

### A New Look at the *Converso* Problem in Carvajal's *Tragedia Josephina*

Charles Patterson  
Stephen F. Austin State University

In 1890 a cache of manuscripts was discovered in the *geniza*, or storeroom for discarded documents, of a synagogue in Cairo, Egypt. These documents span from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries, and represent a spectrum of genres, from personal letters to *responsa*, and from legal documents to literary works. The content of the Cairo Geniza is now scattered amongst libraries and personal collections throughout the world, and cataloguing it has been an arduous task for scholars.<sup>1</sup> Eleazar Gutwirth describes the worth of these manuscripts as providing “coordinates of the Jewish cultural map of the area” (349). It is therefore surprising that, among the many documents discovered in the Cairo Geniza, there have been found fragments of an *aljamiado* version of Micael de Carvajal's *Tragedia Josephina*, a theatrical adaptation of the Old Testament story of Joseph (Gutwirth 352).<sup>2</sup> Although it is easy to see how the story of a son of Israel prospering in Egypt might appeal to the Jewish community in Cairo, the *Tragedia* is a sixteenth-century Spanish play that, according to David M. Gitlitz, “on the whole presents the Jews unfavorably” (1972, 260). Although how or why this dramatic work came to be stored in the Cairo Geniza remains unknown, I believe that this evidence of Jewish receptiveness towards the play requires a reevaluation of Gitlitz's negative conclusion.

Carvajal's *Tragedia Josephina* is widely considered to be one of the best works of early sixteenth-century Spanish drama. The play seems to have been quite popular in Spain in its own time: it was published in at least four editions between 1535 and 1546 (McGaha 18). Even though it appears to have been banned by the Inquisition in 1559 for its depiction of dream interpretation, it was popular enough with the people of Plasencia (Carvajal's hometown) that their *cabildo* made a special request to the Holy Office to allow its performance in 1599 (Pérez Priego 120). Manuel Cañete, who edited the first modern edition of the work in 1870, contrasts the play with works from the following century by asking rhetorically: “¿Hay en el famoso y popularísimo teatro español del siglo XVII una sola comedia profana donde las pasiones que agitan al corazón del hombre estén puestas en relieve con más verdad y naturalidad que en la tragedia *Josefina*?” (173). A later editor, Joseph Gillet, describes the work's

<sup>1</sup> For a more complete history of the discovery and cataloguing of the Cairo Geniza, see Goitein 1-28.

<sup>2</sup> Carvajal was a playwright of *converso* descent best known for his work *Las cortes de la muerte*. The *Tragedia Josephina* was performed at the Corpus Christi festival in Plasencia in the 1530s and was first published in 1535. It is quite faithful to the story of Joseph as found in Genesis, with many echoes of Jewish and Muslim traditions. As Michael McGaha explains, it is modeled on Senecan tragedy in that it is divided into five acts, each including both a prologue and Chorus (18). This structure makes it one of the most developed attempts at tragedy to be found in the still experimental theatrical environment of the sixteenth century.

“transcending value” as owing to its creation of Zenobia, Potiphar’s wife: “Outside of the *Celestina* there had not yet appeared in Spanish literature a woman of flesh and blood. Zenobia, however, lives” (Carvajal lvi). Francisco Ruiz Ramón notes, “la obra, pese a sus defectos de construcción, tiene emoción –cosa que no encontramos en muchas piezas de la época– y nervio dramático” (103). Alfredo Hermenegildo goes so far as to say that the *Tragedia* is “el mejor drama religioso de la primera mitad del siglo [dieciséis]” (121).

These evaluations of the work’s literary merit, however, fail to grapple with the complex cultural and social dynamics of its context. During Carvajal’s time, the Jews had been expelled only a few decades before, and the outward practice of Islam was prohibited shortly thereafter. There remained, however, Jews and Muslims who had converted to Christianity, blurring the lines of identity for the Old Christians. Jerome Friedman describes the resulting situation:

Before the turn of the sixteenth century there were still hundreds of thousands of Jews and even worse, an even greater number of crypto-Jews who lived like New Christians. Worst of all, this confusing situation had been created by the Christian populace itself. Many people suspicious of Marranos, no doubt quite shocked to learn that holy water was less powerful than they had believed, looked back with nostalgia to the good old days when Christians were Christians and Jews were Jews and everyone knew their place. (11)

Since the story of Joseph is one held in common by Christians, Jews, and Muslims, the religious identity crisis of post-expulsion Spain must be taken into account when approaching the *Tragedia*.

Gitlitz is the one scholar to date to explore these issues with any thoroughness. In his article “Conversos and the Fusion of Worlds in Micael de Carvajal’s *Tragedia Josephina*,” he speculates on the playwright’s possible *converso* origin (260), a supposition that he is able to confirm in a subsequent study (1974, 148). He also makes a convincing argument that the play must be read against a multicultural backdrop:

Aside from its considerable artistic merit and its recognized place in literary history, the *Tragedia Josephina* deserves consideration as an example of the studied juxtaposition of several worlds: the characters are at once Joseph and his brothers, Jesus and the Jews responsible for his crucifixion, and the old- and new-Christians of the world of Carvajal. The play cannot be wholly understood without taking into consideration the *converso* background of the early sixteenth century. (1972, 261)

I agree with this assessment entirely, but disagree with his conclusion that the Carvajal was “one of those *conversos* who, energetically rejecting their past, adopted the anti-Semitism of the old-Christians, for the *Tragedia Josephina* on the whole presents the Jews unfavorably” (1972, 260). He bases this reading on his analysis of two main characteristics of the *Tragedia*. The first is the apparent division between “malicious Jews” and “proto-Christians,” the former characterized linguistically by their use of the stereotypically Jewish phrase “el dio” to refer to God, while the latter use the Spanish “dios” (1972, 262-63). The anti-Semitism of this aspect of the play is evidenced by the fact that the Cairo Geniza version replaces all instances of “dios” with “el dio” (Gutworth 355). The other apparently anti-Semitic characteristic is the use of derisive terms and stereotypes in the mouths of Zenobia, Potiphar’s wife, and Faraute, the character who introduces each act (1972, 266, 269-70). Gutworth notes that Faraute’s monologues were also not included in the Cairo Geniza version (355).

While I agree that these aspects of the play do seem to be an example of New Christian anti-Semitic zeal, I disagree with Gitlitz’s conclusion that the work portrays the Jews in a generally negative manner. I believe that the anti-Semitic characteristics of the play are superficial, and that a closer reading reveals a more inclusive vision of Spanish identity than that favored by Old Christians. In this I am in closer agreement with Michael McGaha, who asks the rhetorical question, “What literary analogue could better illustrate the harm done by envy to the Spanish Jews and their descendants, the *conversos*, than the story of Joseph and his brothers?” (20). He rightly argues that the *Tragedia* is an example of the “Spanish theater that might have been –a theater teaching lessons on justice and tolerance for diversity . . .” (23). I agree with and will seek to expand upon McGaha’s conclusion by examining the implications of the play’s festival context, its incorporation of Muslim elements, and the overall *converso* perspective apparent in the work.

Carvajal’s hometown of Plasencia, according to Cañete, was particularly famous for its Corpus Christi festival:

El esplendor con que la Ciudad y Cabildo eclesiástico de Plasencia celebraban de muy antiguo la fiesta del *Corpus*, desahogando su entusiasmo por la Institución Eucarística en alegres danzas, en autos, comedias y representaciones dentro y fuera del templo, era tan grande que se había hecho notorio en toda España. (136)

The *Tragedia Josephina*, as one of its prologues states, is taken from “la sacra hystoria para esta santa fiesta del Corpus Christi” (7). It goes on to reiterate the connection between the play and the festival: “Es materia que en figura contiene la causa que oy causa esta sancta fiesta [...]. [L]a intencion del auctor es ornar la sancta fiesta y a ninguno injuriar mas contentar a todos a lo menos a los sabios y buenos” (7). As Miguel A. Teijero Fuentes puts it, “Carvajal ha recreado una historia sagrada que al

mismo tiempo le permitiera, en su concepción más profunda, adecuarla a los festejos que tenían lugar con motivo de la celebración del Corpus (338).

A number of scholars have noted Eucharistic symbolism in the play that demonstrates its integration into the festival. Marcel Bataillon, for example, says, “Carvajal deja claramente traslucir que la historia de José vendido por sus hermanos prefigura el sacrificio de Cristo vendido por Judas” (188). Francisco Ruiz Ramón notes “la identificación simbólica José-Cristo Salvador” throughout the work (103). Gitlitz explains: “The allusions to the cordero, repeated in subsequent passages, together with the emphasis on Joseph’s innocence, purity, and perfection, and the statement that he is a portrait of divinity, assure us that Carvajal is talking about Christ” (264). He adds that “Joseph’s passion was his mistreatment by his brothers, his symbolic death his being thrown into the well, and his resurrection his rising from the well” (268). Pérez Priego, while noting that the play is not as thoroughly allegorical as later *autos sacramentales*, says that it “no deja de insinuar una cierta intencionalidad figurativa y un simbolismo eucarísticos” (119).

This symbolism is important because, as the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says, “the first and principal effect of the Holy Eucharist is union with Christ by love.” It goes on to say that

The immediate result of this union with Christ by love is the bond of charity existing between the faithful themselves [...]. And so the Communion of Saints is not merely an ideal union by faith and grace, but an eminently real union, mysteriously constituted, maintained, and guaranteed by partaking in common of one and the same Christ. (Pohle)

If unity with Christ and the faithful is the primary purpose of the Eucharist, the Corpus Christi festival that is meant to celebrate it took on other purposes in early modern Spain. As Bruce Wardropper explains,

la exaltación y la pompa religiosas de la procesión al aire libre contribuyeron a arraigar el Corpus Christi, más hondamente que las demás fiestas eclesiásticas, en el corazón del pueblo español [...]. Como si fuera una fiesta nacional, más que universal, pronto adquirió en España rasgos típicos. (41-42)

With the threat of Semitic “impurity” at home and Protestant heterodoxy abroad, Spain converted the Corpus festivities into a celebration of an Old Christian version of national identity. Its entertainment, therefore, had a tendency to turn universal conflicts between good and evil into local conflicts of Christians and the Semitic or heretical Other. For example, Francis George Very describes a Corpus Christi dance performed in Madrid that “consisted of a mimic combat of the devils, represented by the men dressed as Moors, and the angels, which ended with the decapitation of

Mohammed by St. Michael” (21). Alan K.G. Paterson says that in Corpus Christi’s theatrical performances,

desde una perspectiva doctrinal, Judaísmo representa a los que están excluidos del misterio eucarístico y privados de los beneficios de la salvación. Desde una perspectiva social, Judaísmo representa a la otra comunidad en el Madrid austríaco, la clandestina, a los judaizantes que hacían sus negocios en los patios del Alcázar y solicitaban permiso para ejercer legalmente sus profesiones en Madrid. (qtd. in Herskovits, 2005a, 19)

My argument is that Carvajal’s *Tragedia Josephina* rejects this divisive, Old Christian version of national identity normally associated with Corpus Christi, and instead promotes the theological emphasis on the unity of all Christians, regardless of their background, made possible through the Eucharist. As Gitlitz explains in his study of Carvajal’s *Las cortes de la muerte*, it was a common tendency among *conversos* to take advantage of Corpus Christi’s Eucharistic theme because “en el momento de recibir la comunión, todo cristiano, nuevo o viejo, es igual a los demás cristianos” (1974, 149). This inclusive message could possibly explain, at least in part, why the copyist of the Cairo Geniza version makes no attempt to excise the apparent Eucharistic symbolism from the play (Gutworth 355).<sup>3</sup> One of the ways that Carvajal emphasizes the theme of cultural inclusiveness is by incorporating narrative details from the Muslim traditions into a basically Christian framework.

Manuel López Sánchez-Mora, in his history of Plasencia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, notes the precise location of that town’s *morería* during those centuries and adds, “tenemos que confesar que no es escaso ni pobre el recuerdo auténtico que nos dejaron los musulmanes de sus actividades en Plasencia” (16-17). That Carvajal might have had contact with the Muslim community is therefore at least possible, and that that community’s Josephine tradition influenced his work is very evident. Cañete, in his pro-Catholic enthusiasm, denies any such influence: “Carvajal se atiene a la historia de José tal como se cuenta en los capítulos XXXVII al L del *Génesis*, desentendiéndose por completo de la tradición koránica” (152-53). Starting with Gillet, however, scholars have pointed out the numerous Muslim echoes in the *Tragedia*. Gillet, for example, notes Joseph’s visit to Rachel’s tomb on his way to Egypt, the Muslim emphasis on Joseph’s beauty, the detailed attention given to the seduction scenes, and the possibility that an earlier and now lost version of the play may have included Zenobia’s reliance on a *privada* (Carvajal xl). Teijeiro Fuentes summarizes these observations and points out a few details that he believes are

---

<sup>3</sup> Gutworth’s own explanation of this phenomenon is that the Sephardim “do not seem to have seen a clear allusion to the Host.” He goes on to conclude that “the Sephardim connoisseurs of Spanish literary excellence were obviously not prepared to let antisemitic commonplaces impede their entertainment” (Gutworth 355)

specifically *not* shared between the Muslim *Poema de José*<sup>4</sup> and the *Tragedia*, such as Jacob's apprehension about sending Joseph to check on his brothers, the talking wolf, the cruelty of the slave-driver on the way to Egypt, and Joseph's insistence on Zenobia's confession before agreeing to leave prison (331). This leads him to conclude that "ambas historias no sólo discrepan en algunos incidentes fundamentales, sino también en su concepción más general" (330).

I believe that the issue requires far greater attention than the cataloguing of a few superficial similarities or dissimilarities between the *Tragedia* and Muslim tradition. On the one hand, there are more Muslim influences in the play than are immediately apparent. On the other hand, the process by which Carvajal manipulates and incorporates these details reveals his vision of the place of the Moriscos in Spanish identity.

In many cases, the allusion to the Muslim tradition is faint or placed in a different context so as to defamiliarize it. For example, in the *Tragedia* the brothers celebrate Joseph's hitting the bottom of the well:

gad. vistes el golpe que dio  
 alla dentro en el fondon  
 le. ora esta mi coraçon  
 mas contento que se vio. (vv. 797-800)<sup>5</sup>

This dialogue has no counterpart in the book of Genesis, which indicates that it instead alludes to this scene from the *Poema de José*:

Ejjaronlo en el pozo con cuerda muy larga.  
 Y cuando fue a medio ovieronlo cortada.  
 Y cayo ent(e)re una penna y una piedra airada,  
 Y quiso Allah del çielo que no le noçio nada. (B.34)<sup>6</sup>

The reference to Joseph's hitting the bottom of the well can make sense on its own as a dramatically interesting detail, but those familiar with the *Poema* are likely to understand its significance differently than those who are not.

Another related example is the reference in the *Tragedia* to Joseph's unusually heavy weight when the brothers pull him out of the well:

---

<sup>4</sup> The *Poema de José* is an anonymous Morisco *aljamiado* narrative poem from the fourteenth century, comparable in form to works of *cuaderna vía*. It follows the Muslim version of the Joseph story found in the surah 12 of the Q'uran with additional details from Muslim exegetical tradition. For a study and edition of its two extant manuscripts, see Johnson.

<sup>5</sup> All citations from the *Tragedia* come from Gillet's edition. I will cite the body of the play by line number, and the prologues by page number.

<sup>6</sup> Citations from the *Poema* come from Johnson's edition. The letter indicates the manuscript, and the number indicates the stanza.

dan. Pareceme que esta muerto  
 segun pesa este rapaz  
 ysachar tu alla te haz  
 porque salga por concierto. (vv. 873-76)

To an audience unfamiliar with the Muslim tradition, this statement merely serves as comic relief. An exegetical detail that made its way into the roughly contemporary Morisco *Leyenda de José*, however, makes clear why Joseph would weigh so much: “Y [Mālik]-anšentolo en-el pešo i hallo ke pešaba ku(w)at(o)ro kintaleš. i(y)-era la ora Yusuf de katorze annoš, maš era šu pešo dell-annūbu’a [prophecy]” (30).<sup>7</sup> Once again, the context is entirely different: while in the *Leyenda* Joseph is being weighed at the time of his sale to pharaoh, in the play he is being pulled from the well. Only those familiar with Muslim tradition could have picked up on this allusion and understood that Joseph is weighed down by prophecy. Other similar passing allusions to the Muslim tradition include Joseph’s farewell to his family (Carvajal 1057-62, *Poema* A.41), Zenobia’s concern for her reputation with the ladies of the city (Carvajal 1892-901, *Poema* B.89), and Potiphar’s adoption of Joseph (Carvajal 2058-59, *Poema* B.64). All of these Muslim allusions contribute to the dramatic interest without causing the play to stray substantially from the biblical version. They also provide a sense of familiarity to any recently converted Moriscos in the audience who may have grown up listening to the *Poema de José* or other Muslim versions of the story.

These allusions function as more than just a nod to the Morisco community, however. As noted above, one of the details that Teijeiro Fuentes lists as absent from the *Tragedia* is the Muslim idea that Jacob speaks with a talking wolf, who denies having eaten Joseph (see *Leyenda* 15; *Poema* A.31). While this detail is indeed absent, Carvajal appears to have at least been aware of it. Although Jacob does not address the wolf personally, he does address it in apostrophe:

O fiera perra maluada  
 que a mi hijo assi tragaste  
 di porque no te acordaste  
 de su lindeza estremada  
 y en joya tan agraciada  
 como pudieron tus dientes  
 hallarse tan diligentes  
 di cruel desatinada. (vv. 1369-76)

---

<sup>7</sup> The *Leyenda de José* is a handwritten Morisco-*aljamiado* text produced in the crypto-Muslim communities of Aragon, probably sometime between the forced conversions of 1526 and the expulsions of 1609-12. Citations come from Klenk’s edition.

Later, Jacob asks his sons to take him to the wolf:

Lleuadme hijos alla  
 a topar con essa fiera.  
 Que avnque tan braua aya estado  
 en matar a mi heredero  
 ya la sangre del cordero  
 le aura del todo amansado. (vv. 1711-16)

This is an example of a Muslim detail that has been “Christianized.” Carvajal borrows the motif of the wolf, but replaces the Muslim miracle of a talking animal with an allusion to the Christian miracle of the Eucharist, in which even a “fiera” can be tamed by “la sangre del cordero.” While Moriscos would likely recognize the allusion, they would also recognize that the playwright is converting it to a more Christian world-view. The implication is that while the Moriscos are welcome to form part of Spanish society, it is ultimately Christian doctrine that unites Spaniards. Any elements of Moorish culture that continue in Spain must be subordinated to Christian purposes.

The play’s relationship with Judaism is somewhat more complex. Identifiable Jewish details are relatively rare in the text, possibly because they might have been more familiar to Inquisition officials. The few allusions to Jewish tradition are fairly obscure and innocuous. For example, one of Simeon’s complaints against Joseph at the beginning is that “de vn crimen pessimo y malo / nos quiso ogaño arguyr” (vv. 183-84). The play itself contains no further information as to what specific crime he had accused them of, but Jewish midrash offers a number of explanations. Rashi explains that Joseph accused them of eating the limbs of live animals, mistreating the sons of concubines, and committing various sexual perversions (37:2). Thus, a full understanding of Simeon’s comment requires some background in Jewish tradition. Another example of Jewish influence is Judah’s bellicose attitude before Joseph reveals his identity: “mueran mueran quantos son / y abrasemos el lugar” (3699-3700). This echoes Judah’s similar threat in the Judeo-Spanish *Coplas de Yosef*: “onbres de esta çivdad de nós serán matados” (184b).<sup>8</sup> There is also the common Jewish motif of Joseph putting straw in the river to alert other nations that there is bread in Egypt (2983-90). As with most of the Muslim influences, these are only faint allusions that would have only made sense to those familiar with Jewish exegetical tradition and do not fundamentally change the biblical storyline.

Far more important than any direct influence from Jewish versions of the story is the general *converso* perspective that permeates the play. This perspective, as Andrew Herskovits describes it, “may be summed up as individualism (strong belief in the dignity, liberty, and equality of individuals), heterodoxy (a theologically and socially

---

<sup>8</sup> The *Coplas de Yosef* are a fourteenth-century poem in Hebrew *aljamía*. Like the Poema de José, they are written in a variation of *cuaderna vía*. The citation is from Girón-Negrón and Minervini.



critical attitude), and double language (ambiguous communication)” (“Towards” 257). The sense of individualism and equality, as I discussed above, is part of the emphasis on the Eucharist celebrated during Corpus Christi and is apparent in the play.<sup>9</sup> In the analysis that follows, I will first discuss Carvajal’s socially critical attitude in the work, mainly exemplified by his disgust with anti-intellectualism. Then I will examine some instances of ambiguous communication, primarily irony, in the play.

Américo Castro discusses at length the tendency towards anti-intellectualism in sixteenth-century Spain. He says:

No quisieron [los cristianos viejos] empañar su honra castiza cultivando tareas intelectuales y técnicas, consideradas nefandas desde fines del siglo XV, por ser propias (por ser *juzgadas* propias) de las castas hispano-hebrea e hispano-morisca. (16)

He adds that as a result of this association of intellectualism with *conversos*,

La cultura intelectual . . . acabó por hacerse síntoma e indicio de no pertenecer a la casta electa y heroica, a la de la hombría radical. Y fue fatal repercusión de tal hecho el que –poco a poco primero, y paso de carga más tarde– la gente huyera de practicar todo menester que implicase sabiduría y ejercicio intelectual.” (31)

According to McGaha, Carvajal’s “defense of the intellectual life, and of the value of literature, in his profoundly anti-intellectual society is especially poignant” (20). This is particularly evident in the dedication that precedes the play. Carvajal describes his intent as

no passar la vida en silencio como las bestias que naturaleza formo inclinadas a obedecer a la sensualidad y apetito del vientre quise dexar alguna cosa texida de mis manos . . . por diferenciarme de los brutos como tengo dicho: de la qual causa muchas vezes no puede mi coraçon retener sus lagrimas: viendo quantos buenos ingenios aparejados para produzir frutos tan excelentes y suaues que gran prouecho en la humana vida pudiesse[n] exerir. Mas ay de mi que los veo tan enfrascados en tantos linajes y diuersidades de vicios que no tienen memoria de letras . . . (3)

Here Carvajal sharply criticizes the tendency to shun intellectual activity; by saying that his own creative pursuits distance him from animals, he is implying that Old

---

<sup>9</sup> As explained above, Carvajal seeks to celebrate the theological emphasis on unity and equality through communion with Christ, in contrast with the typical appropriation of the Corpus Christi festival as a celebration of Old Christian identity.

Christian anti-intellectualism is bestial. He laments to see so many hide their own intelligence because of concerns over “linajes y diuersidades de vicios.” He goes on to explain that ‘poco aprouecha leer las vidas del filosofho Plutarco si el tiempo se gasta en detratar de las vidas ajenas y la tuya es incorregible y desenfrenada” (4). This can be read as a criticism of the emphasis placed on determining the public honor and blood purity of others rather than on private virtue. He then extols the many benefits of intellectual activity: “dandose a las letras y buenas artes el alma recibe salud: el cuerpo autoridad: y la vida honestidad y hermoso adornamiento de la fama y honra y excelentes virtudes” (5). While the prevailing Old Christian sense of honor was connected to descending from the warrior caste, Carvajal connects “fama” and “honra” to virtue and the arts.

The playwright’s representative within the work is a figure named Faraute who addresses the audience before each act. His opening speech continues the scathing criticism of anti-intellectualism begun in the dedication, this time in a more comedic and entertaining style. He begins by quoting a line in Latin, then ribbing the audience for not understanding: “perdonen vuestras mercedes que en verdad no me acordaua que todos soys tan sabidos que ninguno sabe latin” (6). He then goes on to criticize the chivalry novels that celebrated the warrior attributes so valued by the Old Christians:

en verdad que el señor auctor dessea mucho complazer a vuestras mercedes para lo qual se ha desuelado: y a trastornado a Amadis con la demanda del sancto Grial de pe a pa por rememorar oy algo que sin perjuyzio fuesse: y no halla sino casos atroces de muertes: armas campos rebueltas peleas golpes espadas tan estrañas que por ventura en la tal representacion el corrimiento passado agora sea correnca. (6-7)

This metatheatrical reference to the creative process highlights a criticism of popular literature of the time by noting the impossibility of finding in it material appropriate for public performance. Instead, according to Faraute, “el auctor oy se ha buuelto a sus treze: y ha sacado de la sacra hystoria para esta santa fiesta del Corpus Christi vna tragedia llamada Josephina” (7). The phrase “se ha buuelto a sus treze” may very well be an allusion to Maimonides’ thirteen principles of faith, two of which refer to the divine origin and immutability of the Torah.<sup>10</sup> In that case Carvajal is implying that Jewish learning points to the Bible, which in turn points to the mystery of the Eucharist. According to Hermenegildo, in the play “se observa la vuelta a las fuentes y el retorno a la pureza bíblica tan característicos de los intelectuales cristianos nuevos”

---

<sup>10</sup> According to Sanford Shepard, “se ha buuelto a sus treze” is related to the phrase “estar en sus trece,” which is still used today. About the latter, he notes, “This curious turn of phrase often has a <<Jewish>> environment. It may ultimately be derived from the famous Thirteen Articles of Faith composed by Moses Maimonides in the twelfth century, considered by Jews the essential articles of religious belief” (51).

(127). Chivalry novels, on the other hand, while celebrating Old Christian warrior values, contain material inconsistent with Christian theology. In the play itself there is another positive reference to Jewish learning in the mouth of the butler while he is in prison with Joseph:

Pues toda sciencia y saber  
 los judios alcançays  
 y la ventaja lleuays  
 en secretos conocer (2520-23)

Most references to Judaism, however, appear to be negative. This leads Gitlitz to his conclusion that the play depicts Jews unfavorably. Hermenegildo concurs, saying that the play “tiene el aspecto típico de ser el reflejo de la actitud propia de los conversos que despreciaban, de forma injuriosa . . . a los que habían permanecido fieles a la ley mosaica” (128). I believe, however, that, given the ambiguous language that forms part of the *converso* perspective of the play, the sincerity of the unfavorable presentation of the Jews is not to be entirely trusted.

Carvajal illustrates the unreliability of language in an otherwise superfluous moment in the *Tragedia*. After the brothers return to Egypt bringing Benjamin, Joseph has his servant put his cup into Benjamin’s grain sack. He then sends for his captain of the guard so that he can instruct him to apprehend the brothers. The captain, while on his way to meet Joseph, grumbles

o descreo o reniego  
 siempre con tanto llamar  
 si con tanto militar  
 nos vaga seguir el juego (3595-98)

Once he sees Joseph, however, his tone changes dramatically:

Que manda tu señoría  
 gran señor adelantado  
 ay algo que en este estado  
 nos cumpla hazer oy día  
 que si lo ay tu bien confía  
 y estos no son dichos vanos  
 que si ay do poner las manos  
 se hara sin mas porfia. (3599-3606)

The dramatic irony lies in the fact that the audience knows very well that the captain, having only just complained about “tanto llamar,” now exuberantly affirms his

willingness to follow orders. His assurance that “*estos no son dichos vanos*” is in fact the opposite of the truth.

Keeping in mind the unreliability of words illustrated here, it becomes reasonable to assume a certain irony in Carvajal’s anti-Semitism. This irony generally serves to accentuate the irony of a society that can celebrate biblical Jewish figures while persecuting their descendants. Faraute’s opening monologue again illustrates this paradox. He is apparently dressed in Jewish clothing as he says,

creo me conoceys porque algunos me parece que se alegran y otros se alborotan que sera? mas que sera ha ha ha ya ya ya vos entiendo: oyd señores que gente tan sentida sabed que muchos se quexan: porque siempre en estos trances se entremete traje y gente de Judea: y a mi parecer tienen razon que para en verano no son sanas tantas capirotadas aunque los que se sienten ajos han comido en ellas. (6)

Gitlitz explains this passage in the following way:

As Gillet points out, this is a “clumsy pun on *capirotas*-Jews with ‘*capirotas*’ or ‘*caperuzas*’, and *capirotada-aderezo hecho con hierbas, huevos, ‘ajos’, y otros adherentes . . .* (Acad.)” but he does not attempt to show the relation between the proverb about garlic and the pun. It would seem that Faraute is saying that many people in the audience know about these Jewish hats (which if the proverb is relevant must be the “ajos”) because they have personal experience in the matter of Jewish hats (“han comido en ellas”). It is understandable how a *converso* audience might be “alborotado” watching an Old Testament play. (“*Conversos*” 269-70)

While I agree with Gitlitz’s evaluation of the pun’s relevance and his observation about the audience’s squeamishness, I want to also note the irony of the passage: by taunting the audience for feeling uncomfortable about seeing Jewish clothing in a biblical play, Faraute is pointing out the connection between Old Testament Jews and the *conversos* of Jewish descent in the community. One of these Old Testament Jews, Joseph, is held by Christian belief to be a model of virtue and a type of Christ. The irony, then, is that in Spanish Old Christian thinking those Jews who lived long before Christ can be paragons of Christianity, while contemporary Jews must live in constant fear and dissimulation even if they have sincerely converted to Christianity.

Understanding this connection between Old Testament Jews and sixteenth-century *conversos* in order to point out their difference in treatment helps to contextualize many of the apparently anti-Jewish statements in Faraute’s soliloquies. For example, at the beginning of the second act he comments on Jacob’s lengthy *planctus* for the supposed death of Joseph, saying “*Nunca pense que jamas acabara este planto de Jacob y de alli les viene que todos sus descendientes son lloraduelos*” (73). Although

apparently an anti-Semitic jab, once again a connection is made between a respected Old Testament figure and the contemporary image of the Jew. What makes it uncomfortably ironic is the inconsistency between the sympathy elicited by Jacob's lament and the laughter elicited by attributing Jacob's same characteristics to his descendents. Another example is when, at the beginning of the fourth act, Faraute promises that in this act "no vereys xergas: lutos: llantos: sino plazerer: gozos: alegrias . . . ." But then he warns: "avnque tratando con gente de judea no puede dexar de auer alguna mezcla de defendimiento de mano: por ser como sabeys reboltosa: achacosa y amiga de poner las cosas a riesgo" (119). Once again, Faraute connects the Old Testament characters to the contemporary image of the Jew with the phrase "como sabeys." Yet the character in the act whose behavior could be described as "reboltosa" and risky is the hero Joseph, who puts his brothers through several trials before revealing his identity. Even while apparently insulting the Jews, Carvajal is associating them with a positive figure. Finally, at the beginning of the fifth act, after commenting on the audience's silence, Faraute says, "señal es que soys amigos de ver trajes y gentes de judea" (154). Although this statement appears to be a taunt, the implication is that Spanish society's fascination with Joseph and other Old Testament characters should translate into a higher esteem for their contemporary descendents.

This irony is also apparent in the anti-Jewish comments that appear in the main body of the play. It is evident in the fact that the same pride in pure lineage that defines the Old Christians also characterizes the family of Israel, suggesting that the Israelites' descendents should have claim to the same honor as the Old Christians. For example, after Joseph is sold into captivity, he laments, "vn visnieto de abraham / en cadenas y en dolor" (1175-76). This reflects the *converso* attitude from previous centuries described by Castro:

en los siglos XIV y XV los hispanos-hebreos se sentían <<fidalgos por natura>>, por haber sido su linaje planeado por Dios, con paternidad espiritual atestiguada por la misma palabra divina. ¿Qué mayor nobleza que la de los hijos de Israel, de Abraham?, decía en el siglo XV Juan de Lucena, amigo del Marqués Santillana. (45)

Joseph's dismay that someone with that lineage would fall into captivity also reflects a certain outrage that contemporary *conversos* must fall victims to persecution.

Another scene in which the idea of lineage is treated ironically is the interaction between Joseph and Zenobia. The latter refers to Joseph as "un jodihuelo" (2046), which Hermenegildo, following Gitlitz, sees as evidence of "un cierto desprecio de los judíos" on Carvajal's part (128). The problem with Hermenegildo's argument is that he confuses the playwright's attitude with the character's attitude. Zenobia is both idolatrous and adulterous, so neither the author nor the audience is likely to identify with her or sympathize with her views. Thus, when Carvajal puts in Zenobia's mouth descriptions of Joseph that echo prevailing Old Christian attitudes about the Jews and

New Christians, such as “circunciso jodiguelo / el y todos sus parientes” (2388-89), and “de hombre de tan mala casta / que se puede pensar del” (2394-95), he is in fact vilifying those attitudes.

In contrast with Zenobia’s derogatory epithets, Joseph’s own statements on lineage during the same scenes reflect a very different attitude. Shortly after Zenobia first refers to him as “jodihuelo,” Joseph says to her, referring to his sister that they are discussing,

Tu merced sepa vna cosa  
que de la sangre do viene  
por mayor dote se tiene  
ser honesta que hermosa (2096-99)

Shortly thereafter, while in prison, he introduces himself to his fellow prisoners by saying,

. . . hebreo soy de chanaan  
de la casa de abraham  
desciendo por linea reta  
enemigo de la seta  
gentilica sin desman (2515-19)

This is the more privileged attitude because the hero expresses it. The message is that Jews have honor because of their lineage, but that honor is tied to virtue (“ser honesta”) and orthodoxy (“enemigo de la seta gentilica”).

The chorus at the end of the third act summarizes the *converso* attitude discussed above:

Que trabucos da este mundo  
que baybenes y que saltos  
ya los baxos vemos altos  
ya los altos en profundo  
mas yo sobre esto me fundo  
que virtud a todo trance  
siempre da mate y alcance  
con rostro libre jocundo. (2999-3006)

The irony of a society that honors Jews in the Bible and vituperates them in their own community gives the sense of a world upside-down. The solution, according to Carvajal, is to judge people by their virtue rather than their lineage, thereby viewing all humans as part of the universal “linage humana” mentioned at one point by Jacob (1560).

The *Tragedia Josephina* was able to appeal to a diverse public. Intellectuals would have taken an interest in its classical erudition evidenced by its five-act, Senecan form and its scathing criticism of ignorance. More popular audience members could have found much to move them emotionally in Faraute's jokes, Joseph's trials, and Jacob's laments. Its appeal also extends across religious and ethnic boundaries. Old Christians would have found religious edification in the play's Eucharistic message and some confirmation of their prejudices in the anti-Semitic jabs. There are enough Muslim details and echoes to give recently converted Moriscos a sense of familiarity with the story. Jewish *conversos* might have nodded in agreement with the ironies that the play reveals about Spanish society. Even the expelled Jews in Cairo apparently found the work entertaining and inoffensive enough to preserve a copy of it.

At the same time that Carvajal's Joseph play appeals to a diverse audience, it also, like all good theater, questions the public's attitudes. Old Christians are taken to task for exalting biblical Jews while disparaging living ones. Moriscos see their version of the Joseph story subordinated to an ultimately Christian theological perspective. Jewish *conversos*, particularly those who seek to conceal their heritage, are chided for their familiarity with Jewish customs.

Theater scholar Jill Dolan has expressed the opinion that "theatre and performance can articulate a common future, one that's more just and equitable, one in which we can all participate more equally, with more chances to live fully and contribute to the making of culture" (455). The *Tragedia Josephina*'s combination of appeal and castigation communicates this hope for multicultural inclusiveness in the increasingly monolithic society of sixteenth-century Spain.

## Works Cited

- Bataillon, Marcel. "Ensayo de explicación del «auto sacramental.»" Ed. Marcel Bataillon. *Varia lección de clásicos españoles*. Madrid: Gredos, 1964. 183-205.
- Cañete, Manuel. *Teatro español del siglo XVI: estudios históricoliterarios*. Madrid: Impr. de M. Tello, 1885.
- Carvajal, Micael de. Ed. Joseph E. Gillet. *Tragedia Josephina*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932.
- Castro, Américo. *De la edad conflictiva*. Madrid: Taurus, 1972.
- Dolan, Jill. "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative'." *Theatre Journal* 53.3 (2001): 455-79.
- Friedman, Jerome. "Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: a Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 3-29.
- Girón-Negrón, Luis M., & Laura Minervini. *Las coplas de Yosef: entre la Biblia y el midrash en la poesía judeoespañola*. Madrid: Gredos, 2006.
- Gitlitz, David M. "Conversos and the Fusion of Worlds in Micael de Carvajal's *Tragedia Josephina*." *Hispanic Review* 40.3 (1972): 260-70.
- . "La actitud cristiano-nueva en *Las cortes de la muerte*." *Segismundo* 17-18 (1974): 141-64.
- Goitein, Solomon D. *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967.
- Gutwirth, Eleazar. "On the Hispanicity of the Sephardi Jewry." *Revue des Études Juives* 145.3-4 (1986): 347-57.
- Hermenegildo, Alfredo. *La tragedia en el Renacimiento español*. Barcelona: Planeta, 1973.
- Herskovits, Andrew. *The Positive Image of the Jew in the 'Comedia.'* Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2005a.
- . "Towards a Positive Image of the Jew in the Comedia." *Bulletin of the Comediantes* 57.2 (2005b): 251-82.
- Johnson, William Weisiger. *The 'Poema de José:' A Transcription and Comparison of the Extant Manuscripts*. Valencia: Romance Monographs, 1974.
- Klenk. See *La Leyenda*.
- La Leyenda de Yusuf: ein Aljamiado-text*. Ed. Ursula Klenk. Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1972.
- López Sánchez-Mora, Manuel. *Plasencia (Siglos XVI y XVII)*. Plasencia: La Victoria, 1974.
- McGaha, Michael. *The Story of Joseph in Spanish Golden Age Drama*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1998.
- Pérez Priego, Miguel Ángel. *Estudios sobre teatro del renacimiento*. Madrid: UNED, 1998.



- Pohle, Joseph. "The Blessed Eucharist as a Sacrament." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 5. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. In <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05584a.htm>.
- Ruiz Ramón, Francisco. *Historia del teatro español (Desde sus orígenes hasta 1900)*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1967.
- Shepard, Sanford. *Los Lexicon: Secret Meanings in the Vocabulary of Spanish Literature During the Inquisition*. Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1982.
- Teijeiro Fuentes, Miguel A. *El teatro en Extremadura durante el siglo XVI*. Badajoz, España: Excma. Diputación Provincial de Badajoz, 1997.
- The Torah: With Rashi's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*. New York: Mesorah Publications, 2003.
- Very, Francis George. *The Spanish Corpus Christi Procession: A Literary and Folkloric Study*. Valencia: Tipografía Moderna, 1962.
- Wardropper, Bruce. *Introducción al teatro religioso del Siglo de Oro: Evolución del auto sacramental antes de Calderón*. Salamanca, Madrid: Anaya, 1967.