

the young man into a home where he was crucified in mockery of Christ's death on the cross. The youth's body was solemnly buried in the cathedral where it was said to work miracles. Several other cases of blood-libel were reported in England prior to the expulsion of the Jews in 1290. One of them, which occurred at Lincoln in 1255, is Chaucer's acknowledged source for "The Prioress' Tale." The body of a child, later venerated as "Little St. Hugh," was found in the cesspool of a house located in the Jewish section of the town. Its owner, a Jew by the name of Copin, was immediately arrested. He confessed to the "crime" under torture and was condemned by King Richard III to be hanged. Ninety other members of the Jewish community were apprehended; eighteen of them were later executed. Chaucer's imagination and rhetoric considerably embroidered the facts, as every one who has read the tale knows only too well. The circumstantial detail of the cesspool was exploited by Chaucer as a springboard for his sadly prejudiced invective against the Jews:

I seye that in a wardrobe they him threwe  
Whereas these Jewes purgen their entraille.  
O cursed folk of Herodes al newe  
What may your yvel entente yow availle?  
Mordre wol out, certein, it wol nat faille,  
And namely ther th'onour of God shal sprede,  
The blood out cryeth on your cursed dede.

(Lines 120-126)

As I mentioned earlier, it was not the medieval mind which invented the ritual murder of Christians of which the Jews were accused, but its wide-spread accounts—including Chaucer's—certainly made a lasting impact on the collective imagination. Hard to believe as it may seem, the last case of blood-libel occurred in Russia in 1903. The story is told by Bernard Malamud in *The Fixer*.

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### *Remembering Medieval Anti-Semitism*

There are two things to remember about medieval anti-Semitism: first, that it is a phenomenon of medieval Christians and often has little or nothing to do (except in its consequences) with real Jews; second, that it is both like and unlike modern anti-Semitism. There has been much debate as to the origins—historical, economic, psychosocial, etc.—of anti-Semitism, and many of the works in my bibliography discuss this matter in detail. My own thinking has focused on theological notions, particularly typology.

Typology is an appropriative strategy that duplicitously cleaves Jews and Christians (in both senses of the word). It distinguishes Christians from their Jewish forebears (and from their Jewish contemporaries) while simultaneously coupling them. It separates Judaism from Christianity at the same moment that it subsumes Judaism into Christianity. Thus while Christians are in some sense Jews—the True Israel, as it were—Jews themselves are divided chronologically and historically into two groups: the good Hebrews of the Old Testament and the bad, contemporary Jews, i.e., those who are really proto-Christians and those who persist in ignorance and sin. This distinction, seen in the writings of Augustine, became particularly important in the later Middle Ages as Christians rediscovered the strangers in their midst (and there are of course many arguments as to why such rediscovery occurred when it did; see Moore, for one, on this). The expulsions and persecutions of the Jews during this period are connected with the host desecration and blood libels as well as with changing economic conditions during the transition from late feudalism to a market economy; they are also connected (as Langmuir argues) to the institution of the dogma of transubstantiation. Typology figures into all of this in that a society anxious about its own spiritual practice will have particular difficulties in accepting those whose very existence challenges those practices and the increasingly codified beliefs that underlie them—especially if those who embody difference cannot be separated from the roots of belief and practice, i.e., if it turns out that at the heart of the self is the other. Typology creates an origin for Christians that is founded on the existence and priority of Jews. Explaining Jewish existence as necessary for the periods before and under the law that are then superseded by the period under grace does not eliminate the paradox at the center of belief. Just as the lineage of Christ had to be Christianized—thus typological appropriations of episodes of the Hebrew Bible were allied to creative rereadings of the Hebrew prophecies—so too did Jews of the era before Jesus, leaving available the remnant of European Jews for sinful contrast and messianic conversion. But the priority and the origins and the contrast are not thereby explained away. During the period of greatest anxiety over Corpus Christi (discussed also by Bynum), it was not just that Christian doubts were manifested as attacks against those projected as doubters (which indeed Jews were and are) but that these attacks were also directed at those others who could never be extirpated precisely because they (and their doubts) were, in some fundamental sense, at the heart of received truth.

In the 16th century, the clearest example of the ongoing typological dilemma was the institution of the *limpieza di sangre*, the attempts to determine purity of lineage for many generations of Iberians. The expulsion in 1492 of what was arguably the oldest settlement of Jews in Europe was mirrored in the shock that many Old Christians of Spain received on discovering that one or more of their ancestors was Jewish. In neither case, of course, could the Jew at the heart of Christian culture be banished. Marranos remained in Spain, and so did the Jewish origins of Christianity. In the 20th century, the scientific racism of German National Socialism was likewise founded on a desire for purity, a wish to eliminate what they deemed to be the degenerate and subversive social elements in the midst of Aryan uniformity. The rationale was no longer theological, and the authoritative texts were no longer primarily religious, but the justifications were surprisingly similar: Jews were metaphorized, emblemized, demonized, empty signifiers to be filled at will. The consequences for Jews of the 20th and 15th centuries were, of course, absolutely the same.

Should we be surprised then that contemporary debates on the reality of the Shoah reprise the rewriting of history, the appropriation of the other, the alternation of forgetting and remembering that has constituted so much of Christian relations to Jews? The anamnesia (to use Lyotard's term) of Christian Europe shows itself in many ways, and certainly has tragic consequences for others in addition to Jews, but the case of European anti-Semitism is one, especially good instance of it. On a recent visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (a problematic title in many ways), I came to believe that the museum's central, though unintentional, theme is that same anamnesia: the futile (though obligatory) attempt to remember what is always, already forgotten, the reach for a purity of memory and truth—an origin—that is necessarily illusory and by definition beyond the grasp. Because memory involves reconstruction, it necessitates that we forget, and yet, though we cannot remember neither are we allowed to forget. What began in Europe in the later Middle Ages is with us still. Our origins (as Americans, as medievalists, as members of the occidental community) are necessarily impure too. What then do we do?

Addressing these issues historically is allied to ongoing investigations of the origins of the discipline of medieval studies and the ways the texts of medieval society have traditionally been read. Medieval studies has until very recently been a Christian discipline, in which treasures (often anti-Semitic) of the European Christian past were lovingly read by Christian scholars. (The anti-Catholic bias of so much of the historical writing early in this century and late in the last is another instance of that same anamnesia.) In the study of medieval drama, for instance, typology is the standard way of reading the English cycle plays, and literary instances of anti-Semitism are either excused as typical of that (benighted) time or dismissed as too insignificant to discuss: in other words, anti-Semitism (like antifeminism, homophobia, etc.) has been naturalized. More and more, however, the Christian gaze (another facet, like the male gaze and the heterosexual, of the compound occidental gaze) is no longer felt as compulsory, though it will take some time before this compound gaze no longer seems valid, let alone natural. However, remembering medieval anti-Semitism is one place to start the process by which we no longer forget to remember but try (while keeping in mind the futility of the attempt) to remember in order to never forget.

