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The Stereotypical Representation of the Jewish Figure in Some Late Medieval English Texts

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Fréquentes sont les références dans la production littéraire christocentrée en Occident médiéval au sentiment profondément anti-chrétien prêté aux Juifs. En Angleterre, le Conte de la Prieure de Chaucer rédigé à la fin du XIV^e siècle puise dans une rhétorique antijudaïque usant de stéréotypes et formules hérités d'une longue tradition d'incrimination du peuple déicide de Judas, le traître qui a provoqué les souffrances du Christ. Y compris après leur éviction du pays ordonnée par Edward I^{er} en 1290, les Juifs d'Angleterre continuent d'inspirer cet « enseignement du mépris » qui nourrit l'imaginaire collectif de la population majoritaire, en même temps qu'il contamine le discours sermonnaire, hagiographique, ou encore le genre dramatique des mystères. La labilité des frontières génériques de nombreux textes, en l'occurrence de la période tardo-médiévale, concerne également, à moins qu'elle ne favorise peut-être, la circulation de phrases, expressions, désignations réduisant le Juif à un contempteur de la doctrine chrétienne, dont il profane des rituels ou des symboles, comme le corps du Christ figuré dans l'hostie eucharistique. Ainsi que le suggèrent les références citées dans l'article, il est difficile de démêler la réalité du fantasme à une époque où l'instruction des laïcs et le modèle de l'*imitatio christi* prôné par l'Église laissent peu ou prou entendre la voix des impies, pour ne pas dire des hérétiques.

Introduction

Judaism implies closely poring over and ruminating some crucial texts, unceasingly delved into, interpreted in a new light, and commented upon. This ancient practice has been handed down from father to son for generations. One illustration of the transmission of the judaic tradition is the account of the liberation of Hebrews from Egypt on Pesah, the festival of freedom marking the Exodus. On the first night of Passover, Jews have to eat some food items in a specific order, as the word *seder* indicates, while reciting the Haggadah, or story, that commemorates the release of their ancestors from bondage.¹ The saying of these words requires the use of repeated formulas during the ritual. As they recall by retelling the early history of their people, Jews not only mouth but also re-enact the formulaic style of the Seder service that prompts the use of rhymes and mnemonic devices to guide the celebrants through the performance.

¹ N. GLATZER, ed., *The Passover Haggadah*, with English translation, introduction, explanations and illustrations. Based on the Haggadah studies by E.D. Goldschmidt, New York, Schocken Books, (1953) 1969, p. 5-6. The meaning of this festival can be summarised in the tenet which says that in every generation each man should look on himself as if he came forth out of Egypt. "The custom of telling the story of the deliverance from Egypt goes back to the scriptural command: 'And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying : It is because of that which the Lord did to me when I came forth out of Egypt' (Exod. 13 :8)". This hortatory formula purports to make the Exodus from serfdom into freedom a living personal experience transmitted through words and the eating of symbolic food that unites the members of a community in the telling of an old but renewed story.

The Jews of medieval England were subjected to pejorative formulaic designation through the use of ready-made language, set forms of words applied disparagingly in definite and systematic statements.² They were the target of stereotypical representation in literature and the visual arts. As a notion, the stereotype pertains to intellectual, social, and identity-related constructs propped up by salient traits, fixed images ingrained in individual and collective conscience, efficiently conveyed in oral and written forms³. Now, these forms, on which the cliché feeds, are recurrent expressions that trap and entrench the literary translation of the Other, the Jew for that matter. Such forms rely on the use of formulas. Michel Morel points out « [...] la propension de la formule à simplifier le donné de réalité de façon réductrice et quasiment binaire, ceci concernant aussi bien les thèmes qu'elle traite que les formes qu'elle affecte. Dans sa dimension à proprement linguistique, la formule repose fréquemment sur des processus d'écho, de symétrie et d'opposition. »⁴ The examples of anti-judaic stereotypes picked out in the Middle English texts under scrutiny in this article reveal how potently instrumental formulaic designation is when it comes to portraying the Jew.

Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy employ the disease metaphor for the antisemitism that still contaminated England's population after the eviction of the Jewish *communitas*⁵ in 1290.

² J.A. SIMPSON and E.S.C. WEINER, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Oxford, Clarendon Press, (1980) 1991, Vol.VI, p. 89-90. Definition of *formula*.

³ M. GRANDIÈRE, « Introduction. La notion de stéréotype », in *Le stéréotype : outil de régulations sociales* [en ligne.] Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004, p.7-12 (version imprimée). <http://books.openedition.org/pur/20998>

⁴ M. MOREL, « Préambule : Regards sur la formule », in Colette Stévanovitch, Élise Louviot, Philippe Mahoux-Pauzin et Dominique Hascoët (dir.), *La formule dans la littérature et la civilisation de l'Angleterre médiévale*, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2011, p.11.

⁵ R. MUNDILL, "England: The Island's Jews and Their Economic Pursuits", in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries)*, Cluse, Christoph, ed., Turnhout, Brepols, 2002, p. 221. Quoting Louis Rabinowitz, *Herem Hayishub* (1945), p. 61, the author in his introduction observes that the Anglo-Jewish community was actually 'a branch of northern French Jewry with few distinctive or separate characteristics.'" The use of the term *communitas* seems to be justified in Mundill's article by the fact that "Anglo-Jewry was a society within the society", as he points out at p. 222. The notion of *communitas* was clarified by Victor Turner, as reminded by Nicolas Journet, « Les rites de passage », in *Sciences Humaines* « Pouvoirs, sociétés, rôles. Les hommes en question », N° 112 Janvier 2001. At the beginning of the paragraph entitled « *Communitas* versus structure », Journet summarizes Turner's concept as follows: « une *communitas* est une communauté homogène, égalitaire et fondée sur des liens interpersonnels, qu'on peut opposer au caractère structuré, différencié et inégalitaire de la société en temps ordinaires. » https://www.scienceshumaines.com/les-rites-de-passage_fr_1079.html

In the third chapter of *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York, Aldine de Gruyter, 1995, entitled "Liminality and *communitas*. Forms and attributes of rites of passage", p.96, Victor Turner explains he prefers "the Latin term '*communitas*' to 'community', to distinguish this modality of social relationship 'from an area of common living.' The distinction between structure and *communitas* is not simply the familiar one between 'secular' and 'sacred', or that, for example, between politics and religion." http://www.iupui.edu/~womrel/Rel433%20Readings/SearchableTextFiles/Turner_RitualProcess_chaps3&5.pdf

They describe a contagious collective emotion that functioned as an outlet for Christian anxieties at a time of political unrest and economic mutation.⁶ Among the texts examined in this article are examples drawn from medieval drama, essentially religious thereby designed to trigger compassion and indignation at the sight of Christ's body tormented following the accusations levelled by the disbelieving Jews. In late medieval England, alongside drama, sermons and narrative poetry otherised the Jewish figure, making it the embodiment of a suspect doctrinal difference.

The Anglo-Jew, a useful “traytoure” and a “wikkid man”

A thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalist⁷ recommended that Jews avoid conceiving of an abstract object always in the same terms lest thought should become sterile, stunted. To some extent, this view fits the Christian perception of judaism. Medieval Jews were generally apprehended in a perspective that resisted change and invited formulaic description. Antijudaic formulas in Middle English literary productions infused Christian thinking with stereotypes. In a late fifteenth-century dominical sermon, the preacher borrows the motif of felonious Judas from the isotopy of Christ's treacherous enemies among his own people: “[...] anone after mydnyghte Iudas gaderyd xl knyghtis, strong and bolde, with a grete company of Iewis and cam to take Criste”.⁸ Then, he spells out the symbol of darkness referring again to Judas' falsehood: “the whyche derkenesse makythe mynde how Iudas betrayed Criste, and how the Iewys cam with force of armys as prevely as thei cowde, for drede of the pepyll.”⁹ Here the adverb “prevely” emphasises the Jews' deceitful and envious nature in the way they proceeded. In medieval England the doctrine of the Church was the extension of a long-standing attitude with regard to judaism, and theological opprobrium went hand in hand with antisemitism. Unsurprisingly, stereotypical thinking confined the Jew to a

⁶ D. BOQUET et P. NAGY, *Sensible Moyen-Âge. Une histoire des émotions dans l'Occident médiéval*, Paris: Seuil, 2015, p. 328-329.

⁷ E. WOLSON, *Abraham Aboulafia, cabaliste et prophète. Herméneutique, théosophie, et théurgie*, Éditions de l'Éclat, 1999, Collection « bibliothèque des sources hébraïques », traduit de l'anglais par Jean-François Sené. In his introduction the author spells out the specificity of the cabbalistic method that characterised rabbi Abraham ben Samuel Aboulafia (1240-1291). Aboulafia wrote a treaty in 1276 which laid the foundation of ecstatic Kabbalah. Aboulafia's goal, he points out, was: “repousser constamment les limites de la compréhension rationnelle”, “accepter une logique défiant la logique qui s'exprime par l'affirmation concomitante des contraires”, unlike Maimonid. “Il n'y a jamais de stase dans sa réflexion, dans la mesure où toute chose peut devenir son contraire. Chaque pensée est ainsi une étape sur une route qui nous emporte toujours plus loin après un répit temporaire.” <http://www.lyber-eclat.net/lyber/wolson/wolson.html>

⁸ S. MORRISON, ed., *A Late Fifteenth-Century Dominical Sermon Cycle*, Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, Oxford, 2012, Vol.1, Sermon 25, *De Questionibus Tenebre*, lines 11-12.

⁹ S. MORRISON, ed., *A Late Fifteenth-Century Dominical Sermon Cycle*, 1, 25, lines 24-25.

purely economic function¹⁰ — the first Jewish presence of some economic weight in England dates back to the Norman Conquest. Interestingly, Pam Manix’s article echoes Robin Mundill’s on the subject of the first traces of Jewish presence “on an island at the edge of the known world”¹¹, as the latter describes medieval England:

The medieval English jewries sprang from the Jewish communities of Northern France, known in contemporary rabbinical literature as *Zarfat*. Modern usage of this term encompasses all of France, but the term then referred to a very specific subgroup of Ashkenazic Jews, concentrated west of the *Shum* Rhineland communities, across Champagne, Île de France, Picardy and Normandy. Brought to England by William the Conqueror to serve as credit factors in his new kingdom, it is not known precisely when these Jews arrived in London, or in any of the provincial towns.¹²

Held responsible for murdering Christ, Jews aroused animosity which could take the form of violent punitive action such as collective manslaughter, burning, or hanging. Contempt for the people of the Old Law, “l’enseignement du mépris”, to quote Jules Isaac’s formula,¹³ was a preeminent feature of the ecclesial institution. Disregard of the Jewish customs and rabbinical rulings derived from the theology of substitution, the manner in which the Church from the start attempted to define its role, finds its place beside a religion that preexisted it. The destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in year 70 AD was interpreted as a disqualification of Jews, whilst Pauline hermeneutics foregrounded Christian godliness and enlightenment (Romans 8 :9).

This theological contention grew out of the belief that God had established a new covenant with Christians. The interpretation of the precedence of Judaism as proof of its outdated thereby erroneous character placed medieval Jews in the position of heretics.¹⁴ Etymologically, *heresy* means *choice*.¹⁵ Now, a choice can consist of a divergent stance. In the Good Friday Sermon of *A Late Fifteenth Dominican Sermon Cycle*, the priest observes

¹⁰ For instance, in the thirteenth century banker Aaron of Lincoln largely financed the building of the local cathedral as well as abbeys and episcopal palaces in other cities. However as soon as Jews were deemed no longer profitable for the Crown, Edward I ordered them out of England. Along with the majority of the English population, at least as was reflected in contemporary writings, the king and his court failed to take into account the close socio-economic interaction between Jews and Gentiles. See K. LAVEZZO, *The Accommodated Jew: English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2016, 22.

¹¹ R. MUNDILL, “England: The Island’s Jews and Their Economic Pursuits”, p. 221.

¹² P. MANIX, “Oxford: Mapping the Medieval Jewry”, in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries)*, Cluse, Christoph, ed., Turnhout, Brepols, 2002, p. 406.

¹³ J. ISAAC, *L’Enseignement du mépris. Suivi de L’Antisémitisme a-t-il des racines chrétiennes ?*, Paris, Grasset, 2004 (rééditions de 1962 et 1960).

¹⁴ R. MILLS, “Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief”, in Sarah Salih, ed., *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2006, p. 95-97.

¹⁵ J.A. SIMPSON and E.S.C. WEINER, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol.VII, p. 164.

that the Jews scorned Christ thrice on the day of Passion with emphasis laid on aggressive irreverence. And yet, the holy Church is magnanimous enough to pray for all its enemies: “For the Iewys were on this day thries skornyng Criste knelyng. Then, in these orisons, holy chyrche prayethe for all maner of pepyll: for Iewis, for Sarresyns, for eritykis, for sysmatykis, but no cursyd man.”¹⁶ The old alliance with the chosen people was revoked because Jews were deicidal unbelievers.¹⁷ In *The Harrowing of Hell*, Jesus warns those who will not acknowledge his “Lawe” that he will “juge thame worse thanne any Jewe.”¹⁸ The spokesman for the Old Testament Jews, Adam hails Jesus as the almighty Lord: “Here have we levyd withouten light / Four thousand and vi c yere ; / Now se I be this solempne sight / Howe Thy mercy hath made us clene.”¹⁹

Persistent judaism antagonized, if not defied, the Christian claim of supremacy that Patristic literature had striven to validate. Still, abhorrence of the Jews palpable in the degrading measures taken against them was somewhat counterbalanced by the consciousness of the utility of judaism as foil to Christianity. Medieval England faced an embarrassing theological paradox (which drew on Pauline supersession): how to account for the existence of some members of God’s former people²⁰ in a land where they did not acknowledge the dominant religion?²¹ The biblical predecessors of Christians came to be branded as despicable others, enemies of God, idolatrous *iudei*, even profaners. It seemed to follow some “othering programme”²² *avant la lettre* foreshadowing their expulsion. In a *Miracle of Our Lady Abraham*, a Jewish money-lender, requires an image of the Virgin as security from his debtor,

¹⁶ S. MORRISON, ed., *A Late Fifteenth-Century Dominical Sermon Cycle*, Vol.1, Sermon 27, p. 63-66.

¹⁷ M-A. OUAKNIN, *Talmudiques*, “De l’enseignement du mépris à l’enseignement de l’estime”, 01-04-2018, France Culture: <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/talmudiques/talmudiques-du-dimanche-01-avril-2018> . The Jews as deicides was a formula already in usage at the time of the ecumenical Council of Nicea of 325 C.E. In N. GLATZER, ed., *The Passover Haggadah*, xiv, Solomon Zeitlin in “Jesus and the Last Supper” writes: “At the Council of Nicea, 325, C.E., the Christians were prohibited from celebrating pascha at the time the Jews were celebrating Passover. The Emperor Constantine, who presided over the Council, said: ‘Let us have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd’.” Besides, saint Augustine considered that the Jewish diaspora was instrumental in promoting the superiority of Christianity because he presented Jews as the necessary witnesses of its triumph. The Old Testament, which the Jews carried around the world wherever they travelled, embodied material evidence of the advent of a New Law revolving around the concept of mankind’s redemption through the sacrifice of Christ replacing that of liberation from bondage.

¹⁸ G. WALKER, ed., *Medieval Drama. An Anthology*, York (The Saddlers) *The Harrowing of Hell*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, (2000) 2008, 148, lines 313-314, 320.

¹⁹ G. WALKER, ed., *The Harrowing of Hell*, lines 354-357.

²⁰ R. ALTER and F. KERMODE, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (1987) 2002, p. 669.

²¹ Augustine saw in the dispersal worldwide of the remnants of the older faith evidence of its paving the way for the fulfilling of the prophecies regarding the Redeemer. The Greek Old Testament indeed translated the Hebrew *Messiah* as *Christos*.

²² K. LAVEZZO, *The Accommodated Jew: English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2016, p. 17.

a pious Christian merchant. “Therefore go we in to your chirche, / Ther is an ymage of hire iliche, / A-rayed wel with iuweles riche: / Tac thou hire me ther bi the hond ! / Of the kep i non othur bond”.²³ Later, Abraham hides his due sent by the honest borrower, and claims he was never repaid. Miraculously the statue of Our Lady speaks to confound the Jew, whose villainous trick shames his community. The story ends on his conversion in face of the evidence of divine Grace: “ The Iewh vox a-schomed tho / And graunted wel that hit was so. / Alle that leued on his lay / A-schomed weren that ilke day. / Ther he hedde saumple bi good dome / Cristene mon forte bi-come-.”²⁴

Politically deprived of a voice, medieval Anglo-Jews were ex-centered, denied a decisive role in society, yet were allowed to live among Christians as long as they were in the service of rulers, to whom they lent money.²⁵ They were accommodated ; their presence was tolerated on condition that they adapted to the majority’s interests and welfare, and kept to the limited professional scope authorised for their kind until Edward I ordered them to leave by November 1, 1290. Manix specifies that in July of that year “the Order of Expulsion gave Jews until November to take with them their possessions, money and pledges (pawns), but all bonds and real estate escheated to the King.”²⁶ Jews were considered wanderers, associated with travelling for business purposes especially. Still, they were represented in a variety of trades since they could be pawnbrokers, artisans, “physicians, goldsmiths, soldiers, vintners, even fishmongers or cheesemongers”.²⁷ In the fifteenth-century East-Anglian *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, also known as *The Conversyon of Ser Jonathas the Jewe by Myracle of the Blyssyd Sacrament*, the characterization of Jonathas, a Jewish merchant, begins with a lengthy catalogue of the astounding diversity of exotic luxurious goods that he buys and sells. John

²³ C. HORSTMANN and F. FURNIVALL, eds., *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Ms... (with a few from the Digby mss. 2 and 86)*, VI. *Hou a iew lente a cristenemon moneye, and took vre lady to borow*, Paul K., Trench, Trübner & Co., London, for the EETS, 1892-1901, Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan Library. Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse, 158, lines 41-46. <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/APE7335.0001.001>

²⁴ C. HORSTMANN and F. FURNIVALL, eds., VI. *Hou a iew lente a cristenemon moneye, and took vre lady to borow*, 161, lines 159-164.

²⁵ Traces of a preoccupation with the deleterious influence of capital corrupting human relationships and moral principles underlie the debate-poem *Winnere and Wastoure*. See W. GINSBERG, ed. *Wynnere and Wastoure and the Parlement of the Thre Ages*, TEAMS, Middle English Texts Series, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1992. Indeed religion and economy interpenetrated in the medieval western world. Though *Winnere and Wastoure* was written after the expulsion, it is likely that the allegorical character of *Winnere (Thesaurus)* was inspired by the stereotype of the mercenary Jew compulsively hoarding material wealth, the exact antithesis of the figurative wealth of God’s grace and promise of salvation, the one true good humankind should aspire to. See A. BLANDEAU, “*Wynnere and Wastoure* ou comment brouiller la transparence du sens dans la représentation allégorique de la thésaurisation et de la prodigalité”, in *Transparences médiévales*. Textes réunis par Martine Yvernault, Limoges, Presses Universitaires de Limoges/ Pulim (Collection Espaces Humains), 2015, p. 29-45.

²⁶ P. MANIX, “Oxford: Mapping the Medieval Jewry”, p. 413.

²⁷ R. MUNDILL, “England: The Island’s Jews”, p. 227.

Sebastian remarks on the alliterative boastful display of his mercantile prowess.²⁸ In fact, it echoes the monologue that precedes in which Aristorius, his Christian competitor, prides himself on travelling the seven seas for business motives in a profusely alliterative list of the lands he has visited. “For all Aragon I am most myghty of sylver and gold: / For, and yt wer a countre to by, now wold I nat wond !”²⁹ [...] “I am knowen certenly for bying and sellyng”³⁰. Ironically these hubristic words of greed and ambition strike as the type of speech usually placed in the mouth of a Jewish *dramatis persona*. Now, the most guilty of the two may well be Aristorius because he acted like Judas in selling to a Jew the holy body of Christ for a goodly sum of money. At the end of the play, Synagoga is superseded by Ecclesia as the miracle opens the Jew’s eyes on the Eucharistic truth and leads to his conversion and subsequent exile. As for the Christian merchant, he regrets his “on-lefull bargayn” for “covytyse of good” and fears to be blamed for being “an heretyke”³¹, another derogatory word akin to “traytoure” and “wikkid man” which can be found in The Cuttelers’ *Conspiracy* play.³² It is but a short step to demonisation, as suggested in the troubling similarity between the exclamations of Jonathas stunned at the sight of the bleeding Host stabbed in the heart³³ and Sathan’s rage at his failed temptation of Jesus³⁴: “Ah, owt, owt ! Harrow ! What devyll ys this ? / Of thys wyrk I am in were !” (*Croxton*), “Out, out ! Harrow ! Alas, alas ! / I woundyr sore—what is he this ?” (*Temptation*). Satan, in *The Harrowing of Hell* confesses to entering Judas’ heart to prompt him to betray Christ, “Therefore I gaffe to the Jewes counsaile / That thei schulde alway garre hym dye. / I entered in Judas / That forwarde to fulfille”, to which his lieutenant Belsabub replies “Sir Sattanne, sen we here thee saie / That thou and the Jewes wer same assente”.³⁵

Misrepresenting Jews “as perpetrators rather than victims of violence”³⁶

²⁸ J. SEBASTIAN, ed., *Croxton Play of the Sacrament. Introduction*, University of Rochester, Teams (Middle English Texts Series). A Robbins Library Digital Project, 2012, p. 10. <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sebastian-croxton-play-of-the-sacrament-introduction>

²⁹ G. WALKER, ed., *The Play of the Sacrament*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, (2000) 2008, p. 217, lines 7-8.

³⁰ G. WALKER, ed., *The Play of the Sacrament*, p. 217, line 28.

³¹ G. WALKER, ed., *The Play of the Sacrament*, p. 230, lines 772-777.

³² R. BEADLE, ed., *The York Plays. A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, Vol.1 (The Text), published for The Early English Text Society, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, (*The Cuttelers*) *Conspiracy*. This is how Judas is addressed by one of Pilates’ soldiers, p. 222, lines 263-264.

³³ G. WALKER, ed., *The Play of the Sacrament*, p. 224, lines 401-402.

³⁴ D. SUGANO, ed., *Play 23, The Parliament of Hell ; Temptation* (from the N-Towns Plays), University of Rochester, Teams (Middle English Texts Series), 2007, lines 187-190.

³⁵ G. WALKER, ed., *The Harrowing of Hell*, 2008, p. 145-146, lines 163-170.

³⁶ R. MILLS, “Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief”, p. 96.

In his article devoted to the Anglo-Jews' economic activities, Robin Mundill, alongside other scholars, is faced with the difficulty to reconcile two antagonistic aspects of Jewish life in medieval England. On the one hand, he describes the Anglo-Jewish community as:

[...] a small, separate, self-governing and well organized *communitas* amongst an alien and often hostile society at large. It had the protection of the crown which restricted, regulated and controlled it in return for providing loyalty in the form of arbitrary tallages. It also had to make a living within Christian society as the Jewish community pointed out to Edward I in 1276 when they expressed their concerns about his Statute of the Jewry.³⁷

On the other hand, he remarks on the relative degree of independence granted to England's Jews by the King. Besides, it was "widely accepted by Gentile society that the Jew was allowed to swear on the Torah as the Christian was on the Vulgate."³⁸ Pam Manix focuses on the situation of Oxford's Jews before but also after 1290, and concludes against the stereotypical view of Jews as a group keeping apart from the majority: "Oxford's Jewry, like most, was hardly homogeneous, with Christian and Jewish properties cheek by jowl throughout the ward."³⁹ A contradiction indeed lay at the core of England's position regarding her Jews: written after 1290 and before their readmission in the seventeenth century, a great deal of texts vilified them whilst they had supposedly left the country.⁴⁰ Paradoxically, at the time of the expulsion, and more remarkably afterwards well into the fifteenth century, the social relationships between both communities deteriorated and massacres were perpetrated in the jewries of York, Norwich, or Bury-Saint-Edmunds among other English towns. Poem VI among *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript* relates the miracle of a Jewish child put in a burning oven by his own father for having taken holy communion in a Christian church. At the beginning we read: "As Iewes weren I-wont to be / Among the cristen and wone I-fere : / The Cristene woneden in on halue / Of that Cite, as I the hete, / And alle the Iewes bi hem-selue / Were stihlet to wone in a strete."⁴¹ A visceral rejection of the Gentiles' belief and

³⁷ R. MUNDILL, "England: The Island's Jews", p. 224.

³⁸ R. MUNDILL, p. 222.

³⁹ P. MANIX, "Oxford: Mapping the Medieval Jewry", p. 410.

⁴⁰ H. ANSGAR KELLY, "Jews and Saracens in Chaucer's England: A Review of the Evidence", in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 27, F. Grady, ed., The New Chaucer Society, Washington University in St. Louis, 2005, p. 130. The author of the article reminds us of the persistence of Jewish presence in England even after 1290 in houses of converts. In his introduction, he points out: "We sometimes see it argued that the absence of Jews from England made an important difference to Chaucer's understanding of the tale told by the Prioress. Not many Christians, it seems, are aware of the presence of the Domus Conversorum in London or of its history, even though the basic facts have long been available." Further down at p.133, we read: "Even in Chaucer's time, the House of Converts was still known as having been established for the maintenance of converts 'from Jewish depravity', *de Judaica pravitate*."

⁴¹ C. HORSTMANN and F. FURNIVALL, eds, *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Ms*, IV. "hou a Few putte his sone in a brennyngge ouene, for he was communed wit othur cristene children on the pask-day", Corpus of

precepts allegedly fueled foul, harmful misdeeds against fervent Christian piety, hence the wave of ritual murders libels contending that helpless believers fell victims to hateful barbarities at the hands of Jews.⁴² In fact, the slaughters of Jews as early as the first crusade of 1096 entailed desperate reactions on the part of some preferring suicide or the death of their own children to foreswearing their faith. The aforementioned text portrays a Jew who, infuriated by his son's heartfelt communion at Easter, threw him into a blazing oven without telling his wife. A miracle occurred. When the child's disconsolate mother eventually found her son, he came out of the burning oven sound and healthy. "The Iewesse thorw hire sones sawe / Was conuertet to crist a-non ; / The Child tok hym to cristes lawe, / And alle the Iewes euerichon."⁴³ Unsurprisingly, the father was burnt in the oven.

Determined to maintain the unity of an inclusive majority, the Gregorian Church pushed for exclusion, despite the Christian doctrine of love and acceptance and because of an ambiguous rhetoric oscillating between contradictory attitudes from protection for service done to the Crown to forced conversion, not to mention torture. The nation's policy regarding its Jews lacked consistency actually. Not only were Anglo-Jews blamed for the practice, among other social ills, of usury judged reprehensible for yielding a profit, which jarred with the precept of poverty, but they were also the targets of homiletic crusades against the non-Christian Other. The Christian faith was to be championed not only in the Holy Land but also at home in England. By the way, as reminded by Jean-Christophe Attias and Esther Benbassa, the Middle Ages was a time when objective conditions of existence for Jews resulted in a profound and long-lasting change in their relation with the Holy Land. Throughout the various Crusades, Christians and Muslims, motivated by spiritual aspirations and imperial appetites, were engaged in a fierce fight over the possession and control of the Promised Land⁴⁴. It became properly impossible for Jews to claim their right on their forefathers'

Middle English Prose and Verse, 150, lines 15-20. The Miracles of Our Lady section of the corpus also contains a poem strangely reminiscent of Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*. [*Hou the Fewes, in despit of vre lady, threwe a chyld in a gonge.*] <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/APE7335.0001.001>. The child of the poem also sings the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. At lines 33-34, we read: "The Iewes hedden that song in hayn, / Therefore thei schope the child be slayn."

⁴² R. DAHOOD, "English Historical Narratives of Jewish Child-Murder, Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, and the Date of Chaucer's Unknown Source", in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 31, D. Matthews, ed., The New Chaucer Society, Washington University in St. Louis, 2009, p. 125-140.

⁴³ C. HORSTMANN and F. FURNIVALL, eds., *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Ms*, IV. "*hou a Few putte his sone in a brennyngge ouene, for he was communed wit othur cristene children on the pask-day*", 153, lines 169-172. <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/APE7335.0001.001>

⁴⁴ In the Middle Ages, the terms "Holy" or "Promised Land" were frequently used, whereas "Israel" referred to the people only.

territory.⁴⁵ Perpetual exile in punishment for denying the validity of christianity would explain Jewish concern with a stable dwelling in the host country. In England anti-Jewish feelings were expressed in the late twelfth century about one hundred and twenty years after some Jews from Rouen came along with William I to settle down in his newly conquered island. Following Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council the English political authorities imposed the wearing of a badge so as to identify the Jews and set them apart. The one hundred years or so from the late twelfth to late thirteenth centuries were punctuated by raids, shameful acts, massacres attesting to growing anti-Jewishness that culminated in the expulsion. The Jews who managed to stay on English soil lived under cover in Houses of Converts, in London and Oxford for instance.

The precocious rejection of Jews was echoed in the contemporary antisemitic literary production.⁴⁶ A vehicle of the clerical argument for bringing discredit on Jews, preaching vented antijudaic suspicion. Sermons were instrumental in spreading “a pastoral of emotions”, as Boquet and Nagy called it.⁴⁷ Devotional literature in the vernacular made abundant use of the exemplum to arouse emotion. Pastoral practice by those entrusted with the *cura animarum* set great store by the sincerity of the religious feeling, deemed indispensable didactically to the successful transmission of various points of the Christian doctrine. “L’art d’éduquer par les émotions devient central” from the thirteenth century onwards.⁴⁸ The duty to strive for eternal salvation required turning away from obsolete judaic principles. To Dives, his lay interlocutor with whom he is engaged in a disputation of the holy commandments, Pauper explains: “and therefore in oure preyere, preysyng and wurshepyng we shullyn turnyn vs into the est to seen how Crist fur vs heng vpon the tree and so to han eye on his passioun [...]. Also to lettyn the peple that they shullyn nought suwe the Iewys in maner of wursheppyngge.”⁴⁹

What comes out of these Middle English texts regarding the attitude toward the Jewish figure? It is difficult to answer the question, but the prevalent impression may be that the Christian view was hard put to reconcile the Jew with an obsession with doctrinal uniformity.

⁴⁵ J-C. ATTIAS et E. BENBASSA, *Israël imaginaire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1998, 94. The situation of the land of Israel in the Middle Ages during the Crusades provided what Attias and Benbassa call “une sanction historique aux prétentions théologiques de la chrétienté et de l’islam”, p. 94.

⁴⁶ K. LAVEZZO, *The Accommodated Jew*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ D. BOQUET et P. NAGY, *Sensible Moyen-Âge*, p. 331.

⁴⁸ D. BOQUET et P. NAGY, p. 332.

⁴⁹ P. BARNUM, ed., *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.1, Part 1, EETS, 1976, Commandment I, Chapter 16, lines 10-14.

Yet, in an England which confessionalised society Christians and Jews shared a porous space despite the creation of jewries in urban areas. Significantly, the Hebrew word *arvah* for *brother* also means *I will say*. It suggests the notion of dialogue, verbal exchange, and debate. A brotherly bond implies responsibility toward the other, not only in the adelphic sense of the word but also in the broader sense of one who is different, who has another religious faith.⁵⁰ What may bind together christianity and judaism is a fundamental link that invites a revision or re-reading of their complex kinship. In French, *re-reading* is *relecture*, which is etymologically connected with two Latin verbs: *religere* meaning *reread*, as well as *religare*, in other words *bind, unite, associate*.

The history of the cohabitation of Jews with Gentiles in England kept shifting between clash and accommodation (in the sense of compromise), conflict and arrangement. As in medieval France, Jews in England perceived themselves as a minority nation. *Nation* stems from the Latin *natio*, itself related to the verb *nasci, to be born*. There is of course a Hebrew lexicon for the group as nation. The word *ham* designates the Jewish people, but it derives from *him* meaning *with*, so it means *being with the other*. As for the term *goy* for *the other*, it has an Aramaic root which signifies *the body*.⁵¹ The realm of narrative poetry contains an extensively studied Marian miracle, *The Prioress's Tale*, steeped in antisemitic rhetoric. The Jewish group of the Asian town forms a body which, far from trying to engage in a dialogue with the Christians, is depicted as a corporation jealous of its space in which any Christian interference whatsoever is proscribed. Resenting the *O Alma redemptoris* sung by a little Christian child crossing the jewry everyday on his way to school, "Fro thennes forth the Jues han conspired / This innocent out of this world to chace."⁵² The Prioress takes great care to picture these Jews as weak enough to fall under the nefarious influence of "Oure firste foo, the serpent Sathanas, / That hath in Jues herte his waspes nest".⁵³ Indeed she relates a story of Christian purity endangered by Jewish brutality, taking the form of the inhabitants of an Asian district slaughtering a "litel clergeon", whose corpse they defile shamefully and throw in their latrine for singing a Marian hymn. Nevertheless, on close examination the tale revolves

⁵⁰ M.-A. OUAKNIN, *Talmudiques*, France Culture, "De l'enseignement du mépris à l'enseignement de l'estime", 01-04-2018. <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/talmudiques/talmudiques-du-dimanche-01-avril-2018>

⁵¹ M.-A. OUAKNIN, *Talmudiques*, "Dire la nation : les sources médiévales", 18-1-2015, France Culture. <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/talmudiques/dire-la-nation-les-sources-medievales>

⁵² G. CHAUCER, *The Prioress's Tale*, in L. BENSON, gen. ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, (1987) 1988, p. 210, lines 565-566.

⁵³ G. CHAUCER, *The Prioress's Tale*, 558-559.

around a rather disturbing ambivalence: it ostracises the Jews as a heinous, bloodthirsty mob whilst undermining “fantasies of a pure, distinct, and exalted Christian identity”.⁵⁴ Chaucer’s tale was written in the context of late fourteenth-century mercantile England, where antisemitic images may have been employed with an intention to indirectly “judaize” Christian mercenary conduct. However, another aspect of the context in which *The Prioress’s Tale* was composed is that of the historical narratives of Jews crucifying Christian boys. Late medieval imagination in England was permeated with the legends of Hugh of Lincoln, Adam of Bristol contendingly crucified in a Jewish latrine in the thirteenth century, and other boy-singer tales attesting to the persistence of representations of Jews as a dangerous presence to be kept under close watch⁵⁵. According to Roger Dahood, the Prioress indirectly invokes the 1255 martyr of Hugh of Lincoln in her version of the Chorister tale.

A story that presents itself as Asian turns out to be deeply informed by events in England of the twelfth and especially the late thirteenth century. Some seventy and more years after the discovery of C1 (the first group of Chorister tales distinguished by Carleton Brown) relegated Hugh of Lincoln to the margins of *Prioress’s Tale* study, it is now perhaps time to move him back closer to the center.⁵⁶

The *contra Iudaeos* current running through Christocentric literature ranged from rudimentary antisemitism conveyed in a variety of topoi, formulas and images (like “that faitoure so false”, as Anna calls Jesus in *The Remorse of Judas*, a York Corpus Christi play⁵⁷ or Pauper’s evocation of the Jews on the day of Christ’s passion, who “stodyn aforn hym and pasydden aforn hym wyt manye scornys and dispittous woordys, wyt mowys and manye a iape”⁵⁸) to theological anti-judaism oozing out of the hermeneutic gap separating the Old from the New Testaments.⁵⁹ In a devotional culture, the disparagement of Jews served as a reminder of their agency in the Passion. The sight of Jesus’ suffering was “spectacularized” in drama especially, as it seemed to goad the Jewish tormentors, while adducing an *imago pietatis* to inspire affective piety. In late medieval England, preeminent in the liturgical calendar was the Holy Week and its processions commemorating Passion followed by Resurrection. This climactic event sometimes aroused violent emotional outbursts caused by

⁵⁴ K. LAVEZZO, *The Accommodated Jew*, p. 107.

⁵⁵ A. BALE, *The Jew in the Medieval Book. English Antisemitisms, 1350-1500*, Cambridge University Press, [2006] 2010. See chapter 3 “Miracle : shifting definitions in ‘The miracle of the boy singer’ ” and chapter 4 “Cult : the resurrection of Robert of Bury”.

⁵⁶ R. DAHOOD, “English Historical Narratives of Jewish Child-Murder”, 2009, p. 140.

⁵⁷ R. BEADLE, ed., *The York Plays. A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, Vol.1 (The Text), published for The Early English Text Society, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, (The Cookis and Watirleders) *The Remorse of Judas*, 293, line 47.

⁵⁸ P. BARNUM, ed., *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.1, Part 1, Commandment I, Chapter 16, lines 33-35.

⁵⁹ A. BALE, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, p. 12.

the deep-seated prejudice against the Christ-killers staged in an exaggeratedly expressive manner in mystery plays. Underlying the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* was the profit motive antagonising the symbolic substantiation acted out in the liturgical affirmation of the eternity of Christ's body and blood.⁶⁰ The play about Eucharistic piety contains a forceful, outrageous host-desecration scene and may echo the dolorist emphasis on Christ's agony. Still, some scholars interpret the empirical testing of the Host by the four Jews as Lollard rejection of the real presence of Christ in the bread during communion, whilst others equate Jonathas and his companions to doubting Christians⁶¹. Such divergent readings point to the necessity to look beyond traditional antijudaism and "the literal Jewishness of the play's Jews for their symbolic significance", as the editor of the Croxton play put it.⁶² Nevertheless, today's temptation to assume that medieval Anglo-Jews were systematically blamed and disgraced needs to be qualified. In the conclusion to an article on Jews and Saracens in Chaucer's England, Henry Ansgar Kelly remarks:

In fact, there was an abundance of positive characterizations of Jews in the realm, as well as negative ones. As well as being denigrated, Jews, like Saracens, were often praised as having morals and characters superior to those of Christians. These latter themes are particularly evident in the sermons of Bishop Brinton, and his lessons, and also his zeal for converting the infidel, undoubtedly influenced William Langland. "Good" and "bad" themes (showing Jews and Saracens as moral and well intentioned, on the one hand, and as evil and deserving of death, on the other) are often mixed together in the same works or in the same collections—for instance, miracles of the Virgin.⁶³

Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy draw attention to the old *inimicitia-amicitia* conflict, the oscillation between discord and friendship which characterised the relationships between the Gentile majority and the Jewish minority.⁶⁴ In the name of national unity and identity in medieval England, historical chronicles fantasised the past in linking it to classical Rome or Troy, even to the biblical world. The primary purpose was to institutionalise a reading of time

⁶⁰ A. BALE, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, p. 39.

⁶¹ J. SEBASTIAN, ed., *Croxton Play of the Sacrament: Introduction*, 2012.

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sebastian-croxton-play-of-the-sacrament-introduction>. In his detailed online introduction to the play, John T. Sebastian points out at p.3 that recent commentators have reaffirmed Cecilia Cutts' "assessment of the play as anti-Lollard polemic", whilst others like Heather Hill-Vasquez, he observes at p.4, view it as "a celebration and reassertion of orthodox belief for the benefit of non-Lollard Christians whose faith might nevertheless need buttressing." John T. Sebastian also refers to Michael Jones' remark on the disagreement the play has always been fuelling among scholars p.3.

⁶² J. SEBASTIAN, ed., *Croxton Play of the Sacrament, Introduction*, p. 4.

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sebastian-croxton-play-of-the-sacrament-introduction>.

⁶³ H. ANSGAR KELLY, "Jews and Saracens in Chaucer's England", p. 167.

⁶⁴ D. BOQUET et P. NAGY, *Sensible Moyen-Âge*, p. 324.

“reformatted in terms of its usefulness and resonance to a Christian present and future”⁶⁵, which consequently eclipsed Hebrew history, pre-Incarnation time.

Conclusion

The post-Crucifixion continuity of Judaism was controversial in England in the Middle Ages. Stereotypes of Jewish deviancy and malevolence were conveyed through a diversity of formulas. Formulas can provide adequate verbal means to fashion, even circulate, antisemitic tropes, fictitious images by debasing some moral and physical features to exaggerate the Jews’ allegedly toxic contact/conflict with the host community. In addition, the formulation of distrust of the Jew can take the form of clerical use of anti-Judaic clichés like, for instance, the erroneous identification of the Sabbath day as Saturday. *Dives and Pauper* devotes several chapters in the discussion of the Third Commandment to this moot doctrinal point to prove that the Jewish error stems from innate “vnkyndness” and “schrewydnese”.⁶⁶ Lastly, taken in a broader sense, the stereotypical designation of the Jewish figure comprises common motifs. One salient illustration is the blind persistence of the old faith giving in to the superior Christian truth. In a disputation between a Christian and a Jew from the *Minor Poems of the Vernon Ms*, the Jew stubbornly sticks to his law. The Christian deplors: “To his trouthe hedde he tiht, / Trewe as the tre:– / That wol I apertly preue: / Thulke lay that he on leue, / Ffor no gold that me mihte him yeue, / Change wolde not he”.⁶⁷ Another motif concerns the cruel punishment forced onto Jews, done away with, written off the text at the end of *The Prioress’s Tale*, just as the Asian town is purged of its undesirable Jewish elements and Judaic scoria. “ ‘Yvele shal have that yevele wol deserve’ ; / Therefore with wilde hors he dide hem drawe, / And after that he heng hem by the lawe.”⁶⁸

A definition of the formula, found in the plural in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*⁶⁹ entry, observes that the “pre-existent blocks of phrases, sentences, and verses” used by authors borrowing from a poetic tradition could be “re-combined into new arrangements”. The

⁶⁵ A. BALE, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, p. 24.

⁶⁶ P. BARNUM, ed., *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.1, Part 1, Commandment III, chapter 17, lines 88 and 90. See also Commandment III, chapter 2, 66-73; chapter 3, 1-15; chapter 11, 25-31; chapter 17, 73-91.

⁶⁷ C. HORSTMANN and F. FURNIVALL, eds., *The Minor Poems of the Vernon... (with a few from the Digby mss.2 and 86)*, XLV. *A disputison by-twene a cristenemon and a Jew*, Paul K., Trench, Trübner & Co., London, for the EETS, 1892-1901, Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan Library, Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse, p. 485, lines 27-32. <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/APE7335.0001.001>.

⁶⁸ G. CHAUCER, *The Prioress’s Tale*, p. 211, lines 632-634.

⁶⁹ M. MARTIN, ed., *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, York, Longman York Press, (1984) 1993, p. 124. See *Formulae*.

medieval appropriation of the Jewish type with a view to overloading it with predominantly negative meanings partakes to a proneness to reconfigure, fragment, or select narrative material. This can be explained by the blurred delineation between objective perception of reality, moral didacticism and the protean nature of fantasy judaism, as Anthony Bale formulated it.⁷⁰

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⁷⁰ A. BALE, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, p. 52.

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