

# From Baroque Spain to 1600s Amsterdam: Emergent Judaism in the Literary Works of Ex-New Christian Miguel de Barrios

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## Abstract

Writing from the Hispano-Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam, Miguel de Barrios (1635–1701) used literary forms of Catholic Spain to resist the erasure of Jewish identity in Iberian lands by Inquisition tribunals that prosecuted non-Catholic practices as heretical. Our analysis of sonnets and allegorical plays by Barrios shows how, through them, this converso, or New Christian, of Jewish lineage openly exalts Judaism as a divinely chosen faith. We also argue that, by writing diasporic texts firmly adherent to Baroque Spanish literary trends, Barrios broadens the reach of this literature to include the hybrid identity of former conversos living as Jews. We demonstrate how the poet expresses this identity by examining elements that influenced its expression, including his biography and the importance of Amsterdam as a centre of Sephardic, or Iberian Jewish, settlement, and how he reworks canonical genres of Spanish literature to privilege Judaism and Hispano-Portuguese conversos returned to Judaism.

**Keywords:** *Autos sacramentales* (sacramental plays), Hispano-Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, Miguel de Barrios, New Christians (conversos), Martyrs of the Iberian Inquisition, Crypto-Jews

## Introduction

This article studies sonnets and *autos alegóricos*, or allegorical plays, of Miguel (Daniel Levi) de Barrios as a way of understanding how this prolific author of 1600s Jewish Amsterdam uses literary forms of Baroque Catholic Spain to represent the worldview of a converso (New Christian) who returned to Judaism outside the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal). Our analysis of his sonnets praising Inquisitorial victims and of his allegorical theatre can increase awareness of the hybrid nature of this worldview. We thus show how Barrios writes as a Spanish poet to express a Jewish identity that would have been considered heretical in the Spain of his time. In the sonnets, Barrios represents flames that consumed crypto-Jewish martyrs as a figurative light illuminating their faith. Likewise, in plays such as *Jonen Dalim*, *Maskil el Dal*, *Torá Hor* and *Meirat Henayim*, all found in *Triumpho del gobierno popular y de la antigüedad holandesa* (*Triumph of Popular Government and of Dutch Antiquity*; Barrios, 1683),<sup>[1]</sup> he reworks the genre of sacramental *autos*, especially as expressed by canonical playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca, to show the elect status of the Jewish people and the Hebrew Bible. As part of this reworking, he incorporates references to classical mythology, the [Holy Office of the Inquisition](#) (the Inquisition) in Iberian lands and contemporary Amsterdam. To situate our investigation of these texts in a hybrid context and show how Barrios uses them to privilege Judaism, we also discuss elements that influenced their production, including his biography, the importance of Amsterdam in the diaspora of Hispano-Portuguese [conversos](#) able to live as Jews and characteristics of *autos* as Spanish literature.

## Biographical information

Barrios was born in Montilla, a town near the city of Córdoba in southern Spain, towards the end of 1635 (Oelman, 1982: 219). His family were conversos of Jewish origin and baptised Barrios to attest to their Christianity, even though they may have professed Judaism secretly. Evidence of this crypto-Judaism is the fact that his parents and siblings had Hebrew and Christian names. Thus, his mother, Sebastiana Valle, and father, Simón de Barrios, were also known as Sara Levi and Jacob Levi, respectively (Lieberman, 1996: 19). Conversos who took Hebrew first names and surnames did so at great risk, since doing so could call attention to their crypto-Judaism. After the expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492, such naming practices occurred in at least two circumstances: when conversos left Iberian lands for places where they could live as Jews, or if they became martyrs for their crypto-Jewish faith while remaining in Hispano-Portuguese territories. Even if they had Hebrew names, conversos also had names indistinguishable from those of people without Jewish background, as the following examples of [New Christians](#) ‘reconciled’ (‘reconciliados’) for Jewish heresy by the Inquisition of Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in 1722 demonstrate: Fernando Álvarez de Castro, Leonor de Marto y Silva, and Gerónimo de Paz Salcedo (‘Relación de los autos particulares de fee’, 1722).<sup>[2]</sup>

In 1650, two members of Barrios’s family were detained by Spanish Inquisitorial authorities for Jewish heresy. Perhaps fearful that these individuals would implicate relatives, the Barrios family was forced to flee from Spain. They went their separate ways in a migration that showed the breadth of the diaspora of New Christians. His parents, sisters and brother Diego settled in Algiers. Meanwhile, Barrios left the Iberian Peninsula on a journey similar to that of Jews in 1492 who, refusing to convert, had to leave Spain, resulting in the Sephardic diaspora (Lieberman, 1996: 19–21).

After initially residing in Nice, France, the poet took refuge in Livorno, Italy, where he was circumcised and openly practised Judaism. In Italy, Barrios married fellow former conversa Débora Vaez, and they journeyed to the Caribbean Island of Tobago, then a Dutch colony. The death of his wife led to his return to Europe, specifically, the ‘Portuguese’ community of Amsterdam composed of former New Christians living as Jews. Undoubtedly Barrios chose this community because of the opportunity there to be faithful to his true religious identity. In so doing, he was ‘drawn [...] by the legacy of [Saul Levi] Morteira’ (Kaplan, 2019: 61) and other luminaries whom he praises in *Triumpho del gobierno popular*. Originally from Venice, Morteira founded a yeshiva, or academy for religious instruction, in Amsterdam called Keter Torah (Crown of the Law). In 1639 he became the first rabbi of Talmud Torah Synagogue, the Sephardic congregation formed by the joining of three smaller ones, a position he held up to his death in 1660.

In 1662, shortly after arriving in this community, Barrios married Abigail de Pina and subsequently had three children with her. Embracing fully his Jewish faith as Daniel Levi, he actively contributed to the religious literature of the Sephardic community as its most productive author during the last third of the 1600s.

Despite having this literary success in Amsterdam, however, Barrios still faced censorship from the *Mahamad*, or governing board, whose seven members had the authority to approve works for publication by fellow community members. As a prose writer, poet and dramatist, he wrote several plays and works of mystical character that were considered a threat to the teachings of the Jewish community, so they were not originally allowed to be published in Amsterdam because the religious authorities considered them a violation of the Divine Law. Because of this restriction, Barrios was forced to go to Brussels, where his non-religious works were more likely to be well received. As part of the Netherlands still under Spanish control then, Brussels provided a more favourable audience for works of Spanish Baroque literary culture. However, the Hispano-Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam considered Brussels a ‘*tierra de idolatría*’ (‘land of idolatry’)

because it was ruled by Spanish Catholics, so they forced Barrios to apologise publicly for works he had written there (Lieberman, 1996: 22–25).

While in Amsterdam, Barrios dedicated much time to the study of the Torah. He also became one of the most recognised scholars and a leading chronicler of events in the Sephardic community of Amsterdam through works such as the aforementioned *Triumpho del gobierno popular*. This miscellany of over 700 pages includes – besides the short allegorical plays – descriptions of academies for religious studies and charitable works, the community’s burial society, and the people who composed these groups, among other texts. Dependent on financial support from many of these individuals, Barrios was never economically secure. The combination of this material poverty and the premature deaths of both his wives and two of his children may help explain the frequent presence within his poetry of Spanish Baroque literary *desengaño*, a process not strictly of disillusionment, but rather of enlightenment that consists of, among other characteristics, a ‘waking to true awareness [...] to see things as they are’ and hence to arrive at ‘wisdom’ (Green, 1966, vol. 4: 44). The poet demonstrates this ‘wisdom’ in texts treating the ephemerality of human capabilities and life itself, especially one neglectful of God. Thus, for example, in the sonnet ‘A la cortedad de la vida’ (‘To the Brevity of Life’), the poetic speaker urges humanity, ‘Hombre que buscas en tu error tu daño, / olvidado de Dios con alma ingrata, / vuelve en tu acuerdo, anhela el desengaño’ (Scholberg, 1962a: 226; ‘Man, you who look for your ruin in your error, / forgetful of God with an ungrateful soul / return to your agreement, long for an awakening’).

Barrios never returned to Spain. He died in Amsterdam in 1701 as a faithful Jew. For a brief period, he appeared to have been part of the Sabbatian movement, which during the 1660s believed that Shabbetai Zevi, a Jew from Izmir in present-day Turkey, was the messiah – the one who would redeem Sephardic Jews and lead them back to their ancestral motherland of Israel. After Zevi was detained by the authorities of the Ottoman Empire in 1666, he converted to Islam on pain of death, and died as an [apostate](#). Despite this outcome, for a time, Barrios continued to believe in the authenticity of Zevi as the messiah. The belief in the Sephardic world that the messiah would arrive imminently followed by the apostasy of Zevi caused upheaval in many communities. These events may have impacted Barrios negatively, given that he was susceptible to depression and the fact that his ‘mental equilibrium was delicately balanced’ (Scholberg, 1962b: 147).

## Amsterdam as a centre of rejudaisation of former conversos

During the 1600s, Amsterdam became a magnet for conversos, many of whom had suffered greatly at the hands of the Inquisition for secretly practising Jewish rites in Spain and Portugal. Protestant Amsterdam allowed them to create their own pocket of society where they could practise Judaism, and they quickly took advantage of this opportunity. One of the reasons the city was so attractive to immigrants was due to its strong mercantile economy as a large port with popular items to trade, such as sugar, spices, coffee and tobacco. The ability of ex-conversos to communicate with Portugal also meant that they were able to stay connected with family members still living in Iberian lands and diversify the trading options in a thriving economy. However, despite these positive features, members of this community faced restrictions on expressing their Jewish identity in the Netherlands. For example, Protestant leaders did not allow Jews to practise openly, and when they received permission to build their first synagogue in 1612, it had to be owned by a Christian in order to appease Protestants who were opposed to such a public place of worship for Jews (Bodian, 1997: 59).

The origins of the Iberian Jewish settlement in Amsterdam are partly unclear, although Uri Halevi, an Ashkenazic rabbi from Emden, Germany, and hence not a Sephardic Jew, appears to have played an early role for conversos returning to Judaism. In *Maskil el Dal (The One Who Enlightens the Poor)*, Barrios narrates an important episode of this history, about the opposition that Halevi and these former New Christians faced during their celebration of Yom Kippur in 1603:

Inquieren severas vigilancias,  
de aquel albergue todas las estancias  
[...]  
en busca de los ídolos romanos.  
Uri y Aaron Levi, son los primeros,  
que en manos dan de los Ministros fieros,  
Que a la cárcel les llevan maniatados.  
– (Lieberman, 1996: 145)

The stern watchfulness [of the officials of justice]  
investigates all the rooms of that refuge  
[...]  
Uri and Aaron Levi are the first [members of this community]  
whom [these officials] turn over to the hands of the fierce ministers of justice,  
Whom they [the ministers] bring to jail with their hands tied.<sup>[3]</sup>

In the account of this event by Barrios, city officials discovered a group of individuals wearing prayer shawls and observing a clandestine Yom Kippur service in a synagogue in the home of Jacob Tirado. When the officials realised they were among Jews, the lead officer ‘ask[ed] them to pray to the God of Israel for the government of Amsterdam’ (‘les pide que ruegen al Dios de Israel, por el Gobierno Amstelodamo’; Barrios, 1683: 412). Notwithstanding inaccuracies in his retelling of this foundational event, Barrios conveys the challenges that Portuguese converso immigrants faced establishing a Jewish presence. Once released, Halevi continued to serve the community, teaching the laws of Judaism and performing circumcisions (Lieberman, 1996: 47). Within a few years, a number of merchant converso families planted roots as openly practising Jews, and some grew in wealth and size during the 1600s, focusing on growing the community through education, charitable works and commerce.<sup>[4]</sup>

Religious organisations dedicated to charity and study began to appear. These organisations were a key foundation of Hispano-Portuguese Jewish life because of the support they offered to the community financially, religiously and intellectually. Beneficent organisations cared for orphans, widows and unmarried young women, and maintained the cemetery established in nearby Ouderkerk. Another role of these brotherhoods was to provide groups of men an academic setting for discussing religion and philosophy, such as the most suitable epithets for the Law of Moses, or Judaism, which Barrios recounts in his allegorical play *Torá Hor (The Law is Light)*. A key function of these societies was to reinforce Jewish teachings for former conversos who were still influenced by the Catholicism they grew up in, despite now being able to openly practise Judaism.

## Inquisitorial influence on Jewish Amsterdam and the sonnets of Barrios

This pocket of hope in Amsterdam contrasted with the situation of conversos in Spain and Portugal, and their colonies in Mexico and South America still subject to Inquisitorial persecution, including death, for the

heresy of being Judaizers (judaizantes), or secret Jews. In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul had used this term to accuse Jewish Christians of being ‘false brothers’ (*NIV Study Bible*, Gal. 2:4) who preached a ‘perversion’ of the gospel (Hunter, 1959, vol. 22: 14–15) – for example, by insisting on the ritual of circumcision among converts to Christianity.<sup>[5]</sup> Similarly, the Inquisition used the term Judaizer as a pejorative to accuse New Christians in the Iberian world of secretly practising Judaism. As scholars such as Gitlitz, Kamen and others have shown that, in the most extreme cases of this persecution, the Inquisition would sentence to death, among other victims, New Christians whom it deemed *negativos*, or unrepentant of their Jewish beliefs, and/or *relapsos* – that is, those judged guilty of recidivism after having been convicted and reconciled before for practising Judaism in secret. Upon announcing these sentences at a public spectacle called an *auto de fe* (or act of faith), the court frequently would then hand over these prisoners to secular authorities for burning at the stake afterwards to set an emphatic example for the population on the consequences of heresy. Paintings by contemporary artists depicting *autos de fe*, such as ‘Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto-da-fe’ by Pedro Berruguete (Berruguete, 1491–99), visually dramatised these consequences while also communicating the didactic impact of these performative ceremonies. The condemned did have an option for mercy in being strangled with a garrote before being burnt at a separate location, but they had to renounce Judaism and declare that Catholicism was the one true faith.<sup>[6]</sup> The Inquisition often hired clergymen to prepare *relaciones*, or accounts, of *autos de fe* – such as, for example, the ones describing that of Córdoba, Spain, of 29 June 1665 by friars Pedro de Herrera and Pedro Mateo de Lara (Gracia Boix, 1983: 446–94), which mentions three victims whom Barrios exalts in a sonnet discussed in this article.

Stories spread throughout the Iberian converso diaspora of the suffering of these victims, especially those who rejected mercy and died proclaiming themselves proudly Jewish, an outcome that created powerful martyrs. Their sacrifice was deeply moving and affected the people who had escaped it, as Barrios makes evident in many poems. In one, he describes the death of Friar Diogo de Asumpção (Diego de la Ascensión), a Portuguese monk who, despite little or no Jewish background, became a crypto-Jew who refused to renounce this heresy and whom the Inquisition condemned as an unrepentant Judaizer. Barrios dramatises his martyrdom in the following way:

Rompe los yerros de opresión violenta  
y arrojado al suplicio que lo enciende  
muere y renace Fénix de su lumbre.  
– (Scholberg, 1962a: 241)

He breaks the chains of violent oppression,  
and having been thrown into the pyre that sets him aflame,  
he dies and is reborn as a phoenix from his own light.

The image of a phoenix is prominent in the writings of Barrios about martyrs for the ability of this mythical bird to be eternally reborn from the ashes of its death. Hispano-Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam also adopted the phoenix as a symbol to represent the rebirth of their community as a place where they could live their Judaism freely. This potent image also exemplifies how the Sephardic population in its diaspora connected with *crypto-Jews* in Iberian lands, which were under Inquisitorial laws. Additionally, the phoenix as a symbol of resistance to the Inquisition appears in the poetry of Antonio Enríquez Gómez (c.1600–63; Brown, 2007), a contemporary of Barrios and fellow converso (and possible secret Jew). For example, in ‘Romance a Lope de Vera’ (‘Ballad to Lope de Vera’, 1644–45), Enríquez Gómez glorifies the martyrdom of Lope de Vera y

Alarcón, a Spanish Old Christian of the 1600s who, refuses to repent of his conversion to Judaism and declares to inquisitors, ‘pero yo seré en el fuego / el ave que simple sabe / morir y vivir a un tiempo’ (Brown, 2007: 170;<sup>[7]</sup> ‘but in the flames I will be / the simple bird that knows how / to die and live at the same time’).

Barrios also compares crypto-Jewish martyrs of his era with biblical figures, showing how the Hispano-Portuguese diaspora glorified these individuals who sacrificed themselves for their Jewish beliefs. In his sonnet about Tomás Treviño (or Tremiño) de Sobremonte, ‘Años catorce en cárcel rigurosa’ (‘Fourteen Years in Severe Prison’, 1683; Scholberg, 1962a), he dramatises the fiery death of this prosperous Spanish converso merchant and unrepentant crypto-Jew in colonial Mexico by comparing him to the prophet Elijah:

Y el indiano Elías por subir al cielo en  
el carro voraz que lo levanta  
deja la capa de su polvo al suelo.  
– (Scholberg, 1962a: 242)

Now Elijah of the Indies by rising to the sky  
in the fierce chariot that lifts him up,  
leaves the cape of his dust on the ground.

Barrios asserts that Treviño becomes a new Elijah being swept to heaven in a chariot of fire; just as Elijah’s cloak fell from him in 2 Kings: 11–13, Treviño leaves behind his ashes. In the biblical story, after Elijah’s student Elisha picks up the cloak, he strikes the Jordan River, declaring, ‘Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?’ As a result, when the river parts, allowing Elisha to cross, ‘the disciples of the prophets at Jericho [...] exclaimed, “The spirit of Elijah has settled on Elisha”’ (Berlin and Brettler, 2014; *Jewish Study Bible*, 2 Kings 2:14–15). By rewriting this transfer of spirit from Elijah to Elisha through the martyrdom of Treviño, Barrios shows how Hispano-Portuguese Jewish communities carried on the legacy of their brethren who died because of the Inquisition. His elevation of Treviño to the level of biblical prophets also emphasises the privileged status of martyrdom, with ‘the cape of his [Treviño’s] dust’ serving as a remembrance of Treviño’s faith.<sup>[8]</sup>

Many Jews who remained in Spain as New Christians after the expulsion of 1492, as well as those who went to Portugal and were forcibly converted five years later, experienced discrimination and, in some cases, Inquisitorial persecution. Barrios depicts these experiences in sonnets extolling crypto-Jew martyrs who reject Christianity at the cost of their lives. For example, the following citation to the sonnet ‘Los rayos del amor tanto cegaron’ (‘Beams of Love Dazzled So Much’) shows how Barrios celebrates the willingness of these individuals to die for their unbreakable faithfulness to their Jewish beliefs:

Tanta voracidad los tres burlaron  
porque al tiempo que el fuego les pusieron  
se interpuso el amor y no sintieron  
lo vivo de las llamas que tocaron.  
[...]  
Mas amor por burlar como valiente  
llevando los espíritus divinos  
sola dejó al tirano la ceniza.  
– (Scholberg, 1962a: 243)

So much voracity the three of them overcame  
 because at the time that they [secular authorities] put the fire to them  
 love intercepted and they did not feel  
 the intensity of the flames they had touched.  
 [...]
   
 But love by outwitting as a brave one,  
 carrying away their divine spirits  
 only left their ashes to the tyrant.

In this sonnet, Barrios glorifies Jorge Méndez de Castro (Abraham Atías), Domingo (Jacob) Rodríguez de Cáceres, and Beatriz (Raquel) Núñez Fernández, the three aforementioned crypto-Jews from Córdoba whom the Inquisition sentenced to the stake as relapsed Judaizers after the *auto de fe* of 1665 (Bodian, 1997: 83; Gracia Boix, 1983: 463–64, 493–94). Mentioning ‘flames’, ‘fire’, and ‘ashes’, the poet unflinchingly describes the literal suffering that these and other victims of Inquisitorial burnings had to endure. However, he does not present these experiences as negative; on the contrary, the text suggests that the three martyrs overcome their unimaginably painful death to attain the salvation of their souls, which was an important component of Iberian crypto-Judaism. Many secret Jews, especially those few who refused to repent their forbidden beliefs, believed that such salvation could only be accomplished through the Mosaic Law, which they considered true and absolute and for which they willingly died (Gitlitz, 2002: 110). Barrios communicates the idea that God’s love is so powerful, that no threat or torture is strong enough to impede divine protection for those who die faithful to their belief in the perfection of the Law of Moses.

## Context and analysis of sacramental plays

Although Barrios lived as a Jew in Amsterdam, his literary works were written from a Spanish-Christian viewpoint. He reclaimed Spanish as a Jewish language to extol the Jewish community of Amsterdam for the suffering that many members endured during the Inquisition. Elements of Baroque Spanish that characterise his works include affected language, hyperbaton, wordplays and constructions rarely used today, such as the future subjunctive. As well, Barrios used allegorical representations of, for example, the (Catholic) Church, Judaism, Israel and Wealth, as well as biblical and mythological references, to add complexity to his works.

By using the *auto sacramental* (sacramental play) in his allegorical theatre, Barrios inverts a canonical genre of Spanish Catholic identity to assert a Jewish one. In so doing, he shows the hybridity of his literary formation, even as he inhabited a milieu of New Christians who may have identified as secret Jews. An *auto sacramental* of the Middle Ages or Renaissance was a ‘short dramatic work based on religious or secular themes’ (Real Academia Española, 2021; ‘Auto sacramental’) that during the Baroque era had the purpose of ‘teaching the most crucial points of the faith to its adherents’ (Thornton Spinnenweber, 2021: 13). The plays were typically performed during Corpus Christi, the Roman Catholic feast that celebrates the Eucharist, or transubstantiation, ‘the supernatural transformation of the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ’ (Thornton Spinnenweber, 2021: 12). *Autos* spread their message of divine grace through allegory, or language in which ‘the author uses elements that are familiar to the public in order to express abstract theological ideas’ (Arellano, 2015: 19). For example, in *Maskil el Dal*, Barrios uses the characters Religión (Religion) to represent Judaism and Aumento (Increase) to represent someone who shuns this faith until convinced to believe sincerely (Lieberman, 1996: 138, 164).

The sacramental plays in *Triumpho del gobierno popular* (1683) contain much historical context about Iberian Jews in Amsterdam and the life of Barrios himself. In these plays, he praises the study of the Law of Moses and the brotherhoods that supported his work. Although some of his colleagues may have contributed money, they also likely commented on his writings at their meetings and, for these reasons, Barrios lists many names within his plays. These lists often extend for several pages, and include a short compliment, offering insight into the makeup and activities of these groups. For example, in *Maskil el Dal*, he notes that the founder of the brotherhood of the same name was Abraham de Fonseca and that it met for one hour on religious holidays (*días de fiesta*) and 30 minutes on Sundays (Lieberman, 1996: 152–53). Likewise, in *Meirat Henayim* (*Light to the Eyes*), he acclaims the four founders and ten notable ‘brothers’ of this society with specific details of their lives. By mentioning here that Jacob de Castro de Paz was the brother of a crypto-Jewish martyr in Lisbon, Isaac de Castro Tartas, and the great-grandson of another, he again connects the Amsterdam community with the Iberian Jewish diaspora (Lieberman, 1996: 201–02). Given that this community consisted of about 2500 individuals at its peak, such lists provide much detail about those who lived there and the roles they filled (Bodian, 1997: 54).

Barrios includes his own ancestry in a poem within *Maskil el Dal* titled ‘Lamentación Fúnebre’ (‘Funeral Lamentation’; Lieberman, 1996), which he wrote while still lamenting the loss of his mother and father ten years prior. He grapples with the suddenness of death, describing it as an overpowering and unforgiving occurrence, emphasising how deeply his father’s passing affected him:

¡Ah muerte! Como rayo fulminado aun antes que sentida, ejecutada.  
 ¿Quién fía de la Vida si es mudable?  
 ¿Quién no espera la Muerte si es forzosa?  
 – (Lieberman, 1996: 156)

Oh death! Like a lightning bolt, before even felt, already determined.  
 Who can trust life if it is so mutable?  
 Who can ignore death when it is inevitable?

Here Barrios testifies to the inexorability of death, and also does so a few lines later when he calls Atropos, one of the three Fates from Greek mythology, a tyrant (Lieberman, 1996: 156). Invoking Atropos, Barrios communicates the figurative importance of her and her sisters determining human destiny: Clotho weaves the string of life; Lachesis measures it to the length allotted for each person; and Atropos cuts it, ending life (March, 2014: 197, 2018). The Fates represent the belief that the string of life can be cut at any moment and that the circumstances of death are beyond human control.

Finally, Barrios presents more historical context when confirming that his parents, Sara Levi and Jacob Levi (Simón de Barrios), died only a few months apart, in 1670 and 1671. He also informs readers that his grandfathers were named Abraham Levi Castro and Ishac Cohen de Sosa, and that Levi Castro lived in the Portuguese town of Marialva. Given the location of Marialva in the northeast part of the country, a region where many Spanish Jews settled post-1492, and the fact that Barrios was born in Spain, his ancestors likely immigrated to Portugal in 1492 because of the expulsion, but eventually returned to Spain to live as New Christians.

While *Maskil el Dal* shows the importance of Barrios’s writing as a source of biographical information, *Jonen Dalim* (*The One Who Pities the Poor*) is one of Barrios’s most recognised literary works that elevates Jewish people of Iberian origin. To approach this allegorical play, it is essential to understand first that Barrios was



a member of several religious and literary academies in Amsterdam. Such academies were founded following both Jewish and Spanish literary traditions. These *hermandades* (brotherhoods) served as sites for Barrios and his contemporaries to discuss and interpret the Torah, to evaluate each other's literary works, and to share and recite their own poems. Individual brotherhoods also had a *yeshiva*, or academy for religious instruction, as well as means for distributing charitable support to those within the community who needed it. In this way, the academies had the goal of providing justice and compassion, especially towards the poor. Many of Barrios's allegorical plays, such as *Jonen Dalim*, bear the names of these academies because, besides being works dedicated directly to these brotherhoods, they were also the places where the protagonist – in this case, Israel or the Jewish community, would study and honour the Divine Law closely – as well as question its conflicts and refuse the Christian faith. *Jonen Dalim* includes multiple biblical references, specifically verses from the book of Proverbs. This play focuses on the idea of having mercy on those in need, and Proverbs reflects this same notion in many of its passages. Thus, the verse, 'He who despises his fellow is wrong; / He who shows pity for the lowly is happy' (Prov. 14:21), inspired Barrios when he wrote this play since it emphasises the importance of showing charity and compassion towards those in need.

In this work, there are four main allegorical characters: the Law, Israel, Edom, which symbolises Rome or the Catholic Church, and Jonen, which represents the academy that shows solicitude for the Israelites. This play revolves around the exile of the Jewish people that God imposed as punishment for their idolatry and disobedience (Lieberman, 1996: 68). Edom, as the antagonist, represents the rich and the enemy of Judaism, the one who does not pity anyone. This allegorical character desires abundance and the suffering of Israel, whereas Israel seeks redemption for its acts of rebellion. The Jewish people want to be faithful followers of the Mosaic Law and to be enlightened and guided by it. The Israelites recognise their greatest sin of idolatry, so Barrios portrays Israel as a reflective character who regrets betraying its promise to God and hopes for long-awaited divine forgiveness:

JONEN. Yo soy Jonen Dalim que a tu bien corro,  
por la Piedad que a los desnudos viste.

EDOM. Yo, Edom, que en molestarte no me canso.

LEY. Yo, te daré consuelo. a Israel.

[...]

ISRAEL. El susto que Edom me ofrece,  
creer me hace en toda instancia

que la Inquisición me coge,

y que me arroja a la llama.

– (Lieberman, 1996: 126-27)

JONEN. I am Jonen Dalim, who runs to your well-being,  
for the piety that clothes the naked.

EDOM. I, Edom, do not tire of bothering you.

LEY. I will give you [Israel] solace.

[...]

ISRAEL. The fright that Edom offers me,  
makes me believe in every instance

that the Inquisition seizes me,

and that it throws me to the flames.

On the one hand, this dialogue demonstrates how both Jonen Dalim and the Law help Israel achieve its redemption. First, Jonen gives the Jewish people compassion and justice. Second, the Law gives Israel hope and guides it to attain consolation from God. On the other hand, Edom, the Catholic Church, continues battling against Judaism, which fears Edom's Inquisitorial flames. Barrios's references to the Inquisition remind the audience of horrors suffered by crypto-Jews at the hand of the tribunal for asserting their secret Jewish faith despite being New Christians.

## Conclusion

Through the sonnets and allegorical plays discussed in this article, Miguel Barrios broadens the canon of Baroque Spanish literature to include works written by a New Christian returned to Judaism who closely followed Spanish literary customs. His texts show that, beyond the Iberian Peninsula nearly 200 years after the expulsion, one could be a fully Jewish and a Spanish writer despite the contradictions these identities might otherwise have suggested. At the same time, our analysis has shown the lasting influence of Inquisitorial pursuit on the worldview of the poet, given that his sonnets glorify victims of the tribunal, and the plays represent Catholic Christianity as the antagonist of Judaism, both in ways that resonated throughout the Sephardic world. These texts bring readers today closer to the bifurcated worldview of a writer who expresses his Jewish identity using the language and literary forms of his education in a Catholic milieu. Finally, they show how Amsterdam provided a setting for Iberian conversos to embrace the faith formerly denied them. As chronicler of this transformation, Barrios testifies to the depth of this faith while also showing the influence of the society that had forbidden its expression.

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## Notes

[1] All citations in the essay to these allegorical plays of Barrios are from the edition of them prepared by Lieberman, 1996.

[2] Gitlitz confirms the absence of surnames that would have identified the converso identity of their bearers: 'I know of no surnames used exclusively or even preponderantly by conversos. The Inquisition, always vigilant to identify New Christians so as to scrutinise them for crypto-Judaism, never used surnames as a guide' (2002: 211n11).

[3] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own. We have maintained the initial capitalisation of certain words as Barrios wrote them in the original Spanish.

[4] For further information about the possible role of Halevi in this history, see Bodian, 1997: 20–22 and 43–46.

[5] This citation to Galatians is taken from the NIV Study Bible (Barker, 1995).

[6] For further description of Inquisitorial prosecution of heresy, see Gitlitz, 2002: 18–25 and Kamen, 2014: 226–60.

[7] Our citation to the “Romance al divín mártir” by Enríquez Gómez is from the edition and study of this poem prepared by Brown, 2007.

[8] For further analysis of this sonnet, see Leibman, 2014: 45–50. Barrios included the sonnet in *Triumpho del gobierno popular*, 1683: 561.

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## Glossary

**Auto de fe (act of faith):** Public sentencing of individuals deemed heretics by Inquisition tribunals of Spain, Portugal and their overseas territories.

**Apostate:** A person who renounces a religious or political belief or principle.

**Auto sacramental:** Spanish term for a play that, using allegorical characters, focuses on the sacrament of the Eucharist.

**Conversos (cristianos nuevos in Spanish, cristãos novos in Portuguese) or New Christians:** Converts from Judaism to Catholicism in the Iberian world. Significantly, these terms also applied to descendants of

converts over multiple generations, hence becoming markers of ethnic differentiation. Muslim converts to Catholicism were also conversos but were more typically called Moriscos.

**Crypto-Jews:** Conversos who secretly maintained Jewish practices; in Inquisition parlance, they were called Judaizers (*judaizantes*). They might also be called Marranos, a pejorative word of unclear origin that frequently became associated with swine.

**Holy Office of the Inquisition (Inquisition for short):** Court in Spanish and Portuguese lands, originally under monarchical control but staffed by members of religious orders, that attempted to maintain Catholic orthodoxy by prosecuting individuals suspected of heretical beliefs and practices.

**New Christians (*cristianos nuevos* in Spanish, *cristãos novos* in Portuguese) or conversos:** Converts from Judaism to Catholicism in the Iberian world. Significantly, these terms also applied to descendants of converts over multiple generations, hence becoming markers of ethnic differentiation. Muslim converts to Catholicism were also conversos but were more typically called Moriscos.

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