Transposed Appetites: Mary of Jerusalem's Cannibalism in Post-Reformation Narratives

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In 1601 William Biddulph, a staunch Protestant ministering to his community in Aleppo, wrote up an account of his travels to the neighboring Holy Land. In the section entitled "On the Jews," he made a special point of noting how "They obserue still all their old Ceremonies and feasts, Sacrifices only excepted." One might initially assume that by "Sacrifices" Biddulph meant the blood offerings that had ceased with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. After all, many Protestants of the day linked the end of Temple ritual with Christ's triumphant supersession of the old law, and often emphasized such cessation when repudiating Christianity's own sacrificial rite, the Eucharist. Yet Biddulph was referring to something more sinister. As he went on to explain, "[The Jews] were wont amongst them to sacrifice children, but dare not now for feare of the *Turkes*. Yet some of them haue confessed, that their Physitians kill some Christian patient or other, whom they haue under their hands at that time, in stead of a sacrifice."[1] By presenting the killing of "some Christian patient or other" as an expedient substitute for child sacrifice, Biddulph effectively established a link between the "old Ceremonies and feasts" of Jewish culture, now forcibly abrogated, and the practice of child murder he claimed was likewise suppressed under Ottoman rule.

Biddulph's equation of child murder, divinely mandated sacrifice, and salvific promise is striking but not singular. His version of Judaism, shared

Our thanks to Barnaby Taylor and Imogen Black for their help with this article.

1. William Biddulph, *The Travels of Certaine Englishmen into Africa, Asia, Troy, Bythinia, Thracia, and to the Black Sea* (London, 1609), 74.

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by many of his fellow Protestants, was of a religion still fixated on Temple tradition, unable to conceive of worship without some form of sacrifice. This perspective certainly shapes an earlier sermon preached by John Foxe in 1578 on the occasion of a failed Jewish baptism (the subject actually ran away before the ceremony could be performed), in which he proposed that God had allowed the 70 CE destruction of Jerusalem "else the uaine persuasion, that hath taken roote so long in the hearts of the people, touching the righteousnes of the Law, touching circumcision, peace offrings, & sacrifices could not be rased out of their mindes, if the ceremoniall Law should continue in her former authoritie."[2] Here again, we get a reminder of "sacrifice" as part of Temple ceremony that at once invites us to consider Protestantism's complex relationship to Judaism and implicitly raises questions about the Eucharist and its tendentious place in the early modern Reformed church. Making a similar connection nearly two decades later in 1593, the popular preacher Henry Smith exulted that there were "no moe Sacrifices, no mo Ceremonies, for the truth is come. Sacrifices and Ceremonies are honorablie buried with the Priesthood of Aaron, let them rest: it is not lawfull to violate the sepulchers of the dead and take their bodies out of the earth, as the witch would raise Samuel out of his graue. Therefore they which retaine ceremonies, which should be abrogated, reliques of Iudaisme, or reliques of Papisme, may be said to violate the sepulchers of the dead."[3]

Our essay considers this overlapping "violat[ion] of sepulchers" by examining the intersection of ritual sacrifice, blood libel, and child murder in a notorious story set against the backdrop of Jerusalem's final devastation at Roman hands in 70 CE. Mary of Jerusalem, otherwise known as Maria or Miriam, is fabled to have killed, eaten, and served up her only son to starving rebels during the terrible famine that preceded the Temple's destruction. Our respective scholarship has acknowledged how early modern Protestant writers deployed Mary's cannibalism as a satirical attack on the Eucharist. But what is more striking is that links between Mary's action and that sacrament also occurred in pre-Reformation texts. Given the swirling controversies over transubstantiation and the real presence of Christ's body and blood, it is unsurprising that Protestant writers should have adopted this parallel. But it is less clear at first glance why medieval writers resorted to the same Eucharistic association.

Juxtaposing medieval and early modern Protestant accounts of Mary's cannibalism reveals a shared value system that elevates the symbolic or

2. *A Sermon Preached at the Christening of a Certaine Iew, at London, by Iohn Foxe*, trans. James Bell (London, 1578), Kr. See also Sharon Achinstein, "John Foxe and the Jews," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 86–120.

3. Henry Smith, *Gods Arrowe against Atheists* (London, 1593), 117.

sacramental over the literal or corporeal. Specifically, these stories overlap when they commend the religious praxis of the writers by disparaging that of their predecessors as stubbornly carnal. Thus, where medieval narratives denigrate the Jews as literal consumers of flesh, subsequent Protestant texts redirect that charge of cannibalism against the doctrine of transubstantiation, which they rejected in their own faith. Granted, there are key differences too. By deflecting the discomfort with flesh eating (however divine that flesh might be) back onto the very Catholics who had first displaced it onto the Jews, these Protestant texts are less implicated in the blood libel literature that so dominated medieval Europe.[4] That said, both medieval and Protestant narratives end up confirming the overwhelming appeal of healing flesh, particularly as it pertains to the powerful mediation of Mary's holy namesake, the Virgin.

This material at once emphasizes the degree to which the Holy Mother was rendered complicit in the sacrifice of her son, and how easy it was to pervert, parody, and evacuate that relationship of all sanctity. Linking pre-Reformation accounts of Mary's cannibalism to their post-Reformation counterparts illuminates an important aspect of the Protestant reception of medieval theology. Specifically, it reveals the degree to which both parties were preoccupied with the power of the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary's part in it, how similarly they sought to expel its resultant anxieties about anthropophagy, and further, how the practical theology of the Eucharist changed in the Protestant world.

RELIQUES OF IUDAISME, PAPISME

Mary's terrible story comprises the sixth book of Josephus's eyewitness account of the wars between the Jews and the Romans that ended in the Holy City's devastation. The *Jewish War* (ca. 75 CE) introduces her as a once wealthy widow who, like so many others, was trapped within the walls of the beleaguered city during the siege laid by Titus Vespasian. Like her hapless fellow denizens, she scoured the streets for sustenance, crawling down the food chain in search of snakes, rats, mice, horses' hooves, dung, and maggots. When nourishment of any sort proved impossible to come by, she killed her son—partly for food and partly to save him from impending enslavement by the Romans.

4. See Clive Sinclair, *Blood Libels* (London: Allison & Busby, 1985); David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007); E. M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kathy Lavezzo, *The Accommodated Jew: English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

As may be imagined, Josephus's grisly story fascinated centuries of readers, especially those who, like Foxe, interpreted the siege as divine punishment for Christ's crucifixion. Indeed, Foxe was operating in an established providentialist tradition that can be traced back to Eusebius, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea. Meredith Hanmer's translation of Eusebius, published in 1577, just a year prior to Foxe's abortive attempt at Jewish conversion, assigned the cause of Jerusalem's destruction to "the iust iudgement of God" for "the haynous offence committed against *Christ*."[5] Though it is unclear whether early readers of Eusebius also had full access to Josephus's account, they nevertheless embraced the notion that the devastation he described was divinely mandated. Early church fathers such as Basil the Great (330–379), Jerome (347–420), and Isidore of Pelusium (d. 450) all credited Josephus with identifying his people's sinfulness as the chief reason for their fall.[6] This bias finds memorable expression in Pseudo-Hegesippus's trenchant *De excidio urbis Hierosolymitanae* (ca. 370–75), which established an unequivocal connection between the Crucifixion and the Jews' catastrophic end by justifying the terrible suffering of the latter—particularly starvation and cannibalism—as righteous punishment for their reprobation.[7]

The result was that a figure such as Mary of Jerusalem became "deeply entrenched in the European collective consciousness," to quote Shulamith Shahar.[8] Mary's gruesome history of suffering and violence against the backdrop of the siege featured in countless sermons, histories, homilies, treatises, and exempla, including Dante's *Purgatorio* (1472) and works by Boccaccio, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Trevisa. She also played a prominent role in the medieval vengeance plays on Jerusalem's devastation. As Sheila Delany posits, Jews continued to preoccupy English writers with what she calls their "absent presence" long after their expulsion from England in 1290.[9] The besieged Jews of 70 CE were no different in this regard. With Peter Morwen's 1558 translation into English of the *Josippon*—a bowdlerized version of the *Jewish War* often confused with the original—Mary of Jerusalem's ghastly story found further appeal with a newly reformed readership.[10]

5. Eusebius, *The Avncient Ecclesiasticall Histories of the First Six Hundred Years After Christ*, trans. Meredith Hanmer (London, 1577), 37–38.

6. See Heinz Schrekenberg and Kurt Schubert, eds., *Jewish Historiography and Iconography in Early and Medieval Christianity*, vol. 1 (Assen: Fortress, 1992), 73–80.

7. Pseudo-Hegesippus, *De excidio urbis Hierosolymitanae*, in *Hegesippi qui dicitur Historiae libri V*, ed. Vincente Ussani, vol. 66 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1932), 296.

8. Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990), 138.

9. Sheila Delany, ed., *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

10. Beatrice Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38–43.

Early modern sermons on Jewish iniquity were particularly partial to Mary's sad history, describing it with a mixture of pity and horror. John Stockwood's *A very fruitfall and necessarye Sermon of the most lamentable destruction of Ierusalem*, first preached in 1579, paints Mary as a tenderhearted mother driven to extremes who stabs her son while running backward because she cannot bear to look upon her sacrifice.[11] Adam Hill, preaching during the plague of 1593, likewise plays up the emotional torment of the scene by emphasizing the process by which Miriam is forced to dehumanize her son in order to kill him: "when she had wept and kissed him often, she put her child behind her and killed it with a dagger."[12] Thomas Wilson's 1613 sermon, which also assigns maternal suffering in Jerusalem as just consequence for "murthering Christ their Sauiour," multiplies the cannibalizing mother so that we now have "many mothers through rage of hunger, occasioned by famine in the time of the Seige, [who are] forced to broyle and eate their one children for food, to saue their liues with the death of thir sweet Infants, as it hapned by *Iosephus* report."[13] The same amplitude characterizes John Cockburn's 1697 Good Friday sermon, which reminds the penitent congregation of "what afterwards fell out at the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, viz. That during the strictness of the Siege, some were reduced to that strait, that to preserve their own Lives they Eat the flesh of their own Children."[14]

Mary's story exerted tremendous pull even beyond the pulpit. Though John Baker's popular ballad *Of the horyble and woful destruccion of Jerusalem* (1569) again multiplies the cannibalism by singing of "The mothers [who] moste unnaturally, / . . . slewe their Children ruefully, / And rosted them to eate," it is Mary who is most clearly called to mind in the details of the sorrowful slaughter and roasting of progeny.[15] Elsewhere she functioned as a shorthand for national calamity, as in Thomas Dekker's plague pamphlet *London Looke Backe at that Yeare of Yeares 1625*, where London becomes a cannibalistic mother, "eating vp, with *Mariam*, thine owne children."[16] Some writers did not even feel the need to name her, so sure were

11. John Stockwood, *A very fruitfall and necessarye Sermon of the most lamentable destruction of Ierusalem, and the heauy iudgements of God, executed vppon that people for their sinne and disobedience* (London, 1584), C4v–r.

12. Adam Hill, *The Crie of England, A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse in September 1593* (London, 1595), D8v.

13. Thomas Wilson, *Christs Farewell to Jerusalem and Last Prophesie* (London, 1614), C2v–r.

14. John Cockburn, *Fifteen Sermons Preach'd Upon Several Occasions, and on Various Subjects* (London, 1697), 153.

15. John Baker, *Of the horyble and woful destruccion of Jerusalem: And of the Sygnes and Tokens That Were Seene before it was Destroied* (London, 1569), lines 58–60.

16. Thomas Dekker, *London Looke Backe at that Yeare of Yeares 1625*, in *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Frank P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), 176.

they that her tragic story would be recognized. Samuel Cradocks's *Apostolical History* (1672) speaks only of a "certain *Noble Woman*" who "sod her Child to eat it." Mary's actions are no less pivotal for this anonymity: consequent upon her cannibalism, "such Mortality ensued, that from the 14 of *April* to the first of *July*, were carried out to be buried at the publick charge, an incredible number of Carkasses of the poorer sort."[17]

Reformation-era texts fascinated by this instance of child cannibalism reflect a shift in attitude toward Jews and Judaism that is not immediately obvious in the brief excerpt from Biddulph. The break with the Church of Rome occasioned new ties and allegiances: Luther's *sola scriptura* dictum, for instance, which charged reformed Christians to know the word of God in its original language, provoked interest in the Hebrew Bible. The "properties of the Hebrew tongue" were lauded by William Tyndale in his preface to *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), in which he claimed that they "agreeth a thousand times more with the English than with the Latin."[18] So dedicated was he to the Hebrew tongue that he continued his studies even as he languished in prison awaiting execution.

Tyndale's fervor was carried on well into the seventeenth century by the likes of the antiquarian John Selden, hailed in 1644 by Milton in his *Areopagitica* as "the chief of learned men reputed in this land."[19] Selden, who also pleaded for access to Babylonian and Palestinian Talmudic texts during a prison stint in the late 1620s, vigorously promoted the study of the Hebrew language, the Talmud, and Jewish history.[20] In 1628, Bishop Joseph Hall exalted England to the status of "second Israel," marveling at "those incomparable FAVOURS, wherewith God hath provoked and endeared this Israel."[21] The result was that, as Achsah Guibbory has shown, Protestant England evinced an increased respect for the Hebrew Bible and Jewish scholarship, a stronger sense of kinship with the people of the Old Testament, and a desire to associate Protestantism with the ancient faith.[22]

17. Samuel Cradock, *The Apostolical History promises The Acts, Labors, Travels, Sermons, Discourses, Miracles, Successes, and Sufferings, of the Holy Apostles from Christ's Ascention to the Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus* (London, 1672), 460.

18. William Tyndale, preface to *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, in *The Works of William Tyndale*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Appleford: Sutton Courtnay, 1964), 326.

19. John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953–82), 2:549.

20. See Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 2–4.

21. Joseph Hall, "The Blessings, Sins and Judgments of God's Vineyard," in *The Works of Joseph Hall: Successively Bishop of Exeter and Norwich; With Some Account of his Life and Sufferings*, vol. 5 (Oxford, 1837), 321.

22. Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity: Jews & Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2010). See also Groves, *Destruction of Jerusalem*; Vanita Neelakanta,

At the same time Protestant preachers were acutely conscious that kinship between their own nation and the ancient Jews meant, in the words of Hill's *Crie of England*, that "if these thinges [sins] be among the people of England, as they were among the Iewes" then it could go very hard for them for "as God spared not the natural oliue, so hee will not spare the wilde."[23] William Perkins lamented that England "requited" God's kindness with "more and greater sins than ever Israel did" and was therefore "a nation not worthy to be beloved: for thou has multiplied thy transgressions above theirs of Israel."[24] Bishop Hall's celebration of equivalence between England and Israel was likewise tempered with the dismayed admission: "are we less deep in the sins of Israel, than in Israel's blessings."[25] John Brinsely's 1655 sermon *Teares for Ierusalem*, which focused on the heresies, errors, and malpractices that beset the Reformed church, was dedicated to the "mourners in Sion" sensible of and "cordially affected with the present sad and calamitous condition of the Church of God in the Island of Great Britain."[26]

Consequently, accounts of Mary's action during this period focus largely on its Eucharistic connotations—in keeping with post-Reformation attacks on the Mass as cannibalistic. The idea that, in Aquinas's formulation, "the complete substance of the bread is converted into the complete substance of Christ's body, and the complete substance of the wine into the complete substance of Christ's blood," was interrogated by Luther, who dismissed Rome's "trumpery stuff about transubstantiation."[27] Calvin likewise repudiated the "execrable" Eucharist as "an idolatry condemned by God," marveling that "bread [could be] taken and adored as God."[28] Miles Coverdale's translation of Calvin in his *Treatise on the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ* expressed discomfort at the medieval designation of the Lord's Supper as a "sacrifice" because of its associations with ancient Jewish practice. Even though "bread for

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Retelling the Siege of Jerusalem in Early Modern England (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2019).

23. Hill, *Crie of England*, 100.

24. William Perkins, *A Faithful and Plain Exposition upon the First Two Verses of the Second Chapter of Zephaniah Containing a Powerful Exhortation to Repentance* (London, 1606), 279.

25. Hall, "Blessings, Sins and Judgments," 323.

26. John Brinsely, *Tears for Ierusalem, or The Compassionate Lamentation of a Tender Hearted Saviour over a rebellious and obdurate people* (London, 1656), Aaa3r.

27. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 58, *(3a. 73–78): The Eucharistic Presence*, ed. and trans. William Barden (1965; Cambridge University Press, 2006), 73. Martin Luther, "The Pagan Servitude of the Church: A First Inquiry," in *The Reformation Writings of Martin Luther: The Basis of the Protestant Reformation*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf, vol. 1 (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 226.

28. John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, ed. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 30.

their sacrifice" was used rather than an animal, it "pricketh too near the Jewish mark, and is not agreeable to the institution of the Lord."[29] For Zwingli, the mass was nothing more than a cannibalistic ritual and therefore "monstrous."[30]

Such allegations certainly underpin texts such as *Pammachius*, a play written in 1538 by the reformer Thomas Kirchmeyer, and performed in Cambridge in 1545. *Pammachius* overtly attacks transubstantiation in its final scene: a cannibalistic feast attended by Catholic clergy. In a slightly more restrained preface, Kirchmeyer hints that the play will deal with the taboo desires of Catholic clergy who

> indulge their appetites and their bellies excessively, as if they were serving the highest of the gods, like Cyclops in the tragedy, and they make sacred rites for their foulest desires. But they do not allow anyone to mutter against these actions, nay rather, like the foulest tyrant in Herodotus, when he had given Harpagus his son to eat and had asked him, the father, how the deed pleased him, was in no way willing to be cursed but rather to listen, forsooth, to the most agreeable words, "Whatever the king does, that is pleasing to me."[31]

This is a fascinatingly open suggestion on Kirchmeyer's part that King Henry VIII, through sanctioning the doctrine of transubstantiation, was essentially permitting cannibalism. He was not alone in voicing his dismay at this aspect of Catholic doctrine. Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563) describes the martyrdom of Thomas Brook who raged against the notion that "whoso would [receive the Eucharist] might have their stomach full of gods, their entrails full of gods."[32] English divines such as Thomas Becon specifically target medieval stories that described the vision of the child Jesus in the host. Becon castigates the "blusteryng and blowing" of the priests who "charme the bread on such sorte, that . . . it trudgeth streygt-wayes awaye beyonde the moone, and a fayre yong childe, about xv hundred yeares olde, come in the place of the bread." His description of the consumption that follows is visceral and uncompromising: "And after ye haue made him, ye tear him on peces, ye eat hym, ye digest hym, and send hym downe by a very homely place. O cruell and unmercyfull

29. Miles Coverdale, *Treatise on the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ*, in *Writings and Translations of Myles Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter*, ed. George Person for the Parker Society (Cambridge, 1844), 451.

30. Huldrych Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religions*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Neville Heller (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 216.

31. Thomas Kirchmeyer, preface to *Tragœdia noua Pammachius, autore T. Naogeorgo* (Wittenberg, 1538). Translation by C. C. Love, available at www.chass.utoronto.ca/epc/rnlp/pammach.html. See also Paul W. White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485–1660* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 111.

32. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. George Townsend (London, 1837), 510.

fathers, so to handle your poore yong olde chylde."[33] The account of tearing the child to "peeces" echoes John Firth's 1533 objection to the sundering and multiplication of Christ's body such that "he shuld haue ben at ye least in xii. or xiii. places at once in his Disciples mouthes, and syttying at the table with them."[34]

Not to be outdone, in 1568 George Buchanan, Montaigne's old schoolteacher, echoed Kirchmeyer's anxieties about cannibalism when he compared the Eucharistic altar to a "sight [*sic*] more disgraceful / Than the bloody feast of the Cyclops."[35] A few years later in 1571, we get John Bridges denouncing priests as "cruell Canibali" and Thomas Adams echoing Becon in deriding the papists' "baked God."[36] In the seventeenth century certain Calvinists would adopt a rather crude reductio ad absurdum to discredit the doctrine of transubstantiation. Thus, Thomas Tuke's *Concerning the Holy Eucharist and the Popish-Breaden God* (1625) goes so far as to compare the Catholic consumption of Christ's body to men eating oysters: "so on Him they feed; / Whole and alive, raw and yet not bleed."[37]

MARY'S EUCHARISTIC PERVERSION IN PROTESTANT LITERATURE

It is alongside this propaganda about the Mass as state-sanctioned child cannibalism that Morwen's translation of *Josippon*, titled *A compendious and moste marueilous History of the latter times of the Jewes common weale*, would be printed multiple times. Composed during Morwen's self-imposed exile from persecution under Mary Tudor, it was first published just as Protestantism was reasserted as England's state religion with the accession of Elizabeth I.[38] His version adds much to Josephus's pathetic account, notably the words with which Mary (here known as Miriam) offers her only son's body to others: "Taste & see howe sweete my sonnes fleshe is."[39] Here the Eucharistic parody

33. Thomas Becon, *Worckes of Thomas Becon*, pt. 3 (London, 1563), fol. 38.

34. John Firth, "A Christen Sentence," in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Frank Manley et al., vol. 7, appendix C (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 429.

35. George Buchanan, "In colonias brasilienses," in *George Buchanan: The Political Poetry*, ed. and trans. Paul J. McGinnis and Arthur H. Williamson (Edinburgh: Lothian, 1995), 62.

36. John Bridges, *A Sermon Preached at Pauls Crosse* (London, 1571), 126; Thomas Adams, "Mystical Bedlam: Or the World of Madmen," in *The Works of Thomas Adams: Being the Sum of his Sermons, Meditations and Other Divine and Moral Discourses*, ed. Joseph Angus, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1861), 287.

37. Thomas Tuke, *Concerning the Holy Eucharist and the Popish-Breaden God to The Men of Rome, as well Laiqves and Cleriqves* (Amsterdam, 1625), 6.

38. See Erin E. Kelly, "Jewish History, Catholic Argument: Thomas Lodge's *Workes of Josephus* as a Catholic Text," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 998.

39. Peter Morwen, *A compendious and moste marueilous History of the latter times of the Jewes common weale* (London, 1575), 231v.

is underlined by a direct allusion to Psalm 34:8: "O taste and see how gracious the Lord is."[40] From at least the fifth century, Christians have noted the Eucharistic overtones of this verse, and it has long featured in Eucharistic liturgy. Indeed, Susan Gillingham has observed, "From the sixteenth century onwards, most arrangements of this psalm, using verse 8 in particular, were for use in the Eucharist."[41] As Morwen was a deeply Protestant writer, one may assume that this parody, while certainly anti-Jewish (part of the long libel linking Jewish "literalism" with cannibalistic perversions of the host), is even more pointedly directed against the Catholics. Certainly, it is tempting to rank it alongside the other Protestant caricatures of the Mass as a cannibalistic perversion and of the Catholic faith, in general, as "Jewish" in its emphasis on externals.

But something odder is at work here. Morwen's text imitates none other than that famed early Christian version of the story, Pseudo-Hegesippus's *De excidio urbis Hierosolymitanae*, which alludes to the very same Eucharistic Psalm.[42] The widow in *De excidio* also offers her son to the soldiers with the encouraging words "gustate et videte quia suavis filius meus" (taste and see how sweet my son is), a direct echo, just as Morwen's phrase is, from the Psalm "taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus).[43] This entanglement of Eucharistic echoes in Catholic sources will receive closer attention later in this essay. Suffice it to say here that Pseudo-Hegesippus's parody of Mary/Miriam's action may be read as anti-Jewish—the Jews take literally the sacrifice only intended symbolically—and that Morwen, either copying this early (Catholic) source or coming up with the Psalm echo independently—decided to extend the satire to include Catholics as well.

To be sure, Morwen's anti-Catholic bias is unmistakable in the definitive relationship he establishes between Miriam and her venerated namesake, Mary, Mother of God. Her preparation of the feast and the language with which she greets the seditionists truly establish her as the perverse

40. Unless otherwise noted, all psalm references in this essay are to the Coverdale Psalter (1535). In the King James Bible (1611), this psalm is translated as "O taste and see that the Lord is good," but Morwen could well have been thinking of the text in the Hebrew. See Jacob Reiner, "The English Yosippon," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 58, no. 2 (October 1967): 134; G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester University Press, 1983), 135–37; Groves, *Destruction of Jerusalem*, 41.

41. Susan Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1–72*, vol. 2(Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2018), 208.

42. H. Leeming and K. Leeming, eds., *Josephus' "Jewish War" and Its Slavonic Version: A Synoptic Comparison* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 27. See also Bonnie Millar, *The Siege of Jerusalem in Its Physical, Literary and Historical Contexts* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000), 60–70; Auvo Kurvinen, ed., *The Siege of Jerusalem in Prose* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1969), 14.

43. Pseudo-Hegesippus, *De excidio*, 384. (This is Ps. 33:9 in the Vulgate.) All translations are our own unless otherwise noted.

Virgin. For when greeting the ravenous enemies who flock to her door at the "sauour of the fleshe rosted," she declares herself to be none other than their humble handmaid: "Be not displeased I beseeche you, with your handemayde for this, for you shall see I haue reserued part for you. Syt you downe therefore, and I wyl bryng it you, that ye may taste thereof, for it is very good meate. And by and by she layed the table, and set before them parte of the chyldes fleshe, saying, Eate, I pray you, here is a childes hande, see here his foote and other partes."[44] Miriam's self-appellation of "handmayde" immediately invokes images of the Virgin, the self-designated "handmayden of the Lord" (Luke 1:38).[45] As we shall see, it is as this "handemayde" that she most closely replicates—and subverts—the Virgin's role, even as her ceremonial laying of her table conjures up the post-Reformation communion table that replaced the Catholic altar.[46]

The uneasy association of Miriam's banquet with the Eucharist is likewise evident in other Protestant texts inspired by Morwen's *History* such as Thomas Nashe's *Christs Teares over Ierusalem* (1593), which affirms the similarity between the "tender-starued Mother to kill and eate her onely sonne" and "God's owne onely child, Christ Iesus (as deere to him as thou to mee, my sonne) he sent into the World to be crucified."[47] By explicitly invoking the Passion, Nashe calls attention to the medieval tradition that sought to equate the Virgin's nourishing breast with Christ's wounds on the cross.[48] The same equivalence is implied and subverted in T.D.'s *Canaan's Calamitie Jerusalem's Miserie and England's Mirror*, printed first in 1618. Here Miriam's son achieves a whole new level of abjection by begging to consume his own extremities:

> Dear Mother hear me one word and no moe:
> See here my foot so slender in your sight:
> Give me but leave to eat my little toe;
> No better supper will I ask too night;
> Or else my thumb, a morsell small you see,
> And these two joynts, methinks may spared be.[49]

44. Morwen, *Compendious and moste marueilous History*, 231r.

45. Bishops' Bible (London, 1568).

46. See also Beatrice Groves, "*Christ's tears over Jerusalem* and Maternal Cannibalism in Early Modern London," in *Biblical Women in Early Modern Literary Culture, 1550–1700*, ed. Victoria Brownlee and Laura Gallagher (Manchester University Press, 2015), 146–62; Neelakanta, *Retelling the Siege*, 30–31.

47. Thomas Nashe, *Christs Teares over Ievusalem*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, vol. 2 (1904; repr., New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), 75–76.

48. On medieval church art, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). On religious music and verse, see Robert Stevick, ed., *One Hundred Middle English Lyrics*, rev. ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 144; Carl Horstmann, ed., *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript* (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1975), 25.

49. T.D., *Canaan's Calamitie Jerusalem's Miserie and England's Mirror* (London, 1677), D4v.

In tendering his own body as the bread of life—but only for himself, not others—the boy becomes little more than a self-consuming artifact. Again, it is his mother who transforms him into something more by consuming him herself. Specifically, her later allusion to her "one blood" conjures images of the lactating Virgin in medieval altarpieces whose purified blood nourished the infant savior so that he, in turn, could sustain humankind. By describing her as a golden-haired young matron, T.D. effectively aligns her with medieval representations of the Virgin that highlighted her long golden tresses—the perfect embodiment of the European model of beauty. But in famished Jerusalem this blond Mary's blood/milk is translated into tears that have no nutritive value whatsoever. Rather than feed her son through her body, she can only satisfy her hunger pangs by preying on him.

Miriam's incorporation of her child through eating becomes a depraved literalization of Augustine's pronouncement on the Eucharist—"You shall not change ME into yourself as bodily food but into ME you shall be changed"[50]—slyly rendered in Pseudo-Hegesippus as "reddite matri quod accepistis, redite in illud naturale secretum in quo domicilio sumsisti spiritum" (give back to your mother that which you have received; return into that natural, secret place, in which abode you took up the spirit).[51] The idea of a mystical incorporation with Christ was celebrated by certain Protestant preachers such as the evangelical Thomas Norton in the mid-1570s: "Oh what a sweete thinge it is to feede in Christe and by feeding on him to have him so made one with us. As by good disgestion [*sic*] our meate and drincke is made one with our fleshe and bludd. What a thinge is the communion and incorporatinge of Christe into you."[52] But whereas Norton's alimentary absorption of Christ's body is metaphorical ("as by good disgestion"), we cannot escape the grossness of Miriam's (re)union with her son. As if to underscore her folly, the 1677 edition of *Canaan's Calamitie* included a passage about Jewish greed that focused exclusively on gluttony: "Such was their daintiness and delicacy, that they could not devise, with what meat they might best please their stomachs, wishing for better bread than could be made of Wheat: abusing in such sort the blessings of God (which was in great abundance bestowed upon them)."[53] But man cannot live by "better bread" alone, and the Jews soon discover that even the roasted flesh of the only begotten son cannot sustain them. In this context, Miriam's rebuke to the onlookers who "Charge me with eager looks to

50. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, bk. 10 (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 118.

51. Pseudo-Hegesippus, *De excidio*, 382–83.

52. Thomas Norton to James Hawes, quoted in Michael A. R. Graves, *Thomas Norton: Parliament Man* (Oxford: Wiley, 1994), 325.

53. T.D., *Canaan's Calamitie*, A2v.

lay the cloth: / And as I lou'd my life to bring you meate" affirms not just the Jews' moral accountability but, implicitly, the culpability of the Catholic communicants who participate so avidly in the Eucharistic feast.[54]

The lure of Marian/Eucharistic symbolism proved too strong to resist even for William Heminge, whose *Jewes Tragedy*, probably written in the late 1620s, is an otherwise strikingly secular dramatization of Jewish defeat. Following Morwen, Heminge makes the victim a "pretty" little boy, articulate and courteous, who when given the option to die, politely requests both food and life. The horror is thus magnified when Miriam announces her grisly intent, "Why thou shalt be my food: / When I have kill'd thee, I will feed on thee."[55] Her ghoulish gesture to the means by which she will end his life—"my sweet Lamb, look; here is the knife prepar'd" (5.2.51)—echoes the binding of Isaac and its typological prefiguring of the Agnus Dei. But she is no more Abraham than he is Isaac, and there is no graceful reprieve.

Instead, Heminge's Miriam, far from averting her gaze in shame and pain, stabs her unfortunate son repeatedly even as he "sturs and sturs" (5.2.72). At this moment Miriam seems closer to the two Jews in the medieval *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* who, upon buying a consecrated host, stab it multiple times and then throw it in an oven. Like her kinsmen in that text who are frightened by a vision of "a Chyld apperyng with wondys blody: / A swemfull syght yt ys to looke vpon,"[56] she too is then tormented with the memory of her son with heart "raw and bloudy" (5.6.48), thereby reinforcing the Christological parallel. Her reaction is equally reminiscent of a figure in the *Vitae patrum*, a hagiography of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of early Christianity, translated by the Dutch Jesuit Heribert Rosweyde in 1615. One of the stories in the collection tells of a Jewish traveler who stops by a church only to realize his culpability in the Crucifixion when he sees a vision of a bloodied infant in the host. Heminge's Miriam might almost be echoing that hapless sojourner when she confesses how her son's "wounds bleed fresh / in my remembrance: the bloudy act / sits sad upon my soul" (5.8.109–11).[57]

The degree to which Heminge is successful in co-opting the anti-Jewish sentiments of medieval texts into the prevailing anti-Catholic bias is clear

54. Ibid., E4r.

55. William Heminge, *Jewes Tragedy* 5.2.46–47, in *The Plays and Poems of William Heminge*, ed. Carol Morley (Madison NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006). Hereafter, we cite the play parenthetically by act, scene, and line numbers.

56. *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, ed. John T. Sebastian (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), lines 804–5, https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sebastian-croxton-play-of-the-sacrament.

57. See also Merrall Llewelyn Price, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 32.

from his creation of Peter, Miriam's serving man. The play's buffoon, the ironically named Peter, is hardly the rock upon which any church can be built. In a scene that echoes *Canaan's Calamitie*, the suffering servant foraging for worms confesses that he is "so hungry, that I could eat my flesh / If I had any flesh to eat" (4.12.20–21). But Peter is no sacrificial victim, and his self-cannibalization remains a monstrous fantasy. Instead, he functions to satirize the Eucharist further by emphasizing the grotesque—as opposed to tragic—quality of Miriam's cannibalism. As a partaker of her feast, he consumes her son in the flesh rather than merely in the bread. His comic revulsion upon realizing what he has eaten—"Me thinks I feel a great toe stir in my stomack now" (5.8.108)—echoes the anti-transubstantiation rants that focused in gruesome detail on the passage of the sundered body of Christ through the alimentary canal.[58]

In a striking image, Peter compares the upheaval of his stomach ("some thing sturrs in my belly") to the pangs of childbirth—"I am in travail sure: for my stomack wambles and wambles / And I shall be deliver'd on't ere long" (5.6.64–65)—thereby reinforcing the nexus between birthing and consumption incarnate in the miracle of the host. Peter's violent physical repudiation of the child in his belly subverts that miracle, even as his comic delivery ("travail") links him to Miriam, whose womb is again full with her son's roasted remains. But this delivery is not deliverance. Though both Peter and Miriam survive at the play's end, they are preserved merely on the level of the body.

THE VIRGIN AND THE EUCHARIST IN MEDIEVAL ICONOGRAPHY

Mary of Jerusalem's story was immensely popular, not least because it was riveting in its horror. But in the medieval world, this story about the "sacrifice" and consumption of a boy child by his Jewish mother was necessarily charged with implication. In light of transubstantiation, what did Mary signify to the worshippers who at once consumed her tragic tale and the body of their God—all while venerating her holy namesake? We argue that the sacramental symbolism embedded in Mary's horrific act not only lent itself to anti-Jewish parodies or later anti-Catholic ones, but equally expressed the power of Eucharistic imagery and, relatedly, Marian symbolism within Christian culture. Indeed, it is impossible to avoid the paradoxical associations that cluster around the Virgin, whose links to the Eucharist and to the blood libel were so complex. The result was that

58. See Milton's memorable fulmination against real presence in *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.28, in his *Complete Prose Works*, 6:560.

medieval writers, too, confronted the Eucharist's transgressive power as they retold Mary of Jerusalem's story, even as their Protestant counterparts would later return to the complex offer of nurture and community provided by the very sacrament they sought to disenchant. The push and pull of contrary emotions—desire and revulsion, nostalgia and horror—characterize both sets of writings.

Scholarship on Mary of Jerusalem generally maintains that she exerted such fascination precisely because she functioned as a dark mirror of the Mother of God whose name she shared. Mary of Jerusalem, to quote Shahar, represents "the opposite pole to the Holy Mother," her cruelty highlighting the compassion of the latter. As Merrall Llewelyn Price likewise argues, she functioned as the "the mirror image of the blessed Virgin, the bad woman damned rather than redeemed by the body of her son, the Law-less Mary reproved rather than revered by the paternal Joseph, the Jew condemned through her own body rather than being saved by her avoidance of its pleasures."[59]

In medieval Europe where the Virgin was regarded as co-redemptrix, linked physically to Christ through the sacrificial blood that ran through both their veins, the image of her breastfeeding was particularly common.[60] Popular iconography frequently invoked the *vasa menstrualis*—the channel that purportedly translated and purified blood into lactating milk—thereby "foreground[ing] the association between the redemptive blood of the sacrificed Christ and the purified blood of the Virgin."[61] A perfect example of this is Jan van Eyck's sublime *Lucca Madonna* (ca. 1437), which depicts the nursing Virgin seated on a wooden throne in a resplendent blood red gown (the subject of an excellent study by Caroline Walker Bynum, who also focuses on the "eucharistic associations" of the piece.)[62] A polyptych in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella portrays the Madonna and child with a scroll on which the legend "Ego sum panis vivus qui cello descendi" (I am the living bread which is come down from heaven) is inscribed—reinforcing yet again the intimate connection between the Virgin and Eucharistic food. Even when not actively suckling Christ, the Virgin was deemed integral to her son's salvation.[63]

59. Price, *Consuming Passions*, 85.

60. Beth Williamson, "The Virgin *Lactans* as Second Eve: Image of the *Salvatrix*," *Studies in Iconography* 19 (1998): 105–38.

61. Merrall Llewelyn Price, "Bitter Milk: The *Vasa Menstrualis* and the Cannibal(ized) Virgin," in "Oral Fixations: Cannibalizing Theories," ed. Allyson D. Polsky and Tina Takemoto, special issue, *College Literature* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 147.

62. Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 302.

63. Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 17, interprets Mary's intervention at the wedding of Cana, where she motivated Christ to transform water into wine, as further proof of her involvement with the Eucharist.

Though Miri Rubin traces the association between the Virgin Mother and the Eucharist to the eleventh century, that discourse seems to have gathered real strength only in the fourteenth century, where she was frequently portrayed as a tabernacle, vessel, sacred container, a celebrant of the Mass, and even the oven in which the host was baked.[64] John Ryman's carol of 1492 celebrates the notion that "In virgyne Mary this bred was bake / Whenne criste of her manhoode did take, / For alle of synne mankynede to make."[65] A Swabian illustration from the same century even shows her pouring flour into the mill that produces the host. In Rubin's words, "She became a mediator, celebrant, the person who had intimately constituted the sacred."[66] Instrumental in lending Christ the flesh that then appeared miraculously on the altar, the Virgin Mother was, by this token, the preparer of the feast. Rubin translates Ranulph de la Houblonniere's sermon at the Beguinage in Paris (ca. 1273) as follows: "in his presence in flesh taken from the Virgin, on the table of the altar, he visits us by his grace."[67] A fifteenth-century Corpus Christi song likewise acknowledges that the "bred from heuene cam / Ffleych and blod of Mary it nam. / Ffor the synnys of Adam."[68]

Just as the sermons underscored the sacramental significance of the Nativity, art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries emphasized the idea of the Christ child as sacrifice. Leah Sinanoglou, in her seminal essay, reminds us that "in visual representations the manger scene becomes a hieroglyph of the divine Victim of the Mass. In church windows, manuscript illustrations, and sculpture the Christ Child often appears not protectively enclosed in His mother's lap, but remote from her, lying bound in swaddling clothes on what is clearly the altar of a church."[69] Hardly surprising, then, that plays on the Purification that comprised part of the medieval

64. Wendy Love Anderson, "The Real Presence of Mary: Eucharistic Disbelief and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Fourteenth-Century France," *Church History* 75, no. 4 (December 2006): 759.

65. Richard Leighton Greene, ed., *The Early English Carols* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935), 65.

66. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 142.

67. Nicole Bériou, *La prédication de Ranulphe de la Houblonnière: Sermons aux clercs et aux simples gens à Paris au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), 107.

68. Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), 180–81.

69. Leah Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the Corpus Christi Plays," *Speculum* 48, no. 3 (July 1973): 495–96. See also Emile Male, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey (New York: Harper, 1958), 185–86; Adolph Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral: Christ, Mary, Ecclesia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), 12–15.

Corpus Christi cycle should center on this sacramental space. The stage directions of the *Purification* play in the fifteenth century N-town cycle require four candles to be lit, after which the Virgin comes forward and places the child not in the arms of Simeon, as traditional, but on the altar ("Mari leyth the childe on the autere.")[70] Though these directions are not clear about when exactly Simeon lifts the child off the altar, Sinanoglou speculates, based on the strong Eucharistic imagery of the scene, that "he almost undoubtedly was to hold Him up as a priest would elevate the host."[71]

This implicit relationship between Christ and host is spelled out in no uncertain terms in Play 17 of the York cycle that also dates to the fifteenth century. *The Purification of the Virgin* emphasizes that in addition to the two turtle doves, the Holy Mother carries her own son as an offering. In Joseph's words:

> He is our lame, Mary, kare thee not,
> For riche and power none better soght.
> Full well thowe hais hym hither broght,
> This our offerand dight.
> He is the lame of God, I say,
> That all our syns shall take away
> Of this worlde here.
> He is the lame of God verray
> That muste hus fend frome all our fray,
> Borne of thy wombe, all for our pay
> And for our chere.[72]

As "lame," Jesus's sacrifice, effected by Mary, is thoroughly efficacious (he "all our syns shall take away"). Indeed, his power of preservation ("fend frome all our fray . . . / And for our chere"), seems to derive as much from his human mother as from his divine father. The Virgin's breast—as we have noted—was, in Margaret Miles's words, a "symbol of God's loving provision of life, the nourishment and care that sustain life, and the salvation that promises eternal life," especially in times of famine, siege and war.[73] This promise of plenitude often appears in literature commemorating Easter. "Of the sacrament of the Altere" exults that on the day the Jews

70. *Purification* (Play 19), in *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-19-purification.

71. Sinanoglou, "Christ Child," 501.

72. *The Purification of the Virgin* (Play 17), lines 258–69, in *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-17-the-purification-of-the-virgin.

73. Margaret R. Miles, "God's Love, Mother's Milk," *Christian Century* 125, no. 2 (January 2008): 22.

"eten a lamb al ded," Christians "eten quyk bred."[74] In another poem from the Vernon MS (ca. 1400), Christ is described as the lamb roasting in the sun on the platter of the cross.[75] Medieval nativity plays in particular emphasize food and satiation. Play 16 of the York cycle has the third king address the infant thus, "Hayll! foode that thy folke fully may fede."[76] In contrast such bounty is notably absent in the story of Mary of Jerusalem, whose own body cannot satiate her child and from whom starving compatriots recoil when they realize the provenance of her offering.

MEDIEVAL RECKONINGS

Once Mary of Jerusalem kills and cooks her son and serves him up to the rest of the community, however, the differences between her and the Virgin Mother collapse and blur in startling ways. Clearly this imbrication was not lost on medieval writers who, rather than avoid or ignore this parallel, often seemed to go out of their way to court it. One such example is the medieval alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem* (1370–80), which lingers enthusiastically on the grisly mutilation of Jewish bodies such that Mary's (here Maria's) cannibalism is not even the most gruesome episode in the poem. In an unforgettable episode, the High Priest Caiaphas is punished for his part in Jesus's crucifixion by being subjected to a horrifically cruel death, after which his corpse is burned, and his compatriots are commanded to drink in the ashes. Alex Mueller argues that the besieged Jews are here forced to partake in a unique form of cannibalism that is "a parody of the passion and the Eucharist: Caiaphas is tortured, executed, and consumed in a way that both meets and exceeds the violence of Christ's crucifixion."[77] But as with Maria later, there is no possibility of either bodily resurrection or "any divine act of transubstantiation."[78]

Though the *Siege* was composed near York, the site of one of the most notorious twelfth-century pogroms, its anti-Jewish bias is not as simple as the Caiaphas episode might suggest. If anything, it is quite vexed. Ralph Hanna even suggests that the flaying of flesh that Caiaphas endures matches the very punishment meted out to Lollards who rejected the

74. *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems: (Including "Petty Job") from the Oxford MSS. Digby 102 and Douce 322*, ed. J. Kail, EETS, o.s., 24 (London, 1904), 106

75. See *Minor Poems from the Vernon MS*, ed. F. J. Furnival, pt. 2, EETS, o.s., 117 (London, 1901), 616.

76. *Herod Questioning the Three Kings and the Offering of the Magi* (Play 16), line 321, in Davidson, *York Corpus Cristi Plays*, https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-16-herod-questioning-the-three-kings-and-the-offering-of-the-magi.

77. Alex Mueller, "Corporal Terror: Critiques of Imperialism in *The Siege of Jerusalem*," *Philological Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 293.

78. Ibid., 294.

doctrine of transubstantiation in the fourteenth century and who, in lieu of expelled medieval Jews, suffered the displaced cruelty of "Christian xenophobia."[79] Furthermore, the lady Maria is clearly intended to be sympathetic. Unlike Pseudo-Hegesippus (a likely source for the poem), who condemns her deed as one at which even barbarians would shudder, the *Siege* poet reserves passing judgment on her action. He makes Maria a "myld wyf," full of "rewful wordes," whose "sorrow is alofte"—clearly a figure to be pitied.[80] Mueller agrees that the emphasis on "myld" accentuates the "uncharacteristic nature of her behavior and emphasizes the depths of despair that have driven a gentle woman to commit such a base act."[81]

Of course, the poet's decision to name her Maria deliberately encourages associations with the suffering Virgin at the cross—as noted also by Christine Chism who calls her "an obvious antitype of Christ's mother." Chism argues that the poem's devout Christian readership, charitable as they may have felt toward the sorrowing mother, would have still been "disturbed by the perversity of the scene," especially by its "contaminated Eucharistic structure." At the very least they would have recognized that there was no way her suffering could be transposed into something more sublime. If anything, it underscored that for this besieged mother, "no transubstantiation is necessary or desired—the ritual is raw in its literality."[82] As such, her story would have carried no more transcendental significance than Caiphas's and, indeed, would have sent much the same message.

Even so, unlike many of his peers, the *Siege* poet does not deploy cannibalism as an unambiguous weapon of condemnation. Rather, he emphasizes the misery of the situation and the grievous pain of those who recoil from Maria's bloody repast. Mueller's argument that the *Siege* uses Maria's story, among others, to emphasize the unconscionable horror of inflicting violence in the name of imperial ambition is particularly persuasive in this instance. Here at least her terrible fate is as much the result of starving as it is being Jewish. Maria is at once sympathetic and horrific. Trapped in the most appalling of situations, she picks the worst solution.

In other medieval accounts, however, Mary's very Jewishness seems to condemn her to cannibalism. Even conversion is not enough to foreclose

79. Ralph Hanna, "Contextualizing the Siege of Jerusalem," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 119–20. See also Cecilia Cutts, "The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece," *Modern Language Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (March 1944): 45–60, for the overlap of Jews and Lollards.

80. *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. Ralph Hanna and David Lawton, EETS, o.s., 320 (Oxford, 2003), 73.

81. Mueller, "Corporal Terror," 300.

82. Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 160.

that possibility, as in the fourteenth-century rhyming poem *Titus and Vespasian* where, after becoming Christian, Mary kills and eats her son in obedience to an angelic visitation—a horrific rewriting of the Abraham and Isaac prefigurement of Christ's sacrifice. In the Middle French *La vengeance de Nostre-Siegneur*, she is the converted widow of the king of Africa, but even here her elevated status does not shield her. She is informed by an angel of the prophecy that in her generation there would be such a famine in Jerusalem that mothers would eat their own children.[83] Though the text suggests that this cannibalism is an act of obedience to God—thereby relieving its perpetrator of guilt—her great mourning for her dead child nevertheless casts a shadow on such devotion. The note of abhorrence is unmistakable in Pseudo-Hegesippus's work, which deliberately includes that "taste and see" echo—even though Jews have no ritual in which they attempt to taste the Lord through the medium of the body as Christians do. For no discernible reason, then, we are left with a clear and disturbing mockery of Eucharistic fellowship with Maria prefacing her exhortation to "taste and see how sweet my son is" with the words "hoc est prandium meum" (this is my dinner)—a grotesque parody of *hoc est corpus meum*.[84] As with the much later Protestant accounts, we get imitation without salvation, blood without redemption.

This brings us inevitably to the blood libel. Though Pseudo-Hegesippus predates that allegation, first recorded in 1235, his medieval emulators were unmistakably steeped in it. Gavin Langmuir, Alan Dundes, Lester Little, and Miri Rubin have eloquently argued that the blood libel was a projection of medieval unease about transubstantiation—a claim underscored by the fact that the first accusations that Jews ritually killed Christians for their blood only occurred in the mid-thirteenth century, after real presence was officially ratified as a doctrine.[85] The 1235 allegation at Fulda

83. Alvin E. Ford, ed., *La vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur: The Old and Middle French Prose Versions; The Version of Japeth* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 150. Marina Warner and Michael P. Carroll suggest that some constructions of the Virgin may have derived from the tradition of devouring mother-goddesses—see Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 221; and Carroll, *Madonnas That Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 67–87. Though medieval writers may not have been actively conscious of this connection, their version of Mary of Jerusalem effectively functioned "to absorb anxieties about the Holy Mother's role, allowing [the latter] to remain firmly on the side of the Christian, the civilized, the 'cooked'" (Price, *Consuming Passions*, 151).

84. Pseudo-Hegesippus, *De excidio*, 383.

85. See Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 100–133, 263–81; Alan Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend : A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London: Eleck, 1978), 55–56; Miri Rubin, "The Person in the Form: Medieval Challenges to Bodily Order," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*,

that a group of Jews had murdered five children and drained their blood for healing purposes turned into unequivocal accusations of cannibalism by 1247. At Valreas that year a Jew was tortured into confessing that a Christian girl had been kidnapped and crucified to provide blood for a Jewish mockery of communion on Easter Sunday.[86] Allegations that Jews crucified Christian children in parody of the Passion translated readily into further linked accusations of child cannibalism and host desecration. Medieval sermons emphasized how Jews stabbed the host and fed it to dogs, further proof that Jews "ate" literally rather than spiritually. As Denise Despres sums up, "A narrative and iconographic tradition conflating ritual crucifixion, ritual cannibalism, and host desecration mythology spread with the image of the Christ child as sacrifice, demonstrating the fundamental difference between the stubborn, literalist Jew and the spiritual metaphorical Christian."[87]

Notably, the Virgin Mary featured prominently in many of these stories as a preserver of and intercessor for the violated children (as in Chaucer's notorious Prioress's Tale). While most concern the torture and mutilation of Christian children, there are exceptions like the immensely popular medieval story of the Jew of Bourges, who throws his little son into an oven after the child attends Mass and receives the host. The Virgin preserves the boy and, in some redactions, inspires the mother to convert to Christianity. While these accounts primarily reinforce Mary's miraculous ability to protect the Christian body through the Eucharist, Despres asserts, "Her purgative and restorative powers extend to the social body as well, for she converts repentant Jews who can now see the meaning of the sacrament itself, not as defiling but as transformative and salvific."[88] Crucially, this capacity to preserve is also denied to Mary of Jerusalem, even when she converts. Where the Virgin intervenes in the Jewish ritual sacrifice of children, Mary sacrifices in ritualistic parody as in Pseudo-Hegesippus, speaking sacramentally charged words to no avail. Of course, Mary of Jerusalem's failure implicitly directed medieval worshippers—through the complex use of Eucharistic symbols—to think of the Mary who could save. But the reverse was also true, with the Virgin's "sacred" anthropophagy always threatening to redound upon her devout subjects.

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ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester University Press, 1994), 100–122. See also Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

86. Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1943), 132–33.

87. Denise L. Despres, "Immaculate Flesh and the Social Body: Mary and the Jews, *Jewish History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 50.

88. Ibid., 55.

CONCLUSION

The connection between the blood libel and Catholic beliefs was articulated as early as 1540 when Andreas Osiander (1498–1552), an evangelical reformer, convincingly linked transubstantiation and Catholicism's preoccupation with the efficacy of blood with the fabrication of the blood libel.[89] In the mid-seventeenth century he would be emulated by Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657), the primary Jewish advocate for his people's readmission to England, who rebutted the idea in his *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (1656) "that the *Iewes* are wont to celebrate the feast of unleavened bread, fermenting it with the bloud of some Christians, whom they have for this purpose killed," and argued instead that the myth was promulgated "sometimes to justifie, and patronize their massacres already executed."[90] In a telling observation, he noted that there were no such reports in Asia and Africa, where Jews lived among Muslims who "never yet to this day forged such a calumnious accusation."[91] His arguments led to the conclusion (although he courteously desisted from spelling it out) that something peculiar to the Christian psyche had generated the myth.[92]

Menasseh ben Israel seems to have been one of the first to psychologize the blood libel, seeing it as a justification for violence already perpetrated against the Jews. This theory that Christians projected onto Jews—figuring something they were ashamed of as Jewish so that they could then castigate it—has been upheld by recent scholarship on the topic. According to Harold Fisch, the blood libel was an unconscious reaction by a lay mind uncomfortable with the way that the doctrine of transubstantiation nudged against the greatest of taboos, and wishing to displace that transgressive behavior onto the "other."[93] For Langmuir, likewise, the blood-stained predatory Jew embodied Catholic unease about its own praxis.[94] Hyam Maccoby avers that child cannibalism was "a religious act performed in fantasy by the Christians themselves, but it was easily displaced and imputed to the Jews, who thus once more became the bearers

89. Andreas Osiander, *Ob es war und glaublich sey dass die juden der Christen Kinder heymlich erwürgen und ir blut gebrauchen* [Whether it be true and credible that the Jews secretly strangulate Christian children and make use of their blood] (Nuremberg, 1540). See R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 126, 136–43.

90. Menasseh ben Israel, *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (London, 1656), A2v.

91. Ibid., Br.

92. The *Vindiciae Judaeorum* rebuts a diatribe by William Prynne in which he had accused Jews of ritual murder in a bid to foil their readmission; see *A Short Demurrer to the Jewes Long Discontinued Barred Remitter into England* (London, 1656), A3v–A4r, 30–33.

93. Harold Fisch, *The Dual Image: The Figure of the Jew in English and American Literature* (London: World Jewish Library, 1971), 22.

94. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition*, 11–14, 100–133.

of Christian guilt about their sacrificial modes of handling spiritual problems."[95]

Our article illustrates that medieval and early modern Protestant accounts of Mary's cannibalism share significant Marian/Eucharistic imagery. Consequently, they also share unease, thereby offering a telling insight into the knotty sacramental legacy of the Reformed church. This is particularly evident in Nashe's plague pamphlet *Christs Teares over Ierusalem*, where Eucharistic language reverberates hollowly, suggestive of a sacrament that was deemed to have lost its reconciling power. And yet, the fantasy of healing flesh was far from exorcised—not just in Nashe's work but in his very culture. Protestantism may have tried to strip cannibalism of its cultic force, but it could not quite deny its pull. Speaking of the Eucharist, Rubin reminds us that "by combining the most holy with the most aberrant/abhorrent, the routine workings of sacramental power—an image of the fulness of life-giving, which dwells in the image of utmost transgression—a very powerful symbol was created, as awesome as it was promising."[96] *Christs Teares* concedes to the lure of life-sustaining flesh by offering up a substitute in the form of mummy—human flesh as medicine. In his 1593 dedication to Vicountess Elizabeth Cary, Nashe describes his work as "a handfull of Ierusalems mummianizd earth," a dense and complex image that makes a claim for both the physical and spiritual benefits of his text. Nashe's "mummianizd earth" is a clever play on both the medieval pilgrim practice of returning with ampoules of earth from the Holy Land and the fashionable practice of corpse pharmacology.[97] Richard Sugg and Louise Noble have both argued for the popularity of remedies that contained human bones, blood, and fat for treating ailments that ranged from headaches to epilepsy. As Sugg observes, "The question was not, 'Should you eat human flesh?' but, 'What sort of flesh should you eat?'"[98] Eating Christ's flesh may have been abhorrent, but early modern Protestants found little to complain about Egyptian mummy that was mixed into a tincture to stop internal bleeding, or the potion of human

95. Hyam Maccoby, *The Sacred Executioner: Human Sacrifice and the Legacy of Guilt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), 155.

96. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 359–60.

97. Beatrice Groves, "Laughter in the Time of Plague: A Context for the Unstable Style of Nashe's *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem*," *Studies in Philology* 108, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 250–51.

98. Richard Sugg, quoted in Maria Dolan, "The Gruesome History of Eating Corpses as Medicine," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 6, 2012, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-gruesome-history-of-eating-corpses-as-medicine-82360284/. Louise Noble argues that the "post-Reformation cultural fantasies of consuming medicinal flesh . . . invert to representations of the Catholic sacrament," thereby raising "the intriguing possibility of the medical corpse as uncannily appeasing a residual Protestant hunger" (*Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011], 98, 116).

skull and chocolate that physician Thomas Willis brewed as cure for apoplexy. The ideal corpse for such remedies was one recently deceased—ironically, that of a young boy whose blood might still pulse with vitality.

The hypocrisy is hard to ignore and yet entirely comprehensible when we realize how it mirrors medieval attitudes toward the Jews' alleged cannibalism and host desecration. Indeed, it is only when we realize the ubiquity of mummy and its vigorous advocacy by the very Protestant writers who objected so vehemently to the Eucharist, that we can appreciate the full extent of Nashe's impish presentation of Mary's (here Miriam's) cannibalism with its strident sacramental echoes. For how could his readers—themselves consumers of the text-as-mummy, the word-made-flesh—repudiate the Jewish woman who ate her son in extremis. And how could they dismiss, for that matter, the Catholics who consumed their savior's body and blood in the form of bread and wine. While not all of Nashe's contemporaries were as aware or artful as he, their inclusion of Eucharistic elements in Mary's story only confirms an urgent need to elevate their own culture hungering for curative flesh above that of the Catholics—just as those medieval worshippers projected their own appetites upon the Jews.