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## Meaning of Folklore

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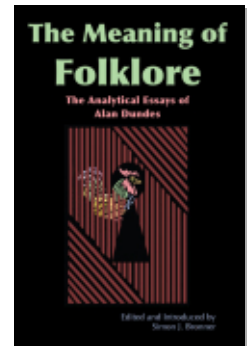
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THE RITUAL MURDER OR  
BLOOD LIBEL LEGEND:  
A STUDY OF ANTI-SEMITIC VICTIMIZATION  
THROUGH PROJECTIVE INVERSION

Introduction

This essay brings out an important principle in Alan Dundes's work—that folkloristic analysis can help combat bigotry by illuminating the cause and content of material used to maintain prejudice from generation to generation. One problem he encountered was that collectors avoided or repressed offensive texts, because they did not fit into their preconceived image of folklore as charming and quaint. Dundes countered that the collectors' selectivity, driven by an urge to romanticize cultural expression, rendered folklore sterile and inconsequential. He wanted to show that folklore was a powerful cultural force, and could be used by scholars as evidence to objectively assess social divisions, as well as bonds. He maintained that folklore could have dire consequences, and necessitated serious attention as a source of social biases, beliefs, and actions. If a better world was to be constructed, he argued, then the folk processes by which attitudes were formed and spread needed to be uncovered—and understood.

Dundes used the terms evil, horrible, insidious, and dastardly to describe the subject of blood libel. It was, in his words, "one of the most bizarre and dangerous legends ever created by the human imagination." He blamed the narrative for causing Jews psychological pain and physical injury, and frequently death. Rather than suppressing awareness of the lore, Dundes called for holding it "up to the light of reason with the hope of nullifying its pernicious influence." To him, this appeal to reason meant doing more than showing that the accusation was untrue. Many scholars had already established its falsehood, but that had not stopped its regeneration. As his contribution, Dundes sought to provide a psychological rationale to explain the content and persistence of the narrative that had apparently irrationally spread through several continents for many centuries.

Blood libel is the allegation that around Easter, Jews murder Christian children to obtain blood for rituals. A key motif of the narrative, in Dundes's interpretation, was the accusation that Jews mixed the blood into the Passover ceremonial food of matzoh, an unleavened bread. Other ritual murder charges included taking blood for Purim pastries, medicinal remedies, and sorcery. Despite the fact that Jewish law expressly forbids blood

sacrifices, the legend created an image of Jews as bloodthirsty, demonic, and depraved. Another questionable detail is the function of the blood in the end product, since matzoh is white, but the implication was that Jews, as an ancient people with mystical powers, retained profane magical practices—represented by using blood as a magical ingredient—that stood in contrast to sacred Christian norms.

The blood libel legend is characterized by the narrative's localized setting, and a temporal reference to a contemporary moment or the recent past. As a legend, the narrative drew attention to itself because of its bizarre content, frequently thought to be true when it was circulated orally in song and story, in print and image, and even in courts of law. Or else its legendary context raised questions, if not doubts, about a central belief in blood sacrifice, conveyed in the actions of the text. Structurally, its ending invited commentary on the unusual feature of murder-lust, resulting from inhuman or un-Christian ritual uses of blood. The blood libel legend drew listeners from members of the dominant group and possessed symbolic characteristics because Jews, as a marginalized group, often conveyed a degree of mystery. It was as if a secret was revealed about their true nature, encapsulated in key actions and objects within a narrative.

From the viewpoint of Christians, the legend confirmed the "othering" of Jews (or other minorities) as profanely despicable, and therefore socially intolerable. From the Christian perspective, the theological implication of the legend's message was that the Jews were inconvertible and incorrigible. This conclusion was significant, in that it obviated the need to convert Jews (since Christians, particularly during the medieval period, believed that conversion was a prerequisite for the Second Coming of Christ). The danger of the blood libel legend was that it encouraged mobs to spill Jewish blood in retribution, whereas the Christian theology of the New Testament would have called for preservation of the Jewish presence, as the precursor people of the "old" testament (Jewish terminology prefers the Torah or Hebrew Bible), until conversion was successful. Dundes viewed this background as a crucial context for the inclusion of converted or apostate Jews in the plots of blood libel variants. Extending the example of Jews to other victimized minorities, Dundes's essay stated: "When Jews resisted acting out their assigned part in this overt Christian fantasy [that the guilty Jew should accept his punishment and be converted to Christianity], Christians became angry, very angry—just as whites become angry if blacks don't conform to the white stereotype of blacks and just as men become angry if women won't conform to the men's stereotype of women."

Jewish chronicles and conversations refer to blood libel to epitomize an extremely virulent strain of anti-Semitism in a region, evident in a metafolkloric statement: "Scratch a (national identity), and you get an anti-Semite; they even had a blood libel case there." Dundes mentioned several medieval examples in England, a concentration of blood libel trials in Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century, the revival of the legend by Nazis during the Holocaust, and several American examples in the early twentieth century. Since Dundes's essay was written, a number of twenty-first century blood libel accusations have been identified in Islamic countries (Israeli 2002, 2003). In speeches and in the media, Islamist demagogues demonized Jews as drinkers of Muslim children's blood and enemies of humanity. At first glance, this development of a non-Christian victim negates Dundes's thesis that blood libel projects Christian guilt (over the cannibalism implicit in the Eucharist) to Jewish blood-lust. Yet many sources claim that the Islamic manifestation of blood libel came from Christian influence and was adapted to the Islamist goal of eliminating Jews; it contained the projective inversion of turning the wish fulfillment of "I want

to rid the world of them” to “They want to get rid of me.” Thus, contemporary legends associated with blood libel include Jews poisoning Muslim wells, spreading plagues among Arabs in Jewish-prepared foods, and surreptitiously sterilizing Muslim men through various products (Wistrich 2002; and Karsh 2006).

Dundes was concerned with what associated texts revealed about blood libel in the Christian world. The primary example he gave in this essay was the “Wandering Jew,” but he did not gloss it in detail, perhaps because he treated it separately in *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend* (Hasan-Rokem and Dundes 1986). The central motif (Thompson Q502.1, The Wandering Jew. Ceaseless wandering with inability to die as punishment for blasphemy) is that, because of not helping Jesus on his way to crucifixion, a Jew is punished by being doomed to remain homeless, roaming the land on foot, unable to die. The most common legendary plot is of a modern sighting of an aged man of strange appearance, usually bearded and carrying a walking stick. The unusual figure is introduced as a shoemaker named Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, who, when Jesus leaned against his house, drove him away. Jesus then is reported to have said, “I will stay and rest, but you shall go.” Thus the story accounts for why Ahasuerus had to give up his home and his family, and roam the world. Along with blood libel, the Wandering Jew legend was used in Nazi propaganda and other anti-Semitic campaigns. Another connection between the two legends is in the Christian interpretation of the Jewish characters as Christ-killers. In the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus (or Ahasver) is blamed for Christ’s demise, and punished. Set in the context of Christian ambivalence toward Jews as both the theological parents of Christians and their enemies, an Oedipal theory, familiar to Dundes, claimed that the Christian son (Jesus) is opposed to the Jewish father (Ahasuerus). A result of their separation is that Jesus is the father one can love, while the Wandering Jew is the father one can despise and abuse (Isaac-Edersheim 1986). The Jewish character thus becomes transformed into a symbol for all Jews. In blood libel, vengeance is exacted because the bleeding innocent child is viewed as a Christ figure, in contrast to the demonic, predatory, older Jew. Jews were pictured as doing in reality what the Christian worshiper was doing in fantasy: killing a child (son of God) and ritually drinking its blood. (Dundes’s source is Hyam Maccoby’s *The Sacred Executioner: Human Sacrifice and the Legacy of Guilt* [1982], which he excerpted in *The Wandering Jew*). In a casebook he compiled about blood libel, Dundes included the psychoanalytical reading of blood libel as a reflection of the Christian need to reenact the crucifixion of Christ (see Rappaport 1991, excerpted from Rappaport 1975). According to Dundes, Christians directed against others the calumny once directed against themselves. A cognate text that Dundes cited in support of this symbolism—one that led him to an interpretation through projective inversion—was the anti-Semitic belief that Jews profaned the host by piercing the wafer and making it bleed (Strack 1909).

Dundes’s use of projective inversion in the blood libel legend has been applied, in contemporary life, to groups other than Jews. Folklorist Bill Ellis pointed out the way that, beginning in the late twentieth century, rumor-panics about the threat of satanic cults and brainwashed devil-worshippers in America and Great Britain related to Christian Charismatic views of teenagers as social menaces, all of which symbolized dissatisfaction with the decline of religious authority. He observed that the projective inversion suggested by Dundes revealed the “inner stresses” of the persecuting group. Documenting examples of legends involving the blood sacrifices of children among occultists who are mainstreamed into society, Ellis discerned an othering function of the narratives by Christian Charismatics, to show that ordinary people, undetectable in everyday encounters, can

be diabolical, waiting for a chance to satisfy their blood-lust. He concluded that the Charismatic agenda was to scapegoat a "*hidden* source of social evil," reminiscent of the demonization of Jews, that would explain the world's economic, social, and moral problems, and rally citizens to the Charismatic cause. Ellis's interpretation was that "recognizing the existence of this evil would then encourage people to adopt Charismatic religion in spite of its internal problems" (2000). Surveying African legends of sorcerers who were accused of eating souls, and of killing and devouring young children to acquire their vital force, folklorist Véronique Campion-Vincent extended Dundes's use of blood libel as a Christian anti-Semitic legend to the Western ruling-class fears of minorities and deviants. She examined texts of conspiracy theories that were often linked to blood libel. To her, legendary accusations of plots to deliberately infect populations (legends of a conspiracy to spread AIDS among Africans through Western food products) and to undermine sexual restrictions (Muslim beliefs in an aphrodisiac-laced gum given to women to undermine their chastity) took the role of the oppressed against outsiders (2005).

Anti-Semitism was a frequent topic of Dundes's research. Although not religious, Dundes had come from a Jewish lineage. Becoming aware of the Holocaust after World War II, he often related his horror at the Nazi legacy of hate and genocide against Jews. Essays he wrote that deal with anti-Semitism and Holocaust themes included Dundes and Hauschild 1987; Dundes 1987f, 1987e, 1997f, and 1984a; and Banc and Dundes 1990.

For essays on bigotry expressed in folklore against various ethnic groups and women, see Dundes and Abrahams 1987; Dundes 1987d (both of these essays interpret the symbolism of African Americans in joke cycles told by whites); as well as Dundes 1980a, 1997d. See also Dundes's comments on the educational uses of folklore to build tolerance in the first chapter of this volume, "Folklore as a Mirror of Culture."

## The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion

IF ONE WERE TO POLL most folklorists as to whether or not folklore was on the whole a positive force in human culture, I suspect there would be considerable consensus that indeed it was. A tale well told, a song well sung ordinarily give pleasure to the performers themselves and almost certainly to those in the performer's audience. Esthetically speaking, it would appear to be a safe generalization that life is more pleasant because of the charm of folk costume and the delight in participating in a favorite calendrical festival. Shorn of its folkloric dress, daily life would be ever so much more drab and dull than it otherwise is. Yet it is important to keep in mind that there is some folklore which is highly pernicious and even life-threatening. I am thinking of various forms of racist and sexist folklore. Social scientists are normally reluctant to attach value judgments to the data they study, but it is my contention that one can make a convincing case for the label "evil folklore" for selected individual items of tradition.<sup>1</sup>

Among the prime candidates for placement under the rubric of the folklore of evil, I would rank at or very near the top of the list the so-called blood libel legend. Other phrases designating this vicious legend include *blood accusation* and *ritual murder (accusation)*. These terms are used almost interchangeably but there are several scholars who have sought to distinguish between ritual murder and blood libel, arguing that ritual murder refers to a sacrificial murder in general whereas the blood libel entails specific use of the blood of the victim.<sup>2</sup> In the case of alleged Jewish ritual murder, the blood motivation is nearly always present which presumably accounts for the equally common occurrence of both ritual murder and blood libel as labels.

The relevant motif is V361, Christian child killed to furnish blood for Jewish rite. The typical gist of the story line is that one or more Jews murder an innocent Christian infant or child, supposedly to obtain blood required for ritual purposes, e.g., to mix with unleavened bread or to make matzah. The legend has been in constant circulation in oral and written tradition from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries, often leading to deadly consequences for Jews accused of the crime. Like all legends, the blood libel story is traditionally told as true, that is, as an actual historical happening.

Joshua Trachtenberg begins his chapter of *The Devil and the Jews* devoted to a discussion of ritual murder as follows: "Of all the bizarre charges against the Jewish people the one that has enjoyed the hardest tenacity and the utmost notoriety and has produced the direst consequences, is the so called ritual-murder accusation. In its popular version, it foists upon Jewish ritual the need for Christian blood at the Passover. The subject of much study and infinitely more polemics, its absurdity has been conclusively established, but the true nature of the accusation has never been made sufficiently clear."<sup>3</sup> Salomon Reinach made a similar comment: "Of all the accusations which fanaticism and ignorance have used as a weapon against Judaism, there is none which can be compared in terms

of improbability and absurdity to that of ritual murder.<sup>4</sup> Max Grunwald, the pioneer of Jewish folklore studies, had this to say: "Of all the attacks on Jews, there could scarcely be one capable of inflicting a deeper or more painful injury than the blood-lie."<sup>5</sup> Another major figure in Jewish folkloristics, Moses Gaster, in a strong letter to the London *Times* of 2 October 1888 remarked: "Baseless and without foundation as these legends are, they are dangerous even in normal times; how much more in abnormal? Who can foresee to what terrible consequences such a superstition might lead, when the people fanatic with rage and terror, get hold of it and wreak their vengeance on innocent men?"<sup>6</sup> Finally, American ballad scholar Francis James Child used the following language: "And these pretended child-murders, with their horrible consequences, are only a part of a persecution which, with all moderation, may be rubricated as the most disgraceful chapter in the history of the human race."<sup>7</sup>

Anglo-American folklorists are reasonably familiar with the plot, in part because it occurs in ballad form, namely as "Sir Hugh, or, The Jew's Daughter," Child Ballad 155. It has many titles in oral tradition, e.g., "Hugh of Lincoln" or "Little Sir Hugh" among others. In the ballad, a Jewish temptress induces a young Christian boy to enter her garden where she brutally murders him, often taking special care to catch the blood in a basin or cup.<sup>8</sup>

The narrative is also well known because it is one of Chaucer's celebrated *Canterbury Tales*: the Prioress's Tale. The murder of Hugh of Lincoln supposedly occurred in 1255; Chaucer's tale was written near the end of the fourteenth century. The earliest subtype of the legend, according to the standard typology, goes back to before the year 1200 and contains the following elements:

1. A boy sings the responsorium "Gaude Maria" as he passes daily along a street in which Jews dwell, thereby provoking their resentment.
2. He is slain (either by a single Jew or by a group of them in conspiracy), and his body is buried under the earth in the Jew's house, in his garden, in a trench beside the door, in a stable under the manure, etc.
3. The boy's mother, in her search for him, passing by the Jew's door, hears the voice of her child, and with the assistance of friends, a crowd of citizens, forces an entrance.
4. The boy is dug up from the earth alive and unharmed.
5. In consequence of this miracle, the Jew (or Jews) according to most versions is converted.<sup>9</sup>

In other versions of the legend, the boy's body is thrown into a latrine. When the body is recovered, it miraculously continues to sing praise to the Virgin Mary, typically until a Christian priest removes a seed from under the child's tongue whereupon the singing stops (cf. motif V254.7, Murdered boy still sings "Ave" after his death).

It would be one thing if this classic bit of anti-Semitic folklore existed only in ballad or legend form, but the sad truth is that what has been so often described in legend and literature is also alleged to have occurred in life. There have not been tens, but hundreds of actual cases of blood libel tried in various courts in various countries. The map of Western and Eastern Europe and the Near East is profusely dotted with sites where ritual murders were said to have occurred.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, one must keep in mind that many of these allegations led to lengthy trials (often involving torture to extract "confessions" from the accused Jews)

and eventual executions: "In 1171 at Blois, after due trial, thirty-eight Jews were burned at the stake; in 1191, at Bray-sur-Seine, the number of victims reached one hundred."<sup>11</sup> Trials occurred in England, France, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain, and elsewhere. There is no comprehensive or definitive list of all the alleged instances of ritual murder, despite the fact that many of the numerous books devoted to the subject consist of little more than synopses of reported instances. For example, Frank (1901) reviews 172 cases. Monniot (1914) in a chapter entitled "The Facts" discusses more than 100 separate purported cases. Manzini (1930) lists 137 examples. Folklorist Peuckert (1935–36) gives some 175 examples in chronological order while Lyutostanskii (1934) summarizes 144 instances. Trachtenberg gives a round number of 150 charges of ritual murder but suggests these are not more than a "fraction" of the whole.<sup>12</sup>

Although one might have logically assumed that this strange medieval legend might have died out over time and that the number of recorded cases might have declined over the centuries, this does not appear to be the case at all. One observer noted that there seem to have been almost as many blood accusations in the nineteenth century as in all the previous centuries combined and that, for example, between 1887 and 1891, there were twenty-two indictments in Europe alone with some fifty cases of blood libel reported between 1870 and 1935.<sup>13</sup> It should also be remarked that compared to the large number of Jews actually brought to trial on the basis of blood libel or ritual murder charges, only a tiny percentage of the anti-Semitic accusers were ever themselves brought to trial.<sup>14</sup>

Some readers may find it hard to believe that Jews were dragged in front of tribunals accused of having performed ritual murder, often having been first tortured on several occasions so as to elicit a confession of guilt from them. But a considerable number of monographic studies have detailed these heinous trials which have sometimes ended with condemning the "guilty" Jew(s) to death. Some of the trials, especially those which took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries attracted international notice.

One of the earliest trials was in Norwich, England, in 1144. Some even go so far as to claim that it was in England that the ritual murder charge first appeared,<sup>15</sup> and that it was with this account that "the continuous history of the Ritual Murder libel begins."<sup>16</sup> In fifteenth-century Spain, we find "El Santo Nino de la Guardia."<sup>17</sup> It was said that a group of Jews and Catholic converts (from Judaism) had ritually murdered a child at La Guardia, near Avila, in imitation of the Passion of Jesus. This version of the blood libel legend, incidentally, was apparently used as part of the pretext to expel Jews from Spain in 1492.<sup>18</sup> (The infant was supposedly murdered in 1488 with the trial held in 1490 and 1491.) If this is so, then it would demonstrate the extraordinary power of folklore in general and legend in particular to effect political events. An annual ten-day holiday in La Guardia is said to continue to the present day and local clergy are not anxious to close down the La Guardia festival because it is the major village holiday and it brings in valuable income from tourist-pilgrims.<sup>19</sup>) This instance of a festival springing up from a legend shows that the blood libel story remains alive and that it is even celebrated annually in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated instance. For example, the Domingo del Val cult is widespread in Spain. According to tradition, little Domingo was a choir boy whose singing hymns so enraged Saragossa Jews in the 1250s that they secretly crucified him and buried his body. However, his body began to glow mysteriously, and in the twentieth century he is known as the patron saint of choir boys in Spain; in the Seo Cathedral in Saragossa, there is a brightly lighted chapel devoted to him, a chapel which actually serves as a site of destination for modern pilgrimages.<sup>20</sup>



The blood libel legend is not only the basis of ongoing festivals, but it has also been memorialized in church decoration. Legends proclaiming the Jewish “ritual murder” of Christian children or the profanation or desecration of holy wafers are celebrated in various European towns in such artistic form as tapestries or stained glass church windows. For example, there are such windows or pictures or tapestries ornamenting the choir of the Saint Michael-Saint Gudule Cathedral in Brussels, a ceiling fresco in the small Tyrol village of Judenstein, paintings in a church sanctuary in the Vienna suburb of Korneuberg, and a stained glass window in a Paris church chapel.<sup>21</sup> These artistic renderings of the legend provide daily reminders in such locales of the existence (and by extension presumably the truth or historicity) of the story.

One might think that in modern times there would have been protests against festivals or stained glass representations of the legend, but that is not the case. In only a few instances have campaigns waged against this blatantly anti-Semitic folklore had any success. In the Judenstein case, we have perhaps a typical situation. A French Jew, Jean Hauser, whose brother died at Auschwitz, tells of a vacation trip in 1952 in Austria not far from Innsbruck when he took an unexpected detour to an apparently idyllic hamlet of Judenstein (the name meaning, of course, the stone of Jews).<sup>22</sup> Entering the village church, he found in the nave, near the altar, in front of a tapestry, three figures made of wood or wax in a menacing pose with knives in hand surrounding a stone upon which was stretched out a supplicating infant garbed in white. The scene purportedly commemorated the ritual murder of Andrew of Rinn at Judenstein, as Hauser soon discovered when he purchased souvenir postcards in the shop located conveniently and immediately across from the church. He later learned that for nearly two centuries, Judenstein had been a place of pilgrimage where children led by their parents could see for themselves the reconstruction of the assassination by three Jews of a small child of about their own age.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly enough, the Judenstein site had been noted a year earlier in 1951 by famed Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal who wrote a short essay “Tiroler Ritualmord Märchen” in protest. In that report, Wiesenthal voices his dismay at seeing full cars and busloads of school children making annual pilgrimages to Rinn under the tutelage of their religious instructors to see the ritual murder lie depicted as a historical event. Wiesenthal was sufficiently concerned to bother to write a letter of protest about these pilgrimages to Cardinal Innitzer via Innsbruck Bishop Rusch, but he was rebuffed by the latter when he replied that “. . . the Jewish writer goes much too far if he meant to claim that Jews had never done such things.”<sup>24</sup> Prejudice and bigotry die hard if at all. Part of the problem is clearly that of trying to disprove the negative. As one report of Bishop Rusch’s response to a protest from the Jewish community of Linz reads: “The Jews have not up to the present time ever proved that they never committed a parallel crime [of ritual murder].”<sup>25</sup>

After several repeated unsuccessful attempts to halt the pilgrimages, a plaque was finally put up in 1961 in the Judenstein church by a secret order of Pope John XXIII. The plaque stated that the case of Andrew of Rinn was nothing other than a legend and that “it is clear that the event had nothing to do with the Jewish people.” Pope John also directed that the cult of Andrew be suppressed and that the various tableaux, statues, and frescoes be removed from the church. But the villagers of Rinn became incensed. If the statue of the martyred Andrew were removed, they would openly revolt against the church. So despite the papal order, the statue was left intact, and a large fresco on the ceiling of the church showing a group of Jews in the act of burying little Andrew was similarly left alone. Moreover, the pilgrimages continued with the statue of the infant martyr surrounded by

flowers and candles left by those who came to pray from near and far.<sup>26</sup> It may be concluded from this that it is not easy to legislate folklore out of existence. Since the Austrian authorities decided not to suppress the artwork celebrating the legend or to remove the statue of the martyr,<sup>27</sup> it remains to be seen if the installation of the plaque can succeed in defusing a legend which has circulated and flourished for centuries. (Andreas Oxner of Rinn was said to have been killed by Jewish merchants on the “Jew-stone” in 1462 and although he was never officially beatified or canonized by the Catholic church, a plenary indulgence for pilgrims to Rinn was granted on 15 January 1754.)<sup>28</sup> All this attests to the remarkable staying power of folklore. While folklore’s resistance to censorship may be deemed a positive thing, e.g., when folklore opposes political repression or social injustice, this very same strength of tradition also means that dangerous and pernicious racist folklore cannot really be checked or halted either.

There have been so many famous cases and trials involving ritual murder that it is simply not possible to recount them all in a brief overview. In 1840, the Jews of Damascus were accused of the ritual murder of a Capuchin friar, Father Tommaso. To obtain “evidence” that it was a case of ritual murder, some seventy Jews were tortured to secure the necessary confessions.<sup>29</sup> There was a concerted surge of international protest and it did have some effect.<sup>30</sup> The Sultan Abdul Mejid issued a firman or proclamation which said in part:

An ancient prejudice prevailed against the Jews. The ignorant believed that the Jews were accustomed to sacrifice a human being, to make use of his blood at their feast of Passover. . . . the religious books of the Hebrews have been examined by learned men, well versed in their religious literature, the result of which examination is that it is found that Jews are strongly prohibited not only from using human blood but even that of animals. It therefore follows that the charges made against them and their religion are nothing but pure calumnies. . . . we cannot permit the Jewish nation whose innocence of the crime alleged against them is evident) to be vexed and tormented upon accusations which have not the least foundation in truth.<sup>31</sup>

The sultan’s words—like the words uttered by various popes—proved to be insufficient to put the legend to rest.

It should be noted that there were a number of papal bulls on the subject of ritual murder, e.g., in 1247, 1259, 1272, 1422, 1540, as well as Cardinal Ganganelli’s famous investigative report of 1759.<sup>32</sup> Although a number of popes did honestly seek to repudiate and deny the blood libel legend, it is also true that the semi-official Vatican periodical, the *Civiltà Cattolica* from 1881 to 1914 promoted and systematically “documented” the legend,<sup>33</sup> and this was the case as well with other nominally Catholic periodicals, e.g., *La Croix*, in the late nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> In some instances, Catholic priests cleverly used the ritual murder accusation as a weapon against Jews.<sup>35</sup>

In his oft-cited report of 1759, Cardinal Ganganelli, the future Clement XIV (1769–74), reviewed a large number of the alleged ritual murder cases and rejected them all with the exception of Andrew of Rinn (1462) and Simon of Trent (1475). In Ganganelli’s words, “I admit, then, as true the fact of the Blessed Simon, a boy three years old, killed by the Jews in Trent in the 1475 in hatred of the faith of Jesus Christ. . . . I also admit the truth of another fact, which happened in the year 1462 in the village of Rinn . . . in the person of the Blessed Andreas, a boy barbarously murdered by the Jews in hatred of the Faith of Jesus Christ.”<sup>36</sup> Ganganelli generously adjudged his own findings as being generally an

exculpation of the Jews. In his own words, "It should then be concluded that, among so many infanticides imputed by writers to the Jews in hatred of our Holy Faith, only two can be said to be true, since these two only can be said to be proved by authentic proofs after much diligent search and a considerable lapse of time. . . . I do not believe, then, that by admitting the truth of the two facts . . . one can reasonably deduce that this is a maxim, either theoretical or practical, of the Jewish nation; for two isolated events are not enough to establish a certain and common axiom."<sup>37</sup> Vacandard plausibly suggests that Ganganelli's views of these two cases was very probably influenced by the political fact that there had been previous papal decisions authorizing the cults of Simon and Andrew and the miracles attributed to these martyrs.<sup>38</sup>

Among the more famous cases of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are that of Tisza-Eslar, Hungary (1882);<sup>39</sup> the murder of a nineteen-year-old Christian girl, Agnes Hruza, on 29 March 1899, in the Grzina Forest near Polna in Czechoslovakia,<sup>40</sup> a case which fortunately was influenced by the critical intervention of T. G. Masaryk, then a professor at the Czech university in Prague, who would later (1918) be elected as the first president of Czechoslovakia;<sup>41</sup> the ritual murder case in Kiev in 1911 involving a twelve-year-old boy, also known as the Beilis case, which came to trial in 1913;<sup>42</sup> and a case in Massena, New York, in 1928.<sup>43</sup> Many of these and other cases are discussed at length in detailed essays and book-length monographs, many of which reprint actual trial transcripts.<sup>44</sup>

Even in those instances where the accused was eventually found innocent, the very fact that a trial took place in which the basis of the accusation was essentially the existence of the legend demonstrates the undeniable tenacity of the story. Some well-known individuals went on record to state their conviction that the ritual murder story was true. The celebrated traveler and amateur anthropologist-folklorist Sir Richard Burton in his book, *The Jew, the Gypsy and El Islam*, published posthumously in 1898, ends his supposedly objective ethnographic description of the Jews with a list of "what *history* [my emphasis] tells us concerning the Jews, their crimes, and their condemnations,"<sup>45</sup> a list which includes numerous alleged instances of ritual murder. The editor of this curious volume claims he elected to suppress Burton's special "Appendix on Human Sacrifice among the Sephardim or Eastern Jews," the data for which Burton was said to have gathered during the period from 1869 to 1871 when he served as British Consul in Damascus, although one anti-Semitic source claimed that the appendix in question had been suppressed through pressure from influential Jews.<sup>46</sup> The important point is that Burton evidently considered blood libel legends as "history," not fiction.

Unfortunately, the research of folklorists has on occasion been utilized to "prove" the existence and veracity of ritual murder. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a special secret commission to investigate the supposed "use by Jews of the blood of Christian children" and this commission enlisted the aid of folklorist V. I. Dal. He wrote a book in 1844 on ritual murder based upon fieldwork carried out among the so-called Old Believers.<sup>47</sup> Apparently, Dal was himself persuaded by his informants of the truth of the custom and his research was cited in the Kiev trial of Beilis in 1913.<sup>48</sup> It may or may not be a total coincidence that Dal's book was reprinted in 1913.<sup>49</sup>

In similar fashion, Sir James George Frazer's writings were also cited in the Kiev trial. When Frazer learned of this, he immediately wrote a letter to the London *Times* protesting the citation of his research in such a trial. The particular passage from "The Scapegoat"

volume of *The Golden Bough* which had been quoted in the trial was actually published in the *Times* of the day preceding, that is, 10 November 1913. However, a close reading of both the passage itself and Frazer's letter of protest of November 11 reveals considerable equivocality on Frazer's part. The upshot is that he does not really deny the possibility of Jewish ritual murder. His position is rather that if ignorant lower-class Jews did commit such crimes on occasion, that was no reason to hate all Jews. In other words, Frazer's anti-Semitism was tempered by typical British class consciousness: It wasn't Jews who committed the crime, but lower-class Jews. "If all the charges of ritual murder which have been brought against the Jews in modern times are not, as seems most probably, mere idle calumnies . . . the extraordinary tenacity of life exhibited by the lowest forms of superstition in the minds of ignorant people, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, would suffice to account for an occasional recrudescence of primitive barbarity among the most degraded part of the Jewish community."<sup>50</sup> Frazer acknowledges the debate about the issue of historicity, but he hedges by saying, "Into this troubled area I prefer not to enter; I will only observe that, so far as I have looked into the alleged cases, and these are reported in sufficient detail, the majority of the victims are said to have been children and to have met their fate in spring, often in the week before Easter."<sup>51</sup> That statement could hardly be taken as any kind of a repudiation of the truth value of the ritual murder legend! Shortly thereafter, he again fails to take a stand: "If deeds of the sort alleged have been really done by Jews—a question on which I must decline to pronounce an opinion—they would then interest the student of custom as isolated instances of reversion to an old and barbarous ritual which once flourished commonly enough among the ancestors both of Jews and Gentiles. . . . Such customs die hard."<sup>52</sup>

In his letter to the *Times*, Frazer does not alter his position: ". . . while I discuss hypothetically the possibility of an occasional crime instigated by superstition among the dregs of the Jewish as of the Christian population, I stigmatize such accusations against the Jewish people as 'a monstrous injustice,' and speak of all the charges of ritual murder as 'most probably' mere idle calumnies, the baneful fruit of bigotry, ignorance, and malice" [emphasis mine].<sup>53</sup> The continued and insistent use of such words as "occasional" crime and "probably" certainly strongly suggest that Frazer may have harbored some personal conviction that Jewish ritual murder was in part a historical reality.

Some twentieth-century folklorists apparently believe in the historicity of the blood libel legend, e.g., Caro Baroja of Spain<sup>54</sup> and Peuckert of Germany. The latter called for a scientific study to determine which cases were false and which were fact. After having compiled a considerable chronological list of cases, Peuckert comments, "There remains only one question to be answered in connection with this shocking list: For what purpose did the Jews use the blood?"<sup>55</sup> Moses Gaster, in his review of the volume of the *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens* in which Peuckert's extensive entry on "Ritualmord" appeared, remarked scathingly, "It is unfortunate that this volume should be disfigured by a disgraceful article on the foul blood-libel accusation of which author, publisher, and editors ought to be thoroughly ashamed."<sup>56</sup>

If folklorists considered the blood libel legend credible, then it is no wonder that various folk groups did so as well. It is, however, disheartening to realize that the legend has continued to exert its maleficent influence well into the twentieth century. A book published in Russia in 1917 recapitulating the Beilis trial in Kiev in 1913 made the following shameful statement: "The fanatic murder committed by the *Zhidi* [Yids] in order to obtain Christian blood is not a legend even in the twentieth century; it is not a blood libel; it is a terrible reality."<sup>57</sup> The lie and legend also surfaced in the United States. Besides the Massena

incident of 1928, among others, there was also a pamphlet which claimed that the 1932 kidnapping of Charles A. Lindbergh's baby was an instance of Jewish ritual murder.<sup>58</sup>

The striking revival or perpetuation of the blood libel legend in the twentieth century was very much nurtured by Nazi Germany. The legend was obviously made to order for anti-Semitic propaganda efforts. Leaflets circulated in Berlin and Dresden in 1933 telling of ritual murder accusations and calling for the prosecution of Jews.<sup>59</sup> A special ritual murder of *Der Stürmer* was published in May of 1934. The campaign of hate continued throughout World War II. Nazi researcher Hellmut Schramm compiled a massive 475-page collection of blood libel legends entitled *Der jüdische Ritualmord*. Published in 1943, the book struck a responsive chord. Here is part of a letter dated 19 May 1943, and addressed to SS Gruppenführer Dr. Kaltenbrunner, chief of police in Berlin:<sup>60</sup>

Dear Kaltenbrunner,

I have ordered a large number of copies of the book *Jewish Ritual Murder* and I have distributed them to individuals up to the rank of *Standartenführer* [SS colonel]. . . . We should proceed to investigate ritual murders among the Jews with respect to those who have not yet been evacuated. Every case discovered should be submitted to me. We will organize then several trials for this category of crime. The problem of ritual murder ought to be treated by experts in such countries as Rumania, Hungary, and Bulgaria. I have the idea that we could pass on these ritual murder cases to the press in order to facilitate the evacuation of Jews from these countries . . . .

[The letter concludes:] In short, I am of the opinion that we could give anti-Semitism an incredible virulence with the help of anti-Semitic propaganda in English and perhaps even in Russian by giving huge publicity to ritual murders.

[Signed) Heil Hitler!  
Heinrich Himmler

But the blood libel legend did not end with the end of World War II either in Germany or anywhere else where anti-Semitism flourishes. In November of 1960, Golda Meir, addressing Israel's Knesset specifically protested against blood libel charges appearing in the official newspaper of the Soviet Republic of Daghestan, which accused Jews of using the blood of Moslem children for ritual purposes—Moslems being the predominant group in Daghestan. Soviet authorities apparently ignored a delegation sent to Moscow seeking a retraction.<sup>61</sup> The legend may have been Christian in origin but it also can function in a Moslem context. In 1985, Mustafa Tlas, then Defense Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Syria, holder of a law degree and at one time a doctoral candidate at the Sorbonne, published a book in Arabic entitled *The Matza of Zion*, a two-hundred-page book which revives the 1840 Damascus legend. A quote from the book provided by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, which sought to alert people about the existence of this updated version of the legend, reads: "From that moment on every mother warned her child: Do not stray far from home. The Jew may come by and put you in his sack to kill you and suck your blood for the Matza of Zion."

It is not my purpose in this essay to document all the countless cases of blood libel which have occurred or even to demonstrate how the legend may have encouraged prostitutes or unwed Christian mothers to practice infanticide and then blame Jews for the crime. There is evidence that the victims of child abuse or child murder may have been "planted" on Jewish property.<sup>62</sup>

My interest lies in other questions. Why did such a legend arise in the first place? Why has it continued to be popular? Why should it have been believed to be true for at least eight centuries? There isn't a shred of evidence whatsoever to indicate that Jews ever killed Christian children to obtain blood for sacrificial or ritual purposes. We are dealing here not with fact but with fiction, not with history but with folklore, not with life but with legend. But how could such a bizarre legend have come into existence to be used as a continuing basis for cruel prejudice and as a charter for anti-Semitic sentiments?

Psychology is necessary, I submit, for the analysis of fantasy material. Most of the writers who have studied the blood libel legend have tried to treat it historically or rather have tried to show that the legend lacks historicity. I have no quarrel with those of a historical turn of mind, but I remain convinced that historical analysis alone cannot fully explicate the content of fantasy. The question can then be phrased: Why should Christians think that Jews murder innocent children to obtain blood to mix with their matzah?

Some scholars have recognized the need for psychological interpretation in connection with the challenge of illuminating the blood libel legend. Isidore Loeb writing in 1889 remarked that savants searching for a historical origin of the blood accusation would search in vain. "The problem is not one of history, but one of psychology."<sup>63</sup> Among the earliest psychoanalytic interpretations of the blood libel legend was that proposed by Theodor Reik in 1923.<sup>64</sup> According to Reik, the legend represented a displacement of the reproach that the Jews had killed and eaten Christ who was substituting for the father god. The reproach "derives from an unconscious feeling of guilt accomplished by projection. Mankind insofar as it has turned Christian confesses in this legend without any disguise the old tendency to deicide."<sup>65</sup> It is equivalent to the argument between two brothers who have together murdered the father and now want to shift the guilt to each other. But it is not immediately obvious—at least to me—why we are obliged to interpret the legend as an example of killing a father figure, especially keeping in mind that in the vast majority of reported instances, it is specifically a child or infant who is ostensibly murdered.

In a later (1967) psychoanalytic reading of the legend, Seiden argues along similar Oedipal lines to explain ritual murder by suggesting that Christian sons want to kill Jewish fathers—Judaism did historically give rise/birth to Christianity—claiming that this is why the Jew is "the monstrous father who threatens or destroys the lives of his innocent primordial children. He is the guilt-ridden father who must be punished by his imaginary Christian son."<sup>67</sup> In a further articulation of the Oedipal model, Seiden claims, "As a ritual murderer of little children, the medieval Jew thus personifies and reflects the unconscious fear of 'the primordial male child': the child's fear that his father, whose rival he is for the latter's wife (and consequently for his own mother), may one day castrate him."<sup>68</sup> One difficulty here is that the "plot" of the blood libel legend rarely involves a battle for a female mother-wife figure. Moreover, the hypothetical suggestion that Christians want to kill their father-figure Jews would *not* seemingly elucidate such details of the blood libel legend as the Jews requiring Christian infant blood to make matzah.

Rappaport argues in 1975, in yet another psychoanalytic reading of the legend, that "by committing the ritual murder the Jews are to act out the doctrine of the transubstantiation by mixing the blood into the host. . . . By the reference to Passover . . . the ritual murder is acknowledged as infanticide whose repetition is desired for the acquisition of the unlimited life expectancy of the . . . eternal infant on the eternal lap of the eternal virgin."<sup>69</sup> But it is by no means clear why ritual infanticide committed by Jews would ensure eternal life for the infant Jesus.

Finally in 1982, Rosenman suggests that the blood libel legend gives “expression to the adult’s desire to destroy enviable youth.”<sup>70</sup> Adults thus do to infants what they think infants will want to do to adults. According to this formula, adults believe that infants want to devour their (adult) blood and so to forestall that, the adults devour the infants’ blood. Supposedly this parental hatred for their children is projected onto Jews. In addition Rosenman contends, “Also projected upon the Jew in the blood libel is envy of the young sibling who drains all the mother’s nutrient fluids, leaving the mother too depleted to succor the subject.” Here we find the standard psychoanalytic arguments based upon the familiar parent-child as well as sibling rivalries. Yet the semantic fit, if any, between conventional psychoanalytic theory and the actual details of the blood libel legend seems a bit contrived or forced. A Jungian as opposed to a Freudian reading of the legend offers even fewer specifics insofar as a Jungian might simply label the legend as a reflection of the dark or shadow side of man.<sup>71</sup>

I am persuaded that a more appropriate and revealing approach to the legend lies in the Christian need for a Jewish scapegoat and in the psychological process I have termed “projective inversion.”<sup>72</sup> In a brilliant analysis of the legend of the Wandering Jew, Hyam Maccoby has proposed that Christians needed a dead Jesus to worship, but that they also needed someone to kill Jesus, to take the blame or bear the guilt for committing the crime.<sup>73</sup> Although Jews did not kill Jesus (who, of course, was himself a Jew—the Romans did), Christian folklore insists that the Jews were Christ-killers. In this context, the blood libel is simply another example of the same kind of Christian folklore. Christians blame Jews for something which the Christians needed to have happen, a thing which the Jews never did.

Projective inversion refers to a psychological process in which A accuses B of carrying out an action which A really wishes to carry out him or herself. Otto Rank described this process (but without calling it projective inversion) in his path-breaking *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* in 1909. In standard Indo-European biographies, the father tries to kill his own son. According to Rank, it is the son who wishes to kill his own father (along Oedipal wish-fulfillment lines), but since this is a taboo thought, it is expressed in folklore the other way round, namely that the father wishes to kill his son.

This psychological process of “blaming the victim” is also found in female terms. A girl would like to remove or kill her own mother (so as to have her father for herself), but this is a taboo thought. So in fairy tales, it is invariably the mother who tries to remove or kill her own daughter. In the tale of Hansel and Gretel (Aarne-Thompson tale type 327), it is really Gretel’s story. It is a girl-centered tale and therefore it is about a girl’s struggle with her mother. In the original *oral* tale, it is actually Gretel’s *mother* who sends the children out to the forest to die, but the Grimms altered the tale and changed “mother” to “stepmother.”<sup>74</sup> The fight for nourishment involves Gretel and the witch (an evil mother imago) who seduces the children with the orally attractive gingerbread house so that she can eat the children. The struggle ends when Gretel dupes the witch/mother into being burned up in her own oven—a symbol which suggests both the production of food and the production of infants—to have “a bun in the oven” is a conventional euphemism for pregnancy. Or in other fairy tales, the girl’s taboo wish to marry her own father is transformed through projective inversion into a father who wishes to marry his own daughter.

In the case of majority-minority group relations, it is typically the minority group which is victimized by the majority group’s stereotype or image of the minority group. Blacks are victimized by having to conform to white stereotypes of blacks; women are victimized by

having to conform to men's stereotypes of women; and in the present instance, Jews are victimized by having to conform to Christian stereotypes of Jews.

Let us be absolutely clear about this. I am saying that it is Christians, *not* Jews, who would like to commit the blood libel and in a way they do. It is, after all, Romans, not Jews, who killed a savior and it is Christians who use his blood in *their* ritual. The Eucharist is one of the central rituals of Christianity and this is so whether one believes that the bread and wine actually turn into the body of Jesus Christ or simply commemorate Jesus' last supper. Either way, it is an act of patent cannibalism. To incorporate the blood and body of one's savior is at the very least symbolic cannibalism. The doctrine of transubstantiation as found in Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox Eastern churches would seemingly entail literal rather than figurative cannibalism.

The Eucharist is a fairly complex symbolic ritual for it entails not only cannibalism, but also the male usurpation of the female nurturant role. It is men who give their body and blood (no milk is available from males) to nurture their followers. That is presumably why women are not permitted to give the Eucharist. It is a purely male ritual involving the imitation of female nurturance.<sup>75</sup>

For the commission of an aggressively cannibalistic act, participants in the Eucharist would normally feel guilt,<sup>76</sup> but so far as I am aware, no one has ever suggested that a Catholic should ever feel any guilt for partaking of the Host. Where is the guilt for such an act displaced? I submit it is projected wholesale to another group, an ideal group for scapegoating. By means of this projective inversion, it is not we Christians who are guilty of murdering an individual in order to use his blood for ritual religious purposes (the Eucharist), but rather it is you Jews who are guilty of murdering an individual in order to use his or her blood for ritual religious purposes, making matzah. The fact that Jesus was Jewish makes the projective inversion all the more appropriate. It is a perfect transformation: Instead of Christians killing a Jew, we have Jews killing a Christian!<sup>77</sup>

Another indication that projective inversion underlies the blood libel legend comes from the supposed motivation for Jews to commit ritual murder. Almost invariably, the anti-Semitic tract will proclaim that the Jews killed the innocent Christian infant because Jews hate Christians.<sup>78</sup> In the language of the 1759 report of Cardinal Ganganelli, infants Simon and Andrew were killed by the Jews "in hatred of the faith of Jesus Christ."<sup>79</sup> We know that in standard projective inversion, "I hate you" becomes transformed into "You hate me." By transposing subject and object, the initial party is left free to hate his or her enemy and furthermore to be totally absolved of feelings of guilt therefore. So the Christian hatred of Jews is neatly transformed into Jews' hatred of Christians. (Another modern example of this kind of projective inversion occurs when men accused of raping women claim that the women victims actually wanted sexual activity. The undoubted power of this projective inversion is such that rape victims are sometimes made to feel that they, not the rapists, are on trial.)

Projective inversion also serves to illuminate the curious detail in which Jews are alleged to need Christian blood to make matzah. First of all, Jews are not supposed to consume blood. Genesis 9:4: "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." Leviticus 3:17: "It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood." Leviticus 17:12: "There I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood." As many authors have pointed out, Jews are expressly forbidden to incorporate blood and this is why Kosher butchers take great care to drain blood from any animal to be eaten.<sup>80</sup> English folklorist



Venetia Newall goes so far as to suggest that it may have been the non-Jew's misunderstanding of such ritual rules of blood-letting that led to the formation of the blood libel legend in the first place!<sup>81</sup>

The consistency of the Old Testament rule prohibiting the eating of blood may perhaps be usefully contrasted with the New Testament words of Jesus (John 6:53–56): “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” The point is obvious: Whereas Jews are specifically forbidden to drink blood, Christians are specifically ordered to do so. This is why Rappaport is correct when he says, “The paradox of the blood accusation is that the Jews are accused by the Christians of consuming blood which is in accordance with Christian ritual tradition, but is trespassing the Mosaic law.”<sup>82</sup> But now thanks to the device of projective inversion, we can understand this paradox. In a *Christian* projection, the Jews operate under Christian, *not* Jewish, terms. One has only to compare the highly *negative* image of evil Jews standing with basins waiting to collect the blood from the slain innocent child with the very *positive* image in Christian iconography of Joseph of Arimathea who used a chalice (the Holy Grail) to collect the precious blood from the body of Jesus!<sup>83</sup>

The fundamentally Christian aspect of the projection also explains why, as Maccoby reminds us, “the accusation is associated with the Christian festival of Easter, *not* with the Jewish festival of Passover; it was at Easter-time that these alleged crimes took place.”<sup>84</sup> Since Easter is the time of crucifixion (as well as resurrection), this might be a period of maximum or intensified guilt feelings on the part of Christians for eating the body and blood of their god. Other evidence that projective inversion is involved comes from the celebrated case of Simon of Trent in 1475 when Jews were alleged to have admitted that they required “fresh Christian blood” because it was a “jubilee year,” but as Trachtenberg astutely observes, it was a jubilee in the *Catholic* calendar, but not in the Jewish calendar.<sup>85</sup> The Jews under duress and torture had to confess their “crime” in strictly Christian terms.

What about the blood being used or needed to make matzah? If the story needed a functional equivalent for the Christian Eucharist which involved wine (blood) and a wafer, then obviously the nearest thing in Jewish ritual to the Eucharistic wafer is the matzah. The obvious parallels between the Eucharist and the ritual murder/blood libel were pointed out by earlier writers, but were explained solely from a Christian perspective in terms of the Jews intentionally seeking to mock the Passion.<sup>86</sup> Maccoby puts it this way: “The Jews . . . were pictured as doing in reality what the Christian worshipper was doing in fantasy, i.e., killing a child and drinking its blood.”<sup>87</sup>

We can now better understand why the blood libel legend so often gets mixed up with related legends of profaning the host.<sup>88</sup> Using blood to make matzah is in symbolic terms not all that different from making the host bleed. The belief that Jews pierced the wafers making them bleed apparently goes back at least to the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>89</sup> Reports indicate that Jews were persecuted and burned as punishment for this alleged miraculous crime.

Again in terms of projective inversion, it is Christians who profane the Passover meal by claiming that Jews use blood to make matzah. The Last Supper was in all probability a Passover meal, but that historical fact has little to do with the projective fantasy. The Jews did not and do not profane Christian Eucharistic ritual. It is the underlying Christian

guilt for orally incorporating the blood and flesh of their god, commonly perceived as the Christ *child*, which makes them project that guilt to the convenient Jewish scapegoat.

As Maccoby observes in his analysis of the Wandering Jew, Christians want Jews to accept the role assigned to them by Christian fantasy, e.g., as killers of Christ.<sup>90</sup> Recall that in the summary of the major subtype of the Prioress's Tale, the story ends with the Jews being converted. This is straight, unadulterated wishful thinking on Christians' part. The guilty Jew should accept his punishment and be converted to Christianity. This is perhaps why so many blood libel legends involve converted or apostate Jews in their plots. When Jews resisted acting out their assigned part in this overt Christian fantasy, Christians became angry, very angry—just as whites become angry if blacks don't conform to the white stereotype of blacks and just as men become angry if women won't conform to the men's stereotype of women.

The blood libel legend is clearly *not* a significant part of Jewish folklore any more than the legend of the Wandering Jew is part of Jewish folklore.<sup>91</sup> The blood libel legend and the legend of the Wandering Jew are part of the Christian folklore about Jews. Unfortunately, because of the very nature of the legend genre—that is, a story set in the modern, post-creation world and told as true—the blood libel legend has had a devastating effect upon Christian-Jewish relations in Europe and elsewhere.

There is yet one more piece of evidence to be adduced in support of the interpretation of the blood libel legend proposed here. To what extent is it reasonable to assume that the Christian celebration of the Eucharist is perceived as a form of ritual cannibalism or murder? Has this perception existed in a documentable form? Relevant here is the fact that it was the Christians themselves who in the earliest years of Christianity were accused of killing infants to obtain their blood to be used for sacrificial purposes.<sup>92</sup> Presumably, the accusation was made by non-Christians who recognized the bloody cannibalistic underpinnings of the Eucharist, although not everyone agrees with this explanation.<sup>93</sup> These charges were leveled very early in the history of Christianity. Pliny the Younger writing the Emperor Trajan circa A.D. 110 commented that he had interrogated Christian prisoners who adamantly denied that they had murdered children and drunk the blood.<sup>94</sup> Tertullian, born in the middle of the second century, who became one of the most important early Christian writers, referred to Pliny's letter in his famous *Apologeticus*, written near the end of the second century, before articulating the charges in somewhat gory detail. He begins his seventh chapter: "We are called abominable from the sacrament of infanticide and the feeding thereon." Then after directing some well-chosen criticisms at rumor, which is what he aptly labels the blood accusation, he tries in the next chapter to show the absurdity of the rumor by recounting it: "Come, plunge the sword into an infant who is no one's enemy, guilty of no crime, the child of all: or if such bloodshed is another's duty, do you merely stand by a human dying before he has really lived; wait for the flight of the new life; catch the scarce-formed blood; with it soak your bread, and enjoy your meal." Tertullian even imagines someone in charge of the ritual murder giving verbal instructions: "You have need of a little child, still soft, with no knowledge of death, who will smile under your knife; also bread, in which to gather the blood sauce."<sup>95</sup> This enables us to understand a wave of persecutions of Christians in southern France in A.D. 177 in which mobs accused Christians of cannibalism. Reports of the Eucharist led to rumors that Christians had consumed someone's blood and flesh.<sup>96</sup>

Anyone the least bit familiar with the simplistic attempts of small children to counter insults by turning the very same insults back upon the initial insulters ought to be able

to see how Christians might try to deflect the blood libel accusations aimed at them by claiming that it was instead another group which was guilty of performing ritual murder. In one scholar's words, "Unfortunately Christians, after the Christian religion became dominant, directed against others the calumny once directed against themselves."<sup>97</sup> As we have noted, through projective inversion, it was not Christians who were guilty of murdering the Jewish son of a Jewish father god, but it was Jews who were guilty of murdering a Christian innocent (usually a boy).

Before the advent of psychoanalytic theory and the identification or formulation of such concepts as projective inversion, as defined here, some scholars did intuitively understand the basic psychodynamics of the blood libel legend. The Dutch jurist and philosopher Hugo Grotius, in a letter dated 12 December 1636, suggested that the ritual murder accusation derived simply from the Christian hatred of the Jews and that the accusation was strangely similar to comparable accusations made against the early Christians themselves.<sup>98</sup> Isidore Loeb who was one of the first to recognize that the problem was one of psychology, not history, spoke astutely about the popular obsession with the mystical idea of blood. "Those who accuse the Jews accuse or betray themselves. The Jew is there only to put into action the dream [nightmare] they carry within themselves. They burden them [the Jews] with playing in their place the drama which simultaneously attracts and terrifies them."<sup>99</sup> Loeb appears to have understood that the blood libel legend is a Christian fantasy in which Jews were forced to act against their will.

In much the same way, twentieth-century scholars have understood the issue even if they fail to utilize such psychoanalytic concepts as projective inversion. For example, René Girard in his provocative 1987 essay "Generative Scapegoating" does not make specific mention of the blood libel legend, but he speaks eloquently of the "imaginary crimes and real punishments" of victims, and more to the point, he draws attention to the role reversal of victimizer and victim: "The victimizers see themselves as the passive victims of their own victim, and they see their victim as supremely active, eminently capable of destroying them."<sup>100</sup> So many Christians saw and for that matter still see the Jews.

The sad truth about the blood libel legend is not so much that it was created—the need for such a psychological projection on the part of Christians is evident enough—but that it was believed to be true and accepted as such and that the lives of many individual Jews were adversely affected by some bloodthirsty Christians who believed or pretended to believe in the historicity of the blood libel legend.

Let me end as I began by remarking once again that not all folklore constitutes a positive and constructive force in human society. Folklore is powerful fantasy material and it unfortunately has the capacity to act as a dangerous and all too potent force for evil. I wish I could be sanguine about the blood libel legend's eventually dying out. But the undeniable persistence of this pernicious legend for the past eight centuries must give one pause. Louis Ginzberg, the celebrated student of Jewish legends, probably summed up the problem best in the first sentence of his unpublished 24-page "A Reply to Mr. Pranaitis," inspired by the Beilis case in Kiev: "August Dillmann, the famous oriental scholar and Professor of Hebrew at the Berlin University, once remarked, 'I do not see any use in refuting the Blood-Accusation; those who spread it do not believe it, and the fanatical who believe it do not read the refutation, nor would it have any weight with them if they would read it.'<sup>101</sup>

## Notes

1. See Rysan 1955.
2. Cf. Cohen 1982:244; Cohen 1983: ln.2. Trachtenberg also devotes separate chapters to ritual murder (1966:124–39) and to the blood accusation (1966:140–5).
3. Trachtenberg 1966:124.
4. Reinach 1892:161.
5. Grunwald 1906:5.
6. Gaster's letter is cited in full in Newall 1975:198–200.
7. Child 1962:240–41.
8. There is considerable scholarship devoted to this ballad. See Michel 1834a and 1834b; Halliwell-Philips 1849 (drawn largely from Michel); Hume 1849; Jacobs 1893–94; Gresham 1934; Beckwith 1951; Woodall 1955; Ridley 1967; Hippensteel 1969; Bebbington 1971; and Langmuir 1972. It should be noted that the blood libel was the subject of folksongs in other countries as well, e.g., Germany. See Lewin 1906 and Hsia 1988:59–60. For a general account of the image of the Jew in German folksong, see Kynass 1934.
9. This summary follows the research of Brown 1906. For a further consideration of Crown's typology, see Statler 1950. For an entrée into the scholarship on the Prioress's Tale, see Morris 1985. Chaucerians have argued to what degree Chaucer himself was anti-Semitic as opposed to poking fun at anti-Semitism (cf. Friedman 1974; Archer 1984; Rex 1984; and Boyd 1987:43–50).
10. For such a map, see Ben Sasson 1971:1125–26.
11. Poliakov 1974:60. There is some question about the exact number of victims in the Blois incident. See Chazan 1968:15n.4 who mentions thirty-one or thirty-two martyrs.
12. Trachtenberg 1966:125.
13. Kubovy 1964:23–24.
14. Cf. Bloch 1973:121, 353.
15. Roth 1933:523; cf. Schultz 1986:6. For discussions of William of Norwich, see Berger 1897; Anderson, 1964; Langmuir 1984.
16. Maccoby 1936.
17. See Loeb 1887; Lea 1889; and Baer 1966:398–423.
18. Trachtenberg 1966:134; Baer 1966:423; and Shepard 1968:78.
19. Anon. 1975:284.
20. *Ibid.*, 283–84; cf. Bishop 1974:105.
21. Anon. 1975:283.
22. Hauser 1969: 120–22; Anon. 1975:284.
23. Hauser 1969:123.
24. Wiesenthal 1951.
25. Despina 1971a:22.
26. *Ibid.*, 26–27. The plaque at Judenstein is reminiscent of similar plaques installed at other sites of martyrs allegedly the victims of Jewish ritual murder. For example, a notice at the shrine of Little Saint Hugh in the Cathedral Church of Saint Mary in Lincoln reads: "Trumped-up stories of 'Ritual Murders' of Christian Boys by Jewish communities were common knowledge throughout Europe during the Middle Ages and even much later. These fictions cost many innocent Jews their lives. Lincoln had its own legend, and the alleged victim was buried in the cathedral in the year 1255.  
Such stories do not redound to the credit of Christendom, and so we pray: Remember not, Lord, our offenses, nor the offenses of our Forefathers." See Boyd 1987:vii.
27. Braun 1973. The importance of such artwork is also attested by Mary Anderson's account of how her curiosity was piqued by a damaged painting she noticed on the roodscreen of an East Anglian church in the village of Loddon and how it led her to write a book on the "Strange Death of William of Norwich." Again the scene depicted three Jews murdering a child. One has pierced the child's side with a knife and is holding a basin to catch the blood. See Anderson

- 1964:14. For a striking series of illustrations of the martyrdom of Simon of Trent evidently printed in 1475, the same year of his death, see Tessadri 1974:164–65. Similar illustrations appear in children's textbooks. For example, one popular booklet in Spain designed to prepare children for their first communion contains the story of Saint Domingo de Val accompanied by a picture of four Jews and a child. Two Jews are nailing the child to a wall while the other two catch his blood in wineglasses. See Shepard 1968: 74 n.8. See also Bishop 1974 for comparable materials in Italian and French teaching materials.
28. Despina 1971a:17. One may compare this case with that of the cult of Simon of Trent (1475) which was not officially abrogated until October of 1965 when the Archbishop of Trent relayed such a notification from the Vatican Commission for Religious Customs and Observances. See Z. 1967. Cf. the removal of the Werner relief from the Werner chapel in Oberwesel in 1968—the relief celebrated the ritual murder of “Good Werner of Bacharach” in 1287. See Petzoldt 1986:41. For other accounts of Andrew of Rinn, see Hruby 1960–62; and Hauer 1985.
  29. Hyamson 1952:49. The Damascus incident of 1840 inspired J. B. Levinsohn to compose a fictional dialogue between a Greek Orthodox Priest and a Rabbi in which the blood libel is discussed at length. See Levinsohn 1841.
  30. Ezekiel 1900; Jacobs 1902; Meisl 1930; and Helfand 1980.
  31. Hyamson 1952:70, 71.
  32. For the papal bulls, see Anon. 1900; Strack 1909:250–59; for an English language text of Cardinal Ganganelli's 1759 report, see Roth 1934; for additional references to Ganganelli's findings, see Szajkowski 1963: 207n.33.
  33. Klein 1974.
  34. Sorlin 1967: 296n.114.
  35. Cohen 1982:43–44; cf. Burbage 1916.
  36. Roth 1934:83.
  37. *Ibid.*, 85.
  38. Vacandard 1912:353, 359; cf. Poliakov 1974:272.
  39. Wright 1883; Handler 1980.
  40. Nussbaum 1947; Rychnovsky 1949.
  41. For details of Masaryk's involvement, see Rychnovsky 1949.
  42. This is one of the best-known cases of ritual murder in the twentieth century. The best account is to be found in Tager 1935. For other discussions, see Polak 1949; Szajkowski 1963; Rogger 1966; Samuel 1966; Zeitlin 1968; and Giffin 1980. The case was the inspiration for Malamud's novel *The Fixer* (1966), which in turn was the basis for an American (MGM) film with the same title released in 1968. There is a long history of ritual murder trials being the source of poems, novels, and dramas. The Endingen incident of 1470, for example, evolved into a full-fledged folk drama. Trachtenberg 1966:149 claims that the Endingen *Judenspiel* was one of the most popular German dramas of the seventeenth century. See also Hsia 1988:36–40 for more detail. In the same way, the La Guardia incident in Spain in 1490 inspired a drama by Lope de Vega. For a discussion of this 1605 play, see Shepard 1968:71.
  43. See Friedman 1978; Jacobs 1979. For other American instances of blood libel, see Duker 1980.
  44. There are simply too many individual case studies to list. See, for example, Chazan 1968 for Blois (1171); Molinier 1883 for Valréas (1247); André-Michel 1914 for a case in 1297; Esposito 1938 for Savoy (1329); Kracauer 1888 and Hsia 1988:14–41 for Endingen (1470); and Menestrina 1903; Eckert 1964; and Tessadri 1974 for the case of Simon of Trent (1475), etc. For a sample of the enormous bibliography devoted to the subject, see Chwolson 1901 and Hayn 1906, who lists 121 separate items, mostly from German sources. For later German references, see Lehr 1974 and Hsia 1988. For Russian cases, see Lintostanskii 1934; Wolpe 1961; and Slutsky 1972.
  45. Burton 1898:120; for the list, see 120–29.
  46. *Ibid.*, xv; Monniot 1914:315; see also Holmes 1979:49–62; and Holmes 1981:269–70.

47. Slutsky 1972: 1129; Baer 1972:26.
48. Polak 1949: 265.
49. Baer 1972:26.
50. Frazer 1913b:395–96.
51. *Ibid.*, 395.
52. *Ibid.*, 396.
53. Frazer 1913a; cf. Holmes 1981:282n.27.
54. Shepard 1968:74.
55. Peuckert 1935–36:734.
56. Caster 1937:324.
57. Tager 1935:225.
58. Anon. 1938:8; Jacobson 1948:127–28.
59. Tager 1935:xviii.
60. For the full text of the letter, see Poliakov and Wulf 1959:292.
61. Wolpe 1961:22; Newall 1973:113.
62. Anderson 1964:97; Rappaport 1975:109. For a consideration of the blood libel legend from the perspective of parental treatment or mistreatment of children, see Schultz 1986 (pp. 273–303 in this volume). For discussion of how “evidence” can be trumped up, see Strack’s “The Pretended Evidence of History for Jewish Ritual Murder” 1909:169–235; or Bloch’s “Attempts at Fabricating ‘Ritual Murder’ 1973:365–73; or the intricate details of the effort to frame Beilis in Tager 1935.
63. Loeb 1889:184.
64. Reik 1923:128–129.
65. *Ibid.*, 129; cf. Rappaport 1975:113; Rosenman 1977:21.
66. Reik 1923:129; cf. Rappaport 1975:113–14.
67. Seiden 1967:78.
68. *Ibid.*, 145–46.
69. Rappaport 1975:115.
70. Rosenman 1982:243.
71. Liefmann 1951:494.
72. Dundes 1976.
73. Maccoby 1982:167; cf. Hasan-Rokem and Dundes 1986:245–46.
74. Ellis 1983:73.
75. This feature of the Eucharist was overlooked by Schuster 1970 in his psychoanalytic consideration of the ritual.
76. Rosenman 1977:19 mentions “the discomfiture that the Mass, so close to the parricidal crime, calls forth in its celebrants” in connection with the legend of the Jewish desecration of the consecrated wafer, but not with the blood libel legend.
77. Schultz 1986:13 does rightly insist that the blood libel is the product of projection, but she does not explain the legend in terms of projective inversion.
78. For a typical statement, see Desportes 1889:277–85.
79. Roth 1934:83.
80. Cf. Strack 1909:124 for additional biblical citations regarding the prohibition against consuming blood. The lack of Old Testament or talmudic sanctions for Jews requiring Christian blood posed no problem for the true anti-Semite. The sanctions came, supposedly, by means of a secret oral tradition passed on from generation to generation. Cf. Desportes 1889:252–53.
81. Newall 1973: 114. This speculation is somewhat analogous to Roth’s conjecture that the blood accusation arose from Christian misunderstanding of the Jewish feast of Purim. See Roth 1933.
82. Rappaport 1975:103.
83. Cf. Bebbington 1971:33.
84. Maccoby 1982:153.

85. Trachtenberg 1966: 137.
86. Roth 1933:525; Trachtenberg 1966:131.
87. Maccoby 1982:159, 155.
88. Cf. Browe 1926; Despina 1971b.
89. Strack 1909:59.
90. Maccoby 1982:167; Cohen 1983.
91. But see Noy 1967 and Alexander 1987 for Jewish texts of the blood libel legend. There is also the curious figure of the Golem (Motif D1635), a clay anthropoid mannikin which in Prague was thought to have been created by a rabbi who employed it to expose ritual murder accusations against Jews and to apprehend the instigators of these blood libels. Cf. Bloch 1925:37; Goldsmith 1981; and Sherwin 1985. I am indebted to Professor Dan Ben-Amos of the University of Pennsylvania for these references.
92. Levinsohn 1841:171; Labriolle 1913; Schultze 1953–54; Cohn 1977:1–9.
93. Cf. Harris 1914:200. Cohn 1977:8, however, is confident of this interpretation when he says, “As it happened, there was one feature of Christian ritual which could easily be interpreted as cannibalistic: the Eucharist.” In the light of the argument of the present essay, I am very tempted to see a possible correlation between the point in time when the doctrine of transubstantiation first arose and the initial flourishing of the blood libel legend in the twelfth century. The basic idea of transubstantiation apparently existed as early as the ninth century but it was not fully adopted until the Fourth Lateran council in 1215. Strack (1909:59) suggests a connection between the doctrine and the legends of Jews desecrating the host, but not the blood libel legend itself.
94. Pliny 1925:168 (letter XCIV).
95. Tertullian 1917:25, 29.
96. Schuster 1970:231.
97. Strack 1909:283.
98. Balaban 1930:88.
99. Loeb 1889:184–85.
100. Girard 1987:87, 91.
101. Pranaitis was an obscure Catholic priest who had written a pamphlet purporting to prove that the practice of ritual murder was advocated by Jewish religion and he had been called as an expert witness in the trial of Beilis in 1913. For details, see Tager 1935:199–212; Polak 1949:266; and Samuel 1966:87. A copy of Louis Ginzberg’s unpublished essay is located at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York City.

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