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The Minster and the Privy: Rereading The Prioress's Tale

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[1]

THE DEEDS OF THE ABBOTS OF THE MONASTERY OF SAINT ALBAN recounts how the monks of Saint Alban, on the death in 1183 of their improvident abbot, Simon, encountered a man to whom they were in considerable debt, the great financier Aaron of Lincoln. Referring to his financing of a window and the shrine of Saint Alban in the cathedral, Aaron "boasted that it was he who had made the window for our Saint Alban and that from his own money he had prepared a home for the homeless saint" ("jactitabat se feretrum Beato Albano nostro fecisse, et ipsi, dehospitato, hospitium de pecunia sua praeparasse" [Walsingham 193–94; fig. 1]). While we do not know how the monks responded, they may have found in Aaron's words a troubling acknowledgment of an architectural contradiction in Christian culture. Some of the most exalted spaces of worship in medieval England, sites like the gorgeous shrine to Saint Alban, depended on money lent by Christendom's official enemy, the Jew. Medieval Christians viewed Jews as inherently materialistic, stereotyping them in the image of the grasping Jewish usurer. Aaron does suggest his worldliness as a moneylender, but he also links his materialism to a Christian church and its dead English occupant. Relics, signs of the embodied, physical aspect of medieval Christianity, required shelter, and the Christian faithful needed buildings in which to worship, holy spaces that relied on capital for their existence. Scholars of medieval architecture, most famously Jean Gimpel, have taught us much about the material culture of church building by delineating the labor it entailed. But the "basic question," asked ten years ago by Bennett Hill regarding improvements of the fabric of Rievaulx Abbey, remains pressing: "one wonders how the abbots *paid for* their renovations?"

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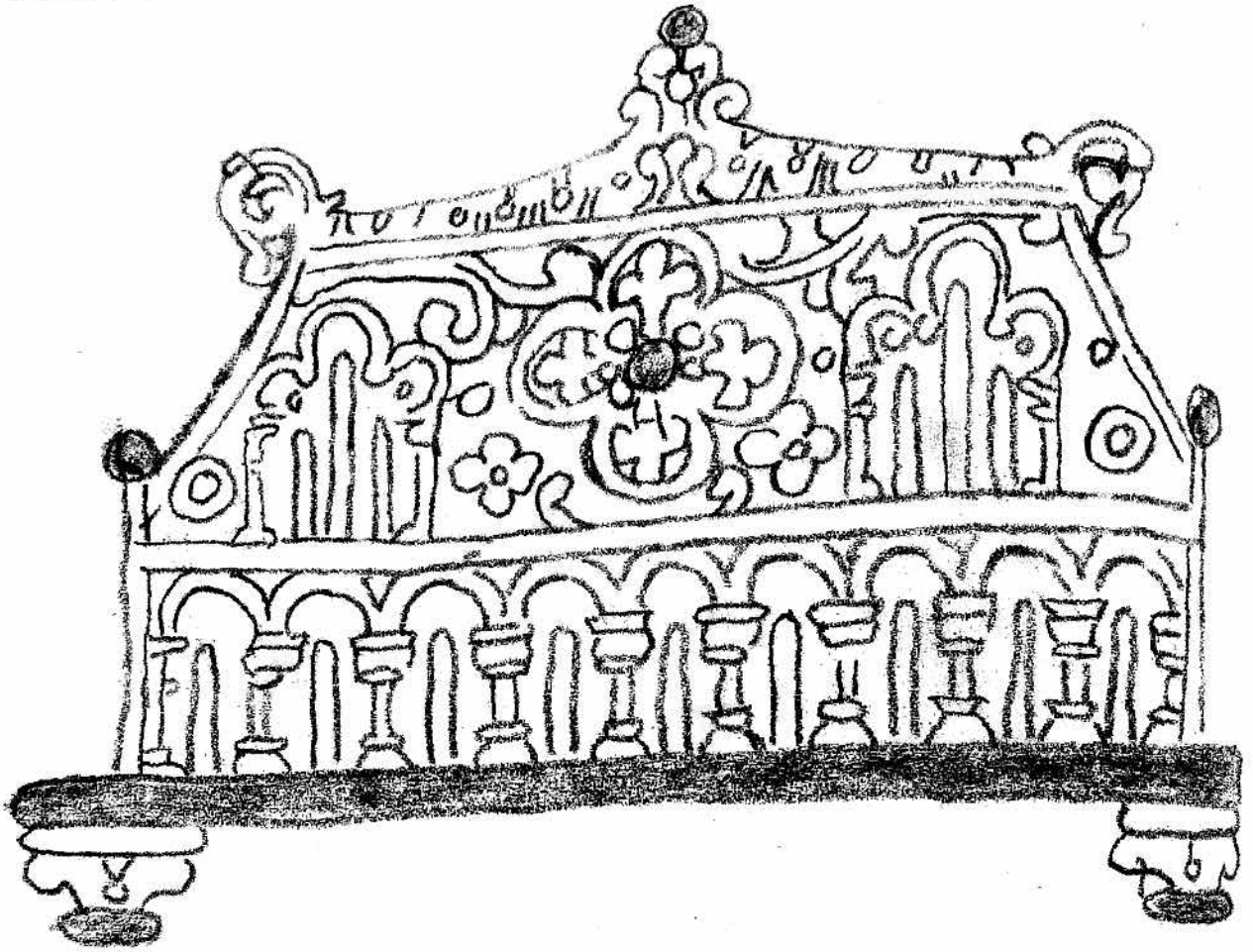

FIG. 1
Tracing of a detail of a drawing by Matthew Paris, in his *Vie de Seint Auban*, c. 1230–40. The detail, part of an image depicting the elevation of Saint Alban's relics, shows a shrine ordered by Abbot Simon and financed by Aaron of Lincoln. Trinity College Library, Dublin (MS 177, fol. 61r).

"The implication," Hill points out, "is that they borrowed" (93). Ironically, the sacred spaces of medieval Christian society depended on usury, a practice that came to be reviled as heresy.

Aaron's comment complicates the architectural thinking of English anti-Semitic narratives. Instead of linking Jews to sacred Christian places, those texts, which range from the earliest ritual-murder legend, told by Thomas of Monmouth in the 1150s, to the host-desecration fiction staged by the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* over three centuries later, imagine Jews in relation to profane built environments, domiciles where they kill Christian boys, violate Christian objects, and attack the Eucharist. According to the deep spatial structure of those writings, dangerous Jewish dwellings, where sinful violations occur, counterpoint Christian churches, where martyrs and the host are venerated. Aaron subverts the opposition of profane Jewish and sacred Christian edifices. By asserting his economic links to Saint Alban, Aaron shows how Jews, far from martyring young boys and attacking hosts, helped erect the churches that sheltered them. The Jew, who inhabits a den of iniquity in anti-Semitic texts, instead subsidized houses of Christian worship.

In what follows, I rethink one of the most familiar English stories of a boy martyred by Jews, Chaucer's Prioress's Tale, by interpreting it in terms of the currents of capital that yoked medieval Christian culture to its Jewish other. In that Canterbury tale, a schoolboy's Marian hymn so offends the inhabitants of the Jewry through which the boy passes that they conspire to murder him. But the Virgin Mary exposes their crime: hidden in a latrine in the Jewry, the violated boy miraculously resumes singing, is discovered, and ultimately is entombed in a local minster (i.e., a monastic church). While some earlier readers of the tale, like Sherman Hawkins, stressed its theological import, recent work by Louise Fradenburg, Steven Kruger, Lisa Lampert, and others has analyzed the offensive image of Jews on

which the nun's devotional message depends. As that scholarship has shown, at the heart of The Prioress's Tale are images of flow, contact, and containment that oppose Christian purity and Jewish danger. Thus, we find, in Kruger's words, "an opposition between the Christian body, attacked but preserved, and the Jewish body, foul [and] justly destroyed" (306; see also Lampert 79). At the same time, contemporary scholarship has identified in Chaucer's text what Anthony Bale describes as "elements which force ambiguous connections" between Christians and their supposed enemies (84). In details such as the beating the schoolboy fears he will receive for his unauthorized memorization of a hymn (lines 541–42) and the tearful convulsions of the monks who witness the boy's death (677–78), we find Christian counterparts to the cruelty and physical paroxysms of the murderous and defecating Jews of the tale (e.g., Bale 84–85; Fradenburg 106; Kruger 307; Lampert 79; Patterson, "Living Witnesses" 511).

In addition to those representations of bodily violence, issues tied to the theory and practice of moneylending structure the ambiguous connections between Christians and Jews in Chaucer's text. Curiously, in the substantial body of scholarship on The Prioress's Tale, critics have paid scant attention to moneylending, despite the fact that the Prioress opens her performance with a description of an Asian city whose lord, like Abbot Simon of Saint Alban, depends on Jews for "foule usure and lucre of vileynye" ("foul usury and illicit gain" [491]).[1] Chaucer's stress on usury becomes all the more striking when we consider that none of the forty miracle tales identified by scholars as analogues mentions moneylending, let alone foregrounds it.[2] Chaucer's other key set of analogues and sources, tales of the martyrdom of Hugh of Lincoln, to whom the Prioress alludes near the end of her performance (684), offers nothing approximating Chaucer's emphasis on usury.[3] The prominence of moneylending in Chaucer's text, I contend, urges us not to pass over that plot detail but instead to ponder it and ask how it sheds light on the whole narrative. By attending closely to the question of usury in The Prioress's Tale, we find a social commentary that resonates with Aaron's reference to funds linking him to Saint Alban and discover a new approach to some of the famous cruxes of Chaucer's narrative.

Chaucer's commentary on Christian materialism is not explicit. Although the nun foregrounds usury at the beginning of her tale, she soon drops it as a topic. Moreover, the Prioress, instead of linking Jews to Christian building practices, as Aaron does, associates them with a built environment far worse than the profane domiciles of most anti-Semitic tales: a public latrine, whose contents embody the sinful foulness of Jewish materiality and usury. Such elements of Chaucer's text confirm Roger Dahood's and other critics' claims that the tale offers an especially nasty version of the boy-martyr motif. Though the tale contains geographic and architectural dimensions of an aggressive anti-Semitism that uses the privy to demonize and contain Jews as usurers, the Prioress's privy ultimately fails to isolate Jews as sinful materialists and instead signifies currents not unlike the flow of capital binding Aaron to the shrine of Saint Alban. Culminating, like other anti-Semitic tales, in a church where a martyred boy resides, The Prioress's Tale does not finally imagine that building as a purely sacred site, as the Christian architectural opposite of the filthy Jewish pit. Rather, the Prioress's minster flows into and merges with the usurious privy. And it does so through the prime traveler of the tale, the singing boy (572). A territorializing figure, the boy connects the privy to the minster through elements such as the processional movement of his body between those locations as well as through contaminating aspects of his miraculous song. By merging latrine and church through such details, The Prioress's Tale exposes the precariousness

of all efforts to distinguish Christians from Jews and the futility, indeed undesirability, of attempts to rid Christianity of material impurities. If, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has taught us, some currents in the anti-Semitic literatures of medieval England united imaginatively disparate Christian populations, others exposed the connections between Christians and Jews, destabilizing fantasies of a coherent and sovereign Christian identity.

[II]

When the Prioress expounds on the nature of the privy into which the Jewish assassin thrusts the schoolboy (572–73), she offers arguably the most abject image of her tale. But the privy scene is not the first time filth emerges in her performance, whose opening sentence refers to "foule usure." Foule connotes sinfulness in that citation and resonates with the harshest condemnations of usury that appear in medieval theological, canonical, and popular writings.[4] An instance of the "bourgeois sin" of avarice (Le Goff 10), usury was linked with a lender's intention to profit from a loan, as the Prioress's pairing of it with "lucre of vileynye," or illicit gain, affirms (Yunck; Shatzmiller 45; *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Luke 6.34–35). The Prioress does not comment further on the nature of usury, but she indirectly elaborates on the practice through the two activities in which she depicts Jews engaging, the first of which is slaying the schoolboy. Christian writers evoked the sinfulness of usury by likening it to a slew of crimes, among them sodomy, prostitution, incest, adultery, perjury, and murder (Shatzmiller 45; Parkes 283). By representing Jews conspiring to kill a child, the Prioress therefore recalls the similarities drawn between murder and usury by Christian authorities such as Ambrose, who denounced lending as an act that consumed the life of the borrower (Maloney 255).

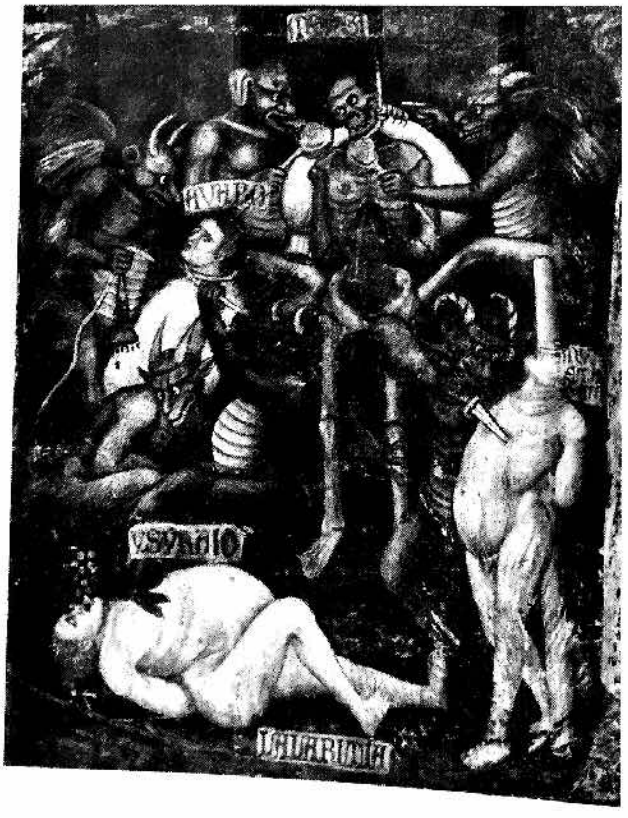

FIG. 2
Taddeo di Bartolo, detail of fresco depicting scenes of hell, c. 1396. Duomo, San Gimignano. Alinari / Art Resource, NY.

Yet if Chaucer wanted to evoke usury primarily through crime, he surely would have chosen theft, the illegal act medieval writers most frequently compared with lending (Le Goff 39–41). Thus, while its Jewish murder plot suggests usury, it is the other action identified with the Jews of The Prioress's Tale, defecation, that most manifests the sinfulness of usury. The voiding of waste is no crime, but excrement was an important sign of sinfulness in medieval culture (Hawkins 613). In a widespread iconography of sin, filth signaled viscerally the sinfulness of earthly life and was "a staple of *contemptus mundi* literature" (Bayless 147). And thanks to an emerging money economy that led to the elevation of avarice to the deadliest sin, usury often epitomized a wrongheaded quest for monetary gain that the pious should revile as so much dung. Thus, an exemplum by Jacques de Vitry recounts how a donkey bearing the corpse of a usurer is led by God to send "the cadaver flying into the dung beneath the gallows" (Le Goff 64). An even more arresting linkage of usury and defecation appears in a fresco of hell by Taddeo di Bartolo (c. 1396). For the punishment of *usuraio*, Taddeo depicts an obese, white, nude, and prostrate usurer

whose gaping mouth receives gold coins excreted by a naked, hairy, black, and grimacing devil (fig. 2). Jacques's sermon and Taddeo's fresco both illustrate how by labeling usury "foul" the Prioress suggests the resonance of that sin with the physical valences of *foule*, whose primary meaning is "dirty, filthy, soiled" ("Foule"). In the pit we witness not only the "stynkynge ordure of sin" ("stinking filth of sin" [157]) decried by the Parson in his tale but also the ordure medieval Christians associated especially with moneylending.

By linking Jews with usury and excrement, the Prioress exemplifies the classic workings of medieval anti-Semitism. Authorities such as Augustine relegated Jewish identity to a materialism and an attending interpretive literalism that was superseded by forms of Christian spirituality (Jeremy Cohen 44–51). Originating in Paul's hermeneutic assertion that "the letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3.6), the notion that Christianity launched a new, vital spirituality that supplanted a fatal Jewish literalism proved extremely influential during the Middle Ages, when derogatory images of literal-minded and carnal Jews proliferated, including representations that identified and even equated Jews with excrement. From the popular legend of the Jew who fell into a sewer to myths of Jews tossing statues of Mary into toilets, medieval Christians deployed fecal imagery to denigrate Jews and connote their foul materialism (Bayless 151; Bale 23–54; Price 199–202). With even greater frequency, medieval Christians from the twelfth century onward labeled Jews usurers, so often that a money bag was second only to funnel hats and exaggerated physiognomic features in visual stereotypes of Jews (Strickland 142). There are, to be sure, historical grounds for the linkage of Jews and finance. Jews in England came to dominate lending until Edward I outlawed the practice in 1275.[5] But beyond their real history as lenders, Jews were imagined to be essentially connected to lending, as the medieval terminology of usury demonstrates. By the twelfth century, the term *judaizare*, which Christian writers had used earlier to signify heresy, came to indicate the charging of interest (Lipton 33–34; Shatzmiller 47). Similarly, the Middle English word for Jews, *Jeuerie*, was synonymous with moneylenders as early as 1230 ("Jeuerie").

Such anti-Semitic concepts of the avaricious Jewish usurer, notions that often incorporated related images of Jewish filth, would have been well known to Chaucer, despite the fact that he lived long after 1290, when Edward I expelled all Jews from England. In Chaucer's late medieval milieu, negative stereotypes of Jews proliferated through artifacts such as the Hereford world map of circa 1300 (fig. 3). That *mappa mundi* locates contemporary Jews in

FIG. 3

Jews depicted on the Hereford World Map, c. 1300. Hereford Cathedral. © The Dean and Chapter of Hereford and the Hereford Mappa Mundi Trust.

the Asian upper half of the terrestrial world. West of the Red Sea and contiguous to the Exodus of the Israelites appears a group of men, one of whom has a stereotypical hooked nose. Termed *Iudei*, the men worship a bestial idol defecating a string of coins (Strickland 166; Leshock 210–12). In an England devoid of Jews but filled with images like that of the idolatrous Jews on the Hereford map, the equation of Jews with a foul materialism continued well after 1290 and into the Renaissance.

Insofar as the Prioress follows that offensive tradition of stereotyping and produces the Jew as a filthy usurious other to Christianity, she simplifies a complex situation. The chestnut of the Jewish financier hardly matched the realities of medieval Christendom, where the lending practices reviled by Christian thinkers and projected onto Jews had extended to the spaces of Christian life. As much emerges in Jacques's exemplum, where the dung-covered corpse is that of a Christian lender whose impenitence prompts his parish priest to refuse the body a proper burial (Le Goff 63–64). The most famous medieval Christian lenders were secular Italian bankers who, by the later Middle Ages, engaged in money-lending on a scale that far exceeded that of their Jewish counterparts (Shatzmiller 88). Particularly ironic is the entanglement of the medieval Church in lending. At the top of the ecclesiastical ladder, the papacy was indirectly involved in lending money at interest through taxes and fees, whose exactions in England are recorded by Matthew Paris (3: 184, 3: 328–32). Usury was prevalent enough among the English clergy that Richard fitz Nigel could refer matter-of-factly to "a clerk who is employed in usury" in his twelfth-century *Dialogue of the Exchequer* (Douglas and Greenaway 550).[6] Closer to Chaucer's period are Bishop Walter Langton (d. 1321) and Archbishop William Melton (d. 1340), English figures long recognized by scholars as usurers (Shatzmiller 85).[7]

If usurious clerics, bishops, and popes, like the worldly Prioress, with her golden brooch and well-fed pets (160), evince a materialism that queries the elevation of the spiritual church over the worldly temple, Aaron of Lincoln's words before the monks of Saint Alban provide us with the flip side of such ironies. The Church not only lent but also borrowed, from lenders both Christian and Jewish. In postconquest England, the Jewish bankers brought over by the Normans found some of their most important clients in abbots, bishops, and archbishops. A good portion of the loans went toward building the grand cathedrals and abbeys for which the Middle Ages are famous. Beyond Saint Alban at least nine Cistercian abbeys and two cathedrals, Lincoln and Peterborough, borrowed from Aaron of Lincoln (Roth 109; Jacobs 633–37; Richardson 90–91). A century later the financier Aaron of York (d. 1268) gave loans to seven or more abbots (Adler 133–35). To this day local York tradition refers to the Five Sisters Window in York Minster as the Jewish Window in remembrance of money lent by Aaron of York (fig. 4). The phenomenon of Jews financing the erection of buildings like York and Lincoln minsters indicates the presence inside Christian material culture of its great other, the Jew. In somewhat the same way that, on a temporal register, the priority of the Jews as God's first chosen people undermined medieval Christian rhetorics of supersession (Robbins 1–20), the reliance of sacred edifices on Jewish funding belied spatial efforts to distinguish Christians from Jews. Thinkers had long stressed the mystical qualities of the Christian church when asserting its supersession of Judaism. Bede, for example, in his biblical commentary *On the Temple* (c. 729–31), asserts his aim of seeking the "spiritual mansion of God in the material structure" of the temple, a goal that relegates the Jews to a physical temple that the spiritual community of Christians supplants (2.1). But the medieval cathedral dramatically departs from that stress on spirituality.[8] In their spectacular materialism and their basis in usury,

the stones, the stained glass, and the jeweled ornaments of the medieval minster indicated Christianity's entanglement in the mire of the Jewish usurer.

Christian writers were not blind to the ironies of church building. Denigrating the prideful, "unnecessary[,] and distracting magnificence" of church building was a "common theme" for ascetically bent writers such as the English Cistercian abbot Ælred of Rievaulx (d. 1167). Though Ælred helped build Rievaulx Abbey, he writes in his *Mirror of Love* that the monk "shuns any sort of habitation that is too large or extravagantly vaulted" and embraces humble sites of worship, so that any ornamentation and grandeur, from "fine hangings" to "marble pavements" and "glittering" vessels, "will seem to have become loathsome to him; and to be in a place where such things are, will make him feel like one expelled from paradise and imprisoned in a dungeon of filth and squalor" (Draper 45). In the same way that Ælred renders church magnificence repellant, foul, and sewer-like, Bernard of Clairvaux, the most famous Cistercian critic of church building (and the man who inspired Ælred to write *The Mirror of Love*), suggests in his *Apology* (c. 1125) how church magnificence opposes the monastic perception of all material delights as "dung" (Rudolph 281). Bernard's condemnation of church magnificence appears in chapter 28 of his *Apology*, part of a brief yet crucial section of the tract that scholars have hailed as the single most important medieval commentary on religious art. Chapter 28 provides references not only to the excremental qualities but also to the Jewish and usurious aspects of church building and art. Viewing the physical grandeur of the cathedral as atavistically Jewish, Bernard writes, "I will not mention the immense heights of the churches, their immoderate lengths, superfluous widths, costly refinements and painstaking representations which catch the worshipper's eye and impede his devotion, things which seem to

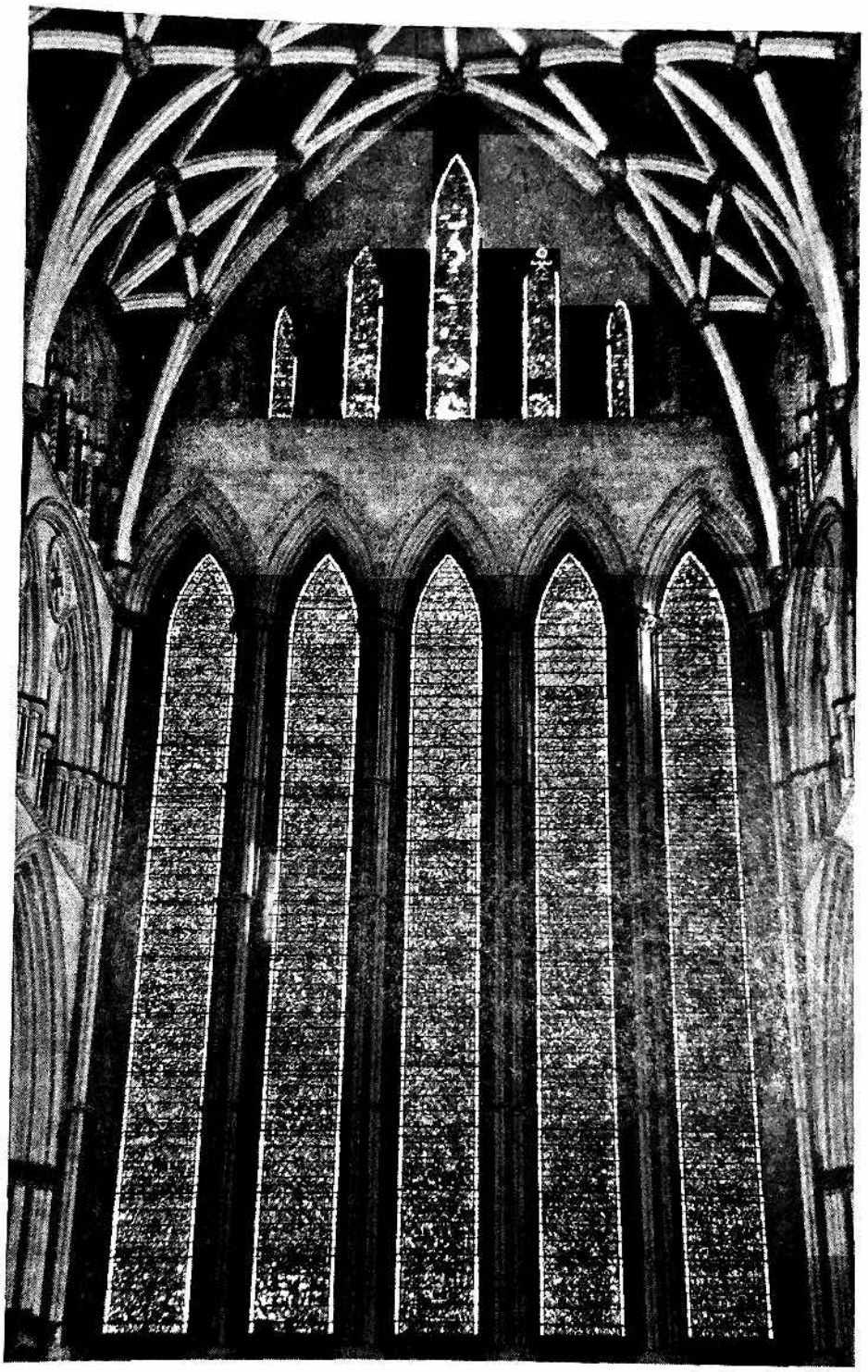

FIG. 4
The Five Sisters, or Jewish, Window, c. 1260. York Minster.

me in some sense a bringing back of ancient Jewish rites" (278–79). He sees in the physical grandeur of church edifices a turn away from the "spiritual mansion of God" hailed by writers like Bede and toward a materialism defined as Jewish (313–14). Bernard further criticizes church magnificence by addressing the profit impulse behind the monastic investment in art and architecture:

> [D]oes not avarice, which is the service of idols, cause all this, and do we seek not the interest, but the principal? If you ask, "In what way?" I say, "In an amazing way." Money is sown with such skill that it may be multiplied. It is expended so that it may be increased, and pouring it out produces abundance. The reason is that the very sight of these costly but wonderful illusions inflames men more to give than to pray. (105)

As Conrad Rudolph observes, Bernard censures monks for seeking what Paul rejects: the financial donations of the faithful (322); Bernard, moreover, invests monastic greed with usurious significance (322–23). Following Aristotle, medieval thinkers defined usury as the perverse breeding of money from money.[9] In Bernard the monks' expenditure on architecture and ornament leads to the marvelous production of more money from churchgoers. Depicting church building as a practice that defiles like dung, recalls "ancient Jewish rites," and resonates with the breeding of money from money, Bernard effectively adumbrates the slippages between the Christian minster and the Jewish privy in Chaucer's work.

[III]

The privy of The Prioress's Tale affirms Chaucer's awareness and perpetuation of the anti-Semitic conception of Jews as an intrinsically usurious people possessed of a foul materialism, but was Chaucer cognizant of how Christian building practices contradicted that stereotype? Was Chaucer aware of Bernard's idea of the excremental, usurious, and Jewish aspects of medieval cathedrals? While the architectural campaigns criticized by Christian ascetics flourished during the High Middle Ages, the products of those building programs persisted into Chaucer's period. We might say that the history of Jewish lending complicates the monumental function of medieval churches, insofar as they not only commemorate Christian culture and house Christian bodies but also memorialize the much-needed capital lent by Jewish bankers. Chaucer might have learned about the money trail linking English minsters to Jewish lenders through his continental travels, when he might have encountered Jewish merchants, and he could have read about those loans in English texts, like *The Deeds of the Abbots of the Monastery of Saint Alban*, by his contemporary Thomas Walsingham. He may also have come across notions of the Jewishness of ecclesiastical materialism by reading treatises by writers such as Bernard or, less directly, by encountering texts influenced by the ascetic ideas circulating during the period.

While such scenarios remain speculative, we can be confident that Chaucer, thanks to his immersion in the "world and ethos of commerce," need not have known about the Jewish financing of minsters to be attuned to the hypocrisy of the Prioress's anti-Semitism (Patterson, *Chaucer* 322). The son of a merchant, Chaucer lived most of his life in a London populated by Italian bankers, and he gained more knowledge of banking when, as esquire of the king's chamber, he spent three months in Italy on a trading mission.[10] As clerk of the king's works, Chaucer collected from royal debtors to finance the building and repair of royal properties, including Saint George's Chapel in Windsor Castle (Pearsall 211; Carlson 28). As a controller of wool and other customs, Chaucer oversaw the shady business of using custom revenues to repay the creditors of the Crown (Pearsall 100–01; Carlson 5–15). Chaucer himself seems to

have borrowed funds with some frequency; we know of five suits brought against him to recover debts between 1388 and 1399. His creditors included a London merchant and moneylender, Gilbert Mawfield, from whom Chaucer is recorded as borrowing, on 28 July 1392, twenty-six shillings eight pence, a loan he repaid one week later (Pearsall 221–23).

As critics such as Lee Patterson and Patricia Eberle have observed, not only Chaucer's routine mercantile transactions but also his literary productions exhibit his commercial sensibility. The form and content of *The Canterbury Tales* affirm how commercial practices and beliefs had spilled over into late medieval sacred locations. We need only remember the protobourgeois Wife of Bath's fury at the parish wife who preceded her during the offering at mass to recall Chaucer's sensitivity to how a church can be a stage for profane sentiments (449). The cloth-making Alisoun and other pilgrims represent emerging lay occupations, and all the tales are, in Eberle's words, "conditioned, directly or indirectly, by the essentially commercial arrangement involved in Harry Bailey's conditions for the tale-telling game, by the continuing presence of [the businessman] Harry as fictional audience and judge of the tales, and by the point of departure and final destination of the group, Harry Bailey's tavern" (171). Indeed, a logic of debt and repayment informs the game led by Bailey. Starting with his request for a tale from the Monk that will "quite with the Knyghtes tale" ("match the Knight's tale" [3119]), the tale-telling competition becomes a game of "quitting," in which pilgrims strive to "quite," or match, one another's stories and win the prize of a free meal. A primary meaning of *quiten* is to repay a debt, a valence signaled by Chaucer's friend John Gower, who writes of debtors, "Bot who that takth or gret or smal, / He takth a charge forth withal, / And stant noght fre til it be quit" ("But whoever receives a large or small [loan] / Pays a charge in addition to that / And remains in debt until it is repaid" [5.7727–29; my trans.]). Similarly, in the give-and-take of stories between pilgrims such as the Miller and the Reeve, and particularly in the pilgrims' attempts to outdo (or return with interest) others' tales, we find a literary version of the dealing out and repayment of goods in the medieval economy.[11]

If the "quitting" arrangement suggests how Chaucer embeds usury in the structure of *The Canterbury Tales*, the tale that precedes the Prioress's performance deals the most overtly with moneylending. Morally suspect loans abound in the Shipman's fabliau, which is populated by three characters whose social interactions assume a fundamentally economic form. A professional lender, the French merchant of The Shipman's Tale repays a debt to Lombard bankers to his economic advantage through the medieval system of the bill of exchange. When the merchant borrows twenty thousand shields in Bruges but repays the loan in Paris, he makes a one-thousand-franc profit from the exchange of currency from shields to francs (Fulton 318). Less professional but equally commercial practices appear in the actions of the merchant's wife and his friend, a lecherous monk who receives sexual favors from the wife in exchange for helping her resolve her financial debts. With its depiction of usurious interactions not only in the marketplace but also in the home, between a housewife and a monk no less, The Shipman's Tale makes clear more than any other Canterbury tale Chaucer's cognizance of the thoroughgoing commercialism of his society.

The Prioress relates her story on the heels of the Canterbury tale whose plot most directly involves usury. Through her tale, the nun emerges as a figure bent on repressing the irrepressible: the mercantilism of the Christian society that surrounds her. In response to the morally murky world of The Shipman's Tale, the nun offers a narrative that clearly distinguishes right from wrong: usury is *foule*, as foul as excrement. Usury is imagined as other to Christianity in the nun's tale,

whose only lenders are Jewish. Furthermore, the usurious *Jewerye* of the tale exists in an anonymous urban enclave in Asia, far from France and Flanders, the familiar western European settings of The Shipman's Tale. While England had been officially empty of Jews since 1290, the nun pushes them eastward, out of Europe.

As if to segregate the Jewish usurer further, the Prioress associates him with the confining space of the latrine. By labeling Jews and usury as ordure, she thus renders them "so fundamentally alien" that they "must be rejected; labeling something as filthy is a viscerally powerful way of excluding it," to cite William Cohen's recent formulation (ix). The privy not only indicates the foul sinfulness of Jews and usurers but also registers the wish to deny them habitation altogether. The sequestration of Jews in the privy sets Chaucer apart from his sources. The closest analogue features a privy, but that structure is located inside a Jewish home. The analogue, from the late-fourteenth-century Vernon manuscript, describes how a Jew entices a boy into his house, where he hides the child in a "gonge-

FIG. 5

The Child Slain by Jews, from the Vernon manuscript, c. 1390–1400. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (MS Eng. Poet. a. 1. fol. 124v).

put," or toilet (Broughton 625; fig. 5). That house becomes a key source of conflict in the plot, which relates how the murderer refuses the mother entry into his home but ultimately allows the mayor of Paris inside, since "þe Jeuh may nou3t þe Meir refuse" ("the Jew cannot refuse the Mayor" [626; my trans.]). The home is featured in an illustration that conflates the key events of the tale by portraying the murderer inviting the boy into his house, slitting his throat, and putting the corpse headfirst into the privy, a square seat with a circular, dark hole. While the Vernon analogue resembles most tales of Marian intervention or Jewish murder in its focus on the Jewish home, The Prioress's Tale departs from that generic convention. The nun's reference to a *Jewerye* implies houses in the aggregate, but the Prioress alludes to only one home, that of the Christian boy and his mother, when she describes the schoolboy's travels "homward" (92, 97). Reinforcing other aggressive aspects of the tale, such as its overdetermined punishment of the Jews associated with the boy's murder, The Prioress's Tale resists imagining Jews in domestic spaces even as it sequesters them in the filthy confines of the privy.

Through the tale's spatialized animosity toward the Jews, Chaucer intensifies the architectural opposition at work in earlier anti-Semitic stories of Jewish violence. While those stories contrast dangerous Jewish dwellings with Christian churches, the Prioress opposes the Christian minster where the murdered boy ultimately rests to the Jewish privy into which his body is thrown. The Prioress's Tale takes the dualism of profane private and sacred communal space that so often informs anti-Semitic stories to its seeming architectural extreme: while the most ordinary yet contaminating bodily functions occur in the privy, the most sacred and extraordinary Christian actions—the praise of God and the consecration of the host—occur in the church. Following Henri Lefebvre, we might say that the privy epitomizes the quotidian building, a space that in literary terms offers "the prose of the world as opposed, or apposed, to the poetry" and collective joy of the monumental building that is the cathedral (222, 227). The sociospatial politics of the Jewish privy only set it further apart from its architectural other. Minsters are inherently communal structures. Isidore of Seville writes in his influential *Etymologies* (c. 636) that *ecclesia* "is a Greek word that is translated into Latin as 'convocation' (*convocatio*), because it calls (*vocare*) everyone to itself" (173). Exemplifying the public, Christian function of *ecclesia*, the conventual church of The Prioress's Tale gathers the "Cristene folk," lay and religious, of the eastern city to honor the little schoolboy (614). In contrast, the privy isolates defecators as they engage in the basest of bodily functions. Thus, in keeping with her effort to generate a world cleansed of the amoral economic dealings depicted in The Shipman's Tale, the Prioress invokes the latrine to indicate how usury and its Jewish practitioners require containment. The downward-looking privy, tellingly called a "pit" by the Prioress (119), goes underground to conceal the filthy products of the defecator and usurer, while medieval cathedrals are immense, eye-catching monuments possessed of a spectacular, heaven-scraping verticality. The pit functions in the tale in both architectural and discursive terms. Alongside the pit's symbolization of medieval Christians' wish to dump their own illicit practices, like usury, on the Jewish other is the literal pit: the privy as a physical structure understood in dynamic relation to other physical structures.

That medieval people easily tolerated waste is still a widely held assumption. In Norbert Elias's well-known formulation, only in the Renaissance did western Europeans begin to privatize and feel shame over natural bodily functions (111). But, as Susan Morrison observes, "the idea of a modern subjectivity emerging from the dung heap of the Middle Ages seems misguided, since private acts certainly occurred in the medieval period"

(132). The vocabulary of medieval sanitation evoked spatial concealment. Isidore writes that a "privy (*seccessus*) is so named because it is a private area, that is 'without access' (*sine accessu*)" (308–09). Middle English semantics similarly stress the capacity of the latrine to isolate its occupant. The primary meaning of *privy* is "privacy" or "secrecy," a definition emphasized by The Prioress's Tale in its account of the clandestine schooling of the child by his older schoolmate, who taught him the *Alma Redemptoris Mater* "homward prively / Fro day to day" ("secretly as he went home / each day" [544–45]), and its description of the murderer's concealment in "a privee place" ("a hidden place" [568]) in an alley as he waits for his young victim to pass by. If the privy hid its occupants and their excretions, bodies suggested to medieval people the need to sequester waste even from the defecators themselves. In a biological section of his *Etymologies*, Isidore notes how the bodily mapping of the anus and the eyes protects humans from their own polluting activities. The anus, Isidore claims, is located on "the backside and on the opposite side from the face, so that while we purge the bowels we may not defile the sense of sight" (237–38). As Isidore suggests, medieval people understood human waste as a contaminating substance that required physical isolation.[12]

Aspects of Chaucer's society suggest how he might have been especially attuned to the medieval sanitary impulse and its ideological resonance. The desire for waste management assumed national proportions around the time that the poet likely was working on The Prioress's Tale, during the latter half of the 1380s. After the Merciless Parliament dissolved in June 1388, the Cambridge Parliament of that year demonstrated Richard II's effort to regain his authority by "cleaning up" the realm, legislating against dirty politics (namely, favoritism) practiced by public officials and restricting the mobility of laborers, beggars, servants, and pilgrims. The king's cleanup plan also included the first sanitation act in English history, which aimed to stop the spread of sewage by removing "Annoyances, Dung, Garbages, Intrails, and other Ordure" from the "Ditches, Rivers, and other Waters, and also within many other Places" in the cities and suburbs of the realm (*Statutes* 59). Closer to home, Chaucer had personal experience in sanitation, thanks to two royal appointments. As clerk of the king's works from 1389 to 1391, he served as a property manager and contractor for the Crown and worked with laborers including the master mason, carpenter, joiner, and plumber (Crow 413–29; Pearsall 210). And in 1390 Chaucer sat on a royal sanitation commission charged with the maintenance of "walls, ditches, gutters, sewers, bridges, streets, dams, and trenches on the Thames between Woolwich and Greenwich" (Crow 490–93).

Chaucer's administrative work in public health and the government's investment in controlling waste help explain why the poet decided to have the Prioress deploy the latrine to confine her usurious Jews. The Prioress, we might say, seeks to manage the threat of the Jewish usurer much the way the fourteenth-century Crown sought to manage the threat of human detritus: wandering beggars, laborers, servants, pilgrims, and others. But that is hardly the whole story. Defecation, after all, is a filthy yet irrepressible flow from the human body. In the privy Chaucer found an apt symbol of the medieval Christian impulse to stem abhorrent flows and the futility of that wish. Medieval English sewage systems were far from foolproof. The London Assize of Nuisance records complaints by Londoners over faulty walls, gutters, and privies between 1301 and 1431. Among the grievances heard by the assize justices are a common sergeant's claim "on behalf of the commonalty" that "men living in the churchyard" of Saint Lawrence Church "throw dung and other refuse, and make their privies [near its entrance], which is an abomination to the mayor and aldermen and common people passing along

the street" and Ralph de Cauntebrigg's accusation that the sewage from his neighbor William's latrine "penetrates and defiles his [Ralph's] whole premises" (Chew and Kellaway 121, 102; see also 94). If The Shipman's Tale, set largely in the home of the French merchant, exposes the flow of usury into medieval domestic space, the assize demonstrates how another repellant flow had come home to medieval Londoners. Instead of enjoying the architectural sovereignty aimed at by the assize, which regulated matters such as the minimum thickness of walls and the distances between private cesspits and neighboring properties, the citizens of medieval London were susceptible to excremental currents within and without their houses.

Reflecting the medieval circulation of sewage, the multiple open pathways of The Prioress's Tale ultimately encompass the latrine. Mirroring on a smaller geographic scale the exposed nature of the Jewry, into which "men myghte ride or wende, / For it was free and open at eyther ende" ("men could ride or walk, / For it was free and open at either end" [493–94]), the privy is no closed and bounded container of filth but rather a porous site. Its permeability emerges in the Prioress's prurient elucidation of the pit. After recounting how the "homycide" ("assassin" [567]) hired by the Jews seized the singing child, "heeld hym faste, / And kitte his throte, and in a pit hym caste" ("held him fast, / And cut his throat and cast him into a pit" [570–71]), the nun goes on, with obscene clarity, to describe the pit: "I seye that in a wardrobe they hym threwe; / Where as thise jewes purgen hire entraille" ("I mean that they threw him into a latrine / Where these Jews emptied their bowels" [572–73]). The Prioress opens the privy to the gaze of the members of her audience, who imaginatively witness the excretions that—as Isidore reminds us—even the defecator is protected from seeing.

The exposure of the privy registers how the spaces associated with oppressed groups are always susceptible to violation. These spaces' vulnerability is evident throughout the history and literary representation of Jews in medieval England. In examples such as Thomas of Monmouth's twelfth-century voyeuristic gaze into the home of Jewish murderers in the first recorded ritual-murder legend, the royal confiscation of Jewish synagogues in thirteenth-century England, and the forced emigration of Jews from England in 1290, Jews are disenfranchised of medieval English space (Thomas 89–90; Stacey, "Conversion" 265). But, to return to Isidore, the Prioress's violation of the privy also signifies the breeching and contamination of other spaces, such as the mind's eye of both the Prioress's pilgrim auditors and Chaucer's readers. Wordsworth deemed the Prioress's description of the pit so offensive he censored it in his translation, which reads, "I say that him into a pit they threw, / A loathsome pit whence noisome scents exhale" (lines 121–22). In Wordsworth's sanitized version, the pit never quite becomes a "wardrobe," or latrine, is never exposed as a place of Jewish defecation, but is merely a site from which vile smells emanate. Wordsworth's censorship of the tale suggests how the filth associated with Jews leaks into and taints the language of Chaucer's text, so that the Prioress's words themselves must be erased from the narrative. In the vulnerability of the Prioress's narrative to contamination, we perceive how the violated privy enables the return of multiple repressed flows, flows that shore up the status of space as not static but mobile. Buildings, like bodies and societies, have thresholds and apertures, openings that enable the circulation of persons, objects, and sounds in and through them. The exposure of the privy reflects Chaucer's sensitivity to the impossibility of stemming all sorts of flows, from what Bale describes as the "entry of Jew and Christian into each other's bodies, worlds, rituals and texts" to equally problematic fluxes between Christians (57).

[IV]

The figure of The Prioress's Tale who most exhibits a destabilizing circulation between selves and others is the excrement-covered schoolboy. While the tale does not state that the child is soiled, it implies as much by the alacrity of his burial; the abbot and his monks "sped hem for to burien him ful faste" ("hastened to bury him as soon as possible" [638]).[13] The boy's quick entombment seals up his remains, but not before they are subsumed by the chief holy flow of the tale, the funereal procession. Bearing the filthy boy from the privy to the conventual church, the procession links those spaces through the body that moves between them. The flow from privy to minster effectively closes the divide between the two structures, recalling the representation in The Shipman's Tale of the omnipresence of filthy commercial currents in European Christian life.

To be sure, some aspects of the child render him an emblem of Christian purity over and against Jewish danger. In architectural terms, the boy separates the Christian minster from the Jewish latrine. The final resting place of the child in the church suggests how that holy space is, unlike the foul privy, "proper" to his identity. The appropriateness of the church as a shelter for the boy emerges further in the plotting of his bodily surfaces. If the mapping of the lower regions of the Jewish body, particularly its anal portal, produces the Jew as a carnal and filthy figure who belongs in a latrine (Kruger 306), the corporeal geography of the schoolboy shifts up, heavenward, to the head and throat, out of which issues the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, a liturgical antiphon sung in church. Indeed, we can go further and consider how the song, which affirms the tale's ecclesiastical teleology, also defies Jewish space through its territorializing and reterritorializing capacities. Sung by the living boy as he enters into and departs from the Jewry and resumed thanks to the miracle, the *Alma Redemptoris Mater* is a refrain that violates the Jewish neighborhood by marking it out lyrically as a Christian space.[14] When, despite his severed throat, the boy resumes singing the hymn in an Asian city, he realizes the miraculous global advance of Christian acclamation celebrated in the tale's prologue: "O Lord, oure Lord, thy name how merveilous / Is in this large world ysprad" ("Oh Lord, our Lord, how marvelously is your name spread throughout this wide world" [7.453–54]).

What is most striking about the miracle of the boy's lyrical generation of Christian territory, however, is that it does not so much repress as respond to the economics of spiritual space with which we began. The miracle results from Mary's placement on the boy's tongue of a "greyn" ("grain" [662]) that enables him to "with throte ykorven lay upright" ("sit upright with a slit throat" [611]) and sing anew. The grain is a detail original to Chaucer's version of the singing-boy legend; when an object appears in the mouth of the boy in the analogues, it is either a lily, as in the Vernon analogue, a gem, or a pebble (Broughton 589). The question of what the grain signifies has inspired a wealth of scholarly speculation. The many meanings put forth by critics include a rosary bead and a pill used to cure speech loss, as well as two particularly resonant interpretations: the idea, articulated by Hawkins, that the grain represents the deeper "kernel" or nucleus of meaning located by medieval exegetes beneath the "chaff" or literal significance of a text and many readers' association of the grain with the Eucharistic wafer (Hawkins 615–18; see also Boyd 160–61; Patterson, "Living Witnesses" 510). No one will ever definitively explain the polyvalent image of the grain. But we can add to the rich store of interpretations by considering how Mary's gift of the grain to the boy and its later removal by the abbot constitute the sole representation of a loan in the tale, a loan that reminds us of the prominence of grain not simply in medieval exegetics but also in the

medieval economy. Loans frequently entailed grain, so much so that grain was a stock example of a fungible good in medieval lending theory (Noonan 57, 92; Langholm 56).

Even as Mary's agrarian loan speaks to a fundamental aspect of the medieval economy, she is no ordinary lender. A beneficent and wondrous figure, Mary, through the loan she bestows on the boy, departs dramatically from the stereotype of the carnal and sinful usurer. While moneylenders exhibit a foul materialism that, as Ambrose writes, kills the life of the borrower, Mary's loan enables the boy's rescue from the latrine and restores his life. Not a profit seeker but a "blisful mayden free" ("blessed and generous maiden" [660]), Mary simply gives. Her figuration as a kind of holy creditor appears elsewhere in medieval culture. The thirteenth-century devotional work *The Mirror of the Blessed Virgin Mary* identifies "generosity countering avarice" among the meanings of "the fruit of Mary" and goes on to cite Bernard of Clairvaux's claim that "any earthly thing [Mary] could have had from her father's house, all such possibilities were like dung to her, for she made profit from Christ."[15] An even more explicit comparison of Mary to usurers appears in a fourteenth-century tract on moneylending by Remigio of Florence. After a lengthy discussion of the usurer's unnatural breeding of sterile money, Remigio opines how "many things that are shown to come into existence against nature are nevertheless in truth good. For the Virgin Mary, remaining a virgin, against nature brought forth her son Jesus."[16] Remigio's account of Mary's unnatural birthing of Christ resonates with Chaucer's tale of the miraculous grain that enables the unnatural restoration of life and song in the schoolboy. As the child puts it to the abbot of the convent to which he is taken, "[B]y wey of kynde, / I sholde have dyed, ye, longe tyme agon" ("[A]ccording to nature, / I should have perished a long time ago" [649–50]). In the same way that Remigio sets usurious breeding against Marian generation by describing the former unnatural act as sinful and the latter as "in truth good," The Prioress's Tale places the illicit actions of the tale's usurious and murderous Jews at variance with the wondrous and fertile outpouring of the *Alma Redemptoris Mater.*

And yet this dichotomy of benevolent Virgin and dangerous Jew does not completely hold in either Remigio's text or The Prioress's Tale. The fact that Remigio is compelled to refer twice to the unnaturalness of Mary's maternal function suggests how he, like many medieval writers, was uncomfortable with her extraordinary maternal identity. As much could be said about the citation from Bernard in *The Mirror of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, with its odd formulation of Mary's profiting from Christ. The medieval notion of Mary as a kind of antiusurer evinced medieval writers' discomfort with her unnaturalness as much as it exemplified their praise for her generosity. We might similarly speculate that in The Prioress's Tale the Marian loan that seems to oppose usury is problematic. After all, Mary's generosity leads to the spectacle of a near-decapitated singing boy. Is it possible that the monks are anxious to inter the boy not only because he reeks of the privy but also because his miraculous song disturbs them? While the miracle is not viscerally unclean like the privy, it nevertheless exemplifies the workings of abjection as described by contemporary theorists. "It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection," Julia Kristeva writes, "but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Producing noise from a throat that has been gruesomely "ykorven" to the "nekke boon" ("neck bone" [649]), the schoolboy is abjectly situated on the border between life and death. The child's song renders him a sort of zombie possessed of a disquietingly inexorable anthem. Thanks to Mary's generosity, the undead boy sings without stopping, "syngynge his song alway" ("always singing

his song" [622]) as he is removed from the latrine and taken "unto the nexte abbay" ("to the nearest abbey" [624]), making the Christian folk around him "wondre," a Middle English verb that connotes not only awe and astonishment but also horror and loathing (615; "Wondren"). Relentless and stridently omnipresent, rendered unpleasantly "loude" so "that al the place gan to rynge" ("that the entire place began to ring" [613]), the boy's song suggests how even a Christian liturgical refrain can oppress and contaminate.[17]

The abbot who uncovers the workings of the miracle also indicates its disturbing effects. After asking the boy to explain his strange actions, the monk learns that the child's compulsion to sing results from the Virgin's agrarian gift; as the boy puts it, "I synge, and synge moot certeyn, / . . . / 'Til fro my tonge of taken is the greyn" ("I sing and certainly must sing, / . . . / Until the grain is taken from my tongue" [663–65]). Immediately the monk "[h]is tonge out caughte, and took awey the greyn" ("grabbed the tongue of the boy and took away the grain"), enabling the child to "yaf up the goost" ("give up the ghost" [671–72]). The sudden violence of the abbot's removal of the grain may reflect negatively on the miracle. Instead of a wonder that merits praise and inspires joy, the song seems a disturbing and troubling event that requires instant termination. The abbot reclaims his minster from the undead singer.

Retroactive support for this interpretation may appear at the close of the next tale, told by Chaucer the pilgrim. Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas is a notoriously bad performance featuring the inane adventures of the knight Thopas. The tale, indeed, is so awful that Harry Bailey finds himself compelled to cut Chaucer off in mid-sentence with the commandment "Namoore of this" ("No more of this" [919]). If the Host's interruption of Chaucer recalls the abbot's silencing of the boy, Harry goes on to denigrate Chaucer's tale in a manner that returns us to the filth at the heart of The Prioress's Tale. Condemning Chaucer's tail-rhyme romance with the assertion "Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord!" ("Your crappy rhyming is not worth a turd!" [930]), the Host makes clear why he must put an end to the Thopas story: it is as worthless as feces. Here the excremental qualities associated with the privy and usury by the Prioress are linked to, of all things, Chaucer's poetry. But insofar as Harry's words mirror the abbot's interruption of the boy's song, we might read them as Mary Hamel has interpreted other aspects of the Tale of Sir Thopas: a parodic commentary on the Prioress's performance. As Hamel has suggested, by following The Prioress's Tale with the adventures of the Marian devotee Thopas, Chaucer spoofs themes related by the nun. Most pointedly, Hamel shows how the fantastic nature of the Prioress's Jews emerges in their bogeyman counterpart in the Tale of Sir Thopas, an absurd three-headed giant whose "parodic ridicule awakens us from [the] nightmare" offered in the nun's dark tale (258). Similarly, Harry's interruption of Chaucer is a send-up of the abbot's interruption of the boy. When Harry dismisses Chaucer's tale as worse than filth, the Host offers a light-hearted version of the thinking behind the abbot's squelching of the miracle. In putting an end to the boy's song, the abbot suggests the impropriety of that supernatural event to the minster. While Harry decries Chaucer's rhyme as shit, the abbot implies his preference that the minster shelter no wondrously singing boy but something more ordinary and profane: an excrement-covered corpse.

In keeping with its association of the minster with everyday material realities, The Prioress's Tale offers no account of the ornamentation or exalted form of that structure. Beyond the altar before which the child's bier is set, the only space in the minster that the Prioress encourages us to imagine is its floor. After the abbot removes the grain and the child perishes, the monk "fil al plat upon

the grounde" ("fell down completely flat on the ground" [632–35]); the members of the convent follow suit, lying on the "pavement," where they emit tears that may signify relief as much as devotion, while an abject presence finally leaves their church (677). The tale's persistent gaze on the minster's floor, the humble surface on which people travel and under which sewers are built, seems to emphasize the status of the church as a structure sharing earthly and ordinary characteristics with other built environments of medieval society, even privies. Though the tale does not advocate the demolition of sacred space in favor of the simple structures espoused by ascetics like Bernard—Chaucer, after all, was no monk—the absence of a gaze heavenward at the conclusion of The Prioress's Tale may urge a more grounded approach to sacred space, a perspective that reflects the writer's fourteenth-century mercantile society and the economic aspects of *The Canterbury Tales*. The Prioress's Tale suggests how a minster may be most attractive—and is certainly most livable—not in its divine and miraculous guises but in its ties to the mundane realities of lived existence. The entombment of the boy is instructive in this regard. The enclosure of the corpse "in a tombe of marbul stones cleere" ("in a tomb of pure marble stones" [681]), as Bale observes, "rescinds the 'free and open' urban spaces and denies the flux of signification between Christian and Jew" (85). The tomb, like the sealed container of the boy's chaste corpse "sowded" ("soldered" [579]) to virginity, demonstrates how a space imagined as wholly bounded and impermeable results in morbidity (Bale 85; Morrison). Livable space, on the other hand, requires apertures and access to flows.

To be sure, the quotidian habitability and permeability of the minster in The Prioress's Tale are far from universal and hardly extend to Jews. To rethink the minster as a livable location is not to make a case for the humane treatment of Jews, as their final depiction in the tale makes clear. Horrifyingly disenfranchised of space, the Jews "[t]hat of this mordre wiste" ("[w]ho knew of the murder" [630]) are "with wilde hors" ("with wild horses" [632]) drawn through the streets of the city and then hanged. In collapsing the pit-minster divide and exposing the Jewish materialism of Christian built environments, Chaucer does not celebrate Jews and their contributions to the medieval Christian economy in general or to English church-building programs in particular. Rather, the oppressive geography of anti-Semitism in the tale resonates with the ugly spatial realities of medieval Jewish-Christian relations in England, the first nation to expel its Jewish residents. Yet as readers cognizant of the flux of Jews into medieval Christian material cultures, we have ethical grounds for putting those historical relations into conversation with The Prioress's Tale. When the boy is silenced and the Marian miracle ends, the minster is restored to its quotidian identity as a Christian edifice like the English minster cited by the Prioress at the end of her tale, Lincoln Cathedral, an all-too-human space sponsored by loans from the financier Aaron of Lincoln.

Notes

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1. Some critics have made important yet brief critical references to the role of moneylending in the anti-Semitic dynamics of the tale (e.g., Dahood, "English Historical Narratives" 140; Fradenburg 106–08). All translations of Chaucer are my own.

2. Debt collection is a metaphor for hunger in one analogue (Broughton 638–39). Most analogues do not specify the Jews' occupation, except for three versions, which refer to winemakers, cloth merchants, and pharmacists (Brown 23; Broughton 604–08, 610–12).

3. Rather, Jewish financing is presumed in *The Burton Annals* and Matthew Paris's versions of the Hugh of Lincoln story (Luard 345; Paris 5: 519).

4. Not all Christian writings condemned usury. Philosophers and theologians debated issues such as permissible

amounts of interest, and even Aquinas acknowledged that in the realm of human law, at least, "civil legislation has at times to consider usury" for regulatory purposes (Shatzmiller 45). Medieval popes, as Stow has shown, at times even promoted Jewish lending at a "controlled rate of interest" (161). Still, no important writer supported usury outright, and theologians were united in identifying usury as "unacceptable in principle" (Shatzmiller 45).

5. Stacey, "Jewish Lending." The prominence of finance in Anglo-Jewish life reflects a variety of factors, among them narrowing opportunities for Jews, economic advantages to the Crown, and the apparent theological loophole provided for Jewish lenders insofar as Jewish law permitted loans with interest to strangers (Deut. 23.20–21; Nelson).

6. See also a thirteenth-century English legal case in which a witness let slip that the defendant "took less than the archbishop takes from his debtors" (qtd. in Helmholz 377).

7. Christian lenders were perceived at times as harsher than their Jewish counterparts (Shatzmiller 91, 97).

8. In recent decades, critics have written extensively on the many tensions and contradictions that Christian building programs entailed. Rosenwein; Hayes; and Camille address issues such as the marking out and ordering of territory through ecclesiastical immunities; the presence of secular activities, including buying and selling goods, in minsters and abbeys; and theological challenges to the notion of church building altogether.

9. Langholm 263–65. In a Latin translation of Aristotle that was influential in the Middle Ages, the term for interest is *tokos*, a word whose Greek origins signify offspring or breed, because interest entails a sort of (artificial) reproduction.

10. Childs. The 1372–73 mission took Chaucer to Genoa and Florence; He also traveled to Lombardy on another lengthy Italian visit (Pearsall 102, 106–07).

11. To put it another way, the quitting game resembles the "charge" and "discharge" of medieval accounting (Parker 95).

12. Forms of waste, however, including human excrement, did not figure only as a contaminating agent in the Middle Ages. Augustine, e.g., affirms the utility of dung as a fertilizer repeatedly in his writings (*Sermons* 136–67; *Manichean Debate* 74–75). Morrison discusses the various and complex meanings of filth in Chaucer's world.

13. Other versions of the singing-boy tale, such as the Vernon analogue, stress the child's dung-covered body on its removal from the privy (Broughton 626).

14. I use "refrain" in the sense established by Deleuze and Guattari in their work on sound and territory (310–50). Bale considers the *Alma Redemptoris Mater* as a refrain more extensively (68).

15. Conrad of Saxony (Pseudo-Bonaventure), qtd. in Derbes and Sandona 281–82. The following discussion of Mary is indebted to Derbes and Sandona's contextualization of Giotto's Arena Chapel.

16. Qtd. in Derbes and Sandona 282.

17. While Holsinger does not discuss the unending nature of the boy's song, he tellingly analyzes The Prioress's Tale in terms of the torturous effects that badly performed music—"*musica humana* [human music] gone awry"—was thought to have on singer and auditor (190).

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