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England's Spain: An Invisible Romance

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England's Spain: An Invisible Romance

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Dedication

A papá, mamá y Mau, porque nunca quitaron el dedo del renglón.

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ENGLAND'S SPAIN: AN INVISIBLE ROMANCE

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Historically, political and cultural relations between Spain and England have been understood as tense or otherwise dominated by animosity due to the religious and imperial disputes that both nations waged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A consequence of this fraught relationship was the emergence of the so-called Black Legend, an array of English Protestant ideologies aimed at denigrating Spain, its peoples, and colonial endeavors. While the origins of the Black Legend are normally traced to the first European age of exploration, it would be misleading to think that Anglo-Spanish tensions began only in the Renaissance. My dissertation already sees complex, intricate dialogues between England and the Spain over the course of the Middle Ages and uncovers a hidden, invisible, and primeval display of a Black Legend narrative in three Middle English texts that remain relatively overlooked in scholarship: the late fifteenth-century Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*; Geoffrey Chaucer's *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*; and the anonymous *Floris and Blancheflour*, one of the earliest romances in Middle English.

"England's Spain: An Invisible Romance" hears echoes of Spain in England's late medieval textual traditions. I argue that Spain, although prominent in the three texts that I analyze, appears as an othered or "invisibilized" entity from a structural and thematic standpoint, thus contributing to what I identify as an early textual strategy that mirrors

complicated dialogues between Spain and England. Through an unusual combination of texts and genres, my dissertation throws into relief a cultural narrative that has been poorly understood or overshadowed by historical developments in the context of a history of acrimony and enmity. Positioning Spain as important in the development of medieval English literature exemplifies how a culture normally overlooked in Anglophone historical and cultural discourses is central –and not invisible– in the study of a field that, still today, is dominated by concerns so nationalistic, monolingual, and mono-cultural that they appear to reinforce the negative connotations of the term “medieval.”

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INTRODUCTION

The Unbearable Medievalness of the Black Legend

i. Laughing at the Spanish Queen

Anno quoque sub eodem, videlicet circa festum Sancti Dionisii, cum rex rediens de partibus Angliæ Borealibus Londonias properaret, ut interesset sollemniis Sancti Edwardii, in quidena Sancti Michaelis, Aleniora regis Hispaniæ soror uxorque Edwardi cum magno comitatu et pompa, ita ut toti Angliæ esset suspectus adventus talis Hispanorum ut ab illis violenter occuparetur, applicuit apud Doveram. Præcepitque rex, ut cum summo honore et reverentia tamalibi quam Londonis reciperetur, sed Londonis maxime, in processionibus, luminaribus, classicis, cantibus, et allis excogitatis lætitiæ generibus et sollempnitatis. Et adventati occurrerunt Londonienses festivis vestibibus et faleris adornati. Et cum venisset illa nurus nobilissima ad hospitium sibi assignatum, invenit illud, sicut electi Tholetani hospitium, olosericis pallis et tapetiis, ad similitudinem templi appensis, etiam pavementum aulæis redimitum, Hispanis secundum patriæ suæ forte consuetudinem hoc procurantibus, ita ut fastus superfluitas in popula sannas moveret et cachinnos. Graves autem personæ et viri circumspecti, futuros casos ponderantes, ex intimo cordis profunda traxere suspiria, gaudia, quæ rex omnibus alienigenis multiplicando impendit, subtiliter trutinantes. Honores enim exhibiti in oculis Hispanorum admirationem et stuporem, nec mirum, omnivus generaverunt. Doluerunt igitur Anglici inconsolabiliter quod inter omnes nationes plus ceteris coram rege suo proprio viluerunt, et eisdem exterminium immineret irreparabile.”¹

[That same year, around the feast of Saint Denis, as the king hurried back to London from the north in order to take part in the solemn festivities of Saint Edward during the fortnight of Saint Michael, Eleanor, the king of Spain’s sister and Edward’s wife, arrived in Dover with a retinue and pomp so great that all of England was wary about this Spanishwoman of such importance, and thought that their country would be seized violently. But the king commanded that their procession be received with the greatest honor and reverence, with guards, torches, songs, and other forms of celebration; in all places as well as in London, but mostly in London.

The people of London came to meet them, adorned with festive clothes and trappings. And when the king’s most noble daughter-in-law occupied the lodgings that had been destined for her, she found them to be just like those belonging to the bishop of Toledo, with silk curtains and hanging tapestries, in the manner of a temple. She also found the floors covered with elegant rugs according to the fashion of her homeland (for she was fortunate that the Spanish had taken care of this) and the banality of their arrogance caused great, explosive laughter. On the other hand, many men of worth, thinking about future consequences, sighed deeply from the bottom of their heart as they reflected on the many privileges the king bestowed upon all foreigners. In the eyes of the Spanish, the honors shown caused stupor and admiration. But the English lamented inconsolably, because,

1 See Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. Henry Richard Luard (London: Longman, 1872-73).

among all nations, their own king regarded them as less worthy than everyone else, and [expected] an imminent, irreparable destruction.]²

Chronica Majora, v.513

The year is 1255. Eleanor, a fourteen-year old princess from Castile and a future queen of England, has just arrived in London for the first time with a great entourage from Toledo. She has been summoned by King Henry III, whose fifteen-year-old son Edward she had married the year before in Spain. Eleanor came from what was perhaps Castile's most illustrious line of monarchs. Her father, Ferdinand III, was a central figure in the *Reconquista*, annexing most of the northern portion of the Iberian Peninsula (the Christian kingdoms of Galicia and León) into Castilian control, and conquering large swaths of formerly Muslim territories south of Toledo, most notably the cities of Granada and Seville. Her half-brother, Alfonso X, has come down in history as one of medieval Europe's most cultured kings, and his tenure saw, in addition to further expansion, unprecedented scientific, artistic, and literary developments, solidifying Castilian as the Peninsula's primary vernacular language.

Emphasizing Eleanor's lineage here is important, as it contrasts the fragment above in ways that are not necessarily self-evident: Matthew Paris, the foremost English chronicler of the thirteenth century, writes a peculiar portrayal of a future queen that most scholarship would otherwise describe as politically competent, beloved, and a patron of

2 I wish to thank Iván García and Adrián Israel Rodríguez for their help in translating this fragment.

literature and the arts.³ That, however, might not have been the general sentiment in Matthew Paris's England in the years following Eleanor's arrival. On the basis of the chronicler's account, her very presence in the country caused suspicion, and, if we are to read this 1255 entry more closely, it would appear that her Spanish origins alone were reason enough to incite distrust and most notably, ridicule, as Rose Walker has noted: "for Matthew Paris, [Eleanor's] Spanish nationality was sufficient to provoke derisive laughter among the people" (68). Upon arriving to London, for example, Eleanor's sartorial style and loud Spanish delegation caused, according to some records, the bystanders to "mock and sneer at such outrageous pomp, which experience told them would soon affect their own pockets" (lxiii).⁴ But the most blatant indicator of the people's negative feelings against Eleanor and the Spanish might be Matthew Paris's suggestion that the English feared their country would be seized by Spaniards, and that the respect shown to the young Eleanor was nothing but a convenient political move from her Plantagenet father-in-law.

The precise cause for these ill feelings against a Spaniard is difficult to trace in English historical discourse before 1255, even though Eleanor's marriage to Edward was not the first dynastic union between England and Castile.⁵ However, the passage above

3 John Carmi Parsons has extensively studied the life and political contributions of Eleanor of Castile. See, in particular, *The Court and Household of Eleanor of Castile in 1290* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1977); and *Eleanor of Castile: Queen and Society in Thirteenth-Century England* (New York: St Martins, 1995).

4 See, in particular the collaborative work edited by Beriah Botfield, *Manners and Household Expenses of England in the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, Illustrated by Original Records* (London: William Nicol, 1841). The authors expand on Eleanor's first activities in England and cite Matthew Paris on the backlash caused by her arrival.

5 In 1174, Leonor of England, the Anglo-Norman daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II, married king Alfonso VIII of Castile, which meant that the queen apparently mocked in London was actually her husband's second cousin once removed. For an insightful comparison between the two Eleanors, see Rose Walker, "Leonor of England and Eleanor of

appears somewhat disparaging against a princess who, decades later, proved to be, as I outline in Chapter 2, key in fostering a culture of productive scientific and literary exchanges between England and the polyglot Iberia of the thirteenth century. Given the lack of concrete archival evidence to sustain otherwise, I would like to begin my discussion by suggesting that Matthew Paris's description of Eleanor of Castile initiates a distinctly English literary and cultural tradition of seeing Spain (and Spanishness) as distant, minor, or otherwise fear-producing without being explicitly aggressive. Note, for example, that the Hispanophobia in Paris's account seems nuanced and calibrated; almost, one could say, invisible, as the text does not in any way provide credible justification to support Eleanor's portrayal, nor does it invite a moral reading of her character.

Because medieval historians were not concerned with producing historicity in the modern sense of the word (their work was not meant to be reasoned, investigative, or analytical) but rather, with conveying facts through a variety of rhetorical or textual strategies, it would be reasonable to describe the English chronicler's perception of the Spanish princess as authoritative, which would suggest that veiled forms of anti-Hispanism might have already existed in medieval English texts as early as the mid-thirteenth century.⁶ This dissertation locates those hidden episodes and demonstrates their

Castile", *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th-15th Cultural, Literary, and Political Exchanges*, ed. María Bullón-Fernández, 67-87 (New York, Palgrave, 2007).

6 The notion of "fiction" in the Middle Ages remains a contested scholarly arena. Two thoughtful discussions on the role of fiction in medieval historiography can be found in Monika Otter, "Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing," in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner, 109-30. (New York: Hodder-Arnold, 2005); and Ana María Morales, "Entre la historia y la ficción: las materias narrativas medievales," *Fuentes Humanísticas* 14.25-26 (2002-2003): 73-83. Regarding the way medieval English chroniclers generally conceived of historical writing, see Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London and New York: Hambledon, 2004).

presence in the literary culture of England from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. However, in order to situate this project's scholarly relevance, it is first important to historicize what I think constitutes this particular exercise of looking at Spain not only in the English context where it originates, but indeed the greater realm of medieval and modern European intellectual histories.

ii. Mapping a Medieval Mentality: Liminal Spain⁷

Spain's position as both an Atlantic and Mediterranean nation, as well its close proximity to the African continent, has historically resulted in a complex and often paradoxical history. From a geographical perspective, the Iberian Peninsula can be both the beginning of Europe, but also its terminus. Implicit observations and anxieties regarding this location are to be found as early as the seventh century. Consider Isidore of Seville's description of the Peninsula in Book XIV (*De terra et partibus*) in his encyclopedic account of the known world, the *Etymologies*:

Sita est autem inter Africam et Galliam, a septentrione Pyrenaeis montibus clausa, a reliquis partibus undique mare conclusa, salubritate caeli aequalis, omnium frugum generibus fecunda, gemmarum metallorumque copiis ditissima. [...] Duae sunt autem Hispaniae: Citerior, quae in septentrionis plagam a Pyrenaeo usque ad Cartaginem porrigitur; Ulterior, quae in meridiem a Celtiberis usque ad Gaditanum fretum extenditur. Citerior autem

7 María Bullón-Fernández begins her introduction to *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages* by stating that: "From a geographical point of view, England...and the Iberian Peninsula constituted, respectively, the Western and Southern borders, the geographical margins, of medieval Christendom, and Europe. Being on the edges of the Christian world, England and Iberia did not seem as important..." (1). The author specifically argues that the British Isles and the Iberian Peninsula might have established a form of early communication based on their mutual marginality. However, perceptions of "otherness" did not arguably affect England the same way they did Spain.

et Ulterior dicta quasi citra et ultra; sed citra quasi circa terras, et ultra vel quod ultima vel quod non sit post hanc ulla, hoc est alia, terra.⁸

[Hispania is situated between Africa and Gaul, closed off by the Pyrenees mountains to the north and everywhere else shut by the sea. [...] Furthermore there are two Spains: Inner Spain, whose area extends in the north from the Pyrenees to Cartagena; and Outer Spain, which in the south extends from Celtiberia to the straits of Cadiz. Inner (citerior) and Outer (ulterior) are so called as if it were citra (on this side) and ultra (beyond); but citra is formed as if the term were ‘around the earth’ (circa terras), and ultra either because it is the last (ultimus), or because after it there is not ‘any’ (ulla), that is, any other, land.]⁹ (XIV. Iv. 28-v.10)

Isidore’s description is, from a literal point of view, nothing but a geographical record. Taken at face value, the author simply states that the territory now known as Spain is located partly between the Pyrenees and Africa. An alternate reading, however, reveals hidden implications. First, it is not gratuitous that Spain is the very last item in his description of the European continent (the next mention concerns Libya) even though the author lists several other regions within Europe that could be considered geographically marginal, or otherwise markers between major landmasses. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the author stresses the liminal position of the latter part of Spain, therefore tacitly indicating that the region serves to understand the limits of what is European. When Isidore wrote the *Etymologies* in the first quarter of the seventh century, the Muslim conquest of Spain was still roughly a century away, so the cultural reading ascribed to this description centuries later – i.e., Spain as a marker of religious otherness

8 The complete Latin text can be found in *Etymologiae*, The Latin Library: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/isidore.html>. Access: 3 Aug 2017.

9 English translation by Stephen A. Barney. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

– might not expressly apply. Yet a careful interpretation of the excerpt suggests that, even to this Spaniard, the Peninsula’s liminality was beyond question.

There is no need to look further than later medieval literature to measure the extent of this thinking. Spain appears mentioned several times in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s 1136 *Historia regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*), often as a geographical limit inhabited by wondrous creatures. The first example of this limit is the text’s allusion to the “Pillars of Hercules”, the name given in classical Antiquity to the stretch of coastline separating Africa from the Iberian Peninsula that is home to the Rock of Gibraltar. There, Geoffrey says in Book 1, “deep sea-monsters called the Sirens made their appearance and nearly sank [sailors’] ships as they moved forward” (1-1.12). Admittedly, this first implicit mention of Spain in Geoffrey’s book has more to do with the author’s goal of linking the history of Britain with Brutus’s, but the reference is important in that it makes Iberia’s marginal position abundantly explicit and, as such, a territory suitable for fantastic Others, human and non-human alike.

In a bizarre leap of time from Classical Antiquity to the years following the Moorish conquest of the Peninsula, we find a reference to a certain Spanish king called ‘Ali Fatima’ in Book 8 (8.5-1), which concerns the deeds of Arthur. The ruler belongs to a long catalog of lords from the Orient that have allied with the Romans in order to fight against Arthur in his conquest of Britain. As Arthur prepares for battle, he learns about the existence of a supernatural creature: “Meanwhile the news was brought to Arthur that a giant of monstrous size had emerged from certain regions in Spain. This giant [...] had fled to the top of what is now called the Mont-Saint-Michel” (8.5-3) Together, the king’s name, the presence of the giant, as well as Mont-Saint-Michel contribute to a narrative

that furthers Spain's uniqueness; a land that produces monstrous beings, likely ruled by a Muslim king, and which seems connected to a place that evoked admiration, danger, and a sense of adventure to medieval pilgrims, the island of Mont-Saint-Michel. It would appear then, that Geoffrey already conceived of Spain as a faraway, distinctive, and alien territory. Furthermore, the writer seems vaguely familiar with the Peninsula's history (even if he names a dubious Muslim king), but associates its apparent geographical remoteness with the presence of supernatural forces, something that might very well speak to Spain's status as an odd piece within a greater European puzzle.

Presumably, this image carried on to medieval English texts throughout the fourteenth century, which scholars have typically identified as the high point of Middle English literature. The opening fragment to the early fourteenth-century poem *The Land of Cockayne* (ca. 1330) tells us about a foreign land abundant with riches:

Fur in see bi west Spayngne
Is a lond ihote Cokaygne.
þer nis lond vnd' heuen riche
Of wel, of godnis, hit iliche.
þo3 Paradis be miri and bri3t,
Cokaygn is of fairir si3t. (1-6)

While not explicitly set in Spain, the poet *does* imagine the Peninsula as a geographical boundary lying between the marvelous Cockayne and the rest of the known world, and the tone of the text is generally in keeping with descriptions of exotic paradises or otherworlds that much European literature would later associate with Islamic culture, such as spices and precious stones. Portrayals of such features, of course, would have been extremely common to medieval readers without necessarily referencing Islam, but the fact that they coexist in a text in which the *only* non-imaginary element happens to be

Spain is important. First, scholarship has frequently described the poem as an example of a medieval utopia, and Spain offsets and reinforces at once that idea. Second, the poem was compiled in Ireland, westernmost and liminal like Iberia. Karma Lochrie, in fact, writes that: “west of Spain is the equivalent of ‘out there in no man’s land’ [and for that reason the poem is set] off the coast of Spain. As a place far removed from Ireland, where the poem was most likely composed, this somewhere west of Spain would also be exotic in foreignness” (67). Though serious critical work on the possible implications of this Spanish reference is non-existent, it seems plausible to claim that, to Middle English writers, their more southerly neighbor was meant to be depicted, as I have tried to argue, as both a faraway land and a buffer zone between the fantastic and the real, or between Christendom and “hethenesse.”

Indeed, the generic image of Spain as the battlefield between Christians and Muslims is especially well attested in some Middle English textual traditions. We have, for example, a cluster of some twenty Charlemagne romances mostly derived from earlier poems in Old French in which: “Spain naturally provides the setting [and is] an arena for feats of chivalric derring-do” (Shaw 42). By the mid-fifteenth century, an era that also saw a prolific development in Middle English romance, it was clear that Spain, in addition to being the fictional setting of conflicts between Saracens and Charlemagne and his peers, was also a place of ideological division, as Laban, the enemy sultan in *The Sultan [Sowdone] of Babylon* (c.1450), expresses here:

So Mahounde moost me spede,
For al the realme of hethen Spayne
þat is so brode and large. (1530-1532)

In these Middle English texts, Spain – heathen or otherwise – is a common setting to define the European versus its dangerous Other, but this is partly because the Peninsula itself struggled to come to terms with its own religious and cultural identity: just as “broad and large” portions of its territory were under Muslim control, even broader regions saw themselves as bastions of Christianity. This peculiar dichotomy is, as I explore at length in Chapter 3, what primarily interested Spain’s northerly English neighbor.

Beyond these mainstream representations, there are a number examples of late medieval English literature that exhibit a more aggressive and quietly Hispanophobic approach. The *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*, a 1436 poem that praises England’s mercantile ventures, has been extensively studied as an example of how the country engaged with other economically powerful nations such as Spain and Flanders. Sebastian Sobeki in particular has described the poem as “staunchly jingoistic in its nationalism” (254), but no critic has thus far identified the piece as early evidence of English anti-Hispanism. This sentiment was not, of course, without due cause: England competed against Spain and Flanders for trading control over the Atlantic, which gave rise to a rhetoric of rivalry and anxiety:

Ye wot ye make hit of oure Englissh wolle.
Thanne may hit not synke in mannes brayne
But that hit most, this marchaundy of Spayne,
Bothe oute and inne by oure coostes passe?
He that seyth nay in wytte is lyche an asse.
Thus if thys see werre kepte, I dare well sayne,
Wee shulde have pease with tho growndes tweyne;
For Spayne and Flaundres is as yche othere brothere,
And nethere may well lyve wythowghten othere. (77-85)

The poet's protectionist approach towards English wool and the text's encouragement to be vigilant of Spanish ships marauding the English coast can be said to prefigure the major naval conflicts that both nations waged openly the following century, the era that most scholars identify as the true origin of the Black Legend. However, as I have attempted to argue, the distance marked either by religious or geographic boundaries or rising conflict over trade became, in time, a literary and textual one. Spain, while an important presence in Middle English literature, often appears as eminently foreign, and; in some cases, almost invisible, and this, I argue, constitutes an early display of what centuries later came to be known as the Black Legend.

iii. Mapping a Modern Mentality: Black Legend(s)

In her 2011 essay "Chaucer and the Matter of Spain," Sylvia Federico argues that "despite its political and cultural importance, Spain has been suspiciously invisible to scholars of medieval England..." (299), noting later that this has been largely due to long-held views about Spain as a "backward" and "barely European country" during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁰ One should like to think that this particular intellectual tendency applied *only* to the Spain of the nineteenth and twentieth century, which admittedly "lagged behind the industrial leaders of Western Europe" (306), as William D. Phillips Jr. and Carla Rahn Phillips assert.¹¹ Some scholars, however, have

10 Federico is citing John Cowans in his introduction to *Early Modern Spain: A Documentary History*, who very aptly observes that, "during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Spain occupied a curiously marginal place in the field of modern European historiography..." (1).

11 There is, of course, a point to be made about the emergence of nineteenth-century medievalism and its relationship to philology and the European nation state, a discourse in which Spain remained largely invisible as well.

directly associated the Black Legend with the demeaning uses of the term “medieval,” as Anne J. Cruz notes in her critique of art historian Jane C. Nash, who erroneously affirms that in the mid-sixteenth century:

Spain’s political policy was that of a crusade: its philosophy one of mysticism, and its culture an inbred continuation of its own past which was suspicious of potentially corrupting foreign influences. While the rest of Europe was experiencing social, political, and intellectual innovation, Spain remained, essentially, a medieval country that was resistant to progressive ideas. (7)

There are, evidently, several problems with this view. Not only does Nash fall victim to inherently pejorative categorizations about a time period; most notably, this scholar, who was writing during the 1980s, specifically reproduces an Anglophone tendency to see Spain as a country lacking “progress” *exactly* during the centuries it experienced some of its most vibrant cultural achievements. Far from wishing to render a celebratory view of Spain when it was at its imperial heyday, it is interesting to note how the discourse on the nation’s perceived backwardness transcends the intellectual narratives of several time periods.

At least some part of Nash’s unfortunate claim finds its basis in Spain’s negligible role in European geopolitics during the long nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whereas nations such as France and England experienced rapid imperial expansion during that period, Spain would lose all of its major colonies in the Americas starting the 1800s, becoming effectively invisible in the discourse that treated the imperial powers or otherwise newly-formed industrial nation states of Western Europe as embodying “modernity” and “civilization”. To some Europeans, in fact, Spain seemed to be veering in the opposite direction, and was to be considered a “country of ignorance, superstition, religious fanaticism, unable to become a modern nation” (Greer 1).

But nineteenth-century Spain, turbulent though it was, remained a culturally prolific country, a fact largely unknown in the larger European context of the time. Indeed, a number of historians have noted how a generation of prominent intellectuals rose precisely to counter the effects of decolonization. The so-called *Generación del 98*, “included a brilliant array of cultured individuals, unquestionably the largest and most energetic display of creativity since the Golden Century” (Phillips 305). One of the chief legacies of the Generation of ‘98 was its scholarly encouragement to question and redefine what it meant to be Spanish in keeping with the nationalistic ideologies swiping Europe at the time. In this sense, the first quarter of the twentieth century is important to recall because it produced the presumed coiner of the term “Black Legend”.

In 1914, Julián Juderías, a conservative and nationalist Spanish journalist, wrote a long treatise aiming to criticize the mostly industrialized nations that downgraded Spain for its historical colonial endeavors, arguably inventing the term “Black Legend.” It is important to highlight that Juderías’ text *La leyenda negra y la verdad histórica* is impassioned, ethnocentric, and lacks the critical rigor and spirit for self-criticism that had characterized the work of most intellectuals of the Generation of ‘98. However, the study is important for being allegedly the first work by any Spanish author to formally identify a cultural trend purposely aimed at demonizing Spain or the Spanish at different points in history, but especially starting the sixteenth century:

En una palabra, entendemos por leyenda negra, la leyenda de la España inquisitorial, ignorante, fanática, incapaz de figurar entre los pueblos cultos lo mismo ahora que antes, dispuesta siempre a las represiones violentas; enemiga del progreso y de las innovaciones; o, en otros términos, la leyenda que habiendo empezado a difundirse en el siglo XVI, a raíz de la Reforma, no ha dejado de utilizarse en contra nuestra desde entonces y más especialmente en momentos críticos de nuestra vida nacional. (15)

[In one word, we understand the Black Legend to be the story about the inquisitorial, ignorant, and fanatic Spain, unable to belong among civilized peoples both now and then; a country predisposed to violent repression, anathema to progress and innovation. In other words, it is the legend that began circulating in the sixteenth century after the (Protestant) Reformation and that has been used against ever since, particularly during the most difficult moments of our national life.]¹²

There was, of course, a particular logic to this: England and Spain, formerly collaborators on numerous fronts during the Middle Ages, became rivals in light of Spain's rising global power in the late-fifteenth century.¹³ It is possible to find late medieval echoes in this Anglo-Spanish rivalry by looking at the aggressive annexationist policies of the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand, starting in 1469. Their marriage heralded, as I note in Chapter 1, the eventual expulsion of non-Christians from the Iberian Peninsula during a time period that blurs the limits of what we can call "medieval" in the context of Spanish historiography.

Local and specific though it appears, this powerful dynastic union carried English echoes. Like many Spanish nobles of her age, Isabella had English blood (she was a granddaughter of Catherine of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's eldest daughter) and would eventually raise an English queen consort, Catherine, whose marriage to Henry V was tumultuous enough to initiate a radical change in European geopolitics during the mid-

12 My translation.

13 William D. Phillips, Jr. and Carla Rahn Phillips suggest that Spain's powerful alliances with important European monarchies in the late fifteenth century, as well as the change in European geopolitics resulting from Columbus's first voyage to the Americas, led to what they call "the first global empire". See, in particular, Chapters 4 and 5; "The rise of Spain to international prominence", and "Spain as the first global empire," in *A Concise History of Spain*, 134-245 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010).

sixteenth century. Increasing monarchic, cultural, and economic disagreements between both nations in the late 1580s (which led to the Anglo-Spanish war that saw the defeat of the Great Armada in 1588) explain what Juderías identifies as the origin of the Protestant Anti-Spanish discourse. But, because the conflict was predominantly religious in nature, England’s perception of Spain as a stronghold of conservative Catholicism crystalized the cultural and ethnic distance that ascribed Spain’s alleged backwardness, incivility, and, in particular, appetite for religious warfare and repression, a feature that, interestingly, also applied to English political discourse during the Elizabethan era. Indeed, the specific emergence of an anti-Spanish sentiment in early modern England appears to be a contained result with inescapably medieval voices and allusions.

It is uncertain whether Juderías’s work was read extensively outside Spain. The propagandistic tone, as well as its publication during a particularly critical time in Spanish history suggests a localized, specific target rather than a broad, European one. It is *not* uncertain, however, that its basic tenets -whatever the time period- carried some potency in the formulation of modern anti-Spanish narratives to frame atemporal descriptions about race and racial otherness, as Walter Mignolo, Margaret Greer and Maureen Quilligan generally affirm in *Rereading the Black Legend* (2).¹⁴

There is a phrase variously attributed to Napoleon and Alexandre Dumas (father) that reads “Africa Begins at the Pyrenees.” Its origin is contested and it survives as much in popular lore as it does in contexts once considered scientifically legitimate. To be sure,

14 See, in particular, the introduction to this study, in which the authors theorize the Black Legend as a racist construct even if Juderías does not specifically discuss the term “black” as having racial connotations. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan, eds. *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in Renaissance Empires*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

even if its presumed origin is not conclusively English, it was for some time applied in the broader context of Anglophone Black Legend discourses. That was at least the case of American ethnologist William Z. Ripley, who authored a now widely discredited book entitled *The Races of Europe* in 1899. The study is considered an example of turn-of-century racist theories and lacks rigorous scientific or academic credibility. In describing what he calls the “Mediterranean races”, Ripley claims that:

“Beyond the Pyrenees begins Africa. Once that natural barrier is crossed, the Mediterranean racial type in all its purity confronts us. The human phenomenon is entirely parallel with the sudden transition to the flora and fauna of the south. The Iberian populations, thus isolated from the rest of Europe, are allied in all important anthropological respects with the peoples inhabiting Africa north of the Sahara from the Red Sea to the Atlantic.” (272-273)

Regardless of these highly questionable theories, there lies the general image of the Spanish as non-European, both racially and geographically, but the truth is, as I suggested earlier in this chapter, that at least some aspects of this claim might have resonated among early medieval thinkers. If permitted to stretch temporal and disciplinary boundaries here, I might even argue that Ripley’s far-fetched assertion finds an uncanny –but perhaps not completely irrelevant– echo in Isidore of Seville’s initial description of the Iberian Peninsula as geographically isolated (the argument that drives Ripley’s theory) and the tacit anxiety over its proximity to the African continent.

When studied as a whole then, the cultural and intellectual narratives that imagine Spain either as marginal or explicitly different from England and the rest of the Europe (ethnically, religiously, and otherwise) appear to constitute a continuum from the early medieval to more recent periods, suggesting that Juderías’s principles have found at least some currency at different stages over the course of a millennium. Therefore, what the

Spanish journalist of the twentieth century denounced as a modern discourse describing a hypothetically post-medieval ideological trend has, I argue, a much earlier inception than previously thought.

Recalling Juderías's work, this dissertation devises a methodology that reorients the medieval Anglo-Spanish bond by historicizing what I have come to identify as the earliest iteration of the Black Legend. Specifically, I demonstrate how the Middle Ages produced a particular, delicate manifestation of the Black Legend in three Middle English texts written over the course of three centuries.

Unlike Juderías's ardent criticism, the medieval Black Legend is subtle, and does not seek to demean Spain overtly, following, instead, a pattern of veiled distance and desire. In this manner, Middle English literature can be said to showcase early examples of tense Anglo-Spanish interactions, setting an important precedent for a cultural narrative that is most commonly located in the early modern period and beyond. The following segments abridge the project's methodology and relevance within the field of Middle English literature, and provide a brief breakdown of its subsequent three chapters.

iv. What Is At Stake

This dissertation is being written at a time when Iberia has experienced a comeback among scholars of medieval English literature, a big leap from what James Fitzmaurice-Kelly, a British scholar of Spanish literature, once said in relation to the links between England and Iberia in the Middle Ages: “[there was] almost complete insulation of each country with regard to one another” (73). Fitzmaurice-Kelly's observation in 1906 has been since resuscitated and cited *ad nauseam* to prove that

England had, in fact, a long history of collaboration with the different Iberian kingdoms over the course of four hundred years. Without a doubt, the scholar responsible behind the current Anglophone interest in the literary cultures of medieval Iberia might be María Bullón-Fernández, who in 2007 edited a remarkable volume of collected essays called *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages*, which gathered original research on historical, literary, artistic, political, and cultural relations between medieval England and the modern nations of Spain and Portugal. Bullón-Fernández's work has been instrumental not only in originating a healthy scholarly trend that has proven that medieval Iberia was – and remains – historically important to England, but has also made up for the fact that scholars of medieval English literature have typically preferred to concentrate in traditions they consider to be more directly relevant to their endeavors, such as Greece and Rome, or France and Italy.

Characteristically, critics have cited military collaboration, political unions based on dynastic marriages, sea trade, pilgrimage, and crusading as the dominating aspects of the medieval Anglo-Spanish collaboration. Less commonly, though equally important in this relationship, scholars have also pointed to the exchange of science, art, literature, and legal systems. This dissertation, while taking advantage of such recent scholarship, *does not* seek to provide an exhaustive historical survey of Anglo-Iberian relations in the Middle Ages. The project, instead, looks at the relationship between England and Spain as a continuum by investigating the medieval components of a historical animosity thought to have occurred only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Evidently, the question arises whether such an endeavor is “literary” enough, but given that my interest lies in deconstructing and redefining a cultural trend in three examples of Middle English

literature, my dissertation satisfies (and advances) the historicist drive that remains popular among literary medievalists. No one theoretical framework, however, can be said to circumscribe the project in its entirety: the only dominant facet consists of uncovering Spain within the text and beyond; in other words, unearthing the invisible.

In this sense, perhaps the greatest contribution of *England's Spain* is that, unlike most scholarship dealing with medieval Anglo-Iberia, proceeds cautiously regarding a redemptive discourse regarding the relationship between the two territories. At this point, no medievalist would challenge England and Spain's close bonds. Interestingly, however, none of the vibrant criticism produced in the last decade seriously considers how the ideological conundrums that gave way to a construct such as the Black Legend also illuminate the medieval bond between Spain and England. If, as Elizabeth Scala says in her introduction to *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England*, "the primary function of the medievalist is to locate missing stories" (1), then the medieval might be the missing link that relocates a story that, in time, became one of outright rivalry, and whose results have had a lasting impact on Western culture. In other words, this dissertation ultimately maintains that the complex cultural dialogue that the "Anglo" and "Hispanic" worlds still maintain might, in fact, be medieval.

Notwithstanding my interest in Spain, I should note that this dissertation is about England. Its focal point is Middle English literature and only moves outward from there. In this sense, *England's Spain* differs from much recent scholarship that studies medieval English and Spanish literature comparatively (note, for instance, that I do not actively work with Spanish texts here). As with any research project, my dissertation

acknowledges methodological gaps and limitations, but also justifies them for the sake of an argument. In particular, specialists in the subfield of medieval Anglo-Iberia might rightly note that John Gower –an author with palpable rather than peripheral links to Spain, and whose work has been extensively analyzed for its fruitful examples of *direct* literary collaboration between medieval Iberia and England– is not, in any way, present in this discussion.¹⁵ It is a widely known fact that Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* was the first Middle English text to be translated into another European vernacular, first Portuguese, and then Castilian, in the first decades of the fifteenth century. As such, Gower’s influence in medieval Iberian literature is far from invisible or tangential, and his inclusion in my narrative of Anglo-Spanish literary relations in the Middle Ages is therefore not warranted.

In wanting to provide a representative sample of genres and cultural contexts that might speak to Spain’s unique status in the literature of medieval England, I have chosen to focus on texts that, despite being relatively canonical, remain somewhat understudied in criticism. Two of them in particular, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and *Floris and Blancheflour*, take Spain as their setting and diffuse this Spanishness even when they very clearly allude to elements of medieval Spanish history and culture. The Chaucer chapter is radically different. The segment re-historicizes the available scholarship on Chaucer’s purported connections to Spain by looking at astronomy and how it travelled

15 Numerous essays and collections have treated Gower’s importance to Iberian textual culture in the context of translation and patronage over the course of the last decade. For good recent insights, see, in particular, Ana Sáez-Hidalgo and R.F. Yeager, eds., *John Gower in England and Iberia: Manuscripts, Influences, Reception* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2014); Joyce Coleman, “Philippa of Lancaster, Queen of Portugal –and Patron of the Gower Translations,?” in *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th c.–15th c.: Cultural, Literary, and Political Exchanges*, ed. by María Bullón- Fernández, 135–65 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and R. F. Yeager, “Gower’s Lancastrian Affinity: The Iberian Connection,” *Viator* 3 (2004): 483–515.

from Spain to England. Importantly, the segment also speculates how Chaucer might have benefitted from this collaboration in order to produce one of his least studied texts, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*.

Altogether, these three texts –a sacramental play, a technical treatise, and a popular romance– have little in common by way of genre, cultural history, or inception. They are, however, linked by their oblique yet unquestionable gaze at Spain and the way they carry forward a history that, until now, remains to be credited as expressly medieval.

v. A Note on Terms and Chapter Overview

Because this dissertation is concerned with reading Spain in unusual places in order to establish its importance within a Middle English text or canon, I will use the term “invisible” and invoke its malleability throughout this discussion. Because, furthermore, something that is invisible is meant to be hidden or otherwise concealed from plain sight, my usage of the term suits the idea of Spain –historical, literary, scholarly– advanced in the texts I have chosen to analyze in this dissertation. The three principal chapters are presented in reverse chronological order, and consider, respectively the late fifteenth century (when Anglo-Spanish relations started to cool), the fourteenth century (when Anglo-Iberian relations were strongest), and the mid-thirteenth century (when monarchies in Norman England and Castile began establishing alliances). This choice is strategic: engaging in a process of historical deconstruction will help me re-chart and re-trace a narrative of European acrimony and friendship.

Chapter 1 discusses the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (c. 1461), the only known host-desecration play to be written in medieval England. The plot concerns a powerful

Aragonese Christian merchant who sells a consecrated host to his Jewish counterparts. Although the play is explicitly located in the Spain, the Spanish connection in this text has only been marginally discussed in criticism. My reading historicizes the processes of conversion offered by the text to ponder how England might have understood the cultural and religious crises that allegedly distinguished medieval Spain from its perceived “modernity” in the sixteenth century.

Chapter 2 has a twofold purpose. First, it offers a detailed scholarly review of Chaucer and/in Spain, and interrogates why astronomy has not been at the forefront of these studies. Additionally, the chapter offers an alternative reading of Chaucer’s *Treatise on the Astrolabe* by pointing out the importance of Spain in the transmission of scientific texts to medieval England and highlights a connection unacknowledged in the criticism that fervently advocates a kind of Hispano-Chaucerian connection. The problem with much of this scholarship is, as I detail in my chapter, the concrete lack of textual evidence regarding a definitive Spanish link in Chaucer’s broader universe. I offer a solution to this problem by tracing a noticeable Spanish route of traffic and travel in a Chaucerian text –and, more generally, a subject– that has remained overlooked in criticism.

Chapter 3 treats the popular romance *Floris and Blancheflour*, which recounts the story of two children who fall in love with one another despite their different religions. Of particular importance is the Spanish setting of the story, which criticism has only been able to deduce through comparisons with other European versions of the tale. The story begins with a Moorish king who, attempting to conquer the Christian north of Spain, seizes a group of pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. This episode,

however, is strangely omitted in all extant Middle English manuscripts. The chapter reads this omission's broader implications in the context of English pilgrimages to Spain in the early fourteenth century; and, following the text's themes of gardens, fountains, harems, and sultans, I argue that *Floris* is the first major English text to adopt a cultural distance with regards to Spain.

Readers will quickly realize that the term "Iberia" favored by most current scholarship for the benefit of linguistic and geographic inclusion is not consistently used in this discussion unless it describes the Iberian Peninsula as a whole. In general, the regions I treat in this dissertation –Aragon, Castile, Andalusia, and Galicia– are included in the geographical boundaries of the modern state of Spain and, despite nuances and local histories, they became generally unified within a single political entity in the late fifteenth century. That, of course, does not mean I disregard the issue of cultural diversity: many of the places I allude to here often carried historical legacies of multiculturalism and multilingualism.

In that sense, my dissertation, like many others that deal with medieval Spain, works with *and* questions the concept of *convivencia*, that shaggy monster of a term that has become a most problematic myth about the Spanish Middle Ages. Widely challenged, *convivencia* became a tool and best-selling myth in constructions of Spanish nation-making. The term is so powerful that, still today, it is impossible to conceive of Spain without somehow alluding to the often romanticized and misleading image of its multicultural medieval past. As recently as 2002, the late María Rosa Menocal, an unquestionable champion of the notion, advocated the idea of a culturally harmonious Spain despite linguistic, racial, and religious differences among its communities in her

book *The Ornament of the World*, in which the author claims that Muslims, Jews, and Christians created “cultures of tolerance.” If anything, history (and in particular, literary history) invites us to question the extent of such a tolerance. While it is undeniable that Spain was unusually multicultural during much of its medieval history, and that its religious atmosphere was unique in the context of the pre-modern European West, idealizing the varying degrees of interaction among its medieval communities is problematic at best and deceptive at worst.

Fortunately, wider interest (especially American) in medieval Iberian studies, has complicated *convivencia* and the consensus at present is that the uneasy and tense coexistence between Iberian Muslims, Jews, and Christians led to particular cultural developments that continue to be investigated and demystified in order to be understood in their entirety.¹⁶ An answer that might bring us closer to this question involves studying

16 Menocal’s book continues to be influential. See *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002). Scholarly questioning of *convivencia*, however, is neither recent nor controversial. Even the presumed coiner of the term, Américo Castro, wrote in his seminal study *The Structure of Spanish History*: “each of the three peoples of the Peninsula saw itself forced to live for eight centuries together with the other two at the same time it passionately desired their extermination” (84). In Anglophone contexts, Thomas Glick recognized the problematic status of the term in 1992 by stating that: “the word [also] embraces the phenomena of mutual friction, rivalry, and suspicion” (1). Two interesting, recent takes that acknowledge the contentious nature of *convivencia*, but that do not completely disavow the concept are Ryan Szpiech, “The Convivencia Wars: Decoding Historiography’s Polemic with Philology,” in *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, eds. Suzanne Akbari and Karla Mallette, 135-161 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); and Maya Soifer, “Beyond *Convivencia*: Critical Reflections on the Historiography of Interfaith Relations in Christian Spain,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 1.1 (2009): 19-35. For scholarship that provides nuanced examination of the different religious communities in Spain and their degree of interaction and cultural assimilation, see, generally, the references to David Nirenberg’s work throughout Chapter 1. Additionally, an excellent volume of collected essays that studies Spain’s multiculturalism as a historical continuum can be found in Simon R. Doubleday and David Coleman, eds. *In the Light of Medieval Spain: Islam, the West, and the Relevance of the Past*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

medieval Spain in relation to other European cultures: if people from diverse backgrounds found it both challenging and productive to coexist in medieval Spain for hundreds of years, a similar case can be made in relation to how Spain engaged with other European cultures. This dissertation hopes to unearth the origins of a comparable, uneasy dialogue from the perspective of Middle English literature.

CHAPTER 1
THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY
The Spanish Subtext in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*

1.1 – Contested Periods, the Jews of Spain, and the Croxton Play

Of all the centuries that can be loosely defined as “medieval,” few have been the object of more scholarly contention than the fifteenth.¹⁷ Long considered the bridge to the “early modern,” the century appears to be a disparate mixture of significant ecclesiastical tensions, civil wars, and economic transitions that ultimately supplanted feudal life on the Continent. Particularly in the latter half of the fifteenth century, we see a renewed interest in commercial expansion and international maritime trade that prefigure the early rise of Spain and England as European powers.¹⁸ Discrete periodizations are, of course,

17 The fifteenth century has typically been described as transitional to “early modernity,” an era that, according to some scholars, abounded in instability and contradictions. Far from conforming to this statement, however, criticism in the past decade has proven that clear-cut divisions can be inoperable for the study of early periods. Margreta de Grazia in particular notes that “[n]o period division has had more consequence than the divide between the ‘medieval’ and the ‘early modern’ with the exception, perhaps, of B.C. and A.D. . . . That [secular divide] works less as a historical marker than as a massive value judgment, determining what matters and what does not” (453). My dissertation also treats such an insistence on “modernity” with skepticism, especially since it studies Anglo-Spanish relations from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries as a continuum, and not as a before/after phenomenon. For an in-depth view pertaining to the medieval/renaissance divide in European literary culture, see the remarkable articles (including De Grazia’s) in Jennifer Summit and David Wallace, eds., *Medieval / Renaissance: After Periodization*, special issue of *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37.3 (2007): 447-645.

18 Although serious interest in literary exchanges between England and Spain has been generally limited to the past ten years or so, the history of commercial contacts between both nations prior to 1500 remains better studied. See in particular William D. Phillips Jr., “The Frustrated Roles of Atlantic Europe,” in *Material and Symbolic Circulation Between Spain and England, 1554-1604*, ed. Anne J. Cruz, 3-12 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Betsabé Caunedo del Potro, *La actividad de los mercaderes ingleses en Castilla (1475-1492)* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 1984); and, especially, Wendy Childs, *Trade and*

dangerously misleading, and it would be inaccurate to suggest that earlier centuries did not also witness episodes of religious conflict or important socioeconomic transitions.

In Spain, however, the 1400s foreshadowed the forced conversion and subsequent expulsion of all Jewish communities, and the period has been a tremendously important marker for dating the archetypal medieval/early modern divide.¹⁹ In fact, historiography has at times treated the events surrounding the Jewish expulsions of the late fifteenth century as momentous in defining the advent of a new era; indeed, Spain and Portugal were the last western European countries effectively to banish or otherwise convert their Jewish populations as José Ayaso Martínez notes:

La historia de los judíos en la España cristiana tiene una periodización diferente a la de las comunidades judías en Europa occidental. De manera general, podemos afirmar que la degradación de las condiciones de vida de los judíos se produjo más tarde. . . . Así, mientras que en los reinos cristianos Peninsulares las comunidades judías experimentaron un notable florecimiento durante los siglos XII y XIII, en los estados de Europa occidental se produjo un progresivo y rápido empeoramiento de sus condiciones de vida a partir de la Primera Cruzada. (50)

[The history of the Jews in Christian Spain has a different periodization from that of other Jewish communities in western Europe. We can generally affirm that the worsening of their living conditions occurred much later. . . . As such, whereas Jewish communities in Spain experienced a notable flourishing during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, elsewhere in Europe we find a quick and progressive deteriorating starting with the First Crusade.]²⁰

Shipping in the Medieval West: Portugal, Castile, and England (Oporto: Fédération internationale d'études médiévales, 2009).

19 Barbara Fuchs argues that Spanish historiography has been largely complicit in creating the discourse that sees the year 1492 as a watershed episode between the “old” and the “modern” Spain: “How can we reimagine the periodization of Hispanic studies so as to privilege neither supersession nor nostalgia? . . . [The year] 1492 has functioned as a kind of guarantor for Hispanism, that despite its exceptional, eccentric history, Spain had a Renaissance, and a modernity” (494). To read the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* in the context of that contested periodization, however, seems productive precisely because the text evokes a nostalgia for things lost.

20 My translation. Ayaso Martínez offers a detailed account of the circumstances under which Jewish activities were “tolerable” in the Christian kingdoms of Spain in the years before

The notion of splendor noted above has in many ways dictated the way scholarship talks about Jewish Spain, but one must also note—per the author’s own admission—that this flourishing came at great cost and that the memory of violence had a visible impact on the culture of the age. It is the impact of that violence that marks the Middle English text that initiates my historico-literary inquiry, a play likely written in the midst of Spain’s Jewish crises in the fifteenth century. However, the development of different Jewish communities across Iberia was far from uniform, and writing on the history of Jews in Spain must perforce entail a particular gaze to its different kingdoms at different stages of history. In this chapter, I look at late medieval Aragon, a conglomerate of kingdoms occupying much of the eastern portion of the Iberian Peninsula until their union with Castile in 1469.

Aragon was home to thriving Jewish communities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As Paola Tartakoff has noted: “Jews assisted Christian kings as financial advisors, translators, doctors, and diplomats, and they helped administer and colonize new domains” (5). Nonetheless, the relatively successful communion between Jews and Christians in Aragon was thwarted by periods of great violence after 1391, a year that recorded atrocious Jewish massacres in Castile and the Crown of Aragon generally, and that has served as a watershed moment in Sephardic history.²¹ In the last decade of the

their expulsion and describes the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as seeing a sharp rise in anti-Judaism. His main argument focuses on the *Siete Partidas* (Code of Seven Parts) of King Alfonso X (the Wise), the principal legislative document of thirteenth-century Castile. Although the code is not exclusively a legal text, there are fragments concretely aimed at regulating the activities and cultural lives of Jews and Muslims.

21 A general problem with scholarship on Jewish Spain is that it often exhibits the totalizing traits that critics of *convivencia* have come to identify: either an excessively romanticized discourse on the splendor of Jewish communities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries or an overtly apocalyptic approach to their demise in the fifteenth century. In that

fourteenth century, instances of Jewish mass conversion became commonplace in Aragon and the rest of the Christian kingdoms and intensified in 1478 with the institutionalized power of the Spanish Inquisition. In 1492—perhaps the most common year to define the terminus of the Spanish “medieval”—the Alhambra Decree effectively banished Jews from the unified Christian kingdoms and concluded a series of expulsions that had occurred elsewhere in western Europe in previous centuries.

This cycle of anti-Semitism, one could argue, might have oddly influenced Anglo-Iberian cultural relations centuries *before* the imagined end of the Spanish Middle Ages.²² England, for instance, was the first European nation to issue state-sanctioned restrictions against Jews in the late thirteenth century (Heng 251). Under the mandate of Edward I, Jews were forcibly expelled from English territory in 1290. As stated earlier, Edward’s wife, Eleanor, was Castilian, and came from a political lineage strongly involved in the process of *Reconquista*. Her brother, Alfonso X (the Wise), had a complicated relationship with non-Christians and issued laws that regulated the activities

sense, the year 1391 has emerged as a contentious topic in its own right and has been the object of widely disparate criticism. Some useful studies that analyze the phenomenon of anti-Semitic violence in 1391 as a moment of crisis and, in some cases, as a trigger for unintended cultural transformations are Philippe Wolf, “The 1391 Pogrom in Spain: Social Crisis or Not?,” *Past & Present* 50.1 (1971): 4-18; David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Alexandra Guerson, “Seeking Remission: Jewish Conversion in the Crown of Aragon, c. 1378–1391,” *Jewish History* 24.1 (2010): 33-52. Guerson’s work in general examines how Jews and Christians in Aragonese-controlled territories developed strategies to cope with economic and social problems and studies *conversos* as a result of those relations. For a more localized account, see in particular Guerson’s unpublished dissertation: *Coping with Crises: Christian–Jewish Relations in Catalonia and Aragon, 1380–1391* (Diss. University of Toronto, 2012).

22 In using the concept “anti-Semitism” to describe violence against Jews in the Middle Ages, I am largely following Anthony Bale’s reasoning that “the [term] is admittedly a modern one applied retrospectively, but the fact that the label did not exist does not mean that anti-Semitism was absent; it simply had not yet been categorised. Medieval texts display the standard ‘antisemitic’ features of abjection, corruption, flexible notions of superiority and crude categorisations of Jewish physical difference. To be ‘anti-Jewish’ is to attack the real faith and culture of Judaism and those who identify as Jews” (129).

of Jews and Muslims in the Peninsula. Her father, Ferdinand III, oversaw the union of two major Christian kingdoms, León and Castile. In short, Eleanor's monarchic ties spoke to a hidden, invisible desire for kingdoms without non-Christians, an ideal that Edward I fulfilled and that was echoed by Isabella and Ferdinand two centuries later with the union of Castile and Aragon. We might thus find an initial, invisible route of medieval Anglo-Spanish communication in these monarchic vicissitudes linked to the treatment of Jewish communities, fictions that begin in England and conclude in Aragon.

Exactly how Spanish Jews were perceived among other medieval Europeans is hard to measure, but a miracle play from East Anglia suggests that conversion might have carried cultural impact outside the Peninsula. With an alleged staging in Aragon during 1461 and a manuscript history that goes well into the 1550s, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, I argue, capitalizes on Jewish Aragonese economic and religious history, ultimately demonstrating that Spain mattered in the English cultural imaginary of the fifteenth century.

Locating a Spanish subtext in this play is important given that a common scholarly assumption posits that the play's Aragonese setting is fictional—invisible, really, in practical terms. Most notably, Derrick Higginbotham has described Spain as a “misrepresentation that mingles the native and foreign [and that] passes off one place as another” (164).²³ Nevertheless, if we examine Aragon in depth, we can shed light on one

23 Derrick Higginbotham's persuasive essay compares the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* to the fifteenth-century English poem *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*, an example of England's mercantile anxieties, and treats Aristorius, the play's Christian merchant, as evidence of a newly formed English social identity based on maritime trade. My analysis of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* supports this reading. However, Higginbotham's piece falls short of identifying Spain as a possible factor in the construction of such an identity. While the piece does mention that “the distinct dislocation of Jonathas rings as historically specific when juxtaposed with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal in the late fifteenth century”

of the text's principal conundrums: the status of Jews as real historical characters as opposed to atemporal holders of cultural memory, the view most strongly favored by the latest criticism.²⁴ Because the Aragonese Empire was once home to notable Jewish communities and because conversion—the text's chief concern—featured prominently in the religious atmosphere of late medieval Spain, the place that most scholars have deemed fictitious in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* becomes central rather than peripheral.

The following discussion, then, marks a slight yet important shift away from the previous critical history of the play: I ultimately maintain that the text, however English, makes a statement on the historical importance of Spanish Jewry. But this representation of Spain, I contend, is not without its problems: even when the play's plot responds largely to Jewish stereotypes and anti-Semitic violence, the text also implicitly creates a

(69), this important historical connection is not, in any case, considered more seriously, thus belonging to a larger body of critical work that explicitly neglects Spain or otherwise renders it invisible in this fifteenth-century sacramental play. Perhaps the only exception to this scholarly trend is offered by Lisa Lampert: "The play's setting in Aragon in 1461 is important, irrespective of how we might read that date in relation to the creation or performance of the play itself" (109). See, respectively, Derrick Higginbotham, "Impersonators in the Market: Merchants and the Premodern Nation in the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*," *Exemplaria* 19.1 (2007): 163-182; and Lisa Lampert *Gender and Jewish Difference From Paul to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

24 See Miriamne Krummel, *Crafting Jewishness in Medieval England: Legally Absent, Virtually Present* (New York: Palgrave, 2011). Krummel argues that the cultural legacy of medieval Jewry persisted in England well after the expulsion of 1290 and that the Christian daily experience in the nation was enriched by the remnants of Judaism. Indeed, readings in the field of memory studies have consistently dominated analyses of the Croxton play for the past decade. An excellent essay on the act of late medieval liturgical rituals as a communal event enhancing memory and repetition is Paul Strohm, "The Croxton Play of the Sacrament: Commemoration and Repetition in Late Medieval Culture," in *Performances of the Sacred in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Tobias Döring, 33-44 (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2005). Strohm's argument has more to do with the persistence of host-consecration ceremonies than with the text as an example of the legacy or continuation of Jewish culture in medieval England although Strohm does note the association of the Jews' conversion toward the end of the text with a possible pogrom, a reading I wholeheartedly support, but in light of anti-Semitic violence in late fourteenth-century Spain.

fantasy about Jews and Christians coexisting, thus speaking to the historiographical myth about *convivencia* that I discuss in my introduction.

This chapter is divided into three principal segments. Initially I will be interested in providing a succinct overview of the play within the context of East Anglian drama and will explain why the East Anglian context matters in an Aragonese context. The chapter next addresses religious themes by drawing parallels between the text's violent culture of conversion and Jewish-Spanish history. Finally, the last portion of my argument discusses the play's relevance beyond the boundaries of the medieval period and suggests why Croxton may have been instrumental in the creation of an implicit Black Legend discourse in early English theatrical traditions.

1.2 – Place matters: East Anglian Drama and Aragon

Even though the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* lies comfortably within the canon of medieval English drama, the text has always posed a number of problems to critics. Ruth Nissé has called it “an elusive cultural document, one that confounds the traditions that it supposedly continues and refines” (100). Part of the play's originality, she explains, lies in the fact that no other host-desecration narrative is to be found in Middle English drama, at least not in the available corpus.²⁵ Some theater historians like Greg Walker have preferred treating the text as a miracle play since it deals specifically with a fantastic

25 On medieval English plays dealing with hagiographical material, miracles, and conversions, see David Grantley, “Saints and Miracles,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle, 263-286 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). For an alternate reading, see Richard Homan, “Two Exempla: Analogues to the Play of the Sacrament and Dux Moraud,” *Comparative Drama* 18.3 (1984): 241-251. Homan notes that some English *exempla* were sometimes given Spanish settings. A didactic reading of the Croxton play would likely illuminate this theory, but the author does not elucidate why some exemplary literature in Middle English might contain references to Spain.

manifestation of the Divine (213).²⁶ It should be noted, however, that the plot remains unusual in English liturgical drama, as it is not directly linked to a particular Biblical episode, nor does it dramatize a saint's life. Host-abuse literature gained firm purchase on the Continent after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which contains an unequivocal clause on transubstantiation:

There is one Universal Church of the faithful outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed ("transsubstantiatio") by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us. And this sacrament no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ Himself gave to the Apostles and their successors.²⁷

I quote this first canon at length because its content is what drives the plot in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. A group of Jewish merchants travel to Aragon to buy a sanctified host from Aristorius, their Christian counterpart, only to mock and test the ideology stated above. In particular, the five Jews question Christ's existence in a "cake" calling it "onkynd" (unusual; l. 200) and proceed to officiate a false sacrament. After taking turns at stabbing the host, the body and blood of Christ invoked in the canon materialize, and this materialization catalyzes the Jews' conversion. Although in England questioning Christ's material presence was, as we shall see, linked to Lollardy, the

26 See also Greg Walker, "The Corpus Christi in York and Croxton," in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David Johnson and Elaine Treharne, 370-385 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Walker notes that the image of the tortured body of Christ was fundamental to instill a form of "affective piety" as part of the story of the Eucharist and its desecration.

27 Fourth Lateran Council, First Canon. Medieval Sourcebook at Fordham: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp> Access: 3 Aug 2017.

Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* reproduces a tradition of anti-Semitism propagated in devotional and clerical literature over the course of three centuries.²⁸

Accusations of host-abuse carried legal importance and were used to subject Jewish populations to unjustified violence on the grounds of heresy. The first major instance is thought to have occurred in Paris in 1290 at the parish of Saint-Jean-en Grève.²⁹ The legend tells the story of a poor Christian woman who was tempted by a Jew to exchange a host for money after Mass during Easter. Upon receiving the host, the Jew pierces it with nails and a hammer. The host bleeds but remains otherwise intact.³⁰ Perplexed, the Jew throws it into a boiling cauldron, which becomes red, Christ's blood manifesting itself. The tale survives in an ecclesiastical document known as *De miraculo hostiae*.

28 For readings in this vein, see, in particular Anthony Bale, "Fictions of Judaism in England Before 1290," in *The Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary, and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. Patricia Skinner, 129-44. (Woodbridge/Suffolk: DS Brewer, 2003). Bale's essay focuses on the persistence of ritual murder literature and its role in both the origin and demise of the Jewish community in England before Edward I's edict of expulsion in 1290. The author specifically argues that anti-Judaism was fundamental in the cultural, artistic, and literary life of thirteenth-century England. His analysis, however, remains markedly in keeping with the scholarly trend that reads the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (and medieval English Jewish culture more generally) as a catalyst for cultural memory.

29 In studying the overall development of Jewish communities across medieval Europe, we would see how the year 1290 is not fortuitous. The Saint-Jean-en-Grève episode is also believed to have happened in 1290, the year Jews were expelled from England. This year is important because it strangely brings Spain into the conversation of anti-Jewish violence. From the York massacre of 1190 to the definitive expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, we can conclude that Europe recorded major violent acts against its Jewish population every hundred years or so.

30 The definitive study of host-desecration narratives as a literary genre is Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Rubin offers specific case studies for numerous European countries and argues that host-desecrations fed into a generalized Christian anxiety that caused Christians to live apart from Jews. That anxiety is very clearly manifested and gruesomely fantasized in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*.

Although no related narratives are linked to England, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*'s closest Continental analogue, the French *Mistère de la sainte hostie* reproduces extremely similar plot events. Meanwhile in Iberia, Aragon and Catalonia recorded accusations throughout the late fourteenth century that are roughly concurrent with the development of religious drama in England. Accusations, for example, have been specifically recorded in Aragonese-governed territories such as Barcelona in 1367, Huesca in 1377, and Lérida in 1383 (Rubin 109). The timing is enlightening if we consider that the first allusions to the so-called Corpus Christi pageants of York—a tradition whose plays also signal the importance of fictions regarding transubstantiation—appeared around 1377 (Beadle and Fletcher xix).

Host-desecration claims in England have proven more difficult to locate, but numerous towns in the northeast document a history of anti-Semitic violence. The twelfth century saw Jewish massacres in York, Lincoln, Stanford, Lynn, Norwich, and especially Bury St. Edmunds.³¹ The most famous instance occurred in York in March 1190 when a riot gathered around York Castle (present-day Clifford's Tower). Following months of anti-Semitic violence in the city—fueled mostly by financial motives—a large group of Jewish citizens sought refuge inside the castle and remained there for days until a prominent rabbi urged a collective suicide rather than a mass conversion. It is believed that more than 150 people died as a result, and this York massacre has often been cited as

31 The significance of Bury St. Edmunds as evidence for anti-Jewish material in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* has been aptly noted by Lisa Lampert. See, in particular, "The Once and Future Jew: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Little Robert of Bury and Historical Memory," *Jewish History* 15 (2001): 235-255. Lampert's piece argues that despite criticism that assures that the Jews of the Croxton play are anything but Jews, it is the anti-Semitic language of the text that helps us place them in a larger historical perspective. Lampert explicitly refers to England's most famous ritual murder accusation concerning the young boy St. Robert of Bury, whose killing was legendarily attributed to Jews. The Croxton play does mention East Anglian locations associated with ritual mass murder.

one of the most gruesomely anti-Semitic pogroms in the history of medieval Europe.³² Not surprisingly, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* has often been historicized in relation to these events, but scholars also note that by the late fifteenth century (when the play is thought to have been composed) Jewish communities did not officially exist in England, thus advancing a somewhat untenable argument if the play is to be studied solely in light of the historicity of these killings that occurred almost three hundred years before it. Massacres were often committed on the basis of Jewish “ritual murder,” according to which Jews supposedly killed Christian children and used their blood to perform rituals at religious feasts. In England, this narrative proved enduring well after 1290, the year of the Jewish expulsion, and made its way into secular literature: Chaucer’s *Prioress’s Tale* is a salient example.

Many of the English areas associated with Jewish ritual murder were also epicenters of dramatic culture. East Anglia, the region that encompasses Norfolk and Suffolk, was famous for its important theatrical traditions. John C. Coldewey notes that “if East Anglia was a region marked by prosperity during the late Middle Ages, it was also known to be pious, literate, and politically active, although in more limited ways, perhaps because of its geographical isolation. [Economic vitality] acted as the busy backdrop against which spiritual success might be cultivated” (214-215).

Coldewey’s assertions are useful for imagining an East Anglian play dealing with a wealthy Christian merchant who must trade his faith to secure his success at home and abroad; they might serve to clarify that the region was more linked to the outside world

32 For more information on the York massacres, see, generally, the work of Barrie Dobson. A useful essay analyzing the killings in the larger historical perspective of medieval Anglo-Jewry is “The Medieval York Jewry Reconsidered,” *Jewish Culture and History* 3.2 (2000): 7-20.

than previously understood. For instance, the indirect allusions to wine from Spain in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* attest to the author's knowledge of foreign commercial networks and, importantly, foreign religious practices. In short, beyond exhibiting similar traits in style and performance, many East Anglian and non-cycle plays favored topics of conversion and anti-Semitism, thus creating a parallel cultural dialogue with their Spanish counterparts. Indeed, what is powerful about the intercultural dialogue favored by the Croxton play are the ways the poet finds to rework specific East Anglian dramatic elements with the purpose of representing what seems a Spanish religious conflict.

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* survives in a manuscript miscellany in Ireland although scholarly consensus has firmly established its East Anglian origin. 1461, the date most commonly associated with the play's dating, should not be read definitively since evidence suggests that the manuscript was copied well into the mid 1500s.³³ Nothing is known about the author although John T. Sebastian describes him as a "poet of considerable skill" who "adapted a familiar legend to a new set of circumstances" (27).³⁴ To be sure, the playwright must have been thoroughly familiar not only with East Anglian cultural trends but perhaps also with Aragonese Christian ones that grounded theatrical production in anti-Semitic discourse and customs. The text is widely available in good modern critical editions, but most relevant studies date from the 1980s.³⁵

33 The reference to Babwell Mill ("Babwyll Myll") appears in line 621. John T. Sebastian indicates that "Babwell had been a site of a Franciscan priory since the middle of the thirteenth century and lay just outside the powerful Benedictine abbey at Bury St. Edmunds, which dominated the political and economic affairs of the surrounding region" (12).

34 Davis identifies three different hands in the manuscript, but the East Anglian provenance seems conclusive (lxxi).

35 In addition to the EETS text, scholars also use David Bevington, ed., *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975). Two additional excellent editions include Greg Walker, ed., *Medieval Drama, An Anthology* (London: Blackwell, 2009), and the most recent one, John T.

The surviving manuscript of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* provides very little indication of the text's performance history or conditions, but the play is thought to have belonged to a sub-category of medieval English drama called "place-and-scaffold," in which the open-air space was surrounded by a variety of props connected to a central *platea*. This central place, Meg Twycross writes, "acts as a No Man's Land into which the characters descend to converse, fight or otherwise interact" (46). Perhaps the most relevant example of this kind of play in Middle English is *The Castle of Perseverance*. A morality play, *The Castle of Perseverance* is representative in that it includes an explicit diagram with scaffolds to invite different entities to move around it. Provided that the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* was staged under the same principle, Aragon is the center toward which all bodies—both speculative and real—gravitate. This phenomenon can first be noticed in the opening statement enunciated by the second banner bearer:

SECUNDUS [VEXILLATOR]. S[o]uereyns, and yt lyke yow to here þe
purpoos of þis play
That [ys] representyd now in yower syght,
Whych in Aragon was doon, the soþe to saye,
In Eraclea, that famous cyté, aright:
Therin wonneþ a merchaunte off mekill might—
Syr Arystorye was called hys name—
Kend full fere with mani a wyght;
Full fer in þe worlde sprong hys fame. (9-15)

Thys marycle at Rome was presented, forsothe,

Sebastian, ed., *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012).

Yn the yere of our Lord, a thowand fowr hundder sixty and on,
That þe Jewes with Holy Sa[c]rument dyd woth,
In the forest seyde of Aragon. (57-60)

And yt place yow, thys gaderyng þat here ys,
At Croxston on Monday yt shall be sen;
To see the conclusyon of þis lytell processe
Hertely welcum shall yow bene. (73-76)³⁶

Were we to imagine in those lines a stage that includes a circle with concentric scaffolds, we would see that geographical markers are clearly indicated: a forest in Aragon, “Eraclea,” Rome. This opening, I argue, is not entirely formulaic. Rather, it serves two important purposes in the play. First, it demonstrates the performance’s geographic authenticity and the author’s commitment to the truth (“the sothe to say / in yower sight”). Second, it reveals the playwright’s engagement with history and, possibly, with non-English cultures. That the play was “presented” in Rome speaks to the ecclesiastical consequences of the host desecration and indicates that the author is at home with a larger tradition of devotional literature. But unlike “Croxton,” which may refer to a number of towns in the area, “Aragon” *is* in fact an identifiable locus and is to be read closely against subsequent plot developments. The name appears twice in those lines and explicitly reinforces the imagery of commercial power connected to a specific location with which East Anglians must have identified. Furthermore, the writer’s choice to locate an “Eraclea” within Aragon complicates the passage in interesting ways. Not only does the name remind of us of Hercules (a suitable comparison if we think of the main character, Aristorius) but also “via Heraclea” was the name of an important commercial

36 All quotations are from Norman Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* (EETS / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

route that encompassed the Iberian Peninsula and connected it to numerous ports on the Mediterranean and cities in northern France during the late Roman era. Pondering such a connection might seem ahistorical, of course, but the fact that Aristorius's reach extends beyond Iberia might invite that reading.

What little criticism exists on site-specificity and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, however, appears to dismiss or altogether omit Aragon as the focus of the place-and-scaffold stage. Instead, readings in this vein rescue what Clare Wright calls the "embodied aspect of site" in which, Wright writes, the "cognitive, affective, and corporeal aspects of medieval performance environments . . . manipulate space and place to communicate meaning [and, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* cannot therefore] be firmly located to a specific site" (160). While it is undeniable that Wright correctly notes the flexibility of the medieval stage and, in particular, medieval performing spaces as intrinsically aware of site, forgetting that the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* constantly emphasizes a specific locus as its stage is problematic. In fact, the Aragon of this East Anglian play is appropriate to consider in relation to practical issues in the text: if Wright's analysis on performative cognition and emotion is sound, place-naming is anything but arbitrary but responds, in fact, to particular staging needs.³⁷

Because medieval drama was not produced to be theatrical in the modern sense (playhouses or acting troupes were arguably non-existent), when the poet alludes to geographical settings, he makes use of what little props he has at his disposal. An early study on the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* mentions that "stage-directions imply a

37 Wright begins her discussion on embodied sites in the Croxton play by stating that "there are few (if any) medieval English playtexts that seem completely disconnected from the site of performance" (159).

‘place’ with ‘stages’ for the chief players, a ‘tabyll’ and a ‘chyrche’ [ll. 149, 288, 305, 445]” (Chambers 427). This is because performers had to make the most of all objects on stage, including the recreation of certain sceneries. Aragon, as such, becomes a functional concept and appears carefully calibrated throughout the text and the stage: twice in the banns as a context for background (lines 11, 60), once to introduce Aristorius and his mercantile activities (87), once to reaffirm Aristorius’s place in the world (130), once to describe the quality of Aragon’s wine (341), and once to insist that the events recounted did indeed happen in Aragon. One thing is sure in each of these instances: the playwright wishes to contrast a discourse of power against one of cultural misunderstanding in order to understand a specific historical moment. In the analysis that follows, I will historicize the so-called Aragonese empire and read Aristorius’s complex relationship with the Jews of the Croxton play to show that East Anglia might have understood Aragon—and more generally, Spain—as a culturally porous territory.

1.3 – Spain on an English Stage

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* has a scholarly history spanning at least sixty years, but its inclusion in David Bevington’s *Medieval Drama* (1975) has assured the text’s place in the canon of medieval English drama though it remains overlooked when compared to pieces like *Everyman*, *Mankind*, or even *The Second Shepherd’s Play*. A careful examination of all criticism since 1944 reveals that scholars have favored the Jewish topic over questions of performativity although there is some consensus on the play’s violence as a didactic tool.³⁸ There appear to be, in this sense, two identifiable

38 The most ardent defender of the Lollard thesis is Cecilia Cutts. Newer studies, nonetheless, strongly question the Lollard approach but there are many who disagree, as John

trends. The first one questions the exact meaning of “Jew” in an age in which Jews were officially absent from England. The second and most dominant one assumes that Jewish culture persisted despite the expulsion and was recrafted in dramatic traditions to create a performative discourse about Christianity: “The sacrament in the Croxton Play’s imaginary city becomes subject to a postexilic Jewish line of interpretation that presents a formidable challenge to Christian tenets of belief” (Nisse 99).

Eminently productive though they are, these models have failed to understand the importance of the play’s location (note how Nisse also deems Aragon to be imaginary). The only serious attention to Spain thus far has been brought to light by Lisa Lampert: “[The setting] is important yet overlooked, and is crucial to an understanding of the centrality of conversion in the play and the play’s exploration of the construction of Christian identity” (108). I side with Lampert unequivocally. Indeed, Spain should and must be read closely to comprehend the text’s themes of conversion. However, I wish to go one step further and suggest that the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is in fact a play *about* Spain, as the text’s treatment of commercial success and faith-trading is historically consistent with events that occurred in Aragon from the late fourteenth to the late fifteenth century.

Unique among medieval maritime empires, the crown of Aragon ruled at one point during the Middle Ages virtually all important seaports in the western Mediterranean. Historically, Aragonese-controlled regions came to include the totality of

Sebastian indicates: “Cutts’ argument has proven durable. Many recent commentators have either reaffirmed her assessment of the play as anti-Lollard polemic or offered variations on it” (9). See Cecilia Cutts, “The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 5.1 (1944): 45–60. For a structural study on the play’s violence, see Richard Homan, “Devotional Themes in the Violence and Humor of the *Play of the Sacrament*,” *Comparative Drama* 20.4 (1986): 327-340.

the northeastern Iberian Peninsula (Catalonia, Valencia, the Pyrenees, and the Kingdom of Aragon proper); the area around the French cities of Montpellier and Perpignan (which was in turn an active center of Jewish culture throughout the thirteenth century); the islands of Sardinia and Corsica; significant regions of Northern Africa thanks to the establishment of a Catalan trading zone in the late fourteenth century; the coveted Duchy of Athens (from 1311 to 1388); Sicily (formerly under Norman-Angevin rule); and, importantly, the Kingdom of Naples in the late fifteenth century.³⁹ Critics have not always collectively identified these locales under the name *empire*, but they do aptly tie the crown's commercial achievements across the Mediterranean to larger political ambitions wherein Jews (and to a lesser extent, Muslims) proved fundamental for success. Should it be gratuitous, then, to include an English play that offers, if subtly, commentary on Aragon and the trading activities of its Jews as part of that cultural (and obviously political) dialogue? The convoluted tale of commerce, invasion, and negotiation of religious faiths that developed in the crown of Aragon for some three centuries (which Aristorius's Jews replicate in the *Play of the Sacrament*) suggest in turn that England may have been engaged in what happened in Spain during much of its medieval history.

The Aragonese Mediterranean was characterized by years of unparalleled success, but its existence was also threatened by constant local revolts and dissidence among

39 The crown of Aragon possessed an extensive merchant fleet that often served as a commercial link between English cities, the Middle East, and Africa. For a compelling history on the Catalan Mediterranean, see Lawrence V. Mott, *Sea Power in the Medieval Mediterranean: The Catalan-Aragonese Fleet in the War of Sicilian Vespers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003). Although Mott's argument focuses on the military aid offered by the Catalans in the Sicilian takeover of 1282, his study is an excellent introduction to the expansive maritime project of the Aragonese monarchs in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

regional rulers.⁴⁰ Efforts were concentrated in Sicily and Naples, which was annexed to the crown in 1442 by Alfonso V (the Magnanimous). Scholars generally agree on the cultural benefits of such a move: the king was a staunch supporter of the arts, and a fruitful exchange of knowledge ensued between Italy and the Iberian Peninsula as a whole. Nonetheless, the Aragonese could no longer rely solely on Catalan commerce to survive. By the mid-fifteenth century, Sicily would gradually become the focus of the crown's Mediterranean policies. From 1458 to 1479, Aragon was ruled by John II, who witnessed civil wars in Navarre and Catalonia and a gradual pressure to contain Muslims from regaining strongholds in his kingdom. At this point, it would be instructive to think of Aragon not only as the independent political entity that once ruled the Mediterranean but also as a structure that would eventually become unified with the rest of Spain, which in the fifteenth century targeted its non-Christians more aggressively than before. That same Spain was also gradually invested in the notion of commercial and imperial expansion. If the *Play of Sacrament* was indeed written around 1461, and if the manuscript dates from the mid-sixteenth century, then these narratives become worthy of staging: Aristorius was conceived in an England probably aware of the context of Spanish conversions tied to economic interests. Let us not forget that Ferdinand's daughter Catherine became a queen consort of Henry VIII, and her story, much like Aristorius's, was marred by religious conflict and early imperial power. We can, as such,

40 This is especially well attested in Thomas N. Bisson's classic history of Aragon, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). The author focuses primarily on the dynastic revolts that the different Aragonese kingdoms experienced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Though the issue of Jewish conversions does not deserve a specific chapter, the study touches on economic developments that led to Aragon's Mediterranean expansion, something that concerns the plot in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*.

relocate the East Anglia of the banner bearers to an Aragon—to a medieval stage, really—where Europe, and in particular, England is divided by commerce, empire, and faith.⁴¹

Shortly after the banner bearers leave, Aristorius's life on the sea and his power become evident to the spectator:

For of all Aragon I am most mighty of silver and gold—
For, and it were a countré to by, now wold I nat wond!
Sir Aristory is my name,
A merchaunte mighty, of a royall araye.
Full wide in this worlde springith my fame,
In all maner of londys, without ony naye,
My merchaundise rennet, the sothe for to tell. (89-94)

What follows next is a list emphasizing places by or near the Mediterranean: Genoa, Syria, Salerno, Alexandria, Catalonia, Milan, Spain, Lombardy, Navarre, Turkey, “Caldea,” and Thrace. Lawton says, in relation to this long list of places, that “[the list’s] length is its point: it serves to overshadow the play it initiates. Its content, a wide-ranging survey of world geography with references to near and far-flung places both East and West, needs to be recognized as a topos of later medieval literature” (286).

But the extensive paragraph is not merely a survey of cities East and West. If the Eraclea of the play, by virtue of its relation to the Mediterranean, is synonymous with Aragon, the passage becomes historically viable: many of the far-flung places identified by Lawton were in fact controlled by Aragonese monarchs from the late thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century. Ultimately then the East-West nexus invoked by Lawton is

41 For example, in “Impersonators in the Market,” Derrick Higginbotham proposes a similar reading and eloquently interrogates how trafficking prefigures the idea of an early modern English nation in the *Play of the Sacrament* but does not specifically work his arguments in favor of a possible Spanish subtext.

relevant in ideological terms: medieval Iberia *was* both East and West within the limits of its own territory, and the Aragonese merchant of the *Play of the Sacrament*, blending heretical practices into his notion of Christianity and mingling among Jews without difficulty, convincingly personifies that hybrid identity.

I would also add that, to the reader, the fragment conveys ideas of imperialism and Mediterranean control, a hegemony that originates in Aragon both literally and metaphorically: literally insofar as Aristorius has indeed conquered those places and metaphorically in his own performance and understanding of power. Aragon appears once more in line 130 to summarize the narrative of supremacy highlighted previously. In sum, that the Christian's merchant view of the world is understood solely in terms of material wealth should not surprise us if we are to conceive the Aragon on stage as genuine.

It would be misleading to think that the idea of an imperial, expansive Spain began only in 1492 as historians have often posited. The story may have begun much earlier, to be sure, and the crown of Aragon was instrumental in that plot. From the first union with Catalonia in the twelfth century to the subsequent alliances with English, French, Italian, and Flemish monarchies, expansion was always at the core of the Aragonese ethos. In some ways, as I have shown, Aristorius symbolizes those ideas of unlimited expansion. But to ensure its continuity into the future, it was necessary for the Aragonese Empire to turn to the Peninsula rather than abroad. The desire for cultural homogeneity that had obsessed the Christian kingdoms in Iberia for six centuries became a tangible reality with the forced expulsions and conversions of Jews and Muslims in the second half of the fifteenth century after the union of Aragon and Castile. In the *Play of*

the Sacrament, however, conversion seems to touch Christians and non-Christians alike. If one is to contemplate an idea of Spain as possible in the play, cultural histories and models of historical interpretation such as those that propagate the image of Spanish Jews and Christians cohabitating are also brought on stage.

After describing his unmatched qualities as a merchant (in fact he appears to understand his value in monetary terms when he says he is “most mighty of silver and gold”), Aristorius orders his cleric to patrol the coast to see if there are merchants from afar. Three places are mentioned that are at once Mediterranean and “Eastern” in origin: Syria, Saby, and Chelidonia. These references predict the coming of the Jews, who are described as strange and foreign but like Aristorius are skillful at bargaining for the right price. Of perhaps greater importance, however, are their religious practices:

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

Muhammad-worshipping Jews are, of course, not exclusive to the *Play of the Sacrament*. As noted by Michael Chemers, their presence is ubiquitous in medieval and Renaissance theatrical traditions: “Throughout the canon Mohammed is mentioned dozens of times in diverse contexts, sometimes as a saint or god of Muslims, and sometimes as an historical figure. . . . Invoking Mohammed’s name specifically as part of a curse or oath is some-

thing any non-Christian villainous character (that is, a Roman, Muslim, or pagan), or even corrupt priests and bishops, may be expected to do” (28).

It should not surprise us then that Jonathas and his peers pray to the Muslim prophet repeatedly as part of their religious rituals and practices. But even if much criticism on the *Play of the Sacrament* questions whether the text’s Jews are archetypes rather than actual historical figures, based on the historical associations I have suggested thus far, the episode above acquires a particularly interesting reading. If our play does indeed offer a representation of the seemingly fluid religious contexts of late medieval Spain, the Muslim-believing Jews become both performatively and historically significant: performatively in that the excerpt might serve as a paradigm of the author’s engagement with Iberia’s Jewish and Muslim past and historically in that the text’s timeline is roughly concurrent with Spain’s Jewish mass conversions and expulsions and the ultimate defeat of the last Muslim caliph in the Peninsula. In fact, if *not* considered in light of Spain, the fragment remains murky to scholars. Consider, for example, David Lawton’s skepticism regarding a modern staging of the play:

The Jews of the play had been carefully costumed in turbans and flowing garments according to the orientaling conventions of some manuscript illuminations. This strikes me as a mistake, for such costuming prejudices some of the most interesting questions about the play: What experience had its writers and performers of Jews, and what did they take Jews, both in and out of the play, to be? In fact, this is a question about identity that the play seems to me to pose: Who or what is a Jew? . . . In contesting the notion that the play’s Jews represent Christian heretics, it has largely insisted that the Jews are there to represent “real” Jews, only to insist at once on the physical absence of the “real” Jews so represented from a community that is not subjected to scrutiny as it ought to be. (4)⁴²

42 Robert L. A. Clark and Claire Sponsler view this phenomenon as an example of “racial cross-dressing,” a practice they argue was standard in medieval theatre, particularly as it related

Lawton, in some ways, is unmistakably right; a careful contemporary representation of the play should do more than just interpret its characters in an Orientalizing fashion. But such an inaccurate representation might, as a matter of fact, be the point here. If we observe the scholar's questions in depth, we would realize how much they are in keeping with the play's critical history: Lawton too is concerned with the limitations of the term "Jew," and while it might be impossible to offer a definitive answer to his queries, we *can* turn to the historical Aragon for a broader perspective. Since the Croxton play's core themes concern conversion and Christian-Jewish connections, and since communion, persecution, and conversion featured prominently in the political life of late medieval Spain, I am prompted to think that the Jews of the *Play of the Sacrament* may stand for historical individuals restaging centuries of Spanish religious history, and the turbans mentioned above might attest to that, irrespective of their erroneous depiction.

To be sure, the poet's understanding of Spain could have led to Jews who believed in Muhammad or to Christian merchants willing to test the limits of their own faith. In a territory where religious coexistence was at best tense and where non-Christians lived especially with the threat of their own extinction, these elements might have indeed come as no surprise.⁴³ Across the different Iberian kingdoms, to Jews and

to Jews: "[I]n the *Play of the Sacrament*, as in other plays that put 'Jews' on the stage, there is a physical appropriation and indeed inhabiting of the body of the other" (9). See "Othered Bodies: Racial Cross-Dressing in the *Mistere de la Sainte Hostie* and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.1 (1999): 61-87.

43 If the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* often blurs bodies and identities, a case in point can also be made about Mozarabs or Moriscos—respectively, Christians who inhabited Muslim-governed regions (particularly al-Andalus) and former Muslims who converted to Christianity, often under violent circumstances. Clark and Sponsler's arguments on othering and cross-dressing would appear to support such claim, but we have yet to see an essay analyzing the Jews of the Croxton play exclusively as Muslims. The Spanish subtext would no

Muslims conversion often meant renegotiating or otherwise hiding certain religious traits. Such is the way Jonathas and Aristorius understand faith: not only as a trading commodity but indeed also as a construct that can be used at one's convenience.

Jonathas, the main Jewish merchant, is portrayed in terms very similar to Aristorius's: influential, overreaching, materialistic (*Croxton* 150). The long list of places we see with the Christian character becomes, with Jonathas, a long list of foreign goods: diamonds, emeralds, ginger, licorice, and spices. Medieval authors often resorted to similar textual strategies to portray the alleged greed of Jewish characters, but the marked emphasis on the exotic nature of these items matches European descriptions of an "othered" (or even "Oriental") Spain, be it Jewish or Muslim. The Jews arrive in Aragon from the East with a clear purpose though: they are to prove whether or not the body of Christ lives in the host: "the beleve of thes[e] Cristen men is false, as I wene / For the[y] beleve on a cake—me think it is onkind" (200-201). Although several theatre historians have signaled the likely association of this episode to Wycliffite theology, the scholarly consensus now is that equating Jews to Lollards or conceiving Jewish characters as instruments to read uniquely Christian beliefs is problematic as Donnalee Dox has convincingly shown and Ruth Nisse has echoed.⁴⁴ But these analyses, while valuable, do not account for the ways in which the *Play of the Sacrament* conceives Aragon-on-stage

doubt provide reasonable material for such a reading, but nevertheless I agree with the authors that "the play itself stresses the Jews as Jews. Indeed, the basic situation of the play—the desecration of the Eucharistic wafer—was closely linked in popular piety to Jews" (69).

44 See Donnalee Dox, "Medieval Drama as Documentation: 'Real Presence' in the Croxton *Conversion of Ser Jonathas the Jewe by the Myracle of the Blissed Sacrament*," *Theatre Survey* 38 (1997): 97-115. Dox in particular concludes that the play can be read as a historiographic document "that brings a camouflaged ideology to the surface and demands continuing analysis in the current efforts to deal with the power of representation and the boundaries of cultural alterity" (110). The evident problem with this reading is that, like most every work of scholarship on the Croxton play, it blurs the limits between historicity and so-called "cultural memory."

to be a medium in which Jews and Christians—however problematically—*can* interact with one another. In fact, when Jonathas says that “in Eraclea is noon so moche of might” (190) to refer to his own commercial activities, the reader is led to believe that these Jews actually live in Aragon and have not come from abroad. In a way, the line exists to support the idea that Aristorius and Jonathas inhabit the same cultural, geographical, and even religious atmosphere, something that reminds us of the social composition of Iberia during the Middle Ages. If I may be permitted to stretch historical and disciplinary boundaries, a context that stresses how Jews and Christians are similar to rather than different from one another is oddly reminiscent of the notion of *convivencia*.

Convivencia's apparent celebration of cultural diversity might afford us with a unique framework to study this English play because, I contend, it serves the purpose of *homogenizing* rather than *highlighting* difference. The Middle English *Play of the Sacrament*, in its quasi-identical treatment of Jews and Christians, might be a testimony to this Spanish cultural paradigm.

Given the Aragonese control of the Mediterranean, as well as the Aragonese ability to secure political and religious power through commercial agreements, Aristorius's inability to distinguish between good commercial and religious practices on stage is, in my view, not only likely but also feasible. Consider the scene with the priest who guards the church's door in line 339 in which Aristorius agrees to trick him with red wine to execute the Jews' commands:

PRESBITER. Sir, almighty God mott be yowr
g[u]ide,

And glad yow wheresoo ye rest!

ARISTORIUS. Sir, ye be welcom home
this tide.

Now, Petere, gett us wine of the best.
[*Peter Paul brings wine and bread.*]

CLERICUS. Sir, here is a drawte of Romney
Red—
There is no bettere in Aragon—
And a lofe of light bred;
It is [w]holesom, as sayeth the fesicion. (339- 344)

Going beyond these lines' echoes of the Christian liturgy, I find it important to highlight the prominence of Spain in the medieval European wine trade. When networks of commerce flourished along northern European and Mediterranean seaports in the fifteenth century, Spain capitalized on wine production. Commercial relations between Spain and northern Europe during this period have been extensively documented: "From Iberia to other parts of Atlantic Europe went Spanish and Portuguese wines, including ordinary red and white, but more importantly the fortified wines such as sherry and port" (Phillips 87). The passage above insists on the quality of Aragonese fortified red wine and might thus provide us with telling clues about Spain as an economic power and its consequent control of wine trade in western Europe in the late fifteenth century.⁴⁵

English demand for Spanish wine, however, probably goes back to the thirteenth century. Catherine Rachel Pitt explains: "Henry II married his daughter to Alfonso VIII in the twelfth century, and the Anglo-Spanish trade boom of the late thirteenth century has been attributed to Edward I's Spanish marriage in 1254. It was not impossible that

45 The historical sources I consulted on wine trade in medieval Aragon do not specifically mention a "Romney Red" type or brand, but they all refer to Aragon as a major wine-producing and exporting region. Catherine Pitt frequently quotes Wendy R. Childs' instrumental study, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978). In particular, Child affirms that "Englishmen had come to rely heavily in the west on Iberia to offset Gascon [wine] losses" (132, qtd. in Pitt 7).

wine was amongst the Iberian imports to England” (24). Monarchic links between Norman England and the Christian monarchies of Spain, including Aragon, were fueled especially by financial interests. For instance, the marriage of Edward I and Eleanor of Castile meant that the compound Anglo-Iberian monarchy could exercise control over major wine-producing regions in Gascony and the Iberian Peninsula, some of which bordered Aragon. Even Chaucer acknowledges the attributes of Spanish wines. In the *Pardoner’s Tale*, we find the following reference: “Now kepe yow fro the white and fro the rede . . . namely fro the white win of Lepe. . . . This win of Spaigne crepeth subtilly” (562-565). The fragment alludes to the city of Lepe, near the present-day Portugal-Andalucía border. Wines from Portugal, we know, were also of high value, particularly after the famous “Anglo-Portuguese alliance” of 1386 in the time of John of Gaunt, whose links to Chaucer have been studied at length. The “Romney Red” given to the cleric in the excerpt above may therefore be quite revealing of commercial trends of the age. By the time the *Play of the Sacrament* was written, most wine shipments coming into England came from Spain (Pitt 7).

The wine episode anticipates another important scene with discernible connections to commerce between England, northern Europe, and Spain. After putting the priest to sleep with red wine, Jonathas forces Aristorius to conceal his identity with a piece of cloth:

JONATHAS. And I shall kepe this trusty treasure
As I wold doo my gold and fee! [*To the host.*]
Now in this clothe I shall the[e] covere,
That no wight shall th[e] see.
Here shall Aristory goo his waye. (381-384)

Although Aristorius's cloth may be indicative of a Christian who accommodates certain religious rituals in light of commercial production (we shall have more to say about this cloth in the next section), in an effort to link Aristorius's wealth to traceable economic processes in England, some critics have emphasized the importance of East Anglian towns as hubs of wool trade. Heather Hill-Vásquez notes: "uniting mercantile activities and religious duty, Aristorius's enticing yet troubling conflation of worldly and spiritual abilities also may have been particularly resonant for an East Anglian audience whose own centers of worship owed so much to the economic prosperity of the region's cloth trade" (93). Nowhere is this more convincingly seen than in the interactions of the economically empowered Spanish Aristorius. Take, for instance, his first dialogue in which he meets the Jewish merchants, which is marked by the notion of bargaining. To Jonathas's proposal "to bargeyn with you this day am I boun," Aristorius replies, "tell me w[h]at good ye have to sell, and if ony bargeyn mad[e] may be." (270-271) But the spices, jewels, and clothes are quickly replaced by one more specific request: Aristorius's God in the host. Aristorius appears to be unapologetic about his decision not to trade with the body of Christ, but when Jonathas offers one hundred pounds in pure gold, his mind changes. The religious divide that in theory separates both men becomes shorter once their aggressive trading abilities are revealed; it does not really matter to commerce with God. An agreement is reached: Aristorius is to put Isidore, the church's priest, to sleep with red wine, take the church's keys, steal the host, and thus begin his process of conversion:

[Here shal he entere the chyrche and take the Hoost.]

Ah, now have I all myn[e] entent!

Vnto Jonathas now wyll I fare.

To fulfill my bargain have I ment,
For that mony will amend my fare,
As thinkith me.
But now will I passé by thes[e] pathes plaine;
To mete with Jonathas I wold faine.
Ah, yondere he commit in certain!
Me thinkith I him see. (368-376)

Earlier in the text, the reader witnesses a somewhat doubtful Aristorius, a character mindful of the risks of sacrilege. However, as evinced in the fragment above, the merchant firmly believes that his condition in life will be improved after carrying out the deed (“that mony will amend my fare / as thinkith me”). Of note is his trust in the Virgin Mary. This juxtaposition of a heretical moment with a pious one suggests that Aristorius’s unmatched skills as a merchant do not resonate with his qualities as a Christian as many scholars have duly signaled: “[Aristorius] seems a good Christian, attentive to his subordinate position as a layman and merchant . . . but he is also a Christian whose material success has curiously infiltrated his religious attitude and life. Financially successful, he believes that he has God’s blessing on all of his activities” (Hill-Vásquez 93). Perhaps that explains the remarkable ease involved in this transaction, as well as the absence of moral judgment from the playwright. In selling the host then, the desecrated body of Christ is used to symbolize a distinctive religious practice, like that of the Jews who pray to Muhammad earlier in the text. Aristorius flees, and Jonathas celebrates a mock mass with his peers who repeatedly comment on the falsehood of Christianity.

But conversion in Aragon and elsewhere in Spain was frequently accompanied by periods of violence about which the Croxton poet also offers significant textual and cultural commentary. As such, if the relationship between religion and commerce is closely linked to the piece's understanding of medieval Spain, so is the text's attestation of the violence of conversion and the Aragonese histories derived thereof.

1.4 – *Conversos* as the Desecrated Body of Christ

By the late fourteenth century, the crown of Aragon was, as we have seen, at its territorial and economic peak, and the kingdom had witnessed two centuries of relatively peaceful interactions with its Jews. More or less unanimously, criticism points to the existence of a so-called “golden age” regarding the crown's Jewry, but scholars also agree that this peace was at best intermittent.⁴⁶ Paola Tartakoff notes in particular that, notwithstanding productive collaboration between Jews and Christians, animosity toward Jews remained high and was especially seen in Aragonese cultural discourse:

In the Crown of Aragon . . . Christian antagonism towards Jews was rooted in the annals of Christian sacred history. Holy week liturgies and graphic passion plays reminded Christians yearly that Jews were the stubborn rejecters and killers of Christ, and many Christians believed that Jews were inherently malevolent and still conspiring for evil purposes.

46 In many ways, economic activity in the crown of Aragon was made possible thanks to the trading and seafaring ventures of its Jewish citizens. Many scholars have noted that before systematic persecution occurred in the late 1300s, Aragonese Jews enjoyed special protection from royal authorities in some cases and were also employed as financial advisors to kings. Though not particularly nuanced with regard to the tragedy of conversions, a book that investigates the positive impact of Jews in Aragonese communities is Yom Tov-Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327* (Portland: Valentine Mitchell, 1997). Yom Tom-Assis is among the many historians who have suggested the existence of an alleged “golden age” in Aragon based on the relative tolerance afforded to Jews before 1391. As such, his work is more representative of the branch of historiography that views medieval Iberia as uniquely tolerant—and welcoming—toward non-Christians.

Jews were the church's antagonists par excellence, and their malice was said to know no bounds. (6)

The author, of course, signals that this situation was not entirely unique to Aragon (the sentiment above resonates clearly with the subject matter of many Middle English Corpus Christi plays, for example, and provides the thematic subtext for the Croxton play), but it seems enlightening to consider in the context of the Aragonese Crown, which had, ostensibly, the largest Jewish population in Western Europe and an important degree of Christian-Jewish interaction.⁴⁷

Ultimately, the dominant aspect surrounding perceptions of Jews was, according to Tartakoff, one of disproportionate violence, which became a fact of daily life.

In my introduction to this chapter, I suggested that anti-Semitic sentiment might have indeed constituted a channel of early invisible Anglo-Iberian dialogue fueled by monarchic interests: a century separates the English expulsion of 1290 and the Iberian violence of 1391, and the English mastermind behind those attacks had a clear Castilian connection by virtue of his marriage. Unlike the year 1290 in England, however, 1391 in Spain cannot be said to have marked a single uniform event. Instead, we have several documented pogroms that first began in Castile and swept quickly through other Iberian territories, namely those controlled by the crown of Aragon such as Valencia, Catalonia, and Mallorca

47 For a persuasive recent study on the nature of conversions *before* 1391, see Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250-1391* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). Tartakoff argues that conversion and its problems predate the violence of the late fourteenth century and studies the complex conditions under which Christians and Jewish relations occurred in the crown of Aragon. She persuasively retraces the narrative of inquisitorial confession as a political tool for Jews and provides conclusive evidence by citing four well-publicized trials against Valencian Jews.

(Nirenberg 75). The effect of violence spilling into Aragon was not, evidently, without its problems: with Jewish communities decimated, the economic power of the Crown faltered, which meant that previously disenfranchised, impoverished Christian communities took on activities such as trade and banking that were typically performed by the crown's Jews—an economic conversion of sorts, such as the one Aristorius experiences in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*.⁴⁸

My goal here is not to reflect on the historical reasons for these killings or to provide an exhaustive timeline of them: research shows that violence against Jews was routine regardless of their contributions to Spanish cultural life.⁴⁹ I am, however, interested in one specific outcome that speaks to the themes and cultural legacy of our play: mass conversions and the subsequent emergence of a new, often complex religious identity in late medieval Spain: the *converso* (convert).⁵⁰

The legal situation of *conversos*—like the history of Spanish Jews itself—was convoluted, but it is generally agreed that a great deal of converts to

48 Hanne Trautner-Kromman provides an excellent summary of the events leading to the 1391 riots, citing an initial episode in 1378 when the Archdeacon of Écija in Andalusia ordered the destruction of local synagogues and began a campaign against Jews shortly thereafter (36). Instances of forced conversion became more commonplace as a result.

49 The most authoritative study on violence as a major component of multicultural coexistence in medieval Iberia remains David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

50 It is important to mention that Jewish converts to Christianity in Iberia were not exclusively a late fourteenth-century product. Their presence is recorded as early as the late Visigothic kingdoms in the early seventh century. The influence of *conversos* in literature, art, religious practices, politics, and generally the cultural life of all constituencies of medieval Iberia—including al-Andalus—has been studied at length. For the purposes of this analysis, however, I am interested in converts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries particularly because their communities were disproportionately affected by discrimination, violence, and sanctioned persecution at the hands of the Christian elites. There are many excellent studies on *converso* history and literature, but a remarkable general overview of *converso* relationships and tensions with Christians and Muslims can be found in Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of Jews from Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

Christianity in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did so in contexts of violence and extreme persecution. To be sure, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* provides ample subtext to read into this situation. The text does not explicitly recreate, say, Jewish massacres, but it is nonetheless possible to study the play's formula of performative violence (bodily harm, symbolic and literal conversion, miracle) in relation to historical events that touched the lives of *conversos* in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. There is no need to go further than the opening fragments in which the banner bearers anticipate that the interlude will deal with miracles and things wondrous and proceed to offer a snapshot of the play's main preoccupation, the host and its fate at the hands of Jews who will later repent and convert:

PRIMUS VEXILLATOR

We be ful purposed with hart and with thought
Off our mater to tell þe entent,
Off þe marvellys þat wer wondursely wrowght
Off þe holi and blyssed Sacrament. (5-8)

PRIMUS

Thes Jewes all grete joye made they;
But off thys betide a straunger chaunce:
They gravid our Lord gretly on grownd,
And put hym to a new passyoun;
With daggers gouen hym many a greuyos wound;
Nayled hym to a pyller, with pynsons plucked hym doune.

SECUNDUS. And sythe that they toke þat blysed brede so sownde

And in a cawdron they ded hym boyle.
In a clothe full just they yt wounde,
And so they ded hym sethe in oyle;

And than thay putt hym to a new turmentry,
In an hooete ouyn speryd hym fast.
There he appyred with woundrys bloddy;
The ovyn rofe asondre and all tobrast.

PRIMUS. Thus in our lawe they wer made stedfast;
The Holy Sacrement sheuyd them grette fauour;
In contrycyon thyr hertes were cast
And went and shewyd ther lyues to a confessour.

Thus be maracle off þe Kyng of Hevyn,
And by myhgt and power govyn to þe prestys mowthe,
In an howshold wer conuertyd iwys elevyn.
At Rome þis miracle ys knowen welle kowthe. (37-56)

Here it might be worthwhile to cite this opening in full because, although its content echoes concerns present throughout medieval liturgical drama, the stress on the alleged miracle and the corporality of the host become important when read closely with the circumstances of the Aragonese violence of 1391. There are several emblematic elements that feed into the violence of the story told in the banns, such as the text's implicit understanding of the bloody scene as a "miracle" that *must* happen if the Jews want to save their lives or, for instance, the insistence on the torment and the graphic imagery that result from the oven bursting into pieces (the Jews express their intent to boil the host inside a cauldron for three hours after stabbing it).

Finally, there might be some indication in those lines that allude to a mass conversion although this is not necessarily transparent. Line 55 mentions that "in a howshold wer conuertyd iwys elevyn" (without a doubt, eleven were converted in a household). But the actual play never, in fact, states that the performance includes eleven Jews. In the actual

list of characters, only five Jews are mentioned (JUDEUS PRIMUS, SECUNDUS, TERTIUS, QUARTUS, QUINTUS per the manuscript), and the number of Jewish characters is consistently reiterated throughout the play, particularly during the host-desecration scene. Whatever disparities may exist among the manuscript, the banns, and the actual performance, the gap between the numbers five and eleven is not irrelevant: it may actually refer to the imagined staging of a mass conversion.

At any rate, the relationship between cultural identity, murder, and conversion is made abundantly clear, and similar stories would have struck Jews from late fourteenth-century Aragon as peculiarly familiar. Again, the earliest conflicts during the summer of 1391 might serve as an appropriate parameter:

Synagogues were transformed into churches, and Christians moved into the Jews' houses in the Jewish quarter . . . [c]ommunities were decimated by killings, conversions, and the flight of Jews. Thousands were baptized to save their lives; a few preferred martyrdom. In July the disturbances broke out in Aragonia: hundreds were massacred and many more were forcibly baptized, and well nigh all the Jewish population was collectively baptized. [E]ven if there were social undertones in the riots, they were primarily religious persecution. As soon as the Jews had been baptized the violence stopped.

(Trautner-Kromman 36)

Though somewhat totalizing in tone, Trautner-Kromman's argument proves useful to understanding the religious climate that might have surrounded the Aragon of the Croxton play. Consider even reading the excerpt at face value; the language of martyrdom and persecution appears to be in stark contrast with the author's conclusion that conversion happened somewhat unassumingly. I react to this reading because it parallels what happens in the Croxton play. Just as Trautner-Kromman peculiarly states that even on a historical level baptism quelled violence almost instantly (in the *Play of the Sacrament*, the Jews also undergo baptism), the discursive distance that separates the

host-desecration scene from the Jews' actual conversion appears, as we shall see, effectively concealed in the text, thus contributing to the narrative of Jews and Christians that perform their identities within the same stage.

Trautner-Kromman's assertions also reverberate with the cultural policies instituted by some Aragonese monarchs as they gained power across the Peninsula and exemplify anything but the culture of tolerance that proponents of *convivencia* have come to celebrate. John I (Joan, per his Catalan name in most records), the regent of Aragon during the massacres of 1391, was certainly notorious for his inaction and for initiating institutional persecution against Jews during the remainder of his reign, but the union of Castile and Aragon in 1469 allowed for further violence and prompted Jewish communities across to scatter, some even finding refuge (but also specific forms of violence) in Muslim territories such as Granada (Trautner-Kromann 37).

If the Croxton play offers any commentary on the identity of *conversos*, the distinction between true and false Christians that historically applied to Jewish converts undoubtedly affects Aristorius as well. The Christian merchant, who runs, hides, and disappears from the stage after concealing his identity so that he can commit an act deemed egregious, might be instrumental in understanding that in Spain there were also Christian converts to Judaism but that those individuals fared considerably worse than their Jewish counterparts, something Trautner-Kromann notes as well: "a Christian who converted to Judaism was to be killed and his property seized" (31). Aristorius's figurative death, as such, occurs on stage when he becomes invisible so as to avoid

persecution (a crypto-Christian) reminding us, once again, that the Croxton play might speak to the historical narrative about Spain's legendary converts.⁵¹

After the Christian flees the stage, the five Jews, Jonathas, Masphat, Jasdon, Jason, and Malchus preside over a mock mass: "now, serys, ye haue rehersed the substance of ther lawe" (441-442) and violently stab the host they have just acquired:

[Here shal þe iiij Jewys pryke þer daggerys in iiij quarters, þus saying:]

Jason. Haue at yt! Haue at yt, with all my might!

Thys syde I hope for to sese!

Jasdon. And I shall with thys blade so bright

Thys other syde freshely afeze!

Masphat. And I yow plight I shall hym not please,
For with thys punche shall hym pryke.

Malchus. And with thys augur I shall hym not ease,
Another buffett shall he lykke.

Jonathas. Now am I bold with batayle hym to bleyke,

þe mydle part alle for to prene;

A stowte stroke also for to stryke –

In þe myddys yt shalbe sene!

Here þe Ost must blede.

Ah! owt! owt! harrow! what deuyll ys thys?

Of thys wyrk I am in were;

Yt bledyth as yt were woode, iwys;

But if ye helpe, I shall dyspayre. (469-485)

51 The subset of scholarship on the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and violence generally highlights the desecration scene and its belonging to the play's larger anti-Semitic discourse. None of this criticism, however, ponders wider historical connections with Spain or the country's Jewish past.

To medieval audiences, the gruesome imagery would have most likely evoked Jesus's metaphorical crucifixion, and if the Croxton play did indeed serve didactic purposes as several critics have posited, the host-desecration scene does effectively teach the story of Christ's passion with substance, economy, and an utmost precision despite the violence.

There is, however, an alternate reading to the passage if we are to consider Spain. Notwithstanding its clear connection to Biblical literature and especially the tradition of host-desecration plays like the *Mistere de la Saint Hostie*, the aggression contained in the lines above might also speak to a most stereotypically Spanish product and indeed one of the major cultural symbols of the Black Legend: the Inquisition.⁵² Wrongly imagined to be an early modern creation, the Spanish Inquisition existed in various forms since the thirteenth century but was established as a full-fledged legal institution in 1478. Initially it focused on Jews and Muslims living in Christian-governed territories, but there is evidence that Jewish converts faced particular harassment from Spanish religious authorities at the turn of the fifteenth century under the assumption that they would always remain false Christians, a moral conundrum that the Jews of the Croxton play do

52 The three-volume 1906 study by Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain* (London and New York: Macmillan) remains a fundamental example of archival work that documents the origin of institutionalized persecution and discrimination in late medieval Spain. Lea's work is provocative and authoritative just as it is problematic. While Lea openly concedes that three centuries of Inquisition had dire consequences for Spain on a cultural and intellectual level, he also implies that this had an impact on the perceived "backwardness" with which the country was associated during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thus contributing to the post-medieval Black Legend narrative that has persisted in Anglo-American intellectual discourse. For an analysis on the influence, problems, and criticism of Lea's work within Spanish historiography, see Doris Moreno "Henry Charles Lea y su red de colaboradores latinoamericanos: razones para estudiar el santo oficio en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX," *Astrolabio* 11 (2013): 76-104. There are several excellent newer but equally comprehensive studies that revisit and challenge Lea's legacy. See in particular Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

not specifically face but that nonetheless afflicts Aristorius when he conceives of Christ's body in purely economic terms.

A common accusation during inquisitorial trials in Spain (and later in the New World) reminded Jewish converts of their alleged crimes committed against Jesus, a tactic widely used in host desecration claims in England and France in earlier centuries. In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the theological apparatus conjured by the poet uses the same argument to encourage the Jews' conversion a few lines later when the host bleeds and astonishes the participants in the sacrament ceremony. These five Jews, as such, recall the traditional anti-Semitic pretexts that motivated the Spanish Christian establishment to criminalize them. Importantly, they also perform the historicity of violence toward converts and non-Christians throughout the late medieval period in Spain.

Another important and strangely effective discourse against Jews and religious difference in the text occurs when Jesus materializes just after the host begins to bleed. Responding to this horror, a member of the group decides to seethe the host in boiling oil to see if the bleeding will stop, but it quickly clings onto the right hand of Jonathas, who desperately runs around the stage trying to get rid of it to which end his servants try to nail the wafer to a post, only to be horrified by what ensues later: the hand is torn off and hangs still with the host.

Following a comedic interlude dominated by the entrance of a quack doctor (who, we shall see, carries important performative, cultural, and historical functions) the cauldron rips asunder, producing the image of a bloody, wounded Jesus who addresses the group with compassion, and the play treats this as proof of the true "marycle":

Here shall þe image speke to the Juys saying thus:

JHESUS. *O mirabilies Judei, attendite et videte*

Si est dolor sicut dolor meus.

Oh ye merveylows Jewys,

Why ar ye to yowr kyng onkynd,

And [I] so bytterly bowt yow to my blysse?

Why fare ye thus fule with yowre frende?

Why peyne yow me and straytly me pynde,

And I yowr loue so derely haue brought?

Why are ye so vnstedfast in yow nowght. (719-726)

Here, Jesus's benevolent language exists not only to counter the vehemently aggressive episode witnessed by the audience a few lines earlier but perhaps also to draw clear conceptual lines between groups: the furious, vituperative Jews are met with their theological and discursive Other. Medieval Iberian literature—which stresses religious difference quite unlike any of its other western European counterparts—frequently employs similar tropes, for example, in chivalric romances that, as Noel Fallows writes, recreate between Christian knights and Saracen combatants: “[T]he verbal eloquence to which Christian knights aspired forms a stark contrast with the crude verbosity which, according to medieval Spanish vernacular sources, was symptomatic of Arabic conduct in wartime” (62). In the passage above, Jesus's mercy against the Jews' hostility fulfills that very purpose precisely because the *Play of the Sacrament* as a whole is interested in creating those dichotomies. Without them, the play's fundamental premise on conversion would otherwise be invalid. Historically, conversion in Aragon and other Christian kingdoms addresses comparable concerns.

Some historians of Jewish Spain have used the term “miracle” to describe the atmosphere of conversions that occurred after 1391. Even David Nirenberg, whose work

does not necessarily subscribe to romanticized ideas of *convivencia* despite addressing interactions between religious communities in Spain (and medieval Europe generally), assures that

Christians in the lands we now call Spain witnessed a miracle so great that it seemed to some a harbinger of the Messiah. In town after town across the Peninsula, mobs of rioters attacked the Jews. This was not itself miraculous. The miracle resided in the fact that, although thousands of Jews were killed, many thousands more converted to Christianity. Their conversion, long a dream of Spanish Christians, had been equally long despaired of—and its miraculous nature was abundantly clear. (137)⁵³

If we compare Nirenberg's argument to Trautner-Kromman's, both scholars appear to be in clear agreement that the historical principle of conversion in Spain was dependent *only* upon violence.⁵⁴ To be sure, a meticulous interpretation of this claim can also be read against what takes place right after the host desecration scene: following the horrific shock the play's Jews have just experienced, all five Jews kneel, acknowledge Christ as their savior, and plead for forgiveness.

Of note is that each five makes a different supplication, in Latin: "Tu es protector vite mee; a quo trepidabo?" ("You are my life's protector; what will I fear?" [Jonathas, 741]); "Lacrimis nostris conscienciam nostram baptizemus!" ("Let us baptize our

53 David Nirenberg's *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) is among the several recent examples that take strong exception to the long-held view on medieval Iberia as a haven for multicultural tolerance. Despite being a reality, coexistence in Spain was, as Nirenberg and numerous other scholars contend, not without its problems. An important premise of Nirenberg's book is that interactions between members of different religious Iberian communities reveal much about how notions of tolerance are imagined—or not—today. For issues relevant to the subject matter of this chapter, see especially "Massacre or Miracle? Valencia 1391," 75-88 and "Mass Conversions and Genealogical Mentalities," 143-168.

54 Nirenberg, in fact, emphasizes that "violence was a central and systematic aspect of the coexistence of majority and minorities in medieval Spain, and [was indeed] predicated on such violence" (9).

conscience with our tears!” [Jason, 749]); “Ne grauis sompnus irruat” (“Lest a grave slumber encroach” [Jasdon, 753]); “Miserere mei, Deus!” (“Have mercy on me, God!” [Masphat, 757]); “Asperges me, Domine, ysopo, et mundabor” (“Sprinkle me, Lord, with hyssop, and I will be clean” [Malchas, 761]).⁵⁵ Conversion, therefore, happens seamlessly according to the play: in a matter of roughly thirty lines, the Jews go from utmost belligerence to complete submission with no intervention or commentary from the banner bearers, thus echoing both Nirenberg and Trautner-Kromman’s views on these so-called “miracles” as historically charged constructions that masked the actual degree of violence inflicted against Jews and *conversos*.

The *Play of the Sacrament*’s cycle of conversion comes full circle with Aristorius. Once convinced about the existence of Christ in the host and, more importantly, the host’s divinity, the Jews abandon the stage in a procession toward a church, and Jesus’s image becomes once again bread. Jonathas’s hand returns to its corporeal state, and the priest whom Aristorius had tricked before stealing the host reenters the stage and questions the Christian merchant, who confesses to selling the body of Christ. The new Christians are immediately brought back on stage and confess to attacking the host. All six kneel before a priest, and Aristorius is forced to give up his mercantile profession if he wants to be a part of organized society and religion. The image of all six Christians confessing and praying is key given its direct connection to inquisitorial practices but perhaps most notably for its symbol of cultural uniformity, which had obsessed Christian Spain over the course of many centuries. Such uniformity, however, contrasts heavily

55 Hyssop is an important plant and utensil in Christian ecclesiastical rites and is especially associated with Jesus’s crucifixion. According to Biblical tradition, Christ was given vinegar on a hyssop pod (John 19:28-30).

with the idea of Spain offered by the play: a culturally fragmented territory in which religion is understood as both pragmatic and a vehicle of violence.

There remain, however, important questions to tackle concerning the fate of this play beyond its medieval inception that take us back to England and its relationship to other European cultures: the very problems that Christians and Jews confront with regard to religion and trade in the Croxton play are, in fact, the same problems that brought England and Spain together over the course of the Middle Ages *and* separated them at the turn of the so-called early modern period. Invoking this arguable periodization might be productive in this case. Let us not forget that the staging of the play in 1461 cannot be argued conclusively, and the manuscript's composition history helps advance this claim. If the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* does indeed span a textual history that reaches the sixteenth century, the play not only complicates the narrative about Spain in England and conversion but also might very well question, despite what some scholars have suggested, the very applicability of the term "medieval."⁵⁶

1.5 – Theater for the End of an Age

Perhaps the only scholarly certainty regarding the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* concerns its oddity within medieval English drama: despite the potency of the host-desecration motif in medieval ecclesiastical history, Croxton is the sole extant play retelling a similar story in Middle English. This means that scholars of early English drama have always had to look past a relatively formulaic corpus of liturgical pieces to

56 In his introduction to the 2012 edition to the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, John T. Sebastian begins by stating that "few works of Middle English drama are likely to strike their modern readers as more irredeemably 'medieval'—with all of the negative stereotypes that that word popularly implies—than the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*" (1).

establish the text's currency within the larger medieval theatrical tradition. Such an exercise, as we have seen, inescapably involves gazing outside England. Without a doubt, treating our text without such an analysis ignores the play's clear debt to Spanish religious history, which, I argue, happens to be one of its principal anxieties—if not the main one. But part of this Spanish history occurred near the traditional limits of the medieval period. In fact, in the Spanish context, some of the structures I have emphasized throughout this discussion—trade, conversion, inquisition, and especially the development of theatrical culture—are just as likely to be associated with so-called early modernity, which is, paradoxically, what historians tend to call the Spanish “Golden Age.”⁵⁷

Should one consider, therefore, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* not as an exclusively medieval product, but in fact as a text that occludes categorical periodizations? ⁵⁸ Tamara Atkin proposes a comparable reading in light of the play's intriguing manuscript, MS F.4.20, (ff. 338-356; Trinity College, Dublin): “[B]y treating the play as a medieval text, critics have tended to elide its survival in a mid-Tudor

57 The Spanish Golden Age refers to the period comprised roughly between 1500 and 1650 (decades tend to vary depending on the parameters of study) in which, thanks to colonial and imperial enterprises, Spain saw an unprecedented literary and artistic development. It was the age of Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca, Lope de Vega, and many other recognizable names in Spanish-language literature. Drama saw unparalleled production, and though mostly secular in nature, plays similar to English mysteries and moralities in structure and content continued to be staged well into the early 1700s, particularly those dealing with Eucharistic themes such as the *auto sacramental*. The definitive overview on the culture and literature of the period is Antonio Martí Alanís, *La preceptiva retórica española en el Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Gredos, 1972). Other salient examples include Anthony J. Cascardi, *Ideologies of History in the Spanish Golden Age* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1997), and a relatively recent study on theater, Alberto Blecua and Guillermo Arellano Serés, eds., *El teatro del Siglo de Oro: edición e interpretación* (Frankfurt and Madrid: Iberoamericana Veruvert, 2009).

58 Many late medieval English plays are similarly considered to resist temporal codification. For example, the editors of the 2009 version of *Everyman* in TEAMS state that “the morality has popularly been claimed as a bridge between the medieval mysteries and secular Renaissance drama culminating in Shakespeare” (1).

manuscript . . . and a critical appraisal of the play's sixteenth-century reception is long overdue" (195-196). Atkin's analysis, though entirely codicological (she focuses on the scribe's handwriting and the text's final folio) supports the play's insertion in the middle of the sixteenth century although she also admits that it is extremely difficult to establish a *terminus ad quem*.

MS TCD F.4.20 survives in a miscellany, and there has been considerable debate as to how and why the sole surviving copy of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* made its way to Ireland where it has remained for more than three centuries now.⁵⁹ Scholars generally assume that the play's original script is now lost and that the scribal content cannot be dated earlier than the mid-sixteenth century. Basing her argument on available codicological evidence of the text's last folio, Atkin tentatively dates the manuscript of the Croxton play between 1539 and 1549 (2-12). If Atkin's assertions are correct, there is almost a century between the play's apparent representation in 1461 and its ultimate transmission and reception in 1549.

This difference is important simply because the transition between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries radically changed the nature of Anglo-Spanish relations and the Spain that mid-sixteenth-century East Anglian audiences might have imagined did not necessarily correspond to representations pertaining to the previous century, effectively blurring the problems of periodizations posed by the play. Already the tacit commentary on Aragonese trade in the Mediterranean may serve as significant proof of England's

59 David Lawton claims that "the manuscript is a compilation made in sixteenth-century Dublin" (291), but Tamara Atkin has identified this as incorrect, stating that "the play is part of a composite manuscript that was brought to Ireland in the late seventeenth century by John Madden when he was appointed President of the King and Queen's College of Physicians in Ireland in 1694" (194).

awareness of Spain as naval and mercantile, and as an early imperial power, but this is surely not the sole hidden and possible geopolitical reading surrounding the Croxton text. A character who remains invisible (more so than Spain) in the critical history of the play, Brundiche of Brabant, might provide fertile ground for discussion in the narrative of commerce, religion, and violence that holds the plot together and might even complicate our understanding of the manuscript's larger cultural history.

In the middle of the host-desecration scene, as Jonathas agonizes in pain from the host that has clung onto his hand, Brundiche of Brabant, a colorful fellow claiming to be a physician from Flanders, enters the stage with his companion and servant, Colle, who assures the audience his master can cure any ailment mostly through questionable methods:

COLLE

All tho þat [haue] þe poose, þe sneke, or þe tyseke—
Thowh a man w[e]re ryght heyle, he coud soone make hym sek.
Inquyre to þe colkote, fot there ys hys loggyng,
A lytyll besyde Babwell Myll, yf ye wyll haue und[er]stondyn[g]. (618-621)

Colle announces that Brundiche is there to sell his medical services to Jonathas, but the doctor's mission goes well beyond providing an element of humor. While it is true that comedic interludes involving quack doctors are a staple of Renaissance drama in general, Brundiche of Brabant's presence strongly informs the text's continued concern with the persistence of falsified rituals (Aristorius and Jonathas mock religion and commerce while Brundiche mocks science), thus enhancing the tension between the "real" and "spectral" on which much recent criticism has so vigorously focused.

Notable as well is the mention of Babwell Mill, a locale near Bury St. Edmunds that according to John Coldewey would presumably help establish the play's clear local connection to East Anglia (274). The region was, as explained in the introduction to this chapter, an economically prosperous trading center that also happened to record numerous instances of anti-Semitic violence in the twelfth century. Indeed, the most context-centric criticism has attempted to decode the meaning of the play's Jews in relation to the 1190 massacre at Bury St. Edmunds. But if geography is at all important, the fervent defenders of the East Anglian context have also missed an opportunity to study the region's commercial environments in a broader European perspective. Bury St. Edmunds is located in Suffolk in England's northeast, a region whose seaports historically attracted much commerce from northern Europe. The area's prominence as a wool-producing and textile-making center is well attested, and demand for these products often reached beyond the north of England. In fact, the overly local reading that critics have often ascribed in relation to the 1190 killings may transcend the East Anglian and English context more generally. Late twelfth-century Bury St Edmunds, as Mark Bailey writes, "was established as one of the greatest [town fairs] in England, attracting clothiers from the leading English textile towns and from Flanders: the latter were so prominent and influential that the borough authorities passed edicts to prevent them from monopolizing the trade in leather and velvet goods" (119).

Considering that the cloth motif features prominently throughout the text and that cloths are, in fact, a chief method of concealing *and* generating violence (the Jews first stab the host while it is still covered), we might have a relevant historical reading transcending East Anglia here: Brundiche of Brabant, by virtue of his connection to the

dominant medieval center of cloth-making, could very well represent East Anglia's economic anxieties over a larger and conceivably more globalized European market.⁶⁰ The very nature of medieval theatre supports this reading. In a dramatic culture dominated by pragmatism—especially in one in which limited props appeared to be the rule and all players had eminently specific purposes—the Flemish quack doctor is yet another marker of fear, and comedy serves as a means to offset this dark reading.⁶¹ Only then can we explain the tacit commentary on his moral character: a fake physician who shares the stage with the play's other scapegoats and ultimately fails to deliver his performative mission of dealing with Jonathas's physical pain.

More central to this chapter's concern though is Brundiche's inherent relationship to violence and, consequently, to Spain. First, the character's role as a doctor lies exactly in rendering his patients even sicker as Colle suggests in the initial portrait of his master, and the play ultimately dramatizes Brundiche's attempts to restore Jonathas's severed right hand, enhancing the already appalling sacramental scene and performing a part in the text's larger framework of conversion: Aristorius, Brundiche, and Jonathas all

60 David Lawton also tangentially mentions the existing links between East Anglia and Flanders: “[W]e might reexamine the Flemish quack. Given the recent interest in economic geography, we should make more of the fact that he is Flemish—part of a significant pattern of human and cultural exchange between East Anglia and the European places closest to it” (292). Lawton, nevertheless, does not work this argument in favor of the larger geopolitical reading in the play and the way it affects conversion and, in particular, its performative result.

61 Claire Sponsler offers an interesting alternative reading on Brundiche of Brabant in the context of the Irish owner of the manuscript, James Madden, who was a physician: “Given that one of the central scenes of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is the attempted healing of the Jew Jonathas, whose hand has been torn off after it becomes stuck on a eucharistic wafer he has bought from a Christian merchant, by a quack doctor, Master Brundiche of Brabant, there would appear to be an interesting story linking Madden the physician and the play.” (20) Sponsler acknowledges that this fact has generally been neglected by scholars and that the ownership of the manuscript can be studied in terms of what she deems a productive “cultural appropriation” in early modern Europe. Her analysis is one of the very few that considers Brundiche of Brabant as central to the playtext's plot.

become relevant when embodying something they're not. Second and perhaps more important are Brundiche's links to the play's preoccupations with European politics and economic history: Flanders was, for a good part of its early modern history, a territory of Spain.

At this point, I see Croxton as a text with firm claims to the sixteenth century in keeping with the manuscript's trajectory. Spain's direct involvement in what is now the Netherlands was a gradual political process that first began in 1482 when a Castilian king, Philip I (the Fair) took over the Habsburg throne, which meant that Spain—now a unified polity between Aragon and Castile—had control over economically powerful regions such as Burgundy and, in particular, Brabant.⁶² Over the course of the subsequent two centuries, Spain would rise as western Europe's foremost imperial and naval power, often bearing the standard of religion to secure political and economic success much in the same way Aristorius and Jonathas understand their position in the world.

One of the claims this dissertation has advanced thus far—both in its prefatory pages and this chapter—is that political relations between England and Christian Spain, however productive, also had inadvertent consequences. The fifteenth century heralded if not quite a break in Anglo-Spanish exchanges then certainly a gradual cooling even though dynastic marriages continued throughout the sixteenth century. Part of the changing nature of this dialogue involved, naturally, economics: throughout the late medieval period, Spain appeared to be more economically dominant than England on a larger European level although this dominance has not always been readily noted by scholars. William D. Phillips offers, in this sense, an interesting perspective on economic

62 Parts of the historic region of Brabant—now a part of present-day Belgium—belonged at times to the Spanish Empire, namely between 1556 and 1714.

history with viable connections to Spain, one that takes us back to the narrative on wool and cloth trade. Phillips indicates in particular that the longstanding conflict between France and England due to the Hundred Years' War had dire financial consequences for England's wool commerce, which meant that "Castile was the main supplier of wool for the looms of Flanders. This accounts for the great wealth that wool exports generated for Castile, enabling the Castilian elite to buy all those Flemish paintings that adorn the churches of northern Spain and to employ all those Flemish artists active in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Spain" (9). As a text highly dependent on histories of economic power and intercultural misunderstanding, the Croxton play *can* be studied with these peculiar inter-European dialogues, evincing the complexity of the England-Spain-Flanders relationship.⁶³ Nonetheless, we do not yet have a critical examination of the text in light of late medieval England's links to Flanders, which is surprising given the region's history as a constituency of the Spanish Empire, and even more astonishing if we recall how present-day Belgium and the Netherlands, and later England, became havens for expelled and converted Jews from the Iberian Peninsula.⁶⁴

63 An excellent literary case in point here is, again, the *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*. The text was the result of the famous Siege of Calais in 1436, in which Flemish soldiers and the Burgundian king Phillip the Good tried to attack the city only to be met by a resisting English army. For the larger comparison with the Croxton play, see, again Derrick Higginbotham, "Impersonators in the Market," 163-182.

64 After 1492, a general pejorative term to describe converted Jews in Spain and Portugal was *marrano*, a word that can be used to mean both "pig" and "unclean" in Modern Spanish. There is no one unified historical narrative to describe the fate of converts: some remained as crypto-Jews in Iberia; many others fled to the then-Ottoman empire, to the New World, and to some Italian city-states seaports. Many, especially in the seventeenth century, established themselves in London (particularly Portuguese *marranos*) and Amsterdam, where they formed burgeoning trading communities. Perceptions of Jews in Renaissance English drama have sometimes been read in the light of these itinerant expelled populations. See, for example, Edmund Valentine Campos, "Jews, Spaniards, and Portingales: Ambiguous Identities of Portuguese Marranos in Elizabethan England," *ELH* 69.3 (2002): 599-616 and Dan Vogel, "Balaam, Shakespeare, Shylock," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 35.4 (2007): 231. Generally on

Phillips has also noted that the union of Castile and Aragon in 1469 further solidified Spain's economic position and, in particular, the country's treaties with the British Isles (10). In many ways, of course, this union changed European geopolitics and history: the events following the marriage of the Catholic kings finally crystallized Spain's lifelong religious desires, and the country subsequently rose as the first truly global European power. Through their unmatched abilities at trading, selling, and bargaining foreign goods—of which the host is in many ways an indicator—the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* has both Aristorius and Jonathas perform the notion of this early “globality” in defense of religion. This is evidently not superfluous in the English context if we are to assume the text had a post-medieval afterlife: Spain, now a country securing imperial dominance through conquest and religion may have very well posed a threat to an England still recovering from two wars and whose relationship to Catholicism radically changed in the sixteenth century.

It would be reasonable to suggest, then, that the changing character of Anglo-Spanish relations during this alleged medieval-renaissance divide helped shape a text like the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, which scholars have studied more in relation to its local English microcosm, pondering, for example, the arguable existence of a Jewish English afterlife after 1290, than to the less arguable influence of Jewish conversions that *did* exist in the territory that Croxton calls its stage. The *Play of the Sacrament* was thus the product of a playwright that was highly aware of an English world in transition.

Jewish-Christian relations and perceptions of post-medieval Jewry in England, see Jeffrey S. Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Cultures of Change in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

In that world, Spain surely evoked the conflicting connotations of power, desire, and fear to which I alluded earlier on, and we see those dynamics at play in Croxton. To be sure, even if the text has never been studied as belonging to the larger array of Black Legend writings, the violent Spanish legacy of conversion portrayed by the anonymous English dramatist suggests that our play might find an odd, but perhaps not completely irrelevant place in this cultural tradition. Clearly the Croxton play does not specifically denounce or express anti-Spanish sentiment, but the stage that the East Anglian dramatist devises mingles a strategy of both distance and desire, the ruling principle of the Black Legend, and indeed, the ruling principle of Spain's inquisitorial practices and annexationist policies of the early Renaissance. More generally, though, the Black Legend narrative is key to revisit in this case because it may have strangely permeated the magnificent theatrical culture of sixteenth-century England.⁶⁵

Not that there exists a body of English theatre specifically conceived to be derisive of all things Spanish, but we do have Renaissance plays that employ similar othering strategies and that implicitly assume violence to be a symptom of Spanishness. Take, for example, one of the most wildly popular English plays of the late sixteenth century, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, written around 1587. Kyd's text, though

65 For all the consistently excellent work we have on England's problems with Spain during the Elizabethan era, a full-length study on perceptions of Spain in early modern English literature is yet to be written. Not surprisingly, most scholarship on what could be called the rising Black Legend fantasy in Elizabethan theatre touches upon Kyd's text. Some useful essays include Timothy A. Turner, "Torture and Summary Justice in the Spanish Tragedy," *SEL 1500-1900* 53.2 (2013): 277-292, and, in particular, Frank R. Ardolino, "'Corrida' of Blood in 'The Spanish Tragedy': Kyd's Use of Revenge as National Destiny," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* (1984): 37-49; Edward Eaton, "Spain as Seen in the Theatre of London, 1588-1605: An Exploration of Popular Sentiment," *International Journal of Arts and Sciences* 3 (16): 321-331; and José Manuel González Fernández de Sevilla, "Lo español en 'The Spanish Tragedy'," *Revista alicantina de estudios ingleses* 2 (1989): 91-100.

not the object of my discussion, is important to cite in that, like the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, it is set in an Iberian context (Portugal is part of the equation too) and also follows an inherently violent plot. What is more, the stage imagined by the Elizabethan playwright is, like the Aragon of the Croxton play, a space that creates fantasies of detachment and otherness. However, as J. R. Mulryne rightly notes, the play's treatment of Spain does not necessarily generate a significant amount of scholarship:

The play's critical record shows that with few exceptions modern interpreters have paid scant attention to the national politics of *The Spanish Tragedy*. [But] it is tempting to think that the play touched a chord in Elizabethan sensibility (not a very creditable one, perhaps) of jingoistic anti-Spanish prejudice. . . Hispanophobia was a strand in the English consciousness in the 1570s, and one that broadened or intensified as the 1580s led the Armada of 1588. . . . Protestant opinion came to think of Spain and the Spanish not only in belligerent but apocalyptic terms. (87-88)

In that sense, both the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and *The Spanish Tragedy* share a comparable critical fate: despite tangible associations with Spanish culture and history—more so in the case of Kyd's text—scholars have preferred to focus more on their English contexts or reception. But that is precisely what matters in this argument: the process of hiding, of invisibility, that is at stake when these premodern English authors *and* present day scholars talk—or don't—about Spain. The apocalyptic notion that Mulryne identifies in the fragment above is thus key if we think that the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* was produced in a time long considered to be a bridge between two major periods—theatre for the end of an age. Ultimately, however, drawing parallels between these plays seems key in order to demonstrate that seeing Spain as a distant or markedly distinct construct (what Mulryne calls Hispanophobia) is *not* exclusively a product of late sixteenth-century English mentalities. My analysis has shown how the fifteenth century produced similar

transcultural narratives based on an element that became a major catalyst for ideological misunderstanding between Spain and England: religion. Furthermore, though this connection is not made explicit in the Croxton play, our text also offers indirect observations on early forms of Spanish imperialism through the characters of Jonathas and Aristorius: both are skillful merchants whose endeavors take them to places in Europe and beyond.

The Aragon-Spain of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is *not* invisible or imaginary. Instead, the poet takes part in a historically conscious exercise in which England becomes acutely aware of Spain's position by restaging an episode of the country's late medieval religious life: the legacies of violent conversion. Of perhaps greater importance, nonetheless, is the fact that the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* reminds us—however vaguely—of an alleged golden age that history still grapples to define. Academically and otherwise, medieval Iberia continues to be haunted by a similar myth, but scholars of medieval Aragon do strangely use the term to emphasize the prosperity of the crown's Jewish communities. That very concept, fascinatingly, continues to gain purchase in the cultural and intellectual history of sixteenth-century Spain, the entity that, I have tried to argue, was the remnant of the culturally hybrid territory othered by the medieval English imaginary in many ways, an invisible construct of sorts. Clearly, this Spain operated historically on the basis of two well-differentiated ideas that Aristorius and Jonathas perform throughout the Croxton play persuasively: coexistence and turmoil, a Black Legend fantasy to be sure.

1.6 – Window on the Past

If complicated dialogues between England and Spain appeared full-fledged at the turn of the fifteenth century, previous eras also produced unique responses in the context of Anglo-Spanish relations. Far from concretely embodying the anti-Hispanism that some scholars of the early modern period have noted, the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries also provide significant examples of othering Spain or rendering it invisible, sometimes within the limits of a text, as in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, and sometimes in the culture that surrounds the production of a particular set of texts. The following sections of my dissertation present that process in reverse chronological order; by this, I mean that I retrace the process of making Spain invisible from the late Middle Ages to what we could consider its earliest inception in the very early 1200s.

Tellingly, if Spain meant anything to the rich theatrical culture of fifteenth-century East Anglia and sixteenth-century Tudor England more generally, the fourteenth century, which scholars have repeatedly told us was instrumental in the making of a Middle English canon, necessarily had engagements with Spain. The rich and relatively new subfield of medieval Anglo-Iberian studies has, in that sense, produced vibrant criticism that shows how Spain could have influenced Middle English literature *directly*, and Geoffrey Chaucer has naturally emerged as an indisputable reference. Such scholarship, however, tends to go to great lengths to make sure Spain appears as a visible, completely recognizable entity either by drawing direct parallels to works of fourteenth-century Castilian literature and Chaucer or by attempting to demonstrate that Chaucer was, as Sylvia Federico compellingly argues, “acutely aware of the politics and culture of the place he called ‘Spayne’” (299).

Despite the soundness of this newer body of critical literature, scholars must still come to terms with the fact that Chaucer's Spanish influence, while undeniably extant, is not easy to unearth, and therein lies the complexity of the trans-European relationship at the core of this study. In order to tease out the history behind the Spanish Chaucer, I have chosen to focus on a greatly overlooked aspect of Anglo-Iberian cultural exchanges, at least in the more recent scholarship: astronomy. That astronomy was fundamental to Chaucer's varied work is certainly not a new argument. That much of that astronomy involved, if not quite a Spanish origin, at least a Spanish route of traffic and travel might be.

CHAPTER 2
THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY
Astronomy: Chaucer's Spanish Lesson⁶⁶

2.1 – Obscure Calculations: A Prelude

In Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*, set in Brittany, Aurelius, a squire, is desperately in love with Dorigen, who is married to the knight Averagus. When Averagus goes to England on a quest, Aurelius seizes the opportunity to court and harass Dorigen. Dorigen, for her part, is worried that Averagus's vessel might crash against the "rokkes blake" (*FT* 389) on his way back to Brittany. Believing she can deter her pestering suitor, Dorigen tells Aurelius that the only way he could win her over would be that he remove, stone by stone, all the rocks along the coast so that Averagus's ship may not remain trapped

66 This chapter's title is derived from Andrew Cole's essay "Chaucer's English Lesson", which debunks the commonly-held view that medieval vernacular translation – namely the later Middle English tradition – lacked clear methodologies or even a defined sense of poetics: "Chaucer apparently had nothing to say about the methods that brought about *Boece's* uneven prose...But among the possible reasons for this exclusion...perhaps Chaucer simply sensed that French translation theory...could not account for the particulars of his English practice." (1129) Cole cites the Prologue to the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* as evidence of translation theory in Middle English, especially since the work addresses the importance of vernacularization and even foregrounds the limitations (but also the pleasures) of English as a medium to write about science. The scholar argues that the *Astrolabe's* Prologue is the only clear example of a theory of translation in any work by Chaucer despite its brevity. One of the essay's principal arguments is that Chaucer was highly aware of his own translation practices and that his implicit yet innovative methods for working with Latin would set examples for European writers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Throughout his essay, Cole points out Chaucer's familiarity with both Latin and Continental literary and cultural traditions, including some of the ones that resulted in the creation of the *Astrolabe*. This piece, however, does not contain references to Spain or even the rich Arabic astronomic tradition from which Chaucer is thought to have borrowed widely. If Chaucer did indeed come across the possibilities of vernacular English via other European cultures, Spain (and its status as a cosmopolitan center for medieval translation and scientific production) played an invisible role in that process. See Andrew Cole, "Chaucer's English Lesson," *Speculum* 77.4 (2002): 1128-1167.

between the high tides. Acknowledging this as an impossible feat, the desolate Aurelius retreats into loneliness.

Recalling this plot episode in the *Franklin's Tale* is important, if only because it leads to an obscure, almost invisible reading that oddly involves a Spanish cultural product. In the middle of his despair, Aurelius's brother advises him to go to a cleric from Orleans trained in "magyk natureel" (science; *FT* 1125) to see if he can help Aurelius. This is no accident if we think that medieval Orleans was home to a major European university (the text makes Orleans' status as a center of learning – though sometimes obscure – abundantly clear) and that astronomy was a constitutive part of the university curriculum for most medieval students.⁶⁷ Having met this student versed in magic and astronomy, Aurelius asks him to vanish the dangerous rocks through an illusion, thus tricking Dorigen. As part of his preparations, he must comply with a peculiar ritual:⁶⁸

“His tables Tolletanes forth he broght,
Ful wel corrected, ne ther lakked nought,
Neither his collect ne his expans yeeris,
Ne his rootes, ne his othere geris,
As been his centriz and his argumentz
And his proporcioneles convenientz
For his equaciouns in every thyng.
And by his eighte speere in his wirkyng
He knew ful wel how Alnath was shove
Fro the heede of thilke fixe Aries above,
That in the ninthe speere considered is;

⁶⁷ Most famously, astronomy was taught within the so-called *quadrivium* (four areas of knowledge preceding the three core liberal arts, the *trivium*), which also included music and two branches of mathematics.

⁶⁸ This clerk, of course, also reminds us of Nicholas from the *Miller's Tale* and his *Almagest*, the astronomical treatise written by Ptolemy in the second century AD that would remain the principal text of its kind in the West through the times of Copernicus.

Ful subtilly he kalkuled al this.”

(*Franklin* V 1273-1284)⁶⁹

To calculate the stars’ and the sun’s position with utmost precision, Chaucer’s cleric from Orleans consults the Toledan Tables, the Castilian adaptation of an incredibly famous and widely used astronomical compilation by the eleventh-century Andalusian astronomer Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Yaḥyā al-Naqqāsh al-Zarqālī, most commonly known in Western sources as “Arzachel” and “Arsechieles” (2.45-1417-1423) in Chaucer’s *Astrolabe*:⁷⁰ The popularity of these texts in Chaucer’s England is well documented, but some initial observations on this quotation might be useful for clarity’s sake.

The “Tables Tolletanes” invoked in the *Franklin’s Tale* might in fact be two different texts (or groups of texts, rather). Their relationship to Spain is not a matter requiring proof: one of them was compiled in Andalusia (al-Zarqālī’s); the other was authored in Castile (King Alfonso’s) well before Chaucer’s time. But the bibliographical research that originates from what is perhaps the most authoritative edition of Chaucer’s works, *The Riverside Chaucer*, blurs the difference and distance between these two texts. While problematic, this is, in reality, also tremendously useful. al-Zarqālī compiled, revised, and thickened a series of Arabic astronomical tables that combined Ptolemaic principles around the second half of the eleventh century. Collectively, these compiled texts are known as the Toledo Tables (*Tabulæ Toletanæ*), which were translated from Arabic into Latin by the Toledo-based Italian scholar Gerald of Cremona in the during

69 All quotations from the *Canterbury Tales* are drawn from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Dean Benson (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008).

70 Numerous spellings are recognized. Much literature in English prefers “Arzachel”, or “Azarquiel” although *The Riverside Chaucer* uses “Al-Zargali” (899). Juan Vernet notes that the astronomer’s Latinized name was “Azerchel Hispanus” (202).

the second half of the twelfth century.⁷¹ In fact, in the fragment above, the Arabic designation “Alnath” (النطح), which refers to a major star in Taurus, was used extensively by Andalusian astronomers. If the clerk from Orleans appears to measure it in relation to Aries, it was likely due to conventions offered by the Toledan Tables themselves.

In their footnotes to the *Franklin’s Tale*, the editors of *The Riverside Chaucer* rightly note the existence of some: “astronomical tables adapted around 1272 under the direction of Alphonso X, King of Castile. These Alfonsine Tables, which corrected and superseded earlier, eleventh-century tables compiled by Al-Zargali, were then adapted for longitudes of London and other medieval cities” (899). It is possible that the texts immediately available to Chaucer were in themselves Latin translations of al-Zarqālī’s tables or their later Castilian derivative commissioned by Alfonso. Scholars have proceeded cautiously regarding this point – some as far as establishing that the notion of “Alfonsine Tables” by Chaucer’s time probably consisted of ambiguous astronomical compilations with some connection to Toledo.⁷²

71 Of the many excellent overviews that survey the importance of Islamic lore in the medieval West, two studies by Juan Vernet Ginés provide a remarkable account of the Arab contributions to fields such as translation, literature, and a wide range of sciences including astronomy, astrology, botany, arithmetic, etc. See the classic *La cultura hispanoárabe en Oriente y Occidente* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1978), as well as *Lo que Europa debe al Islam de España* (Barcelona: Acantilado, 2006). Both studies offer a succinct yet nuanced approach on the origins and development of Islamic science in Spain and its dissemination to the rest of Western Europe. For good, recent scholarship in English, see the superb collection of essays in David C. Lindberg and Michael H. Shank, eds. *The Cambridge History of Science: Volume 2, Medieval Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); particularly Charles Burnett on “Translation and Transmission of Greek and Islamic Science to Latin Christendom,” 341-364; Robert G. Morrison on “Islamic Astronomy,” 109-138; and John North on “Astronomy and Astrology,” 456-484.

72 The most ardent defender of this conclusion is John D. North, who points out to the blurry territory between the “Tables Tolletanes” of the *Franklin’s Tale* and later translations and compilations. In terms of a complete record of all astronomical references and associations

But the editors of the *Riverside Chaucer* make a daring and fortunate choice: in establishing a direct link between a translated Castilian text and the obscure conjuring of the Orleans clerk, they also unequivocally assure that the source Chaucer mentions *was* a text written in Castilian, which, by the thirteenth century, had largely become the dominant vernacular in Iberia. But this is hardly a matter for just a footnote; in not delving into this territory more deeply (their introduction to the *Astrolabe*, for example, makes no reference to the text's Spanish implications), the editors of the foremost Chaucer reference erase a cultural history at once fascinating, productive, and that seems forgotten even by those scholars who have investigated Chaucer's Iberian influence more thoroughly.

In this chapter, I show how the English vernacularity that Chaucer branded through his dissemination of astronomy was, already, unavoidably filtered through another culture, even if invisibly and indirectly. Simply put, astronomy was Chaucer's Spanish lesson. In so suggesting, my aim here is not to revisit the already exhaustive scholarly corpus on astronomy in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, but rather, to establish astronomy as a key element to broaden our understanding of Chaucer's Spanish links.⁷³

Connections between Chaucer and Spain have been a nagging scholarly pursuit for some time now. R.F. Yeager in particular has noted that: "although there is no

in Chaucer's work, North's book remains unsurpassed. See John David North, *Chaucer's Universe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For a descriptive account of the different Toledan Tables and their offshoots, see Gerald J. Toomer, "A survey of the Toledan Tables," *Osiris* 15 (1968): 5-174. Though no other study deals with their content more exhaustively, Toomer's essay does note that ascribing authorship and precise origins to all the tables is necessarily speculative.

⁷³ In addition to North's study, another notable book on Chaucer and astronomy is Marijane Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe in the Canterbury Tales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002). Osborn specifically studies how allusions to astronomy inform the textual structure of the *Canterbury Tales*.

concrete evidence of Spanish literary influence in Chaucer's work...there are abundant reasons to consider more seriously than heretofore Spain and Portugal as significant loci, both for Chaucer and for Chaucer studies" (190). Yeager is partly right when he says that Chaucer never directly acknowledges Spanish influence in any of his work, at least not in the way he cites, say, Petrarch. When one, however, revisits the history of scientific dialogues in Western Europe from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, it is impossible to not come across Spanish texts whose content and legacy influenced Chaucer *directly*. The purpose of this section of my dissertation is thus twofold: in addition to uncovering Spain in an overlooked Middle English technical treatise of the fourteenth century, I also reassess Chaucer's Spanish tale based on a text's circumstances of cultural production. In this sense, this chapter is fundamentally different from the previous one: whereas my interpretation of the Croxton play is grounded upon a careful reading of processes of conversion *within* the play, here, I treat Spain from *outside*; that is, I do not specifically read Chaucer based on a strategy of pure literary hermeneutics. Instead, I look at history, translation, and cultural appropriation to demonstrate how medieval England came in close contact with tables, astrolabes, equatoria, and other fantastic objects that allow planetary observation; the same objects that would have presumably allowed the cleric from Orleans to conjure his obscure calculations.

To best present my argument, this chapter is divided into three segments. First, I offer a thorough summary of the scholarship on the Spanish Chaucer and posit why Spain has not mattered as much in the history of Chaucer studies. Secondly, I discuss the importance of scientific translation in Toledo and the way it travelled to England with a particular focus on astronomy and the possible links to Chaucer's work. Finally, the last

segment analyzes *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* as a text that integrates Spanish cultural lore, thus adding a missing piece in Chaucer's Spanish puzzle and discovering a cultural reading that has been made invisible in scholarship thus far. One wishes to know, of course, why reconstructing this story has *anything* to do with Black Legends. Suffice it to say that showing how Spain *was* important in the making of late medieval English literature— and highlighting why it has remained invisible— fits the same line of inquiry.

2.2 – Rethinking the Spanish Chaucer

From the university-level anthology to the special journal issue on medieval multiculturalism, Chaucer's relationship to non-English contexts —and by this, I mean, at best France and Italy, and maybe the Classics— is abundantly documented; no doubt exists regarding his reliance on these traditions.⁷⁴ Nor is this claim an eminently novel one: imagining Chaucer in conjunction with other European cultures has in fact been done for as long as “English” has existed as an academic discipline. There has, however, existed a tendency when authors establish Chaucer's broader Continental connections, to further claims about the “Englishing” of French or Italian styles and forms.⁷⁵ In that way,

74 In his presidential address to the Sixteenth International Congress of the New Chaucer Society at Swansea, Wales (2008), John M. Ganim discusses the term “cosmopolitanism” as an ideological construct in light of Chaucer scholarship that historically values the so-called “Englishness” that scholars have always associated with his work. See John M. Ganim, “Cosmopolitan Chaucer, or, the Uses of Local Culture,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31.1 (2009): 3-21. Some recent thoughtful discussions on multicultural / cosmopolitan / multilingual Chaucer include Mary Catherine Davidson, *Medievalism, Multilingualism, and Chaucer* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); and Shayne Aaron Legassie, “Among Other Possible Things: The Cosmopolitanisms of Chaucer's ‘Man of Law's Tale’,” in *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages*, eds. John M. Ganim and Shayne Aaron Legassie, 181-205 (New York: Palgrave, 2013). Davidson in particular notes how Chaucer became a symbol of imperial and colonial English linguistic practices in the afterword to her study.

75 There are numerous studies in this vein. Some of the more representative ones include Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); and Haldeen Braddy “The French Influence

scholars demonstrate Chaucer's remarkable ability as a translator and highlight a well-known narrative about cosmopolitanism that has become a trademark feature in the way we teach, write, read, understand, and talk about his work. Yet there is nothing particularly exciting about that: *all* vernacular writers in the fourteenth century and beyond were borrowers, and the "original" as a mode of textual typology was largely inoperative in pre-modern literary cultures, as Emily Steiner intuits: "a medieval *auctor*, such as Augustine or Virgil, possesses *auctoritas*, but not simply because he has put his own text in the 'principal place'...A person composes a text and that person becomes authoritative only if what he brings into being becomes an exemplar, fashioning rules for language, form, or belief, which medieval authors generally tried to incorporate rather than surpass." (143) Consider these lines from the Prologue to the *Clerk's Tale*:

I wol yow telle a tale which that I
 Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,
 As preved by his words and his werk.
 He is now deed and nayled in his cheste;
 I prey to God so yeve his soule reste!
 "Fraunces Petrak, the lauriat poete,
 Highte this clerk, whos rhetorike sweete
 Enlummyed Ytallie of poetrie,
 As Lunan dide of philosophie,

on Chaucer" in *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. Beryl Rowland, 143-159 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). For a relatively recent discussion, see Michael Hanly, "France," in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown, 149-166 (Oxford / Malden: Blackwell, 2002). Similarly, Chaucer's use of Boccaccian and Petrarchan material has been amply studied since the early twentieth century. For an overview of Chaucer and Italy, see the essays in Piero Boitani, ed. *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and David Wallace, "Italy," in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown, 218-234. (Oxford / Malden: Blackwell, 2002). The existence of an Italian Chaucer poses problems. For a discussion, see Warren Ginsberg, *Chaucer's Italian Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). Ginsberg argues that the Italy of Dante, Boccaccio, or Petrarch was a radically different political and cultural entity than the one Chaucer would have envisioned. The argument for replicating an academic tradition that insists on Chaucer's French and Italian world has proven durable. Several recent companions or guidebooks on Chaucer still include separate segments on the author's engagement with France and Italy. The same, however, is not necessarily true with regards to Spain.

Or lawe, or oother art particulier;
But Deeth, that wol nat suffer us dweelen heer,
But as it were a twynklyng of ye,
Hem bothe hath slayn, and alle shul we dye.

(*Clerk IV*, 26-38)

When the Oxford cleric assures that he will pass on vernacular lore to the group of English pilgrims via Petrarch and Giovanni da Lignano, he is acknowledging the prominence of both Classical and European cultural traditions, and at the same time, anticipating that his story will be an entirely independent fictional endeavor. After all, there was nothing that the medieval author valued more than their dependence on this authority. But the passage above might also be important to highlight the implicit tension between two worlds on the page. On one hand, when Chaucer sets out his cleric to retell an adaptation –both linguistic and literary– he is implicitly aware of the process of translating from Latin into English. On the other, in making an Italian story palatable to English audiences, he is both recognizing his belonging and his indebtedness to a particular narrative tradition.

For medieval writers, then, translating went beyond the act of rendering something from one language into another or reshaping the narrative content of a story. It presaged, fundamentally, a dislocation of culture and its values.⁷⁶ In sum, furthering the claim that

⁷⁶ Medievalists are well acquainted with the implications of *translatio studii* and *imperii*. There are several excellent critical studies and essays on translation and its prominence in the Middle Ages. For the context of medieval England, see Catherine Batt, “Translation and Society,” in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture*, ed. Peter Brown, 123-139 (London: Blackwell, 2009), and, in particular, Alastair Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Generally on medieval translation, see Laura H. Hollengreen, ed. *Translatio, or the Transmission of Culture in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Modes and Messages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); and Charles D. Wright, and Karen L. Fresco, eds. *Translating the Middle Ages* (Surrey/Burlington: Ashgate, 2013). An insightful discussion on medieval

Chaucer was cosmopolitan for its own sake without also seriously studying the traditions he drew heavily from is problematic, and allows for scholars and students to favor certain literary corpora over others. If Petrarch, Boccaccio, Jean de Meun, as well as a myriad of Classical authors such as Ovid or Boethius were fundamental to stir Chaucerian creativity, so were some products from more southerly regions; and Spain, in this sense, has yet to become a staple feature of the Chaucer canon.

There are two rather straightforward answers to why Spain has not mattered as much in the history of Chaucer studies. Perhaps the most reasonable one concerns the lack of direct Spanish authorial evidence (at least not in any sustained manner) in Chaucer's work. This poses an inherent problem for the literary medievalist, who must circumvent the hardline textual approach often warranted by their discipline in favor of a broader scholarly agenda in order to establish a continuum between Spain and Chaucer.

A less evident but equally plausible explanation might have to do with the relative absence of prestige surrounding Hispanism, but this is problematic, as Sylvia Federico notes: "in...favoring some regions of Europe over others, [Chaucerians] have missed a rich opportunity..." (299). In this sense, not all traditions have been equally historicized despite a growing academic interest in Chaucer's Spanish connections. Nonetheless, capitalizing on the history of the Spanish Chaucer is productive, if only because it speaks to the cultural fabric of a text with ancestral Spanish connections, which, in turn, remains relatively eclipsed in the Middle English canon.

translation as a daily practice can be found in Julio César Santoyo, "Traducciones cotidianas en la Edad Media: una parcela olvidada," *Livius* 9 (1997): 159-186.

Chaucer's Spanish (hi)story is still being written.⁷⁷ Common areas of interest among scholars have included his still controversial mission to Navarre in 1366, as well the possible Spanish influence in his work, particularly with regards to the *Canterbury Tales* and, to a lesser extent, the *House of Fame*. None of the more significant work that has appeared so far, however, explicitly argues that a text such as the *Astrolabe* might have distant Spanish associations.⁷⁸ A brief analysis of Castilian politics in the mid-fourteenth century shows, as Sylvia Federico, Emily Houlik-Ritchey, and R.F. Yeager have aptly noted, that Chaucer's England was deeply interested in contemporary developments on the other side of the Pyrenees.⁷⁹ Most every piece of criticism unequivocally points out to

77 With some exceptions, Anglophone academic interest in Chaucer and Spain remains a relatively recent phenomenon. Some early scholarly inroads, however (all of which deal with Chaucer's Spanish travels), include Suzanne Honoré-Duvergé, "Chaucer en Espagne? (1366)," *Recueil de Travaux Offerts à M. Clovis Brunel* (1955): 9-13; Thomas Jay Garbáty, "Chaucer in Spain, 1366: Soldier of Fortune or Agent of the Crown?," *English Language Notes* 5 (1967): 81-87; Albert C. Baugh, "The Background of Chaucer's Mission to Spain," *Chaucer und seine Zeit: Symposion für Walter F. Schirmer* (1968): 55-69; and Benjamin F. Taggie, "Chaucer in Spain: The Historical Context," *Mediterranean Studies* (1992): 35-44. At the same time, scholars from the Iberian Peninsula have long written on Spanish references in Chaucer's work. Affiliates to SELIM (*Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval*), a Spain-based scholarly organization, have published articles on Chaucer and Spain since at least 1992. Two important discussions are Jesús L. Serrano Reyes and Antonio León, "Spanish References in *The Canterbury Tales*," *SELIM* 2 (1992): 106-141; and Luis Alberto Lázaro, "Some Speculations about Chaucer's Spanish Literary Sources," *SELIM* 5 (1995): 18-28.

78 Although Sigmund Eisner and John D. North have indeed signaled the importance of Andalusian astronomy in Chaucer and, more generally, medieval England, neither one of these scholars concretely describes the *Astrolabe* – or any Chaucerian text containing astronomical references, for that matter – as having possible Spanish origins.

79 See, in particular, Robert F. Yeager, "Chaucer Translates the Matter of Spain," in *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th-15th Century*, ed. María Bullón-Fernández, 189-214 (New York: Palgrave, 2007); and Sylvia Federico, "Chaucer and the Matter of Spain," *The Chaucer Review* 45.3 (2011): 299-320. For an excellent comparative analysis on Chaucer and Castilian chroniclers building on both historicist and psychoanalytic approaches, see Emily Houlik-Ritchey, "Reading the Neighbor in Chaucer and Pero López de Ayala," *Exemplaria* 28.2 (2016): 118-136. The first two essays look at how the so-called "Matter of Spain", a heroic literary corpus dealing with Castilian characters and subjects, was received in Chaucer's England in the context of the diplomatic relations facilitated by John of Gaunt. Houlik-

the segment dedicated to Peter of Castile (the Cruel) in the somewhat overlooked *Monk's Tale*:

De Petro Rege Ispannie:

O noble, O worthy Petro, glorye of Spayne,
Whom Fortune heeld so hye in magestee,
Wel oghten men thy pitous deeth complayne!
Out of thy land thy brother made thee flee,
And after, at a seege, by sublitee,
Thou were bitraysed and lad unto his tente,
Where as he with his owene hand slow thee,
Succedyng in thy regne and thy rente.

The feeld of snow, with th'egle of blak therinne,
Caught with the lymrod coloured as the gleede,
He brew this cursednesse and al thus synne.
The wikked nest was werker of this nede.
Noght Charles Olyver, that took ay heede
Of trouthe and honour, but Armorike
Genlyon-Oliver, corrupt for meede,
Broghte this worthy kyng in swich a brike.

(*Monk*, VII 2375-2390)

I quote from this lamentation substantially because it has greatly dictated the way scholars talk about Chaucer and Spain, and perhaps with good reason. Were we to trace each and every reference to Spain in all of Chaucer's work, the lines above are, without a doubt, one of the very few happy findings.⁸⁰ Chaucer offers a largely encouraging portrayal of a monarch that mired Castile into a nineteen-year long bloody civil war, but history has opposing viewpoints on Pedro, whose negative epithet is not entirely

Ritchey's piece compares English and Castilian literary and historiographical accounts on Pedro I of Castile (the Cruel).

80 Although Jesús Serrano Reyes identifies a total of 62 "references" to Spain in the *Canterbury Tales*, the majority of these are indirect or otherwise only thinly relevant. The author, for instance, even counts Chaucer's commentary on Spanish-born Seneca as evidence of his "Spanish influence". See, again, "Spanish References in the *Canterbury Tales*" 106-141. Importantly, R.F. Yeager cautions that: "...the 'Spanish references' cited in [these] studies...require careful winnowing" (195).

supported in extant medieval documents⁸¹. In the fragment above, Chaucer portrays Pedro favorably because the English crown believed him to be the only legitimate heir to the throne of Castile, which was usurped when his half-brother Enrique (Henry of Trastámara) killed him in 1369. Such a death, described as tragic because it happened at the hands of an illegitimate successor (“broghte this worthy kyng in swich a brike”) is the subject of Chaucer’s candid lament (“well ogthen men thy pitous deeth complayne”). That the monk (a remarkably poor storyteller) strategizes Pedro’s tale into a larger cultural imaginary that carried enormous weight in medieval textual traditions, like the Matter of France (“Genlyon-Oliver”) is important: judged in the greater context of the *Canterbury Tales*, his words could attest to Spain’s evident presence in the minds of late medieval English authors.

Scholars have often read into this fragment to demonstrate how fourteenth-century Castile benefitted from English military assistance.⁸² A popular historicist interpretation of these lines points to the so-called Battle of Nájera in 1367, in which the divided Crown of Castile waged an internal conflict with the help of foreign armies: French, English, and Italian. Castile’s civil strife was indicative of larger European tensions in the context of the Hundred Years’ War between France and England, which

81 Pedro (Pero) López de Ayala was the foremost Castilian chronicler of the fourteenth century and his account of Pedro of Castile provides a unique historical glimpse into the monarch’s military decisions. The poet had an ambiguous relationship with King Pedro, and ultimately supported the House of Trastámara (Castile’s enemies) and King Henry II. See *Crónicas*, ed. José Luis Martín (Barcelona: Planeta, 1991). For an English translation, see *Corónica del Rey Don Pedro*, eds. Constance L. and Heanon M. Wilkins (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1985).

82 The most salient study in this vein is the classic by Peter Edward Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955). Russell in particular establishes that 1362 marked the beginning of formal military collaboration between England and Castile, thus underscoring the importance of different Iberian kingdoms in both English and French politics (1).

drew compelling literary responses among late medieval authors like Chaucer and Gower and, on the French side, Froissart. Pedro's success at Nájera has been largely credited to the help of English forces, most notably John of Gaunt, Chaucer's most famous patron, and Edward the Black Prince. Indeed, the English battalion appears to have been quite formidable.⁸³ In order to secure victory in their fighting pursuits, the two English commanders of the Castilian army were accompanied by men whose allegiances pointed to other Iberian crowns, like the Aragonese. Perhaps more importantly, the Gascons, a regional French monarchy with extensive historical ties to both England and the Iberian Peninsula, allied with the English to force Henry's men into fleeing, something not explicitly mentioned in the monk's account. However, the sweeping success of this multinational military campaign is well documented and has received a great deal of attention both from medieval chroniclers and Spanish historiographers generally.⁸⁴

There is concrete documentary evidence in Crow and Olson's *Chaucer Life-Records* –the most reliable source for the author's biographers – about a mission to Navarre in 1366. The segment devoted to Chaucer's journeys from 1366 to 1398 provides indication of extensive travel in France and Italy with considerable editorial commentary, and I should also add that the entries belonging to these trips are not arranged chronologically, which makes the task of understanding his being in Spain more difficult

83 See, in particular, L.J. Andrew Villalon, "Spanish Involvement in the Hundred Years' War and the Battle of Nájera," in *The Hundred Years' War: A Wider Focus*, eds. Andrew Villalon and Donald J. Kagay, 3-74 (Leiden: Brill, 2005). Villalon's meticulous study dispels the myth that Spain had no participation in the Hundred Years' War and provides an excellent account of the English and Gascon triumph over the Spanish and French armies.

84 For a detailed account on the vicissitudes of Pedro's handling of Castilian politics, see Clara Estow, *Pedro the Cruel of Castile, 1350-1369* (New York: Brill, 1995); and "War and Peace in Medieval Iberia: Castilian-Granadan Relations in the Mid-Fourteenth Century," in *The Hundred Years' War: A Wider Focus*, eds. Andrew Villalon and Donald J. Kagay, 151-178 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

in the greater European context. A meticulous analysis of these records indicates at least three different trips to France (1359, 1368, 1387; and possibly one more visit between 1377 and 1381) and major mission to Genoa and Florence between 1372 and 1373. The very last record, a late addendum to the 1966 edition, concerns a safe-conduct granted by Charles II of Navarre (the Bad), dated 22 February of that year to a certain “Geffroy de Chausserre”:

A touz ceulx qui ces presentes lettres verront salut. Savoir faisons que nos avons donne et donnons bon loyal sauf seur conduit et sauve garde jusques a la feste de Penthecoste prouchain venant a Geffroy de Chausserre escuier englois en sa compaignie trois compaignons avec leurs varlez chevaux et bens quelconques troussez ou a trouser en males ou dehors pour aler venir demorer se remuer coversser et retourner par tout ou il lui playra par touz noz villes forteresses por passages et destroiz tant de jour que de nuit [...] Donne a Olit le xii jour de Fevrier lan de grace mil CCCLx et cinq. Par le roy.
(Duvergé 13)⁸⁵

There are, in this excerpt, a number of interesting elements. Observe, above all, the description of Chaucer as an English squire (“escuier englois”), which is important because it highlights an aspect of his career that scholars sometimes forget: he was, before a poet, a diplomat and a royal servant.⁸⁶ Consider as well the allusion to Olite (Olit), one of the royal seats of the Navarrese monarchy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in fact the principal residence of Charles III, the predecessor to the deposed Castilian king immortalized in Chaucer’s *Monk’s Tale*. But, as I suggested

85 The fragment is drawn directly from Suzanne Honoré-Duvergé, “Chaucer en Espagne? (1366),” in *Recueil de travaux offerts à M. Clovis Brunel* (1955): 9-13, rather than from Crow and Olson, since the Spanish episode was first revisited by Honoré-Duvergé and not by the original editors of the *Life-Records*.

86 Taggie also notes this in “Chaucer in Spain”: “[Chaucer] was best known in his earlier years as a servant of the Crown. Related to the royal household by marriage, he served the Crown as an administrator, envoy, messenger, and soldier” (35).

earlier, Chaucer's tale of cosmopolitanism hardly ever reaches Spain (i.e., in our typical reconstruction of the poet's life, *no one* doubts that he visited Italy) and if one is to follow Yeager's assertion regarding the lack of concrete Hispanic material in his work, it would seem reasonable to omit Spain altogether from the Chaucerian biography. The passage above, however, provides both the reader and historian with practical clues about an indisputable fact: in 1366, Chaucer *went* to Spain, and that alone should suffice to reconstruct the history at the core of my investigation. The fragment, first identified in 1890 by J.A. Brutaills, has long been the object of scholarly controversy, and it is not a coincidence that it did not make its way into Chaucerian scholarship until the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, its absence in medievalist critical methodologies fits quite nicely into my general line of inquiry; i.e., in the making of Chaucer studies in the late-nineteenth century, and for a good fifty years, when the poet was already part of the Anglophone academic establishment on both sides of the Atlantic, Spain, though textually present in Chaucer's life, remained scholarly invisible.

The Navarrese safe-conduct was resuscitated by Suzanne Honoré-Duvergé in 1955 and brought to the attention of the 1966 *Life-Records* editors. Honoré-Duvergé specifically cites this fragment as a *pièce justificative* (hard evidence) and traces its importance to both López de Ayala and more, generally, Chaucer studies: “il est à peine besoin de souligner l'intérêt que présenterait ce nouvel épisode de la vie de Chaucer. Au cours de son voyage, il a pu connaître le futur chroniqueur de Castile, Pedro López de Avala [sic], qui se rallia à la cause de Trastamare, à Tolède, en mai 1366” (12).⁸⁷ Still,

87 “It is worth noting the importance that this new episode bears in Chaucer's life. During his travels, he was able to meet the future chronicler of Castile...who sided with the Trastámaras in Toledo in May 1366”. My translation.

Chaucer's biographers treat his Spanish travels as an addendum (or a curiosity, really) even when they admittedly carried greater political importance than his stays in France or Italy and remain indirectly documented in the larger framework of the *Canterbury Tales*. Notwithstanding the archival documentation available in Navarre's historical records, and despite the quasi-archaeological work undertaken by some Chaucer biographers, the 1366 trip has not been without problems.⁸⁸ Benjamin F. Taggie, for example, invokes a common assumption about Chaucer's life regarding a gap between the years of 1360 and 1366 in which, as far as documents are concerned, nothing is known about the poet's life. If, however, Brutails's assertions are correct, the six-year gap recalled in Taggie's essay becomes not only interesting, but in fact, obsolete: "in early 1366, Chaucer was most likely in the Iberian Peninsula" (35). The most commonly accepted theory is that he went on a mission to rescue English knights to prevent them from siding with Henry of Trastámara. Nevertheless, even some of the more ardent supporters of the Spanish Chaucer like R.F. Yeager treat this mission skeptically, even to the point that it might be historically questionable: "However, this might not have been Chaucer's mission: in truth, we do not know where Chaucer went once he traveled through Navarre, or how long he stayed overseas. The next life record extant is dated June 20, 1367—so, although a much shorter visit seems most likely, Chaucer could have been in Iberia a year and more" (191).

Beyond Yeager's and Taggie's conjectures, scholars of the Spanish Chaucer have not always emphasized Navarre's close proximity and cultural links to Gascony in France. We do know that Gascon knights played a major role in the Castilian civil

88 The essays by Garbáty (1967), Baugh (1968), and Taggie (1992) build heavily on Honoré-Duvergé's work. See note # 77 for further references.

conflict where England was also heavily invested, but in attempting to exhaust all of Chaucer's possible Iberian interests, it might be important to resurrect this Gascon connection in the context of the 1366 Navarrese mission. Geographically close to Navarre, Gascony was part of a linguistic and dynastic continuum with other northern Iberian kingdoms, and had ancestral connections with Plantagenet England. Against this backdrop of gaps in historical records and speculations, Gascony, I argue, might be another viable piece in Chaucer's Spanish puzzle. This history, however, has its inception at least a century before and not in the 1360s, as most scholars have posited. Importantly, it also involves the transit, translation, and travel of astronomical lore between England and the Iberian Peninsula. One cannot, in short, speak about Chaucer in Spain without also considering the earlier monarchic links that possibly favored the authorship of one of his least-studied texts, and where Gascony played a minor, yet visible role. Chaucer's Spanish history begins, as such, *not* with his mission in 1366, but in fact, with two earlier episodes: a claim to the Gascon throne by the most famous Spanish monarch of the Middle Ages; and perhaps even before, when English clerics travelled to Toledo, once Europe's primary center of scientific learning. Thus, well before Chaucer's political move into Spain in 1366, translation had shaped politics and culture as a means of Anglo-Spanish communication as early as the mid-twelfth century. And Chaucer was, sometimes invisibly, the product and result of such collaboration.

2.3 – When Toledo Was The World

Beyond the questionable character of the myth of *convivencia*, there was a place and time when the principle might have partly worked: twelfth-century Toledo. Located

in central Spain, Toledo was the meeting point between the Christian north and the Muslim-dominated areas of the south.⁸⁹ Additionally, the city had always had a powerful Jewish community whose members included royal aides, merchants, and importantly, scholars. The confluence of Jewish and Muslim scholars in a city located in the heart of Christian Spain and near Castile might be testimony to the productive interaction between members of different religious faiths, although we know well that the political complexities of Iberian Peninsula did not always allow for this. At any rate, part of what made the Muslim Iberian kingdoms powerful and prosperous was thus the enormous importance afforded to science, philosophy, literature, and the arts. Translation in particular occupied a prominent role in the intellectual life of twelfth-century Toledo.

The establishment of the so-called Toledo School of Translators between 1125 and 1150 by Raymond, the Gascon archbishop of the city, helped spread numerous Latin translations from Arabic texts previously unknown in Western Europe. In addition to Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the School's members ultimately worked in several European vernaculars, including, possibly, English.⁹⁰ The Toledo School, Juan Vernet cautions, was not an organized institutional body (although Raymond did initially attempt

89 It should be noted that much of the so-called *Reconquista* had taken place by the mid-twelfth century, and that only the region of present-day Andalusia was under effective Muslim control. In the early thirteenth century, the Almohad Empire controlled the cities of Granada, Seville, and Córdoba, and vast areas of northern Africa. See, in particular, Hugh N. Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (New York: Longman, 1996). The author specifically deals with the military and political changes that southern Spain underwent when it transitioned into Almohad rule.

90 Toledo received a number of Englishmen over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth century. The presence of English astronomers such as Daniel of Morley or Robert of Chester; and physicians such as James of Toledo, who was English despite the epithet, might help support the claim that English could have been one of the working vernaculars in the city's scriptoria. Nonetheless, there is no concrete work on the use of English either as an everyday language in the city or even as a working language within the networks of translation I have noted.

to use the Toledo cathedral as a small scriptorium), but rather, a network of translators sustained by patronage who sometimes worked away from Toledo (167). Nevertheless, the city maintained its cosmopolitan character due to the confluence of visitors and translators from many parts of the Iberian Peninsula and Western Europe more generally. In the middle of twelfth century, as Charles Burnett points out, “Toledo became the center for the translation of scientific works, and the separate streams of mathematical, medical, and philosophical translations were united there” (343).⁹¹ England was directly involved in this exchange. In the field of astronomy, the works of Petrus Alfonsi, Adelard of Bath and Daniel of Morley are just some of the examples of this initial Anglo-Spanish intellectual collaboration.⁹²

The work of Petrus Alfonsi seems especially important. A Jewish convert to Christianity (exact details about his birthplace and date are unknown), Petrus Alfonsi “brought Arabic texts north with him to Aragon, England, and France” (Tolan xiii).⁹³ He

91 Burnett, however, notes that: “there was not sufficient local interest or clientele for a large number of students and teachers to form themselves into a corporate university body, as was happening in Paris, Bologna, and Oxford. Most of those who were interested in Arabic learning had their roots elsewhere and wished to benefit the countries or centers from which they originated. The program for translation was, to a large extent, determined by what was required in the newly burgeoning European universities, which were outside Spain” (254). For a detailed analysis of the realities of translation in Toledo, see Charles Burnett, “The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo,” *Science in Context* 14.1/2 (2001): 249-288. Burnett’s essay documents the work of arguably the most important translators in Toledo, Gerard of Cremona (who translated Ptolemy’s *Almagest*), and Dominicus Gundissalinus, who worked with Avicenna’s *Canon*, as well as texts by al Ghazāl.

92 This is not, by any means, a complete list of the English individuals involved with scientific translation in Toledo, but this chapter is not the place for an exhaustive treatment of the subject. For further information, see chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7 –all of which deal with the dissemination and translation of Arabic science to Western Europe via al-Andalus and Toledo– in Vernet’s *Lo que Europa debe al Islam de España*. See note # 70 for more information.

93 Petrus Alfonsi’s religious identity has garnered notable scholarly scrutiny, especially in the context of Jewish communities in al-Andalus. Some scholars have noted the degree of relative power that learned Jewish individuals and communities exercised in al-Andalus, particularly, during the so-called *taifa* period in the eleventh century. See, specifically, John

is credited as the first translator to make a significant corpus of Arabic and Hebrew science available to Western Europe at a time when most of the scientific learning in the region was drawn from Latin sources; astronomy in particular depended on Macrobius (9). Alfonsi also transformed, compiled, and translated Arabic astronomical learning and brought it to England around 1106 (Burnett 342). Many of these texts, such as *De dracone* and *De astronomia*, detail calculations regarding different celestial bodies and the use of instruments such as astrolabes. While in England, the Spanish cleric taught astronomy and was a mentor to Adelard of Bath and Walter of Malvern, famous for measuring the position of the moon in relation to the Earth with an astrolabe, though an astrolabe can only be used to identify and measure celestial bodies, or, in some cases, to establish latitude.

It is likely that Chaucer was aware of Petrus's inherent contributions to astronomy given that his own *Astrolabe* is, in true medieval fashion, a compilation of many different sources. However, the greatest example of Chaucer's cognizance of this Spanish author comes from a direct citation in his *Tale of Melibee*: "And Piers Alphonse seith: "if thou hast might to doon a thyng of which thou most repente, it is bettre 'nay' than 'ye' (2407). Although *Melibee* is a tale conceived through layering and adaptation of earlier vernacular texts, Kathryn Lynch concedes that "Chaucer clearly knew the collection of Eastern tales in Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis*" (79). The *Disciplina clericalis* was Alfonsi's most widely known work, a compendium of fable-like Oriental tales later

Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993).

translated into Spanish and other European vernaculars.⁹⁴ Chaucer, while omitting Spain or astronomy in his two references to Petrus Alfonsi in *Melibee*, implicitly asserts the Spanish translator's authority by quoting his tale as an example.⁹⁵

The question remains, of course, why Chaucer would occlude a direct endorsement of a Spanish author that was responsible not only for providing Europe with a celebrated collection of tales with references to the East, but indeed, for disseminating Spanish scientific learning – in translation – to England. If, by the time Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales* and his *Astrolabe*, Spain was already coterminous with otherness, Chaucer creates an implicit textual distance between the reader and the culture he (does not) allude to. As we shall see, this operates as a distinctive literary strategy in the *Astrolabe* with the limited references imported directly from other Spanish astronomical texts – proof of an invisible mark.

94 Yeager goes as far as claiming that Chaucer might have read Spanish because of his knowledge of Petrus Alfonsi, and suggests in addition that his engagement with the *Disciplina clericalis* might have first occurred in Spain: “because the *Disciplina* was common, and in Latin, he might have picked it up in Spain” (200).

95 For a provocative reading of Chaucer's Oriental sources, see Kathryn L. Lynch, *Chaucer's Cultural Geography* (Routledge: New York, 2002); and Carol Falvo Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* (Suffolk: Brewer and Boydell, 2003). These studies reflect the intense postcolonial drive in medievalist literary scholarship during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Though differing in their approaches, both Lynch and Heffernan conclude that Chaucer's work reflects a profound engagement with the “East”, which he reframes to create his own idea of storytelling. In relation to the *Tale of Melibee*, Heffernan notes the importance of the Toledo School of Translators when she says that one of the many stories contained in Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis* was *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, an Arabic tale ultimately derived from earlier Persian and Indian sources like the *Panchatantra*, which Europe naturally knew through Spain (79; 163). Spanish was the first European vernacular that saw a translation of this tale during the reign of Alfonso X (*Calila y Dimna*). There exists a visible history of Chaucerian scholarship interested in the author's engagement with the “Orient”. A daring interpretation in particular is Katherine Slater Gittes, “The *Canterbury Tales* and the Arabic Frame Tradition,” *PMLA* 98.2 (1983): 237-251, in which the author maintains that “the structure of the *Canterbury Tales* can be most appropriately compared not with the cathedral but with the mosque” (238). In other words, the frame story that Chaucer is thought to have borrowed from Boccaccio was, according to Gilles, Arabic in origin rather than European.

Critics have not always sufficiently explained the reasons behind Petrus's travels to England, but we do know that he became an important teacher there. Most notably, he instructed Adelard of Bath (ca. 1080-1152), arguably the dominant natural philosopher and cleric in England in the years following the Norman Conquest (Hackett 86). Though primarily known as a mathematician, Adelard produced numerous translations of astronomical texts, including the tremendously important *Zīj* (astronomical compendiums) by al-Kwarizmī (the father of algebra), which contain, in turn, instructions on how to use astrolabes and different methods to calculate distance and positions of celestial bodies. Our only surviving evidence of the *Zīj* comes from al-Andalus through a translation done by Maslama al-Majriti, a Madrid-born Cordoban astronomer of whom Chaucer was likely aware through his knowledge of the Toledo Tables.

Finally, the name of Daniel of Morley is important despite his obscurity. Born around 1140 in Norfolk and educated in Toledo, Daniel composed the *Liber de naturis inferiorum et superiorum*, which has been identified as one of Chaucer's unacknowledged sources for the *Astrolabe*.⁹⁶ Very little is known about the English astronomer's life, but Daniel was apparently among the first Englishmen to learn Arabic. Available records and criticism tell us he was dissatisfied with his scholastic formation in Paris and moved to Toledo to learn Arabic science, and at least part of Daniel's experience with translation and learning occurred in a local vernacular: "[he studied in

96 In 1935, S.W. Harvey wrote, in relation to Daniel of Morley's *Liber*, that "there is almost certain evidence that Chaucer was using this source" (38). Sigmund Eisner, however, questions this approach (21). Though recent scholarship has neglected Daniel of Morley's work, we have three older studies that evaluate the English astronomer's contributions to Toledan intellectual life. See especially Charles Singer, "Daniel of Morley. An English Philosopher of the XIIth Century," *Isis* 3.2 (1920): 263-269; Lynn Thorndike, "Daniel of Morley," *The English Historical Review* 37.148 (1922): 540-544; and Theodore Silverstein, "Daniel of Morley, English Cosmogonist and Student of Arabic Science," *Mediaeval Studies* 10 (1948): 179-196.

Toledo] and learned the ‘doctrine of the Arabs’ from Gerard’s assistant, Galippus, ‘*in lingua Tholetana*’...”(Burnett 254). If this is correct, Spanish was a means of instruction among the English of Toledo, and would have remained so at least until the mid-thirteenth century during Alfonso X’s reign. However, the fact that scholars from medieval England might have used Spanish in academic contexts has never received any substantial critical attention, thus furthering the narrative on the invisibility of certain Hispanic cultural products.

2.4 – Kings, Queens, and Astrolabes

In 1252, Alfonso X became the king of Castile, the largest, most prosperous, and politically influential of all Iberian kingdoms.⁹⁷ Though not the subject of this chapter, it is important to mention that his tenure saw remarkable achievements in literature, science, and the arts; so much so, that he is often remembered with the epithet “The Wise” or “The Learned” in many contemporary sources. The monarch was also notable for his relative permissiveness towards non-Christians, but only, really, for practical reasons, something proponents of *convivencia* and many modern historians of Spain tend to conveniently forget. Because Alfonso had an ambitious imperial program, the monarch pragmatically welcomed Jewish and Arab aides into his political circles: “Alfonso’s [cultural contributions] were part of a large movement of the transmission of knowledge from the Islamic world to the Latin West through translation, often by Jewish scholars in Spain both fluent in Arabic and Latin, of Arabic scientific treatises and Arabic versions

⁹⁷ For an excellent study on King Alfonso X’s life, work, and political impact, see, in particular, H. Salvador Martínez, *Alfonso X, The Learned: A Biography*, trans. Odile Cisneros (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010)

of Hellenistic scientific and philosophical works” (Phillips 73). In this sense, the translation of astronomical works became key in Alfonso’s Toledan court. The most immediately relevant to Chaucer is, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Spanish-language version of al-Zarqali’s tables translated by Alfonso himself. Alfonso’s adaptation of the Toledan tables spoke to the king’s larger ideas on vernacularization: in the heyday of his mandate, Spanish appears to have gained precedence in the Toledo School over Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic. Writing science in the vernacular was not, of course, an entirely new concept in Europe, (England, for example, had undertaken a similar task in the late ninth century under Alfred the Great), but the propagation of science in a local language to the rest of the Continent was in many ways pioneered by Spain.⁹⁸

Politically, Alfonso’s cultural program sought to build strong networks within his kingdom, but they also had implications outside Castile and the Peninsula: in his comprehensive foreign policy, England would eventually play a prominent role thanks to the marriage of his half-sister Eleanor –the young Castilian queen derided by the London crowd– to the Plantagenet king Edward I in 1254. Historical records suggest that, in keeping with her half-brother’s tradition of artistic, scientific, and literary patronages, Eleanor too initiated an active campaign to promote intellectual exchanges between England and the northern Iberian kingdoms. In England, the queen established a

98 English was first noted as a viable language for the diffusion of science, including astronomy, in the late ninth century during the reign of Alfred the Great. To learn more about this phenomenon, see Roy M. Liuzza, “In Measure, Number, and Weight,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Claire A. Less, 475-498 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Liuzza cites the importance of Isidore of Seville in early Anglo-Saxon astronomical manuscripts, but it should be noted that most scientific lore in pre-Conquest England came from translated Latin (and to a lesser extent Greek) sources.

scriptorium famous for its illuminated manuscripts and its abundance of texts in Arabic, Latin, and several European vernaculars. The fact that a Spanish queen instituted a major center of learning in England has barely received attention by scholars of medieval English literature, even when a manuscript by Matthew Paris, a key name in thirteenth-century English historiography, had a clear connection to her household.⁹⁹ In addition, a number of surviving miscellanies from Oxford and Cambridge have been associated with Eleanor's patronage. Among the many materials that circulated in Eleanor's scriptorium were scientific treatises, and some scholars have posited that direct textual exchanges between the queen and her half-brother might have occurred: "[s]he was almost certainly sent codices by Alfonso X, including a copy of his 1264 version of the Arabic *Ladder of Mohammed*" (Walker 69). Originally written in Castilian, this medical text was retranslated into French and Italian at Alfonso's court, and from there, made its way to England.

Within this range of scientific lore, however, there was a text that specifically impacted Chaucer's literary production and with which it is possible to trace a link to Leonor's scriptorium. Composed around 1272 by the scribes Isaac ben Sid and Judah ben Moses at the behest of Alfonso X, the Alfonsine Tables of Toledo were one of Europe's principal astronomical treatises and restructured the existing Toledan Tables that were largely compilations of the works of al-Zarqali mentioned earlier. The 1272 tables, a series of canons on astronomy, are the Castilian derivative of al-Zarqali's text.

⁹⁹ Regarding Matthew Paris's chronicle *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*, which documents the life of Edward the Confessor, Rose Walker notes that Eleanor probably owned "the only extant copy [of this manuscript made for her] on the occasion of her marriage in 1254 or for her arrival in England" (69).

Like Chaucer's *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, the Alfonsine Tables were partly conceived to vernacularize science, but their merit also lies in their unusual popularity, for they influenced the course of European astronomy well into the fifteenth century. Regarding the text's importance, José Chabás and Bernard R. Goldstein say that: "[it was] not surprising that the most widely used tables in the late Middle Ages originated in Castile because Christians in the 13th century had easiest access there to the Arabic scientific material that had reached its highest scientific level in Muslim Spain or al-Andalus in the 11th century" (1). By the time Eleanor established her scriptorium in England, Oxford and Toledo were interconnected; Toledo, through its reputed school of translators, and Oxford, by virtue of being one Europe's oldest centers of academic learning.

At this point, it may be instructive to invoke that all-encompassing, but perhaps also convenient medieval term that was used to signify displacements physical and otherwise: *translātiō*. Far from overtly defining the act of rendering one language into another, on the medieval practice of translation, Michelle Warren notes that: "[*translatio*] is a multivalent concept meaning translation and a number of other things..." (58). Translations from Oxford to Toledo were thus not only literary and cultural: the physical presence and widespread use of astrolabes in England was possible *because* of Spain starting the late thirteenth century. Establishing this claim is neither novel nor contentious, yet the argument has not been necessarily analyzed in the broader context of medieval Anglo-Spanish cultural exchanges.¹⁰⁰

100 Thanks to the documented existence of Anglo-Spanish cultural contacts prior to the thirteenth century, astrolabes were certainly known to Englishmen before Eleanor's time. For a broader analysis, see Baxter D. Wilson, "The Astrolabe and Medieval English Life," *Popular*

Astrolabes, of course, were not a Spanish invention. The earliest forms of the object were employed in Greece during the Hellenistic period, and travelled, from there, to the Middle East and on to Spain during the Islamic Golden Age. From Spain, England was, according to most scholarship, the instrument's gateway to the rest of Europe, as Owen Gingerich points out: "England seems to have been the gateway for the introduction of the astrolabe from Spain into Western Christendom in the late 13th and 14th centuries" (78)." A material example can be found in the so-called Sloane astrolabe, the earliest such instrument to be constructed in England. This instrument is currently housed at the British Museum and, while we do not have precise information about its origin, its features "show a knowledge of Arabic astronomy and instrumentation."¹⁰¹

Considering the Greek-Arab-Spanish-English relationship here is important if we want to shed light on the Chaucer-Spain connection for one important reason. Sometime during the eighth century, an interesting figure emerges associated with Chaucer's translational endeavor in the *Astrolabe*: the Baghdad-based Judeo-Persian astronomer Massha'allah ibn Atharī (hereafter Messahalla), widely thought to be the author of an Arabic-language astronomical treatise with specifications on how to use an astrolabe. Chaucer does not mention Messahalla in his treatise, and his Arabic version did not survive. However, Latin and vernacular adaptations did, and it is from this Latin version,

Astronomy 57.4 (1949): 155-169. The essay, though somewhat dated, offers a history of the astrolabe in England. Spain is mentioned, but not as fundamental to the exchange of material culture. Where the author's thesis differs with the story I abridge here is in his claim that astrolabes might have first entered England as early as 1091 through Walcher of Mavern, a French astronomer who had been a disciple of Petrus Alfonsi (163). If this is correct, even this early introduction of the astrolabe to England had a Spanish connection because of Petrus. In general though, later scholarship points out to the late thirteenth century as more representative of astrolabe usage in England.

101 See the British Museum's entry for the object at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=54863&partId=1. Access: 3 Aug 2017.

De compositione et operatione astrolabii, that Chaucer is thought to have borrowed widely in order to write significant portions of *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*.¹⁰²

Most scholars and modern editions of Chaucer's treatise point unequivocally to this source because Messahalla's translation was popular in Western Europe. Naturally, as often happened in this kind of cultural exchange, Spain was, again, involved. Messahalla's texts were likely known, studied, and readapted in Toledo, where several other important astronomical texts (vernacular and otherwise) were either authored or translated. The cultural history I have abridged thus far matters, as Sigmund Eisner notes in his variorum edition of Chaucer's text:

Given the eleventh-century Toledo Tables compiled by Azarquiel and translated into Latin in the twelfth century by Gerard of Cremona, given the Alfonsine Tables commissioned by Alfonso X in the thirteenth century, and given that Eleanor of Castile, Alfonso's half sister, was wife to Edward I of England, it seems reasonable to suggest that Latin translations of Massahalla came with her to England. (9)

With this information, England's Spanish connection to the astrolabe cannot, in any way, be made invisible. In the quotation above, Eisner correctly asserts a cultural travel involving Spain. Nevertheless, the author does not clearly explicate how Chaucer might

102 Although little doubt exists about Chaucer's use of this source, some scholarship has sought to broaden or question this argument given the multiplicity of manuscripts associated with *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*. For a reading that considers, in addition to Messahalla, portions of the Oxford miscellany of astronomical material Selden Supra 78, see Michael Masi, "Chaucer, Messahalla and Bodleian Selden Supra 78," *Manuscripta* 19.1 (1975): 36-47. Masi argues that Messahalla's Latin translation of the Arabic treatise survived in similar collections, and that these often conflate a multiplicity of sources, ultimately arguing that Chaucer was familiar with this collection. Interestingly, the very contents of this miscellany point out to Spanish material, such as Arzachel's *Canons* and the Toledan Tables translated by Gerard of Cremona (40).

have appropriated portions of Spanish astronomical material in order to write his treatise, and he falls short of recognizing that Chaucer, in writing *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, was partly writing about a Spanish object-text. In this sense, Eisner's observations, although certainly not dismissive of things Spanish, echo a visible tradition in the modern critical history of *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* that do not see Spain as crucial to the text's cultural fabric. Consider another major edition, the one found in *The Riverside Chaucer*, in which the editors simply do not offer any detailed discussion of Spain in the treatise's introductory entry. In any case, it is possible, because of the extant historical evidence, to claim English astrolabes *and* Chaucer's namesake treatise as partly Spanish. A further look into the structure, sources, and aims of the text reinforces the argument that Spain's influence was anything but invisible or insignificant.

2.5 – A Note on Instruments, Manuscripts, and Sources

An astrolabe is a navigational instrument that permits determination of position of celestial bodies in the sky. Chaucer's treatise suggests that there were already a number of English-built models in the late fourteenth century, many of which may have followed Spanish versions. In reviewing the different models available from this era, one must be careful: based on Chaucer's Prologue in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, it is not exactly possible to determine *which* astrolabe Chaucer used. Although Sigmund Eisner suggests familiarity with two specific models –the Painswick and the Merton– in the introductory notes to the *Astrolabe's* variorum edition, no one object can be definitively ascribed to Chaucer as proof of ownership (9).

This is important to stress since, at present, most astrolabes are housed in museums or are otherwise of great antiquarian interest, and research on English astrolabes from the fourteenth century the subject often yields information related to “Chaucer’s astrolabe” or “Chaucerian astrolabes”. Catherine Eagleton in particular questions this tendency (including Eisner’s Chaucerian connection in relation to the Painswick and Merton models) in order to draw a pertinent link between Chaucer’s probable celebrity status after his death and the material culture of medieval England: “Chaucer’s name on a book could sell it, so also a Chaucerian astrolabe would have held a certain prestige, linked, as it was, to the author who was fast becoming the embodiment of the national literary tradition and a reputed expert on astronomy and alchemy” (324)., In fact, then, Chaucer’s status as a reputed writer may be, in fact, what drove him to write the *Astrolabe* in the first place, thus rendering science an important component of his own authorial consciousness and intent.



Fig. 1: The Painswick Astrolabe, an example of a fourteenth-century English-built astrolabe similar to the ones Chaucer might have been familiar with. The image above shows the ring (“annulus” *Astr* 88-89), the mother (main structure, “moder” *Astr* 96), the names of months and Zodiac signs (“cercle of the names of the monthes; *Astr* 140-141; 153-154), and the rule (“rewle” *Astr* 188-189).¹⁰³

A text such as *A Treatise on the Astrolabes* poses a number of challenges due to the level of technical expertise and familiarity with astronomy (medieval and otherwise) that it demands from its reader. However, none of these difficulties appear to be more daunting than tracing and understanding the text manuscript’s history. With the exception of the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Astrolabe* survives in more manuscripts than any other Chaucerian

103 For a complete explanation and comparison with other objects and sources, see, generally, Eisner’s introduction and Eagleton’s essay. The image above was taken from Eagleton’s text (310).

material. According to Edgar Laird, “the number of manuscripts (thirty-one) suggests a large readership; their diverse characters and qualities suggest a varied one” (410).

A careful investigation of these documents reveals that, despite the presence of Spanish astronomical lore in them, not one manuscript originated in Spain, nor is there evidence of Spanish scribes contributing to their composition.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, establishing a Spanish connection to Chaucer’s *Astrolabe* based solely on manuscript evidence is virtually impossible. Beyond this Spanish question, moreover, miscellanies with portions of the *Astrolabe* can be said to contain what we could call a “base text.” Not that this is not the rule for much medieval literature that has survived to our days, but unlike the *Canterbury Tales*, whose modern editions often derive from well-known manuscripts such as, say, the Ellesmere or the Hengwrt, the different *Astrolabe* manuscripts contain only portions of text that can be definitively ascribed to Chaucer, and none of these coexist with material explicitly associated with Spain. My previous text, the Croxton play, presents no similar problems; first, because the drama derives from a single sixteenth-century manuscript, and second, because the text unfolds in an Spanish locale during the late fifteenth-century, allowing for rich comparisons with the traditional medieval/early modern divide in which relations between England and Spain changed significantly.

The *Astrolabe*, however, permits no easy Spanish route by way of its manuscripts or even by way of its presumed date of composition in the early 1390s since Chaucer’s trip to Spain occurred in 1366, and the cultural traffic between Toledo and England

104 For a good overview of all 31 manuscripts, including provenance, scribes, and importantly, how they made their way to their current locations, see, in particular, Eisner 47-96.

facilitated by Queen Eleanor and earlier English astronomers was at least a century old when Chaucer is thought to have begun his treatise between 1390 and 1395.¹⁰⁵

The majority of the manuscripts of Chaucer's *Astrolabe* were either composed or compiled towards the second half of the fifteenth century, an era that prefigured the rise of unified Spain as a major European power through maritime commerce and early empire-formation. To be sure, commercial and economic relations between England and Iberia could have impacted, as we have seen already, dramatic production in fifteenth-century East Anglia, but an analysis of how then-dominant Spain might have influenced manuscript culture at a larger European level remains to be written. Due to this lack of documentary evidence, then, I wish to reframe the scene of a possible exchange here: *all* of the *Astrolabe*'s manuscripts have a Spanish link insofar as they discuss an object whose English popularity was fomented by Spain, and importantly, incorporate textual histories that were inextricably linked to the Iberian Peninsula.

Tracing the direct source of *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* is by no means an easy task. Textually at least, Chaucer makes no mention of any source whatsoever. The principal text has long been considered Messahalla's Latin translation, with most scholarship establishing as the "primary source" (Eisner 19). Its pertinence to Spain is evidenced by the fact that Toledo was its gateway to Western Europe, and consequently, to England. Secondly, there is the importance of the Toledan Tables. As I explained in the introduction to this chapter, it is important to distinguish between Arzachel's text translated by Gerard of Cremona, and the Castilian offshoot by King Alfonso in 1272.

105 Regarding the text's date of composition, Eisner mentions that there generally is "no question about a *terminus a quo*" (15). John Reidy, writing for *The Riverside Chaucer*, expands on Sigmund's observations regarding the text's scholarly agreed date of composition of 1391, and indicates the likelihood of this date (1092-1093).

Chaucer was likely familiar with Azarkel based on scattered references in the *Astrolabe* and the *Canterbury Tales*. Thirdly, there is a more obscure figure associated with Spain that much scholarship has conflated with Messahala, and that some critics such as Dorothee Metlitzki identify as another source for the Chaucerian treatise: “[T]he Latin treatise on the astrolabe generally attributed to Messahala... was a product of the school of Maslama al- Majrītī, the eleventh-century Spanish astronomer” (76).¹⁰⁶

Metlitzki does not go into further detail, but if her instincts are sound, al-Majriti’s importance cannot be overstated enough: he authored Arabic-language treatises on the astrolabe that were later translated into Spanish, the first European vernacular to ever decode such technical language.¹⁰⁷ Evidently, there is nothing surprising about that given that Spain had Arabic as one of its literary languages, and highlighting the Arabic influence in the Spanish language seems unnecessary. However, considering that Chaucer’s text is a vernacular adaptation itself, and that a variety of scientific literature *beyond* the Toledan Tables was produced in Castilian throughout the thirteenth century, a case can be made about an English author indirectly furthering a Spanish tradition of empowering a vernacular, and recognizing its suitability as a scientific language. In sum,

106 For this specific argument, Metlitzki says that: “several Latin manuscripts attribute [Messahalla’s translation] to Maslama al-Majriti, while the Arabic text of what has been known as Maslama’s treatise on the astrolabe cites the author as Ibn al-Saffar, one of Maslama’s disciples” (271).

107 See, in particular, Julio Samsó, “Maslama al-Majrītī and the Alphonsine Book on the Construction of the Astrolabe,” *Journal for the History of Arabic Science Aleppo* 4.1 (1980): 3-8. The author begins his essay by stating that “the Alphonsine astronomical and astrological works have an obvious interests for scholars of Arabic science, not only because they sometimes provide translations of lost Arabic originals, but also because they bear witness to the diffusion of Arabic astronomical books which were being translated into Romance languages in the thirteenth century” (3). For a more recent discussion on the origin of a Spanish-language tradition of scientific writing, see also Julio Samsó, “Las traducciones astronómicas alfonsíes y la aparición de una prosa científica castellana” *Alcanate: Revista de Estudios Alfonsíes* 6 (2008-2009): 39-51.

whether or not the *Astrolabe* has one or many direct sources is not the question here – archival history tells us that, in some way or another, the possible sources for *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* all travelled through Spain.

2.6 – Middle English 101 (And Its Spanish Connection)

A Treatise on the Astrolabe embodies all the principal aspects of medieval literary production: translation, adaptation, textual travel, layering, and appropriation, just to name a few.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, it has, in the words of its author, a clear and simple purpose: to explain the uses of an astrolabe in simple English for ten-year old, “Lyte Lowys” (Little Lewis):

Brede and Milke for Children

Lyte Lowys, my sone I aperceveye wel by certeyne
evydences thyn abilite to lerne sciences touching nombres
and proporciouns. And wel considre I thy besy praier
in special to lerne the tretyse of the astrolabie. (1.1-5)¹⁰⁹

108 However, the *Astrolabe* is also subject to the arbitrary processes that govern the idiosyncratic nature of a canon. Regarding this tendency in earlier literary periods, Carol Symes notes that: “the mechanisms which assure the survival and promotion of some cultural artifacts and not others are complex, contingent, chancy, and chauvinistic. That is why *Beowulf* is on the syllabus and not *Judith*, why we have so much Homer and so little Sappho... Medieval processes of textual transmission have exercised less effect on the reception and interpretation of medieval ‘literature’ than modern trends in preservation, proscription, and ‘recognition’, or modern habits of collection, categorization, and use” (19-20). For her analysis on the idea of a Middle English canon and its larger relation to medieval textual culture, see “Manuscript, Matrix, Modern Canon,” in *Oxford Twenty-First Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, 7-22 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

109 Determining the identity of “Little Lewis” remains controversial. Based solely on biographical evidence from Crow’s and Olson’s *Life Records*, there is no record on the birth of any Lewis Chaucer in the entries belonging to 1380. The opening lines to the *Astrolabe* have long led critics to establish that Chaucer could have had a son named Lewis (evidence regarding the existence of another, older son Thomas is, conversely, well attested), and that the treatise could have been written around 1390. Older scholarship has linked the figure of this Little Lewis with Lewis Clifford, a Lollard with ties to Spain. For these alternative theses, see,

...

And somme of hem ben to harde to thy
tendir age of x yere to conceve. This, tretise, divided in 5
parties, wol I shewe the under fill light reules and naked
wordes in Englishe; for Latyn canst thou yit but small, my
litel sone. (1.25-28)

There are, in these lines, several points worth mentioning. Beyond his purported family connections (we don't know conclusively whether Lewis was, indeed, Chaucer's son) and hinting towards a possible date of writing for the *Astrolabe*, Chaucer makes a bold and interesting choice in the opening lines to his treatise: he seeks to explore the linguistic potential of vernacular English with a touch of science. Presumably, that would have been extremely unusual in the late fourteenth century considering that there was virtually no scientific writing in English, as Ralph Hannah argues: "...prose translation begins rather fitfully in the 1370s with scientific translation" (499).¹¹⁰ Another notable element in that opening fragment is Chaucer's unequivocal indication that his treatise is, in fact, a translation, but criticism has not reworked that argument in relation to a possible

G.L. Kittredge "Lewis Chaucer or Lewis Clifford?," *Modern Philology* 14.9 (1917): 513-518; and, importantly, Thomas A. Reisner and Mary E. Reisner, "Lewis Clifford and the Kingdom of Navarre," *Modern Philology* 75.4 (1978): 385-390. The authors posit that it is entirely possible that Clifford be the addressee in the *Astrolabe* given his Gascon interests. Elsewhere in this chapter I stressed the importance of the Gascon throne and its Anglo-Spanish connections in the thirteenth century.

110 Although the context for this quotation comes from an essay on alliterative poetry in the mid-fourteenth century, it may serve to illustrate Chaucer's remarkable precedent in translating science into English. The other two examples mentioned by Hanna in the 1370s, John Lelamour's *Macer* and Henry Daniel's *Liber Uricrisiarum* (neither of which are texts about astronomy) concern work that, according to the author, has not been readily available in good modern editions. See Ralph Hanna, "Alliterative Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace, 488-512 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Spanish interest.¹¹¹ Based solely on the text, it might seem hard to do so: there is not a single mention of a Spanish source. Earlier in this chapter I suggested that, given the cultural transit of the astrolabe, Chaucer's own travels to Spain, as well as Chaucer's awareness of his own political and historical reality, it is likely that he understood Spain's importance in terms of astronomy. In the *Astrolabe's* Prologue, there might be an extremely obscure reading of this situation when he instructs Lewis to use the astrolabe in relation to the latitude of Oxford:

...therefore have I yoven the a suffisant astrolabie as for oure orizonte compowned after the latitude of Oxenforde, upon whiche by mediacioun of this litel tretys, I purpose to teche the a certain nombre of conculsions aperteyning to the same instrument... (1.7-11)

Sigmund Eisner posits, quoting John Fisher, that “[the] astrolabe was to be used with the Oxford-based tables of John Somer and Nicholas Lynne” (104), two English astronomers that appear mentioned in Chaucer's text shortly after that, and that José Chabás and Bernard Goldstein cite as evidence of the popularity of the Alfonsine Tables in England. However, here I wish to provide an alternative reading. While it is entirely possible for Chaucer to have followed English-authored astronomical tables in order to calibrate his astrolabe, it is no coincidence that Spanish-language tables employed a similar principle (i.e., measuring latitude and center) in relation to Toledo. See, for example, the opening segments of the Alfonsine Tables of 1272:

¹¹¹ For a compelling argument that debates the traditional scholarly view of the *Astrolabe* as *only* a translation, see Carol Lipson, “‘I N’ Am But A Lewd Compilatore’: Chaucer’s *Treatise on the Astrolabe* as Translation,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84.2 (1983): 192-200. In particular, Lipson credits Chaucer’s own abilities as a writer of science given that the question of the text’s sources has historically remained controversial.

[8] E porque amava los saberes e los preciava,
mandoles haser los ynstrumentos que dixo Ptholomeo en su libro
del Almagesto sigud son las amarillas y otros ynstrumentos. [9] E
mandonos retificar en la çibdad de Toledo ques una de las
çibdades principales de España, guardela Dios. [10] En ella fue el
rectificar de Asarquiel. Esto mando por endereçar y corregir las
diversidades y desacordanças que paresçieron en algunos lugares
de algunos de los planetas et en otros movimientos.¹¹²

Since King Alfonso loved learning about all these things, he
ordered that instruments be made, many of which Ptolemy
describes in his *Almagest*. And he ordered us to calculate these
dispositions in relation to Toledo, one of Spain's main cities (may
God bless it), where Arzachel himself made his calculations. King
Alfonso made us correct and rectify all the discrepancies that
appeared in some of these planets and movements.¹¹³

Although the goal of the segment above is not specifically to theorize or explain the uses
of an astrolabe", there are invisible connections between the opening of the Alfonsine
Tables and Chaucer's *Astrolabe*. First, the allusions to Oxford and Toledo stresses those
cities' status as centers of scientific learning; and second, the mention of instruments and
mechanisms of astronomical calculation is well attested in both excerpts. Observe, as
well, that the Alfonsine text situates itself as belonging to a culture of translation *and*
astronomer-translators. Specifically, Ptolemy and Azarkel –both of whom Chaucer read
and knew– appear as important *auctores*. In his Prologue at least, Chaucer does not

¹¹² I have edited punctuation in my transcription of the original Castilian text.

¹¹³ My translation. This is a Spanish transcription of the Alfonsine Tables by Jehuda ben
Moses, a Jewish astronomer from Toledo. To read the superb English-language study and
edition of this text, see José Chabás and Bernard R. Goldstein, *The Alfonsine Tables of Toledo*
(Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2003).

attribute his own knowledge of astronomy to anyone; however, he *does* employ a move similar to one we find in the Alfonsine text when he says that:

But natheles suffise to these trewe
conclusions in Englisshe, as wel as sufficith to these
noble clerkes Grekes these same conclusions in Greke.
And to Arabiens in Arabike. And to Jewes in Ebrewe and
to the Latyn folke in Latyn, which Latyn folke had hem
first oute of othere diverse langages and wroten hem in
her oune tunge, that is to seyn Latyn. (1.23-29)

In the lines above, Chaucer makes a seemingly careful genealogy of the traditions he is indebted to in relation to his own English writing. Indeed, as a learned astronomer, the Middle English author cites Greek, Arab, Latin, and Jewish writers as central to his translational project. The mention of the Jews might be worth considering here because Messahalla was Judeo-Persian, but in his *translation* from Ancient to Greece to medieval England, Chaucer curiously forgets or omits the one tradition that conceivably brought him the astrolabe.

Numerous critics see the Prologue to the *Astrolabe* as a primeval example of what we could call translation theory in Middle English. Tellingly, as Roger Ellis explains, this is seen in the fact that Chaucer had the “perfectly straightforward—but thoroughly modern and, for his time, radical—conclusion that an original text exists only as realized in different versions...Latin, from which Chaucer is proposing to translate the work, is not the origin and ultimate point of reference of the work” (446). It is possible, therefore, to throw another transit route into this translational equation. If Latin is neither an origin nor an end (note, in fact, his careful assertion that the Romans themselves translated treatises from other languages), and if English is a viable means to embody cultural dislocations,

Spain's invisible role bears importance in this context, so much so, that it may be the chief link in the route from Ancient Greece to medieval England. It *is* strange, of course, that Chaucer makes this link effectively invisible here.

Shortly after stressing the prominence that cultural and linguistic translation carries to understand his treatise, Chaucer does the ultimate act of vernacular validation; he upholds that a text in Middle English – however simple – is just as good as any text in Latin, so good, in fact, that it is the best medium to correct any available treatises on the astrolabe:

“...I shewe the in my light Englisshe
as trewe conclusions touching this mater, and not oonly as
trewe but as many and as subtile conclusiouns as ben shewid
in Latyn in eny commune tretys of the astrelabie, konne
me more thanke. (1.41-45)

So far, so good. However, I hear, in these assertions, invisible Spanish echoes. That Chaucer was familiar with Spanish scientific material needs, by now, no further proof. Nonetheless, the texts that I have mostly mentioned here, the Toledan and the Alfonsine Tables, represent only a small fraction of the vernacular astronomical material written in Spain before the time of Chaucer. Indeed, Chaucer's scientific expertise might lead us to speculate that he could have been at least somewhat familiar with portions of other Alfonsine texts. In this sense, the tremendously important compilation most commonly known as *Libros del saber de astronomía* (*Books on Astronomical Learning*), is important to cite precisely because it sets a remarkable precedent on vernacularizing science.

Like the 1272 tables, the *Libros* were commissioned by King Alfonso and included, importantly, two treatises on the astrolabe, as well as numerous texts with astrological and astronomical dispositions. The first book in the collection, the *Libro de la ochava esfera* (*Book on the Eighth Sphere*), opens with a curious statement:

Este es el libro de las estrellas fixas que son en el ochauo cello que mandó trasladar de caldeo et de árábigo en language castellano el Rey D. Alfonso...por su mandado Yhuda el Coheneso, su alphaquin, et Guillem Arremon Daspa, so clérigo...Et despues lo endereçó, et lo mandó componer este Rey sobredicho e tolló las razones que entendió eran soueíanas et que non eran en castellano drecho et puso las otras que entendió que complian, et quanto language enderçólo el por sise.¹¹⁴

This is the book on the fixed stars that are found in the eighth heaven, a Castilian translation from the Chaldean and the Arabic language commissioned by King Alfonso and undertaken by his physician Yehuda Cohen and his clerk, Guillermo Arremon Daspa...And then the King perfected (this text) by getting rid of all the unnecessary segments that were not written in plain Castilian; he himself flattened the text by making language abundantly clear.¹¹⁵

In Chaucer's opening, as well as in this rare Alfonsine excerpt, the exact same principle is reproduced: two translators acknowledge that their creations are hardly "original", but they decidedly adapt the new text in the clearest possible form of vernacular. Chaucer in particular makes it explicit that his language must be sufficiently plain so that it can be

¹¹⁴ I have edited punctuation in my transcription of the Castilian original. See the nineteenth-century facsimile edition by Manuel Rico y Sinobas, *Libros del saber de astronomía de Don Alfonso X de Castilla* (Madrid: Eusebio Aguado, 1863).

¹¹⁵ My translation.

read by a child. The Alfonsine scribe, for his part, makes a similar statement by saying he has “flattened” (*endereçó*) Castilian, and in that way, improved it.

These two separate, scattered comparisons between a Castilian and an English text of similar caliber and preoccupations suggest, I would argue, an unquestionable fact: in Chaucer’s invention of English science, there are invisible and untold Spanish stories. To be sure, signaling comparisons like the ones I draw between Chaucerian and the Alfonsine science amounts to an exercise in literary archaeology, but this might be the only reasonable way to stress the *Astrolabe*’s Spanish genealogy given that Chaucer himself renders them obscure.

After drawing attention to the craft of his language and shortly before dissecting the parts of his treatise, Chaucer enunciates what is perhaps the most famous line in the *Astrolabe*: “I am bout a lewde compiler of the labour of olde astrologiens and have it translated in myn Englisshe only for thy doctrine” (1.49-51). Implicitly, Chaucer emphasizes his authority by evoking the wisdom and example of astronomers, and by supporting the very existence of his treatise in the antiquity of other texts. Interestingly, however, the strategy that Chaucer finds to underscore his authority is by diminishing it, as Roger Ellis notes: “Chaucer presents himself as humbly dependent upon an authoritative original which he is proposing to make more widely available, under correction from the learned, to readers who would otherwise have no access to it” (446). In this manner, Chaucer does what any good medieval author would have done in order to make a text legitimate and valid, but I would also argue, in the context of medieval astronomical material, that there is a veiled Spanish reading in those lines.

Consider another segment of the Alfonsine *Libro*, an early portion the which the text's reliance on Ptolemy is profusely expressed:

Mas porque Ptolomeo fue el sabio mas conncoscido que todos en la arte de la Astrologia, et endereçó la esfera en que se demuestra la forma del cielo et de las estrellas que en él son. Et fizo primeramente el *Astrolabio redondo* á la forma de esta esfera sobredicha...Et porque él fué el maestro de fazer estas cosas et endereçallas.

[Because Ptolemy was the most learned sage in the art of astrology, and he straightened the sphere onto which the sky is projected and the stars that are found in it. And he made, firstly, the round astrolabe in keeping with this sphere...this is because he was the master of these things, as well as of their straightening].¹¹⁶

Though we evidently do not know who invented the astrolabe and under which circumstances, it is still interesting to see how the Spanish text traces a direct connection with Ptolemy in favor of a greater form of vernacularity. Chaucer, even if he does not mention Ptolemy in his *Astrolabe*, finds a similar organizing principle for his treatise, suggesting, again, a possible Spanish route of contact.

Like many Chaucerian works, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* is unfinished. According to the design announced in his Prologue, the treatise was to have five parts, but only two exist: a first segment that describes an astrolabe, and a second segment that describes its uses. This particular arrangement, critics say, is what the text owes to Messahalla (Lipson 193). Whether or not Chaucer followed Messahalla closely does not

¹¹⁶ My translation.

interest me here. If anything, Messahalla's text is relevant to my argument only insofar it circulated through Spain. Going back to the general structure of the *Astrolabe*, Chaucer distributes it as follows: Part 1 names the different parts to an astrolabe; Part 2 teaches its various applications (with the use of tables); Part 3 intended to explain how to measure the longitude and latitude of fixed celestial bodies; and Part 4 explains the movement of celestial bodies (particularly the moon), and Part 5 was intended to provide a general history and theory of astrology. In short, the treatise was conceived to be much more than just a technical manual on how to use an astrolabe; it was to be a veritable medieval encyclopedia on astronomy much like the ones produced over the course of three hundred years in the Iberian Peninsula but especially in eleventh-and-twelfth century Toledo.

Indeed, one needs only look at the general structure of any major Alfonsine text, including instructions on how to build and use an astrolabe, to ponder that Chaucer, in addition to the Latin original he is supposed to have used, must have had vernacular examples. We know, after all, that he relished in reading and translating French and Italian texts to come up with novel English creations. Thus, Yeager's initial question at the beginning of this chapter that asked if Chaucer read Spanish at all might have, after all, a lingering answer. At this point, a thorough comparison of Spanish tables and astronomical treatises *vis-à-vis* Chaucer's text is rather impractical (and the object of years of work at best) for the purposes of this chapter. However, because language and translation matters, I'd like to point out to another linguistic aspect Chaucer appears to take for granted that involves Spain: the presence of Arabic words and terms in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*.

In describing the processes of translation and vernacularization for writing science in Middle English, Irma Taavitsainen notes that: “translators of scientific writings struggled with many difficulties in both syntax and lexicon to find adequate expressions in English, since scientific writing in the vernacular was new and the conventions had to be created” (380). Accordingly, Chaucer’s text abounds with words of Arabic origin that are not properly defined as such. This is a radically different approach to translation than that found in some Alfonsine texts. To exemplify, consider two similar segments that explain, respectively, the concentric circles parallel to the horizon, and the angular orientation on a virtual sphere: the almucantars (“almykanteras”, *Astr.* 268-270), and the azimuths (*Astr.* 287).

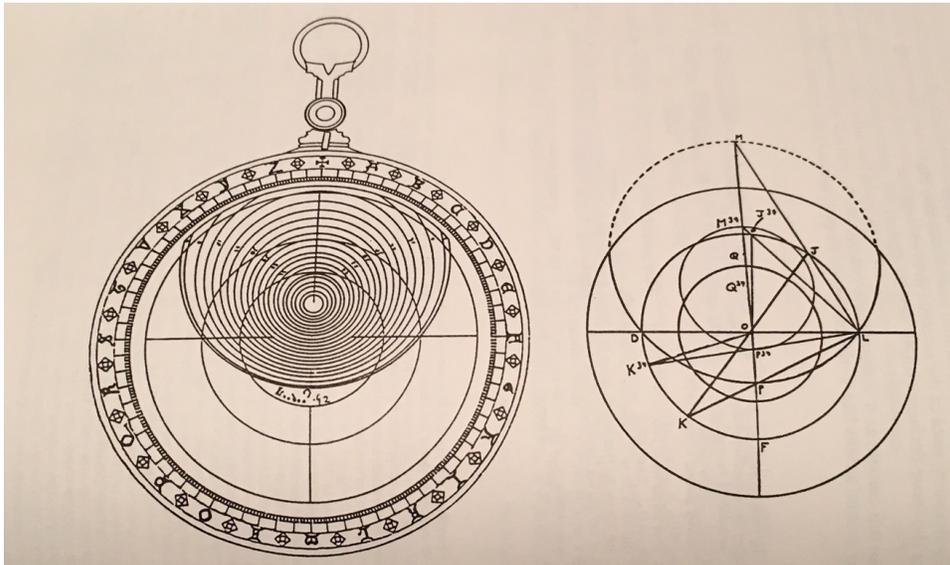


Fig. 2: The almucantars in an astrolabe projection like the one Chaucer might have been familiar with in Eisner’s variorum edition (154).

According to John D. North, almucantars are “circles of equal altitude concentric with the observer’s zenith parallel to the horizon” (100). Chaucer, for his part, defines them as follows:

Upon this forseid plate ben compassed certeyn cercles
that highten almycanteras, of whiche somme of hem semen parfit
cercles and somme semen inparfit. The centre that
stondith amyddes the narwest cercle is clepid the cenyth,
and ne therist cercle or the first cercle
is clepid the orizonte... (1.267-273)

In that brief description, Chaucer materializes, at once three linguistic traditions: Latin, Arabic, and vernacular. Note, in fact, how the author is careful in explaining in English what the Arabic word cannot. At this point in his treatise, Chaucer, it seems, is thoroughly at home using words from a language vastly different than his own, but again, in that Arabic-English connection, the Spanish link is not duly recognized. Needless to say, a in-depth reading of the *Astrolabe* reveals no words of Spanish origin, but if Arabic is used throughout Chaucer’s text (especially to name constellations that also have Latin equivalents), it is, again, thanks to the cultural presence of an invisibilized culture.

The earlier Castilian variant found in Alfonso’s *Libro* (specifically, the *Libro del astrolabio redondo*, or *Book on the Round Astrolabe*) essentially transmits the same information, but with a different twist:

De cuemo deuen sennalar en la espera los cercos empontizos á que dizen en
aráuigo almocantarat...

.....

Quando esto quisieres fazer, pon la espera delante de ti, et cata el punto do se taló
el cerco de mediodia con el cerco de oriente et de occidente, et describe en él
punto del zont de la cabeça et sea escrípto de tal manera que lo puedas rematar.”

On how to signal, with an astrolabe, the bridged circles that are called almucantars in Arabic...

.....

If you'd like to know this, place your sphere in front of you and measure the point where you located midday's circle with the eastern and western circles. Then use that measure to define the zenith on top and describe it in such a way that you don't forget it".¹¹⁷

An interesting feature of the Castilian text is that it indicates its indebtedness to Arabic but also supplies the Arabic word for a native term "cercos empontizos". Additionally, the tone and structure of the explanatory remarks recalls in many ways, Chaucer's remarkable didacticism. Again, the likelihood that the English author may have known or used a Spanish vernacular text to compose his *Astrolabe* is, by now, not entirely implausible.

Due to their circular nature, azimuths, a unit of measurement, can be used to determine the length or angle of an arch projected into the horizon. In Chaucer's astrolabe, azimuths are clearly marked and divided into 24 segments (to allow for a greater latitude). Chaucer describes them both as "clawes of a loppe" (1.284), or spider legs that cross the almucantars. This webbed, concentric design allows, according to Chaucer, for the azimuths to show direction depending on the sun's angles.

¹¹⁷ My translation. It is also entirely possible that "espera" (sphere) and "cerco" allude, collectively, to the sun as a star.

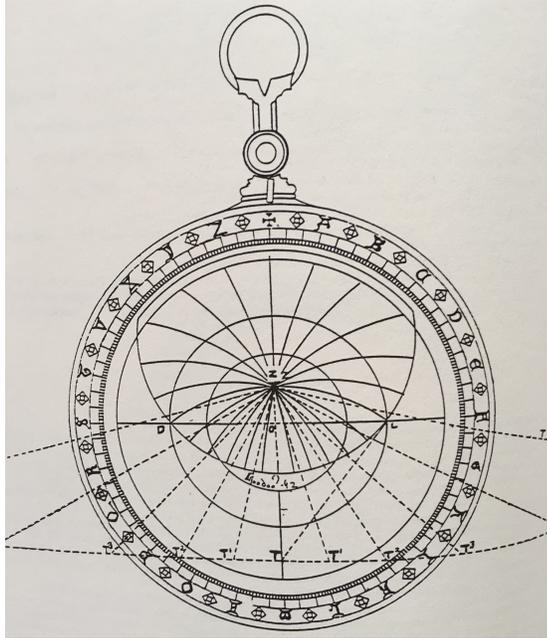


Fig. 3: Azimuts, Eisner (156).

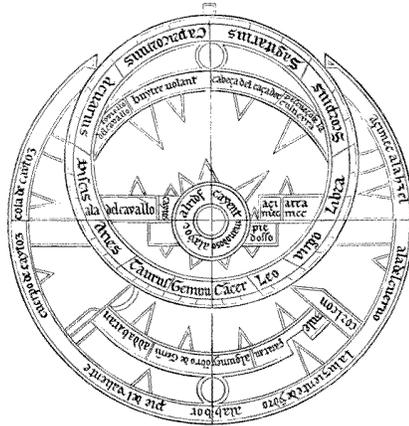


Fig. 4: Azimuts, *Libro del astrolabio redondo* (235).

The Alfonsine astrolabe, to be sure, lacks the metaphoric descriptions of the spider or the woman's hairnet ("wommans calle"; 285) that Chaucer uses to explain the function of azimuths to the imagined ten-year old recipient of the text.¹¹⁸ However, the editors of the facsimile edition of the *Libro del astrolabio redondo* indicate that imagining the astrolabe as a spider web is hardly a Chaucerian invention: Ptolemy himself might have envisioned a similar mechanism to signal, locate, and measure celestial bodies on a circular structure (XXVI). This, naturally, might also carry an implicit Spanish overtone. If we consider that Gerald of Cremona translated the *Almagest* in Toledo, and that he also translated Arzachel's tables into Latin, a compelling case can be made regarding the invisible, but not improbable transmission of Ptolemaic principles from Spain to England through the use of tables and astrolabes.

From a purely textual (and even aesthetic) point of view, Chaucer's *Astrolabe* is an exceedingly demanding text: no modern reader can tackle it without also delving deeply into the history of medieval astronomy. Even some of its most enthusiastic defenders have called it "forbiddingly technical" (Jambeck 117). One could argue, of course, that because it is a Chaucerian text, the treatise also bears upon the literary. However, the vast majority of criticism has traditionally studied this manual either purely as an example of vernacular scientific prose, or, more importantly, as a text that enhanced Chaucer's career as a translator (Cole 1165). For that reason, much scholarship deals only with the Prologue (where Chaucer sets forth his theory of translation), and the first

¹¹⁸ Edgar Laird posits that the intended audience for Chaucer's *Astrolabe* is a "compound one", meaning that the text's pedagogical scope would have indeed considered a larger group of intimate readers, mostly friends and Chaucer's inner courtly circle (439). For a similar overview of the text's imagined readership and its intertextuality, see, in particular, Jenna Mead, "Geoffrey Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*," *Literature Compass* 3/5 (2006): 973-991.

segments of Part 1 (where Chaucer endearingly explains the components of an astrolabe to Little Lewis). Indeed, if as the popular, college-encyclopedia narrative dictates, Chaucer redeemed English in the fourteenth century, the *Astrolabe* must then become central, and not invisible, when talking about the author's contributions to language, translation, and importantly, cultural integration. And, within that discourse, Spain's centrality in the process must also be redeemed.

Part 2 is the arguably the dullest and least studied segment of Chaucer's unfinished treatise. The exacting, appealing language of Part 1 becomes, in Part 2, a long catalogue of mathematical calculations, Zodiac positions, observations on altitude, times of day, ascendants, planetary tables, equinoxes, and the like.

Although his Prologue states that the second part will deal exclusively with how to use an astrolabe, he calls that segment "conclusiouns," almost as if anticipating that the text would remain unfinished. In the sea of constellations, numbers, and specific measurements of time, day, and year that can be carried out with an astrolabe, an obscure, but *tangible* reference to Spain emerges, the only such mention in the entire book.

Conclusions # 44 and #45 demonstrate a technique to calculate the middle point (mean motus) of a planet, which can be done, according to Chaucer, by using the Toledo Tables:

...And yf hit so be that hit be more or lasse, loke many yeris hit passithe, and with so many entere into thy tabelis in the furst lyne ther as is wreten anni collecti et expansi...

[45]. *Another manere to knowe the mene mote.*

Whan thou wolte make the mene mote of eny planete to be by Arsechieles tables, take thy rote, the whyche is for the yere of oure lord 1397 and yf so be that thy yere be

passed the date, wryte that date, and than write that nombere of the yeris.¹¹⁹

According to Eisner and other critics, the tables mentioned in Conclusion # 44 and # 45 are the Toledo Tables composed by Arzakel (319-321).¹²⁰ As the scholar points out and I echo earlier in this chapter, when Chaucer began the *Astrolabe* Arzakel's text was one the principal astronomical references in use at Oxford. In the reference above, Chaucer seeks to "find for a given moment a planet's precise position on the zodiac and on its own epicycle" (Eisner 319). Significantly, however, it seems odd that the *only* endorsement of a Spanish text and a Spanish author comes near the end of the treatise, almost as if Chaucer had tacitly instrumentalized things Spanish through his own exercise in astronomy. In sum, in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, Geoffrey Chaucer takes advantage of centuries of cultural and linguistic exchange between Spain and England, and crystallizes a trajectory that began in Greece but that changed radically in medieval Spain before being translated onto the West.

This chapter, therefore, has sought to provide, rather than a textually-based analysis on the *Astrolabe* (which is next to impossible unless one's goal is purely philological, a kind of analysis that, for the purposes of my chapter, might not be entirely suitable), an alternative history for Chaucer in Spain that rescues astronomy from the margins of the invisible. One wonders, therefore, why a fuller decoding of Spanish

¹¹⁹ Although there is some debate regarding the authenticity and authorship of this portion of the text, which belongs to the so-called "supplementary conclusions" found in several manuscripts. Two major editions, *The Riverside Chaucer*, as well as Eisner's variorium text, include it as an integral part of the *Astrolabe*.

¹²⁰ For an argument on how the Tables help with Chaucer's desired astronomical calculations, see Eisner's footnotes, especially with regards to how years can be calculated. The technicalities of this claim, as well as the mathematical reading it entails, might not be, however, immediately relevant to my analysis.

astronomical references, be it from Arzachel or from King Alfonso, has not generated as much interest in the history of Chaucer studies. In that sense, surely those stars can chart a new constellation, albeit obscure like the Toledan procedures from the Orleans cleric from the *Franklin's Tale*.

2.7 – Orientations

In both English and Spanish, the verb “to orient” (*orientar*) has similar connotations, but one cannot help but think, from an exclusively etymological standpoint, that the word recalls, in many ways, something due east. Throughout this section, I demonstrated how Chaucer might have facilitated textual exchanges between England and Spain by translating and decentering Arabic astronomical lore in the context of fourteenth-century material culture. But beyond the evident themes of pedagogy and vernacularization, the *Astrolabe* is also an example of a literary appropriation that allowed medieval England to access a particular set of Spanish scientific texts that, when considered as a whole, *might* invite –if marginally– scholarly analyses under the larger agenda of “Orientalism,” a concept I explore in favor of my main text, *Floris and Blancheflour*, throughout my next chapter.¹²¹

121 This term will be considered broadly. From a conventional Saidian perspective, as well as from a medieval one, *Floris and Blancheflour* can be categorized as both Oriental and Orientalist. The text imagines the Orient to be at once foreign and fear-producing, but also alluring (the same textual strategies all Orientalist romances – English and otherwise – employ), and the text’s conception of the East would have been grossly different from its “real-life” form, as suggested by Anna Czarnowus in her introduction to her study on Middle English oriental romance (1-36). Czarnowus specifically suggests that the genre often blurs the distinction between the Orient in its imagined, fictional version versus its actual historical, complexly nuanced forms. My intention in this chapter is *not* to theorize the notion of “Orient”, but to examine it in relation to the author’s representation of Spain.

Indeed, Chaucer's fourteenth century, in keeping with larger European cultural and political trends, had catalyzed the concept relatively well: crusading, as well as the rapid expansion of Islam across the Middle East and many parts of Europe, helped build an ideological and discursive barrier that genres such as romance propagated across different languages and cultures for a good three hundred years. But if the *Astrolabe* is any indication that, at least in the English context, narratives containing "Eastern" (which includes, of course Spanish) material can become invisible, it was probably due to a palpable tradition of othering Spain that was *de rigueur* in England throughout the 1400s but that originated, as we shall see, with a detoured pilgrimage the century before.

CHAPTER 3
THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY
Floris and Blancheflour: The Spanish Middle English Romance¹²²

3.1 – An Old Story

If *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* can be considered to provide a Middle English Orientalist reading of things Spanish, the popular romance *Floris and Blancheflour* might be the unequivocal beginner of that tradition among Middle English texts.¹²³ As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, the thirteenth century saw fruitful alliances between England and Spain marked by intermarriages, the direct exchange of scientific texts, crusading endeavors, similarities in the treatment of Jewish communities, and ultimately, an ancillary travel of literary culture. Here, I reflect on the consequences of such a travel by examining the most prolific of medieval narrative styles, and by re-Hispanicizing a

122 Spellings for the title differ. Throughout this chapter, I will cite from A.B. Taylor, *Floris and Blancheflour: A Middle English Romance*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927), as well as Erik Kooper, *Sentimental and Humorous Romances: Floris and Blancheflour, Sir Degrevant, The Squire of Low Degree, The Tournament of Tottenham, and the The Feast of Tottenham* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006). Taylor's edition is based on the Egerton and Auchinleck MSS. Scholars, however, also use George McKnight, ed. *King Horn, Floriz and Blaunchefflur, The Assumption of Our Lady* (EETS / Oxford: 1962).

123 For a compelling study on Orientalism and Middle English romance, see Anna Czarnowus, *Fantasies of the Other's Body in Middle English Oriental Romance* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013). The author maintains that popular English romance is innately "corporeal" and traces the history of that tradition from the late Middle Ages to the European orientalist fantasies of the nineteenth century. Czarnowus's reading of *Floris and Blancheflour* focuses on what she calls "enslaved bodies", arguing that slavery in the romance, both literal and symbolic, results in "curious metamorphoses in terms of gender, religion, and even ethnicity" (96). Indeed, much scholarship has insisted on the characters' cultural hybridity across different versions and adaptations, and Czarnowus notes that the Middle English text makes these even more permeable. Her analysis, however, admittedly favors the physicality of the protagonists over the fluid cultural categories that feed into the tale's perceived background of slavery, a background that becomes enriched if studied in the light of Muslim Spain.

best-seller that underwent numerous adaptations over the course of three centuries and whose European inception and terminus seems to have been in Spain.¹²⁴

That romance stemmed in many ways out of post-feudal and courtly anxieties in the twelfth century is hardly a new argument among scholars.¹²⁵ But in more localized contexts, the genre also underscored complex relations between cultures and territories. Early insular romances, for instance, endorse the Norman colonial project in England and at once reinforce and blur notions of national identity and the ancestral, lingering tensions between the English and the French-speaking Normans.¹²⁶ Later in the thirteenth

124 The precise origins of the story continue to be a matter of controversy. David Arbesú-Fernández maintains that “the vast majority of critics agree that the legend originated in the East, in an Oriental or Arabic country, only to be taken later to continental Europe” (9). However, in terms of the European transmission of the narrative, there is reasonable consensus that *Floris and Blancheflour* became reconfigured in Spain and transformed into romance mode there, according to Patricia Grieve. See, in particular, Patricia Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflour and the European Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Grieve offers a comparative analysis of Spanish, French, Italian, English, and Scandinavian versions of *Floris and Blancheflour* to conclude that the European outset of the story lies in Spain. Similarly, Helen Cooper suggests that the text “probably came from a different cultural source, Arabic Spain: the same culture that might have inspired some elements in the Provençal tradition of love-poetry” (28).

125 The relationship between early romance and courtly politics in Europe (especially France and Norman England) is extensively analyzed in the third volume (*La Société Courtoise: Littérature de Cour et Littérature Courtoise. La Cour d’Angleterre comme Centre Littéraire sous les Rois Angevins*) of Reto R. Bezzola, *Les Origines et la Formation de la Littérature Courtoise en Occident, 500-1200* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1965). Bezzola makes a case for the invention of romance as a political strategy of the Plantagenêts in England, an argument that has proven durable in historicist analyses of the genre to our days.

126 Though frequently identified as a French genre, British and American scholarship has noted the contributions of Norman England in the development of romance. The definitive study of insular romance as a distinct body of writings independent from their Continental counterparts remains Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). For a more recent discussion on the impact of Norman colonialist practices and their impact on written culture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England, see Laura Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

century, the landscape brought about by the Crusades subjected the genre to new political realities, as Geraldine Heng admirably discusses in *Empire of Magic*.¹²⁷

Heng's study established a clear departure from scholarship that had approached Middle English romance in purely historicist, formalist, and most notably, nationalistic terms. She was able to prove how the genre operated interconnectedly beyond paradigms of race, class, nationality, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion. An important contribution of hers was the deconstruction of the Arthurian legend –the dominant narrative matter in medieval romance– from a previously unnoticed perspective: “the story of King Arthur [...] begins in the East” (21). Contacts with the East, Heng argues, proved fundamental to the survival of the genre in England from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, and if romance was so conspicuously present in medieval literary history, it was partly due to the existence of a kind of trans-cultural framework of fictions that began and ended in the East (1-61). But for all its rigorous defiance of traditionally-held viewpoints regarding the history and development of medieval romance – especially in its non-English contexts – Heng's study omits any serious discussion of the one European territory which effectively enclosed that idea of East within its borders, geographical and otherwise; and, that, as Dorothee Metlitzki suggests and I echo, might have provided England with an endless supply of fantasies about what it meant to be “Oriental”.

127 Heng's book is in keeping with a notable scholarly trend during the early 2000s that saw the use of postcolonial theory and criticism to broaden the scope of medieval studies. The field of English literature alone has since seen several important contributions, and medieval postcolonial studies remain vibrant. For readings in this vein, see, for example, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed. *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001); and Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, eds. *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Floris and Blancheflour, the topic of this discussion, might be, I argue, the Middle English Oriental romance par excellence, as the text covers, and most importantly, exhausts and transforms all of the schemes and formulae that abound in this kind of narratives: a despotic emir, Saracen captors, references to luxurious otherworlds, gardens filled with beautiful maidens, othered bodies, and foreign or decidedly “Eastern” locales such as Babylon and Spain. Written around 1250, the text is one of the earliest Middle English romances. Versions of the story existed in several European vernaculars, but most of these can be directly traced – as often happens in the case of romance – to an anterior text in Old French, in this case the poem *Floire et Blancheflor*, written in 1150. *Floire* differs from a later “popular” version that was also the source for numerous European adaptations (Taylor 1). The Middle English texts that survive all admittedly derive from the earlier courtly version, although some scholars have linked them to an Anglo-Norman source composed roughly around the same time, but this text survives only in a fragmentary copy.¹²⁸

Let me preface this chapter by stating that at least one scholar has studied this “original” source in relation to Spain. The seminal 1997 book by Patricia Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflour and the European Romance*, established one of the most notable watersheds in the scholarly history not only of this text, but in fact, in the study of

128 For a complete list of Anglo-Norman romances and their sources, see Ruth J Dean et al., *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999). The editors note that *Floire and Blancheflor* exists both in Continental and Anglo-Norman versions, but do not readily distinguish whether the now-incomplete Anglo-Norman version preceded the Old French. A number of “early” Middle English romances (i.e., those written over the course of the thirteenth century) owe their existence to Anglo-Norman originals rather than Continental ones. If previous versions of the story did indeed circulate in both dialects, it would be safe to assume that the Middle English adaptation of *Floris and Blancheflour* derives from an Anglo-Norman poem, but the lack of textual evidence makes it impossible to establish this claim conclusively.

medieval narrative as a whole. Grieve, in particular, highlighted the role of Spain as a key link in the development of European fiction in the fifteenth century by focusing on a little-known medieval Castilian version of *Floire* that, she argues, was the predecessor to all other subsequent vernacular adaptations, including Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo*, the monumental five-book retelling of the story that catered to the taste of fourteenth-century Italian audiences. Her study's greatest impact, however, was establishing that the story itself might have originated in Spain.¹²⁹

Indeed, Grieve's study did much to rescue Spain as central to the European development of the story, especially in the context of its multiple revisions throughout three centuries. Nonetheless, criticism on the Middle English version has not necessarily used Grieve's thesis on the story's Spanish developments to forward a claim I wish to advance here in relation to the Middle English text: *Floris and Blancheflour* is an English romance about Spain that marks the literary origin of the complex, hidden dialogue that characterized medieval Anglo-Iberian relations. Because the Middle English text deals with Spanish characters without explicitly referencing Spain, and because its opening segments – which presumably occur in Santiago de Compostela – have been lost in *all*

129 Establishing the history of the Spanish texts in relation to other European variants has not been without problem. Accordingly, David Arbesú-Fernández mentions that: “because there are so many versions of *Flores y Blancaflor*, the task of elaborating a thorough classification of its variations and of establishing the precise relationships among the extant manuscripts has never been completely carried out” (3). Thanks to Arbesú-Fernández's and Grieve's important work, earlier medieval Spanish versions of the story, i.e., accounts predating the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, have helped complete the intricate intertextual puzzle of the narrative. A superb critical edition of the medieval Spanish text can be found in David Arbesú-Fernández, *Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor*, v. 374 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011). Arbesú-Fernández's work draws heavily on Grieve's initial investigations –which stress the early modern accounts of the story– and focuses instead on the earlier medieval retelling that Grieve studies only as a continuum with later versions.

four surviving Middle English manuscripts, the romance contributes to the concept of invisibility that permeates my two preceding chapters. Until now, scholars have generally reconstructed these opening lines based on the French original (Koopfer 2-3). But imagining this Spanish setting without also seriously considering developments in Spanish culture of the time is problematic, especially with regards to Christian-Muslim relations and the fantasies derived thereof, *Floris and Blancheflour's* central argument. Therefore, this concluding chapter reads the romance focusing on the cultural and historical implications of its Spanish contexts, particularly with regard to the strategies that the anonymous Middle English author utilizes to imagine a fictional Spain where Muslims and Christians live together. It is crucial, however, to state that, in keeping with my two previous analyses, the idea of Spain in *Floris* is implicit rather than overtly sustained throughout the text. Overall, then, this romance demonstrates how the basis of the complicated Anglo-Spanish dialogue I have identified throughout my dissertation is manifestly medieval, and proves how romance was fundamental to the development of literary exchanges between Spain and England.

3.2 – Romance: A Vehicle for Spanish Stories?

Arguably, romance was the dominant secular fictional genre of the Middle Ages. There was not one European vernacular untouched by its gargantuan power; from Portuguese to Icelandic, from Spanish to Greek.¹³⁰ Romance is malleable in form and

¹³⁰ The most salutary overview of romance as a European phenomenon is still Roberta Krueger, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Without being exhaustive, the volume addresses fundamental questions including the inception of the genre in France, manuscript culture and transmission,

content; its only set rule resides in the possibility of surprise. Romance is complex: it often finds itself at the intersection of other modes and styles, resisting easy categorization, as Christine Chism points out: “the sheer nature of [the genre] suggests that it is something that we should not try to domesticate or categorize.” (58) Because the genre in Middle English is in many ways distinct to its French or other European counterparts, for many decades critics were intent on defining its staple traits, codifying its different sources and, importantly, classifying it according to “matters” in keeping with the traditional Old French triad suggested by Jean Bodel in his *Chanson de Saisnes* (c.1200):

Ne sont que .iiij. matieres à nul home antandant :
De France et de Bretagne et de Rome la grant.
Et de ces .iiij. matieres n'i a nule semblant.
Li conte de Bretagne sont si vain et plaisant ;
Cil de Rome sont sage et de san aprenant ;
Cil de France de voir chascun jor apparant.

[Learned men know that there are only three matters:
That of France, that of Britain, and that of Rome.
And these are quite different from each other.
Tales from Britain are appealing and vain;
Those from Rome are full of meaning and for the wise;
Those from France grow truer by the day].¹³¹ (6-11)

the development of “fiction” as a distinct medieval literary category, and the role that Spain played in the transformation of the genre into the modern novel.

¹³¹ My translation.

Romance in Middle English, however, eludes those systems neatly. Even if we have, indeed, hundreds of texts that can be more or less categorized using the Bodelian system, *Floris and Blancheflour*, judging by its themes and structures, cannot be easily identified to belong, I argue, within any of the established romance groupings (England, Rome, France, Britain, etc.)¹³² Erik Kooper, following Dorothee Metlitzki classifies it as an “oriental tale” (1). In many ways, Kooper and Metlitzki are unmistakably correct and my analysis echoes that reading given what I stated earlier. In some others, however, the very text invites other readings (for example, the reconstructed beginning of the text, in which the poet presumably states that Floris and Blancheflour are Charlemagne’s descendants, has led some critics to view it within the larger Matter of France) reinforces that view. In order to contribute to the ongoing debate of the text’s origin and classification, I will suggest, too, that, while *Floris* is a tale with multiple Oriental elements, the Spanish setting alone might lead us to see the text in a category not devised to analyze Middle English romances so far: *Floris and Blancheflour* is a text belonging to the Matter of Spain.

This view, of course, elicits specific problems as well, because from a traditionally scholarly and textual standpoint, *Floris and Blancheflour* does not overtly recall the deeds of a Spanish hero whose presence can be traced in historiography or

¹³² For a traditional, historicist approach on the matter, see the classic by W.R.J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London: Longman, 1987). Barron also sees *Floris and Blancheflour* as belonging to “the Matter of Orient” (182), which he classifies under a larger “Matter of Romance” (177-205). For a list of the available romances in Middle English based on their edited manuscripts, see John Edwin Wells, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500. Vol 1: Romances*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). An attempt to structurally define Middle English romance (a key scholarly concern for decades), can be found in the classic essay by John Finlayson, “Definitions of Middle English Romance,” *The Chaucer Review* (1980): 44-62.

chronicles like *El Cid*, for example. However, I am considering the evident Spanish setting of the text, as well as its allusions to traceable elements of Spanish history, i.e., its Muslim past, to support this reading. Such an interpretation significantly widens the scope of what other scholars have written in relation to the Matter of Spain in/and England, as Sylvia Federico aptly mentions: “the matter of Spain was strategically promoted in mid-fourteenth-century Castile and translated abroad to Chaucer’s England and in Chaucer’s poetry...” (301). To be sure, Chaucer’s Spanish interests were not an insular development in English literature. If, in fact, England was interested in promoting Spanish history and culture for political reasons, *Floris and Blancheflour* might be evidence of a text written a hundred years before Chaucer and that seeks to follow a similar principle, simply because it is possible, from its reading, to move past romance and into history even if the romance itself blurs and challenges those notions.

In her analysis of Middle English romance, Nicola McDonald acknowledges that, as opposed to its courtly or otherwise more “sophisticated” counterparts, popular medieval romance, which she calls “the pulp fiction of medieval England” remains scholarly neglected even it transforms, through its ostensibly negative traits (ephemeral, predictable, racist, sexist, bigoted, etc.), the reality of the medieval social world (1). I want to endorse McDonald’s reading here, as *Floris and Blancheflour* fulfills all the imagined features of these so-called bad romance narratives, but the romance also challenges and renovates them *precisely* because the text speaks to the realities of an inner, real world, i.e., this text allows us, from its Orientalist, formulaic, and popular perspectives, to access images (however contestable) about Spain, its culture, and its peoples. In that way, *Floris and Blancheflour*’s importance cannot be dismissed in the

context of Middle English literary history given that, in England, romance was still consolidating itself during the thirteenth century (the sheer number of romances produced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is simply greater), and it is not irrelevant that a tale that recreates things Spanish might have helped strengthen the genre in England. However, in the relatively scant critical history of the text, Spain has, remained, naturally, invisible.

3.3– Lost Fragments

Floris and Blancheflour survives in four different manuscripts, and at least one of them, the Auchinleck, is of utmost importance to scholars of Middle English literature.¹³³ Fragmentary narratives inhabit medieval corpora, but the unusual feature of this romance is, as I anticipated earlier, that its introductory portions happen to be lost or missing in all principal copies of the text. This poses our first (and productive) problem: the beginning of *Floris and Blancheflour* is, in many ways, invisible; imagined. And, not gratuitously, this imagined beginning takes place in Spain. Whether lost or non-existent, the fate or importance of these fragments has been generally ignored by scholars, with Erik Kooper

¹³³ The manuscripts in question are MS Advocates 19.2.1, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (Auchinleck); MS Gg.4.27 (2), Cambridge; Egerton 2862, British Library; and Cotton Vitellius D.iii, British Library. All of them are dated in the fourteenth century. Most modern editions of the text are based on the Egerton MS, an unusual compilation, according to Jennifer Fellows, “in that it contains only romances” (xiii). The Auchinleck portions arguably contain the most complete version of the text. Several excellent studies on the romance contents of the Auchinleck exist. For an analysis on the English idiosyncrasies of the compilation, as well as the intertextual connections between its many romances, see, in particular, Rhiannon Purdie. *Anglicising Romance: Tail-Rhyme and Genre in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008). Purdie argues that the single, most identifiable trend that unites the so-called tail-rhyme (another term for “popular”) romances of the Auchinleck is the scribe’s concerns for things English.

describing the issue only as “an unfortunate whim of fate” (2). A radically different reading of the text, however, is possible if one considers how these imagined excerpts alter the course of the story, and two important questions arise. First, how peculiarly strange is it that the surviving Middle English *Floris* lacks concrete evidence of its Spanish setting?; second, why has scholarship addressed this issue as casual rather than important? To this incomplete beginning, scholars have supplied an incomplete answer: they use *Floire et Blancheflor*, the French text, to supply the imaginary beginning of the story, which makes for a particularly bizarre combination if what we want to rescue are the elements of Spanish history. For this reason, it might be illustrative to reproduce parts of this Old French initial fragment in their entirety here:

Einsi dit el commencement:
Un rois estoit issuz d’Espaigne,
De chevaliers ot grang conpaigne;
A navie fur mer passez.
En Galice estoit arrivez.
Fenix ot non si fue paiens;
Passé ot mersus crestiens
Pour u païs la praie prendre
Et les viles torner en cendre.
Un mois tout plain et quinze dis
Sejourna li rois ou païs;
Ainz ne fu jour qu’o sa mesniee
Ne feïst li rois chevauchiee;
Viles roboit, avoir prenoit
Et a ses nés tout conduisoit.
De trente liues de ravage
Ne remanoit ne bues ne vache
Ne chastiaus ne bois en estant,
Vileins n’i vet son buef querant.

Es vous le païs tout destruit;
Paiens en ont joie et deduit.
Dont s'en vout li rois reperier;
Ses nés a fet appareiller;
Puis apela de ses fourriers
Plus de quarante chevaliers:
“Seignor”, fet il, “car vous armez.
Cil autre chargeront assez.
Alez lasus en cez chemins
Guetier por rober pelerins”
[...]

En la compaigne ot un François,
Chevaliers ert preuz et courtois,
Cil un baron Saint Jacque aloit;
Une seue fille i menoit
Qui a l'apostre s'ert voëe,
Ainz qu'ele issist de la contree,
Pour son mari qui morz estoit,
De cui ou ventre enfant avoit. (56-84; 92-100)¹³⁴

In these opening lines in Old French, there is much to analyze in relation to Spanish history. Before giving particulars to the beginning of the problem (the burning and pillaging of Christian Galicia by a Muslim Spanish king), there are a few points worth mentioning. The French text initially describes both Floris and Blancheflour as descendants of Charlemagne's line of nobles, which would immediately place the text in the “Matter of France” category if we were to consider it solely in Bodelian terms. Strange though it may seem, the Charlemagne reference is not completely irrelevant if we were to read the passage historically given that Charlemagne's figure *did* matter in the

¹³⁴ For this Old French version, which at least one editor for the Middle English edition has used (Kooper), see *Floire et Blancheflor*, ed. Margaret Pelan (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1956).

Muslim conquest of Spain in the eighth century, and this, in turn, provided the basis for an entire narrative tradition later known as *chansons de geste*, of which the *Chanson de Roland* remains the chief example. Here, the fact that *Floris and Blancheflour* implicitly alludes to a historically documented event (Spain as a battleground in Charlemagne's battles with the Muslims in the eighth century) serves the purpose of creating clear, absolute, and distinct discursive lines for Christians and Muslims in the text, the same lines that the Middle English text, as we shall see, effectively terminates by creating a fantasy of two cultures coexisting.

The rest of the passage reinforces these differences by mentioning how a Muslim king of Spain (if history is a guide, we might presume from Andalusia) travels to Galicia in the Christian north to burn, destroy, and pillage the country, and later specifically orders his knights to kill all pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela (Saint Jaque). The Charlemagne connection, again, seems productive here because one of the pilgrims happens to be a French king traveling with his retinue, only to be killed by the Muslim army later. In these fragments, the text already sees, in that Spanish king, an utter dislocation of cultural and historical values regarding otherness: the violent, inhumane Muslim king that violently seizes and kills the Christian pilgrims is the same king that, a few lines later, takes advantage of a Christian queen to endorse a narrative of *convivencia* and *Reconquista*. In that sense, I would argue that *Floris and Blancheflour* generally speaks to the historical concerns regarding the cultural conflict and coexistence in which Christians and Muslims found themselves during four centuries of medieval Spanish history, thus suggesting that the unique religious configuration of the Iberian Peninsula might have generated, however askew, interest well outside its borders and into England.

Later in this beginning, the Saracen entourage takes the king's pregnant daughter (Blancheflour's mother) as bounty prize into their court, where she meets with Fenix's wife, who is also pregnant.¹³⁵ Eventually, the pregnant Christian queen is admitted into the Muslim's queen circle though the French text suggests that the Christian woman was made a servant:

La meschine iert courtoise et prouz,
Moult se feisoit amer a touz,
La roïne moult bien servoit
Conme cele cui ele estoit. (138-142)

[The miserable (Christian) was courtly and doughty,
And made everyone feel well and loved,
She served the (Muslim) queen well
Whenever she was with her].¹³⁶

The extent of slavery among different religious groups in medieval Iberia is well documented, so it would not be surprising if the lines above did actually refer to comparable historical paradigms, particularly because Muslims did enslave Christians in the very early years of the Moorish conquest.¹³⁷ Regardless of this implication, however, in the text both queens, after an apparent period of closeness and friendship, give birth on the same day (the French text suggests that the Muslim queen realizes the Christian's woman morning sickness; "la crestienne vit palir, mouvoir coulur et treisaillir, *Floire* 147-148) to two children that are raised entirely by the Christian woman.

¹³⁵ A similar modern English summary can be found in Kooper's introduction to *Floris and Blancheflour*. Here, I paraphrase some of Kooper's ideas and add some of mine (11).

¹³⁶ My interpretation.

¹³⁷ See, in particular, chapters 1-3 in the excellent overview of slavery in medieval Spain and Portugal by William D. Phillips Jr., *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

It is important to capitalize on this Old French beginning that has been typically also considered to be the imagined setting for the Middle English text because, if these fragments somehow *did* once exist in the English version, they would have transmitted a specific discourse about a distant and problematic Spanishness to a range of Middle English audiences that can only be understood in the context of a primeval Black Legend narrative, and romance, as a genre, would have been a key enabler of those type of stories. Again, the Middle English text allegedly containing that beginning is lost, but to imagine that opening in relation to actual events surrounding the Spanish *Reconquista* might be useful: in the mid-thirteenth century –when *Floris and Blancheflour* is thought to have been written– Christian Spain was fully engaged in its process of seizing territory back from Muslim forces.

Here might be a good opportunity to dispel one of the most widely propagated myths about the geography of medieval Iberia, and that a text such as *Floris and Blancheflour* leaves decidedly ambiguous: the idea that the Peninsula could be somehow neatly divided into Christian and Muslim regions (with pockets of Jewish communities in between) with no degree of interaction whatsoever. In reality, the Christian *Reconquista* occurred, though gradually, rather effectively, and beginning the early thirteenth century we see a gradual decline of Muslim kingdoms throughout Iberia. The north of Spain, the first allusion to any Spanish territory in the *Floire-Floris* narrative, was never permanently or decisively conquered by Muslim forces, or, when it was, reconquest happened swiftly (Phillips 55). Indeed, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, only present-day Andalusia, and portions of present-day Castile-La Mancha, Murcia, and Valencia were under effective Muslim control (Almohad Caliphate), and the political power of the

remaining Christian kingdoms (Portugal, Leon, Castile, Navarre, Aragon) was far too great to not wreak al-Andalus in subsequent centuries.¹³⁸ In other words, the notion that Spain was, during its medieval history, a mostly Muslim-dominated territory is rather imprecise, but that is exactly what allowed for the formation of potent cultural myths regarding race and religion both inside and outside Iberia. *Floris and Blancheflour*, indeed, takes advantage of this fantasized history despite the omitted or lost fragments, so much so, that the text begins with a direct, unambiguous beginning about the religious nature of Spain:

Ne thurst men never in londe
After feirer children fonde.
þe Cristen woman fedde hem þoo;
Ful wel she lovyd hem boþ twoo.
So longe she fedde hem in feere
þat they were of elde of seven 3ere. (1-6)

Here, the reader or critic is feasibly aware of the preceding story that mingles episodes and situations pertaining to Spain's history. In and of itself, I should say, the opening segment of our text is not unlike that found in other popular romance narratives: quick, pragmatic, and almost formulaic, but it is the readings with uniquely "Spanish" implications that I am interested in recovering here. First, this beginning completely distorts the Christian-Muslim dichotomy found in the French version, and that the lost Middle English beginning conceivably takes for granted. Second, the opening segment of *Floris and Blancheflor* reveals a fantastic fiction I have challenged earlier in this dissertation: the nature and degree of *convivencia*, a textual territory that allows for the

¹³⁸ For a good historical overview, see María Jesús Viguera Molins, "Taifas, Almorávides y Almohades" in *Historia de las Españas Medievales*, eds. Juan Carrasco et al, 118-139 (Barcelona: Crítica, 2002).

seemingly undisturbed – and, what’s more, the complete– interaction between the daughter of a Christian slave (or lady-in-waiting) noblewoman and the son of a Muslim emir. Both children, despite their difference in faiths, are described as impossibly beautiful, and importantly, raised in relation to a sole cultural code if we are to consider that the Christian woman that “fedde hem þoo” (fed them; nourished them) is, according to the own discursive lines established by the text, a woman of inferior standing. Note, as well, how those lines unambiguously affirm the ambiguous despite historical nuances: that Spain was a territory that permitted interaction between different religious and cultural groups.

But not all criticism has necessarily exploited this cultural reading in favor of Spanish history. Instead, Spain appears to be curiously forgotten in the vast critical tradition that studies *Floris and Blancheflour* only as an example of a fantastic, oriental love story concerning two children belonging to two different religions. Felicity Riddy, for example, sees this Middle English romance as a text “read not only within the family, but [a text] that [takes] family as its subject” (237). Importantly, the scholar argues, *Floris* belongs to a cluster of Middle English popular romances that are “domestic” in nature because of their love themes. In this sense, *Floris*, is, in fact, a romance with a foreseeable plot and a foreseeable circular ending: a hero (Floris) must undergo tribulations in his quest to reestablish his position in the world, and a love interest (Blancheflour) is at the center of those problems. I wholeheartedly agree with Riddy and other scholars that *Floris and Blancheflour* allows for a rich, gendered reading of romantic love and its potential to validate a hero in moral terms. However, it might be also productive to reappraise, as I do in the following section, some of the most

significant scholarship that sees *Floris* chiefly as a well-rounded love story in order to provide a minor yet visible critical shift in relation to things Spanish: it is *not* incidental that the love story in this romance occurs between a Muslim and a Christian, and it is less incidental that its backdrop is Spain even when Ken Eckert assures that “the poem has little interest in Saracen-Christian issues, and Floris’s perfunctory conversion receives only one line at the close” (242). If romance (popular and otherwise) was often written at the margins of history, the love story between Floris and Blancheflour becomes crucial as a means to understand an imagined and invisibilized cultural history, much like what happens in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. In other words, the romantic plot at the core of this romance is indicative of the image of a Spain that never was.

3.4 – Tainted Love

After emphasizing their having been born under equal circumstances, *Floris* stresses what is perhaps the most famous element concerning this story: the intense, often dreamlike love that blossomed between Blancheflour and Floris during their childhood. The text specifically tells how the children were reared together and excelled at reading, writing, and composing letters on parchment (by this time, the children are twelve years old). It is during these years of schooling that their relationship becomes problematic in the eyes of the pagan king:

The kyng understood the grete amoure
Bytwene his son and Blanchefloure,
And thought, when they were of age,
That her love wolde noght swage;
Nor he might not her love withdrawe,
When Florys shuld wife after the lawe. (35-40)

In terms of plot developments, having an impossible element to the children's romance is convenient. One must not forget, however, that Christian-Muslim relations are key to uncovering the meaning of this passage: even if Muslims and Christians coexisted in Spain, there were well-defined religious lines that were impossible to trespass. In the lines above, it is suggested that Blanche flour cannot continue seeing Floris because they would not be able to marry "after the lawe." This provides an interesting twist because the negative conceptions surrounding King Fenix in the French text are, for the first time, reproduced in the Middle English version. Understanding that it is somehow impossible for Floris and Blanche flour to remain together, the king suggests to his wife that Blanche flour be killed:

"Dame, he seide, 'y tel thee my reed:
I wyl that Blanche floure be do to deed.
When that maide is yslawe
And brought of her lyf dawe,
As sone as Florys may it undereyte,
Rathe he wylle hur forgete." (45-50)

If we take Fenix to be an embodiment of Spanishness here, the poet bestows a rather unflattering description: cruel, violent, and importantly, exercising a problematic masculinity. As such, for all the gendered readings that redeem the intimate and domestic nature of women in the text, we have, throughout the story, images of a problematic "Oriental" masculinity that applies to kings, emirs, merchants, but never to Floris himself even if, per the text, he is a Spanish character himself.

The king's wife decides that it would be too much of a risk to have Blanche flour killed, and instead arranges for Floris to be taken to a certain kingdom of "Mountargis" (*Floris* 67) with the queen's family and away from Blanche flour. Erik Kooper indicates that the Middle English text is one of the few versions that do not specifically link this "Mountgaris" with the Andalusian town of Montoro, suggesting instead an allusion to the French town of Montargis in the Loire Valley (39). The Andalusian Montoro, however, seems to have been important in the Muslim history of Spain. In fact, regional Andalusian records suggest that the town of Montoro, equipped with a fortress, served as a Muslim battleground against Christian forces.¹³⁹ If this is true, the Middle English text weirdly forgets this reference to Spanish toponymy, or at the very least, invisibilizes it.

At this point, it is interesting to note that the imagined setting for this Muslim Spain (provided that we do indeed consider that we've shifted away from Galicia and into Andalusia or another Muslim-governed territory) is notoriously refined: the castles, ladies, and general atmospheres that we would be sure to find in any courtly romance are strangely diffused if we consider that the plotline concerns Muslim Spain, i.e., the settings where Floris and Blanche flour interact before Floris's departure are depicted as clean and courtly, a stark difference from romance-like description of exotic Oriental settings, which we find only later in the story. Not that the same strategy does not apply to other romance narratives (consider, for example, the so-called *romans antiques* where Greek and Roman settings are purposely medievalized), but the Spanish interpretation suggests, even at this very early stage, that the text will specifically give a shadowy

¹³⁹ See the history in the regional archives available from the "Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico": <http://www.iaph.es/web/> Last access: June 29, 2017

impression of its different settings in order to stress that Spain was, indeed, a place of cultural exchange.

Like the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, *Floris and Blancheflour* has few direct allusions to Spain (in fact, it has only three) . Like the Croxton play, indeed, this thirteenth-century romance makes its setting at once murky and symbolic, but again, a closer look into Spanish culture and history might broaden our reading of the next major shift in the story: Floris's quest to rescue a Blancheflour that has been kidnapped by Babylonian merchants once Floris's parents decide that they should lead separate lives.

As Floris is sent away to Montoro-Montargis, the city likely in Andalusia, the text makes it clear that the twelve-year old has a difficult time adjusting because he is constantly thinking about Blancheflour ("love is at his herte rote; *Floris* 117), and the lord of Montoro, Duke Orgas (Orgaz, note, is an actual Spanish town that would have been governed by Muslim forces due to its proximity to Andalusian territory) commands his chamberlain to inform Fenix about his son's sadness. Enraged, the Spanish king resorts to characteristic violence:

“Let do bryng forth that mayde!
Fro the body the heved shal goo.’
Thenne was the quene ful woo.
Than spake the queen, that good lady:
‘For Goddes love, sir, mercy!
At the next haven that here is
Ther ben chapmen ryche ywys,
Marchaundes of Babylon ful ryche,
That wol hur bye blethelyche”. (140-148)

The text finds it suitable to give the Spanish king an inherently vicious voice when he desires that Blancheflour's head be severed, thus highlighting the image of the Oriental

despot present in other parts of the text.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the fact that Blancheflour is described in purely material and economic terms (as a prize or something that has been won in exchange for something else), would surely strengthen the generalized idea of the Spanish-Orientals as covetous and cold-blooded, much like the Jews we find in the Croxton play. When the queen replies that they'd be better of sending Blancheflour to nearby "Babylon", the poet makes the daring choice of imagining Spain as anything but European, evidencing a well-known principle of the Black Legend narrative.

Based on the available edited corpus of popular Middle English romances, it would be reasonable to suggest that the genre's treatment of geography is mostly imprecise (to have Babylon and Spain inhabit the same textual and discursive space would have come as no surprise to romance audiences), but I would argue that imagining Spain in relation to "Babylon" (whatever that locale might stand for) is useful of *Floris and Blancheflour*: in a matter of a few lines, the poet pragmatically chooses to Orientalize the romance's location, and, in that manner, the reader expects a specific line of action. Indeed, a historical reading of this segment reveals that the poet might have acutely aware of Spain's particular cultural contexts when, in the text, the negotiator that is charged with selling Blancheflour off to Babylonian merchants is described as having "moony langages in his mouth" (157). If this is the image of Spain in *Floris* is, the author might be alluding to the Peninsula's unique degree of multiculturalism in those lines.

¹⁴⁰ Although the term "Oriental despot" is most commonly used in the context of eighteenth or nineteenth-century British colonialism, Barbara Harlow's and Mia Carter's Enlightenment-based definition of an emperor "to be found largely in Asia, ruling through an administrative elite and supported by the labor of slaves", (89) and exercising excessive oppression at the expense of its subjects or citizens fits, sometimes very suitably, the kinds of "Eastern" rulers we find throughout medieval romance and most notably in a text such as *Floris and Blancheflour*.

Structurally, *Floris and Blancheflour* follows a pattern that much (especially formalist or New Critical) scholarship has described as “circular” in terms of romance narratives: 1) a hero has a specific place in the world, 2) an outer force disrupts his standing, 3) the hero must undergo a quest to regain his place in the world.¹⁴¹ Indeed, this is a principle that applies not only to romance (medieval and otherwise), but in fact, a wide range of medieval narrative modes. Though perhaps not favored in more recent literary criticism, Frye’s circular model would no doubt permit us to understand the functions of Spain inside and outside the text; inside, in that the text seeks to pinpoint to elements that are historically consistent, such as Muslim-Christian relations and the processes of *Reconquista* that *Floris* implicitly demonstrates; and outside, in that the text speaks to the fantasy of *convivencia* and Orientalizes its hermeneutic principles. After all, if a romance hero’s ultimate goal is to “recover” a myth, what *Floris* recovers by the end of the story, I would argue, is, more than Blancheflour’s love or his rightful position as king of Spain, is the image of Spain itself – a Spain that is not culturally homogenous but that is also not the fantasized, dreamlike locus that the poet in *Floris* imagines.

Shortly after being sold off to merchants from the East in exchange for a golden cup that depicts the story of Helen of Troy (something that would prove the romance’s commitment to the distances between myth and history), Blancheflour joins a harem governed by a cruel emir, and the poet makes an interesting digression: he consciously

¹⁴¹ This would resonate, for example, with a well-known model proposed by Northrop Frye in his famous study on romance *The Secular Scripture: A Study on the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976). Frye specifically notes three major points in the development of a romance hero: “descent” (97) “ascent” (129), which generally justifies his quest, and lastly, what he calls “the recovery of myth” (161).

stops the linear story to go back to Spain and focus on Floris, who has been told that Blanche flour is dead. The king and queen have a grave constructed outside a church that Floris adorns with the inscription: “Here lyeth swete Blanche flour, that Florys lovyd par amoure” (*Floris* 217-218). This is an important textual episode because it heralds an element that I have discussed earlier in this dissertation, and that also constitutes a major component of the romance’s scholarship, particularly in its other European variants: conversion.¹⁴² By having Floris –only nominally a pagan– enter a church and participate in a Christian ritual, the Middle English text assumes conversion to be, as in the case of the Croxton play, an implicit staple of Spanish cultural and religious life.

Conversion, which happens seamlessly in *Floris and Blanche flour*, is not specifically stressed; i.e., it is invisibilized from the beginning of the narrative up to this point, and it serves the purpose of creating a narrative about an othered Spain. Of course, historically, conversion in Muslim lands was complex and carried major political and historical implications, even after the expulsion of Muslims in the early sixteenth century.¹⁴³ *Floris*, rather than providing a historically feasible reading of this matter (unlike the Croxton play), befores it in favor of its plot: Floris exhibits, throughout the text, the values of chivalry, generosity, piety, love, and humility that much medieval

¹⁴² Patricia Grieve discusses the conversion motif exhaustively in larger European story, and links it with the importance of pilgrimage. See, in particular, “The Road to Conversion” (52-159). The Middle English version treats conversion only implicitly, which would validate my argument about the text’s discussion of Spanishness. For the particular implications of conversion in the Old French text in relation to other European variants, see, specifically, Marla Segol, “Floire and Blanche flour: Courtly Hagiography or Radical Romance” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (2003): 233-275.

¹⁴³ A brilliant treatment of the implication of the post-medieval memory of Muslim Spain, and in particular, the implications of coexistence and conversion of Muslims in Christian-governed communities can be found in Kathryn Miller, *Guardians of Islam: Religious Authority and Muslim Communities of Late Medieval Spain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

literature would specifically associate with Christian knighthood even when he is the son of a pagan king.¹⁴⁴

Consider, for example, Floris's intuition that Blancheflour might not be actually dead after visiting the church. After an overtly sentimental exchange between the young prince and his parents (the romance stresses, for example, his swooning, his sighing, his crying, and his desperation), Floris runs into a chamber where he finds the Christian queen, who deceives him when she tells him that Blancheflour died for Floris's love. Such a move, naturally, exemplifies the queen's relation to Christian affect and piety, a move that Floris echoes when he takes a knife, intent on taking his life. After all, Floris thinks, if both children were born on the same day and under equal circumstances, death would be the only possible answer that completes the Christian cycle of virtue initiated earlier in the text. This episode foretells a true climatic move, for it announces the beginning of Floris's true quest, which, unlike scholarship that sees it as proof of a "coming of age" process that highlights the hero's sentimental (and sexual) maturity (Eckert 244-245), might in fact signal a less evident fact that can be analyzed, again, in light of an invisible Spanish history. Floris's quest to Babylon to recuperate Floris is indicative of a process of conversion and *Reconquista*: a mark that functions as a tangible reminder of the Spanish past reconstructed by the Middle English text.

Before going on his adventure, the pagan queen gives Floris a protective ring (a motif found in Middle English romances roughly contemporary with *Floris*, such as

¹⁴⁴ John A. Geck suggests this duality might also be indicative of Floris representing male and female qualities at once (77). See, in particular, "For Goddes loue, sir mercy!: Recontextualising the Modern Critical Text of 'Floris and Blancheflor'" in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, eds. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Chichon, 77-89 (Suffolk: Derek Brewer, 2011).

Havelok the Dane), and goes on a seafaring quest to an unnamed land which the text also describes on the level of a courtly setting:

Sone so Florice com to londe,
Wel yerne he thanked Godes sonde
To the lond ther his lemman is;
Him thoughte he was in paradis.
Wel sone men Florice tindingges told
The Amerail wolde feste hold,
And kings an dukes to him come scholde,
Al that of him holde wolde,
For to honure his heghte feste,
And also for to heren his heste. (444-452)

[...]

To a fair cité he is icome.
Wel faire men hath his in inome,
Ase men scholde to a kings sone,
At a palais -- was non hit iliche.
The louerd of the hous was wel riche,
And gold inow him com to honde,
Both bi water and be londe. (460-467)

If this courtly paradise is the link between Spain and Babylon, the poet specifically shortens the distance between the real and the imaginary in relation to history by keeping this segment of the text formulaic (the land is only described as a fair city), and not excessively exotic (the favored principle for this kind of narrative).

As is typical of popular romance, *Floris and Blancheflour* is efficient by way of its narrative: there are relatively few judgments from the poet, and the text remains more interested in action than in providing its characters with complex psychologies or moral portraits. Therefore, owing to this particular style of storytelling, it is not uncommon to

have radically distinct descriptions regarding the same place (Spain and Babylon, for example appear, as both “foreign” and in many ways decidedly formulaic). In this sense, the descriptions belonging to the unnamed rich country that Floris visits on his way to Babylon are markedly separate from what we find once he does get to Babylon a few lines later.

There is, in this sense, a clear physical barrier that divides this land from Babylon: Floris must cross a bridge and negotiate with his gatekeeper if he wants to proceed inland. Importantly, and in true medieval romance fashion, the presence of this bridge anticipates Floris’s arrival to an otherworld of sorts, and the gatekeeper makes that abundantly clear. For the first time in the text, however, the hero alludes to his cultural identity when he introduces himself as the son of the king of Spain (“he was of Speyne a kinges sone”; *Floris* 573), and the gatekeeper forewarns him about the dangers of proceeding with his journey.

The status and significance of Babylon in *Floris and Blancheflour* has garnered a relatively healthy amount of criticism. Because the image of Babylon is multifaceted across the many European variants of the story, scholars have carefully noted that the motif appears conspicuously in both western and eastern versions of the tale. Dominique Battles, for example, traces a straightforward line between *Floris* and the Old French *Roman de Thèbes* to argue that the image of Babylon might be more “western” than previously thought based solely on the name of Babylon’s gatekeeper, Daire (Darius?), which the scholar links to the figure of a certain “Daire le Roux”, whose name appears in

narratives pertaining to the siege of Antioch during the First Crusade (75).¹⁴⁵ That an actual crusading tale is interwoven in this part of the text, right after Floris reveals himself to be Spanish (and presumably, by now, a Christian), is tremendously useful, simply because it enhances the text's commitment to the narrative of *Reconquista* embodied in the hero's quest itself.

Arriving to Babylon, the text suggests, is by no means an easy task for Floris. Dayre proves to be a stubborn, but eloquent warden when he advises his would-be guest against trying to fight the vicious emir in order to regain Blancheflour, particularly because Babylon's ruler has:

Other half hondred of riche king.
That altherrichchest kyng
Ne dorste beginner swich a thing;
For mighte th' Ameral hit undereyte,
Sone thou were of live quite.
Abouten Babiloine, withouten wene,
Sexti longe milen and tene
And ate walle thar beth ate
Seven sithe twente gate.
Twente toures ther beth inne,
That everich dai cheeping is inne
Nis no dai thourg the yer
That scheping nis therinne plener. (585-594)

In a matter of a few verses, Floris finds himself in a completely different setting: he must fight a cruel, mean king that watches his fantastic Oriental city well. But if, as I suggest, Floris's quest is indicative of larger developments that speak to Spain's own

¹⁴⁵ The author convincingly argues that: "the episode involving Floris' infiltration into the city of Babylon in the story of *Floris and Blancheflour* captures the flavor of a Middle Eastern city by reaching back into the chronicle tradition of the siege of Antioch" (82).

history, the hero's misfortunes and challenges as a Christian pilgrim-knight (note my deliberate use of the terminology) echo, emphatically, the historical preoccupations addressed by the process of *Reconquista*. Thus, in seizing and reconquering Babylon from its Eastern leader, and in reconquering his Christian love interest, Floris's adventure transcends the typical travel of the average romance hero. In his quest, regaining the lady amounts, symbolically and textually, recovering Spain's Christian identity that had been, according to the discourse of the age, violently taken over by Muslims.

Once inside Babylon, the poet offers what is perhaps the ultimate Orientalist image in the text when he describes the emir's custom of marrying a new maiden every year (*Floris* 642-644) and the elaborate maze of golden and marble bowers where he zealously keeps these young women before bringing them down to a well near a walled orchard:

The gravel in the ground of precieuse stone,
And of vertu iwis echone,
Of sapphires and of sardoines,
Of oneches and of calsidoinis.
Nou is the welle of so mochel eye,
Yif ther cometh ani maiden that is forleie,
And hi bowe to the grounde
For to waschen here honde,
The water wille yelle als hit ware wod,
And bicom on hire so red so blod.
Wich maiden the water fareth on so,
Hi schal sone be fordo.
And thilke that beth maidenis clene,
Thai mai hem wassche of the rene.
The water wille erne stille and cler,
Nelle hit hem make no daunger.
At the welle heved ther stant a tre,

The fairest that mai in erthe be.
Hit is icleped the Tre of Love,
For floures and blosmes beth ever above.
And thilke that clene maiden es be,
Men schal hem bringe under that tre.
And wichso falleth on that flour,
Hi schal ben chosen quen with honour. (660-683)

To medieval audiences, (owing perhaps to the context of crusading narratives and other contacts with the East), this stress on the magical precious stones, the explicitly sexualized bodies, and the marvelous elements such as the well's water from Paradise that screams and turns red as blood in the presence of a sinful woman would have come across as strategies to define and decode otherness. In truth, however, over the course of hundreds of years of medieval literature, and particularly in the case of romance, these images would have also struck audiences as predominantly "Spanish" in origin given their larger "Oriental" context. What is interesting, of course, is that Floris's poet uses them in order to justify *and* blur a general narrative about the East that embodies and rejects, at once, the image of Spain contained within the text.

Since *Floris and Blancheflour* reproduces textual patterns found throughout Middle English romance, subsequent plot developments might come, in this sense, as no surprise if we were to map a number of motifs against other texts in the Middle English tradition (*Sir Orfeo*, *Havelok*, or even *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). In addition to the ring, the text also features, importantly, episodes where the hero must conceal his identity and engage, trick, and engage in gift exchanges with members of the Eastern palace before meeting with Blancheflour, as instructed by Dayre. Of particular importance among the hero's schemes to trick the guards via a game of chess to win a

golden cup. Much like the astrolabe, chess, we know, was one of the Middle Eastern inventions that were introduced to the rest of Europe via Iberia, and its popularity in Alfonsine Spain is well attested, for example, in the so-called *Libro de los juegos*, a thirteenth-century containing elaborate chess rules that also had astrological readings.¹⁴⁶ As such, a close reading into the chess episode could reveal the implicit, invisible presence of cultural exchanges between Western Europe and the Middle East by way of the Iberian Peninsula.

After a series of elaborate plans to arrive at the location where Blancheflour lives, Floris gains the trust of palace members through elaborate, cunning games of deception. Ultimately, his plan is revealed and one of the guards agrees to cover Floris in flowers and inside a basket that would make its way to Blancheflour's chambers. If mechanisms to interpret otherness (whatever form it may take) remain predictable and highly visible throughout the text, episodes such as this one make *Floris and Blancheflour* as entertaining just as it is sentimental (the maidens that have to carry the flowers, for instance, express annoyance at having to carry such a heavy basket). The basket mistakenly ends up in the room of one of Blancheflour's friends, Clarice, and, Floris exits in a hurry, thinking he will find his "fair flour" (844). Upon closer inspection of the basket, Clarice screams, but then quickly agrees to aid Floris in his plan.

Here, I specifically advance this plot-based analysis because its components might bring us closer to the text's Spanish question: Floris's arduous path as a hero, as well as the tactics he employs to deceive and hide his true self, might oddly reminisce a

¹⁴⁶ See the remarkable edition contained in Alfonso el Sabio, *Libro de los juegos: acedrex, dados e tablas. Ordenamiento de las tafurerías*, ed. Raúl Orellana Calderón (Madrid: Fundación José Antonio de Castro, 2007).

culture in which coexistence based on religion often signified trading and masking identities, much like Aristorius does in the Croxton play. Therefore, what *Floris and Blancheflour* strategizes as uniquely humorous in this part of the text might have broader implications if we are to unmask a possible Spanish subtext here: the realities of conversion, as well as the conflicts between Muslims and Christians in the historical process of *Reconquista* often carried legacies of violence and cultural misunderstanding, two facts that the text leaves purposely ambiguous in favor of sentimentality. For example, before re-meeting Floris with the help of Clarice, Blancheflour expresses fear at the prospect of becoming a sexual slave to the emir (“the Ameral wil me to wive habbe”, *Floris* 849), but the romance invisibilizes the violent potency of this event by having Clarice intervene on Blancheflour’s behalf.

The meeting of two distinct religions, as embodied by the first reunion of Floris and Blancheflour as young adults, would appear to be single, most significant moment of cultural rapprochement in the text. However, the episode transcends this reading and exhausts it to go beyond conversion and to focus, instead, on the purely platitudinous:

Leighande sche saide to Blauncheflour:
"Com nou se that ilche flour."
To the coupe thai yeden tho.
Wel blisful was Florisse tho,
For he had iherd al this.
Out of the coupe he stirte iwis.
Blauncheflour chaungede hewe;
Wel sone aither other knewe.
Withouten speche togidere thai lepe,
Thai clepte and keste and eke wepe.

Hire cussing laste a mile,
And that hem thoughte litel while. (860-872)

Clearly, the poet's unsuccessful resolution to a tension that builds from the beginning of the text invisibilizes the larger implications to this excessively banal meeting: Floris concludes, here, a process of latent conversion that the narrative, as I have tried to argue, makes only implicit and covert. The rest of the segment concerns Clarice's strategies to ensure the lovers' well-being (she tricks the emir by telling him Blancheflour is praying, for example), but the emir grows suspicious and eventually discovers Floris sleeping next to Blancheflour in another particularly violent episode (he pulls down the bed covers with the intention of undressing Blancheflour only to discover another man lying next to the Christian princess). Predictably, the Oriental king threatens the lovers with plans to kill and burn them, echoing the imagined beginning in Santiago de Compostela with which the story first problematizes cultural difference.

A peculiar aspect of the implicit coming-of-age story in *Floris and Blancheflour* concerns the text's inconsistent treatment of the lovers' maturity. In many ways, Floris and Blancheflour are described as adolescents or young adults capable of experimenting and exercising sexual love; in many others, and particularly when they're at the mercy of an Oriental force (be it Floris's father or the hot-blooded emir), the couple are frequently described as helpless children. Consider, for instance, the moment Floris and Blancheflour acquiesce to the possibility of their own death, when they have to walk, bound fast, to a bonfire:

After the children nou men sendeth
Hem to brenne fur men tendeth.
Twaie Sarazins forth hem bringe

Toward here deth, sore wepinge.
Dreri were this schildren two;
Nou aither biwepeth otheres wo. (1058-1064)

The powerlessness evoked in those lines strongly contrasts both lovers' resolute intention to remain together during and after death, thus solidifying a route of conversion that began, in fact, with the legendary pilgrimage in Santiago, and that ends as soon as Floris invokes his origin right before his imminent death.

3.5 – All Roads to Lead to Spain

Characteristically, the brevity of narrative style in popular romance makes room for questions and interpretations: compared to other romances in Middle English, *Floris and Blancheflour* is merely a 1225-verse long poem. Given the multiplicity of plot situations that I have emphasized so far (history, conversion, reconquest, invisible Spain, etc.), it would seem reasonable for *Floris* to have a well-rounded, close-knit ending, or at least to have a greater deal of authorial intervention in resolving unfinished issues.

However, and is often typical in this type of texts, the ending is rushed. Here, I read *Floris's* abrupt ending as a textual strategy that mirrors its even more abrupt beginning, but that nonetheless does not impede a fuller reading in favor of the Spanish overtone at the core of my analysis.

When both children await for their death, Floris suggests that it is that he should die because he is a man, or at least die first. However, one of the noblemen that had helped Floris in his plot arbitrates on the children's behalf, and Floris is given the chance to tell his story to the king. Specifically, Floris weeps, but makes it clear that he was "of Speyne a kyngges sone" (*Floris* 1170) and that, on the basis of his nobility, his visit to

Babylon and subsequent irruption in the emir's palace through dishonest means should be forgiven. In that sense, the cycle of conversion that the reader witnesses earlier in the text reaches the Oriental king himself, and the poet finds an odd answer to signify the image of the emir's forgiveness:

And alle this other lowen therefore.
Nou the Amerail - wel him mote bitide -
Florice he sette next his side,
And made him stonde ther upright,
And had idubbed him to knight,
And bad he scholde with him be
With the formast of his mené. (1177-1183)

What might it mean to have the Oriental court laugh at Floris's story? Because what follows immediately afterwards is an abrupt change of tone in the emir's mood (he instantly forgives them), laughter might be a textual mechanism to uncover the often complex reality of religious conversion, a process that all characters in the text complete by the end. Unsurprisingly, the poet turns the tables when the tyrannical emir makes Floris a knight, and celebrates his wedding to Blancheflour in a church in Babylon. Conversion, as such is effectively adopted by the poet to embody the epitome of Spanishness, particularly because Floris, after his wedding, must return to Spain urgently to occupy a vacant throne. As such, the formulaic ending for a formulaic text exposes, I argue, a Middle English cultural approach that applies to all three texts that I have analyzed so far: Spain often inhabits invisible margins. But sometimes, and perhaps only sometimes, what lies at the margins is, as in the case of the fantastic Middle English poem *Pearl*, paradise.

EPILOGUE A Quest Unfinished

When I first began working on this dissertation in earnest some three years ago, I could not have anticipated the strange resonance it would bear in relation to current developments in American politics in 2017. In the context of Donald Trump's crusade against Mexicans and Muslims (both before and after he was elected US president), there is, I would argue, a peculiarly post-medieval tale that carries Black Legend echoes. Unlike the story I have retold here, however, neither Islamophobia nor anti-Mexican sentiment are invisible. Thus, as I offer concluding remarks on my dissertation, I also want to highlight its relevance beyond the Middle Ages and into the present –as medievalists are often required to do –and to link it, insofar as it's appropriate, with my own personal history.

Reading vestiges of the medieval in the geopolitics and cultural wars of the twenty-first century is hardly an innovative exercise; scholars have noted the potency of the atemporal crusading narrative for quite some time now, as Geraldine Heng notes: "...fresh in the aftermath of September 11, the West seemed to find itself in an odd temporal wrinkle that materialized the specter of a neo-Middle Ages, evidence of a kind that the 'medieval' was not only a historical category that named a temporal interval but also a transhistorical category that could be repeatedly reinscribed..." (205). Indeed, as Heng later suggests, many of the modern strategies to enunciate and distinguish otherness (particularly with regard to race and religion) during the medieval period have found uncanny reverberations to our days, be it in the form of holy wars or, more recently,

through the legitimization of nationalist governments in a number of places around the world.

Medievally speaking, the birth of Black Legend discourses in England started, according to this dissertation, as a gradual process that circumscribed difference in relation to Spain or Spanishness, and the texts that I analyzed display the extent of such a process in different ways: the Croxton play and *Floris and Blancheflour* by reworking moments of Spanish history through the lens of conversion and religion; the *Astrolabe*, by implicitly carrying a cultural history that, even in the context of translation, remains hidden. Again, a major cohesive aspect between a miracle play, vernacular science, and a popular romance, is, in this case, their Spanish overtone. Subsequent periods transformed these overtones in outright conflict, and there is ample historical and cultural evidence to sustain that, as of today, that conflict manifests itself problematically, but also productively. A prominent example can be seen in the emergence of the specific subfield of Anglo-Iberian medieval studies; for a good decade now, a growing number of Middle English scholars have turned to Spain in order to widen their academic interests, but more importantly, to dispel the notion that Iberia (and its constitutive regions) is irrelevant to the study of medieval English literature. This dissertation is clearly a result of that scholarly trend.

Within this relative abundance of recent studies that examine the medieval relationship between Spain and England, however, there has not been a full-length analysis that examines England's cultural distance (in fact, most scholarship stresses how the countries were *close* rather than how they were *different*) with regard to things Spanish – much less a historical deconstruction of a story that we imagine to be early

modern in nature. In other words, this dissertation would not have been possible without the brilliant work that studies medieval Anglo-Spain from a redemptive perspective, but it is the origin of a problematic romance that needs to be scrutinized more thoroughly. The readings I applied to the Croxton play, the *Astrolabe*, and *Floris* have sought to locate that history in order to justify a cultural narrative that is somehow still there: the image of two worlds, an “Anglo” and a “Hispanic” one that, although in many ways complimentary, also appear as quite dissimilar.

If a fundamental tenet of the Black Legend (as theorized by historians) consisted of demonizing Spain’s colonial ventures, perhaps an odd result lies in how Mexico and the United States –both offshoots of Spanish and British colonialism– have engaged with one another over the course of the past two centuries. In a recent essay (May 2017) for *The Atlantic*, Franklin Foer masterfully summarizes the history of Mexico-US relations in the following paragraph:

Not so long ago—for most of the postwar era, in fact—the United States and Mexico were an old couple who lived barely intersecting lives, hardly talking, despite inhabiting the same abode. Then the strangest thing happened: The couple started chatting. They found they actually liked each other; they became codependent. Now, with Trump’s angry talk and the Mexican resentment it stirs, the best hope for the persistence of this improved relationship is inertia—the interlocking supply chain that crosses the border and won’t easily pull apart...¹⁴⁷

Capitalizing on the odd couple metaphor might be productive because it mirrors, however bizarrely, the mechanisms that Spain and England found to establish both a medieval alliance *and* an early modern rivalry: distance and desire; discrepancy and dialogue. Of course, it is mostly the negative aspects of the relationship that appear projected onto England’s and Spain’s colonial children in the quotation above because it is those that

147 Franklin Foer. “Mexico’s Revenge.” *The Atlantic*, May 2017.

have made themselves highly visible at present. If there is any truth in Foer's words, the inertia that he talks about might well be the Black Legend itself, a construct that feeds postmedieval, transnational Anglo-Hispanic relations and that cannot, in any way, be torn apart.

Narratives of cultural contact and the way they unfold in divergent patterns of Middle English literature have made up my dissertation's backbone. Through different languages, nations, regions, and religions, *England's Spain* has demonstrated that cultural exchange can come in various forms, thus continuing an academic tradition that authenticates and redeems non-Anglocentric methodologies to read medieval English texts. This is an approach similar (though not entirely the same) to the one medievalists have used to engage with postcolonial and cultural studies in order to explain how modalities of colonial history transcend and recreate what we think of as "medieval".¹⁴⁸

In this sense, tracing the medieval beyond its historical and geographic borders has proven fruitful. Consider Luis Weckmann's eccentric two-volume study *La herencia medieval de México (The Medieval Heritage of Mexico)*, a study of rare scope that evaluates the history of colonial Mexico (1521-1810) in relation to the "medieval" legacy fomented by the country's Spanish colonizers: institutionalized Catholicism, Inquisition, neo-feudal government systems, and even crusading, to name a few.¹⁴⁹ Weckmann, a Mexican, begins his study by delivering an odd, totalizing statement:

148 For an example on the uses of the medieval as a mechanism to assert colonial and Eurocentric practices in geographical contexts not readily associated with a medieval past, see Raúl Ariza-Barile, "The Mexican Chaucer: Philology South of the Border" [forthcoming in *Literature Compass* as part of the *Global Circulation Project*, eds. Candace Barrington and Jonathan Hsy.]

149 See Luis Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*. Vol. 1., trans. Frances M. López-Morillas. (New York: Fordham Univ Press, 1992).

Discovery of the medieval roots of Mexican culture is neither an archaeological task nor an investigation solely of interest to antiquarians. The legacy that our country has received from the Middle Ages –principally, though not entirely from Spain– is still part of the Mexican’s daily experience. Its peculiar features form so clear a picture that it is no exaggeration to say that in many ways we are more ‘medieval’ than a good part of the West, and certainly more so than the Spaniards themselves.(3)

Since its Spanish-language publication in 1984 and subsequent English translation in 1992, Weckmann’s book has had a mixed reception due to its rather vertical conception of history. While it is true that Mexico, by virtue of its colonial history, was an importer of Spanish cultural elements that can be ultimately traced back to the medieval period, Weckmann’s assertion appears to describe Mexico exclusively as a locus that reproduced these Spanish paradigms to somehow transform them into something more “medieval.” Exactly what Weckmann means by “medieval” in the passage above is unclear, but it is interesting to note how the late Mexican scholar already sees his country as part of a trans-temporal history that sees, in Mexico, a transplanted appendix of the medieval European West. I have often thought, if jokingly, about Weckmann’s book in order to validate my presence in a strange setting: a reader and student of Middle English who also happens to be Mexican.

If dissertations mirror, as many say, a part of us and our lives, then it is safe to say that it would never have occurred to me to write about Spain and Middle English literature had I not moved to the United States in order to attend graduate school. This is not, of course, to imply that I wrote a dissertation I did not want to write (far from that), but in wanting to explore the Middle English corpus from a decidedly “foreign” perspective, in this dissertation I have exercised a claim to my Hispanicity that would have simply remained invisible if I had chosen to stay in Mexico or move elsewhere to

complete a doctoral program. Upon moving to the United States, for example, I quickly learned to think of myself—as demanded by the reigning political and cultural narrative—in ethnic, cultural, and linguistic terms: I was “Hispanic” and a “minority”, and I was Hispanic in a field entirely dominated by non-Spanish speakers. I dare to say that I might be, to this day, one of the very few Latin American —read: *not* US Latino— scholars of Middle English literature.

Although these distinctions only made themselves marginally present in the academic context, I still recall the moment a professor from a different field expressed surprise because I did medieval studies as opposed to “Ethnic and Third World Literature” on the basis that I came from Mexico; or the numerous times fellow graduate students (but not my medievalist cohort, of course) were surprised to learn that English, and not Comparative Literature, was my departmental home based solely on the fact that I was a foreign student and Comp Lit is where foreign students belong. Incredible though they seem, instances like these revealed an often uncomfortable truth: there are still limits for those seeking to transgress disciplinary or cultural boundaries, and often, these limits manage to remain in disguise, much like the image of Spain present throughout these dissertation.

Indeed, as I have shown, Spain manifests itself delicately in the lives of Aristorius and his Jewish fellows; without Spain, Chaucer simply could not have written a treatise on the astrolabe, or, even better, thought of English as a scientific language; it is because (and not despite) Spain, that a text such as *Floris and Blancheflour* exists in the first place. In this sense, perhaps these remarks appear a bit celebratory when the goal of my dissertation is to problematize an image rather than redeem it, but part of the reason in

making something visible is also to make it legitimate. Therefore, the means that the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, and *Floris and Blancheflour* collectively find to conceal and represent Spain at the same time might be proof an invisible romance, i.e., a strategy that, through the act of hiding, renders something intimate.

In his 1990 Nobel Prize lecture *La búsqueda del presente (In Search of the Present)* Octavio Paz, the Mexican poet, translator, and modernist *par excellence*, compares himself to a medieval pilgrim-knight in a mission to uncover what he calls “poetic modernity”: “the search for poetic modernity was a Quest, in the allegorical and chivalric sense this word had in the 12th century. I did not find any Grail although I did cross several waste lands visiting castles of mirrors and camping among ghostly tribes.” In those waste lands, Paz treads on territory that fuses a medieval past as part of its history (the ruins he evokes are its vestiges), and transforms that history into a timeless future. As a whole, the notion of Black Legend, as explored in this dissertation, is subject to a similar reading by reconfiguring a tale of friendship and conflict as uniquely medieval. However, as in the case of Paz’s knight, the quest remains, in many ways, unfinished. Surely these three texts’ pilgrimage through an “invisible” Spain has subjected them to new questions and new possibilities.

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