

WOMEN, JEWS AND GERMANS:
OUTSIDERS IN THE OLD CZECH *UNGUENTARIUS*

Alfred Thomas

Jarmila F. Veltrusky's *Mastičkář. A Sacred Farce from Medieval Bohemia* (1985) represents the most detailed study of the two extant fragments of the Latin-Czech medieval drama *Unguentarius (Mastičkář)* from c. 1340. Veltrusky is surely correct to maintain that the *Unguentarius* reconciles the comic potential of farce with the religious power of spiritual drama. According to Veltrusky, obscenity assumes the bakhtinian form of universal mockery of all social categories whereas Alfred Thomas discerns a distinction between an unmarked and unmocked Czech-speaking ethnic majority (of noblemen and peasants) and a mocked category of outsiders (prostitutes, old women, Germans and Jews). These outsiders are conflated metonymically through the denigrated sexual and scatological imagery of lower bodily parts (anus, male and female genitalia) which are implicitly contrasted with the sacred bodily parts of the head (the locus of anointing), the chest and the arms. Analogously, the play distinguishes between the denigrated discourse of the outsiders and the elevated discourse of the sacred characters, a distinction which goes beyond the Latin-vernacular dichotomy to encompass German and even mock-Hebrew. Whereas for Veltrusky obscenity functions as a means of subverting social control from below, for Thomas there is a collusion between the author and his audience in oppressing the powerless outsiders for the benefit of the majority. Finally, Thomas discusses the prevalence of the same mode of exclusion in contemporary popular culture as manifested in television and cinema, seeing *inversion* both as the defining trope of exclusion and the ideological link between medieval forms of obscenity and their modern secular equivalent.