's official argument, the removal of this symbolically-charged prop should have vindicated Christianity against Jewish skepticism: Synagoga "sees" the light of Christian truth, and repents of her Jewish error. By the time the *Antichrist* reaches its climax, however, this reading is virtually impossible.

The problem with the removal of Synagoga's veil, as the *Ludus de Antichristo* presents it, is double-edged. On the one hand, it is a problem of signs; on the other, it is a problem of sight—and as signs and sight are integrally connected (every sign requires an interpreter), so are the problems that plague them in this scene. The problem with signs is that they have been evacuated of meaning: if a cross does not mean Christ, how do we know that a blindfold means spiritual blindness? If Synagoga's veil is overdetermined at the start of the play, by the climax it is underdetermined. This underdetermination leaves a kind of semantic vacuum, which the play attempts to fill by substituting a quasi-literal explanation of Synagoga's blindfold—an explanation that falls directly into the problem of sight.

Stripped of its symbolic meaning, Synagoga's blindfold becomes just that: a piece of fabric preventing her from seeing the characters and events onstage. When this fabric is removed, then, the natural question is: what does Synagoga see? The play's answer to this question is surprisingly—or perhaps inevitably—clumsy. Elijah tears off Synagoga's veil to show her, not Christ, but Antichrist. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that Elijah shows her "not-Christ": the words that immediately precede the stage direction "[t]unc tollunt ei velum" are "[n]on est Christus!" ("[h]e is not Christ!" 360; Wright 359).[23] This sequence of events is incoherent on several basic levels: first, because it is unclear why the realization that Antichrist is

[23] This is a half-line, and most scholars have assumed that we are missing the second half. Various additions have been suggested (see Wright, footnote 71, p. 95); I find the half-line most effective as is, intentional or not.

not Christ should entail an acknowledgment of Jesus of Nazareth as Christ;[24] and second, because the play has given us no framework for understanding what Synagoga could possibly see at this moment. Everything leading up to this point has suggested that the appearance of Antichrist is completely deceptive; why should the sight of him reveal anything new to Synagoga?

The *Ludus de Antichristo* offers no solutions to these problems, and its denouement reflects its inability to keep its contradictory parts together. The Antichrist and his followers are abruptly scattered by a clap of thunder, and the apostates (that is, everyone) return to the faith in an unexplained parenthetical: "[t]unc omnibus redeuntibus ad fidem" ("[a]s everyone returns to the faith..."; p. 48; Wright p. 99). The tidy ending that the play's symbolically-ordered opening seemed to promise is never delivered. What we are left with instead is a radical openness to interpretation—and the possibility of recognition.

This possibility comes about, paradoxically, as a result of Synagoga's veil—for while this symbolically freighted piece of fabric prevents her from seeing, it also hides her from sight. Against the weight of cultural association attached to Synagoga's veil, the Latin word used in the rubric suggests a primary importance for what is beneath the veil, rather than the "unblinding" that its removal would seem to represent. "Tunc tollunt ei velum" recalls another "velum," the veil of the temple that is torn in two at the hour of Jesus' crucifixion.[25] What is significant about that veil is what it conceals—the living presence of God, too holy and too terrible for human sight. The sight of Synagoga is, in its way, equally terrible. Synagoga's unveiled face has the

[24] The rubric seems to be aware of this difficulty, explaining that "Synagoga convertitur ad verba prophetarum" ("the Prophets' words convert Synagoga"; p. 42; Wright p. 95). This explanation, however, is of course inaccessible to an audience, which must make its own conclusions.

[25] "Et ecce velum templi scissum est in duas partes a summo usque deorsum" (Matt 27:51, Vulgate translation). The Vulgate translation of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (which refers to the "veil [that] covers the hearts" of the Jews) uses the word "velamen." If the *Antichrist* playwright was aware of his options (both words can be translated as "veil"), the use of "velum" would seem to be deliberately provocative.

power to recall an all-too recent history, evoking memories of mass-scale, apocalyptic violence inflicted not by Antichrist but by Christians; memories of inaction, of insufficient action, and of action taken too late.

What this evocation of traumatic memory might have felt like to a contemporary audience, we can only guess. Within the play, however, some version of this recognition is experienced by the figure of Ecclesia. While she is silent throughout the Jews' ordeal, Ecclesia emerges during their slaughter to sing an unlikely refrain: "[f]asciculus mirre dilectus meus mihi" ("[a] bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me"; 403; Wright 401; Song of Sg. 1:13). This lyrical lament is taken directly from the Song of Songs, in which it is one of the many erotic expressions passed between the lovers whom Bernard of Clairvaux identified as Christ and the Soul ("Sermon 43"). In a startling re-interpretation, the *Ludus de Antichristo* casts these lovers as the Church and the Synagogue, and brings out the full tragic import of this aporetic love affair. As she reveals her longing for the Synagogue, the Church simultaneously expresses her knowledge that it is too late—that she has missed the moment of action.

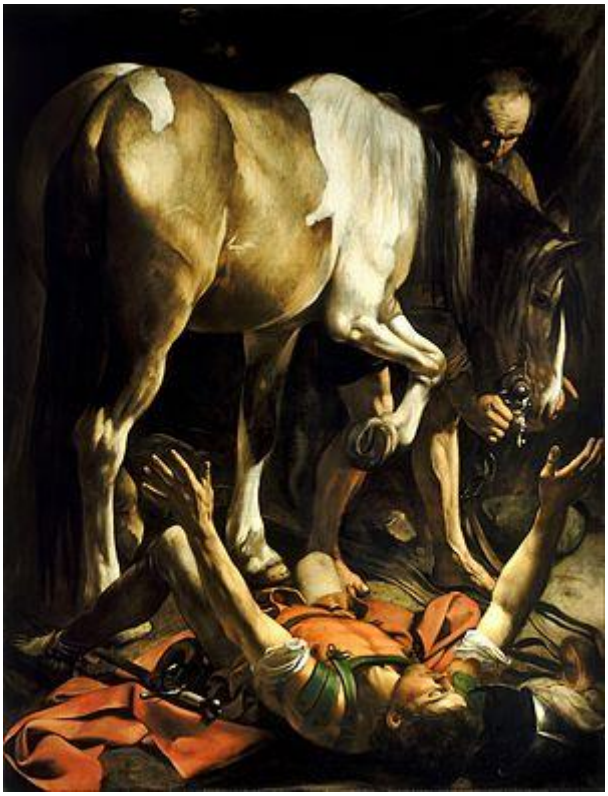
This expression of erotic pain reveals the fundamentally cruel nature of the rhetoric that pervades the *Ludus de Antichristo*, an eschatological narrative that erases its Jewish subjects—and that had so conditioned medieval Western society that its Christian members could not see, help, or properly mourn the Jews who were massacred in its streets. So Antichrist arrives on the scene, as Bernard of Clairvaux among others feared he might, to reveal and punish this great coldness of charity:

> Quam sane inopiam super nos adea invaluisse videmus, ut nulli sit dubium illa sententia nos feriri: QUONIAM ABUNDABIT INIQUITAS, REFRIGESCET CARITAS MULTORUM. Et, ut suspicor ego, aut praesto, aut prope est, de quo scriptum est:

> FACIEM EIUS PRAECEDET EGESTAS. Ni fallor, Antichristus est iste, quem fames ac sterilitas totius boni et praeit, et comitatur. Sive igitur nuntia iam praesentis, sive iamiamque adfuturi praenuntia, egestas in evidenti est.
>
> We are so aware of this need at present that we are all doubtlessly struck by the saying: 'Because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall grow cold.' (Matt. 24.12). And I suspect that he is already at hand, or at least close by, of whom is written: 'Want shall go before his face' (Job, 41.13). Unless I am mistaken this is Antichrist, whom famine and sterility of all good precedes and accompanies. Then whether he is the messenger of one already here or a presage of one still to come, the need is all too evident. ("Vita Sancti Malachiae Episcopi" 3:307; Meyer 11)

Bernard was hoping for an increase in recorded lives of the saints, "ut sint in speculum et exemplum" ("so that they could serve as a mirror and good example"; 3:307; 11). What his age would produce instead was a *Play of Antichrist*, a different sort of mirror: one that reveals what has been done already, what will be done, and the terrible consequences of failing to see what must be done—who must be acknowledged—in the present.

# CONVERSION AS SUFFERING IN THE CROXTON *PLAY OF THE SACRAMENT* AND THE DIGBY *CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL*



*Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Conversion on the Way to Damascus, 1601*

I am lame, my legges be take me fro,

my sygth lykwyse I may nott see;

I can nott tell whether to goo;

my men hath forsake me also.

*The Conversion of Saint Paul (Digby), ll.198-201*

## *Introduction*

England holds the dubious honor of executing the first medieval general expulsion of Jews, under the edict of Edward I—an action that would be followed shortly afterward by France, and two centuries later by Spain in what Cecil Roth calls "the culminating tragedy of medieval Jewish history" (*History* 90). The exiled English Jews were absorbed into a continent that scarcely proved more welcoming, many settling initially in France but all eventually pushed further eastward, becoming part of the community of Ashkenazi Jews (Chazan, *Jews of Medieval Western Christendom* 167). As for the country the English Jews had left behind, its part in medieval Jewish history seemed to have ended: "With the demise of medieval English Jewry, a curious experiment in Jewish settlement came to a close. A new Jewish community had been created, had matured and flourished, and had expired, all within the span of little more than two centuries" (Chazan, *Jews of Medieval Western Christendom* 167).

Reading recent scholarship on medieval literature, one could be forgiven for taking this narrative as established fact: that from 1290 until the Resettlement under Oliver Cromwell, "few Jewish feet touched English soil" (Smith, *A History of England;* qtd. in Shapiro 65). As James Shapiro has pointed out, however, this "exaggerated claim," which "continues to exercise a mysterious hold upon British historians" (43), is a myth: "archival research over the past hundred years makes it clear that small numbers of Jews began drifting back into England almost immediately after the Expulsion, and began to arrive in larger numbers during the Tudor period" (62). Shapiro is not the first to push back against the myth-makers. As early as 1896, Sidney Lee remarked that it "is frequently stated that after the banishment of 1290 no Jews came to England until the later years of Cromwell's Protectorate, but special investigation of the subject leaves little doubt that small numbers of them were present in the country from the fourteenth to

the seventeenth century" (qtd. in Shapiro 64). Yet, as Shapiro shows, Lee's historical analysis failed to make a lasting mark. Twentieth-century historians continued to read post-Expulsion England as a space "free of Jews" (65; 42).

This trend has held true in the field of medieval drama. Scholars seeking to explain the surprising endurance of Jewish figures on the medieval stage—particularly in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament,* which features "contemporary" Jews—have typically resorted to various creative readings of Jewish historical absence. One approach interprets the post-Expulsion fascination with Jews as the output of a tortured communal memory. Ruth Nisse argues that "[i]n East Anglia... including in Bury St. Edmunds [the most likely candidate for the provenance of the Croxton *Play*], where they were exiled early on, the Jews were no sooner gone than they were remembered—and reimagined—with a vengeance" (105). The Jews' expulsion from England is here interpreted not only as physical exile to an unfriendly continent, but as metaphorical exile "into a... diffuse realm of memory and abstraction" (102). Another explanation of the starring roles given to Jews in a drama written so long after actual Jews had left English shores is that the Jews of Croxton are not really (or not primarily) Jews at all, but stand-ins for other, more present threats: "[I]t is evident," Sarah Beckwith writes, "that what we are exploring here is the doubt of the Christian community" ("Ritual" 72).[1]

These analyses are persuasive, but they require paving over the presence—or at least, the significance—of those Jews who were *not* absent from England while Croxton, along with a number of other medieval plays prominently featuring Jews, were being composed and performed. Particularly relevant to the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament,* as well as to another

[1] Beckwith follows a line of critical interpretation that reads the play's Jews as Lollards, an argument that first occurs in Celia Cutts, "The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece" (1944), and is shared by Gail McMurray Gibson, who refers to the play's Jews in quotation marks ("Jews") (35-38). A helpful overview of this debate is found in Nisse 101.

"Jewish" drama of the fifteenth century, the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul*—both plays about the conversion of a Jewish character to Christianity—is the presence in post-Expulsion England of a small but enduring community of Jewish converts to Christianity. Without making extravagant claims for the impact of this small group, it is nevertheless the case that *some* population is very different from *no* population. To quote Albert the Great somewhat out of context, "Inter pure ens, et pure non ens, non est proportio: ergo distantia infinita..." ("Between pure being and pure non-being there is no proportion. There is, therefore, an infinite distance [between them]"; *In 4 Sent* 2.1.7, sed contra 2; Pearson 156).[2]

If we trace the history of medieval English Jewish Christians, we find that their presence, if small, is yet substantial. The symbol for the established place of converts in English society throughout the Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period was the *Domus Conversorum,* a "House of Converts" established outside of London in 1232 by order of Henry III, with the aim of encouraging Jewish conversion to Christianity (Roth, *History* 134; Chazan, *Jews of Medieval Western Christendom* 163). This House received royal funding and protection, allowing its inmates to spend their time in prayer—though there were several periods in which the *Domus* was overlooked by a forgetful monarch, and its inmates suffered severely from the lack of income (Fogle 109; Adler 5). Since the Rolls and other documents recording the House's inhabitants are still extant, we possess a rich, if incomplete, record of these converts.[3]

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[2] Shapiro states the case for "counting" the Jews of Medieval and Renaissance England more strongly: "The debate ["between those who began to assert a Jewish presence in Shakespeare's England and those who rejected the merits of such claims"] itself is an exhausting and in many ways a foolish one. Its persistence can best be explained by looking past the circular arguments about how many Jews constitute a Jewish presence in Elizabethan England to what is more profoundly at stake in this controversy: whether Jews should be recognized as belonging to England's past" (62-63).

[3] Fogle notes that the records are "irregular" (109); Adler, however, notes that while he relies upon "the Close and Patent Rolls, ...Rymer's *Foedera,* and...other contemporary records" for the early years of the *Domus,* "[w]ith the year 1331... there begins a most valuable series of documents that pertain exclusively to the House of Converts, and that are carefully preserved in their original skin pouches at the Rolls Office. These extend in an almost unbroken

At the time of the Expulsion, the *Domus Conversorum* housed eighty converted Jews (Adler 2). Edward I seems to have believed that after the Expulsion, the necessity for the House (and its upkeep) would soon cease—hence an injunction that upon the death of each convert his or her annuity should lapse (Adler 4). The king proved to be mistaken: "The House continued to receive baptized Jews, almost without a break, to the days of James I, and, as late as the year 1717, an application was made for the payment of the royal pension to a converted Jew in London" (Adler 5). Where did these Jews come from?[4] Some, as the Rolls of the *Domus* specify, were the children of converts (Adler 7). Others arrived from overseas, from as close as France to as far away as Morocco (Roth, *History* 134). There is at least one instance of a foreign Jew seeking to cross the channel as a convert expressly because he had heard of the *Domus Conversorum:* Edward of Brussels was given the king's name at baptism after the Belgian Jew applied to join the London House, while King Edward was at Antwerp en route to his invasion of France. As Adler remarks, "The fame of the Domus must have spread very far for a Jew of Brussels to seek to participate in its benefits" (14).

The population of converted Jews outside of the *Domus Conversorum* is more difficult to ascertain, but it was certainly not zero. The Rolls of the House record instances in which an inmate left for some time to live in the world, as in the case of Claricia la Converse, daughter of Jacob Copin, who had been the wealthiest Jew of Exeter prior to the Expulsion. Claricia, who had initially dwelt in the House as a convert, returned to Exeter for about nineteen years—long enough to be married and bear several children, who joined her in the *Domus* when she

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sequence to the year 1609, thus covering nearly the whole of the obscure Middle Period of Anglo-Jewish history" (11).

[4] One tantalizing possibility is that there remained unconverted Jews living in medieval England, who subsequently converted. There was certainly a resettlement of small numbers of Jews in England in the wake of the Spanish and Portuguese expulsions of the late fifteenth century (Shapiro 68). It is difficult, however, to come to any conclusions about unconverted Jews who had remained in England in the interim. Shapiro remarks that "we will probably never know" (68).

ultimately returned (Adler 11). This anecdote points to a world not only outside of the *Domus* but outside of London in which Jewish converts evidently were able to conduct ordinary lives. Other converts "at large" can be traced by the surname that was often affixed to former Jews, "le Convers/la Converse," or "the Convert" (Fogle 110).[5] Several such converts served the king as soldiers, crossbowmen, and serjeants-at-arms, some rising to positions of prominence ("Jewish Converts"). This phenomenon is found both pre- and post-Expulsion. For example, as late as 1483 a Portuguese Jewish convert and "soldier of fortune," Edward Brandão (later Sir Edward Brampton), was knighted and received the governorship of the isle of Guernsey (Roth, *History* 134).

Given the solid and continuing presence of converted Jews in England in the post-Expulsion Middle Ages, we must ask why scholars of medieval drama have ignored this population. Is it because—due to its relatively small size, perhaps—it has been judged irrelevant? Or is it because of a perception that these converted Jews are, after all, not really Jews but Christians? This latter possibility gets to the heart of a matter explored by the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul:* what did it mean for a medieval Jew to become a Christian? I would suggest that these plays, far from reflecting Jewish absence, are shaped by the perplexing, semi-Jewish presence of Jewish converts to Christianity—by the persistent witness of an "other" who should have been assimilated by baptism but who, somehow, never fully was. The plays' multi-layered and complex portrayals of their Jewish Christian protagonists point to an interest in how these dual identities were experienced by the converts themselves.

[5] As Roth points out, "convers" could also designate a lay-brother (*History* 134). However, it is generally fairly easy to distinguish between the two, as lay-brothers were typically attached to monasteries.

The historical record gives some sense of the imperfect assimilation of medieval converts. It is no accident that the surname "le Convers" attached itself to former Jews like a burr—while seemingly allowed all the privileges of Christian society, these converts were always viewed with suspicion, their identities a palimpsest of ancestral Judaism and newly-adopted Christianity.[6] The story of Henry de Winchester, one of the most illustrious converts of the thirteenth century, is a powerful case in point. Henry, who served as agent provocateur in the coin-clipping crisis[7] under the third English king of that name, was knighted and given the post of notary at the Jewish exchequer. In the coin-clipping trials of the 1270s, he was initially appointed a justice. At this, however, there was an uproar, and the bishop complained:

> Scilicet quia indignum Deoque minime gratum judicabat, Christi fideles e Christianis natos parentibus homini a Judaismo ad Christum nuper converso subjacere, eorumdemque vitam & membrorum integritatem in potestate esse ejusmodi viri, cujus conversionem equitatemque forsitan suspecta habebat ex Judaica perfidia veterique gentis in Christianos odio. (*Acta Sanctorum* I:547-548)
>
> [It is] unworthy and not pleasing to God for the faithful of Christ and those born to Christian parents to be subject to a man recently converted from Judaism to Christ and for their lives and limbs to be in the power of such a man, whose conversion and fairness he [i.e. the Christian] perhaps held suspect, on account of Jewish perfidy and the ancient hatred of the Jewish people for Christians. (Stacey 278)

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[6] My analysis here largely echoes Fogle's: "[o]n the whole, [converts living in London] were more protected and less harassed than were the converts of other European countries, although they were still subject to the identity problems encountered by nearly all converts. The Christian laity viewed them with a cool apathy, the upper clergy with perhaps a veiled threat; and the Jews wanted to reclaim them or disassociate from them completely. Yet the kings of England provided for them, on some level, from 1232 until the *Domus Conversorum* finally closed in the early seventeenth century. Its existence seemed one of the only things to in any way legitimize this new identity, somewhere between Christianity and Judaism" (114).

[7] Henry was charged with seeking out and purchasing *argentum fusum*—silver melted down from coin clippings—and hence identifying likely coin-clippers ("Dernegate, Sir Henry de").

Henry was removed from the position. As Lauren Fogle remarks, "If a convert personally knighted by the king could not gain true acceptance, what were the chances for the majority of poor converts living without a special patron?" (112).[8]

The Jewish attitude toward apostates was not greatly different from the Christian, insofar as Christian Jews were still seen as fundamentally Jewish: "Jews who converted were thought of as sinning Jews, but Jews nonetheless; and although there were true converts who joined the Christian world and were completely lost to their former Jewish friends and family, there was also a tradition of welcoming, or indeed coercing, those who had converted back into the fold" (Fogle 108). This belief in the persistent Jewishness of converts is evinced by Michael Adler, writing as a Jewish Rabbi and scholar in the early twentieth century,[9] as he looks back on the history of the *Domus Conversorum*:

> The subsequent careers of Jews who have deserted the fold must always possess an absorbing interest for us. The fame of a Heine or a Beaconsfield—to mention only two of the present century—remains a valued possession of our people, however deeply we deplore the apostasy of these men, for we can never forget that the Jewish temperament remains the same throughout life, whatever religious label be attached to the individual. (1)

The identity of the medieval Jewish convert to Christianity necessarily bore with it the baggage of a former life—and the consciousness of a former community with which he or she had broken faith.

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[8] Shapiro notes that English Christians had a similar attitude toward English Jews in the Renaissance period: "[W]hile Jews who were admitted into the Church of England might share the same religion as the English, they did not necessarily belong to the same race or nation" (7).

[9] Rev. Adler's wide-ranging career (he was an army chaplain during the First World War and, in addition to his historical interests, wrote several books on Hebrew grammar) is difficult to encapsulate in a few words; for a more thorough account, see Barnett 191-194.

The medieval Anglo-Jewish convert must have experienced suffering, but a different kind of suffering from that borne by her Jewish kindred who remained within the fold. Permitted to remain on English shores, even granted an annuity on which to live (when the King remembered to pay it), she was nonetheless permanently severed from her people and forced to live on the margins of a society that would never fully accept her. In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul,* late-medieval English plays about the conversion of a Jew (or several Jews) to Christianity, this suffering is figured as physical pain: the severing of a hand, or the sudden loss of eyesight and mobility that leads Digby's Saul to believe his soldiers have deserted him. The relation of pain to conversion remains partially obscured in these plays, muted by cultural narratives about the villainy of Jews, deserved punishment, and the healing effects of Christianity. But pushing against these forces, the mysterious and painful experience of the plays' protagonists asserts itself as a counter-narrative that must be accounted for.

## *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*[10] was not the first instance of a medieval Host-desecration story, and it would not be the last. The tale of a Jew who gets his hands on a consecrated Host and abuses it, only to be confronted by an image of Christ, into whom the Host has miraculously changed, first emerged in France in the 1290s, though its constituent parts hark back to older tropes (Rubin 40).[11] These tropes—Rubin highlights, for instance, a popular tale in which a Jewish boy who has partaken of the Eucharist is thrust into an oven by his enraged father—crop up across Europe throughout the Middle Ages, immortalized in various artistic

[10] Generally dated to sometime not long after 1461 (the date mentioned in the play), though Davis notes that the manuscript (Trinity College, Dublin, F.4.20, catalogue no.652, ff.$33^{8r}$-$35^{6r}$) "must be half a century or so later" (lxxxv).

[11] Rubin notes that while "[t]he first complete telling of the accusation story is known to us from Paris... it could have occurred in any number of German towns, and indeed soon did" (40). See also Barns 213.

mediums, from narrative poems to illuminated Books of Hours to stained-glass windows (Rubin 7-39). The 1290 legend, however, seems to have had a particular appeal for the stage: dramas on the subject were composed in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain, as well as England.[12]

Even amidst these myriad variations, however, Croxton stands out. Its fundamental difference from its continental cousins, both in substance and tone, can be traced to the conversion of the persecuting Jew, Jonathas, at the end of the play. In continental versions of the story, desecration and conversion are kept strictly separate. The Jew who tortures the Host is burnt alive, or slaughtered in the pig-market; his family, which has not participated in his sacrilegious activities, converts to Christianity.[13] In some versions, the Host-torturing Jew begs for conversion; his request is denied. Croxton is different: as Stephen Spector puts it, "[i]n the Croxton play the conflation of traitor and believer does not contaminate, but rather saves" ("Time" 190).

The centrality of conversion to the Croxton play shapes its familiar materials into something new. The play's full title, *þe Play of þe Conversyon of Ser Jonathas þe Jewe by Myracle of þe Blyssed Sacrament,* points to the centrality of the conversion narrative of "Ser Jonathas."[14] How one is to interpret this new take on an old story, however, is far from clear. Miriamne Krummel argues that the play's conversions simply give "antisemitic roots... a new twist: there is a renewed desire to craft Jewish bodies in such a way that those (formerly) Jewish bodies fit perfectly into a Christian culture" (138). In this reading, Croxton's changes are of

[12] Rubin catalogues the extant plays from England, France, and Italy (169); Barns also notes evidence of the Dutch and Spanish plays (202-203).
[13] The Jew of the Italian play is burnt alive (Barns 202). The French *Mistere de la Sainte Hostie* features the particularly repugnant detail of the Jew's execution in "a public square normally reserved for the buying and selling of pigs" (Enders, "Dramatic Memories" 200).
[14] Miriamne Krummel makes essentially this point—that "the desire to convert the Jewish Other... [is] a key topic, as the full title *þe Play of þe Conversyon of Ser Jonathas þe Jewe by Myracle of þe Blyssed Sacrament* makes evident" (139).

detail but not of substance. The play still performs the age-old trick of dissolving Jews into a totalizing Christian worldview.

The problem with this interpretation is that Croxton's converted Jews do not "fit perfectly" into their new culture. Rather, the manuscript continues to refer to the Jews by their Jewish names[15] even after their conversion, a symbolic—even if perfectly pragmatic[16]—indication of an underlying and persistent Jewish identity. Perhaps more surprisingly, these converted Jews immediately declare that they will be on their way: "Now we take owr lea[v]e at lesse and mare— / Forward on owr vyage we wyll vs dresse" (968-969).[17] As Nisse points out, this abrupt retreat marks nothing less than a voluntary exile: "The Jews' diasporic movement," she writes, "begins anew" (122).[18] These Jews are, of course, merchants from "Surrey," and in this sense their departure is only logical, the closing of a narrative loop. Yet the very neatness of this conclusion indicates that, far from being absorbed into English, Christian society, the Jews have ended where they started—as aliens.

The most remarkable indication of an imperfect "colonization," however, is the string of tortures experienced by Jonathas prior to his conversion. This element is another innovation of Croxton's, and if it has failed to elicit surprise, that is probably because it contains much that is familiar to the genre: corporal punishment of a Jew, apparently intended to be both grotesque and humorous. Beneath the gory spectacle, however, lies an unsettling similarity—even an

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[15] Medieval Jewish converts to Christianity were given a new, "Christian" name at baptism. Fogle notes that "[t]his was the first step towards forging a new identity" (109).

[16] Pragmatic because it is helpful for an actor to have his character labelled consistently (as it is helpful to a reader). This same phenomenon of keeping a character's Jewish name occurs in the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul*—though here it is, if anything, more remarkable, as Saul (who is labelled "Saul" throughout) replies to the arresting officer's accusation—"whate, ys not thys saule that toke his vyage / In-to Ierusalem, the dyscyplys to oppresse?"—with, "yes, sertaynly, saule ys my proper name" (573-4, 580).

[17] This and all subsequent quotations are from Davis' edition.

[18] Nisse interprets this second exile in light of the play's own movement: "The diasporic resolution... in fact duplicates the Croxton Play's own 'traveling' theatricality, in which the players leave to play again elsewhere" (122).

identity—between Jonathas' experience and Christ's: both Host and Jew are "put... to a new painfull Passion" (934). This mirroring troubles any reading that would contain Jonathas' suffering within the paradigm of punishment—including Christ's admonishment within the play itself. If we read Jonathas' "crucifixion" as a constituent part of his conversion narrative, however, it takes on a new and as yet unexplored significance, figuring proleptically the pain of conversion that is otherwise masked by the Jews' unanimous decision to convert. There is a sense in which Jonathas' suffering might even be said to effect his conversion, although the mechanics of this change are deliberately made opaque through violence. The only illumination Croxton sheds on Jonathas' experience is a negative one—his Jewish kinship with Christ, a kinship as inaccessible to a Christian audience as the pain of crucifixion.

My reading of Croxton begins with a re-reading of Jonathas: I argue that the play reorients its materials, which frame the doubting Jew as a reprobate in the mold of the High Priests of the Passion story, by casting Jonathas as a merchant of precious stones, thus invoking Jesus' pearl parable. This parable was interpreted, in the patristic period and the Middle Ages, as referring to an adherent of the "old law" who seeks and finds Christ. Thus, Croxton marks Jonathas for conversion from his first appearance onstage. If the first part of the play makes room for Jonathas' conversion, however, the middle section represents this conversion in familiar, but strangely reworked, terms. Transitioning into a miniature Passion play, it thrusts Jonathas into the central role, not as torturer but as victim. Rather than marking a departure from the play's interest in conversion, this double crucifixion is the emotional center of that story, giving free reign to an exploration of the complex and painful experience of Jewish conversion to Christianity before returning, in the play's final section, to a semblance of untroubled Christian order. This order, however, fails to adequately address the turmoil that has come

before; as in post-Expulsion England, the spectacle of Jewish suffering lingers in the "contented" persons of Jewish converts to Christianity.[19]

## I

Croxton's interest in Jewish conversion to Christianity is not just different from other Host desecration stories; it contradicts them. As Spector points out, there was a well-established rule for portraying Jewish persecutors of Christ as "incapable of the faith and the transcendence of reasoned doubt that allow salvation"; thus, "for the Jews of the Passion plays, there could be only one end: the prison of their disbelief" ("Time" 190). One of the reasons the Jew of Host desecration stories cannot be converted is that he is a latter-day cousin of the reprobate Jews who, according to medieval theology, art, and drama, torture and crucify Christ.[20] Croxton, like its continental analogues, cultivates these echoes, explicitly framing the tortures enacted by Jonathas and his companions on the Host as a sort of miniature Passion-play: the first Vexillator announces that the Jews will "put hym [i.e. Christ] to a new passyoun" (38)[21] and the tortures that follow are strongly reminiscent of the sufferings attributed to Jesus by the Christian tradition. These resonances may have been particularly strong if, as many critics believe, this play originated in the same region as the N-Town cycle.[22]

Yet there are early signs that, if Croxton is headed toward a crucifixion, it is deliberately taking a roundabout route, introducing deviations from traditional symbolism that make it difficult to identify Jonathas with any of the Passion's main players. When Jonathas makes his

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[19] See *The Merchant of Venice,* scene 4.1.
[20] In the gospels the torture and crucifixion of Christ are carried out by Roman soldiers (with the exception of the official who slaps Jesus in John 18:22).
[21] For an analysis of Croxton's Passion-like tortures in relation to claims in the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* that players (i.e. actors) effectively "scornen God as diden the Jewis that bobbiden Crist," see Hill-Vásquez 77-101.
[22] Such as Gibson (32-33); Spector ("Time" 192); and Nisse (105).

offer for the Host, he skips over the Judas-price of thirty pieces of silver,[23] tendering instead twenty, then forty, and finally "an hundder pownd"—at which point the Christian, Aristorius, stops protesting and promises delivery of the merchandise on the morrow (315-321). This alteration of the biblical figure has raised several scholarly eyebrows. Beckwith argues that the haggling process subjects the "sacred body" to an unsettling "invasion":

> The point here is not so much the final price of the host but the fact that in the process of being bargained for it is exposed to a different financial and symbolic economy. Its price has been relativised by the market economy from which it has been supposedly immune in the priceless realm of the sacred. It is not just the horrific possibility that the host can be bought that is at stake here, but that it becomes subject to a different economy of representation. As a commodity, the host assumes the nasty fluidity entailed by its susceptibility to barter and exchange. ("Ritual" 69)

Yet Beckwith's analysis does not entirely account for the nature of this scene's innovations. The "sacred body" has always been liable to abuse as a "commodity"—that, after all, is precisely what happens when Judas sells Christ.[24] Moreover, the Host is not really taken out of the realm of the sacred by the merchants' bartering. If it were, it would be valued at the price of a morsel of bread. Instead, its value is raised to the astronomic figure of a hundred pounds, a figure that reflects some measure of belief that the Christians' "God, þat ys full mytheti," is contained in this "cake" (285).

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[23] See Matt. 26:15.

[24] On Judas' blood-money and its importance for medieval drama, see Parker 87-138. Parker notes that "[t]he scanty number of Judas' coins, as an especially *inadequate* representation of Christ's true worth, could illustrate his unfathomable value better than some closer approximation—say, 'infinite riches'—because their inadequacy invited radical supplementation in a way that grander comparisons did not. One could therefore affirm the sickening equation of the thirty silver pieces so as to shadow forth, in the appalling inappropriateness of the affirmation, Christ's overwhelming worth" (106).

What is remarkable about the play's revaluation of the Host at a hundred pounds, then, is not that it "commodifies" the Host, but that it muffles the already muted overtones of Judas in Aristorius' betrayal. While this makes Aristorius a slightly more palatable character (the unfortunate Christian woman of the *Sainte Hostie* receives far harsher treatment),[25] it also makes room for Jonathas to be more than a wicked High Priest. And in fact, Croxton's portrayal of Jonathas is, from the very start, unusually positive. His introductory speech, which clearly parallels Aristorius' opening monologue, begins with a humble invocation to God—albeit, not the Christian God but "almyghty Machomet" (149). In spite of this jarringly non-Christian (not to mention non-Jewish) element, Jonathas' first words cast him as a pious man:

> Now, almyghty Machomet, marke in þi magesté,
> Whose laws tendrely I have to fulfyll,
> After my dethe bryng me to thy hyhe see,
> My sowle for to save yff yt be thy wyll;
> For myn entente ys for to fulfyll,
> As my gloryus God the to honer,
> To do agen thy entente shuld grue me yll,
> Or agen thyn lawe for to reporte. (149-156)

The common, and inaccurate, use of "Machomet" as a god of the Jews reflects a dramatic and literary tradition that was widespread in the period,[26] but it is also noteworthy that, without this

[25] Named only "La Mauvaise Femme" ("The Wicked Woman"), she is raped, becomes pregnant, buries her unwanted child alive, and once her infanticide is discovered, is executed (Enders, "Dramatic Memories" 200-201).
[26] On the grouping together of Jews with "pagans and Saracens" in Middle English literature see Rex 21-23. Michael Mark Chemers similarly affirms that "it is not a rare practice in early modern drama to have Jews curse in the name of Mohammed; indeed Jews, Romans and other pagans, and Muslim characters in early European literature and drama habitually swear by a vibrant cornucopia of strange gods and demons with utter disregard to plausible chronology or actual religious doctrine" (27). Within the context of the *Play of the Sacrament,* however, Chemers reads Jonathas' invocation of "Machomet" as "evidence that, even in the official absence of actual Jews,

inaccurate designator—if, for instance, we substitute "God" for "Machomet"—Jonathas would be indistinguishable from Aristorius. The use of "Machomet" marks Jonathas as different, but the language with which he addresses his "God" suggests a crucial underlying similarity, thereby opening up the possibility of conversion.

If Jonathas is not the reprobate villain of a neo-Passion play, however, who is he? Spector makes a compelling argument for Longinus:

> Amazingly... in piercing the centre of the Host, inflicting the fifth wound on the wafer, Jonathas is also in the role of the soldier in John 19.34 who pierces the crucified Christ's side. Named Longinus by tradition, in the N-town cycle he is a knight who is healed of his blindness by the blood that runs from the wound, just as Jonathas will be cured of his blindness by the bleeding Host. ("Time" 190)

Again, however, this parallel can only be carried so far. For one thing, to claim that Jonathas is "cured" by the bleeding Host is to stretch the play's sequence of events to breaking point. Prior to having his hand restored, Jonathas endures a string of tortures in tandem with Christ, all of which add to his agony. More importantly, however, Longinus is Roman, and therefore pagan, not Jewish. As such he carries none of the baggage that Croxton has so diligently placed on Jonathas' shoulders, as an observant Jew who does not wish to be made "blynd" by the "conceyte" of the Host (203).

The most pertinent biblical parallel to Jonathas the Jewish merchant, in this first part of the play, is not to be found in the Passion story at all, but rather in one of Jesus' parables: "[T]he kingdom of heaven," Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew, "is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought

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distant sources of social tension could cause anti-Jewish feelings to erupt violently" (25). Given the otherwise positive tone of Jonathas' speech, I find this reading unconvincing.

it" (Matt. 13:45-46). Jonathas, unlike any of his continental counterparts, is a merchant, and his primary market is "precyous stonys" (20):

> I have dyamantys derewourthy to dresse,
>
> And emerawdys, ryche I trow they be,
>
> Onyx and achatys both more and lesse,
>
> Topazyouns, smaragdys of grete degré,
>
> Perlys precyous grete plenté... (165-169)

It is this last, "[p]erlys precyous," that hints particularly at Jonathas' interest in procuring another precious pearl—the Host.

In the Middle Ages, great pains were taken to ensure that the Host should have a pearl-like whiteness and roundness: "Ministri ecclesiae induti superpelliciis in loco honesto sedeant, quando oblatas faciunt. Instrumentum, in quo oblatae coquendae sunt, cera tantum liniatur, non oleo, vel alio sagimento; oblatae honestum candorem et decendem rotunditatem habentes, supra mensam altaris offerantur" ("Let the ministers of the Church, clad in surplices, sit in a proper place, when they make the hosts. The irons in which the hosts are to be baked should be lined with wax, not oil, or other grease; the hosts having a proper whiteness and a decent roundness should be offered upon the mensa of the altar"; "Consitutio Willielmi de Bleys"; Garrett 17). This visual resemblance, combined with the Host's spiritual preciousness, may have prompted Venantius Fortunatus to write the following verses for the tabernacle: "Quam bene juncta decent, sacrati ut corporis agni / Margaritum ingens aurea dona ferant" ("How well constructed ought those golden gifts to be / Which contain the great pearl of the sacred body of the lamb!"; *Operum* Par. I. Misc.—Lib. III, Caput XXV; Garrett 19). A similar thought seems to have struck the

*Pearl*-poet, whose poem of that name culminates in the wedding feast of the Lamb who, in the furnace of the poet's apocalyptic language, becomes fused with the image of the pearl.[27]

The visual and symbolic similarity of the Host to the precious pearl is not the only parallel between Croxton and Matthew 13:45-46. A prominent strain of interpretation of this passage—found in Hilary, Origen, and Jerome, and collected in Thomas Aquinas' *Catena Aurea*—connects the merchant with an adherent of the "old law":

> Bonae autem margaritae possunt intelligi lex et prophetae. Audi ergo, Marcion et Manichaee, quod bonae margaritae sunt lex et prophetae. Una ergo pretiosissima margarita est scientia salvatoris, et sacramentum passionis et resurrectionis illius; quod cum invenerit homo negotiator, similis Pauli apostoli, omnia legis prophetarumque mysteria, et observationes pristinas, in quibus inculpate vixerat, quasi purgamenta contemnit, ut Christum lucrifaciat; non quod inventio bonae margaritae condemnatio sit veterum margaritarum; sed quod comparatione eius omnis alia gemma sit vilior. (Jerome, qtd. in Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea* c. 13 l. 10)
>
> By the goodly pearls may be understood the Law and the Prophets. Hear then Marcion and Manichaeus;[28] the good pearls are the Law and the Prophets. One pearl, the most precious of all, is the knowledge of the Saviour and the sacrament of His passion and

[27] See ll.1093-end; particularly: "The Lombe byfore con proudly passe / Wyth hornes seven of red golde cler. / As praysed perles His wedes wasse. / Towarde the throne thay trone a tras. / Thagh thay wern fele, no pres in plyt, / Bot mylde as maydenes seme at mas / So drov thay foth with gret delyt" (1110-1116). Garrett holds a strong view of the relation between the pearl and the Host in *Pearl:* "I have an idea that the whole poem arose from gazing at the Elevated Host in the hands of the Priest" (36). Heather Phillips notes that Garrett's thesis was "quickly rejected, and has never been taken seriously," because "its simple one-to-one correspondence of pearl and eucharist overlooked both the more obvious meaning of the poem and the subtle complexity of its symbolism" (474). Phillips and others, however, have since picked up on the liturgical overtones of the poem (474; see also Stanbury's introduction to her edition, 15). Given the visual resemblance of the Host to a pearl (which, despite Garrett's detractors, he does a good job establishing), the poet's penchant for using the image of the pearl in as many visual and symbolic senses as possible, and the ending of the poem in what is essentially a Mass, I find it difficult to believe that the visual coincidence of pearl and Host is not implied.

[28] I am loath to add a comma to the translation of John Henry Newman, but it would clarify the sense: Jerome is rebuking Marcion and Manichaeus (i.e. Mani), who rejected the Jewish Scriptures.

> resurrection, which when the merchantman has found, like Paul the Apostle, he straightway despises all the mysteries of the Law and the Prophets and the old observances in which he had lived blameless, counting them as dung that he may win Christ. Not that the finding of a new pearl is the condemnation of the old pearls, but that in comparison of that, all other pearls are worthless. (Newman 513)[29]

By making Jonathas a merchant, Croxton literalizes both Jesus' parable and subsequent exegesis. Jonathas is a purveyor of precious gems who spends an inordinate amount of his earnings on a single "pearl," the Host; he is also a devoted follower of the Law and the Prophets who, half-intentionally, purchases "the knowledge of the Saviour and the sacrament of His passion and resurrection."[30]

The ghostly presence of Jesus' pearl parable in the early scenes of Croxton reorients the entire play, not only making room for Jonathas' conversion but placing it at the heart of its Host-desecration narrative. According to patristic and medieval exegesis, the pearl merchant is a Jew—one who, like Paul, is drawn to Christianity by his very zeal for the "old law." Thus, Jonathas' Jewish "fanaticism"—his devotion to "Machomet," his stern condemnation of Christian doctrine—marks him not as a reprobate but as a dogged seeker of truth who will, by the end of the play, be rewarded with the discovery of Christ.[31] What neither the pearl parable nor the play's opening prepares us for, however, is the unrelenting violence that will be

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[29] Likewise, Hilary: "Like the diligent pearl merchant who sought many pearls, Israel had taken great pains with the law, but it was all in vain." (qtd. in Luz 279). In a similar vein, but with a more positive spin, Origen: "But the multitude, not perceiving the beauty of the many pearls of the law, and all the knowledge, in part, though it be, of the prophets, suppose that they can, without a clear exposition and apprehension of these, find in whole the one precious pearl, and behold the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, in comparison with which all things that came before such and so great knowledge, although they were not refuse in their own nature, appear to be refuse. This refuse is perhaps the dung thrown down beside the fig tree by the keeper of the vineyard, which is the cause of its bearing fruit" (*Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew,* Book X; Patrick).

[30] Jonathas' first stanza includes two references to "lawe" or "lawes" (150, 156).

[31] In a related vein, Beckwith notes that "[m]any of the iconoclastic energies of the play derive from the thoroughness of [Jonathas'] doubt. Thus, in this play, profanation is part of a quest for belief, rather than an unmotivated act of desecration. It is part of a search for insight" ("Ritual" 73).

necessary for Jonathas' transformation—the spectacular physical and psychological suffering that he has unwittingly bought for himself. When Jonathas at last enters Croxton's Passion narrative, he will do so not only as Christ's purchaser, but as Christ.

## II

What is the price of a priceless pearl? In Jerome's paradigm, it is a simple exchange: law and prophets for Jesus Christ. In the parable itself, however, the terms are starker: the merchant must sell "everything he ha[s]." Although Jonathas pays Aristorius an unusually high price for the Host, he does not pay "everything." The subsequent section of the play, which in continental versions serves to illustrate the madness and villainy of the Jews, in Croxton shifts midway through to portray the real price of Jonathas' conversion. As Jonathas' hand is severed from his body to adhere to the body of Christ, Jonathas is separated from and set at odds with his fellow Jews, who—albeit unintentionally—torture him and Christ together. The loss of Jonathas' hand may appear to be a mere addition of gory color, or—as Christ interprets it—a natural consequence of Jonathas' "cruelnesse" (771). Read in context, however, Jonathas' bodily suffering is intertwined with Christ's in such a way that Jonathas becomes an unwilling icon of Christ—and Christ's Passion becomes an emblem of the suffering inherent in Jewish conversion to Christianity.

Jonathas' severed hand is another of Croxton's innovations, a potentially multivalent symbol which, however, the play seeks to contain through Christ's explanatory gloss:

> No, Jonathas, on thyn hand thow art but lame,
>
> And ys thorow thyn own cruelnesse.
>
> For thyn hurt þou mayest thiselfe blame,

Thow woldyst preve thy powre me to oppresse... (770-773)

This explanation seems logical enough: Jonathas' hurt comes about as a direct consequence of his desire to inflict harm upon the Host. Contemporary critics have expanded upon Christ's interpretation, finding parallels for the specific type of punishment suffered by Jonathas.[32] Spector argues that Jonathas' misfortune mirrors that of other "doubters" from the N-Town cycle, such as Salomee (from the Nativity) and Primus Princeps (from the Assumption) ("Time" 194, n. 13). Nisse finds a parallel in Jeroboam's withered hand in I Kings 13, arguing that this episode divides Jews "into true believers who follow Christ... and those who follow Antichrist/Jeroboam" (101-102). These interpretations differ in their reading of what Jonathas is being punished for—violence, doubt, or idolatry—but that Jonathas is being punished is taken for granted.

What such interpretations fail to note is that Jonathas' "punishment" most closely resembles nothing so much as the Passion of Christ:

JASON. Hold prestly on thys pleyn

And faste bynd hyme to a poste.

JASDON. Here is an hamer and naylys thre, I s[e]ye;

Lyffte vp hys armys, felawe, [o]n hey,

Whyll I dryue þes nayles, I yow praye,

With strong strokys fast.

MASPHAT. Now set on, felouse, with mayne and myght,

And pluke hys armes awey in fyght!

[32] A partial exception is Cameron Hunt McNabb's reading of Jonathas' dismemberment as simultaneously punitive and redemptive: "Jonathas' doubt...[is] punishable, with himself to blame, but also... deeply connected with the redeeming work of the cross, so much so that the two cannot be separated" (17). Many thanks to Cameron for letting me read her chapter prior to publication.

What yfe he twychhe, felovse, aryght! (506-514)

As Beckwith argues, this (apparently well-meaning) attack is no less than a crucifixion of Jonathas: "Thus both are crucified together: the Jew with Christ's body on his hands is irrevocably implicated in the act of crucifixion" ("Ritual" 75). This coincidence of bodies is far from accidental. If we consider the flimsy pretext behind the other Jews' nailing of Jonathas' hand to the post—why should such an action "remove the sticky host from his hand," as Beckwith puts it ("Ritual" 75)?—it is clear that Jonathas' experience is not only reminiscent of, but joined to Christ's. This remarkable convergence troubles all punitive interpretations of Jonathas' suffering, since the Christian tradition univocally affirms that Christ's blood was innocent, his execution unjust.

Yet Jonathas, prior to his dismemberment, is unquestionably an aggressor. How, then, are we to interpret the mingling of his blood with Christ's? To understand how Croxton might be conceiving of Jonathas' suffering, we must look to a different biblical parallel than Jeroboam's or Salomee's withered hands; rather, we must look to Malchus, the slave of the High Priest whose ear is cut off in the Garden of Gethsemane by one of the disciples (identified in John's Gospel as Peter)—and whose name, by no coincidence, is given to one of Croxton's five Jews.[33] Malchus' loss, like Jonathas', occurs in the midst of the Passion narrative. Malchus has arrived with the party that intends to arrest Jesus, when an overzealous disciple draws his sword and attacks, severing Malchus' ear. For all that Malchus might be presumed a persecutor, Jesus rebukes the disciple's violent act: "'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all

[33] These names, which have gone unremarked in criticism, are in fact remarkable: although Barns finds a parallel for Jonathas' name in an earlier, Belgian version of the legend, the other names are new to the Host Desecration tradition, and unusually inventive. Unlike the garden-variety monikers of the continental versions of the story—Jacob, Manuel—Croxton's Jews are Jonathas, Jason, Jasdon, Masphat, and Malchus. Of these, I have traced all but "Jasdon" to the works of Josephus—texts that were influential throughout the Middle Ages (Kletter 373). Though in some ways an unexpected source, Josephus provides a treasure-trove of "exotic"—that is, Hellenized—Jewish names, which would have been useful to a play claiming an international flavor.

who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?'" (Matt. 26:52-54). One of the implications of this rebuke is that Malchus' suffering is, in an important sense, accidental—Jesus neither orders nor approves the disciple's attack, and he indicates that such violent measures are expressly contrary to his (and his Father's) plans for the Passion.

This accident, however, like every stray detail of the Passion narrative, takes on shaping power, and elevates Malchus' suffering to the level of Christ's. By the late Middle Ages, Malchus' severed ear had become a common feature of the *arma Christi,* popular iconographic representations of the material elements of Christ's Passion, such as whips, pillar, and crown of thorns.[34] The collective meaning of the *arma Christi* was, as scholars have pointed out, polysemous. It also shifted over time, from representing the weapons *of* Christ to representing the victimized Christ as "Man of Sorrows" surrounded by the weapons used against him (Cooper 17).[35] In these later examples, the *arma* function at least partially as the "props" of the Passion story (Ryan 246), inviting the viewer to reflect on Christ's sufferings and their own sins, seen as contributing to that suffering (Cooper 17-18). Paralleling the Croxton *Play,* one common place for depicting the *arma Christi* in the later Middle Ages was the Mass of St. Gregory—the miraculous Mass during which the Host, according to legend, turned into the visual appearance of Christ to convince a doubting parishioner of his Real Presence.[36] In the images of St. Gregory's Mass that incorporate the *arma Christi*, as in Croxton, it is not only Christ but his whole Passion that becomes apparent in response to doubt.

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[34] Their popularity was partly guaranteed by generous indulgences attached to praying before an image of the *arma Christi* from the early fourteenth century on (Cooper 18).
[35] On the polysemic significance of the *arma* see also Ryan 247.
[36] See the appendix for two of these images.

The presence of blood that is not Christ's but that of a Jewish slave in these portraits is, notwithstanding the multivalent nature of the *arma Christi,* remarkable. A viewer could be forgiven for mistaking, however momentarily, Malchus' ear and blood for Christ's, and in those instances where only the sword of Peter is represented, its placement alongside whips and crown of thorns seems to suggest that this weapon was wielded against Christ. Whatever opposition existed between Malchus and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, that antagonism is effaced in the legacy of their common suffering. The same is true of Jonathas' dismemberment. Christ calls attention to their mutual mirroring with his first words upon rising from the oven: "*O mirabiles Judei, attendite et videte / Si est dolor sicut dolor meus"* (717-718). The answer to this rhetorical question presents itself, in the form of the maimed Jonathas, as a surprise "yes"—there is one whose sorrow is like Jesus' sorrow, whose experience is the very image of his.[37]

To what end does Croxton create this startling parallel? If Jonathas' dismemberment does not make sense as a punitive response to his actions in the first part of the play, it may shed light on what follows: his conversion to Christianity. While this conversion is represented as effortless and total—all five Jews convert instantly, and all five respond to Christ in ecclesiastical Latin, as though they had been rehearsing for this moment (741-761)—the shadow of an agonizing experience can be glimpsed between the lines. The key to this hidden suffering lies in another form of kinship between Jonathas and Jesus: their common Jewishness, and the severing from nation that both undergo at the moment of crucifixion.

Jesus points to this similarity in his rebuke to the five Jews: "Oh ye merveylows Jewys, / Why ar ye to yowr kyng onkynd...?" (719-720). While according to Christian theology Jesus' kingship extends to all peoples, his invocation of this title in rebuking the Jews has a more

[37] Similarly, Parker notes that "[t]he miracle of this 'dissemblant similitude' arguably extends to the suffering Jews themselves, Jonathas above all, who in torturing the host, tortures himself and thus also becomes in his way an image of Christ" (132).

pointed meaning. "Onkynd," while it can mean simply "unnatural" or "improper," here has the connotations of "[l]acking natural affection for or loyalty to one's offspring or kin, indifferent to ties of blood; also, hostile or violent in violation of a blood relationship" (*MED Online*). In the context of the crucifixion the Croxton Jews have re-enacted, Jesus' reference to his kingship also recalls the sign Pilate affixes to the cross in the gospels: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19). This title is meant to mock Jesus and the Jews together—to highlight the ridiculousness of Jesus' alleged claims to kingship, and to suggest that this man, beaten, bloody, and forsaken, is in fact a fitting monarch for the downtrodden Jews of the Roman Empire. Pilate's cruel joke thus binds Jesus and his ancestral people together at the very moment of their greatest division.

The purpose of Jesus' invocation of shared identity seems to be to make Jonathas and his henchmen feel particularly bad about what they have done, but it has the added effect of highlighting the link between Jesus and Jonathas, their kindred Jewishness. And this, in turn, reveals an aspect of Jesus'—and Jonathas'—suffering that is not as obvious as the play's abundant gore: the turning-away that is inherent in conversion from one religion to another. In the Gospel of John, the chief priests protest Pilate's joke, perceiving it to be at their, as well as Jesus', expense: "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews" (John 19:21). Between "King of the Jews" and "this man *claimed* to be king of the Jews" lies a terrible chasm, which would continue to separate Jews from Jewish Christians long after the initial disagreement between Jesus and the High Priests. To cross this chasm is inevitably to leave behind those who remain on the other side, as well as whatever part of one's Jewish identity cannot survive the crossing.

Croxton neatly sidesteps this uncomfortable fact by having all five Jews convert together. Just as Christ effortlessly heals Jonathas' hand, so the pain of conversion is drowned out by the Jews' euphoria at having found, at last, the True Faith. As was the case in post-Expulsion England, the stage at Croxton presents a kind of uniformity, only slightly troubled by the Jews' ongoing distinctiveness. Jonathas' severed hand, however, figures proleptically the suffering that is excised from the play's ending—and this suffering, like Christ's wounds and Malchus' ear, perpetually disembodied and bleeding, lingers.

### *The Digby Conversion of Saint Paul*

The convert's division from his Jewish community, excised from Croxton's pat denouement, is explored at length in another Middle English play, this one about Judaism's most famous convert to Christianity: Saul of Tarsus, known to posterity as Saint Paul. In the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul*,[38] Saul's separation from the Synagogue is made central to his story, a separation that is portrayed as painful for those who were once Saul's closest associates. The cause of strife between Saul and the Jews is not only Saul's conversion, however, but the inscrutability of his change, his unwillingness or inability to explain what happened on the road to Damascus. In this unresolved sense of alienation, which is replicated for the audience through the opaque spectacle of Saul's blindness and lameness, the particular, local narrative of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus encapsulates the much larger story of Christianity's division from Judaism—a division that is shown, in this late-medieval drama, to be persistently and painfully personal.

[38] Late fifteenth century (Furnivall believes 1480-90; Hill-Vasquez suggests a date of around 1500), with sixteenth century additions (the marginal notations "daunce" and the Belial-Mercury scene) (Furnivall xv; Hill-Vasquez 52).

That an exploration of the personal effects of Christianity's break from Judaism should attach to Saint Paul is fitting: he in some sense set the conditions for the alienation attendant upon Jewish conversion to Christianity, particularly in his insistence that Jewish law need no longer be followed.[39] Paul's position, which he defended against such eminent figures as Peter and James the Lord's Brother, was that Gentile converts to Christianity need not be circumcised, or indeed keep any part of Jewish ritual law.[40] Thus a religious movement that had begun within Judaism became incompatible with faithful Jewish practice. Jews who converted to Christianity were required not only to affirm their belief in a particular Messiah, but to reject as obsolete some of the most central tenets of Judaism.

Paul's beliefs about the law had long-term effects not only for the shape of Christianity—which has, since Paul's time, very much fulfilled his vision of a Gentile-inclusive Church, lacking the strictures of Jewish observance—but also for Christian attitudes toward those non-Christian Jews who continue Jewish ritual practices. As Boyarin observes, "[i]n his authentic passion to find a place for the gentiles in the Torah's scheme of things... Paul had (almost against his will) sown the seeds for a Christian discourse that would completely deprive Jewish ethnic, cultural specificity of any positive value and indeed turn it into a 'curse' in the eyes of gentile Christians" (229). Taken to one extreme, Paul's theology led even (and after no long interval) to heresy: Parker refers to Marcion as one of Paul's "staunchest allies" (212).[41]

The Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* dramatizes the division wrought by Paul's radical theology by embodying the perspectives of both sundered parties. On the one hand, Christian

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[39] See, e.g. Ruether 95-107; and Baron, *Social and Religious History*: "By this contrast between faith and law... Paul, perhaps unwittingly, laid the foundation for a final separation of Christianity from the Jewish people" (79).
[40] On the Jerusalem Conference, see Luedemann 35-38; on the incident at Antioch, 38-39. I discuss the circumcision controversy in the first chapter of this study, pp. 26-27. An exploration of Paul's views on the Law as such lies beyond the scope of this study. I use the term here to denote primarily the practices (particularly circumcision) that Paul singled out as obsolete in the new, Christian paradigm.
[41] Parker notes Tertullian's epithet for Paul: "apostle to the heretics" (*Adv. Marc.* 3.5.4; Parker 212).

scorn for Jewish practice is encoded in the play's characterization of Judaism, in Saul's casual appeal to "the god bellyall" (later fleshed out into an appearance by that particular devil) and his later repudiation of Jewish temples as "hedyous" (585),[42] as well as in the healing grace that accompanies Saul's baptism as a Christian. On the other, the Jewish perspective is expressed by Saul's knights and the High Priests who, in their sense of betrayal at Saul's defection, bring out a tragic undertone in what would otherwise be a comedy. These perspectives are necessarily incommensurate, and in presenting them both in the form of a paradoxical equation in which both terms cannot be right, but neither can be discarded, the *Conversion of Saint Paul* places a fundamental unknowability at the heart of its story. This unknowability is embodied in Saul's physical suffering, which not only makes the world dark to him but transforms him into an unreadable sign.

## I

Most critics have held that, far from being inscrutable, the Digby *Conversion* is unusually successful at rendering visible the invisible experience of conversion. Ann Hubert argues that "[t]o ease concerns about the legitimacy of his conversion, Paul's internal transition requires external representation" (9). Similarly, Chester Scoville contends that "the play explores the relationship between proofs as visual icons of authority and proofs as verbal structures of reason" (*Saints and the Audience* 85), and Sarah Salih claims that in this play, along with the Digby *Mary Magdalen,* "[a]fter conversion, the convert's own actions must bear witness, *dramatically,* to the effects of their conversion: an interior experience must be translated into exterior behaviour" (128). As Scoville's analysis suggests, critics have found these "proofs" or "external represenation[s]" in two places: "visual icons," such as Saul's change of costume, and "verbal

[42] This and all subsequent quotations from *The Conversion of Saint Paul* are from Furnivall's edition.

structures of reason," particularly Saul's sermon. Although Hubert, Scoville, and Salih place different emphases on these various forms of proof, all believe that these external signs function successfully as evidence of conversion.

These arguments involve certain presuppositions that bear examining. The first is that there is something in Saul's conversion that must be proven. Salih partially explains this necessity: "Conversion," she writes, "is an interior experience: the individual feels, hears, sees the presence of God, which is usually inaccessible to others" (128). This tells us that Saul's interior experience would not be automatically accessible to an audience, but it does not explain why it is imperative that it be made so. Scoville offers a possible response to this second question with his thesis that the *Conversion* is ultimately aimed at evoking a similar conversion experience in the audience. The play, he argues, "teaches, moves, and persuades an audience to follow the experience of Paul sympathetically, and encourages them to use the experience of that following to reconsider their own lives" (*Saints and the Audience* 85). This argument, however, depends upon the assumption that Saul's conversion from Jew to Christian can be mapped onto the Christian's continual need for conversion of heart—that there is nothing in Saul's experience that is necessarily unique, even necessarily alienating. This assumption is, I believe, mistaken, and has led critics to see transparency where there is opacity, symbol where there is cipher.

If the Digby play is, as critics suggest, concerned with making Saul's conversion accessible to an audience, it is going a step further than its primary source, the book of *Acts*. The biblical narrative, to which the Digby play adheres with remarkable closeness,[43] is full of lacunae that appear precisely at those moments in the story when clarification is most needed:

[43] The mechanics of the play's close adherence to Scripture are more ingenious than may initially appear, as Scoville has helpfully illuminated. *Acts* in fact contains three distinct and to some degree contradictory accounts of Saul's conversion, all of which are incorporated into the Digby play ("Bombshells" 201-208). Foakes Jackson and Lake suggest that "there is something to be said for the view that the account in Acts xxii. and xxvi. is nearer to Paul's

> As [Saul] neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
>
> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.
>
> "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."
>
> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9:3-9)

This is only the first stage of Saul's conversion; he is baptized after one Ananias, a Christian commissioned by Jesus for the task, heals Saul's blindness:

> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."
>
> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. (Acts 9:17-19).

This string of supernatural events is clearly meant to explain how Saul came to be convinced of the truth of Christianity. Yet the text is reluctant to give explanatory power to any part of its narrative, forbearing to use result clauses (e.g. ὥστε, "so that") in favor of the weak connectors καί and δέ ("and"/"but"); and without an interpretive guide, the text lies open to a multiplicity of interpretations.

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own story, and that in Acts ix. there has been some editing in accordance with other versions, which made Paul more dependent on those who were Christians before him" (vol 2, pp. 152-153).

For instance, does Saul convert because of his supernatural experience of Christ? In that case, is his blindness and Ananias' curing thereof unrelated to his conversion? Or does Saul's baptism after Ananias' intervention indicate that the curing of Saul's blindness is an essential ingredient in his change? If so, it is unclear why Saul's experience of blindness and subsequent sight should lead him to convert to Christianity—particularly if, as some scholars believe, Saul suffered from epilepsy (or problems with vision) throughout his life.[44] We might also ask why the soldiers who are with Saul hear, but do not see, whereas in Acts 22:9 Paul claims that the men saw, but did not hear.[45] Is the suggestion that Saul's experience is to some degree interior? But if this is the case, why should the soldiers see or hear anything at all?

A partial parallel for Saul's temporary disability exists in Luke 1 (by the same author as Acts [Conzelmann xxxii]), in the dumbness of Zechariah. Zechariah is approached by the angel Gabriel and told that his wife will bear a son. When Zechariah expresses skepticism, Gabriel informs him that he will be dumb until the birth of John: "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time" (Luke 1:19-20). Yet here, the structures of causation are clear: Zechariah is made dumb because he failed to believe Gabriel's words. Zechariah's speech is restored when he indicates that the child is to be called John, the name specified by Gabriel, thus demonstrating that he has come to believe the words of the angel; he immediately uses his voice to praise God (Luke 1:64). The story of Saul's conversion lacks these neat symmetries. Saul's blindness could be anything from a punishment for his former trespasses, to a sign meant to convince him of the need for baptism, to a simple side-effect of the

[44] See Best 118. The diagnosis of Paul as an epileptic has remained popular among interpreters skeptical of his religious experience: see, e.g. White.
[45] See Scoville, "Bombshells" 203-204.

"light from heaven."[46] This ambiguity makes it difficult to wrangle a coherent narrative from Saul's conversion—a difficulty with which *Acts* seems to struggle internally, as it reiterates Saul's story two more times, each time with contradictory information.[47]

Does the Digby *Conversion* suffer from the same ambiguities as the multiple, and inconclusive, accounts of *Acts?* Critics have argued that, on the contrary, the Digby play presents a coherent narrative of Saul's conversion, one Saul recounts himself in his post-conversion sermon on (most of) the Seven Deadly Sins. In this sermon, critics contend, Saul is finally able to identify the sinfulness of his former life: "Paul becomes an *exemplum* in his own sermon, explaining how, at the literal level, he was a proud man whom God humbled and transformed to be a benefactor of Christians" (Hubert 21). Scoville expands on Hubert's observation:

> Saul's sermon emphasizes two particular sins: pride and lust. Saul's pride, of course, was manifest to the audience from the moment of his initial appearance; his lust is suggested by his statement upon conversion, 'For my offencys, my body shal haue punycyon' (303). The lust that Saul seems to be primarily guilty of, however, is not sexual lust, but rather the kind of thinking that places law higher than grace... Saul's sermon thus makes the audience reflect not only upon the *ethos* of the man they see before them, but also upon the *ethos* of the man as he was before his conversion. (*Saints and the Audience* 100)

These explanations, which read Saul's sermon as a retrospective account of the sins from which he has been saved by conversion, fall in line with Salih's analysis of medieval conversion stories

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[46] Some scholars argue that *Acts* precludes a punitive interpretation of Saul's blindness: "The blinding is not a punishment, but indicates the helplessness of one formerly so powerful" (Conzelmann 72). Similarly, Cameron McNabb claims that "the Biblical narrative interpret[s]... [Saul's] blindness as a natural consequence of the light Saul experiences" ("Staging Disability in Medieval Drama" 4). While I agree that the Biblical narrative does not strongly suggest punishment, neither do I believe that it precludes that possibility.

[47] See footnote 43, above.

generally: "What happens in the scene of conversion is that the three [Margery, Mary Magdalen, and Saul] claim responsibility for the period before they became subjects, and (mis-)recognize themselves as having been agents all along. Identity is dependent upon the acceptance of guilt, because guilt guarantees agency" (125). Saul's story becomes coherent, in other words, once he identifies his trespass: "having... deliberately turned away from God" (125).

There is much in the play to support such a reading. Saul's speeches identify him as the classic prideful man, in the vein of Herod or, indeed, Aristorius:[48]

> Most dowtyd man, I am lyuyng vpon the ground,
> goodly besene with many a riche garlement.
> my pere on lyue I trow ys nott found,
> thorow the world, fro the oryent to the occydent,
> my fame ys best knowyn vndyr the fyrmament.
> I am most drad of pepull vniuersall,
> they dare not dyspease my most noble. (15-21)

This "vaunting speech" (Salih 125) contrasts sharply with Saul's confused, even pitiful, demeanor after his conversion:

> where I was blynyd and cowd nott see,
> lord, thou hast sent me my syght agayne.
> ffrom sobbyng and wepyng I can not refrayne;
> my pensyue hart, full of contryccion... (299-302)

[48] See Scoville's similar observation—he compares Saul to "Herod or Pharaoh... or Caesar in the Digby *Magdalene*" (*Saints and the Audience* 89). Parker suggests that this common trope (he mentions Lucifer, Pharaoh, and Herod) "occurs so often on the medieval stage... because medieval drama so often sets for itself the impossible task of making the God of monotheism, who has no peer by definition, 'apere' before an audience. The satanic vaunts of its villains... articulate the drama's own highest, most hubristic aspiration" (216).

Here, in his interactions with Ananias and his direct addresses to God, Saul demonstrates the "meekness that proves his conversion from his former pride" (Hubert 20) before explicitly identifying these elements in his sermon—strong evidence in favor of the argument that a shift from pride to humility is the throughline of Saul's experience.

The problem with this argument is that it occludes an essential feature of Saul's conversion: his sudden conviction that Jesus is the Christ, and his attendant departure from Judaism. It is not only scholars who are silent on this key aspect of Saul's story—the play itself seems to go out of its way to avoid discussing Saul's doctrinal opinions. Oddly, in the conversion scene, Saul is confronted not by "Jesus" or "Christ," but by "Deus." Scoville points out the strangeness of what seems to be a deliberate distinction between the person of the Trinity who speaks to Saul, and the person who speaks to Ananias:

> The appearance of God is curious in this play; it is possible that one actor only played God in both the appearances to Saul and to Ananias, and indeed the speech headings read 'Deus' in both scenes. It is true, however, that the stage directions refer to two different aspects of God: during Saul's conversion, it is 'Godhead [that] spekyth in heuyn' (s.d. 182), while a few minutes later it is 'Cryst [who] apperyth to Annanie' (s.d. 210). The difference seems unlikely to have been a mere slip of the pen, given the precise and not uncommonly understood differences between the two aspects of God. (*Saints and the Audience* 94)[49]

This "curious" variation is underscored by another change the play introduces to the biblical text, in God's address to Saul: "Instead of saying, 'Ego sum Iesus, quem tu persequeris (I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest [Acts 9:5]), the Digby playwright's God says, 'I am [th]i Savyour [th]at ys so trwe, / Whych made heuyn and erth and eche creature'" (Scoville, *Saints and the Audience*

[49] As an aside, Scoville's "aspects" should be "persons."

94-95). Yet again, explicit reference to Jesus has been removed from a scene in which it would seem crucial that he appear. It may be that the scene's staging further excised any hint of incarnation: Parker suggests that the specification "in hevyn" indicates "that the godhead as such does not show its face" (216).

Scoville interprets these changes as representing the Digby playwright's emphasis on "the majesty rather than the humanity of God" (*Saints and the Audience* 95). Yet surely the more pertinent observation is that this suppression of the "humanity" of God—that is, of Christ—puts Saul right where he started. The blustering Saul whom we first encounter is a devout follower of the God of the Jews—a deity who, as the play is quick to qualify, is so misunderstood by Jewish theology and practice as to amount to a devil ("bellyall" [29]). The distinction between the Christian God and the Jewish "Belial," however, is not made clear; and without this distinction, Saul's conversion might more accurately be described as an "intensification" (Parker 219).

In *Acts,* the fundamental difference between Saul's God and Paul's boils down to no more and no less than Christ. In the Digby *Conversion*, the Godhead's plaintive question—"why dost thou me pursue?" (183)—logically implicates Christ (via his body, the Church )[50] as the speaker, but in the vaguest terms possible, a vagueness that is preserved in the post-conversion scenes that follow. When Ananias greets Saul with "speke in crystys holy name!" (270), Saul conspicuously does *not* invoke the name of Christ, responding instead with, "cum in on goddes benyson!" (271). Throughout the entire, lengthy scene of Saul's interaction with Ananias, Saul addresses God as "Lord" five times, as "God" once, and as "Jesus" or "Christ" never. Other characters do not share this verbal tic, if such it is; Poeta proclaims in his epilogue to this scene

[50] "When the disciples are persecuted, the Lord himself is persecuted" (Conzelmann 71).

that "saule ys conuertyd, as ye se expres, / The very trw seruant of our lord Iesu" (346-347). But this is precisely what we have *not* seen "expres."

This studious and strange avoidance of direct contact between Saul and Jesus might seem to indicate that the Digby *Conversion* is simply not interested in the trans-religious aspect of Saul's conversion—his history-altering change from a Jew to a Christian. The play's structure, however, suggests otherwise. Unlike the narrative of Acts 9, the Digby play stages Saul's preaching and arrest in Jerusalem, rather than Damascus. This alteration returns to center stage the Jewish community Saul has left—not in the form of abstract and impersonal authority, but in the aggrieved persons of Saul's knights and the High Priests. As is true throughout the play, Saul's return to the temple fails to occasion any kind of doctrinal discussion; the focus is, instead, on interpersonal dynamics. Far from expressing indifference to Saul's departure from Judaism, however, this focus casts Saul's conversion in terms of the abandonment of one community in favor of another—a change with painful consequences for those Saul has, to their minds, betrayed.

## II

The Digby *Conversion*'s portrayal of a community torn apart by the defection of its star member is remarkable insofar as it invites audience identification not only with Saul, but with the High Priests, who are by all accounts the villains of the piece. The play's generous characterization of its antagonists begins prior to Saul's conversion, as the High Priests watch or

reflect on[51] Saul's departure to Damascus. This scene, superfluous to the plot, is crucial in establishing Annas and Caiaphas' naïve and wholehearted trust in Saul:

ANNA. We may lyue in rest by hys [Saul's] consolacion;
He defendyth vs, where-for we be bownde
To loue hym intyrely with our harttes affeccion,
And honour hym as champyon in euery stownde. (148-151)

Surprisingly, the villainous Annas does not use a tyrant's idiom, adopting instead a language of passivity and feeling: he expresses a need for defense and "consolacion," even—invoking overtones of medieval romance—for a "champion." Annas' mention of "love," unexpected in itself, is highlighted by a string of intensifiers: "To loue hym intyrely with our harttes affeccion." This brief glimpse into Annas' perspective radically recasts his role. In light of Saul's impending defection, Annas' childlike reliance on Saul registers as pathetic, and even potentially tragic.[52]

The tragic aspect of Caiaphas and Annas' experience comes to the fore as the play returns to Jerusalem, providing access to the High Priests' feeling of betrayal at Saul's conversion. Both Caiaphas and Annas invoke their respective "harts" in their response to the converted Saul, expressing astonishment that is mingled with hurt:

CAYPHA. Vn-to my hart thys ys gret admyracion,
That saule ys thus mervelously changyd;

[51] Depending on the performance. In my production, in which the "stations" were arranged in a circle, the High Priests could, from their place in Jerusalem, "see" Saul mounted on his horse, in tableau, while they reflected on his departure.

[52] It could be argued that dramatic irony is here meant to have a comic effect, similar to Belial and Mercury's dismay at Saul's defection from evil. Partly, the effect of this scene will depend on direction and acting. The differences, however, between the play's portrayal of Annas and Caiaphas on the one hand, and Belial and Mercury on the other (who at any rate are a later addition), are instructive. While Belial and Mercury profess a commitment to evil, and Belial speaks in a "proud" idiom akin to that of Herod and his ilk, Annas and Caiaphas are committed only to their own religion, which they clearly perceive as a good; and, as my analysis shows, their idiom has as much in common with victims as it does with persecutors.

I trow he ys bewytchyd by sum coniuracion,
or els the devyll on hym ys auengyd.
Alas, to my hart yt ys dessendyd,
that he ys thus takyn fro our relygyon:
How say ye, Anna, to thys conuercyon?

ANNA. ffull mervelously, as in my concepcion,
Thys wnderfull Case how yt be-fell;
To se thys chaunce so sodenly don,
vn-to my hart yt doth grete yll;
but for hys falsnes we shall hym spyll... (601-609)

Again using personal and even feminized language, Annas decries Saul's "falsnes"—a perspective that, given Saul's fervent anti-Christian rhetoric at the beginning of the play, is easy to understand. Saul *has* betrayed the High Priests, and although a Christian audience might approve of Saul's actions, the affective register of betrayal resounds across partisan lines.

Even more striking than the breach between Saul and the High Priests, however, is Saul's separation from the two knights who had formerly served as his right and left hand. The exchanges between Saul and his knights in the first part of the play are larded with expressions of devotion (from the knights) and gratitude (from Saul). Saul first addresses these characters as "knytys and seruantes trewe" (62), a description he seems to firmly believe. Saul's dependent attitude toward his knights is reminiscent of the High Priests' dependence on him: "Truly," Saul responds to the knights' lengthy vows of obedience,

to me yt ys grett consolacion
To here thys report that ye do avauns

ffor your sapyencyall wyttes I gyf commendacion,

Euer at my nede I haue founde yow constant. (78-81)

This constancy is put to a severe test when Saul finds himself suddenly blinded and lamed. His immediate, pessimistic assumption is that his knights have fled the scene: "[M]y men hath forsake me also" (201). However, Saul is mistaken, as the knights immediately reassure him: "Syr, we be here to help the in thi nede, / with all our affyance we wyll not seise" (204-205). In this promise they are as good as their word, leading the disabled Saul to Damascus.

Yet ultimately, the knights do desert Saul, reporting his defection to the High Priests—a report that results in Saul's arrest and imprisonment. This betrayal, by characters who had made so much of their loyalty to Saul, might seem to cast an ironic light on their former promises. Yet, from the knights' perspective—a perspective made accessible to the audience—it is Saul who has broken faith. As was the case for the High Priests, the knights' experience of Saul's betrayal begins with bewilderment. The difference is that the knights, unlike Annas and Caiaphas, were present on the road to Damascus:

J[us] MYLES. I maruayle gretly what yt doth mene,

To se owur master in thys hard stounde.

The wonder grett lythtys that were so shene,

smett him doune of his hors to the grownde,

And me thowt that I hard a sounde

Of won spekyng with voyce delectable,

Whych was to wonderfull myrable. (248-258)

The knights do not need to be told—as do Annas and Caiaphas—what happened to Saul. They were there with him, and they give a basically accurate narration of events to one another and to

the High Priests.[53] What they do not know is "what yt doth mene." This missing link, "meaning," is not unlike the causal lacunae in Acts. The knights know that Saul has been through a "ferefull" tempest (255) that included some "myrable" supernatural phenomena (254), but they do not know why this experience has turned Saul into a Christian; after all, it has not had the same effect on them.

Lacking a satisfactory explanation for Saul's sudden change, the knights interpret his conversion as a personal "greuauns": "But now, serys," concludes the second knight, "lettt vs relente / Agayne to caypha and anna, to tell this chaunce, / How yt be-fell to vs thys greuauns" (259-261). "To *vs*": just as Saul's conversion has (literally) be-fallen him, it has been inflicted on his companions in the form of an unlooked-for injury. This distance between Saul and his knights is in some ways more serious than his breach with the High Priests, because it is hard to see how it could be remedied. Although the rupture is caused by misunderstanding, this misunderstanding is not the result of a lack of information. The juxtaposition of Saul's conversion with the knights' sense of betrayal crystallizes the inherent difficulty—even impossibility—of communicating any interior state. So long as that state is shared (Jewish faith, or Christian faith) the other appears transparent, because his reasoning and motivations can be mapped onto one's own. When that state is changed, however, the other's fundamental and inaccessible otherness is revealed.

Although a Christian audience might have opposite starting assumptions from those of the knights—simplified, we might express the Christian perspective in terms of viewing Saul's journey as essentially comedic, the story of a blind man who sees the light—there is nonetheless an important sense in which the knights and the audience are aligned at the moment of Saul's conversion. Both knights and audience are "present" on the road to Damascus; both experience

[53] For the differences between their accounts, see Scoville, "Bombshells" 201-204.

the impressive stage-effects and hear the voice from heaven. But is an audience any better placed than Saul's knights to enter into his interior experience at the moment of change? Critics have argued that Saul's inner conversion is manifested in physical signs that the play provides for just this purpose. Yet these visible manifestations, if we look more closely, conceal rather than reveal.

Saul's conversion is synonymous with suffering. Artistic depictions of "The Conversion of Saint Paul" portray Saul as stricken, sometimes sprawled on the ground, sometimes mid-air as he tumbles from his horse, his arms thrown up to protect his eyes.[54] This suffering—a spectacular and sudden blinding, to which the Digby play adds lameness—*is* Saul's conversion, not only by way of metaphor (the casting down of a humble man) or metaphoric irony (in his blindness, Saul "sees" for the first time) but by way of historical explanation; and this last is much more difficult to account for. The Digby play hardly tries. When we encounter the post-conversion Saul in Damascus, contrite and Christian by resolution if not (yet) by baptism, the speech in which we might expect some form of elucidation contains instead a paradox:

> lord, of thi counfort moch I desyre,
> thou myȝty prince of Israell kyng of pyte,
> whyche me hast punyshyd as thi presoner,
> That nother ete nor dranke thys dayes thre;
> But, gracyos lorde, of thi vysytacyon I thank the.
> Thy seruant shall I be as long as I haue breth,
> Thowgh I therfor shuld suffer dethe. (262-268)

[54] Caravaggio's depiction of this scene, on the cover page to this chapter, follows a medieval tradition of portraying Saul as falling or fallen from his horse.

The turn in this enigmatic speech—the "but" that transforms an expression of suffering into a vow of obedience to the one who has, by all accounts, caused this suffering—is unexplained. Saul's acknowledgment of Christ as "myȝty prince of Israell" coincides with his distress over his blindness, lameness, thirst and hunger, but he never presses these twinned phenomena beyond coincidence.

It may be, in fact, that Saul himself does not understand his inner transformation. While he evinces a preternatural calm in the second half of the play, accepting arrest, imprisonment, and a death sentence with Stoic complacency, this calm belies the anguish and bewilderment of the moment of conversion:

> O mercyfull god, what aylyth me?
> I am lame, my legges be take me fro,
> my sygth lykwyse I may nott see;
> I can nott tell whether to goo;
> my men hath forsake me also.
> whether shall I wynde, or whether shall I pas?
> lord, I beseche the, helpe me of thy grace. (197-203)

Saul's evident lack of knowledge concerning cause-and-effect—why has he suddenly gone blind and become lame?—echoes the indeterminacy of Acts, and anticipates the incomprehension of his knights and the High Priests. But Saul's experience of alienation from himself is, if anything, more acute. The world has become a terrifying blackness of which he knows nothing ("what aylyth me?" "I can nott tell..."), and what he does know is mistaken: "[M]y men hath forsake me also."

The effect of this inscrutability is precisely the opposite of what Scoville, Hubert, and Salih have argued for *The Conversion of Saint Paul.* Saul's blindness and lameness do not function as "proofs as visual icons"; they do not translate "an interior experience... into exterior behaviour." Rather, they confound, removing Saul from the ken of his fellow characters and the audience, and even from himself. The visibility of Saul's spectacular suffering points not to easy symbolism—*x* equals *y*—but to distance and lack, to an equation that cannot be completed because its second term is not known. In this, the play's treatment of Saul's physical ailments is akin to Saint Paul's description of his "thorn in the flesh":

> Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor. 12:7-9)

Biblical scholars have forwarded an abundance of suggestions as to what this mysterious ailment might be—from epilepsy, to blindness, to a spiritual complaint of some sort, such as persistent temptation to unbelief.[55] But regardless of what lies behind Paul's metaphorical language, it is curious that he uses metaphorical language at all. He cloaks his suffering, whether physical, psychological, or both, such that it is simultaneously visible and invisible.

The Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* cloaks the pain of Saul's conversion in pain itself—that is, in the dramatic representation of suffering. While the spectacle of Saul's blindness and lameness is accessible to "[a]l men that walkis by waye or strete" (York "Crucifixion" 253), "what yt doth mene" is known, perhaps, to God alone. The distance that this inaccessibility

[55] Best presents a concise summary of the various theses that have been forwarded (118). Many biblical scholars refrain altogether from attempting to diagnose Paul: "Various conjectures have often been attempted, but none are adequately convincing; the sparing intimations of Paul himself warn us to be cautious" (Deissmann 60). See also Meeks 64. For Paul's epilepsy, see n.44, above.

creates between Saul and an audience does not, however, render his suffering less relevant. Rather, it recreates for each spectator the terrible alienation attendant upon Christianity's division from Judaism. For medieval Christians this division had become, perhaps, too comfortable. Medieval drama disrupts this comfort, giving its audiences an unlikely grace: the chance to share in Jewish suffering—though always at a distance.

# APPENDIX: THE MASS OF ST. GREGORY WITH THE *ARMA CHRISTI*

Jean Poyer
*Mass of St. Gregory*
Hours of Henry VIII, in Latin
France, Tours
ca. 1500
256 x 180 mm
The Dannie and Hettie Heineman Collection; deposited in 1962, given in 1977
MS H.8 (fol. 168)
The Morgan Library and Museum
www.themorgan.org/collection/hours-of-henry-viii/32#overlay-context=collection/hours-of-henry-viii/32

The sword of Peter (which cut off Malchus' ear) is represented to the left of the cross.


*The Mass of St. Gregory*, 1539, feathers on wood with touches of paint, 26-1/4 x 22 inches / 68 x 56 cm (Musee des Jacobins)
www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-americas/new-spain/viceroyalty-new-spain/a/featherworks-the-mass-of-st-gregory

Peter's sword, with Malchus' bleeding ear, is located in the top left quadrant of the image.

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