

**The Original is Unfaithful to the Translation:
Conversion and Authenticity in Abner of Burgos and Anselm Turmeda***

Ryan Szpiech
University of Michigan

I. The Three Rings

“But every imitative phenomenon must once have had its original...” –William James, “Conversion,” *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

In the well-known third novella in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, the young Philomena, one of the ten Florentines gathered in a country villa to tell stories after fleeing the plague, recounts a version of the famous tale of the three rings: When Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt, needed money, he devised a plan to trick the Jewish moneylender Melchisedech by asking him to reveal which religion was superior, Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Seeing that the Sultan sought to catch him in a snare, the Jew told him a story of a marvelous ring inherited by a king who loved his three sons equally. Not wanting to choose between them, the king had fashioned two identical copies of the ring and gave one to each. After his death, each claimed to have the true ring, and the question of which was original and which was a copy, just like the question of which religion was the most true, has never been resolved (45).

Although retold in various forms in French, Latin, Italian, and Hebrew in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, elements of the tale can be found in Arabic as far back as the eighth-century polemical disputation of Timothy, the Nestorian Patriarch of Baghdad, with the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mahdī (Shagrīr 167-68). When asked about the true religion, Timothy states that if a pearl is dropped at night and a group of people set out groveling for it in the dark, one person may find a stone, another a piece of glass, and only one will find the pearl itself. Everyone will think they have the one true pearl until they find out the truth in the light of day. In the *Decameron*’s frame-tale version, the basic premise of the tale has not changed from its polemical predecessors,¹ but the implications of its message that “he himself, who had had [the

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¹ A non-religious version of the story is found in the eleventh-century Arabic *Ghurar al-siyar* (known as *History of the Kings of the Persians*) by Persian writer Abū Maṣūʿir Thaʿālibī (d. ca. 1038). Some of the more prominent European examples include the versions of thirteenth-century Dominican Steven of Borbone and fourteenth-century Dominican Giovanni Bromyard, the thirteenth-century old French

rings] made, could hardly tell which was the real one” (45) seem new. Rather than emphasizing that only one son possesses the true ring, Melchisedech suggests that just as the copy cannot be distinguished from its original, so no religion, even one more ancient, can be judged superior to any other. Not surprisingly, the tale, in the form presented by Boccaccio and later repeated by Lessing in his play *Nathan der Weise*, has been highlighted as an embodiment of religious tolerance and even moral relativism.² The novella version of the tale in the *Decameron* and in Boccaccio’s thirteenth-century model *Il Novellino* have been persistently read in this way as examples of a “new” incarnation of the story, one which breaks with past didactic versions that stressed the existence of one true ring (or pearl) rather than the indistinguishability of the original from its copies. As Mario Penna has argued, there are two versions of the tale, one of a didactic, confessional character, and the other of an open-ended, aconfessional character, the latter corresponding to the more literary perspective of Boccaccio and his followers (138).³

A thematic analysis of Boccaccio’s version, however, suggests that even if its frame-tale structure moves away from a dogmatic or apologetic rendering and acquires, in Américo Castro’s words, “its maximum degree of literary relief” (22), the polemical subtext initially associated with the fable has not disappeared completely. Philomena’s tale, it must be remembered, is prompted by the story of the conversion to Christianity of another Jew named Abraham: After a merchant named Giannotto entertains his Jewish friend, Abraham, to convert, arguing that Judaism was “growing weak and coming to nothing” (Boccaccio 39), Abraham visits Rome to decide for himself which religion is superior. After witnessing widespread corruption among the clergy, he decides to convert because in *spite* of such sin Christianity “continuously grows and becomes brighter and more illustrious...it is truer and holier than any other religion” (42). Scholars have frequently taken these two texts have as a pair in dialogue over the relative merit of the three religions (Cottino-Jones 88). Even if Melchisedech’s story is read as a response to Abraham’s conversion, however, their narrative unity, within the context of the frame-tale structure in which the one text “generates” the other, links the themes of the more irenic, literary version of the three-

version of *Dis dou vrai aniel*, and the Hebrew version of Abraham Abulafia in *Sefer 'Or Ha-Sekhel*, among others. An overview is provided by Stewart, although she focuses only on Western sources and can be supplemented with Shagrir.

² The best-known presentation of this thesis is the classic study by Penna. Shagrir argues that the tale “is known in the Western culture as reflecting values of religious toleration and relativism inherent in the term ‘religious truth.’” (163). The eschewing of explicit didacticism in the openness of the frame-tale structure implies not only that the story has no certain moral center, but also that the version of the stories it presents is in no way bound to its earlier models but has become a new “original” version. In semiotic terms, frame stories can be compared to signs that refer to no solid referent but only to other signs. Their means of signification and “expression of meaning” is not linear but circular, revolving not around a fixed center but an empty middle. On the semiotics of the frame-tale structure, see Menocal 482-83, Haring 148-50, and Wacks 1-13.

³ The view that highlights two versions, confessional and aconfessional, is repeated in altered form by both Fischer and Sosio 69.

rings tale –religious relativism and the equality between originals and copies– with those of the more polemical story that precedes it –religious conversion and the abrogation of Judaism by Christianity. By narrating them as a pair, Boccaccio presents their themes as parallel aspects of a larger debate about religious identity and its representation in narrative, reflecting the polemical undercurrent of the story –to which the three-rings tale is meant to be an answer– as an ineluctable component of its meaning.

I propose to adopt the parallel themes presented by Boccaccio in his opening stories –originality and imitation, polemic and narrative, conversion and supersessionism– as the conceptual frames for an analysis of the intersection of literary and religious discourses in two examples of late-medieval writing about conversion. I will focus on the multilingual works of two authors, both religious converts, whose lives nearly overlap at the precise moment that Boccaccio wrote his opening stories: the Hebrew and Castilian texts of Abner of Burgos, known after his conversion to Christianity as Alfonso of Valladolid (ca. 1270-ca. 1347) and the Arabic and Catalan texts of friar Anselm Turmeda, known after his conversion to Islam as ‘Abdallāh al-Turjumān (ca. 1352-ca. 1423-32). Situated between the two, Boccaccio’s tales may serve as a lens through which to read the works Abner / Alfonso and Anselm / ‘Abdallāh together. Looking Janus-faced both backward at its polemical predecessors and forward to its later literary recensions, Boccaccio’s model suggests that the polemical language of confessional supersessionism, in which the “new” obviates the “old” and at the same time invokes it as a permanent condition of its own meaning and value, may be read, through the metaphor of translation, as parallel to the narrative language of originals and translations, of authentic rings and their identical copies.

By comparing the conversion narratives presented at the beginning of their polemical texts, I will show first that both Abner / Alfonso and Anselm / ‘Abdallāh strive to present language in a similar way as a source of authenticity in their polemical argumentation, implicitly linking translation and conversion as tools of religious polemic. I will then argue that despite the intentions of Abner / Alfonso and Anselm / ‘Abdallāh, this link between conversion, translation, and polemic is not a one-way street in which relativism and exclusivity vie to overshadow each other, but a symbiotic circle in which the old and the new, the original and its translation, exist through each other as a dialectical pair of mutually necessary opposites. Just as Boccaccio’s literary, pluralistic reconception of the three-rings tale carries with it, in the companion tale of Abraham’s conversion, the traces of the fable’s polemical history, so contrarily the polemics of Abner / Alfonso and Anselm / ‘Abdallāh, because they are built off of their authors’ narratives of conversion, carry within their narrative structure literary elements that are directly at odds with their polemical agenda. Just as the confessional element of the three-rings tale is in tension with the aconfessional message within Boccaccio’s own literary framing, so polemical writing too, because it depends on the same dialectic of originals and their translations, is

constantly at odds with its own internal paradox of abrogation in which the polemical enemy is rejected and at the same time preserved within that very rejection.

II. Traduttore, Traditore

“Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit ist Ideologie als Sprache.”
 (“The jargon of authenticity is ideology as language.”)
 –Theodore Adorno, *Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*

The theme of “originals and copies” is an essential aspect to the justification of religious abrogation in the writing of Castilian Jew Abner of Burgos / Alfonso of Valladolid. When Abner / Alfonso finally converted to Christianity sometime around 1320, he claims to have struggled with religious doubt as a pious Jew for over twenty-five years. According to the literary narration of his transformation at the beginning of his earliest surviving work, the Hebrew *Moreh Zedek* (*Teacher of Righteousness*, now surviving only in Castilian translation as *Mostrador de justicia*), he began to doubt his ancestral faith in 1295 when, working as a doctor in Burgos, he treated numerous Jews for distress after the failure of the messianic movements in Ávila and Allyón (Baer 1: 280)⁴. He claims that he began to have a series of dreams twenty-five years after the events of 1295 in which crosses appeared on his clothing and a “great man” appeared to him to scold him and tell him he was “responsible for the sins of all the Jews.”⁵ The text takes the form of a dispute between a Christian (“Mostrador,” the Castilian rendering of the Hebrew *Moreh*, “teacher”) and a Jew (“Rebelle” [sic], the Castilian of *Mored*, “rebel”). It begins:

⁴ According to the fifteenth-century polemicists Pablo de Santa María and Alonso de Espina, who quoted and summarized parts of Abner / Alfonso’s earlier work, *Sefer Milhamot ha-Shem* (*Book of the Wars of the Lord*), two Jews predicted that in the year 1295 (5055 AM), the Jews would be called out of exile. They assembled in the synagogue in white garments, as for Yom Kippur. According to the Christian sources, crosses appeared on their clothing, causing them much distress (Pablo de Santa María 525a, and copied verbatim by Alonso de Espina in 3.10 of the *Fortalitium Fidei*, 172rb).

⁵ In the *Mostrador*, he relates that he dreamed he saw crosses on his own garments: “Penssé otrossi en rrazon de aquellos sseellos ssegund cruces que fallé en mi vestimienta e dix: “Quiça que [el] fecho destes seellos fue como los seellos segund cruces que ffallaron muchas aljamas de los judios en este rregno de Castiella...que era ante desta vision quanto veynte e cinco annos” (1994, 1:13-14 / f. 12v. NB: All references to the *Mostrador* will give the page number from the two-volume printed edition by Mettmann followed by the folio from the BNF MS espangol 43. The spelling and punctuation follow Mettmann’s largely diplomatic rendering.) The vision of an elderly, venerable or great man in dreams is a common trope evident in such classical sources as the dream of Scipio. In Christian dream texts, which evolved principally in the context of hagiography, the *apparitio* of such a figure was a means of validating the authority of the dream and dreamer. In the context of late-medieval appropriation of this trope, one interesting parallel possibly known to Abner / Alfonso is the dream of Ibn Zabāra in the introductory *maqāma* of his *Sefer Sha’ashū’im* (*The Book of Delights*). On the development of the authoritative use of dream visions in Christian tradition, see Moreira 13-37. On Ibn Zabāra, see Wacks 79-80.

Dixo el Maestro: Caté la premia de los judios, el mi pueblo donde yo era, que sson en esta luenga captividad quexados e quebrantados e angustiados en ffecho de los pechos, el pueblo que descendieron de la ssu onrra e del ssu loor que ssolian aver, e non an ayuda nin ffuerça en ssý. E acaesció un dia, penssando yo mucho en este pleito, que entré a la ssignoga con gran lloro e amargura de mi coraçon, e ffiz plegarias a Dios...E de la gran coyta que tenia en mi coraçon e de la lazeria que avia tomado canssé e adormesçime; e vy en vision de ssuenuo un grand omne que me dizia: “¿Por qué estás adormesçido?” (Abner de Burgos 1994, 1:13 / f. 12r)

This opening narrative provides the interpretive frame for the lengthy polemic to follow, justifying its anti-Jewish arguments by making them the fruits of the author’s own struggle within Judaism and by conflating the two dueling characters, the Christian *Moreh* and the Jewish *Mored*, into the two sides of Abner / Alfonso’s own identity. Abner / Alfonso presents the Jews as “el mi pueblo donde yo era” and invokes their plight in an increasingly hostile Christian society as his own. He portrays his conversion as born of his pious anguish while he prayed in the synagogue, “E agora, Ssenor...piada ssobre el tu pueblo Israel.” (1994, 1:13 / f. 12r).⁶

The invocation of his own personal experience is essential for the construction and defense of Abner / Alfonso’s authorial voice in the *Mostrador*. By recounting his own conversion story, he aims to show that he is still very much like the Jews against whom he argues. Abner / Alfonso must prove for his Jewish readership, as author and as character of his own narrative, his own authenticity as a Jew who not only shares in Jewish tradition, but who arrived at conversion from within purely Jewish sources and arguments. He presents his new Christian faith as a conclusion born of his Jewish belief, insisting that his “discovery” that Jesus is the Messiah awaited by the Jews “era rrazon estranna a mí mucho, segund el huso e la costunbre que avia husado ante desto en creer la ffe del comun de los judios” (1994, 1:13 / f. 12r). Given the framing of his polemical text within his own conversion narrative of protracted doubt, suffering along with his fellow Jews, and even resistance to his own burgeoning interest in Christian ideas, the “rebelliousness” of the Rebel Jew is conflated with his own internal doubts, just as the Christian voice of the Teacher is conflated with his post-conversionary authorial voice. He asserts that, before converting, he grew frustrated with his dream and the doubts it gave voice to, and said to himself, “Non lo menbraré más, e tollerlohe de mi coraçon e mi ymaginaçion, e ffincaré en la mi fe en que nasçí, como fincó mi padre e mi avuelo e todas mis generaçiones, si quier sea bona fe o mala, e non cataré a mi coraçon nin a mis penssamientos, ca non so yo mejor que mis parientes” (1994, 1:13 / f. 12r). His conversionary persona serves as the basis for the justification (or “author-ization”) of his authorial self as both authentically Jewish in his doubts and struggles and authentically Christian in his new conviction. By

⁶ For consideration of this dual perspective, see Lazar. For discussion of the role of Abner / Alfonso’s dream narrative in his polemic, see Sainz de la Maza 1992b.

claiming he received a revelation of Christian truth largely against his own will as a believing Jew, he aims to present himself as both an expert in Judaism whom his readers personally knew and as a teacher whom they must follow in conversion.

This use of a first-person authorial voice mimicking a pseudo-Jewish experience of doubt before Christian arguments parallels his deliberate avoidance of Christian sources and his stylistic imitation of Rabbinical discourse in the *Mostrador*. He claims that when he awoke from his conversionary dream, his first impulse was to study more deeply in Jewish tradition: “E quando desperté de my suenno...me entró en voluntad a catar y estudiar sobre las rrayzes de la fe en los libros de la Ley e de los prophetas e de los sabios e de los glosadores estoricos e allegoricos e en los libros de filosofos” (1994, 1:13 / f. 12r). It is almost exclusively from these sources of “la Ley” (Torah), “los prophetas” (prophetic books), “los sabios” (Talmud), “glosadores estoricos e allegoricos” (aggadic midrashim and Biblical commentary) and “los libros de filosofos” (Jewish and Muslim philosophers) that he draws the proofs for his arguments, turning only very infrequently to Christian writers and the New Testament. He weaves well-known Talmudic and Biblical phrases into his prose, so that even the words spoken to him in his dream echo familiar statements from Rabbinical tradition.⁷ Abner / Alfonso implores his reader to heed his words and example, encouraging his fellow Jews to explore their own doubts as he did and to find the truth he believes is hidden within the sayings of the sages of Jewish tradition (1996, 2:99 / f. 184v). This exploration of what Abner / Alfonso claims are the secrets of Jewish tradition hidden within its authentic writings is critical not only for individual salvation, but for the preservation of the truth of Judaism itself. Paraphrasing a string of Biblical and Talmudic texts, he pleads:

E non deve ffinçar omne dubdoso en esta grand rrayz, ca non es de las cosas que se pueden perdonar, nin deven tomarla groseramiente e como de passada, ca el enganno que omne puede rrecebir en ello non es como enganno de aver, mas es enganno del alma para él e para su ssimiente e

⁷ Baer 1:334, and Sainz de la Maza 1992a, 800. For example, the section cited above contains within it the following allusions, noted in italics: “*Non lo membraré más (Za 13:2), e tollerlohe de mi coraçon e mi ymaginaçion (Ps 26:2 / 1Sm2:35)...ca non so yo mejor que mis parientes (1Kg19:4).*” In his second dream narrative, the man appeared to Abner / Alfonso again, “*e dixome como sannudo: ¿Ha[s]ta cuándo, pereçoso, dormirás? ¿Quándo te levantarás de ssuenno? (Pr 6:9)...e dixome: “El Sello de Dios es Verdad (BT Shabbat 55a). He que amaté como nube tus yerros e como nube tus peccados; tórnate a mí, que redemíte (Is 44:22)” (Abner de Burgos 1994, 1:13 / f. 12r).* Much work remains to be done in identifying Abner / Alfonso’s allusions and citations. Although the Mettmann has identified many of the thousands of citations from the Hebrew Bible, he did not mention any of these in the opening passage of the work and has identified very few of the hundreds of Rabbinical allusions.

para todos los qui dél ssiuieren, ellos e sus ffijos e fijos de sus ffijos fasta siglo, e que todo Isrrael sson fiadores unos por otros. (1996, 2:99 / f. 184v)⁸

His notion that Jews keep their faith “through each other” not only reiterates the theme he suggested from the very beginning of the *Mostrador* in recounting how the man who appeared to him in his conversionary dreams told him, “los peccados de todos los judios e de ssus fijos e de sus generaçones tienes a cuestras” (1994, 1:13 / f. 12r). It also forms the basis of his call to other Jews to follow his model in converting to Christianity in order to fulfill the truth he sees at the heart of Judaism.

This argumentative strategy differs in critical ways from most earlier Christian anti-Jewish polemical writing in its direct address to Jewish readers, its explicit discussion of concrete circumstances that prevent Jews from converting to Christianity, and its deliberate use of Jewish sources and stylistic elements. The traditional figure of the stubborn and hard-hearted “Hermeneutical” Jew who symbolized, in Augustinian terms, a “witness” to the truth of Christianity in its abrogation of Judaism, existed virtually unchanged for a millennium, determining anti-Jewish polemical writing principally as a refutation of this constructed infidelity.⁹ It was not until the turn of the twelfth century that polemicists sought to blend new sources of argumentative authority such as logical reason with the traditional corpus of Biblical *auctoritates*, or proof texts.¹⁰ The introduction of non-Biblical proofs into polemical writing opened the door to a more general reconsideration of the parameters of argumentative *auctoritas*, leading to a growing interest, by the middle of the thirteenth century and especially within the newly formed Dominican order of preachers, of seeking proof texts in the sources considered authoritative by other religions, including the Talmud and Qurʾān.¹¹ These shifts each entailed a progressive

⁸ I have identified at least three sources used here by Abner / Alfonso, Lv 6:7, BT Bava Metzia 58b, and Ez 37:25. His use of “rrayz” is a clear Hebraism, representing a translation of “‘iqar” (Heb. “root,” “principle,” “foundation”). This is confirmed by similar use in the *Teshuvot la-Meharef*, cited below, n. 35.

⁹ On the concept of the Hermeneutical Jew, see Cohen 3 n. 3; and Markus.

¹⁰ In polemical texts by writers such as the *Dialogus contra Iudaeos* of the convert Petrus Alfonsi (converted 1106), the *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani* of Gilbert Crispin (d. 1117), the *Dialogus inter Philosophum, Iudaeum, et Christianum* of Peter Abelard (d. 1142), or the *Disputatio contra Iudaeum Leonem* of Odo of Tournai (d. 1113), arguments are made *ratione et auctoritate*, by reason and authority together. By the middle of the century, Peter the Venerable of Cluny (d. 1156), in his *Adversus Iudaeorum inveteratam duritiem*, argued that Jewish infidelity consisted not only of a rejection of sources, but an irrational lack of reason. On this shift, see Cohen 254-70; and Funkenstein 1971, 378-80, and 1968, 138-41.

¹¹ In arguments such as those by the converted Dominican Paulus Christiani at the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263 and the Aragonese Dominican Raymond Martini in his anti-Jewish *Pugio Fidei* (*Dagger of Faith*) from 1278, Biblical authorities are blended with hundreds of Talmudic and Midrashic citations, all given in the original Hebrew (or Aramaic) alongside faithful Latin translations. Martini’s arguments and sources bear much similarity to Abner / Alfonso’s in the *Mostrador*, which followed the

attempt to approximate an authentic non-Christian perspective. In moving from “rational” proofs to the refutation of non-Christian sources in their original languages and then finally to the appropriation of those same sources in support of Christianity, polemicists moved ever closer to what they perceived as authentic proofs of their polemical arguments in “original” non-Christian sources. As part of this appeal to the prestige of originality, polemicists exploited Muslim and Jewish arguments defending Hebrew or Arabic as God’s most “original” language by seeking to defend Christianity with the most authentic scriptural sources in those languages.

The arguments of Abner / Alfonso follow directly in the wake of this progressive attempt to approximate authenticity by appropriating originality. Abner / Alfonso explains, “los más de los judios creen en los dichos de ssus ssabios del Talmud...nos adueremos pruebas...de los sus grandes ssabios abtenticos e onrrados entrellos” (1994, 1:43 / f. 28v).¹² He therefore sets out to show that Christianity consists in believing in these authentic sources of the Jews and that “los vuestros ssabios abtenticos entre vos vos desmienten e que concuerdan con los sabios de los gentiles en dar testimonio contra vos...” (1996, 2:444 / f. 342r).¹³ Jews, he argues, do not follow their own authentic authorities and instead “...negades vos a los vuestros ssabios abtenticos” (1996, 2:349 / f. 293r).¹⁴ In Abner / Alfonso’s polemic, authentic Jewish sources both contradict Judaism and support Christian ideas because, he suggests, Christianity is actually Judaism in its most “authentic” state. In making this appeal to authenticity, however, he does not only share in the thirteenth-century project of citing Rabbinical sources in support Christian truth. He also presents himself as an authoritative source of this interpretation because of his authentically Jewish experience. His own conversion narrative, which he uses to frame his anti-Jewish arguments, can thus be read as a deliberate appeal to authenticity as one who understood “la premia de los judios, el mi pueblo donde yo era.”¹⁵

A central part of this construction of authorial persona as authentically Jewish is the use of Hebrew. Abner / Alfonso is unique in the long history of Christian polemical writing because he is the first writer to compose his anti-Jewish arguments

Pugio by less than fifty years, even though Abner / Alfonso’s work shows no concrete signs indicating he was familiar with the Dominican’s polemics. On Abner / Alfonso’s place in the history of anti-Jewish polemic, see Chazan 1984. For an argument against his familiarity with Martini, see Chazan 1999.

¹² He also discusses “los grandes sabios abtenticos, que estudiaron mucho en la çiencias e las escribieron en los libros abtenticos” (1996, 2:350 / f. 293v).

¹³ “Los christianos...nos fallamos e creemos bien ffirmemiente los dichos de los prophetas e de los grandes ssabios abtenticos entre vos e entre otros gentiles” (1996, 2:58 / f. 165r).

¹⁴ “...non avedes Ley de verdat. Ca ffue olvidada de vuestros parientes e de vos, pues que non la entendedes segund la verdat que tienen los omnes de los entendimientos abtenticos” (1994, 1:64 / f. 38v).

¹⁵ See the forthcoming article by Szpiech for a further exploration of the rhetoric of this self-representation.

in Hebrew.¹⁶ Like the *Mostrador*, virtually all of Abner / Alfonso's surviving works—all written after his conversion—were composed in Hebrew.¹⁷ It is known that Abner / Alfonso himself translated his first work, the now lost *Sefer Milhamot ha-Shem* (*Book of the Wars of the Lord*), into Castilian at the request of Doña Blanca, Señora of the convent of Las Huelgas in Burgos.¹⁸ The fact that, even after he was commissioned to translate his work, Abner / Alfonso continued to write his later polemics in Hebrew is a significant demonstration of the importance of language in his polemical endeavor. He explicitly refers to his use of Hebrew in the text as a deliberate choice that reflected his intention to speak directly to a Jewish readership: "...Non tomé los viessos ssegund que sson trasladados al latin entre los christianos, ssinon segunt que sson entendudos en lengua del ebrayco. E esto es porque mis palabras e mis rrazones aqui non son con los christianos, ssinon con los judios contradezidores" (1996, 2:28 / f. 151v-52r).¹⁹ He appeals to language as the basis of his argumentative authority and proof of his authenticity as still culturally Jewish even after his conversion.

¹⁶ No earlier work of Christian anti-Jewish polemic written in Hebrew is known to exist. Abner / Alfonso's composition in Hebrew and later translation into Castilian parallels Ramon Llull's repeated self-translations between Catalan, Arabic and Latin. Llull allegedly wrote the million words of his *Llibre de contemplació de Deu* first in Arabic, and later translated them himself, a practice he may have repeated with some other works. Nevertheless, even Llull, who became slightly more involved in anti-Jewish polemic later in his prolific career, never wrote in Hebrew. On Llull's alleged use of Arabic, see Garcias Palou.

¹⁷ Mettmann speculates that Abner / Alfonso's lost work known as *Libro de las maldiciones de los judios*, mentioned in the opening of *Libro de la ley* (Abner de Burgos 1990, 87), may have been written only in Castilian (9).

¹⁸ The sixteenth-century *Viaje* of Ambrosio de Morales gives notice of "Un Libro en pergamino, de letra harto antigua, y tiene este titulo: *Este es el Libro de las Batallas de Dios, que compuso Maestre Alfonso, Converso, que solia haber nombre Rabbi Abner, quando era Judio, è trasladolo de Hebraico en lengua Castellana por mandado de la Infanta Doña Blanca, Señora del monasterio de las Huelgas de Burgos*" (9). This raises the important question of Abner / Alfonso's involvement in the Castilian translations of his works after the *Sefer Milhamot*. Baer notes that his works were "mostly written in Hebrew and later translated under his own supervision" (1:334). Walter Mettmann, the recent editor of the *Mostrador*, suggests that, based on the comparison of the Spanish and Castilian *Teshuvot* texts, there is "no doubt" that Abner / Alfonso himself was the translator of at least that Castilian text (Abner de Burgos 1998, 7, but cf. his doubts in the introduction to the *Mostrador* 1994, 1: 8). Almost exact parallels between the Castilian *Teshuvot* and the *Mostrador* (e.g. 1998, 36 / f. 51ra; 1994, 1:159 / f. 85r; and 1993a, 369 / f. 22b) seem to import Abner / Alfonso's own hand in the Castilian translation of the *Mostrador*, as does its chronological proximity to the *Sefer Milhamot* / *Libro de las batallas*. Sainz de la Maza 1990, 198, likewise supports this view.

¹⁹ As shown by the parallel Hebrew and Castilian versions of Abner / Alfonso's later work, *Teshuvot la-Meharef* / *Respuestas al blasfemo*, Abner / Alfonso avoided the Vulgate entirely in the original Hebrew of the *Mostrador*. For an example of the replacement of Hebrew Bible citations with the Vulgate equivalent in the Castilian translation, see the *Teshuvot la-Meharef* (1998, 25 / f. 47a) and the original Hebrew version in 1993a, 354 / f. 15b. Cf. also a similar passage in 1994, 1:162 / f. 86v-87r. For examples the very rare instances in the *Mostrador* in which the Vulgate is given instead of Abner / Alfonso's own translation of the Hebrew original, see 1996, 2:123 / f. 195r and 2:412 / f. 324v, but as other examples from the *Teshuvot* suggest, such as the citation of Augustine in Hebrew (1993a, 367 / f. 21b), no Latin was given in the original Hebrew version of the *Mostrador*.

Through the narration of his own story, his manipulation of a multitude of Rabbinical sources, and above all through his appeal to language as the ultimate source of his authenticity, Abner / Alfonso seeks to claim not that original and translation –in his mind, Judaism and Christianity– are indistinguishable, but that the “translation” has replaced the “original” as a more faithful representation of original truth. Just like Christianity itself, which had long arrogated to itself the status of New Israel before the alleged insufficiency of the Old Law, Abner / Alfonso himself, writing as a convert who still intended to communicate like a Jewish authority, approximates the copied ring that displaces the prestige of its model by matching its appearance of authenticity. Like Boccaccio’s copied rings, Abner / Alfonso’s interpretation of Judaism is the translation that obviates its source by becoming a new and improved original.

Abner / Alfonso’s construction of polemical authority and his appeal to language as the key to his authenticity are unique within polemical writing in fourteenth-century Castile, but they were not without parallels elsewhere. His arguments and rhetoric are strikingly similar to the those of another, equally notorious convert, Anselm Turmeda, who was born on the island of Mallorca around 1352, a few short years after Abner / Alfonso’s death and at the very moment of Boccaccio’s retelling of the three-rings tale in the *Decameron*. Turmeda is one of the most infamous Catalan writers of the Middle Ages as a result of his conversion to Islam at the end of the fourteenth century. As in the case of Abner / Alfonso, much of what is known about his early life and conversion comes directly from the narrative given in the opening to his polemical writing, the Arabic anti-Christian *Tuhfat al-Adīb fī al-radd ‘alā ahl al-ṣalīb* (*Gift of the Lettered One for the Refutation of the People of the Cross*), completed almost exactly one century after Abner / Alfonso’s *Mostrador*. Although critics have called the authenticity of the last of the work’s three sections into question –charges we will consider in more detail below– all have taken as authentic part one of the text, which presents the author’s conversion story, because it recounts numerous local details particular to the author’s life and experience. The author narrates that, after studying as a child in Mallorca and then as an adolescent in Lléida, he went to Bologna to study philosophy, where he took Franciscan orders and remained to study for approximately ten years. One day, his professor, called “Nicolao Martello” in the text, fell ill and did not come to the day’s lesson, Anselm and the other students carried on the class in his absence.²⁰ Their discussion centered on the nature of the “paraclete” or advocate whom Jesus mentions repeatedly in the Gospel of John (e.g. 15:26). Unsatisfied with the day’s debate, Turmeda went afterwards to his professor’s home and summarized for him the arguments of the different students. When the professor dismissed them all as erroneous,

²⁰ The identity of Anselm / °Abdallāh’s teacher is uncertain. Epalza 1965, 123-36, discusses the sources surrounding various possible candidates, and Giraldo explores the information about one figure in particular at the University of Bologna in her dissertation, 301-11.

I rushed to his feet and kissed them and said to him: “O Master! ... I have acquired from you a body of knowledge beyond measure, but from among all of your gifts, could you possibly complete this with the knowledge of this holy name?” The master began to cry and said to me, “Oh my son, you are very dear to me because of your services to me, and surely, knowledge of this holy name is a great benefit, but I fear for you, because if this is revealed to you, the Christians would kill you right away... Know, my son, that the Paraclete is one of the names of...Muḥammad, Peace be upon Him.” (Anselm Turmeda 1971, 215-17, translation mine)²¹

Over the next year, Anselm made his way to Tunisia and eventually professed publicly his faith in Islam. He married, had a son whom he named Muḥammad, learned Arabic, obtained a post as a customs official, and adopted the name °Abdallāh al-Turjumān, or °Abdallāh “the interpreter.”

Both his new name and new post as customs official are indicative of his position as “translator” between languages and religions, a position that is reflected equally in his Arabic and Catalan writing. Besides his Arabic *Tuhfa*, he is the author of at least four known works in Catalan, all apparently written after his conversion around 1387 but before the composition of his *Tuhfa* in 1420, including the *Llibre de bons amonestaments* (ca. 1396-98), the *Cobles de la divisió del regne de Mallorques* (1398), a series of at least four short, rhymed *Profecies* (ca. 1405 and after), and, most importantly, his *Disputa de l'ase* (ca. 1417-18).²² His works in each language exist in virtual isolation from those in the other, and he makes no mention in his Arabic text of any of his earlier Catalan ideas or their content. As we will see, however, this bifurcation of his oeuvre is indicative of a more fundamental division by which his authorial identity came to be riven, and this division is of prime importance in contextualizing his polemical arguments and autobiographical voice in the *Tuhfa*, his final known work.

The remainder of the *Tuhfa* following Anselm / °Abdallāh’s conversion narrative, including a section praising the Ḥafṣid ruler Abū al-°Abbās Aḥmad, is mainly dedicated to a lengthy polemical attack on Christianity on the basis of the Gospels. As in the case of Abner / Alfonso, Anselm / °Abdallāh’s polemical attack is based heavily

²¹ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

²² Also occasionally attributed to him is the *Llibre de tres* (*Book of Three*, of unknown date), on which see d’Olwer. Although Giraldo calls d’Olwer’s evidence “very questionable” (147 n. 1), Samsó has pointed out an additional parallel between the *Llibre de tres* and the *Thousand and One Nights* (1971-2, 75-6). Beier has considered the evidence in detail without confirming Anselm / °Abdallāh’s authorship for certain (1996, 81-87). See also Riquer (1964, 2:131-32; and his edition of the *Llibre de tres*, 1997, 16-20). There has also been some speculation by Ripoll that Anselm / °Abdallāh began his *Bons amonestaments* before his conversion (Anselm Turmeda 1972, 80-81). For a full consideration of his works and bibliography, see Epalza 1971, 11-25; Riquer 1964, 2:265-308; d’Alós and Beier 1996, 56-123. The *Llibre* and *Cobles* in Olivar’s edition have been republished together with the *Profecies*, and *Llibre de tres* in *Llibre de bons amonestaments i altres obres*, with introductory remarks by Epalza.

on the sources of those whom he attacks, and thus he cites directly from the Gospels with much greater frequency than he cites the Qurʾān (although, as in the case of Abner / Alfonso, the language of his new faith permeates his discourse). Anselm / ʿAbdallāh’s conversion narrative has a function in his polemical argument similar but not identical to the role of Abner / Alfonso’s narrative in the *Mostrador*.²³ Like Abner / Alfonso, Anselm / ʿAbdallāh uses his carefully constructed narrative to establish himself as an expert in his former religion and as a gifted student of Christianity who, at the age of six, studied the Gospels “until I memorized (ḥafaztu) more than half in two years” (1971, 205), then studying Greek for two more years. This early precocious success in studying Christianity underscores the length of his ten-year study in Bologna with Martello, “a priest of great age and great rank” (205), whom Anselm / ʿAbdallāh describes as one of the greatest living authorities in Christendom:

His rank among them in knowledge and religion and asceticism was very high. He was

unparalleled in his age in these things among all the peoples of Christendom. Indeed, questions in their religion were brought to him from all distant places on behalf of kings and others...With this priest I studied the foundations and principles²⁴ of the Christian religion. (1971, 209)

This description culminates in Martello’s revelation of the secret meaning of the Paraclete to his young disciple, and the emphasis placed on his nonpareil authority in Christianity deliberately corresponds to Anselm / ʿAbdallāh’s lengthy description of his own prodigious mastery of Christian ideas and texts.

As in the conversion account of Abner / Alfonso, which establishes his knowledge in order to prove that he sees Christianity within Jewish sources, the introduction to the *Tuhfa* serves to establish Anselm / ʿAbdallāh’s authenticity as an expert in his former religion, one with the secret knowledge necessary to find Islam at its core. In both texts, the autobiographical content directly supports the polemical argument in defense of the supersession of the old religion by the new. In this way, Anselm / ʿAbdallāh follows directly in the path of the polemical tradition of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a tradition with which he was no doubt intimately familiar through his studies in Paris and Bologna.²⁵ The polemical content of the text elaborates on the implicit arguments of the opening frame narrative. Anselm / ʿAbdallāh specifically chooses to use the method of appealing to *auctoritas* as it

²³ Epalza 1993 briefly considers the narrative context of Anselm / ʿAbdallāh’s text.

²⁴ Epalza translates *aḥkām*, “principles” or “regulations,” as referring to the *Sententiae* of Peter Lombard (Anselm Turmeda 1971, 210). Reynolds translates *uṣūl* and *aḥkām* as “principles” and “details,” respectively (197).

²⁵ Anselm / ʿAbdallāh explicitly states that in contrast to earlier anti-Christian polemicists who argued “following the method of Reason” (al-maʿqūl), he will follow a method of “tradition” (al-naql), specifically adopting a term of methodological divisions within Arabic branches of learning (reason / religious tradition, ʿaql / naql) to describe methodological divisions within polemical writing between use of reason (ratio) and authority (auctoritas).

developed after the twelfth century by using the proof texts considered authentic by Christians. He states that in order to refute their religious traditions and beliefs, “I will cite therefore their Gospels and those who wrote them and their laws and those who compiled them and the rottenness of their reasons and the negation of their blasphemies about their traditions and their calumnies (fī manqūlihim wa-iftirā’ihim) about Jesus the Messiah and lies about God” (1971, 197). Moreover, Anselm / °Abdallāh relates that just prior to his public conversion, the Ḥafsid ruler sent for a number of visiting Christian soldiers and merchants and asked them if they knew “this new priest who arrived by boat” (227). They replied, “Sire, he is a very learned man in our religion and our priests have even said, truly, they have not seen one of higher authority (a°lā minhu darajatan) in knowledge or faith in our religion” (227). Like Abner / Alfonso’s text, Anselm / °Abdallāh’s polemic rests on the thorough knowledge of sources authoritative among his enemies, and his conversionary narrative serves to establish his authority in the very sources he sets out to refute.

It is in this light that we can understand, just as in the case of Abner / Alfonso, how Anselm / °Abdallāh’s polemic also relies on an authoritative legitimacy derived from his appeal to language as a source of authenticity. Just as Anselm / °Abdallāh’s body of writing seems to culminate in his Arabic *Tuḥfa*, abrogating the Christian ideas of his earlier Catalan writing, so his own authorial voice seems to culminate in his personal repudiation of Christian ideas and his deliberate representation of himself as a convert who has replaced his former identity with his new, Arabized self. He not only boasts that he “learned the Arabic language perfectly in one year” (231). He also claims that he served the Ḥafsid ruler Abū al-°Abbās Aḥmad as translator and interpreter of enemy correspondence during the Franco-Genoan attack on Mahdia in 1390 (231).²⁶ In order to depict his linguistic ability as one of the foundations of his authenticity in conversion, he relates a scene in which Abū Fāris, the son of Abū al-°Abbās who became the Ḥafsid ruler after the death, intercepted a letter written to Anselm / °Abdallāh by one of his former acquaintances, a Franciscan brother from Sicily trying to convince him to return to Christianity. Without informing Anselm / °Abdallāh that he already knew its contents, Abū Fāris tested his fidelity by asking him to translate the letter. When Anselm / °Abdallāh finished his translation, Abū Fāris exclaimed, “By God, he did not leave out a single letter!” (237), directly connecting his fidelity in conversion with his linguistic skill in translation.²⁷ At the

²⁶ Epalza estimates he knew “at least six languages”: Catalan-Mallorcan, Castilian-Aragonese, Italian dialects, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew (1965, 146). To this can be added his specific mention of “the languages of the Gospels” (Anselm Turmeda 1971, 205), possibly implying he studied Greek in his early years in Lléida. On Anselm / °Abdallāh’s possible role in the siege of Mahdia in 1390, see Lubienski-Bodenham.

²⁷ This anecdote can be read in the light of two important archival records (Arxiu de la Corona d’Aragó R. 2672 f. CXr and R. 2691 f. 138v) mentioning Anselm / °Abdallāh. The first is a copy of a letter sent by King Alfonso V, el Magnánimo, to the son of the king of Tunisia thanking him for his help in settling a case of ransom of prisoners, which ends with a brief greeting to Anselm / °Abdallāh “en altra manera appellat Alcayt Abdalla.” The second, which is also the last surviving document mentioning

very end of the text, Anselm / °Abdallāh returns to a discussion of the Paraclete from the Gospel of John, “the cause of my conversion to Islam” (483), which he claims is a Greek word that can be translated into Arabic as “Aḥmad.” By connecting the name with the historical circumstances of his conversion under the Ḥafṣid ruler Abū al-°Abbās Aḥmad,²⁸ he not only blends his textual first-person perspective with that of his real, authorial voice.²⁹ He also connects the “discovery” of the secret name of the Paraclete with his own newfound faith by drawing a direct parallel between translation and conversion. In numerous similar examples, he presents himself as “the interpreter” –al-Turjumān– in both a literal and a spiritual sense, translating Christian messages for Abū al-°Abbās just as he converted his own identity into that of a new believer and transformed the authoritative sources of Christian tradition into proof texts justifying Christianity’s prophetic abrogation by Islam.³⁰ The power of both Anselm / °Abdallāh and Abner / Alfonso to “translate” the old tradition and the old self into the new conflates translation and conversion into a single act of faith whose ultimate goal is polemical supersession.

III. Lost in Translation

“El original es infiel a la traducción.”

–Jorge Luis Borges, “Sobre el ‘Vathek’ de William Beckford”

Both Abner / Alfonso and Anselm / °Abdallāh, following the tradition of polemical writing as it developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, present language as a source of authenticity in their conversion narratives and in the polemical arguments framed by those narratives. The crux of this appeal in both writers is the central position of language as a bridge between the two religions and two selves of their respective conversions. Their use of language as both proof of their expertise in their old religion and as the foundation of their authentic conversion to their new one conflates the two personas of their drama of religious transformation, the old self and

Anselm / °Abdallāh, is a letter dated 1423 from Alfonso directly to him offering him safe passage to return as a Christian to his kingdom without punishment for his apostasy. Both documents have been published by Calvet, 52-53 and 40-41, respectively.

²⁸ “This name [Paraclete] is in the Greek language and its translation (tafsīruhu) in Arabic means “Aḥmad” [helper]” (483).

²⁹ Various critics have, on this basis, judged Anselm / °Abdallāh as a renaissance humanist thinker. Marfany has read into Anselm / °Abdallāh’s first-person presence what he calls an “egoist” or “egocentric” perspective that was “una actitud precursora de les posiciones típiques de l’humanisme renaixentista” (6). Martos similarly highlights this as “un yo literario *poco medieval*” (18) just as Alvarez highlights his “visionary humanism” (2002a, 172). Rafael Alemany Ferrer has explored in detail the literary play of perspective and voice in Anselm / °Abdallāh’s texts (1989 and 1995). Also of interest is Carreté, who remarks on the use of proper names.

³⁰ This is reflected in his spare use of two Arabic anti-Christian polemicists, Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qāḍī °Īyād (d. 1149). On his Arabic sources, see Epalza’s edition of the *Tuhfa*, (Anselm Turmeda 1971, 92-101) and Ljamai 168-73.

the new, as mutually dependent halves bound together into one converted self. They both justify their polemical authority not by emphasizing the completeness of their conversion, but by evincing their simultaneous authenticity as both converter and converted and their fluency in crossing between both perspectives. As we will see, this conflation of antitheses within their conversion narratives, strangely mirrors the external circumstances of the works themselves after their authors' deaths: Although they both strive within their texts to keep the originals and models of their writing apart from their translations and imitations—either by casting originals as more authentic than their translations, as in Abner / Alfonso's case, or by disguising translations as new originals, in Anselm / °Abdallāh's—the external circumstances in which their writing has been received and transmitted have inextricably bound their originals and translations together into one multilingual corpus of writing.

Because their conversions are cast principally in terms of language, their converted selves, like newly translated texts, must overcome their original models while at the same time preserving them in a marginal space of both acceptance and rejection. This paradox of simultaneous presence and absence affects not only the linguistic identity of their texts; it determines the limits of their own appeal to polemical authority within the conversionary rhetoric of selfhood and authenticity. The consideration of their respective attitudes toward language and translation must therefore also involve the analysis of their parallel confrontation with the paradox of scriptural supersessionism, in which each must justify the polemical attack on the faith they have rejected but still cannot do without in their narrative of transformation and redemption.

In the case of Abner / Alfonso, there is a significant parallelism between the alternation of his authorial voice as both steadfast Jew and faithful Christian and the interpenetration of his original Hebrew texts with his Castilian translations. Despite Abner / Alfonso's deliberate composition of his polemical arguments and his conversion narrative in Hebrew, his work lacks this intended unity and instead survives in a potpourri of different forms and languages. As a result of Abner / Alfonso's deliberate choice to write his polemics in Hebrew and then translate them into Castilian, some of his works now survive in two "authentic" fourteenth-century versions. At the same time, however, because part or all of some texts have been lost, his corpus is divided between texts in one or both languages. While the *Mostrador*, as well as his late *Minḥat Qena'ot / Ofrenda de zelos*, and *Libro de la ley*, now only survive in Castilian, some other works, including his *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref / Respuestas al blasfemo* and three polemical letters survive in both Hebrew and Castilian, while still other works such as his *Teshuvot ha-Meshuvot (Responses of the Apostasies*, also read as *Teshuvot ha-Teshuvot* by some critics) survive only in Hebrew.³¹ To complicate matters more, the fragments of his now-lost *Sefer Milḥamot*

³¹ For a full consideration of Abner / Alfonso's bibliography and scholarly works on his other writing, see Carpenter 2002. Rosenthal has published the text as *Teshuvot ha-Meshuvot* (Abner de Burgos 1967) and Benjamin Richler, who has recently viewed the manuscript in preparation of a new catalogue of Hebrew manuscripts in Parma, has confirmed to me by email correspondence that the manuscript

ha-Shem / *Libro de las batallas de Dios* are only preserved in Latin in the fifteenth-century polemics *Fortalitium Fidei* of Alonso de Espina and *Scrutinium Scripturarum* of Pablo de Santa María, and the handful of works of uncertain authorship often attributed to Abner / Alfonso likewise exist in either Hebrew or Castilian but not both.³²

Because of the distribution of his writing across three languages and the preservation of his longest text, the *Mostrador*, only in Castilian, Abner / Alfonso's works do not exist in the original form intended by him as part of his polemical persona as an authentically cultural Jew, but now must necessarily be read from a multilingual perspective to be fully understood. On the one hand, the Hebrew version of the *Teshuvot la-Meharef* not surprisingly clarifies many things in the Castilian translations, filling in lacunae and clarifying obscure wording.³³ Comparison of the Hebrew and Castilian shows that the translation is, in many places, but a pale and fragmentary reflection of the original text. In one notable passage in the *Mostrador*, the argument stops in midstream and the text states that there are "otras muchas rrazones que ay segund la lengua del ebrayco...ssinon que non se puede trasladar bien al rromance" (1996, 2:113 / f. 191r). Statements such as this, as well as other explicit references in his works to the meaning of the words "en rromance"³⁴ intimate the profound deficiencies that must be understood to affect the translations of Abner / Alfonso's texts, above all the text of the *Mostrador*, which exists without its Hebrew original and which is seven times as long as the *Teshuvot la-Meharef*.

Despite all of these imperfections in AbnerAlfonso's corpus, however, the original

"clearly reads" "Teshuvot ha-Meshuvot" and not "Teshuvot ha-Teshuvot." Whether this represents a scribal error is unclear.

³² On Abner / Alfonso's lost works, see Carpenter 2002 and Sainz de la Maza 1990, 198-208. On the *Sefer Milhamot ha-Shem* in particular, see Del Valle.

³³ For example, in one important passage based on the Rabbinical Midrash commentary on Psalm 50:1 interpreting the three names listed for God in the Hebrew text ("El, Elohim, Yahweh"), as "the three goodly attributes of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge" (*Midrash on Psalms* 468), Abner / Alfonso specifically rejects the Rabbinical and Kabbalistic interpretations that connect these three attributes with the characteristics of justice, mercy, and a combination of the two. In the Castilian version, his argument is unintelligible because part of the text is missing, while in the Hebrew, the full text is preserved along with almost an entire folio of additional explanation not preserved in the Castilian translation. Thus the Castilian reads: "Et porque algunos glossadores dixieron que aquellas tres maneras de Dios sson nonbradas costunbre de piedat e costunbre de juyzio e costunbre mezclada de aquellas amas" (1998, 30 / f. 49a), seeming to imply that this argument is acceptable as it stands. In the Hebrew version, however, the text explicitly states that "*It is not possible to say*, like some of the commentators have said, that these three attributes are the "attribute of justice," the "attribute of mercy," and the "attribute (which is a) blending of the two of them" (1993a, 361 / f. 18b, emphasis mine). NB: All citations from the *Teshuvot* will give both the page number from the edited edition by Mettmann or Hecht, respectively, followed by the manuscript folio (for the Castilian *Teshuvot*, Vatican MS lat. 6423; for the Hebrew *Teshuvot*, Parma MS 2440).

³⁴ This is likewise evident in statements such as the following in the Castilian *Teshuvot*, "E maguera que algunos rroma[n]çan en este logar "a ellos", enpero bien sufre el ebrayco que se diga "por ellos" (1998, 43 / f. 53rb).

versions are not universally more reliable than the Castilian translations. Because in some texts, a number of passages missing from the original Hebrew are preserved in the Castilian translations, there are places where the Castilian illuminates the original Hebrew versions rather than the other way around. In the *Teshuvot la-Meharef / Respuestas al blasfemo*, for example, not only can the Castilian text give more information about the total content of the text by filling in gaps where the Hebrew is lost. In certain cases, the Hebrew must be reinterpreted in light of the parallel content of the Castilian.³⁵ Barring any further discovery of another, more complete Hebrew version, the Castilian translation is actually indispensable for comprehension of Abner / Alfonso's *Teshuvot la-Meharef* as it existed in its original form, and the same argument also holds true for Abner / Alfonso's polemical letters, in which original and translation likewise coincide in many places but do not overlap exactly. Even more significant is the fact that many of Abner / Alfonso's later works, including the *Teshuvot la-Meharef / Respuestas al blasfemo*, the *Libro de la ley*, and the polemical letters, repeat arguments and passages previously expressed the *Mostrador*, his earliest and longest work to survive.³⁶ Because it contains numerous parts of Abner / Alfonso's later writing in more developed or elaborate form, the Castilian translation of the *Mostrador* actually sheds important light on *both* the originals *and* the translations of his later writing, making it essential and necessary, even in its defective, translated form, for a full understanding of any of Abner / Alfonso's later

³⁵ For example, in one passage discussing the relative merits of "study" versus "action," the Hebrew text cites a verse from the Talmudic tractate BT Qiddushin 40b, observing, "They said in Tractate *Kiddushin*: Study is not the essence rather, deed is the essence" (1993a, 346 / f. 11b). As Hecht, the editor of Abner / Alfonso's Hebrew text, points out, the actual Talmudic verse continues past this statement by giving the responses of other rabbis and their arrival at the opposite conclusion: "Study is greater, for it leads to action" (129-30, n. 182). Based only on the Hebrew version, it seems Abner / Alfonso has distorted or entirely misunderstood the verse in question. A comparison with the more-complete Castilian version, however, shows that in fact the Hebrew is missing a folio in which the rest of the verse, along with other arguments, are explained. Our insight into the fact that Abner / Alfonso understood this perfectly, however, comes not from the "original" text, which is defective, but from the translation. As Abner / Alfonso elaborates in the Castilian version, "Et como lo dize en el libro "Quidussim" que rrespondieron todos los sabios e dixieron que el estudio es rrayz, porque el estudio trahe a obrar" (1998, 17 / f. 43vb-44ra). On the term "rrayz", see above, n. 8.

³⁶ A consideration of the fragments of Abner / Alfonso's first work of anti-Jewish polemic, the *Sefer Milhamot ha-Shem*, likewise suggests that at least some of the passages of the *Mostrador* were reproduced and developed from his earlier arguments there. For example, concerning the events of 1295 (Del Valle, 78-83 and 105-09, and cf. Abner de Burgos 1994, 1:13-15 / f. 12v-13r), the identification of Edom (Del Valle 85-87 / 110-12, cf. Abner de Burgos 1996, 2:209f / f. 236r), the death of Christ and his disciples, (Del Valle 88-89 / 113-14, cf. Abner de Burgos 1996, 2:6-65 / f. 166v-69r), the "Blessing of the Heretics" (Del Valle 89-96, cf. Abner de Burgos 1996, 2:65 / f. 169r), the condemnation of a Jew who returns a lost Christian item (Del Valle 96-98 / 117, cf. Abner de Burgos 1996, 2: 221-22 / f. 241r), the avoidance of Jewish doctors (Del Valle 98-101 / 117-19, cf. Abner de Burgos 1996, 2:431-32 / f. 335r-v), and the miscalculation of the day of the Sabbath (Del Valle 101-03 / 119, cf. Abner de Burgos 1996, 2:371-83 / f. 303v-09v).

works, even in their original Hebrew versions.³⁷

Thus despite the attempts, considered above, to present language as a source of his authenticity and authority in his conversionary polemic, Abner / Alfonso's actual texts, mostly because of fortuitous circumstance, have developed and changed in a way that has made his original versions ineradicably bound to his patently inferior translations. Like the two selves of his conversion narrative, the Jew and the Christian, his Hebrew and Castilian texts must rely perpetually on each other to make total sense. In Abner / Alfonso's polemic as well as in the conversion narrative he uses to justify and frame it, original and translation, old self and new, Hebrew and Castilian, exist in a dialectical equation of mutual dependence in which neither can definitively claim authenticity or authority over the other.

This duality is even more striking in the case of Anselm / °Abdallāh, who faces a similar paradox in his own multilingual authorship. Comparison of his works written in Arabic and Catalan shows that like Abner / Alfonso, Anselm / °Abdallāh's appeal to language as a source of authenticity is undermined by the instability of his authorial voice, in which the coherence of the content and perspective of his works in one language depends on its isolation from the other. Not only did Anselm / °Abdallāh continue to write in Catalan after his conversion, obviously directing his works to a Christian, Catalan readership. The content of all of his Catalan writing, when viewed in isolation from his Arabic polemic, seems in no way determined by his new identity as a Muslim living in North Africa. Despite his claim in the *Tuhfa* to have learned Arabic "perfectly" at least a decade before the dates given to his first Catalan works, and despite his claim even in his earlier works of great linguistic skill in both Arabic and Hebrew,³⁸ the composition of all of his earlier works in Catalan for Christian readers sets the Arabic *Tuhfa* apart from the main corpus of his writing and raises the

³⁷ For example, in one passage from the Castilian *Teshuvot*, which is almost identical to the Hebrew, he states, "algunos philosophos façian de ssi mismos dioses. Como el qui dizia...Alabado e exalçado so, ¡e cuánto es grant el mi grado!" (1998, 39 / f. 52ra). Without any further details, these statements would seem to come from disparate sources, such as the mystic al-Ḥallāj (d. 922) and Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 875). Based on other citations in the *Teshuvot*, some critics (e.g. Gershenzon 266 n. 43 and Hecht, in Abner de Burgos 1993a, 183 n. 437) have sought to attribute these citations not directly to the mystics who said them, but to Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who cited them together in his *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*Niche for Lights*). Without any further details, it seems from both the original and translation of the *Teshuvot* / *Respuestas* that Abner / Alfonso read widely in Islamic mystical sources. Comparison across Abner / Alfonso's works, however, shows that this same string of citations is given in two places in the *Mostrador*, where he states "lo mostraron encubiertamente los ffilosofos Ben Rrsot e Ben Tufayl en lo que dixieron que erró el que dixiera "Alabado sso e ensalçado. ¡Quánto es grande el mi grado!" (1996, 2:57 / f. 164v-65r). This indicates that Abner / Alfonso took his citations not from al-Ghazālī, but from the philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl ("Ben Tufayl") who cited the former in his philosophical tale, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* (*Alive, Sone of Awake*), a fact further confirmed by the mention of Ibn Rushd ("Ben Rrosd"), who likewise refers to part of Ibn Ṭufayl's references to Al-Ghazālī. This both clarifies Abner / Alfonso's argument and narrows the scope of his source base in his polemics.

³⁸ "O de les tres lletres mestre! / Lo morsic vos és tot clar/ e en l'hebraic sóts molt destre" (1927, 121). Likewise, the queen of Mallorca tells him, "Bé e mills sabets parlar/ vós que eu dir no sabria" (128-29).

question of how these seemingly disparate bodies of writing can be integrated.

The difficulty of this question is exacerbated by the fact that his Catalan works give virtually no explicit indication of his newfound Muslim beliefs.³⁹ Apart from a few details about his location and Arabic name, he says nothing about his identity, and he never refers explicitly to his conversion in any of his Catalan works. Even more significantly, his Catalan works seem at times to reflect a decidedly Christian perspective, citing the Gospels approvingly and even advising belief in the Trinity and the Catholic Church.⁴⁰ Given that in the *Tuhfa* he condemns the Christian concept of the Trinity and criticizes all four Gospels as mendacious, the only logical conclusion is, as Samsó says, “un total desdoblamiento de personalidad en su autor” (1971-72, 79).⁴¹ Because all of Anselm / °Abdallāh’s apparently Christian statements come from works finished *after* his conversion to Islam, critics have sought to attribute his conversion to opportunism, philosophical indifference, or material desires rather than sincere faith.⁴²

This reading is complicated by the problematic uncertainties surrounding the

³⁹ His works only mention in passing that, “...est de nation cathalaine, et nay de la cité de mallorques...et est official en la doyne de Thunicz” (1984, 48) and that he is “en altre manera appellat Abdal·là” (1927, 144). One of his prophecies specifies that “Aquest dit/ fou scrit...jus en Tunis/ Barboria per mi/ Abdala/ sense falla” (Bohigas i Balaguer 181). See also Ripoll’s comments in his edition of the *Llibre* about the lack of his Arabic name in some of the manuscripts (Anselm Turmeda 1972, 77-91).

⁴⁰ For example, in his *Llibre*, he gives specific advice to believe in the Trinity and accept the teachings of the Catholic Church: “Primer, pus sies batejat/ creuràs que la divinitat/ és ésser en trinitat/ de les persones/ e que Jesús, fill de Déu viu/ és Déu e fill de Daviu;/ açò és ver, e així ho diu/ la Santa Escripura./ Dels altres articles, fill meu,/ creuràs ço que le Esgleia creu” (1927, 144-45). Likewise, in the *Cobles de la divisió del regne de Mallorca*, Anselm / °Abdallāh specifically mentions the “prophecy” of “Sant Lluç” in the Gospels about Jesus’ second coming, and states that “Déus lo Pare, per amor/ e per gran bé que ens volia/ adobar volent la error/ que Adam feta havia./ son Fill tramès en al via/ en semblança humanal./ Con Ell fos tot immortal./ per nós morir lo jaquia” (1927, 134). In the *Profecies*, he states, “La gent pagana/ Branden lur lança/ An esperanca/ de fer dapnatge/ Al gran linatge/ Qui porta crisma/ peccat del cisma...cells qui corona/ ffallssament porten...sobre ells plora/ la santa esgleya” (Raimondi, 237-38, and Cf. d’Alós, 482-83). Most significantly, in the *Disputa de l’Ase*, the character of Anselm wins the debate against the Ass by citing the Gospel of John 1:14, “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,” concluding that “Dieu tout puissant a voulu prendre chair humaine, mettant sa haulte divinité avec nostre humanité, se faisant homme...et sur cela, disoit saint Augustin: ‘La parolle du Seigneur est le filz du Père’, c’est à sçavoir Jésus Christ...” (1984, 138). The citation from Augustine could possibly come from his Commentary on John, but also matches other citations from his *Sermones*, e.g. Sermon 118: “Verbum enim dei filius est” (Migne, 38:672).

⁴¹ Samsó notes that, “Si se compara la *Tuhfa* con la obra catalana de Turmeda, puede advertirse que corresponden a dos mundos culturales completamente distintos: el autor de la *Tuhfa* es, culturalmente, musulmán, mientras que el Turmeda de la obra catalana es, culturalmente, cristiano” (1971-72, 79).

⁴² For example, Menéndez y Pelayo calls him a “vicioso apóstata cuya conciencia fluctúa entre la ley mahometana que exteriormente profesa y defiende; el cristianismo, al cual en el fondo de su alma, no renunció nunca, y ciertas ráfagas de incredulidad italiana o averroísta...” (1:174). Pou i Martí argues that Anselm / °Abdallāh had “un corazón minado por la incredulidad. Ésta lo pervirtió, completando la obra nefasta la ambición y deseo de bienestar material” (660). Probst accuses Anselm / °Abdallāh of “un Islamisme superficial, d’ont il se drapa jusqu’à sa mort comme d’un manteau” (477). Calvet concludes that he was a skeptic who lost all hope in all religions (217).

Tuhfa itself, including the fact that no manuscript of the text survives from before the seventeenth century. Even more significantly, Anselm / °Abdallāh's authorship is called into question by numerous problems within the text, including changes in tone between the conversion narrative in part one and the polemic in part three, changes in tone within part three itself, and numerous egregious imprecisions concerning Christian rites and beliefs that would be unthinkable for a former Franciscan Friar with Anselm / °Abdallāh's experience and education.⁴³ Epalza, citing the exact coincidence of long passages of the text with the Castilian anti-Christian polemic of the Morisco Aḥmad al-Ḥānafī, has speculated that the original text written by Turmeda was modified and expanded by a Morisco, possibly al-Ḥānafī himself, sometime around the end of the sixteenth or beginning of the seventeenth century, a theory further supported by elements in the text, pointed out by Samsó, of oral, Western dialectal Arabic, including elements particular to sixteenth-century Moriscos.⁴⁴

Against these doubts concerning the work's authenticity, however, Robert Beier has recently presented convincing evidence that the opening prologue, which defines the work as an anti-Christian polemic and which describes all three parts of the work to follow, was written by Anselm / °Abdallāh himself: the original Arabic text reproduces very closely a passage of the very same Arabic text of the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā'* (*Bretheren of Purity*) used by Anselm / °Abdallāh as a model for his *Disputa de l'ase* only a few years before the *Tuhfa* (Beier 1992, 85-8).⁴⁵ This coincidence directly associates Anselm / °Abdallāh not only with the first autobiographical section but with the *Tuhfa*'s structure and polemical premise as it is described in the opening of the work. Moreover, it bolsters the impression of coherence across the work given by other coincidences linking the first and third sections, most notably the conclusion of the third section with mention of the Paraclete as Muḥammad, the very subject that is at the heart of Anselm / °Abdallāh's conversion narrative in the part one. On this basis, the explicitly polemical and acerbic content of his *Tuhfa* cannot be excluded from or

⁴³ In response to these apparent disparities, Giraldo claims that the third section "can be divided into original and redaction with a large degree of confidence" (143). She recommends removing the sections that are not "original": "Certain conclusions must be drawn from a reading of the "Turmeda" portions...once the rabid, anti-Christian imprecations are removed the book becomes a quiet treatise of a singular nature for its period" (144).

⁴⁴ Aḥmad al-Ḥānafī was a figure who had truck with the Ottoman emperor Aḥmad I around the turn of the seventeenth century during the same years when Aḥmad I was given a Turkish translation of the *Tuhfa* by Muḥammad ibn al-Sha°bān along with the Arabic text. This entrance of the text into Turkish sparked a renewed interest in Anselm / °Abdallāh and his text. Epalza has noted that al-Ḥānafī was close to the Tunisian intellectual Muḥammad Abū al-Ghayth al-Qashshāsh (called "Citibulgaiz" in Aljamiado manuscripts), who, besides helping many Moriscos relocate to Tunisia from Spain, also wrote the introduction to that same Turkish translation (1971, 48-50). Alvarez has evoked Epalza's theory as indirect support for her reading of the *Tuhfa* as a text at odds with what she calls the "universalist rhetoric of his earlier works" (2002a, 184).

⁴⁵ The texts in question are the opening passage of the *Tuhfa* (1971, 193) and the "Speech of the Quraishī" of the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā'* (1977, 155; translated in 1978, 123-24). On the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, see below, n. 56.

considered ancillary to Anselm / °Abdallāh's earlier body of writing, even if some of the specific arguments contained within the third section are considered to be Morisco additions or alterations. The core of the *Tuhfa*'s narrative of conversion and anti-Christian sentiment, which can now be linked to Anselm / °Abdallāh with greater certainty, is at odds with his earlier works in language, tone, and perspective. As his last known work, the *Tuhfa* thus seems to "abrogate" Anselm / °Abdallāh's earlier works, serving as his last word on the subject of languages, faith, and identity.

The *Tuhfa* was not, however, a work for which Anselm / °Abdallāh was known in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Because there are no known manuscripts or fragments of the text surviving from before 1603 and only one known reference to the work or its author in any other text,⁴⁶ Anselm / °Abdallāh's carefully constructed abrogating, polemical persona –his "translated" self– was quickly eclipsed by the persistence of his "original" Catalan, Christian authorial persona, notwithstanding the fact that it too was itself a textual product postdating his conversion. By the time the original *Tuhfa* became well known in the Muslim world because of its translation into Turkish –leading to a wealth of manuscript copies and printed editions, and eventually, the veneration of Anselm / °Abdallāh's name and tomb as a great defender of Islam– a false legend had already sprung up in European sources, which show no knowledge of the *Tuhfa*, reclaiming him as a prodigal son who returned to Christianity and received martyrdom.⁴⁷ The struggle between later Christian and Muslim legends to claim Anselm / °Abdallāh for their own is an ironic parallel to the ongoing struggle within his own writing between his two authorial personas. This struggle not only distorted the way Anselm / °Abdallāh's texts were read and understood –Anselm himself was not even correctly identified as °Abdallāh until the turn of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ It has also come to determine the interpretive parameters within which his bibliography can now be viewed.⁴⁹ Rather than judging Anselm / °Abdallāh and his multilingual corpus of works according to a psychological divide that insists on exclusivity between the two sides of a "bicultural" identity –in the case of his conversion, as *either* a sincere convert *or* an opportunist apostate; in the case of his works, as expressing *either* a secret Christian belief *or* a decisive Muslim riposte– the

⁴⁶ Epalza has uncovered a single reference to the anecdote of the Paraclete and the discussion with Nicolao Fratello made by the contemporary Algerian writer °Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Ta°ālibī (1388-1468) (Anselm Turmeda 1971, 47).

⁴⁷ The outlines of this legend have been reconstructed by Giraldo, 67-84, based on Calvet, 9-21. On Anselm / °Abdallāh's tomb, see the early remarks of Bel Khodja and Miret i Sans.

⁴⁸ The Arabic text of the *Tuhfa* was studied and translated by Spiro (Anselm Turmeda 1885) without knowledge of the true identity of the author. For discussion of the identification of the text, see Anselm Turmeda 1971, 52-60.

⁴⁹ This is patent in the fact that despite the legend of saintly martyrdom that grew up around Anselm / °Abdallāh in Christendom, the *Llibre* were examined and censored by the Inquisition at the end of the sixteenth century (See Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición, legajo 4436 #24, discussed in Samsó, 1971-72, 82-84) and similarly that the *Disputa* was included in the *Index of Forbidden Books* published by the Church in 1583 (Riquer, 1964, 2: 286).

fragmentary fate of his works demands that both author and text be understood, in Beier's term, as "intercultural," in which the two sides of his authorial identity become essential and mutually necessary elements of his textual voice (1996, 160-62).⁵⁰ When read from a multilingual perspective that transcends the limited audiences of his two respective bodies of writing in Arabic and Catalan –or in other words, when viewed from an exterior, phenomenological perspective rather than an interior, psychological one– the instability of his shifting authorial voices comes to undermine his appeal within his texts to authenticity through language, and with it the very foundation of his polemical stance of abrogation in the *Tuhfa*.⁵¹

At the same time, however, the degree to which translation and mistranslation have come to determine his authorial identity as multiple and to overshadow his machinations toward any singular authenticity is evident in his Catalan works as well. As has now been well-documented, most of his works were based on earlier models in other languages. The *Llibre*, which was eventually transformed into a minor classic of Catalan literature read well into the nineteenth century, is, as Menéndez y Pelayo has demonstrated (1: cv-cx, especially cx), itself a partial reworking of the thirteenth-century Italian work, *La dottrina dello schiavo di Bari*, although Anselm / °Abdallāh's version can be read as more "original" than translation.⁵² Likewise, critics have shown that the "Fable of the Falcon and the Cock" passage and the "spell" ("encantament") put on Mallorca in the *Cobles*, as well as the structure of the work itself, can be linked to original Arabic models.⁵³

Even more significant is the case of his last-known Catalan work, the *Disputa de l'ase*, written only two or three years before the *Tuhfa*. Despite being published in 1509, the work has not survived in its Catalan original apart from a few pages at the

⁵⁰ Guy has likewise argued that Anselm / °Abdallāh's most unique characteristic is that he represents a union both between the "oriental" and the "occidental" as well as between medieval and renaissance thought (55).

⁵¹ The argument that Anselm / °Abdallāh's multilingualism "is more than a claim to rhetorical (and prophetic) authority. It is...integral to his message of reconciliation and unity" (Alvarez 2002a, 176) must be modified in the light of the persistent contradiction between his polemical and literary works. A message of either reconciliation or of polemical opposition cannot be read into his corpus of writing without limiting the analysis to only part of this dialectical equation of mutual exclusion spread across his various works. Alvarez herself alludes to this internal division elsewhere: "Turmeda's...liminality and equivocal status as convert and exile –indeed, even near-sainthood in two religions– is more than a colorful footnote to his work. It has played an integral and inescapable part in determining the reception of his books..." (2002b, 190).

⁵² See also Calvet, 160-67. For the history of the *Llibre* and its frequent publication, see Anselm Turmeda 1972, 61-76.

⁵³ For the fable, see 1927, 129-32. Samsó notes that although the text is present in *Kalīla wa-dimna*, it was most likely derived either from the the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (*Book of Animals*) of al-Jāhīz (d. 868-69) or the *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* (*Lives of the Animals*) of al-Damīrī (d. 1405) (1971-2, 72-75). He also links the "spell of Mallorca" passage (on which, see Anselm Turmeda 1927, 121-27) with the episode of Falix the philosopher in *De imaginibus* of Thābit ibn Qurra (1971, 215-19). Rubiera i Mata has likewise suggested a possible Arabic model found in an Aljamiado manuscript (Centro de estudios históricos, Manuscrito aljamiado XXX, ff. 132-43) for the structure of the *Cobles*.

end corresponding to the “Prophecy of the Ass.”⁵⁴ The earliest surviving version of the text is the French translation published in Lyon in 1554, and it is on this basis that the text has been re-translated back into Catalan in the twentieth century.⁵⁵ This fate is all the more significant for a work that was itself, as Arabist Miguel Asín Palacios demonstrated, a translated reworking of the Arabic work *Tadāʿī al-ḥayawānāt* ‘*alā al-insān* ‘*inda malik al-Jinn* (*Case of the Animals versus Man before the Jinn*) found in volume twenty-one of the collection of the *Ikhwān al-ṣafāʿ* (*Bretheren of Purity*), an anonymous tenth-century group of religious scholars probably from Basra.⁵⁶ As Alvarez has eloquently established, the charges by critics of Anselm / ‘Abdallāh’s alleged “plagiarism” from his unacknowledged original source stand in stark contrast to the critical praise conceded to the source itself for its intellectual syncretism and eclectic source base (2002b, 182).⁵⁷ When the tables of this criticism are turned, Anselm / ‘Abdallāh’s adroit appropriation of other voices through his translations, borrowing, and copying of previous works can be seen as the very source of his “originality,” and it is fitting that this originality be preserved only in fragmented and translated form by extra-textual forces beyond the author’s own control.

The authorship and authority of both Abner / Alfonso and Anselm / ‘Abdallāh are similarly premised on their inherent duality as both Abner and Alfonso, both Anselm and ‘Abdallāh, both convert and apostate, both author and translator. Both polemicists rely on a dialectical appeal to their former selves and its original language as a construction of the authenticity and authority of their present authorial voices. In an uncanny parallel in which life seems to imitate art, their original writings are, in both cases, preserved only by virtue of their translations, just as their identities as converts—understood as both the fictional characters of the conversion narratives and as the real authors who produce them—depend on the defining opposition of their former selves as “witnesses” to their new identities. Their strategic exploitation of the inherent duality of their own converted identities—intended, of course, as tools of their own appropriation and supersession of their models—has been revisited upon their own original writings through their dispersal and dissemination in the translations, distortions, and rewritings effected by others.⁵⁸ Both possessed the ability to absorb

⁵⁴ The text survives in the fifteenth-century manuscript 336 (formerly 332), ff. 188-91v, of the Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine of Carpentras and has been published by Rubió.

⁵⁵ The 1544 Lyons text was immediately republished and then published again in 1548 and 1606. The French text has been edited by Foulché-Delbosc in 1911 and again recently by Llinarès. The Catalan text has been re-translated into Catalan various times.

⁵⁶ On the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʿ*, see Netton and De Callatāy, among various sources. On the chapter in question, see Alvarez 2002b as well as Tornero’s introduction to his Spanish translation (*Ikhwān* 2006) and Goodman’s remarks to his translation (*Ikhwān* 1978).

⁵⁷ On the question of plagiarism, see Alvarez 2002b, Larson, and Alemany Ferrer 2003. For other discussions of Anselm / ‘Abdallāh’s sources, see Salvat, Garcia Sempere, Martín Pascual, Garcia Sempere and Martín Pascual, and Nader.

⁵⁸ Francisco Rico has documented one example of the transformation of Anselm / ‘Abdallāh’s *Llibre* in the *Doctrina de la discrición* of fifteenth-century poet Pedro de Veragüe. Emilio Tornero has suggested that Pico refers to Anselm / ‘Abdallāh when he mentions the “Saracen Abdallah” in his *De hominis*

and transform multiple works, languages, and beliefs in their writing, and this served as the foundation of their polemical appeal to authenticity as well as their literary “originality.” It is ironic that for both, this ability is at the same time the very source of the repeated erasures and distortions suffered by their works that have so effectively undermined that appeal.⁵⁹

In the *Disputa*, Anselm / °Abdallāh himself alludes to the explosive power of this dialectical opposition between originals and copies to escape the control of its author. One of the arguments put forth by the character Anselm to the Ass as to why humans are nobler than animals is that each is unique. This is a blessing from God, because if this were not so, “the Jew would not be distinguished from the Christian, nor the Muslim from the Jew, and both could mix with the Christians. Infinite other evils would follow...and the whole world would be lost.”⁶⁰ Yet Muslim and Christian did in fact mix in his converted authorial identity and in his bibliography, just as Jew and Christian mixed in Abner / Alfonso’s authorial voice, and in this the foundation of each author’s appeal to authenticity in originality has, very literally, been lost in translation. Without realizing how deeply the dissemination and loss of his writing would come to fulfill his own prophetic observations, Anselm / °Abdallāh seems to intimate in his character’s remarks to the Ass how the logic of abrogation inherent in conversion narratives and indeed in polemical writing itself is essentially dialectical, preserving its antithetical content within the synthesis and condemning its “originality” to depend perpetually on the very thing whose destruction is the premise of its existence.

Just as in Boccaccio’s tale of the three rings, in which the value of the original ring at once defines the value of its copies at the same time it is eclipsed by them, the polemical undercurrent of the three-rings story itself is preserved within Boccaccio’s frame-tale structure at the same it is undermined by it. In a parallel fashion, the works of both Abner / Alfonso and Anselm / °Abdallāh, made up of missing originals and usurping translations, have been both preserved and lost, created and destroyed, by their own self-generated liminality, and now even they who made them would not be

dignitate oratio. Alvarez describes the *Disputa* as “in the spirit of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, and a proud precursor of Rabelais” (2002b, 179).

⁵⁹ In the context of this comparison between Abner / Alfonso, Anselm / °Abdallāh, and the three-rings tale, it is an interesting coincidence that both writers have been credited with works of a triune theme: the *Libro de las tres creencias* attributed to Abner / Alfonso and the *Llibre de tres* attributed to Anselm / °Abdallāh. On the *Libro*, see Carpenter 1992 and his edition in Abner de Burgos 1993b. More fitting is the fact that in both cases, the attributions have been seen as spurious and have met with firm critical opposition, and in neither case has the question been resolved. See Mettmann’s rejection of Abner / Alfonso’s authorship (1988-96). On the *Llibre*, see above n. 22.

⁶⁰ “...Nous sommes faits tous à une semblance qui est semblable à l’unité de Dieu...” (Anselm Turmeda 1984, 75). “Et cela est une grande grâce que Dieu nos a faite. Car si tous les hommes ou les femmes se ressembloyent, plusieurs maux et inconveniens s’en ensuyvroient...Davantage le juif ne seroit cogneu du chrestien, ny le maure du juif, et pourroient avoir affaire avec les chrestiennes. Et infiniz aultres maux se ensuyvroient, si tous les hommes se ressembloyent, tellement qu’il n’y a mal qui ne s’en ensuivit, et seroit tout le monde perdu” (76).

able to tell which text is the more original, which self the more authentic.⁶¹ This parallelism between converted selves and translated texts, in which the ongoing conflict between form and content in literary didacticism mirrors the unclosable gap between text and experience inherent in autobiographical confession, allows us to apply the lessons of literary history in our reading of religious polemic: the plenitude of meaning generated by the literary recasting of the exemplary frame tale becomes, in the guise of the convert's affirmation of faith and polemical break with the past, a source of religious doubt and uncertainty. The fruitful tension between continuity and authorial innovation out of which such exemplary literature grew was at the same time, within polemical writing, an unsettling paradox that undermined authority and erased religious difference and this bifurcation of textual uncertainty became, within the volatile conflicts of late-medieval Iberia, simultaneously a force for creation and destruction.

⁶¹ “The “recognizability” of a translation was a recurrent theme of polemical exchanges about the language of revelation. In one revealing passage given in the work *Shulhan Kesef* (Table of Silver) of the fourteenth-century Jewish philosopher and exegete from Provence, Joseph Caspi (d. 1340), the author describes a debate with a bishop over the relative value of Hebrew and Latin. “Once a bishop honored in our country, who was versed in the Holy Scriptures, asked me...what superiority and sanctity have the Hebrew language and writing over the Latin language and writing since the meaning intended in them remains the same? My answer was...[First] the writing our books are written in [Hebrew] is the Script of God and it is in this tongue that they were given. [Secondly] the meaning intended by the metaphors has been changed [in Latin] and has so deteriorated in a number of passages that they cannot be understood even by the One who made them, God. The Book of Moses translated into another language and written in another writing is not at all the Book given to us by God.” (*Shulhan Kesef*, Turin MS ebreo A VI 34 / 7 fols 165r-v, quoted in Sirat 326).

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