

CONSTRUCTING GOOD AND BAD “OTHERS” IN CONTEXT-BOUND LATE MEDIEVAL VISUAL CULTURE

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In his classic from 1991, *Modernity and Ambivalence* that has had a considerable number of re-printings, the Polish-British sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman also deals with the phenomenon of otherness. He states that, inter alia, “woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, the lay public the other of the expert, the foreigner the other of state subject, and enemy the other of friend.”¹

The creators of an audience for late medieval visual culture, in both the religious and secular spheres, were often interested in using images to articulate social, cultural, religious, and ethnic difference and otherness.² Depending on the general message or evaluation presented in the specific context, depictions tended to be negative, but could also be positive. Such context-dependent evidence sometimes led to a situation in which an “other” person or object that had a negative meaning in one case, and should be avoided or condemned, might in other cases have offered a positive message or even represent an ideal to be followed. In this paper, I will show a number of examples of such context-dependent visual representations of otherness that presented a negative evaluation of someone or something “other”, yet in a different context offered a positive appraisal of this “other.” I will use mainly Central European image material.

Sinners and their symbolic personifications were shown frequently. In this respect, depictions of the Capital Vices can be traced in a number of late medieval image cycles in the public space of churches. One, found as wall paintings in the Saint James parish church of Levoča in Slovakia, depicts among others the deadly sin of lust (Fig. 1) by an embracing couple riding on a sow. The sin represented by the embracing couple, is enhanced by the sow, a symbol that was used regularly in medieval Christian discour-

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991; repr. 2007), 16.

² See also Gerhard Jaritz, “The Visual Image of the ‘Other’ in Late Medieval Urban Space: Patterns and Construction,” in Derek Keene, Balázs Nagy, and Katalin Szende, eds., *Segregation – Integration – Assimilation: Religious and Ethnic Groups in the Medieval Towns of Central and Eastern Europe* (Farnham / Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 235–49.



Fig. 1: The deadly sin of lust, wall painting, end fourteenth century. Levoča (Slovakia), Saint James parish church (photo:© Institut für Realienkunde, University of Salzburg, Austria)

ses.³ It was connected with lust, and also dirt, with the Jews (the “Judensau”⁴), and sometimes also seen as a dangerous animal (Fig. 2), as here in a votive image from 1513 showing a baby bitten on the head by a sow. All these contexts point to a regular negative perception of this “other” creature by members of medieval society.

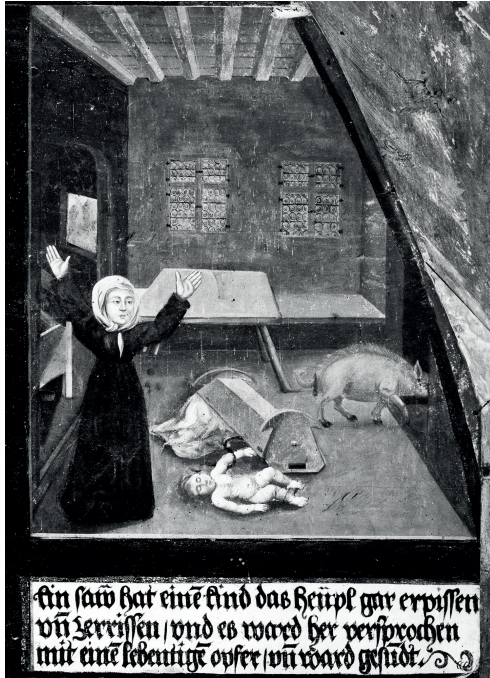
From the fifteenth century onwards, however, the positive motif of the spinning sow (“La truie qui file”) was used in manuscripts, woodcuts, and public spaces, which continued in other contexts until the eighteenth century and later.⁵ Some examples are supplemented with text as, for instance, an end-of-the-fifteenth-century, South German, woodcut showing a sow and her children spinning (Fig. 3). The context is supplemented in the added, rhymed, texts: sows and piglets have to do the spinning as it is no longer done by woman. The sow says, inter alia:

³ See Frederick Cameron Sillar and Ruth Mary Meyler, *The Symbolic Pig: An Anthology of Pigs in Literature and Art* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961); Wilfried Schouwink, *Der Wilde Eber in Gottes Weinberg: Zur Darstellung des Schweins in Literatur und Kunst des Mittelalters* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1985); Milo Kearney, *The Role of Swine Symbolism in Medieval Culture: Blanc Sanglier* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

⁴ See Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau: A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and Its History* (London: Warburg Institute, 1974); Claudine Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, and the Pig* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Birgit Wiedl, “Laughing at the Beast: The Judensau. Anti-Jewish Propaganda and Humor from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period,” in Albrecht Classen, ed., *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 325–64.

⁵ See Maurits de Meijer, *De volks- en kinderprent in de Nederlanden van de 15e tot de 20e eeuw* (Antwerp: Standaard-Boekhandel, 1962), 417–21; Nils Arvid Bringéus, *Volkstümliche Bilderkunde* (Munich: Callwey, 1982), 69–72; Michael Camille, “At the Sign of the ‘Spinning Sow’: The ‘Other’ Chartres and Images of Everyday Life of the Medieval Street,” in Axel Bolvig and Phillip Lindsay, eds., *History and Images: Towards a New Iconology* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 249–76.

Listen, dear sows and dear children: It is just this way and not less. If everybody kept his position, linen would not be as expensive as it is. The world has started with strange customs. Woman is the master and no longer the man. Therefore, do the spinning as I tell you. It is very evil in this world.⁶



Ein saw hat eine kind das heupl gar erpissen
vñ zerrissen / vñ es ward her versprochen
mit eine lebentige opfer / vñ ward gesüdt.



Fig. 3: Spinning sow and piglets, woodcut, South parish church (photo: © Institut für Realienkunde, German, end fifteenth century. Vienna, Albertina, inv. DG1930/221 (photo:© Albertina, Vienna)

Fig. 2: The Virgin of the pilgrimage of Großmain in Salzburg province saves a baby bitten on the head by a sow; votive image, panel painting, 1513. Großmain, South parish church (photo: © Institut für Realienkunde, German, end fifteenth century. Vienna, Albertina, University of Salzburg, Austria)

⁶ Bringéus, *Volkstümliche Bilderkunde*, 70. See also Joseph Chmel, *Der österreichische Geschichtsforscher* (Vienna: Beck'sche Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1838), 118–19; Wilhelm Ludwig Schreiber, *Manuel de l'amateur de la gravure sur bois et sur métal au XVI^e siècle*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Librairie Albert Cohn, 1892), 315; Georg Wickrams *Werke*, ed., Johannes Bolte, vol. 4 (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein in Stuttgart, 1903), x:

Hort liebe sey und liebe kinder.
Es is wol ia und ist nit mynder.
Hielt ydermann sein rechte stat
so wer so tewr nit die leinwat.

Die welt facht seltzem sitten an.
Die frau ist herr und nit der man.
Darumb so spind wie ich euch meld.
Es stat fast ubel in der welt.

Translation by the author.

The moral is: "Look at the sows and take them as an example."⁷

This woodcut is an example of the "Battle of the Sexes" theme that was popular around 1500. Here, the "others", that is, the sow and her children, become a positive model, which the beholder certainly did not expect. They are doing what should clearly be done by another group of "others" – women – who, in the text's argumentation, have taken the leading position from men and no longer concentrate on their proper duties, represented by spinning.



Fig. 4: Israhel van Meckenem, The-world-turned-upside-down: the reversal of gender roles; etching, end fifteenth century (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:90Israhel_van_Meckenenem_Verkehrte_Welt.jpg; public domain; last access: April 19, 2022)

A negative concentration in both textual and visual representations of this otherness of women trying to seize power from men (especially wives dominating their husbands), was also used particularly from the end of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century onwards. For instance, the well-known example by Israhel van Meckenem the Younger (1440/45–1503) from the 1490s shows such a world upside down (Fig. 4).⁸ The dominating woman uses a distaff as a sword to control her husband, who has had to take over spinning and lost his underpants, which are being put on by the wife. She is wearing the pants now, that is, she has taken the power.⁹

⁷ "[...] Nempt war vnd beyspil bei den sauenn." (Ibid.)

⁸ For the-world-upside-down motifs in medieval art and literature see, in particular, *David Kunzle, "World Upside Down: The Iconography of a European Broadsheet Type,"* in Barbara A. Babcock, ed., *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 39–94; Helmut Hundsichler, "Im Zeichen der verkehrten Welt," in Gertrud Blaschitz et al., eds., *Symbole des Alltags, Alltag der Symbole: Festschrift für Harry Kühnel zum 65. Geburtstag* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1992), 555–70; *Christa Grössinger, The World Upside-down: English Misericords* (London: Harvey Miller, 1997); Richard William Hill, "Killer Hares and Talking Apes: Worlds Upside Down in Western Art from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period," in *The World Upside down / Le monde à l'envers* (Banff, AB: Banff Centre Press, 2008), 14–43; Vincent Robert-Nicoud, *The World Upside Down in 16th-Century French Literature and Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

⁹ See Gerhard Jaritz, "Die Bruoch," in Blaschitz et al., *Symbole des Alltags*, 392–416.

Problems arise in searching for opposites to such textual and visual representations of the otherness of women, which were connected to the disturbance of order in patriarchal society. The positive otherness of women cannot be traced as a pattern, but only with reference to particular females, most often saintly figures. A good example of this is the Holy Kinship, showing Saint Anne and her daughter, the Virgin Mary, with the infant Jesus, and Anne's apocryphal daughters from her second and third marriages: Mary of Clopas and Mary Salome, who became the mothers of the apostles John the Evangelist, James the Greater, James the Lesser, Simon, and Jude.¹⁰ In these images one sees the positively framed, dominant, position of the women; their husbands, darker in complexion and positioned in the background of the image, are a kind of less relevant, but still necessary, addendum.



Fig. 5: A virtuous lady taming a woodwose, tapestry, Basel, c. 1470. Copenhagen, National Museum (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tugendreiche_Dame_zähmt_Wildmann.png; public domain, last access: April 19, 2022)

Some virtuous courtly ladies were also not to be seen as negative "others." They are powerful over other "others", for instance, over "wild people", in literary texts as well as in

¹⁰ See, especially, Werner Esser, "Die Heilige Sippe: Studien zu einem spätmittelalterlichen Bildthema in Deutschland und den Niederlanden" (Ph.D. diss., Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn, 1986).



Fig. 6: Monogrammist bxg, "Wild family" engraving, c.1475. Vienna, Albertina, inv. DG1928/332 (photo: © Albertina, Vienna)

images, particularly tapestries.¹¹ One of the most important examples of this is the famous tapestry from about 1470 showing a virtuous lady taming a woodwose (wild man), produced in Basel and now kept in the National Museum of Copenhagen (Fig. 5). The integrated conversation between them runs as follows:

Woodwose: "I will always stay wild until tamed by a lady."

Lady: "I believe that I will tame you well, as I am justly supposed to do."¹²

In contrast, wild people were sometimes shown as positive and ideal counter-models that represented a domesticity that a degenerated human society should follow. Look at them: Don't wild people represent an ideal family life that is missing in our human world?¹³ (Fig. 6).

Socially higher and dominant groups in late medieval society regularly evaluated people of lower status as "others." This was particularly true for peasants, who were occasionally judged as negative "others", but sometimes also considered positive models in particular contexts.¹⁴ The positive perception can be seen especially in the "Labours of

¹¹ For "wild people" see, especially, Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1952; repr. London: Octagon Press, 1970); Timothy Husband, *The Wild Men: Medieval Myth and Symbolism* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980); Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

¹² "Ich wil iemer wesen wild bis mich zemt ein frowen bild. – Ich truw ich wel dich zemen wol als ich billich sol."

¹³ See also Michelle Moseley-Christian, "From Page to Print: The Transformation of the 'Wild Woman' in Early Modern Northern Engravings," *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* 27, no. 4 (2011): 432–34.

¹⁴ See Daniela Münkler and Frank Uekötter, eds., *Das Bild des Bauern: Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmungen vom Mittelalter bis ins 21. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 21–60; Gerhard

the Months"-cycles, which deliver the message and ideal to the beholder that everything should be done in the right way at the right time by the right people.¹⁵ This is mainly represented by peasants' work during the year, on display at public church portals as early as the twelfth century, and also shown later in stained glass windows, in wall paintings, and manuscripts for the elites.

Some manuscripts, however, contain "Labours of the Months" cycles that show peasants acting in a rather negative way, such as a South German or Austrian miscellany from 1475 containing a "Labours of the Months"-cycle. Some of the images show peasants who do their work at the right time, such as harvesting grain in August, and in the right way, but they are not the right people; they are negative "others" (Fig. 7). Looking at their attire, it becomes clear that they do not represent members of a proper peasant commu-



Fig. 7: Labours of the Months, August, "Peasants" harvesting grain, book illumination, South German or Austrian, 1475. Vienna, Austrian National Library, cod. 3085, fol. 7r (photo: © Institut für Realienkunde, University of Salzburg, Austria).

nity. The men wear clothing that is more appropriate for young members of the nobility and their servants, and their hairstyle, although disordered, was also characteristic of

Jaritz, "The Material Culture of the Peasantry in the Late Middle Ages: 'Image' and 'Reality,'" in Del Sweeney, ed., *Agriculture in the Middle Ages: Technology, Practice, and Representation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 163–88.

¹⁵ See James Carson Webster, *The Labors of the Months in Antique and Mediaeval Art to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1970); Bridget Ann Henisch, *The Medieval Calendar Year* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Colum Hourihane, ed., *Time in the Medieval World: Occupations of the Months and Signs of the Zodiac in the Index of Christian Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

young members of the nobility.¹⁶ Thus, in this manuscript example, the otherness of peasants is partly represented in a satiric, negative, way; similarly, sometimes in literary evidence peasants attempt to leave their class to join the nobility.¹⁷



Fig. 8: The “Oriental” murderers of St. Thomas Becket in the cathedral of Canterbury, detail of a Martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket, Michael Pacher, South Tyrol, 1460s. Graz (Austria), Landesmuseum Joanneum (photo:© Institut für Realienkunde, University of Salzburg, Austria)

which occurred in the cathedral of Canterbury in England (Fig. 8). The otherness of the saint’s assassins is visualized not only by their activity, but also represented with the help of their orientalised outer appearance. Their clothes do not identify them as actual “orientals”, but definitely refer to their negative act.¹⁸

Orientalists are a group of late medieval “others” more or less regularly represented as negative; they appear in specific contexts in religious and secular images; in religious space they mainly act as torturers in the martyrdom of saints or the Passion of Christ. These “others” are characterized by “oriental” or, better to say, orientalised elements of dress, especially a turban or other orientaling headgear, or a caftan, often mixed with negatively valued Western elements of dress such as, for instance, extremely tight doublets and hoses or pointed shoes.

This orientalization need not have been connected with the orient at all, which sometimes led to the situation that tormentors or torturers of saints were orientalised independently of the region where the martyrdom happened. Such a situation can be recognized in a visual representation of the martyrdom of Thomas Becket,

¹⁶ See Gerhard Jaritz, “The Visual Representation of Late Medieval Work: Patterns of Context, People and Action,” in Josef Ehmer and Catharina Lis, eds., *The Idea of Work in Europe from Antiquity to Modern Times*, (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 138–41.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Helga Schüppert, “Der Bauer in der deutschen Literatur des Spätmittelalters: Topik und Realitätsbezug,” in *Bäuerliche Sachkultur des Spätmittelalters* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), 125–76.

¹⁸ See also Jaritz, “Visual Image of the ‘Other’,” 244–46.

Ever and again, however, one has to consider the dependence on context. In this regard, there are also visual representations of positive "orientals", who are to be seen and followed as examples, such as the Three Holy Kings and their entourage at the Nativity or on their journey to Bethlehem (Fig. 9).¹⁹



Fig. 9: Adoration of the Three Magi, detail: King Melchior and the entourage of the kings, panel painting, Vienna, c. 1490. Klosterneuburg, Lower Austria, Austin Canon house (photo:© Institut für Realienkunde, University of Salzburg, Austria)

Lastly, Jews in late medieval Christian images were often used as negative signifiers, mainly in the context of the life and Passion of Christ. The visual representation of Jewish "others" was often constructed by making them recognizable, wearing the *pileus cornutus*, that is, the Jewish hat, or having yellow stars or rings attached to their clothes.²⁰

¹⁹ See Gerhard Jaritz, "Late Medieval Images and the Variability of Rituals," in Krista Kodres and Anu Mänd, eds., *Images and Objects in Rituals and Practices in Medieval Northern and Central Europe* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 19–24.

²⁰ For the *pileus cornutus* see different analyses in, e.g., Raphael Straus, "The 'Jewish Hat' as an Aspect of Social History," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 1 (1942): 59–72; Eli Davis and Elise Davis, *Hats and Caps of the Jews* (Jerusalem: Massada, 1983), 28–31; Ruth Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from Medieval Germany* (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Art / The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), 31–4; Norman Roth, "Christian Europe: The Jewish Hat," in Roth, ed., *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 173–74; Eric Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish*

Differences, variations, and developments, however, can be recognized in Christian visual culture. The *pileus cornutus*, for instance, could be used to label positively evaluated Jews in Old Testament scenes (Fig. 10). Images based on the New Testament developed and changed in this respect around the mid-fourteenth century. Until then, at least in German



Fig. 10: Return of the Spies from Canaan (Numbers 13, 25–26), wall painting, c. 1460. Brixen (Bressanone, South Tyrol), cathedral (photo:© Institut für Realienkunde, University of Salzburg, Austria)

and Austrian art, the visual representation of some positive figures like Saint Joseph,²¹ shown wearing Jewish hats, seems to have been legitimate, such as in the context-bound “Return of the Holy Family from Egypt to Israel” in Austrian *Bibliae Pauperum* of the first half of the thirteenth century (Fig. 11); in contrast to the depiction of the “Flight

Dress (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 56–7; Naomi Lubrich, “The Wandering Hat: Iterations of the Medieval Jewish Pointed Cap,” *Jewish History* 29 (2015): 203–44.

²¹ For the general ambiguity and ambivalence of Saint Joseph in medieval Christian literature and art see, e.g., Brigitte Heublein, *Der ‘verkannte’ Joseph: Zur mittelalterlichen Ikonographie des Heiligen im deutschen und niederländischen Kulturraum* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 1998); Paul Payan, “Ridicule? L’image ambiguë de Saint Joseph à la fin du Moyen Âge,” *Médiévales* 39 (2000): 95–111; Payan, *Joseph: Une image de la paternité dans l’Occident médiéval* (Lonnai: Aubier, 2006), 209–99; Anne L. Williams, *Satire, Veneration, and St. Joseph in Art, c. 1300–1550* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

of the Holy Family to Egypt" in these manuscripts, where Joseph does not wear any head-dress.²² Later, however, the Jewish hat was only used to depict negative New Testament figures, most probably connected with the increasingly harsh persecution of the Jews.



Fig. 11: Return of the Holy Family from Egypt to Israel, manuscript illumination, *Biblia pauperum*, 1310/20. St. Florian (Upper Austria), Library of the Austin Canon house, cod. III 207, fol. 3v (photo: © Institut für Realienkunde, University of Salzburg, Austria)

The Jewish hat in visual representations, however, was not only used mainly as an object to signify the negative otherness of Jews in Christian culture. It also appeared in a number of image examples from a Jewish environment, where it was applied as an outer attribute for oneself, for instance, on seals or in some Hebrew manuscripts, like the famous Birds' Head Haggadah or the Regensburg Pentateuch (both c. 1300). While Ruth Mellin-

²² See the St. Florian manuscript (1310/20), fol. 2v (Flight to Egypt) and 3v (Fig. 11; Return from Egypt) and a manuscript from Klosterneuburg (1330s; Vienna, Austrian National Library, cod. 1198), fol. 2v (Flight to Egypt) and 3v (Return from Egypt); generally, see Gerhard Schmidt, *Die Armenbibeln des XIV. Jahrhunderts* (Graz: Böhlau, 1959), esp. 9–13; Andreas Fingernagel and Martin Roland, *Mitteeuropäische Schulen I (ca. 1250–1350): Textband* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), esp. 261–64.

koff designated the Jew's hat even in this context as more or less generally "an antisemitic sign";²³ one should rather follow Eric Silverman's statement that the *pileus cornutus* speaks "to a doubled tension in Jewish ethnicity: the push of separation, both self-selected and imposed, and the pull of acculturation."²⁴

Summarizing, it should again be emphasized that the representation of otherness in late medieval visual culture always has to be seen as context-dependent. It is not possible to recognize good or bad otherness without considering the specific contents and contexts of the scenes in which it occurs. One does not find any neutral "others" in images and texts. They also cannot be classified generally or uncritically as positive or negative beings to be followed or avoided and condemned without considering the context in which they occur. They could be both, shown as beings to be damned as well as to represent positive characters and models.

²³ Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs*, 31.

²⁴ Silverman, *A Cultural History*, 57.