

Ultimately, this is a book that successfully pushes the boundaries of the field of Hispanic Studies just as it sustains a nurturing relationship with canonical authors.

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SZPIECH, RYAN. *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2013. xi + 311 pp.

In this study, Ryan Szpiech shows how various medieval authors (many of them Iberian) avoid or reify inherited models of conversion and conversion narratives to meet their needs as polemicists. Szpiech chooses from the large corpus of available material those conversion narratives associated with “explicitly polemical and interconfessional apologetic writing”—beginning with Augustine, but focusing on the medieval Mediterranean world of Muslims, Jews, and Christians and how the latter either legitimate or discredit accepted authoritative knowledge and discourses. Szpiech’s comparative approach, which seeks patterns of similarity and of methodology across time and religion, proves fruitful and offers a portrait of polemical literature, often authored by converts, and of the changing and developing role of narrative within it.

Each of the six chapters presents case studies of converts, and illustrates how their conversion narratives have been shaped to establish the authenticity of the convert’s new identity by paradoxically establishing his authority in the old faith. In chapter one, “From Peripety to Prose,” Szpiech explores how a convert from Islam, Juan Andrés, and a convert from Judaism, Pablo de Santa María, both include autobiographical accounts of their conversions in fifteenth-century polemical treatises. Once converted, both Juan Andrés and Pablo de Santa María use their knowledge of the proof texts of their former religion (the Quran and *tafsir* for the former, and Talmud and works of Jewish authorities like Rashi and Maimonides in the case of the latter) in an attempt to convert their former coreligionists. These two examples reveal the strategies and models that are the end result of a long process of development and adaptation to which Szpiech turns in the following chapters.

In the second chapter, “Alterity and Auctoritas,” Szpiech explores how two twelfth-century Jews, Judah/Herman of Cologne, and Petrus Alfonsi, a Judeo-Andalusi intellectual, adopt elements of the accepted Augustinian/Pauline conversion paradigms and meld them with the new Aristotelian rationalism entering Europe to forge a new type of conversion narrative. Both Alfonsi and Judah/Herman introduce Jewish authorities and Scripture into their narratives, thus proving

their authenticity as former Jews, but also beginning a process of destabilizing traditional Christian authority. In Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogue Against the Jews*, his fictional converted self debates with his former Jewish self who demands an explanation, and in the process Alfonsi makes alterity visible. As Szpiech points out, Alfonsi uses Jewish texts both as authorities recognized by his former Jewish self, and as authoritative sources for Christological interpretations—thus he wants it both ways, and in so doing “throws the meaning of *auctoritas* into flux” (79). Szpiech explores in the following chapters how this crisis in authority played out as a growing ambivalence toward all authorities and toward the teleological notion of Christian history that undergird them.

In chapter 3, “In the Shadow of the Hazards,” Szpiech takes up conversion to Judaism as an illustrative counterpoint to narratives of conversion to Christianity discussed in the second chapter. He compares the conversion of two ninth-century Christians, Bodo/Eleazar and the Austrian Wecelinus, with that of the legendary conversion of the king of the Khazars as recounted in the letters of the Genizah and in Judah Ha-Levi's twelfth-century *Book of the Khazars*. Bodo/Eleazar's account survives only in Paulus Alvarus's account of the epistolary exchange he purportedly engaged in with the latter, and Wecelinus's conversion account survives only in the work of the Benedictine chronicler Alpertus of Metz. Both are presented by their Christian narrators as invalid. In contrast, Judah Ha-Levi's twelfth-century account of the conversion of the legendary King of the Khazars, although also polemic in nature, is presented as a logical and rational choice on the part of the convert. However, even after accepting Judaism as the best of faiths, the Khazar King's status is problematic. Such converts are a challenge to competing Jewish notions of religious and ethnic identity—of a desire to welcome the stranger and to reject the other (99). Instead of dwelling on the convert's prior identity to establish his authority, and on the experience of the conversion (often in the form of a prophetic dream), these twelfth-century examples of narratives of conversion to Judaism “point to a very different sacred history from that of Christian sources by placing more attention on the defense of faith after conversion than on the portentous infidelity that precedes it” (117).

While Alfonsi and Judah/Herman had combined elements of the traditional Christian narrative of conversion with their own expertise in Jewish traditions and authorities, in chapter 4, “A War of Words,” Szpiech shifts to an examination of how what they had done at a personal level could be adopted by others concerned with proselytizing publicly. In the public debates in Paris and Barcelona, Jewish converts to Christianity were instrumental in deciding the authenticity of Jewish traditional literature and Scripture, as well as how serviceable the latter could be for Christians seeking to use such literature as proof texts for Christianity (i.e., reading it in such a way as to show to a Jewish audience that it, in fact, reveals

through typological interpretation the truth of the future Christian faith). Ramón Martí adopted the techniques perfected in the debates, learning Hebrew and looking for allusions to the Christian Messiah in the Talmud and Hebrew Scripture. Despite sharing Martí's conviction that it was necessary to learn the language and traditions of the Other, the well-known Majorcan scholar Ramón Llull criticized Martí's method as one of attacking and destroying the Other's faith and then trying to replace it with Christianity, assuming the truth of the latter without showing it or presenting it on the Others' terms. Whereas Martí effectively wanted to replace the authenticity of the convert's narrative through linguistic expertise in Hebrew and Arabic, Llull, who, like Augustine, "converts" from being a wayward nonpracticing Christian to a dedicated one, prefers it both ways. Llull pens a conversion narrative that combines the dream visions (and implied chosenness) of conversion narratives used to prove authenticity, and combines it with Martí's linguistic expertise as proof of authenticity—for his dream directs him to dedicate his life to study in order to proselytize among the Saracens.

The way in which *auctoritas* could be expanded to include personal testimony is further evident in the work of the thirteenth-century convert and polemicist, Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid, the subject of chapter 5, "The Jargon of Authenticity." Abner/Alfonso drew on his expertise as a former rabbi and Aristotelian scholar to compose an anti-Jewish treatise in Hebrew, the *Moreh Tzedek*. He was the only polemicist to do so (145). While the original is lost, the treatise survives in his Romance vernacular version of it, the *Mostrador de Justicia*. In the *Mostrador*, Abner/Alfonso creates a fictional narrative in which his converted self debates his former Jewish self (Rebelde). Abner/Alfonso avoids citing Christian authorities because, as he states, these would not be considered authoritative by his target audience (i.e., Jews) (165). Despite this, in the *Mostrador* his Jewish self, Rebelde, fears and doubts his converted Christian self (the narrative voice), and does not convert at the end. His fictional narrative falls short as a polemic text: not only does it call into question his own conversion and status as a Christian, but his Jewish readers are not convinced. His former student Isaac Polgar attacks him, "insisting that he forfeited his Jewish status upon conversion and, with it, his right to cite and interpret Jewish authorities" (172). According to Spziech, Abner exposes the paradox of conversion narrative—of wanting it both ways—and is caught "in the liminal state between selfhood and otherness" (172).

In the final chapter, "The Supersessionist Imperative," Spziech turns to four accounts of conversion to Islam as a type of control for the cases studied in the preceding chapters. In this chapter Spziech shows how the authors of these accounts, Anselm Turmeda, a convert from Christianity, and Samaw'al al-Maghribi, Sa'id Hasan and 'Abd al-Haqq, converts from Judaism, utilize the prevailing idea that Islam has more in common theologically with Christianity than

Judaism does. One crucial difference between these texts and the Jewish and Christian polemical texts studied above is their notion of history: “These Muslim texts seem to be more ordered and chronological and more focused on action and concrete events than on exegetical typology” (176). Such a focus, Szpiech argues, reflects an Islamic conception of sacred history and is modeled on accounts such as that of Muhammad, in which climactic revelation, the marshalling of believers to action, and a rejection of the past (instead of an acceptance of it as proof of authenticity and authority) are embraced.

This exploration of how conversion narratives can be utilized in a polemical context is fruitful, and illustrates with several examples that such narratives are not simply a means to record an event, but are consciously crafted uses of rhetoric, and literary models designed to shape opinion and belief. Such findings resonate with issues of memory studies and testimonial literature, and offer a new way of approaching material that has long been read simply as witnesses to or proof texts of religious tolerance/intolerance. It will be valuable to scholars of European intellectual history, and particularly to those of medieval Iberia. The insightful readings of the work of such figures as Pablo de Santa María, Abner/Alfonso, and Anselm Turmeda will also make their work visible to scholars working in English who cannot or have not read the scholarship on and the original works of these authors before.

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BLANCO, MERCEDES. *Góngora o la invención de una lengua*. León, España: U de León, 2012. 518 pp.

La celebración del tercer centenario de la muerte de Luis de Góngora en 1927 supuso el punto de partida de la recuperación de la obra de uno de los poetas más geniales de la literatura en español. A partir de ese momento y hasta el presente, los trabajos de Dámaso Alonso, Robert Jammes, Antonio Carreira, José María Micó y Mercedes Blanco, entre otros, han contribuido a colocar a este autor en el lugar que le corresponde en el Parnaso poético español. Los gongoristas han tenido que luchar contra el tópico de la oscuridad que acompaña al poeta desde el siglo XVII y que alejó a los estudiosos y a los lectores de su extraordinaria producción. Otro tópico relacionado con este, y en cierto modo su consecuencia, es el de la división entre conceptismo y culteranismo o, para personalizarlo, entre el estilo de Góngora y el de Francisco de Quevedo. Afortunadamente, la labor de los gongoristas citados