

## A CATALAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE *CONVERSO* CONTROVERSY

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THE MARGINALIZATION OF CATALAN LITERARY WORKS from the canon of Hispanic literature is the result of a tendency by many critics to disregard works written in languages other than Castilian. Jaume Roig's *Spill o Llibre de les dones* is one such work. By shunning non-Castilian texts, literary critics are not only limiting scholarship in the field but are also ignoring the possible contributions these works may have in understanding the medieval Hispanic world.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of Jaume Roig's *Spill* will contribute fruitfully to the study of the fifteenth-century lands of the Crown of Aragon in particular, and to medieval peninsular literature in general.

The fifteenth-century Catalan poet from Valencia, Jaume Roig, was city councilor and private physician at the court of Queen María de Castella and Alfonso V the Magnanimous.<sup>2</sup> *Spill*, which was written in Catalan circa 1460 and consists of over 16,000 verses of four or five syllables, each rhyming in couplets, is a virulent and exhaustive satirical denunciation of women with some critics calling it the most misogynistic of all Catalan works.<sup>3</sup>

The misogynistic diatribe is nevertheless not a unique phenomenon, as it was a successful literary theme of the fifteenth century.<sup>4</sup> According to Rosanna Cantavella, the topos—the “cuestión de la mujer,” or matter concerning

<sup>1</sup>The work has received very little attention outside of Catalonia as it has only very recently been translated into English. See María Celeste Delgado-Librero, “Jaume Roig's *Spill*: A Diplomatic Edition and an English Translation of Ms. Vat. Lat. 4806,” Diss., University of Virginia (2003).

<sup>2</sup>Michael Solomon, *The Literature of Misogyny in Medieval Spain, the Arcipreste de Talavera and the Spill* (Cambridge, 1997), 5, explains that Roig, born the son of a physician in the fifteenth century, was educated in Paris at the faculty of medicine and was later named official examiner of physicians in 1435 upon returning to Valencia.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Terry, *Catalan Literature* (New York, 1972), 45–7. Solomon explains that medievalists have typically denied or disregarded the social consequences of misogyny. He cites Jacob Ornstein who believes that misogyny in Spain did not really take hold until the very late fifteenth century with the works of Fernando de Rojas and Luis de Lucena. For Ornstein, these two writers were neither Spaniards nor Castilians but rather converted Jews. However, for others, misogynistic discourse was a literary game and social pastime aimed to provoke nothing more than laughter. *The Literature of Misogyny*, 2.

<sup>4</sup>Antonia Carre, “*Espejo*, de Jaume Roig,” *Insula* 43:497 (1988), 6.

women—stems from thirteenth-century France where it was passed onto Catalan literature in the fourteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, most critics situate the misogyny of the *Spill* within the Latin tradition. As Solomon states,

The most common way of treating the misogynist discourse in the *Spill* is to situate it within a long tradition of authors including Tertullian, John of Salisbury, Walter Map, Andreas Capellanus, Jean leFevre, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Fransesc Eiximenis, Bernat Metge and Pere Torroella.<sup>6</sup>

By pointing to the tenacity of antifeminist writing, these critics hope to account for the author's women-bashing as part of an ongoing tradition.<sup>7</sup>

However, for Solomon, with whom I concur,

Such an approach fails to seek out the specific historical and cultural conditions that encourage men to write against women. By collapsing all antifeminist writing into the trans-historical, this approach fails to ask why, in a particular historical moment, men choose to perpetuate traditional (mis)representations of women. It undermines attempts to analyze institutions and ideologies that foster misogynist discourse, and it fails to answer the most rudimentary question of all: What did Roig hope to gain by writing treatises against women?<sup>8</sup>

While Roig may follow in the footsteps of his Latin contemporaries with respect to the employ of the “woman” topos, we cannot presume that he himself was a misogynist, nor can we consider him more misogynistic than his contemporaries.

In their investigations into the history, culture, civilization, and language of medieval Spain, scholars have often confronted various controversies. One of the most controversial issues in the field of medieval peninsular studies has centered on the contribution of converted Jews, often referred to as *conversos*, to the development of Spanish arts and letters.<sup>9</sup> As N. Roth states, while the “*conversos*

<sup>5</sup>Rosanna Cantavella, *Els card i el llir, Una lectura de L'Espill de Jaume Roig* (Barcelona, 1992), 13–40.

<sup>6</sup>Solomon, *Literature of Misogyny*, 3. See also Alcuin Blamires, ed. *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>During the years 1391 to 1492, widespread pogroms against the Jews took place in the Peninsula which culminated in the Edict of Expulsion of 1492. During this time large-scale conversions occurred whereby Jews, either through coercion or personal conviction, converted to Catholicism en masse. These converts are referred to as *conversos* in modern Castilian today. While many converts were religious believers in and firmly adhered to their new faith, others continued to maintain ties

are not only important as a subtopic of the history of the Jews of Spain, they also played a major role, if not *the* [emphasis mine] major role, in the development of Spanish poetry and literature."<sup>10</sup>

Gregory Hutcheson explains that a controversial issue in the study of medieval peninsular literature has centered on the validity of various critics' claims to detect an identifiable voice that marks the works of *converso* authors.<sup>11</sup>

As John Edward writes,

If any general tendencies can be discerned in recent studies of the literary output of late medieval Spanish conversos, they are that a distinctive mental outlook existed among new converts from Judaism to Christianity, and their immediate descendants, which arose out of the disorientation supposedly caused by the transfer from a minority to the majority community; and that those who made this transition brought to Christian beliefs and practice at least some of the insights and experiences of the Judaism in which they had been brought up. The question here is, more specifically, whether such a *converso* mentality can be discerned.<sup>12</sup>

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with former Jewish communities and often practiced Judaism secretly. Many endeavored to reconvert *conversos* to Judaism. The Spanish Inquisition was established to eradicate crypto-Jews and others deemed heretics by the Church. Hispanists and historians studying the issue today include John Edwards, "The Conversos: A Theological Approach," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 62 (1985), 39–49; "Conversos, Judaism, and the Language of the Monarchy in Fifteenth Century Castile," *Circa 1492: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Colloquium: Litterae Judaeorum in Terra Hispanica*, ed. Isaac Benabu (Jerusalem, 1992), 207–23; David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia, 1996); Gregory S. Hutcheson, "Inflecting the Converso Voice," *La corónica* 25:1 (1996), 3–5; Gregory Kaplan, "Toward the Establishment of a Christian Identity: The Conversos and Early Castilian Humanism," *La corónica* 25:1 (1996), 53–67. Francisco Márquez Villanueva, "The Converso Problem: An Assessment," in *Collected Studies in Honour of Américo Castro's Eightieth Year*, ed. M. P. Hornik (Oxford, 1965), 317–34; and Dayle Seidenspinner-Núñez, "Inflecting the Converso Voice: A Commentary on Recent Theories," *La corónica* 25:1 (1996), 6–18; among many others.

<sup>10</sup>Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison, 1995), xiii.

<sup>11</sup>Gregory Hutcheson, "Inflecting the Converso Voice," *La corónica* 25:1 (1996), 3. Américo Castro, who has emphasized the *converso* ethic in Hispanic literature, believed that the anxiety of everyday life of men sometimes threatened by sudden social and economic ruin produces "creations of great philosophical and esthetic value which may give rise to whole literary genres" (cited in Antonio Domínguez Ortíz, "Historical Research on Spanish Conversos in the Last Fifteen Years," trans. M. P. Hornik, *Collected Studies in Honour of Américo Castro's Eightieth Year*, 79.

<sup>12</sup>John Edwards, "Conversos, Judaism, and the Language of the Monarchy in Fifteenth-Century Castile," *Circa 1492: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Colloquium: Litterae Judaeorum in Terra Hispanica*, ed. Isaac Benabu, (Jerusalem, 1992), 207.

However, Roth is of the opinion that Hispanists' claims to detect a *converso* mentality in the literature of the period is absurd. For Roth,

There is little point in searching for any Jewish influences in the writings of *conversos*. *Conversos* were not Jews, not even crypto-Jews, but Christians. The intellectuals among them expressed themselves either in the most pious of theological and devotional literature or in the humanistic style of the age; in a manner no different from, and learned from, that of Old Christian models. The *converso* writers of the fifteenth century retained a strong religious feeling and absolutely orthodox Christian views.<sup>13</sup>

In his study of *converso* texts, Colbert I. Nepaulsingh defines them as “texts that permit their meanings to be drastically altered depending on the perspective of the reader.”<sup>14</sup> In light of the social climate of the period of persecution of *conversos* by the Inquisition in Spain, *converso* texts can be thought of as texts written so that “Christian readers would understand them one way, while Jews would read the same words and understand them in a totally different way.”<sup>15</sup> For Nepaulsingh,

A *converso* text is culture-coded so that its hidden meanings remain opaque to those who, if they were capable of discovering those hidden meanings, would persecute the author, while at the same time these opaque meanings are clear to a select group of subtle readers.<sup>16</sup>

Nepaulsingh goes on to explain that a *converso* text must contain some element (word, image, or other reference) that is unmistakably clear to some readers and almost entirely opaque to others. Once this *converso* element is

<sup>13</sup>N. Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison, 1995), 187.

<sup>14</sup>Colbert I. Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold in Filigrees of Silver: Jewish Writing in the Eye of the Inquisition* (New York, 1995), x.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. Ronald E. Surtz, in his article, “Características principales de la literatura escrita por judeo-conversos: algunos problemas de definición,” *Judíos, sefarditas, conversos: La expulsión de 1492 y sus consecuencias*, ed. Ángel Alcalá, (Valladolid, 1995), 549, 554, 551, writes that “dentro de la Península, el autor converso se dirigía a un público mezclado que podía o no descifrar sus mensajes (in the Peninsula, the *converso* author presented himself to a mixed audience that was either able or unable to decode his messages); and that “los lectores que leen el mismo texto buscando el mismo tipo de mensajes acaban por hacer lecturas diferentes” (readers that read the same text searching for the same type of messages finish by having read differently.) In other words, there exists a “relación entre la interpretación de un texto y sus lectores” (a relationship between the interpretation of a text and its readers).

<sup>16</sup>Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold*, 3.

perceived, the entire work yields a necessarily tortured meaning quite other than the meaning more easily understood by most readers.<sup>17</sup> Nepaulsingh quotes from the Talmud in elaborating his conception of *converso* texts:

He who translates [i.e. interprets] a verse with a strict literalness is a falsifier, and he who makes additions to it is a blasphemer. It is valid to inquire beyond the literal meaning—there is no doubt that speech can also perform acts and that these acts have a meaning that is not confined to the meaning of the words.<sup>18</sup>

For Joseph H. Silverman, the full meaning of a text cannot be derived from contemplation of the text without considering the political, economic, psychological, and intellectual setting to which it belongs.<sup>19</sup> Ellis Rivkin agrees, stating:

Every source implies a context. Every particular document presumes that larger world which gives it meaning. A source or a document does not exist for itself; its existence is dependent on that which brought it into being. To have grasped its meaning is thus to have grasped its relationship to a total world; to have isolated it is to have distorted, to some extent, its truth.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in the study of *converso* texts, it is necessary to understand the kinds of environment that are conducive to the creation of *converso* texts as “persecution ... often yields ... *converso* texts.”<sup>21</sup> The socio-historical events of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries leading up to and including the Spanish Inquisition and Expulsion as well as the climate of Christian/*converso*/Jewish relations serve as the background against which the *Spill* is read.

According to Leo Strauss,

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Colbert I. Nepaulsingh, *Towards a History of Literary Composition in Medieval Spain* (Toronto, 1986), 8. Nepaulsingh explains that the theoretical basis for *converso* texts is found in the writing of Maimonides. In the introduction to his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides explains how the same text can convey opposite meanings and how a text can be read superficially. For Nepaulsingh, Maimonides is describing what he calls a *converso* text.

<sup>19</sup>Joseph H. Silverman, “On Knowing Other People’s Lives, Inquisitorially and Artistically,” *Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*, eds. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Ann J. Cruz (Berkeley, 1991), 157–75.

<sup>20</sup>Ellis Rivkin, “The Utilization of non-Jewish Sources for the Reconstruction of Jewish History,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 48 (1957–8), 184.

<sup>21</sup>Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold*, 6.

Persecution ... gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature in which the truth about all crucial things is presented, exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only. It has all the advantages of private communication without having its greatest disadvantage—that it only reaches the writer's acquaintances. It has all the advantages of public communication, without having its greatest disadvantage, capital punishment for the author.<sup>22</sup>

Angus Mackay explains that in an environment of persecution, a slight remark or an inappropriate action might result in serious consequences.<sup>23</sup> If a *converso* was unable to express his/her ideas openly for fear of attack or reprisal, the literature may have been utilized as a vehicle in which to encode attacks on prevailing religious and social systems.<sup>24</sup> With the establishment of the Inquisition, a *converso* stood the risk of being denounced not only for judaizing but also for writing a heretical work.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, a favorite strategy of *conversos* (and of those writing under the specter of persecution) was to produce a polysemic text, in which different meanings overlap and disguise one another, which creates diversionary movements and the possibility of varying interpretations.<sup>26</sup>

One of the literary strategies within the polysemous text of the *converso* writer is that of satirical invective.<sup>27</sup> Bitter humor and satire in literary writings can be attributed to persecuted peoples.<sup>28</sup> For persecuted individuals, the conflict between the inner self and the outer self is the product of the fashion of satire, and satire becomes a means of liberating these groups, especially the Jews.<sup>29</sup> One finds a lack of seriousness in Roig's misogyny, and thus the reader is made to speculate on the author's true intentions. For Terry, the humor inherent in the

<sup>22</sup>Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (New York, 1952), 25.

<sup>23</sup>Angus Mackay, *Society, Economy and Religion in Late Medieval Castile* (London, 1987), 171.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>25</sup>According to Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold*, 21, the punishment for possession of a book condemned by the Inquisition, or for submitting a book for printing without permission, was death and confiscation of property.

<sup>26</sup>José Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (Albany, 1992), 58.

<sup>27</sup>The use of satirical invective is also found in the works of many Castilian *converso* poets of Medieval Spain. These poets include Juan Alfonso de Baena, Antón de Montoro and Rodrigo Cota, among others. See the author's doctoral dissertation entitled "Identifying the *Converso* Voice," Temple University (2000).

<sup>28</sup>Kenneth Scholberg, *La sátira e invectiva en la España medieval* (Madrid, 1971).

<sup>29</sup>Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, 1986).

work is really only incidental, as in the long run few works are so unremittingly pessimistic. For this reason, one can only wonder at the apparent gulf that separates the fiction from the unknown facts of the author's life.<sup>30</sup>

For Nepaulsingh, the authors writing during this time used a technique of subtle concealment in which "figurative meanings of greater value than the obvious ones are hidden like apples of gold beneath filigrees of silver."<sup>31</sup> The Golden Age Spanish poet Góngora wrote that the true meaning of a text could be known to those who have the ability to cast away the shell and discover the hidden mysteries.<sup>32</sup> This strategy was quite common during the Middle Ages as various medieval Christian authors employed this tactic (Gonzalo de Berceo, Juan Manuel, and the anonymous author of *El libro del caballero Zifar*, among others). It is suggested, however, that in the case of Roig and the *Spill* the mysteries that lie hidden beneath the metaphorical shell pertain to the Jewish or *converso* voice, while the shell itself, the superficial representation of a misogynistic diatribe, functions as a necessary disguise for an author composing a text during a period of intense suspicion and persecution.

Consequently, this paper proposes that *Spill* is more than just a misogynistic diatribe against women in general and *converso* women in particular. Keeping in mind the concept of the polysemous text alluded to above, it is suggested that Roig used the literary theme of misogyny as a pretext behind which he hid his tenuous Jewish lineage. The literary ploy of an abusive verbal attack on the evilness of womankind may have provided Roig the means by which to shield himself from the official eyes and ears of the Valencian Inquisition—an extremely precarious situation to be in fifteenth-century Valencia.

As suggested, in analyzing this key medieval misogynistic work, one must consider the historical background of the text. Haim Beinart explains that events leading up to the establishment of the Valencian Inquisition of 1484–1530 can be traced to a series of violent outbreaks, which swept over Spain in the summer of 1391. Led by fanatical anti-Semites such as Fernando Martínez, the Archdeacon of Ecija, and fueled by Vicente Ferrer's preaching and propaganda campaigns, pogroms and massacres of Jews broke out as a result of deteriorating economic and political conditions in both Castile and the peninsular Crown of Aragon, which included Aragon, Valencia and the Catalan counties.<sup>33</sup> In Castile, particularly in Toledo in 1449 and Ciudad Real in 1474, a second wave of

<sup>30</sup>Terry, *Catalan Literature*, 45–7.

<sup>31</sup>Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold*, ix.

<sup>32</sup>Cited in Faur, *In the Shadow of History*, 58.

<sup>33</sup>Haim Beinart, "The Converso Community in Fifteenth Century Spain," *The Sephardi Heritage*, ed. R. D. Barnett (London, 1971), 42–56.

violence broke out as a result of the economic distress of the years 1447–9 and 1465–73, directed this time not at the Jews but against the *conversos*.<sup>34</sup>

The controversy surrounding the sincerity of the New Christians, be it of Jewish or Muslim descent, led to proposals to establish the Spanish Inquisition. Thus, with the intent of eradicating judaizing *conversos*, the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel, imposed the Spanish Inquisition on both Castile and Aragon. In order to solidify the religious unity of Spain, the Catholic Kings expelled those Jews unwilling to commit to Christianity, in the hope that their expulsion would eradicate Jewish contamination of the *conversos*' new Catholic faith.<sup>35</sup>

In Valencia, while an unspoken acceptance of the *conversos* existed, between 1460 and 1467 judaizing *conversos* were being tried within the framework of the Papal Inquisition.<sup>36</sup> During the first stage of the Valencian Inquisition, the *conversos* appear to have been divided into three groups: those who maintained a Judaic style of life and were Jewish except for name; those who believed in and practiced both Judaism and Catholicism; and those who believed themselves to be fervent Catholics. Official awareness of, and sensitivity to, Judaic ceremonies increased rapidly in the fifteenth century in response to the growing national preoccupation with the *converso* problem. Offenses committed against the Catholic faith included the following: the practice of specific Jewish ceremonies, rites and customs; the avoidance of the practice of Catholic rituals by *conversos*; and deviant or superstitious behavior and practices.<sup>37</sup> It is against this background, a dangerous period of religious intolerance and persecution, that *Spill* is set.

<sup>34</sup>Stephen Haliczer, *Inquisition and Society in the Kingdom of Valencia, 1478–1834* (Berkeley, 1990), 224.

<sup>35</sup>Mark D. Meyerson, "Religious Change, Regionalism, and Royal Power in the Spain of Fernando and Isabel," *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Robert I. Burns, S. J.*, Proceedings from Kalamazoo, ed. L. J. Simon (Leiden, 1995), 96–112.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 107–8. Meyerson notes that only Castile witnessed intense resentment by Old Christians towards the *conversos*, who, in the latter half of the fifteenth century, suffered from extensive violence. He points out that it was also in Castile where a marked preoccupation with *limpieza de sangre*—purity of lineage—first received attention in discriminatory legislation and where the new Inquisition had its most vociferous proponents. In the Crown of Aragon, however, the *converso* problem in terms of social conflicts and mob violence was not as much of a problem as it was in Castile.

<sup>37</sup>Haliczer, *Inquisition and Society*, 224. Haliczer explains that by 1460, Catholic lay and ecclesiastical authorities could turn to Alonso de Espina's  *Fortalitium fidei* (*Fortress of the Faith*), which provided a type of "master catalog" of common offenses against the Catholic faith committed by *conversos*. He states that the catalog included the identification of twenty-five offenses. Related to this last category is the process of "demonizing" whereby Spain's *conversos* were accused of employing magic, worshipping evil spirits and committing horrible and inhumane crimes in addition to religious heresy.

In the Preface of the text the author tells us that he fled to Callosa in order to escape the epidemic of Valencia and wrote his book there, not only for the entertainment of his pastimes but also to teach by his experiences and to alleviate a public error of which he was a victim.<sup>38</sup> The author carries out his intentions through a narrator. This narrator is also the protagonist, who directs his discourse to his nephew by relaying the story of his life, which, he hopes, will serve as an example to others, particularly young people and those who have suffered pain and anguish. He wants his narrative to serve as a warning for those going astray to mend their ways.

As he states, “Quiero referir ... mi negra vida, repleta de males, para ejemplaridad y como documento” (I want to relay the events of my black life, full of misfortunes, as an example and as a document).<sup>39</sup> After the protagonist’s chief aim of settling down as a respectable married citizen of Valencia is frustrated by a series of disastrous marriages, he declares himself old and alienated from the world that he has renounced. He states that the purpose of his book is to teach that women are repulsive, that they deserve to be treated harshly, and that only the Virgin Mary should be loved and venerated.

In Book One of *Spill*, we see the protagonist setting out on foot from Catalonia to earn his way after having been expelled by his mother from his home. Along the way, he becomes ill and spends the night at a hospital in Clapes.<sup>40</sup> The protagonist then sets out for Paris, passing through Tarragona, Barcelona, Montserrat, Beziers, and Saint-Denis. He then tells us that he crosses

<sup>38</sup>The “public error” to which Roig refers is unclear but significant to this argument. Could Roig have had exchanges or encounters with the authorities regarding his tenuous Jewish lineage? The suggestion is pure speculation as no known data to this effect has been revealed.

<sup>39</sup>All citations of the *Spill* are from the Castilian edition Jaume Roig, *El espejo de Jaume Roig: poema valenciano del siglo XV*, trans. R. Miquel i Planas (Barcelona, 1942), 17, 712–5. Translations are mine. David Wachs in an unpublished article entitled “Is Jaume Roig’s *Spill* the Missing Link Between *maqama* and Picaresque?” suggests that Roig’s *Spill* may be the “missing link” between the Semitic *maqamat* and Spanish picaresque literary genres. He proposes that *Spill* is a proto-picaresque narrative which may have been influenced by the Arabic and particularly the Hebrew *maqamat* literary tradition. Wachs explains that the *maqama* was introduced to Arabic literature in the late tenth century and features a main character, an itinerant rogue personality, who cons his audiences, dupes them and leaves them penniless. The narratives are not autobiographical but rather serve as a literary device or frame to teach and lead by example. See author’s article “The *Libro de buen amor* as Mudéjar Art,” currently under revision. These *maqamat* were cultivated in the Muslim world as well as in Al-Andalus. Wachs explains that in the Iberian Peninsula, Jewish authors were often educated in Arabic but cultivated this genre in Hebrew as well. Because these Jewish writers were proficient in Castilian and Catalan, their work may have served as a literary model for Christian authors who would have had access to their texts through Jews and *conversos*. Wachs believes that while Roig’s work falls within the tradition of misogyny, the work is “without precedent in medieval Iberian literature in that unlike any other work before the Castilian *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), the *Spill* displays many of the stylistic and structural characteristics of the picaresque novel (5).”

<sup>40</sup>Roig later becomes administrator of this hospital.

the Pyrenees and passes through Lerida and Sagunto on his return home to Valencia. His next journey takes him on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela whereby he passes through Requera and Santo Domingo de la Calzada before arriving in Santiago de Compostela. On his return, he passes through Olite, crosses the Ebro, and enters the city of Zaragoza, from where he travels to Teruel and Segorbe. Through his journeys the protagonist encounters a variety of women who provide him with the imagery for his vivid descriptions of the sights and scenes of life in fifteenth-century Spain.

Through his encounters with women, the protagonist is able to improve his lot in life. When his mother sends him out of the house, she recounts the various professions he can acquire in order to support himself. However, he acquires none of them and instead becomes a soldier of fortune by teaming up with a knight whom he serves and with whom he partakes of the conquered booty. As part of this booty, he is awarded a rich duchess as prisoner who pays him her ransom in exchange for her freedom. After acquiring wealth through the duchess, the protagonist states that he married his first wife, whom he met through a procuress, for her dowry and exceptional lineage.<sup>41</sup> As the procuress states, “Vengo a proponeros un casamiento muy excepcional: se trata de una doncella buena y hermosa hacendosa y bien heredada.”<sup>42</sup> (I propose to you an exceptional marriage: It has to do with a good and beautiful lady who happens to be an heiress.) Fena Querol Faus explains that “much attention is paid to one’s family lineage; and also the dowry which one carries has much weight. The first woman turns out to be very good for him because she carries a good dowry.”<sup>43</sup>

Faus describes Roig’s protagonist as “a man who constantly improves his social rank as a result of money.”<sup>44</sup> While as a child he is thrown out of the house, he consequently earns his way in life as a roving knight. The protagonist, once enriched, returns home to marry and establish himself. Faus classifies him as bourgeois. He has money but he does not possess noble blood, and he becomes a very comfortable middle class citizen.<sup>45</sup> The emphasis on money and the acquisition of wealth, characteristic of fifteenth-century urban Valencian society, leads one to pinpoint a certain social class prevalent in Roig. For Faus,

<sup>41</sup>The literary character of the procuress stems from the Semitic literary tradition and can be found in many literary works of Medieval Spain. See Fernando de Rojas’ *La Celestina* and Juan Ruíz’s character Trotaconventos in *El libro de buen amor*. Contemporary authors addressing this topic include Jean Dangler in her book *Mediating Fictions* (Lewisburg, 2001), works by Leila Rouhi, and this author’s article entitled “Identifying the Converso Voice in Fernando de Rojas’ *La Celestina*,” *Mediterranean Studies* 13 (2004), 77–105.

<sup>42</sup>Roig, *El Espejo*, 715.

<sup>43</sup>Fena Querol Faus, *La vida valenciana en el siglo XV: Un eco de Jaume Roig* (Valencia, 1963), 63.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

the “bourgeois, the least defined class of that time in other places is here the most abundant and significant. Roig’s book is based on it.”<sup>46</sup>

This emphasis on things “bourgeois” is noted in Roig’s critical satire of the mercantile class of women who work in the marketplace. According to the protagonist, those who sell fish are the worst kind of thieves because they sell rotten fish for fresh; they infringe upon the law by not praising God in the Cathedral before selling; on Sunday, when the stores are closed, they conduct business indoors; they keep cages full of chickens and other birds along with curdled oxen blood and sacrificed animals; and they deceive the buyer in price and weight and waste time on excessive haggling. In all of their business dealings lies a trick. Because they never go to church, he concludes that they are all false piles of manure.

Roig not only criticizes the mercantile woman, but the *Mora* is also another figure satirically portrayed by Roig. While the protagonist travels on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, he witnesses two scenes reminiscent of the Inquisition. The first concerns a *Mora*, who, contaminated by her faith, is accused of being a devil. Pretending to take communion, she hides it in a box, which she then tries to burn. The protagonist tells us that this event took place on a Friday at noon whereby at the appropriate time the Moorish dog began to say her prayers. The *Mora*’s refusal to accept communion and Christ lead her husband to express his fear of what is to come, a trial by the Inquisition. As he states,

Tengo ya perdida toda esperanza, si Dios poderoso no nos ayuda;  
somos muertos los dos, si llega nuestro caso a ser conocido por el  
populacho; tomemos el partido que mejor pueda librarnos y nos salve la  
vida.<sup>47</sup>

(I have already lost hope. If the Omnipotent one does not help us, the  
two of us are dead. If our case becomes known to the populace, we will  
take the path that will best set us free and save our lives.)

The second scene centers on a bride-to-be who was deflowered before the wedding unbeknownst to her future husband. Attempting to dupe the groom for his money, the bride pretends to be possessed by the devil. The protagonist describes the scene.

Una novia, desflorada ya antes de casar, el día de las arras, aparejada y  
emperifollada, supo fingir, torciendo el rostro, que tenía en el cuerpo un

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Roig, *El espejo*, 60–2.

espantoso diablo; apoderóse de una tranca, con la que buscó camorra a todo el mundo. Congrégase el pueblo maravillado, atada ella de pies y de manos. Viene la gente hacia la iglesia, y allí ¡qué de gestos y despropósitos le hizo al novio! El bueno del cura se propone santiguarla y echarle agua bendita encima, más la maldita pónese a representar todo género de diabluras, declarando que no cree en nada de todo aquello. El sacerdote la conjura, haciéndole el signo de la cruz; ella perjura y reniega de Dios.<sup>48</sup>

(Twisting her face, she picks up a stick and yells at everyone to come and get her. With her feet and hands tied, they take her in front of the church. The good curate tries to make the sign of the cross over her and sprinkle on some holy water. The accused woman comes at him, striking devilish poses. She says she does not believe in that stuff. The curate makes the sign of the cross and conjures her. She curses again and blasphemes God.)

After witnessing the scene with the *Mora* and the bride, the protagonist reanalyzes his life and considers marriage with his neighbor, a *beata*, whom he had left in charge as guardian of his home while making pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.<sup>49</sup> When he realizes that this woman is not what she pretends to be and that her religious piety is simply a pretext, he flees, leaving the false *conversa* to be condemned to whipping and expulsion for plying her trade of witchcraft. According to the protagonist, this woman saw herself accused and in the end condemned. They flailed her and expelled her. As he states, “Llegué a la convicción de que todo su proceder era hipocresía y apariencias nada más, propio de su fariseísmo y mojigatería”<sup>50</sup> (I arrived at the conviction that all of her behavior was hypocrisy and appearances, nothing more, suitable to her Phariseeism and witchcraft).

Along with other crimes such as adultery and murder, the practice of witchcraft was deserving of punishment in fifteenth-century Valencia. This punishment often took the form of torture. The protagonist witnesses a variety of episodes in which women are tortured as a result of committing various crimes. While in Paris, the protagonist describes what happened to the innkeeper of his hostel whom he had left in charge of his personal belongings. Accused of killing her father and robbing the protagonist,

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>49</sup>This “beata,” or pious, religious woman, is also referred to in the text as a “beguina.” The Beguines, a movement that originated in Northern Europe, were a religious community of converts of the Third Order, very prevalent in Valencia during the fifteenth century, who lived an austere and holy life.

<sup>50</sup>Roig, *El espejo*, 68.

“ella fué presa y metida desnuda dentro de un tonel, y cerrada herméticamente junto con una sierpe, una mona y un gallo viejo, y de este modo fue sumergida y lanzada río abajo.”<sup>51</sup>

(She was taken in, stripped of clothing, and thrown face down into an air-tight barrel along with a serpent, a monkey, and a rooster and in this way she was submerged and thrown in the river.)<sup>52</sup>

He also relays the story of the woman, who, accused of poisoning her husband, was buried alive with him. The gory details include the woman being placed in the ground first, face-up with her dead husband, face-down, on top of her. Then, the woman, still alive, is taken out of the grave, put on a cart, and wheeled to the outskirts of town where she is tied up and barbecued like a rotisserie pig, by the bonfire below her until nothing is left but ash.<sup>53</sup>

The equating of women, particularly *converso* women, with witchcraft is a central theme in Roig. In Book Three of *Spill*, King Solomon appears to the protagonist in a vision advising him to avoid and give up women, for they are creations of the devil who turn into witches at night.<sup>54</sup>

“Se preparan ellas un unguento con el cual se tornan brujas, y así se lanzan de noche, al espacio para congregarse en gran número; blasfeman de Dios, adoran a un macho cabrío y todas juntas ... de su caverna ... comen y beben, se alzan luego y vuelan por el aire, entrando por doquiera sin abrir las puertas.”<sup>55</sup>

(They prepare a potion with which they turn into witches, launching out, they blaspheme God, praise a male goat, and in their cave [where they unite], they eat and drink, then launch out again, flying through the air, entering wherever they wish without opening doors.)

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>52</sup>To my knowledge, there is no particular significance to these animals.

<sup>53</sup>Roig, *El espejo*, 31. The narrator describes the scene. “a ser enterrada viva, con el marido muerto encima y ella debajo; sacada aún con vida, fue llevada en carreta fuera al arabal; ... y atada ella al ojal dando vueltas, con una hoguera preparada debajo, fue rodada y chamuscada por envenenadora, hasta que todo fue ceniza.” Other morbid examples include the pastry baker who killed, cut, and baked men in meat pies, a woman described as a witch who extracted dead men’s teeth at night for use in potions, and a woman who prostituted her own son. Punishment of these women included the burning of their homes as well as being skinned alive, drawn and quartered.

<sup>54</sup>It is interesting to note that King Solomon, Biblical King of the Jewish people, takes on the role of advisor and mentor to the protagonist. Throughout the *Spill* reference is made to Biblical personalities including King Asvero from the Purim story whose wife Vashti disobeyed him.

<sup>55</sup>Roig, *El espejo*, 154.

Solomon suggests to the protagonist that he particularly disassociate himself from *converso* women:

Debe, sobre todo, darse muy cautamente a las conversas, porque son reacias, contumaces, y pertinaces, imbuidas de cisma: con perfidia desconfían del prepotente Dios verdadero, rey y hombre, y desesperan de su Ley, porque todavía esperan a otro mesías; no son ni judías ni cristianas; son en realidad, marranas y filisteas, cananeas o samaritanas, vanas, incrédulas y apostatas; están bautizadas, pero tienen en el corazón la judaica ley de Moisés.<sup>56</sup>

(You should be very careful of the *conversas* ... who still await the other Messiah. They are neither Jews nor Christians; in reality, they are Marranas and Philistines, Canaanites or Samaritans. They are baptized but in their hearts is Judaism—the law of Moses.)

Fearing that the protagonist may be labeled a heretic for his association with *conversas*, and thus subject to torture by the Inquisition, Solomon warns him: “Abandona ... el telonio de cambista” (Abandon the front of the moneylender); “No permanezcas por más tiempo en los caminos de las pecadoras, traidoras e infieles” (Do not stay for more time in the path of the fisherwoman, unfaithful traitors); “Apartáte de lugar tan peligroso, no permanezcas más en él: vete adonde te purifiques” (Leave such a dangerous place, do not stay any longer in it—go where you can be purified); “Todos los que no crean firmemente, o no lleguen a creer serán condenados y proscritos” (All of those who do not firmly believe or who do not come to believe will be condemned and exiled); “En Cataluña, han muerto consumidas por el fuego, sentenciadas en buenos procesos por razón de sus extravíos” (In Catalonia, many of them have died consumed by fire, sentenced in good processes by reason of their going astray).<sup>57</sup>

Solomon suggests that it is in the protagonist’s best interest to “haz abrenuncio de Bel y de Satán, y de todo lo que practican las encantadoras y hechiceras, pirománticas y nigrománticas” (openly denounce Baal, Satan, and everything else which the witches, piromantics, and necromancers practice); “abandona la vieja ley” (abandon the old law); “lavarte desnudo en el río Jordán” (get baptized in the Jordan River);<sup>58</sup> and receive the Virgin Mary. The

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 196, 194, 232, 154.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 191, 189, 192. During the Canaanite period of ancient Israel, Baal was the deity to whom the Canaanites and Hebrews prayed prior to receiving the law of Moses. This “old law” refers to the law of Moses of the Old Testament.

protagonist decides to heed Solomon's advice and preserve himself from the infernal dragon Belial ("me preservase del infernal dragon Belial").<sup>59</sup> The protagonist finally accepts the Virgin Mary as the perfect and ideal woman, and ultimately makes peace with himself and with womankind.

If we apply Nepaulsingh's concept of the polyemous text, the above examples and descriptions can be read on two parallels. On the surface, we read and understand that women who practice witchcraft are perceived as blasphemous devils and heretics deserving of punishment for their actions and beliefs through torturous means. Beneath the surface, however, we can read and interpret the above to signify that *conversos* (male or female), because they do not truly accept Jesus as the Messiah and are not true followers of Christianity, are deemed heretics and blasphemers meriting punishment. This punishment is carried out by means of the Inquisition. The solution to this problem is to denounce the "Old Law" (Judaism), accept the Virgin Mary and the Christian faith and become a true Christian believer. Anything else falls short and merits torture and punishment. Thus, we have two readings: The literal or surface reading constitutes the metaphorical shell as described by Nepaulsingh—the misogynistic diatribe, underneath which lies the hidden mystery—the coded Jewish or *converso* message.

As was noted at the beginning of this discussion, the protagonist left his home in order to make his way in life. Beinart explains that during the 1450s *conversos* were found leaving their dwellings to join other Jewish communities in order to keep their faith. These wanderings from community to community continued while the Jews were in Spain and even after their expulsion. "This urge to go away from one's village or town to an unknown place or community was due to the desire on behalf of the *converso*/Jew to separate himself from local gossip and dangers" and to get a new start on life.<sup>60</sup>

Roig supplies evidence in support of Beinart's explanation through various examples. In Book One of *Spill*, before setting out on his first journey, the protagonist tells us that his neighbor, a Jewish widow, had cooked one-half of her son in a broiler, split in two like a goat, saving the other one-half to drink as broth.<sup>61</sup> Upon setting out for Zaragoza, the protagonist mentions a place with a large number of people, all of whom had converted ("fue oído por mayor número de gentes, todas las cuales se convirtieron"),<sup>62</sup> and in a brothel in La Nao, the protagonist claims that everyone enjoyed themselves ... even the

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 244. "Belial," which in Hebrew means "the bad one," is used in reference to Satan.

<sup>60</sup>Beinart, "The Converso Community," 438.

<sup>61</sup>The description is as follows: "Otra vecina judía, viuda, asaba la mitad de un hijo suyo en un asador, partido como un cabrito, para comerlo, guardando cocida la otra mitad del hijo, para beberse el caldo." Roig, *El espejo*, 147.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 58.

*conversas*. (“¡Así se divierten las generosas ... y hasta las conversas!”)<sup>63</sup> Upon returning home after his first voyage, his newly remarried mother greets him with the following: “¡Apártate de ahí, marrano soez!”<sup>64</sup> (Get out of here you dirty Marrano pig!) These examples inevitably lead up to the question: Did Roig’s protagonist leave home simply, as he claims, “to make his way in life,” or was his flight from home a pretext to escape and disassociate himself from the dangers of living among a community of Jews and *conversos*?

The protagonist’s concern for improving his lot in life by marrying well, acquiring wealth, and adopting middle class values can be traced to the desire by *conversos* to improve one’s own position in the community in which one lived. By marrying his first wife, a rich woman of good lineage, Roig’s protagonist acquired wealth, respect, and thus a place within society, all of which might not have been possible had he married a fellow *conversa*.

Roig commonly employs analogy in his satirical denunciation of women, particularly through a negative portrayal of the Jews. In *Spill*, females assume the role of the “deceiving” merchant, an association often attributed to Jews of the Middle Ages. In Roig, the association of the Jew as a member of the mercantile bourgeoisie class, whose principal aim is to promote the circulation of money, is inverted with the *conversa* replacing the Jew in the role of merchant. By criticizing and denouncing women for commercial fraud, Roig may as well have been verbally attacking the Jews. According to Dayle Seidenspinner-Núñez,

Most Conversos accused of Judaizing, as well as most Conversos condemned by the Inquisition, clustered at the lower end of the social ladder; the fact that women also figured prominently in Inquisition records underscores their role in the preservation of Jewish tradition and its survival.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps because the flame of Jewish belief among the *conversos* was kept alive by women,<sup>66</sup> it was this group whom Roig chose to attack in his attempt to disassociate himself from his roots.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 23. The protagonist returns home to find his newly married mother charging him with being a “dirty marrano.” *Marrano*, a Spanish term which literally means “pig,” is often used in a derogatory fashion to refer to *conversos* of the Iberian Peninsula during the late Middle Ages. Which leads to the question: If the protagonist is a *marrano* (crypto-Jew/*converso*), then was the mother still a practicing Jew?

<sup>65</sup>Dayle Seidenspinner-Núñez, “Inflecting the Converso Voice: A Commentary on Recent Theories,” *La corónica* 25:1 (Fall 1996), 6–18.

<sup>66</sup>Stephen Haliczer, *Inquisition and Society in the Kingdom of Valencia, 1478–1834* (Berkeley, 1990), 213.

Haliczer cites the case of a *converso* merchant Pere de Ripoll, of Albarraçin, who, experiencing strong ambivalent feelings which came from an inability to feel entirely at home in either Christianity or Judaism, was caught beating and denouncing his wife in public for being a “bad Christian.” Perhaps for the same feelings experienced by Ripoll, Roig, rather than physically assaulting women, chose to verbally attack the primary transmitters of Jewish customs and culture.<sup>67</sup>

It is a known fact that men of letters frequently belonged to the ethnic and religious group of *conversos*; and while they were vilified by Jews and suspected by Christians, the convert to Christianity was to play a distinctive, though hardly enviable, role in Spanish life and letters.<sup>68</sup> While writings of the period show the *converso* problem and their social integration through a distorted mirror, they bring forth the social and public confusion which prevailed in fifteenth-century Spain.<sup>69</sup> For these reasons and through the examples presented in this work, it has been suggested, and hopefully demonstrated, that Roig, a prominent fifteenth-century physician in the court of the King of Aragon, used the literary device of the misogynistic diatribe, very common in his day, as a front behind which he hid himself from his Jewish roots in order to avoid the eyes and ears of the Valencian Inquisition.

<sup>67</sup>Seidenspinner-Núñez, “Inflecting the Converso Voice,” 16.

<sup>68</sup>Dwayne Carpenter, *Alfonso X and the Jews: An Edition and Commentary of Las Siete Partidas* (Berkeley, 1986), 10.

<sup>69</sup>Beinart, “The Converso Community,” 434. It is interesting to note that the title of Roig’s work, *Spill*, in the Catalan language means “mirror,” and Michael Solomon, *The Literature of Misogyny*, 110, explains that: “Roig’s title alerts the reader that he has in his possession a work that was created to function as a handbook of moral or theological principles, as a professional compendium, or ... as a practical manual of ... behavior designed for the general public. This means that the reader, even before glancing at the first page, is already predisposed to confront a guidebook rather than an extended narrative.” I suggest that this “handbook” may have served as a disguised guide for fellow converts with women becoming the medium through which Roig hopes not only to “heal” men (i.e. converso men), but to also address disturbing social issues.