

A Response to Pamela Berger's presentation on the *Bible moralisée*

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11 March 2009

Today is Shushan Purim (the second day of Purim)—the Jewish expression of that spirit of disorder and topsy turvy, the world upside down, which also explodes for Christians in Mardi Gras: these are two holidays which in their respective religions lead to Passover and Easter, two intertwined holidays that may stand as the sign of intertwined hospitality and hostility that occupies us in “Hosting the Stranger.”

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Richard has asked me to respond briefly to Pamela's presentation, “Hospitality, Hostility, and their Allegories: Illustrations to Judges 19 in a 13th c. Moralized Bible,” so I'd like simply to outline three areas for possible discussion by following the arc we might trace from the linguistic and textual, through the religious and philosophical, to the social, political, and sexual dimensions, as they intersect and inevitably link together from the perspective of hospitality or “hostipitality,” as Derrida phrases it.<sup>1</sup> In the process, I'll be pointing out risks and possibilities, “lethal differences,” as one

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida published two different articles with the title, “Hostipitality”: one in *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5.3 (December 2000): 3-18; the other in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 356-420. I invoke Derrida's writings on hospitality throughout this response not only because his theorizing has echoed as a leit-motif in the seminar since Richard Kearney's opening presentation, but also because Derrida ends the second essay in *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 151-55, by conjuring up the testimony of Judges 19 as a way to interrogate the “law of hospitality” and its relation to “‘morality’ or a certain ‘ethics’” (151). I'd like to thank my colleague Kevin Newmark for helping me make some progress in understanding Derrida's notion of the interplay between conditioned and unconditional hospitality—he is definitely not responsible for my limitations!

commentator on Judges 19 puts it,<sup>2</sup> as we move around the circuit connecting textual bodies, metaphorical bodies, and real bodies made of flesh and blood.

### **1. *Translatio*, or hosting the other('s) text:**

I focus first on textual, linguistic and metaphorical issues in the “translation” of the Bible, from one language to another, from one people, religion and culture to another, from one time and place to another, from one medium to another. *Translatio*’s many meanings in a specifically medieval context all seem particularly relevant here:

- translation as removal of a saint’s physical remains from one place to another
- translation as linguistic but also cultural transfer from Latin to the vernacular  
(transposition, “mise au jour,” “aggiornamento”)
- *translatio* as the term for metaphor in the Latin rhetorical treatises inherited  
from Antiquity

The example from the *Bible moralisée* makes particularly urgent the question of metaphor, or allegory (which in the Middle Ages means, in the most general terms, to say one thing, mean another). This is the move from one level of meaning to another, the reach for figurative meanings fundamental to the *Bible moralisée*’s multiple levels of images and texts, verbal commentaries that aim to fix and explain how we should understand what we are seeing/reading, in the play of resemblance and contrast.

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<sup>2</sup> Ilse Müllner, “Lethal Difference: Sexual Violence as Violence against Others in Judges 19,” in *Judges, A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, vol. 4, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England : Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 126-42).

While Pamela focused on the specific context of philosophy (in the “person” of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*) as a object of dispute among theologians at the university in early 13<sup>th</sup> c. Paris (where the fundamental question posed is, how to appropriately appropriate the texts and traditions of pagan philosophers?), the verbal and visual evocation of the church fathers Jerome and Augustine, the defense of the sacraments (especially the Eucharist represented in image a on 65r), as well as the larger context of the *Bible moralisée* as a whole, points inevitably to another textual dispute: the Bible in Jewish and Christian traditions. Whose sacred scripture is it? Who has the right to translate and gloss it? What kinds of move from text to meaning, from letter to figure are authorized?

Speaking metaphorically, the Bible is a site par excellence to demonstrate Derrida’s laws of hospitality, the place where the host (the Hebrew Bible) becomes the hostage (the Old Testament as fulfilled by the New), the place taken over by the guest who “supersedes” the former host (in a hostile take over?) while keeping it present as testimony to its own/new truth. These reversals and imbrications are at the heart of issues we’ve been reading about and discussing from the works of Benveniste, Ricoeur, and Derrida: translation, the interplay of language and silence, hospitality and hostility. But we also need to move them from the textual to the social and political dimensions, if I understand correctly the implications of Derrida’s critique.

Once the aporia posed by the imbrication of conditional and unconditional hospitality is recognized, we are forced to examine the failures, the perversions of hospitality as practiced in the real world. We must think about how the theoretical model of absolute hospitality might require us to improve our necessarily conditioned forms of

“hostipitality,” hence the turn in Derrida’s own work on hospitality to problems concerning the North African presence in contemporary France—the invited guest of colonialism now viewed as unassimilated immigrant, Muslim other, etc.<sup>3</sup> In the US, we can compare this to our current discussion about 11 million illegal immigrants, or even closer to home here at BC, we might think about the current return to a crucifix in every class room: how does it operate as a sign of hospitality to the “others” hosted by the university? (did you notice the addition and then removal in our class room of other religious signs?)

**2. Jews as the “too intimate” Other of Christianity in medieval European society in general and in northern France at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> - beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> c., in particular**

Here we need to talk in social and religious, historical and political terms about hostipitality as expressed in the co-habitation and conflict of Jews and Christians in the European Middle Ages. In the *Bible moralisée*, we can follow the link between the “philosophers” (put on stage in the images we’ve been looking at) and Jews, heretics, “publicans” (“poplicanz” in the Old French text)—all gathered together in the term “mescreanz”: those who do not believe, misbelieve, believe in the wrong fashion; by extension, miscreants as evil-doers whose misguided belief, nonbelief or disbelief leads them into evil ways of all sorts. Although the university theologians criticized in this

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, his participation in *Autour de Jacques Derrida, De l’Hospitalité: Manifeste, sous la direction de Mohammed Seffahi (avec la participation de Michel Wieviorka)* (Genouilleux: La Passe du Vent, 2001).

passage are Christian, they are associated by contamination with other *mescreanz*, and most particularly with Jews (shown with the same visual representations: grotesque faces, devils sitting on shoulders or emerging from their bodies, menacing and disordered figures linked to snakes, the worship of cats, and elsewhere involved in animal sacrifice). These philosophers act, think, interpret like “judaizers,” with all the negative connotations linked to Jews: carnality, venality, blindness, heresy, perversion (both sexual and textual). This is one of the dominant metaphorical thrusts of the *Bible moralisée*, in both its visual and verbal registers.<sup>4</sup>

Augustinian doctrine argued for protecting (hosting) the Jews within Christian society in their capacity as witnesses to the truth of the Old Testament, its historical testimony verified and kept present in the person of Jews living within Christian community (unlike the conversions forced on pagans, Saracens, Slavs, etc). But Augustine also mandated that Jews be kept in a degraded, captive state, in order to testify as well to their punishment as Christ killers (in the Middle Ages, the charge of deicide continues to weigh on later generations of Jews, as repeated accusations of blood libel demonstrate).

In *Images of Intolerance*, Sara Lipton argues for seeing the *Bible moralisée* (literally and figuratively) as contributing to and shaping the kind of thinking that motivates royal policy toward contemporary Jews during the reigns of Philip Augustus, Louis VIII, and Louis IX. From the late 12<sup>th</sup> to the early 13<sup>th</sup> c (and beyond), the policies of the French kings toward Jews swing between protection and exploitation, on the one

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<sup>4</sup> So argues Sara Lipton in *Images of Intolerance, The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible moralisée* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), throughout the five chapters, but see especially her discussion of the sequence from Judges (pp. 102-6).

hand, and expulsions followed by later recalls to renew the cycle, on the other. Jews in northern France (who have flourished in a period we now think of as the 12<sup>th</sup> c. renaissance) are seen as a source of income through taxes and appropriations; a pool of experts in the realms of commerce, money-lending, administration, used by the Church as well as by secular rulers; a lightening rod for popular anger that can be put in the service of the elite, when desired, to deflect it from the monarchy or the great lords (eg in 1192, when many Jews of Brie are burned at the stake by Philip Augustus—cf. the burning of *poplicans* in Troyes in 1198, the burning of Amauricians in Paris in 1210).

These are not only textual but real bodies at stake. They have moved us from biblical traditions into the political domain, and they necessarily remind us of other bodies that figure so prominently in Judges: women's bodies subject to the power of men who exchange and sometimes destroy them

### **3. The sexual Other(s), deviance and perversion, sodomy and rape**

In the slides shown from Judges 19 (65v C and D, 65v A and B), we have seen graphic images of a woman being raped, her dead body delivered to her husband, who then cuts it up into twelve pieces, each body part easily recognizable. The violence against the woman's body couldn't be more horrifically shown in a medieval context. Indeed, Pamela has stressed how boldly and exceptionally the illustrator represents the woman's naked body with all its anatomical details. It is made present visually, however much the commentary image may clothe it, explain it away on another plane where the violence is visited on Philosophy, on texts rather than flesh and blood bodies (at least theoretically).

In Judges 19-21, 3 sets of women's bodies figure in the story (though only the Levite's wife is represented in the *Bible moralisée*):

1. The virgin daughter offered by the host (along with the Levite's wife) to protect against violation of the male body/politic, refused and effaced in this version in both text and image (cf. the antecedent scene in Genesis 19: Lot offers two maiden daughters to the crowd to save his guests, the three angels).
2. The Levite's (secondary) wife pushed out the door by her husband and raped/killed, then cut up into 12 pieces to call for war (a convention used elsewhere in the Bible but with animals cut up not humans).

Her "semiotization" (Müllner 141), the move to metaphor, is already begun in the biblical story when the Levite dismembers her body to use it as a message of horror. In the text and images of the *Bible moralisée*, further displacement "corrects" the Levite's callous treatment of his wife, whether alive or dead, in order to allow the metaphorical shift that identifies him with Jesus Christ. In the allegorical image and text, a woman's vulnerable body is effaced by the abstract personification of Philosophy. The "scandals" of the text are repeatedly avoided by translation, modern as well as medieval and ancient, in both Christian and Jewish exegesis (as Pamela's examples from Josephus, Philo, and Ambrose indicate).

3. The surviving virgins of Jabesh-gilead and the dancing virgins of Shiloh (Judges 21) are “carried off” by the 400 remaining Benjaminites, with the approval of the elders, in order to prevent the annihilation of one of the 12 tribes (rape is thus “legitimized” by marriage).

The victims become the offenders by repeating the same action that led to the call for vengeance against the Benjaminites (cf. the shifting roles in Derrida’s analysis of hospitality),<sup>5</sup> as women repeatedly pay the price for male solidarity whether in the exercise of hospitality or the efforts to unify or wage war among the contentious tribes of Israel.

Many modern readers have critiqued this story, including Derrida who raises the specter of Judges 19 as a perverted model of unconditional hospitality in order to allow us to contemplate the horror of its conditions for saving the male guest at the expense of a woman’s body. But you don’t have to be a Derridean to question this sacrifice of the female Other, as many feminist critics have demonstrated in two volumes of *Feminist Companions to Judges*.<sup>6</sup> And while feminist readings all critique the patriarchal values represented in the story, at least one (Jacqueline Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*) argues

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<sup>5</sup> See Peggy Kamuf’s analysis: “Author of a Crime,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, *A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England : Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 187-207).

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the essays already cited, see those by Mieke Bal, “A Body of Writing: Judges 19” (1993, pp. 208-30), and Alice Bach, “Rereading the Body Politic: Women, Violence and Judges 21” (1999, pp. 143-59).

that the same critique is already inscribed in the Hebrew text, if read carefully.<sup>7</sup> There are no heroes here; the characters all partake, admittedly to varying degrees, in the same intertwined identity of offender and victim: the wife has left her husband, but the main opprobrium surely falls on the Levite who passes from victim to multiple offender.<sup>8</sup>

That critique is inscribed in the refrain that recurs throughout Judges: disorder repeatedly breaks out among the Israelites because there is no king. And it's repeated in the final verse (Judges 21: 25), which perfectly describes the perversions of our story: "In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did as he pleased" (Jerusalem Bible). In other translations: "every man did what was right in his eyes" (from the Hebrew Bible); "each man did what seemed right to him" (in the Latin Vulgate).

The images and text representing Judges 19-21 form the longest sequence represented in the *Bible moralisée* (Lipton 102). It ends with an image of the surviving Sodomites scattered among the rocks, which signifies, according to the verbal commentary, "the miscreants who have abandoned God and are scattered through the world and live in different places among the Christians." And so we're back to our focus on the others (strangers, foreigners) who live among us.

Thanks to Pam for bringing this example to the seminar—and now for your questions and comments!

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<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word, Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 37-64.

<sup>8</sup> Müllner: "The story has no heroes; nor does it allow the reader to differentiate clearly between offenders and victims" (139).