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Anti-Semitism, Surrogacy, and the Invocation of Mohammed in the *Play of the Sacrament*

MICHAEL MARK CHEMERS

Scholars have made little of the strange habit of Jewish characters who invoke Mohammed in early modern drama. Christian playwrights of the period, we have assumed, merely project the common European practice of calling out to Jesus and the saints to Muslims, incorrectly inferring that the Prophet of Islam was the *god* of the Muslims, and they compound this error by placing the trumped-up blasphemy in the mouths of their fictitious Jews. When seen within the complex history of both the collision and collusion of early modern Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures, however, this phenomenon may indicate a more complicated process of surrogacy and erasure, a cultural practice that strategically blurs certain distinctions among particular groups and exacerbates others to revise fundamental, defining narratives of social origin and unity. Contextualized within a tradition of medieval anti-Semitism, the invocation of Mohammed by Jewish characters in *þe Play of þe Conuersyon of Ser Jonathas þe Jewe by Myracle of þe Blyssed Sacrament* (or the *Play of the Sacrament* as it is also known) may be evidence that, even in the official absence of actual Jews, distant sources of social tension could cause anti-Jewish feelings to erupt violently.

Unique in the corpus of early English drama, the *Play of the Sacrament* has received much attention from scholars in recent years. Failing to fit neatly into any of the usual categories, the play balks at being placed into a progressive genealogy of Jewish characters in Christian drama. Very little is known for certain about the text: it was almost certainly written sometime between 1461 and 1546; it is probably of East Anglian origin, and it was probably performed by a professional touring troupe.¹

The plot purports to be a re-enactment of an historical event that allegedly occurred in 1461 in the city of Heraclea in Spanish Aragon. A Christian merchant, Aristorius, is bribed by Ser Jonathas, a Jewish merchant from Syria, to steal a consecrated host from a local church. Having obtained the wafer, Jonathas and his Jewish compatriots congregate in his house, where they intend to conduct experiments in order to disprove the doctrine of transubstantiation. At length, Jonathas proposes that “thys bred I wold myght be put in a prefe / Whether þis be he that in Bosra of vs had awe.”² The Jews merrily stab the wafer with their knives, but are much disturbed when the object of their violence miraculously begins to bleed. As he tries to staunch the flow of blood, Jonathas’s hand becomes inexplicably affixed to the host. Even when Jonathas and the host are nailed together to a pillar they cannot be separated. Once extricated from the pillar, the miserable Jonathas exits with his cabal to try more extreme measures on the miraculous object. A short interlude ensues, featuring a comic Flemish doctor and his servant Colle. The Jews return, violently rebuff the doctor’s offer of help, and reveal that Jonathas has freed himself from the wafer by severing his own hand. The hand is then thrown into a pot of oil, which overflows with boiling blood. Emerging unscathed, the host is thrown into an oven. The oven explodes, streaming blood from every crack, and an image of a child with bloody wounds emerges from the wreckage to speak as Christ to the Jews:

Jhesus: Oh ye mervey lows Jewys,
Why ar ye to yowr kyng onkynd,
And [I] so bytterly bowt yow to my blysse? (719–21)

Having had their conclusive “prefe” of the wafer’s sacred embodiment of Christ, the Jews immediately repent their violence. Jhesus heals the wounds of Jonathas, witnesses his contrition before a bishop, and transforms himself back into bread. The bishop then informs Aristorius that in penance for his crimes he may no longer operate as a merchant. Finally, the prelate baptizes the Jews, who leave to travel the world expiating their wickedness. Aristorius announces he will return to his country to spread the word of the miracle; possibly the performance itself is meant to be understood as part of his mission.

One aspect of this play that has not been specifically investigated is that the Jews repeatedly invoke Mohammed in the context of a curse or an

oath. Jonathas' first speech, in which he lists his valuables (as many a wicked merchant in English drama is wont to do), begins with a long invocation:

Jonathas: Now almyghty Machomet, marke in þy magesté,
Whose lawes 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 entent ys for to fulfyll,
As my gloryus god the to honer,
To do agen thy entent, yt shuld grue me yll,
Or agen thyn lawe for to reporte. (149–56)

His fellow Jew, Jasdon, later responds to Jonathas' proposal that they steal and test a host:

Jasdon: Now, be Machomete so myghty, þat ye doon of meue
I wold I wyste how þat we myght yt gete;
I swer by my grete god, and ellys mote I nat cheue,
But wyghtly the[r]on wold I be wreke. (209–12)

Jonathas seals the deal with Aristorius, paying him “an hundder pownd, neyther mor nor lasse, / of dokettys good” (315–16) to steal a host from an unsuspecting priest. When the deal is struck, Jonathas praises his Christian accomplice with “Syr, almighty Machomyght be with yow!” (322). Aristorius then plies his friend, the Clericus Isoder, with “lyght bred” (342) and a “drawte of Romney red” (340), in an eerie allusion to the Eucharist ceremony; Isoder sleeps, and Aristorius steals a host and smuggles it to the Jews. Soon after, Jasdon anticipates striking the host with his dagger, saying “Now, by Machomyth so mighty, that mevith in my mode!” (453).

There are four invocations of Mohammed, which in a play of over one thousand lines may not, at first glance, seem particularly significant. In and of itself, 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. To put such an oath in the mouths of Muslims is to perpetuate the fallacy, popularized by certain medieval romances and by the *Chanson de Roland*, that Mohammed was the Saracen god. The poet of the *Chanson* considers Muslims to be “Paynims” (that is, pagans) who idolatrously

worship an unholy Trinity composed of Apollyon (Greek Apollo), the demon Termagant, and “Mahound” (or “Mahond,” or “Mahomet”).³

But the Saracens are not the only characters to invoke Mohammed in early English drama. Throughout the canon Mohammed is mentioned dozens of times in diverse contexts, sometimes as a saint or god of Muslims, and sometimes as an historical figure (as in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, wherein the Boy refers to “Leccyo mahowndys, viri fortissimo sarasenorū” [the book of Mohammed, mightiest of the Saracens]).⁴ Invoking Mohammed’s name specifically as part of a curse or oath is something any non-Christian villainous character (that is, a Roman, Muslim, or pagan), or even corrupt priests and bishops, may be expected to do. In the York *Crucifixion*, for example, the Roman soldiers who abuse Jesus say: “We! hark, sir knights, for Mahound’s blood! / Of Adam’s kind is all his thought” (61–62); and “Ah, peace, man, for Mahoun! / Let no man wot that wonder” (129–30).⁵ In the Digby *Play of Mary Magdalene*, the Queen of Marseilles describes him as “þat lord curteys and keynd, / Mahond, þat is so mykyll of myth” (1139–40) and the Prysbytyr swears “Mahovndys blod, precyows knave! / Stryppys on þi ars þou xall have” (1175–76) and “Do yower offering to Sentt Mahownde, / and ye xall have grett pardon, / þat longyss to þis holy place, / And recyve ye xall y benesown, / And stond in Mahowndys grace” (1205–9), with similar invocations throughout the text (1233–37; 1244–45; and 1985–88). In the Towneley Cycle, *Pharoah*’s title character exhorts “heyf vp youre hertis vnto mahowne / he will be nere vs in oure need” (413–44; the lines appear almost identically in the York *Exodus*, 404–5); Pilate and Roman soldiers and torturers invoke “mahowne” in *The Conspiracy* six times (11, 12, 116–17, 124–25, 156–57, 645–46) and in *The Scourging* five times (3, 39, 239, 394, 413); they continue to do so in *The Crucifixion*, *The Talents*, *The Resurrection of the Lord*,⁶ and also in the York *Arrest of Christ* and *Second Accusation before Pilate*; Romans also invoke Mohammed in the Ludus Coventriae *Guarding of the Sepulchre*. The York *Descent of the Holy Spirit* has the Doctor invoke “Mahoundes” twice as an oath (76; 158). Even supernatural entities are wont to invoke Mohammed, as do two demons in the Chester *Apocalypse* (598–99, 646–47, 661–62, 675–76), and the devil Belyall in the Ludus Coventriae *Parliament of Hell and the Temptation of Christ* (62–63). The York *Harrowing of*

Hell even has Satan himself crying out: “Owt! Ay herrowe! Helpe, Mahounde!” (342).⁷

Jewish characters in the drama of the period, however, seem to take a particular delight in the invocation of Mohammed specifically as a curse or to throw weight behind a threat. In the Digby *Play of Mary Magdalene*, Herod warns “Yff yow do, I xal havrle of yower hedys, be Mahondys bonys, / As I am trew kyng to Mahond so fre!” (142–43). In the Towneley *Conspiracy*, the Jew Malchus (possibly the same fellow from John 18:10) invokes “mahowne” (l. 603). Nuntius opens *Herod the Great* with “Moste mighty Mahowne meng you with mirthe!” (1); he asserts that Herod is king “by grace of Mahowne” (10), and that “Mahowne” is Herod’s “cosyn” (54). Herod swears “by Mahowne” six times (127, 429, 458, 460, 473). In the N-Town *Death of Herod*, Herod invokes “Mahound” once (209), and he continues to do so in *Herod and the Magi*, *The Slaughter of Innocents*, *The Trial before Annas and Caiaphas*, and *The Trial before Pilate and Herod*.⁸ In York’s *Arrest of Christ*, Caiphas (Caiaphas) behaves likewise (l. 342), and the Herod of the York plays makes similar oaths and curses in *The Coming of the Three Kings to Herod*, *Massacre of the Innocents*, and *Trial before Herod*; the Herod of the Chester cycle does the same in *The Three Kings Come to Herod* and *The Slaughter of the Innocents*.⁹ The tradition of Jewish invocation of the Muslim prophet continues into the sixteenth century in Robert Wilson’s 1584 *Three Ladies of London*, wherein Gerontus, a Jewish merchant, warns his debtor Mercadore “Trulie pay me my money, and that euen now presently, / Or by mightie Mahomet I swear, I will forthwith arrest yee” (1545–46).¹⁰

That Jonathas of the *Play of the Sacrament* and his co-conspirators call on Mohammed in their malice or duress is worth examining closely, since certain traits render them unique. Unlike Herod and Caiaphas, Jonathas and his cohorts are not biblical Jews but contemporaries of the fifteenth-century (likely Christian) audience explicitly involved in an act of host desecration followed by a miracle, a practice that by this time had become legendary. An examination of the relationship of the drama to miraculous events in the historical record reveals a significant material precedent linking host desecration by Jews to the invocation of Mohammed. That precedent, I contend, strongly suggests an answer to a question that has troubled scholars of the play over the last century; what exactly do the Jews in this play signify?

I. Surrogacy and the Surrogate

Certain recent investigators of theater history are dissatisfied with strategies of New Historicism that purport to complicate the historiographies of unified voices of power and politics, and wind up, however inadvertently, reifying the very unity they seek to destabilize and fragment. David Lawton writes:

Analysis of resistance and subversion, for example, necessarily (and for Foucault advisedly) casts them as tributaries to the mainstream of power. Examining the Other as a discursive category, a signified into which multiple signifiers may fit, is to testify perhaps unduly to the power of One. A totalizing cultural model is contested by a totalizing critique.¹¹

It is indeed a pressing problem that goes directly to the heart of the New Historicist project, but a refocusing on more dynamic sets of priorities has proven very difficult to achieve in practice, especially for historians of the theater who must contend with the analysis of performance events long gone. Joseph Roach's 1996 study *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*,¹² however, provides a model that is perhaps at once agile enough and sufficiently well anchored in historical practice to provide a productive opportunity to, at the very least, raise some interesting new questions about the *Play of the Sacrament*. Roach's mission in that volume is to reveal the ways in which nineteenth-century performance events, such as Mardi Gras parades as well as conventional melodramas, were put to use in revising important narratives of communal identity in the United States, particularly pertaining to race. In so doing, he crafts a model of theater historiography that has wide applications beyond the specific moment of circum-Atlantic performances he examines. Grounded in postcolonial thought, this model is particularly useful in medieval studies if one considers Kathleen Biddick's now oft-quoted recognition that "[t]he periodization of colonialism and ethnography begins to look very different if one includes Jews."¹³

Roach's *surrogacy* is a technique by which a community defines its core identity by identifying its borders. Surrogacy is envisioned as a function of three complex and seemingly illogical social elements: collective memory, performance, and substitution. The process is by its very nature imperfect, even perverse, since the community's unified core identity is actually, in Roach's words, "a convenient but dangerous fiction." Acknowl-

edging that fiction in order to critique it, which most radical theater attempts to do, is a dangerous act, because calling attention to a disunited social sphere increases sociocultural anxiety. Using performance to conceal or naturalize the fiction, on the other hand, is an act of affirmation that reduces anxiety by congratulating oneself and one's fellows for living in a perfect, harmonious society. Surrogacy is necessary, argues Roach, whenever the general social matrix suffers a significant loss that leaves a discernible gulf between an ideal society and the disappointments of reality. Surrogacy addresses a void and is distinct from *substitution*, which suggests a replacement of something that does not purport to be the original. A substitute teacher, for instance, does not pretend to *be* the teacher he or she replaces, but only to stand in for the teacher. The missing teacher, therefore, is "gone but not forgotten."

On the other hand, a teacher may find him or herself operating *in loco parentis*, as a moral and psychological guide for a student, in fact, as a surrogate for a missing or inadequate parent. In such a case, in order to be effective the actual process of substitution must itself be concealed, so there is no discernible trace of a switch having taken place. In individual relationships as well as in large communities, such concealment requires the construction of elaborate systems of belief that mask the inconsistencies; these systems must be embodied by physical performance and repeated as often as possible to drive home the message against all evidence to the contrary. Roach's humorous, if not ironic, exemplum of the process is the Professor Emeritus, described as "forgotten but not gone."

Since the process of surrogacy directs attention away from a cracked and crumbling fictive social core, it gravitates toward the perceived margins of a culture, that is, toward the intersections between those who belong to the unified core and those who do not. But the myth of a unified social core is dangerous precisely because the very act of defining the boundaries has a tendency to reveal, sooner or later, the very inconsistencies the surrogacy was ostensibly created to conceal. The greater the perceived threat to the social order, the greater is the need for convenient, dangerous fictions to mask these inconsistencies. The more such fictive constructs are used, the more grave is the peril that those minor gaps will need to be replaced by massive revisions of a community's narratives of origin. Such narratives must, in this case, be retold to erase

contradictions between the previous narratives and current policies and beliefs. This rather likely event, Roach observes, requires “public enactments of forgetting.”¹⁵ The inevitable and unending search for a pure and unified cultural core, then, becomes “a voyage not of discovery but of erasure”¹⁶ of origins, to be replaced by new, anxiety-reducing, self-affirming constructs (which of course will eventually require new erasures as their own inconsistencies become apparent).

The appeal that Roach’s model has to the problems facing medieval theater historians in general is rendered clear in Andrew Sofer’s insightful study of the *Play of the Sacrament*.¹⁷ Demonstrating that the theater can act as a quasi-mystical surrogate for the Church when a Eucharist *oble* is the central prop, Sofer shows that Roach’s model does not deny the complexity of a dynamic society in motion, nor the mutability of mimesis and semiosis within that society. Rather, it tends to lead the historian away from a knee-jerk identification of the subaltern as defined by the elite minority and toward the kind of “spatial history” advocated by Rosemarie K. Bank,¹⁸ which understands that any cultural product occupies many social and political positions at once. For the *Play of the Sacrament* in particular, understanding the meaning of the invocation of Mohammed by Jews not as an accident of a general tendency to Orientalize Jews but as a strategic, even premeditated erasure opens up new lines of inquiry. Considering the play as a public enactment of forgetting the differences between two of the most dangerous enemies of a harmonious Christian Europe seems to be productive for decoding the play’s more bizarre elements, for rarely do we encounter the vagaries of the process of surrogacy rendered as clearly as in the sustained and violent myths of medieval anti-Semitism.

Sofer’s observation of the process of theater-to-church surrogacy in the context of this play provides an insightful description of the theological, aesthetic, and physical dynamics of Eucharist and Jew when juxtaposed on the early modern stage. Of particular pertinence to my own study is the suggestion that the connection of the semiotically charged representations of such powerful boundary-blurring images as the Eucharist and the Jew onstage together destabilizes both. This makes the play capable of a kind of double-move, critiquing and reifying the doctrine of transubstantiation simultaneously. Since Sofer is examining

the hermeneutics of the staged Eucharist wafer (as opposed to the Jew who abuses it) it is not necessary for his analysis to interrogate whether, in the minds of the play's intended audience, the Jew is meant as a surrogate for a heretical branch of thought concerning the Eucharist (or Lollardry, in this case). The evidence that I offer attempts no emendation of Sofer's theory other than to clarify that the stage-Jew is not sufficiently dynamic to act as surrogate for a heretical Lollard, but is fluid enough to surrogate other identities. This play is remarkable, not merely for the presence of the Eucharist, or the Jew, or even the numerous invocations to Mohammed, but for the presence of all three at once.

Of the many questions to be raised in my application of Roach's theory to this play, the first would be "What form of sociocultural stress is the *Play of the Sacrament* designed to alleviate?" One of the most vexing issues concerning the ongoing debate about the *Play of the Sacrament* is the utter lack of a material Jewish threat to English Christian culture in the fifteenth century. What can be the significance of the Jewish characters in light of the fact that there was no official Jewish presence in England after 1290, when Edward I began the expulsion crisis by formally expelling all Jews from his domains? The crisis, which persisted into the sixteenth century, saw Jews ripped from their homes across Europe, each instance of banishment having followed pogroms and murders of Jews incited by accusations of well-poisoning, witchcraft, ritual murder of Christian innocents, cannibalism, or the desecration of consecrated hosts. The Jews in England during the era of the *Play of the Sacrament*'s creation have been generally understood, therefore, as "gone but not forgotten." Whether Edward's 1290 edict translates into a total absence of Jews from England almost two hundred years later, of course, is a particularly thorny question. Lawton points out that according to historical record, Jews were expelled from France three times, and that despite expulsion edicts Jewish mercantile communities continued to play key roles in Toulouse, the Baltic, and parts of Italy.¹⁹ Does such inconsistency not demonstrate that expulsions *could* be incomplete, that Jews *could* return to banned regions, or remain hidden by divesting themselves of their identifying clothing, making sincere or mendacious conversions, or in any case somehow reassemble when the expulsion frenzy had subsided? Could the daughters of these communities not have intermarried? Lawton

calls for a re-evaluation of Jewish presence in England that does not automatically assume that expulsion equals actual absence. Determining the presence of a secret or illegally immigrant Jewish population in Europe is certainly beyond the scope of this essay; at the moment, all that can be said with any kind of confidence is that at the time of the play's creation, around or after the 1460s, the English Jew has no official, legal existence; whatever level of existence the Jew might claim is therefore illicit, unofficial, and concealed. Furthermore, as the many references to Jews in English drama between 1400 and 1600 suggest, the symbol of the Jew remains a powerful imprint on the English social psyche. Stephen Greenblatt writes that

in fact, the Jews left traces far more difficult to eradicate than people, and the English brooded on those traces—stories circulated, reiterated, and elaborated—continually and virtually obsessively. There were Jewish fables and Jewish jokes and Jewish nightmares: Jews lured little children into their clutches, murdered them, and took their blood to make bread for Passover. Jews were immensely wealthy—even when they looked like paupers—and covertly pulled the strings of an enormous international network of capital and goods. Jews poisoned wells and were responsible for spreading the bubonic plague. Jews secretly plotted an apocalyptic war against the Christians. Jews had a peculiar stink. Jewish men menstruated.²⁰

Note again that the alleged diabolism of Jews is repeatedly linked to strange practices involving (and linking) blood and bread.²¹ The nightmarish Jew is almost a walking embodiment of the Eucharist turned corrupt and evil, the sacred transformed into the profane. Clearly, the Jew persists in England's collective memory long after the 1290 expulsion, repeatedly embodied in performances such as the *Play of the Sacrament*.

II. Heresy and the Heretic

Let me say at the outset that it is not likely that the play was intended to convince those who doubted the conventional understanding of the mechanics of Holy Communion. In 1944, Celia Cutts argued that the play was crafted to address the Lollard heresy by demonstrating the operation of transubstantiation in the Communion ceremony.²² This argument has been debated heatedly by recent writers whose counterevidence includes the abhorrence the Lollards had for the theater as well as their fundamental rejection of the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist.

Given the strength of such a substantive resistance, it seems odd to imagine that the author of this play believed that the Lollards could have been convinced of their heresy by a rather silly and grotesque piece of stage business when they had not been convinced by violent persecution.²³ On the whole, then, the play seems to resist categorizing as didactic. Considering the utility of such cultural products as plays in the alleviation of social anxiety, it is much more likely that the play is intended to be affirmative, and to provide some level of surrogacy.

Lawton asks a particularly pertinent, difficult, and critical question that remains unanswered: “What might the play’s audience have understood by ‘Jew?’” (293). Perhaps we may shed light on this question by investigating what the Jew was *not*. Jews had not constituted a serious political, military, or evangelical threat to European culture since the disastrous Bar Kochba uprising of 135 C.E., and in the latter half of the fifteenth century, when the Jew had been erased (officially at least) from almost all of northern Europe, it seems strange to assume that the play was designed to combat a perceived Jewish threat or to alleviate any fear of actual Jews. Denise L. Despress describes the Jews of the *Play of the Sacrament* as “terrifying,”²⁴ but anyone fortunate enough to have seen this play in production must draw a different conclusion. The Jews in the play are ludicrous, impotent, and comic. Their irrational hatred of all things Christian is diabolically overblown. They gloat over the helpless wafer, make exaggerated speeches full of false bravado, and respond with outrageous horror to the outlandish violence and bloodletting of the play. They commit slapstick sight gags and spew obvious, lowbrow puns. When rebuked, they convert instantly and completely, going so far as to quote Scripture indignantly in garbled Latin. The Jews of this play are clearly intended to be objects of derisive laughter and scorn, not of fear.

The argument that the stage Jew was for the English a highly mutable and polymorphous sign is compelling, and the view that the Jews of the *Play of the Sacrament* must therefore be stand-ins for a more present, more serious threat has been noted a number of times by scholars. To Cutts’ s 1944 suggestive analogy of Jew to Lollard heretic, mentioned earlier, other critics have contributed alternative options. In 1975, for example, David Bevington rather vaguely offers a sort of “general skeptic,” while in 1991 Victor Scherb suggests that we “look at the violence of the

Play of the Sacrament as a means of expressing and symbolically resolving social religious tensions within the local community,” but fails to be more specific.²⁵ More recent writers have observed serious problems with these premises. Robert Clark and Claire Sponsler point out that the semiotic fluidity of the Jew as a stage referent has certain limits: the Jew could be employed as an adaptable stand-in for the specific enemies of particular nationalisms only to the extent that the dissenting voices could be attributable to *Jewish* values.²⁶ In addition, it is critical to remember, as Jody Enders writes, that the represented violence against Jewish characters in plays like the *Play of the Sacrament* and *Hostie* cannot be separated from the operation of medieval anti-Semitism, in which both this fictional trauma and centuries of *real* violence against *real* Jews is legitimized and encouraged. Enders writes that such plays “create, recreate, and perpetuate a properly Christian space by advocating violence against nonbelievers—wherever they may be,” but also forge “a conceptual bond between violence, drama, space, and anti-Semitism that far surpasses the apparent confines of a stage play.”²⁷

Furthermore, plays that depict Jews doing violence to Eucharist wafers are embodied re-enactments of the Christian origin story, the *mortificatio* of Jesus at the hands of Jews, so necessary to Christ’s redemption of humankind. The violence of these plays against Jews is specific, and the justification of that violence within anti-Semitic belief structures is explicit. These structures encompass the core functions of the medieval stage, a space of torture and trauma that is itself, in Enders’s words, “by no means neutral,”²⁸ but in fact works to link Christian unity with anti-Semitic violence. Seen in this light, the possibility that the stage Jew could operate as a stand-in for *any* Christian, even a hated or heretical one, seems tenuous at best.²⁹

Because the imaginary Jew could not represent a Christian, another thing that he could not be is a heretic.³⁰ R. I. Moore points out that

a heretic, by canonical definition, was one whose views were ‘chosen by human perception, contrary to holy scripture, publicly avowed and obstinately defended.’ That meant in practice that a person became a heretic only by refusing to accept a bishop’s pronouncement that his expressed views were heretical.... Heresy (unlike Judaism or leprosy) can only arise in the context of the assertion of authority, which the heretic resists, and is therefore by definition a political matter.³¹

A heretic, then, has only an official existence *within* Christianity as defined by the boundaries of the *corpus mysticum*, existing by the authoritative decree of a prelate only, while an infidel is, like a leper, an accident of the circumstances of existence, circumstances specifically outside ecclesiastical control. Moore's observation demonstrates that a Jew, whose existence in Europe in the early modern period is almost universally unofficial, cannot be a heretic until he first becomes visible to political and ecclesiastical authorities, converts to Christianity, adopts a certain branch of Christian thought, and then refuses to renounce that doctrine after it is publicly, officially denounced by a bishop. This distinction was not likely to have been lost even on the least theologically savvy members of early modern English society, who most certainly would have understood the importance of classifying the various enemies of Christ. As perfidious, sacrilegious, dangerous, corrupted, and damned as Jews may have been understood to be, one thing they certainly were *not* understood to be was errant Christians.³² Thus, the *Play of the Sacrament* cannot reasonably be understood to have employed its Jewish characters as surrogates for heretical thought on the Eucharist.

III. Infidelity and the Infidel

The conundrum as it stands, then, is how we might understand the meaning of the Jew on the early modern English stage, if not as a stand-in for a heretic. A tradition of imaginative mythmaking in medieval Europe suggests that the stage Jew possessed the particular and specific power to signify the Muslim (who, unlike the Jew, presented a serious, though distant, threat) and yet could remain explicitly, incontestably, and undeniably Jewish.

At the roots of this signifying power is the widespread medieval understanding of time and space as fluid. Far more important to the medieval worldview than the measurable material world by distance, national boundary, and historical period was the theological abstraction of space-time, which put a far greater emphasis on the difference between eternity on the one hand and mortal constructions of time and space on the other. Such eternity recognizes only the boundaries of the *corpus mysticum*, the Body of Christ co-extant (and coterminous) with

the souls and bodies of all Christians from all times (through the sacramental act of *coniunctio* of which the Eucharist wafer is the key signifier). We might recall Albert of Saxony's paradigmatic assertion that God could cause the world to be the size of a millet seed *and* its more usual size at once.³³ If God is indeed omnipotent this makes perfect sense. And yet the imagination must certainly have been troubled by the fact that, in the face of God's omnipotence, so much of the material world remained in the hands of the infidel. Lawton observes that the *Play of the Sacrament* seems very interested in tracing the boundaries of those parts of the material world that illustrate the limits of the *corpus mysticum*; both of the major players in this drama, Aristorius and Jonathas, introduce themselves by giving an inventory of their respective wealth and the widths of their geographic influences, effectively providing a map of the world. He writes:

Implicit in the map is a question about Christianity (the religion) and Christendom (the area of the map it controls): If the religion is so right, and its one true God so omnipotent, how does it come about that Christendom is so circumscribed, and the areas it fails to control, including its own holy places, should be so far from being "marginal" or "peripheral" by the yardstick of the map?³⁴

But the play does more than provide a static map; it underscores the threat of Islam by reminding the audience that those boundaries are permeable and fluid. Evil can leak in, and borders can change. In the play, Jonathas takes the trouble to tell us that he is from Muslim-controlled Syria, and he begins his version of this speech by invoking "Machomet." Aristorius asserts in his speech not only that he has Muslim trade contacts ("In Taryse and Turkey there told ys my tale"), but that he spends time "in Jerusalem and in Jherico among the Jewes jentle," and is thus exposed to the corrupting influences of both Islam and Judaism. Set in Aragon (Christian land lost to Muslims) in the year 1461 (the year that the last city of the Byzantine Empire, Trebizond, fell to Turks) the play reminds us that the borders of Christendom are in fact constricting, thereby reducing the percentage of the world's surface that is safe from spiritual corruption. The Muslim threat is extremely present in this play.

The subjection of the medieval map and clock to divine will permits the recognition of only two real spheres of space/time: that within the *corpus mysticum*, and that beyond its bounds. Jews living in Christian

lands, of course, lived outside the *corpus mysticum*, outside the knowledge of Christ, outside of God's love, outside the sacred parameters defined by performances of Communion. Theologically speaking, Jews cohabited with Muslims, also outside the Christian community. This worldview is particularly nurturing to the long-standing tradition in medieval Europe in which Jew and Muslim are conflated.³⁵

The genealogy of this conflation is well documented, although by no means is it limited to host desecrations. One of its most salient moments occurred in the year 1233 at Acre. The Frankish crusaders, having been ousted from Jerusalem by Saladin, vented their frustration by drawing a libelous picture of Christ being crucified by Mohammed. According to the Arabic Crusade chronicler, Ibn al-Athir, this was the first instance of a charge that Muslims slew Christ.³⁶ Although this is an obvious historical impossibility, the accusation caught fire in the collective European imagination. Such an example of anachronistic erasure as this is soon transformed into a dramatic re-envisioning of the Christian origin narrative, the Crucifixion, with Muslims playing the villain. Such a patently false surrogacy would naturally require massive and repeated public re-enactments.³⁷ What is truly remarkable about this particular moment in history is that the accusation that Muslims were responsible for the death of Christ did not supplant the ancient belief that the Jews were to blame; to the contrary, it *combined* with it, so that Jews *and* Muslims were presented and ultimately accepted as co-deicides. Cutler and Cutler have argued that medieval anti-Judaism is very much a function of medieval anti-Muslimism; because Jews are considered *al-Kitab*, "People of the Book," by Islamic Law, Muslim countries were often havens for Jewish refugees from Europe. Who could blame a Jew, therefore, for rejoicing when Christian lands fell to Muslims?

Such conceptions of alliances between Jews and Muslims (both justified and erroneous) is one way *anti-Judaism* would become *anti-Semitism*, a term modernly used to mean "hatred of Jews" but which strictly refers to hatred of all those who trace their origins to the peoples of the Middle East (biblically, the descendants of Shem, son of Noah). The perceived collusion was further enhanced by a synchronicity of custom, language, and religious beliefs between Jew and Muslim, which included, for instance, common dietary prohibitions and a shared Sabbath engendering

common agricultural and trade interests. As a result of all of these forces, and no doubt others, Jews were sometimes assumed to be fifth columnists for Muslim invaders, working to gather information and betray the cities from within to their cultural cousins and fellow infidels. Jews were also commonly blamed for betraying Christian cities to Muslims, even when a city fell to Normans or, in one case, was not even attacked, just to stir up anti-Jewish feelings.³⁸ All this evidence suggests that the conflation of Jew and Muslim in the medieval Christian imagination, a conflation that ran so deep as to give occasion to revise the primary Christian origin story so that Muslims could be made to occupy the Judas role along with the Jews, was more than substitution, more than mere Orientalization of the Jew. It was surrogacy, in which the gulfs of history separating Mohammed and Jesus could be overwritten and masked by repeated embodied performances conflating Muslim and Jew. As we shall see in the remainder of this essay, there is a strong historical precedent that such surrogacy was manifested as Jews calling out to Mohammed before, during, or after witnessing a host desecration miracle.

IV. Desecration and the Desecrator

As a caveat, any approach to deciphering the *Play of the Sacrament* need not be linked explicitly to a material referent in the historical record. For the purposes of this essay, however, recognizing the historical conflation of Jew and Muslim in Christian thought in reference to the play does provide a wider field of inquiry than the play is usually granted, grounds for a study linking host desecration, Jews, and the invocation of Mohammed. One particular moment in history which has not been heavily examined in relation to this play provides an unusually fertile opportunity for historical inquiry. That event, which I wish to examine after a look at the formation of host desecration libels in general, is the trial and brutal execution of certain Jews in Brussels in 1370.

Any attempt to extract a single coherent genealogy of mythmaking to explain the polymorphous accounts of host desecration miracles with attempts to connect their Jewish victims with Islam would be inadequate. The conflation of Jew and Muslim as enemies of the Christian faith was a part of the crusader spirit from its earliest incarnation. Among the most

influential anti-Jewish writers of the First Crusade was Peter the Venerable, who wrote in a letter to Louis VII:

But what value in pursuing and attacking the enemies of the Christian faith in remote and distant lands, while the Jews, wretched blasphemers far worse than the Saracens, not far away from us but in our midst so freely and audaciously blaspheme, abuse and trample on Christ and the Christian Sacraments with impunity ... [Jews,] believing nothing concerning Christ and the Christian faith, reject, blaspheme, and deride that virgin birth and all the sacraments of human salvation.³⁹

Although anti-Judaism predates the Crusades, this document demarcates a moment after which the European Jewish minority endures many centuries of persecution, very often violent.⁴⁰ Noteworthy in Peter's writing is a warning that Jews are not merely the historical enemies of Christ but that they maliciously and stubbornly persist in an active subversive war against the doctrines of Christianity. Jews are thus purposefully antagonistic toward the Christian sacraments and, by extension, toward associated sacramental objects, and therefore are implicated in the events that necessitate the Crusades against Muslims. In *Warrant for Genocide*, Norman Cohn describes this type of hatred, that which has little to do with actual history or politics but merely targets Jews as the enemies of right-thinking folk, as "the deadliest kind of anti-Semitism."⁴¹ Jews were believed to steal and torture Eucharist wafers frequently, re-enacting the Crucifixion; on many such occasions blood was said to have flowed miraculously from the lacerations in the host. It need hardly be stated that in none of these cases was the guilt of the Jews in question sufficiently established, and the twentieth-century reforms of Vatican II denounced the inflammatory practice of blood libels. Indeed, the utter repudiation of anti-Semitism is a central tenet of the *Nostra Aetate*, and was supported unconditionally by Pope John Paul II, who famously called Anti-Semitism "a sin against God and humanity" and taught reconciliation with Catholics and Jews (and Muslims) throughout his lifetime.⁴²

The earliest surviving account of a host desecration "miracle" is dated 1213.⁴³ In this event, later confirmed by Pope Innocent III, a Jew named Isaac is given a host by a Christian woman, which he hides in a money chest. When he opens the chest, he discovers the host has multiplied, a miracle that incites another Jewish observer, Jonathan, to convert to Christianity. The lies associating Jew and host grew more vicious with time

and innovations accrued to the legend. Innocent III, for example, spread uncorroborated accusations that Jews force their Christian wet nurses to expel their milk into a latrine for three days after taking Communion lest Jewish children drink milk contaminated by the digested host.⁴⁴ The first account of a host miraculously bleeding after being stabbed by a Jew, however, is dated to the 1290s, when a Jew, once again named Jonathan, was murdered for ostensibly causing a wafer to bleed.⁴⁵ This appears to be the first record of a legend that would recur in many spurious accusations and which repeatedly features a significant connection to Islam, through the invocation of Mohammed by Jews being tortured for desecration.

Each new instance of host desecration miracles after 1290 follows more or less the same master narrative. A Jew is accused of employing an agent, usually a Christian woman, to secure a host, which he then tortures. The host bleeds, and the agent, moved by the miracle or guilt, confesses to ecclesiastical authorities. The Jews thought responsible are slaughtered immediately or else tortured to confession and then executed, whereby their property is confiscated and the surviving Jewish community expelled. The irrationality of these accusations was not, as Salomir Baron observes, very consequential:

Remarkably, without inquiring why, devoid of belief in Christ's presence in the wafer, a Jew should wish to expose himself and his coreligionists to horrible retribution, the Christian masses simply assumed that, because *they* believed in the Eucharist, Jews, too would try to use, or abuse, it.... True, one or another deranged Jew may have tried to test his Christian neighbors' attribution of supernatural qualities to the wafer or to put it to his private use. But not a single case of such an aberration has been conclusively proved.⁴⁶

A quasi-scientific testing of the wafer's holiness is the explicit motivation of the Jews in the *Play of the Sacrament*, of course, but a living Jew would have been deranged indeed to risk death for himself and his family and the summary dissolution of his entire community to prove the falseness of the doctrine of transubstantiation in this ridiculous manner.

The events of 1370 that chiefly concern the *Play of the Sacrament* tend to corroborate rather than challenge the general form of the libel. This evidence appears in a document dated 12 August 1402, as an ecclesiastical investigation of a 1370 host desecration trial.⁴⁷ The document is

quite clear as to its opinions of the Jews alleged to have perpetrated the desecration: they are “perfidious,” “impious,” and “contemptuous and hateful” of Christian sacraments. According to the witnesses, none of whom admitted seeing the crime or the event of the miracle, Jews crept into the chapel “like thieves,” stole sixteen hosts, and hid them until Easter. One witness provided this hearsay testimony, transcribed in Latin full of spelling and grammatical errors and peppered with Gallicisms:

Et dicto die Parasceves, quo Salvator noster in cruce mortem subiit temporalem, hujusmodi hostias sacratas, in su passonis blasphemiam et contumeliam, suis cultellis et ferraturis diversis, contemptuose et ignominiose crudeliter transfixerunt. Unde signa miraculosa, tanquam gutte sanguinis, appareuerunt et videbantur exivisse, prout modernis temporibus.

(And he said that on Good Friday, when our Lord temporarily died on the Cross, [the Jews] in their blasphemous, contumelious passion, with their knives and various implements of iron, contemptuously, ignominiously, and cruelly pierced the aforesaid sacred hosts. From them a miraculous sign, in the form of drops of blood, appeared and flowed out.)⁴⁸

The Jews then allegedly enjoined Katherine, a Jewess who had converted to Christianity, to hide the hosts. In the investigator’s account, the Jews begged Katherine to hide the miracle from Christian authorities lest they have conclusive proof of Christ’s divinity.⁴⁹ The document, in its corrupt Latin, goes on to provide a testimony that stretches beyond all credibility:

Tempore quo hujusmodi damnati judei question abantur, de quodam Johanne, qui per antea judeus extiterat, et de noticia etiam dictorum judeorum quam plurima verba jocosa et fabulosa prolata dicendo: <<quare hi canes putridi non fatentur veritatem, absque tanta et tam crudeli pena, cum utique premissa se sciant fecisse et perpetrasse?>> Ex illo verbo fabuloso, plures de curia de facta prenatarro eum suspectum habuerunt, et non immerito, quia confessa veritate per judeos questionatos, de premissis, ut supra, cum ceteris ad eorum accusationem captus est, et cum eis per villam Bruxellensem, in curribus, manibus et pedibus ligatis, ad spectaculum et negotium insigne, ut eorum prava et damnata opera melius manifestarentur, ultimum traditus est supplico.

(At the time when the aforementioned condemned Jews were being questioned, a certain John, who was at that time a prominent Jew, who had been speaking of the crime among other Jews with humorous and fabulous words, had said: “Why do these rotten dogs not confess the truth, when at any rate they themselves know they are guilty as charged, except

out of fear of such a severe punishment?" From these fabulous words, many of the court suspected him of guilt in the crime, and not undeservedly because of the confessions of the Jews when questioned, and so he was taken along with the others, bound hand and foot in wagons, paraded around the village of Brussels, so that their depraved and condemned acts should be well known, and he was finally handed over for death.)⁵⁰

In his analysis of the document in 1932, Placide Lefèvre suggests that this unfortunate Jew was Jonathan Labus, a ducal court official; according to the records of the court *receveur*, Godfrey of Tours, Labus no longer collected wages after 1370 and is marked as "taken,"⁵¹ presumably by the police. C. G. N. DeVooys also describes this event, and identifies another Jewish victim of this event as one Jonathan of Enghien, a local banker captured and slaughtered in his own garden, probably by debtors seizing upon the occasion as an excuse to cancel their debt through murder.⁵² Jonathan of Enghien, according to DeVooys as well as Baron, is thought to have been the chief conspirator behind the desecration. Since the Jonathan mentioned in the accounts of Godfrey was "taken" (with no account of a lynching), we may conclude that these were two different Jews, Jonathan of Enghien who was lynched in his garden ostensibly for the crime of host desecration, and Jonathan Labus who was condemned later while Jonathan of Enghien's alleged accomplices were being tortured.

In any case, Jonathan Labus had obliquely criticized the process of extracting confessions under torture and threat of death (even though he had referred to the arrested conspirators, his fellow Jews, as *canes putridi*, "rotten dogs"), and that seemed ample enough proof of Labus's guilt for the court to justify his arrest, public humiliation, and execution at the stake. Lefèvre, though he ultimately refuses to clear the Jews of the libel, admits that Jonathan Labus' self-incrimination is hard to swallow:

The improbability that the Jews would bribe a woman, formerly their disciple but since having converted to Christianity, for the purpose of hiding their guilt, is abundantly clear, like the rest of this idiotic story as told by John Morelli, of the Jew discovered at the courthouse who, while trying to convince his old co-religionaries of their crime, betrays his own complicity.⁵³

The goal of the 1402 investigation, explicitly stated in the final paragraph of the document, was to secure the bishop's approval for the *culte*

expiatoire that grew in St. Gudule following the so-called miracle to attract more wealthy pilgrims and to sell them indulgences, providing an economic motive in addition to that provided by Jonathan of Enghien's lynching by his debtors. Lefèvre's claim that the document was a fake (in that it could have been written only after 1456 when Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa toured the Pays-Bas admonishing local clergy to cease the commercially lucrative promotion of false miracles) seems difficult to dispute. This revelation does not conclusively prove that the ecclesiastical leaders of Brussels had such monetary gains in mind in 1370 when they tortured and burned some of the local Jews and expelled the rest, but the conclusion is certainly tempting to make. The document may have been forged, but it is a matter of historical record that many of the Jews were murdered, and the surviving community was destroyed, to the financial gain of the city.⁵⁴ The 1370 event's religious importance grew with time; the miracle was repeatedly re-enacted, appearing in stained glass windows, tapestries, a poem (*Miracle de Sainte-Gudule*) festival booklets, and a play in French (*Jeu et Mistère de la Sainte Hostie*)⁵⁵ as well as becoming the focal point of an annual festival which remained Brussels' most popular until the twentieth century. Later, as a result of Vatican II, a plaque denouncing the legend as "tendentious" was finally placed in the chapel.⁵⁶

The 1370 event is of interest to an explication of the *Play of the Sacrament* not only because Jonathan of Enghien (like the Jonathans of the 1213 and 1290 miracles) appears to be the namesake of the character Ser Jonathas, but also because of the presence in both the 1370 history and the 1461 play of the invocation of Mohammed. DeVooys quotes from a Dutch eyewitness account of the 1370 execution:

Als sij dus daer bracht waren ende sij dat groete vier saghen ontsteken, soe named die yoden alle deendander met der hant ende maecten enen dans om dat vier, ende spronghen ende riepen tot malcanderen: "Sijt blide ende vroe ende blijft sterc, bi onsen mamet, ende en gaet u gheloeve niet af, wat pinen men ons aendoet! Wij selen noch tavent alle sijn in Abrahams schoet!"

(When they saw the fire, the Jews all danced in the fire and jumped and called out to each other "Be glad and joyful, and remain strong, by our Mamet, and do not abandon your faith! No matter what pains men inflict upon us, we shall still be gathered in Abraham's bosom!"⁵⁷

Mamet, of course, is Mohammed once again. The poem *Miracle de Sainte-Gudule* also has the Brussels Jews dancing in the flames and crying out "O MAMET!"⁵⁸ It is clear that by 1370, the legend of a Jew named Jonathan who triggers a host desecration miracle also includes his invocation of Mohammed, in public, as part of his martyrdom. As this story transforms into play form in the next century, all of these elements will be repeated.

The French drama *Mistère de la Sainte Hostie*, whose connections to the *Play of the Sacrament* have been described by Jody Enders,⁵⁹ also appears to have a connection to the event of 1370. In act 1, scene 5, the Jew, Jacob, is in possession of a dress pawned to him by his accomplice, the Wicked Woman. When she begs him to release the dress for a single day, he suspects her of trying to abscond with the goods:

La Femme: Hélas! non, sire. Au contraire, je venais vous prier, pour l'amour de Dieu, et par respect pour ce saint jour de Pâques, où je dois communier, de me prêter ma robe. Vous l'aurez de nouveau dès demain; sur mon honneur et sur mon baptême, je vous la rapporterai, et je vous serai à jamais reconnaissante. Je dirai du bien de vous à tout le monde, étranger ou connaissance.

Le Juif: Par Mahomet! vous ne l'aurez qu'après m'avoir donné trente sous.

(*Woman:* Alas! No, sir. On the contrary, I pray you, for the love of God, and out of respect for this sacred day of Easter, which I must observe, give me my dress. You will have it back tomorrow; on my honor and my baptism, I will return it to you, and I will never see you again. I will speak well of you to everyone, be he stranger or friend.

Jew: By Mahomet! You will not have it before you give me thirty sous.)⁶⁰

Ultimately the Jew, holding the dress for a ransom of, significantly, thirty pieces of silver, agrees to lend the dress to the Wicked Woman if she purloins a host for him to torture. In the next scene, the Jew's wife prepares to attend Easter celebrations:

La Femme Du Juif: Par Mahomet, je suis contente! Au moins, cette fois, je verrai cette grande affair des Chrétiens don't ils font tant de bruit.

(*Jew's Wife:* By Mohammed, I am happy! At last, this time, I will go to that grand affair of the Christians where they make so much noise.)⁶¹

Meanwhile, Jacob tortures his purloined wafers, which bleed. After the miracle is betrayed to the authorities by the Wicked Woman, Jacob is

convicted and brought to the execution pyre in a powerful finale. Here, he remains impious, defiantly calling for his “book” (presumably his copy of the Torah), which he believes will protect him from the flames. The authorities finally deliver his book to him, less out of compassion than to demonstrate that it has no power, as he languishes on the stake. While being burned to death in act 2, scene 6, Jacob cries out:

Le Juif: Oui, oui, c'est lui, c'est bien lui! Je suis sauvé... Mais quoi, ô diable! je brûle ... Diables! je brûle, je brûle, je brûle... feu, flame! je vais périr ... Corps, esprit et âme, tout est en feu! Diables! à la hate! Diables! emportez-moi ...

(Jew: Yes, yes, it's my book! I'm saved ... But what's this, o devil! I'm burning! Devils! Devils! I burn! I burn! I burn ... fire, flame! I'm going to die ... Body, spirit, and soul, everything is on fire! Devils! Make haste! Devils! Deliver me ...)⁶²

Jacob calls out to “Diables” (Devils) specifically, not to Mohammed whom he has previously mentioned, but there is a definite echo here of the death-cries of the Jews in Brussels of 1370.

We can now describe a transmission of the invocation of Mohammed from the 1370 event of Brussels to the *Mistère de la Sainte Hostie*, and from there to the *Play of the Sacrament*.⁶³ These plays are, in fact, only two of many legends, poems, and other cultural products that refer directly to the 1370 event, including not only the eponymous “Jonathan” characters, but because the Jews call out to Mohammed at some point in every retelling.

V. Revision and the Revisionist

But why should such a play appear in East Anglia in the late fifteenth century, some two hundred years or more after the lynching of Jonathan of Enghien? There can be little doubt that the abuses, violence, and ultimate failures of the Crusades, and the difficulties involved in launching new ones, were another great source of European sociocultural tension directed toward Jews over many centuries. But at the time of the *Play of the Sacrament's* supposed writing in the years following the conquest by Turkish Muslims of the Byzantine Empire in 1461, the crusader spirit was clearly in its final death throes, sparking broad expressions ranging from mild concern to profound anguish throughout Europe. A scribe at

the Cretan monastery of Agarathos wrote “there has never been and will never be a more dreadful happening,” while Aeneas Sylvius bemoaned the “the second death of Homer and of Plato.” Olivier de la Marche praised the fallen Byzantine emperor as “the one authentic Emperor, the true heir of Augustus and of Constantine.” Guillaume Dufay’s mournful dirge on the subject became wildly popular. Philip of Burgundy’s famous banquet in Liege in 1454, featuring a live pheasant bedecked with jewels and an actor dressed as a Saracen menacing guests with a toy elephant, culminated with all the attending princes pledging the “Oath of the Pheasant” to unite in a Holy War to reclaim Constantinople.⁶⁴ But these and other expressions of Christian piety and unity against the Muslim threat proved hollow, as European princes proved unwilling to put aside personal schemes and local rivalries long enough to commit to the horrors and hardships of a renewed Crusade. Sylvius, by this time Pope Pius II, would in 1459 lament:

We are ashamed that Christians are so indifferent. Some are given over to luxury and pleasure; others are kept away by avarice. The Turks do not hesitate to die for their most vile faith, but we cannot incur the least expense nor endure the smallest hardship for the sake of Christ’s gospel. If we continue thus, it will be all over with us. We shall soon perish unless we can summon up a different spirit.⁶⁵

The spirit was not to appear. By 1480 the Turks were in Italy and threatening Eastern Europe. By the 1520s, the alliance between Francis I, “His Most Christian Majesty” of France, and Sultan Suleiman against the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V had hopelessly muddled up the morally legitimizing “Us-vs.-Them” simplicity of the crusader spirit. So there was certainly a pressing and immediate fear sweeping Europe at the time of the writing of the *Play of the Sacrament*.

As for the English in particular, they could diminish their anxiety considerably by citing Edward’s 1290 expulsion of the Jews as an early blow against the encroaching power of the infidel, one that transformed the material map to better reflect the spiritual one. Sylvia Tomasch has written that Chaucer’s recounting of the removal of Jews to “Asye” (Asia) in *The Prioress’s Tale* was a celebration of England’s expulsion of Jews in advance of the rest of Europe; the “sanitized” England thus becomes a model of a pure Christian land.⁶⁶ The very absence of Jews therefore

becomes critical to the formation of an English Christian identity; the ones who recognized the perfidy of Jews, the risk of defilement even with their presence, and exiled them to live with their fellow infidels:

The Prioress' "Ayse" can be understood not only as the medieval oriental-ized East that replaces the familiar English homeground but also as the "phantasmic space" that supplants in the English imaginary the actual, contested Asia of losing crusades. This is also an Asia, therefore, not only of subjugated Jews but of triumphant Christians; here actual victorious Saracens are replaced by virtual vanquished Jews. (248)

It is very attractive, then, to imagine the *Play of the Sacrament* as not merely a re-enactment of the Crucifixion with Orientalized Jews, but as a re-enactment of the expulsion of the Jews, and thus all infidels (through the Jewish invocation of Mohammed) from England. The *Play of the Sacrament*, then, is a revision of a narrative of origin that exculpates an ethnically cleansed England for the failure of the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople and Trebizond, and rewrites history with an English victory over all infidel forces, embodied locally on the English stage by actors, loaded down with bladders full of animal blood, playing Jews invoking the Muslim Prophet while torturing the semiotically unstable host prop.

I do not mean to suggest simply that the Jewish body in this play was automatically read as that of a Muslim. But the boundary distinguishing infidel Jew from infidel Muslim in the medieval mind was certainly more permeable to the limited fluidity of the Jewish identity than that between the Jew and any intransigent, heretical Christian. Neither do I mean to suggest that the English of the late fifteenth century could not differentiate a performed Muslim from a Jew, only that it was not necessary that they should. Both identities could be made to occupy the same position, multiply and variously. Finally, given the evidence examined above, it seems far more likely that the play's audience could forget that Jews were not Muslims than that they were not Christian heretics. The action of the *Play of the Sacrament* renders the powerful alien, the Muslim, into the familiar, defeated Jew by tapping into the extant stigmatization of the myth of host desecration, whose particular instances in history, which routinely include the invocation of the Prophet of Islam by Jews, suggest complicity between the Jew and Muslim.

The patent anachronisms necessary to render the Jew and Muslim co-deicides, the intentional and strategic blindness toward Jewish law and custom necessary to frame Jews for blood libels, host desecration accusations, and the practice of invoking Mohammed, and the cultural amnesia necessary to achieve through these myths the surrogacy of the Jew for the distant Muslim are all examples of the slippage that Homi Bhaba has predicted is an inevitable result of colonial discourse as:

[a] discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely “rupture” the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a “partial” presence.⁶⁷

What better example of a “partial presence” might we require than the Jew in early modern England? At once absent and present, the Jew’s invisibility to official culture only magnifies the threat that he might be there somewhere, a local tendril of the monstrous danger to Christian civilization from infidels who attack the sacraments and call out to an alien prophet as if he were God.

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NOTES

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¹ See Norman Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, Early English Text Society (EETS), s.s. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), lxx–lxxxv; Michael Jones, “Theatrical History in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*,” *English Literary History* 66, no.2 (1999): 223–60; David Lawton, “Sacrilege and Theatricality: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 281–309; and Gail MacMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) (see pages 34–35). Because Lawton and Jones have complicated the issue of the play’s origin, I will refer to the text here as the *Play of the Sacrament* and not as “The Croxton Play” as is usually done.

² *Play of the Sacrament*, ll. 443–44. This study makes use of Davis’s *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* (pp. 58–89) for quotations from the *Play of the Sacrament*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

³ *The Song of Roland*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Middlesex: Penguin, 1966). See laisses 32, 47, 104, 187, 142, 187 (in which twenty thousand Paynims destroy the shrines and idols of their

gods, whom they believe have abandoned them: "Into a ditch they boot away Mahound / For pigs and dogs to mangle and befoul"), 194, 195, 235, 253, and 264.

⁴ See F. J. Furnivall's *The Digby Plays*, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1896; reprint, 1967).

⁵ From A. C. Cowley's *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (London: Dent, 2004), 140–43.

⁶ *The Towneley Plays*, ed. A. C. Cawley and Martin Stevens, 2 vols., EETS, s.s. 13–14 (London: Oxford University Press, 1994)

⁷ See Lucy Toulmin Smith's *York Plays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885).

⁸ *The N-Town Play*, ed. Spector, Stephen, 2 vols., EETS, s.s. 11–12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

⁹ See *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, EETS (London, Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ For the full text of this play, see H.S.D. Mithal's *An Edition of Robert Wilson's Three Ladies of London and Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* (New York: Garland, 1988).

¹¹ Lawton, 283.

¹² Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead; Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996)

¹³ Kathleen Biddick observes this in "The ABC of Ptolemy: Mapping the World with the Alphabet," in *Text and Territory*, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 291, n. 2.

¹⁴ Roach, 5.

¹⁵ Roach, 3.

¹⁶ Roach, 6.

¹⁷ Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), esp. chapter 1; to my mind, no other scholar has provided a more useful and salient analysis of the stage action of the *Play of the Sacrament* than Sofer does here.

¹⁸ Rosemarie K. Bank, *Theatre Culture in America, 1825–1860* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Lawton, 283.

²⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004), 258–59.

²¹ The idea that Jewish men were capable of menstruation is an ancient one, linked possibly to the blood magic Jewish magicians supposedly practiced in ancient Greece and Rome. For more on blood (and bread) libels related to Jews, see R. Po-Chia Hsia's *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); see also Miri Rubin's *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), and Joshua Trachtenburg's *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943).

²² Celia Cutts, "The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece," *Modern Language Quarterly* 5 (1944): 45–60.

²³ Michael Jones argues that the playscript may have been included in the sixteenth-century Dublin manuscript that provides its transmission because the copyist (or his patron) may have actually been sympathetic to what he perceived to be a critique of the doctrine of transubstantiation (see Jones, 223–60; also Lawton, 291). I agree with Lawton that to disprove Jones's argument that the play may have been seen to serve an anti-Catholic, satirical purpose at the time of its inclusion in this compilation, the mid-sixteenth century, would require "a subtle model of reception"; however, it is unclear whether such a notion can be back-planted to the fifteenth century, and I also must agree with Stephen Spector's assertion that there is little in the behavior of the Jews of this play before their conversion to incite in any audience member a feeling of sympathy or kinship (see his "Time, Space, and Identity in the *Play of the Sacrament*," in *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan E. Knight [Cambridge: Brewer, 1997], 189–200). But it is important to note, as Jody Enders observes, that even if the play is subversive of the Eucharist, it is not at all critical of anti-Semitism, which is the foundation for its violence (see nn. 27–29, below).

²⁴ Denise L. Despress, "Immaculate Flesh and the Social Body: Mary and the Jews," *Jewish History* 12 (1998): 47. See also n. 29, below.

²⁵ See Cutts 45–60; David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 755; Victor I. Scherb, "Violence and the Social Body in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," in *Themes in Drama v. 13, Violence in Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 70.

²⁶ Robert A. Clark and Claire Sponsler, "Other Bodies: Racial Cross-Dressing in the *Mystere de la Sainte Hostie* and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 61–88.

²⁷ Jody Enders, "Dramatic Memories and Tortured Space in the *Mistère de la Saint Hostie*," in *Medieval Practices of Space*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 201.

²⁸ Enders, 199.

²⁹ Enders's observation, I think, seriously complicates David Lawton's characterization of the play as "uniquely tender-hearted" (302) and being "at odds with the active intolerance that generated such [anti-Jewish] stories in the first place" (289); Enders pursues the link between representations of violence against Jews (and violence by Jews against the Eucharist wafer) with actual violence against living Jews in her "Theater Makes History: Ritual Murder by Proxy in the *Mystere de la Sainte Hostie*," *Speculum* 79, no. 4 (2004): 991–1016. See also Stephen Spector, "Anti-semitism and the English Mystery Plays," in *The Drama of the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Davidson, John H. Stroupe, and C. J. Gianakaris (New York: AMS, 1982), 328–41. To clarify: this play is abominably anti-Semitic and violent toward Jews, but the Jewish figures are really not sufficiently frightening to suggest that the piece is meant to be seen as anything other than a lighthearted comedy; as I will discuss, the anti-Semitism is all the more pernicious for that observation.

³⁰ See Ann Eljenholm Nichols, "The Croxton Play of the Sacrament: A Re-Reading," *Comparative Drama* 22 (1988): 120.

³¹ R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 68.

³² In the interest of full disclosure, and before the question of heresy is completely quarantined from this argument, it is worth noting that violence against sacramental bread was actually

part of the regular Eastern Orthodox liturgical ritual. A colleague was kind enough to alert me to an account, dating from the 1360s, by Archbishop Nicholas Kabasilas of Thessalonika, which appears in Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* (C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, v. 12: *Psychology and Alchemy* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968]). The account reads thus:

the priest cuts a piece off the loaf and repeats the text "He is led as a lamb to the slaughter." Then he lays it on the table and repeats, "The lamb of God is sacrificed." The sign of the cross is then imprinted on the bread and a small lance stabbed into its side, to the text "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith came there out blood and water." At these words the water and wine are mixed in the chalice. (309)

The *oble* is then brought out by the priest. Jung notes that the procedure amounts to a reenactment of the actual *mortificatio* of Christ's flesh, although the focus is on the Roman soldier rather than the fabled cabal of high-ranking Jewish priests. The resemblance of this ritual to the action of the *Play of the Sacrament* is indeed striking, and worth, I think, ferreting out. However, since the perpetrators of the violence against the sacred bread are specifically Jewish in the *Play of the Sacrament*, and since they specifically invoke Mohammed, linking the play to the Greek ritual seems, unfortunately, outside the scope of my immediate study. Whether the evidence is strong enough here to suggest that the *Play of the Sacrament* might be a late fifteenth-century critique of this Eastern ritual I must leave to wiser heads than mine to discover.

³³ Donnalee Dox, "Theatrical Space, Mutable Space, and the Space of Imagination: Three Readings of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," in *Medieval Practices of Space*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt, and Michal Kobialka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 175–82.

³⁴ Lawton, 286.

³⁵ Dox does not observe this possibility, but possibly this is because she repeats the unfortunate error of labeling Jews as heretics (180).

³⁶ See Alan Harris Cutler, and Helen Elmquist Cutler, *The Jew as Ally of the Muslim: Medieval Roots of Anti-Semitism* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 100.

³⁷ Cutler and Cutler note evidence of this in many cultural products, most strikingly a Norwegian altar-frontal (103) and a 1508 woodcut (114).

³⁸ The patent perverseness in accusing Jews of betraying these two cities to Muslims when neither was attacked by Muslims is obvious. In all fairness, however, the accusation in general that Jews acted as fifth columnists for Muslims probably has a certain merit (see Cutler and Cutler, 90–93).

³⁹ See Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Anti-Semitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 67.

⁴⁰ For a good summary of the relationship between the blood libels and the expulsion crisis, see Joel Carmichael's *The Satanizing of the Jews: Origin and Development of Mystical Anti-Semitism* (New York: Fromm, 1992), 75; and David Berger's *From Crusades to Blood Libels to Executions: Some New Approaches to Medieval Anti-Semitism* (Second Annual Lecture of the Victor J. Selmanowitz Chair of Jewish History [New York: Touro College Publication, 1997]), 2–4. To be sure, Peter the Venerable and others like him, including to a lesser degree Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi, were vicious anti-Judaic polemicists, but they took great pains to learn the specifics of Jewish and Muslim doctrines, getting their education from ambassadors and converts, and advocated for the bloodless conversion of the infidel to Christianity; Peter even went to great pains to have his writings translated into Arabic to facilitate the conversion of Muslims.

⁴¹ Norman Rufus Colin Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 12.

⁴² See John Paul II's *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome: Liguori 1992) 841–43, 2106; *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf 1994) 80–1, 99; *Path to Peace, A Contribution* (Brookfield, WI: Liturgical, 1980): 478, 826; *Familiaris Consortio*, Encyclical, (Pauline 1981); *L'Osservatore Romano* (Vatican City) of 1 Mar 1980 and 13 Apr 1986; *The Freedom of Conscience and Religion* (Pauline, 1980): 2–4; *Veritatis Splendor*, Encyclical (Pauline 1993) just to name a few of the in-print contributions of this visionary of peace to the reconciliation of Catholics with Jews and Muslims.

⁴³ Clark and Sponsler, 75.

⁴⁴ Salomir Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952–83), 11:166–67.

⁴⁵ Clark and Sponsler, 68.

⁴⁶ Baron, 11:164–5.

⁴⁷ John of St. Guagerico, “Informatio facta per dominum Johannem de Sancto Guagerico, decanum Christianitatis Bruxellensis, super Sacramento miraculoso, seu sacrosanctis hostiis, anno Domini M•CCCC secundo, mensis augusti die XIIa,” *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 28(1932): 342–46. I am deeply grateful to Christopher Geandrites, of the Department of Classics at the University of Pittsburgh, for his help in translating this document from the Latin. The text is an appendix to a critical essay by Canon Placide Lefèvre, “La valeur d'une enquête épiscopale sur le miracle eucharistique de Bruzelles en 1370,” *RHE* 28 (1932), 329–42. I am indebted to the generous contribution of Dr. Sophie Queniet of the Department of Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University in translating this work from the French.

⁴⁸ Lefèvre, 343.

⁴⁹ Note that our translation differs from Lefèvre's account, who has the Jews “horrorstruck” (*frappés d'effroy*) and “bribing” (*soudoyer*) Katherine.

⁵⁰ Lefèvre, 345.

⁵¹ Lefèvre, 341.

⁵² C. G. N. DeVooy, *Middelnederlandse Legendes en Exempelen* (Amsterdam: Hagen, 1974), 207.

⁵³ Lefèvre, 333.

⁵⁴ It is also a matter of historical record that massacres of Jews on trumped-up charges often had financial motives, of course. Two examples stand out: the first, the massacre of the Jews of York in 1190, where the entire community was put to the sword (some of them even after they had been promised safe passage when they agreed to convert), was immediately followed by the mob storming the church basement to burn the financial records that showed them in debt to the Jews (see Chazan, 27; Moore, 31 and 118; and Colin Richmond's “Englishness and Medieval Anglo-Jewry,” in *The Jewish Heritage in British History*, ed. Tony Kushner [London: Frank Cass, 1992], 44–45). The second example is the account of Jacob von Königshofen, who wrote famously of the burning of more than a thousand Jews in Strasbourg in 1349 at the height of an anti-Jewish fervor:

And everything that was owed to the Jews was cancelled, and the Jews had to sur-

render all pledges and notes that they had taken for debts. The council, however, took the cash that the Jews possessed and divided it among the working-men proportionately. The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor and the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt. (quoted in James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin's *Medieval Reader* [New York: Viking, 1949], 176)

⁵⁵ Aix, 1817: Paris, Bibliothèque Réserve Yf 2915.

⁵⁶ For a good description of the social dramas, festivals, plays, poems, and other cultural products that derive from anti-Judaic events, see Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to Present* (New York: Macmillan, 2002): see p. 55 for a very good genealogy of events following the 1370 host desecration trial in Brussels.

⁵⁷ DeVooys, 208. I am indebted to Dr. David Brumble, Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh, for his translation of this passage from the Dutch original. Salomir Baron, who does not apparently have access to the quote DeVooys transcribes here, ascribes the testimony that the Jews were calling to Mamet to a mishearing of the Jews' recitation of the *Shema*, a prayer to be sung during one's martyrdom (XI, 169), but this conclusion stretches the imagination. It seems more likely that such bizarre behavior of Jews calling out in passion and anguish to the Prophet of Islam existed only in the imaginations of those who retold the tales, those who believed them, and those who re-enacted and re-embodied them in the crafted speech of fictitious Jewish characters.

⁵⁸ See Baron, 10:169.

⁵⁹ See Enders, 201–3.

⁶⁰ This text is reprinted in M. Le Comte de Douhet's *Dictionnaire des mystères* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1854): see p. 889. The translation is mine.

⁶¹ See Douhet, 890.

⁶² See Douhet, 900. The Jew of *Saint Hostie* is named Jacob Mousse, not Jonathan, although in his *Les Mystères* (Paris: Librairie Hatchet, 1880), vol. 2, L. Petit de Julleville notes that his name was matched to that of the Shylockian villain of another mystery play, *Le Marchand et Le Juif* (310); see also pp. 574–76 for Julleville's discussion of *Le Saint Hostie*.

⁶³ Miss F. E. Barns connected the *Play of the Sacrament* directly to the events of 1370 in her 1926 Chicago dissertation, "The Background and Sources of *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*"; see Davis, lxxiv.

⁶⁴ See Steven Runciman's *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 160–70.

⁶⁵ Ross and McLaughlin, 320.

⁶⁶ Sylvia Tomasch, "Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew," in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 243–60

⁶⁷ Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 86.