

Left Behind, the Holocaust, and that Old Time Antisemitism

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THE *LEFT BEHIND* SERIES, WRITTEN BY TIM LAHAYE AND JERRY Jenkins, begins with a depiction of the Rapture, an event in which believing Christians vanish from the earth and are taken to Christ. The opening scenes take place on a jet liner, where a number of passengers suddenly disappear, leaving behind “fastidious” piles of clothing and articles, such as hearing aids and glasses. The next ten volumes provide a fictionalized enactment of the Tribulation, the time of plagues and horrors before the Apocalypse. Finally, in volume twelve, *Glorious Appearing*, Christ returns as Judge at the End of Days, joining all believers together to him. At this time all unbelievers and those who converted too late suffer violent, gruesome, and eternal deaths. The novels, which have an explicitly evangelizing purpose, espouse dispensational premillennialism, a view of the End-times developed in the nineteenth century (Kilde 49–70; Shuck (2005) 29–52). The *Left Behind* series debuted in 1995 and has sold over 60 million copies. *Desecration*, which appeared in late 2001, “was the best-selling fiction title in the United States in that year, the first year since 1995 that John Grisham [had] not held that distinction” (Forbes 8). The series has sparked numerous other projects, including study guides, a series for children, two films, and a recently released video game.¹

At the center of the thrillers is the “Tribulation Force,” composed of three characters who are “left behind” by the Rapture: Rayford Steele, a top pilot; his daughter, Chloe Steele, a former Stanford student; and Buck Williams, a renowned young journalist who eventually marries Chloe. After they learn that the mass disappearances of the

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Rapture are divinely caused, Rayford, Chloe, and Buck quickly come to the faith. They join together to fight the forces of the Antichrist, attempting to convert as many as they can before what they know will be Jesus' absolute triumph. As their movement grows, they are joined by converts from Judaism who also become main characters in the series. Tsion Ben Judah is a rabbi of hyperbolic intellectual achievements, who after three years of intensive study, determines that Jesus is the Messiah. The proclamation of this thesis on Israeli television leads to the murder of his wife and children. Another Jewish character, David Hassid, a young tech whiz, also of astounding ability, acts as a mole within the "Global Community," the totalitarian international organization of the Antichrist. Chaim Rosenzweig, a prominent Israeli, is a late convert who finally becomes the leader of the "Remnant" of Jews who accept Jesus, based on the 144,000 converts prophesied in Revelation 7:4 and 14:1, 3.

The *Left Behind* novels attempt to bring older Christian traditions into a contemporary context (Frykholm 4). The novels attempt to deal, post-Holocaust, with the antisemitism that has been tightly bound to Christian apocalypticism for centuries through depictions of Jews as servants of the Antichrist. The Holocaust is a central subtext in *Left Behind*; it comes to function typologically in the novels, as the historical twentieth-century genocide is depicted as a mere foreshadowing of the far more significant threat to the Jews that it is to come in the Apocalypse. These novels imply that the Antichrist is the new Hitler, and that in the face of this coming annihilation the Jews have new saviors: believing Christians. These depictions, however, do not transcend, but merely re-inscribe centuries-old antisemitic tropes. By comparing the depiction of the Jews in *Left Behind* to that in a medieval "blockbuster bestseller," *Mandeville's Travels*, which provides a prime example of the classic portrayal of the Jew as apocalyptic menace, this article will demonstrate how *Left Behind's* inversion of the Jew from perpetrator to victim reveals the novels' philosemitism to be simply the reverse face of the antisemitic coin.

Christian supersessionism animates the core of the portrayal of Jews in the *Left Behind* novels. Supersession is the idea that Christianity is the rightful fulfillment of Jewish prophecy and that, after the advent of Christ, Judaism and its adherents were left tied to an old, stale set of beliefs and practices, which Christianity then superseded. Supersession acknowledges Jews and Judaism only in the context of

their eventual conversion to Christianity. Supersessionist understandings of the Jews stretch back into patristic theology. In what has been called a statement of “toleration,” Augustine writes that post-Crucifixion Jews should be allowed to survive so as to act as reminders of faith to Christians.

In this scheme, Jews exist only for the benefit of Christians; they are scattered across the earth as punishment for their mistreatment of Christ. Christians are not to annihilate them, but rather should allow them to live in servitude until the time that the prophesied Remnant of Revelation will be converted to Christianity. Although the fundamental lack of respect for contemporary Judaism inherent in the supersessionist view cannot be absolutely equated with antisemitism, it is a fundamental part of Western antisemitic discourse. One cannot, for example, simply equate Ann Coulter’s recent remarks about Jews needing to be “perfected” with calls for annihilation, but the two are both part of a long-standing antisemitic continuum (Deutsch).

The Holocaust in *Left Behind*

Sherryll Mleynek has argued that the *Left Behind* “books are ‘stained’ by the authors’ failure to deal with the Holocaust” (15). Mleynek’s overall critique of the novels’ antisemitism is sound, but the novels actively appropriate the Holocaust as a typological precursor of the Apocalypse. The Holocaust haunts *Left Behind*, and the novels do, at least in one sense, “deal with the Holocaust” by making the Tribulation Force into Christian saviors of threatened Jews, a kind of born-again guerilla army of “Righteous Gentiles.”

The links between the Antichrist and the Nazis in *Left Behind* are infrequent but explicit. The Antichrist’s victims are tortured and murdered in special concentration camps that Tribulation Force characters link directly to the Holocaust. A conversation between a German believer, the sometimes comically portrayed Otto Weser, and the tough, earthy Tribulation Force member Mac McCullum lays bare the reality of what the Antichrist plans for the Jews:

“To his people he is referring to the meetings with the sub-potentes, however, as the final solution to the Jewish problem.”

“To a German, that has to resonate with your history books, eh, Mr. Weser?”

“Frankly, sir, our history books don’t read the same as those of others who write about us, but I know what you mean, yes. We’ve been down this road before.” (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon* 223)

Despite the vagueness of this reference to German history books, a direct connection to the Holocaust here is clear through the allusion to a “final solution.” Placing these words in the mouth of a German, followed by Mac’s responses, ensures that readers will make the connection between Hitler and the Nazis and the Antichrist.

The evocation of the Holocaust is fullest in the eleventh volume, entitled *Armageddon*, which narrates the martyrdom of the key character, Chloe Steele. All those who refuse to take the Mark of the Antichrist are executed with guillotines, euphemistically referred to as “morale monitors” by the Antichrist’s forces, the “Global Community.” Chloe is captured and horribly mistreated. As she makes her way to the guillotine, she sees observant Jews also awaiting execution for refusing to accept the Antichrist. Details of Jewish piety are sentimentalized, with descriptions of yarmulkes crudely fashioned from “scraps of cloth” or cardboard by condemned Jews who have stenciled stars of David on their arms (243). As Tsion notes of these victims: “Their crime? They are Jewish” (276). This formulation directly echoes the ways in which the racist annihilation of the Holocaust is often described, as does reference to the Antichrist’s attempt to turn a Jewish refuge into the “largest Jewish concentration camp in history” (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Remnant* 225, qtd. in Dombek 411).

The Nazis are named directly in a scene involving a Jewish convert to Christianity, David Hassid. The young Israeli has roots in Poland that are never explained, but which tie him both to the Hassidic tradition that his name evokes and to the Jewish communities in Poland decimated in the Holocaust. After recovering from an injury, Hassid reluctantly dons the uniform of the Antichrist’s forces once more. Regarding himself in the mirror in this garb he imagines himself in the place of a Nazi soldier:

He stopped by his quarters for a fresh uniform, checked the mirror, and realized how incongruous he looked. His youthful, Israeli features and dark complexion went well with the tailored, form-fitting garb of the senior GC staff. But as he studied his visage, he wondered if any of the Nazis he’d seen in history books hated the swastika on their snappy uniforms as much as he hated

the insignia of the Global Community. (LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Mark* 163)

The uniform of the Global Community has previously been described as odious to those believers who must wear it to function as spies, but here the antipathy is bound up not only with the wearer's belief, but with his Jewish ancestry, an ancestry visible, it seems, in his dark, "Israeli" features. Despite a shadowy Polish background that would seem to link him to Holocaust survivors, David is distanced from the Holocaust; he knows it only from reading about it. He is so removed from this Jewish experience that he can momentarily ponder the mindset of an unwilling executioner rather than a victim, an identification that, the text implies, stems from the connections between the Nazis and the Global Community.

The Tribulation is the new Holocaust for the Jews; those not converted to Christianity will be persecuted again on an even more massive scale. In *Left Behind*, therefore, the Holocaust figures typologically. For the characters in *Left Behind* it is relegated to the past, to be recounted only in history books. For readers it is meant to prefigure the coming Holocaust of the Antichrist. The coming Holocaust, LaHaye and Jenkins' imaginative rendering of the Book of Revelation, is living history and the bridge between these two Holocausts is the Jews. David Hassid's sense of himself in this history is mediated through his Jewishness, a heritage that allows him to travel back and connect with one of the few specific secular historical events referenced in the twelve volumes of *Left Behind*.

In this new Holocaust, the Christians are clearly on the side of right. The series strives to emphasize that only the Antichrist and his followers are antisemites. In stark contrast, the Christian heroes of the series are the Antichrist's sworn foes and they fight valiantly to save Jewish lives and, more importantly, Jewish souls. At the battle of Armageddon, Buck Williams is "trying to keep Jews alive." These efforts are among those that result in his death (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon* 384). In centuries of Endtimes narratives Jews are the conspirators and Christians the potential victims. In *Left Behind*, the secret conspirators are the Christians. They are not malevolent plotters, but, as Kristen Dombek has observed, heroic trickster figures who manage despite incredible odds to elude and vex the Antichrist (65). The hapless Jews, who have far more brain than brawn, require the help of a particularly muscular Christianity.

In *Left Behind*, the legend of the Jews as servants of the Antichrist is turned on its head. The *Left Behind* Antichrist, Nicolae Carpathia, is not a Jew from the tribe of Dan, as apocalyptic commentators from the Middle Ages to Jerry Falwell would have it; instead he has, like Dracula, a Romanian background. The Antichrist singles out for an especially terrible fate those Jews who refuse to take his Mark. In contrast with the mixed reference to Jews and/or Israelis by the narrator and the Christian characters in the series, Nicolae Carpathia consistently refers to “the Jew” and the “Jewish problem.” While direct mention of the Holocaust is infrequent across the twelve volumes, the treatment of the Jews and of Carpathia’s regime is detailed in ways such as these which unmistakably evoke it.

The authors of *Left Behind* attempt to deal with the problematic legacy of Christian culpability and guilt in the wake of the Holocaust by depicting a prophetic vision in which Christians save imperiled Jews. Instead of transcending or escaping this legacy, however, they simply reinscribe it. Antisemitism in the Christian apocalyptic tradition in its powerful and influential medieval forms, operates, like *Left Behind*, on a cosmic scale. The Antichrist, in league with the Jews, will attack Christians wherever they can be found. As depicted in a wide variety of Latin and vernacular medieval texts, including the *Jour de Judgment* (Roy) and Hans Folz’s *Ein Spil von der Herzog von Burgund*, the dimensions of the threat are expressed in terms of a preordained time, the Jews’ role at the Endtimes, and through a vision of infinite destruction in a vast space.

Left Behind and that Old Time Antisemitism

The medieval vision of Jew as apocalyptic destroyer in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* is relevant to an analysis of *Left Behind*, both because it might be called a medieval “bestseller” and because it is an important depiction readily accessible to non-specialists. *Travels*, a narrative that purports to describe the journey of Sir John Mandeville from England to the Holy Land and then eastward into China, originated in the mid-fourteenth century and exists in over 250 extant manuscripts and almost 130 printed editions in ten languages (Braude 136). Known to have been included in the libraries of Christopher Columbus and Leonardo da Vinci, *Travels* is sometimes noted by modern critics for its relatively positive portrayal of

non-Christians who are often viewed in the mold of the “noble” or “virtuous” pagan, even as their lack of faith is seen as regrettable. The Jews in *Travels*, however, come off as frankly sinister: *Travels* depicts Jews as Christ-killers and well-poisoners, using the legend of the Lost Ten Tribes locked up in the Caspian mountain range awaiting release by the Antichrist to explain why Jews speak Hebrew. Elsewhere when the text describes foreign languages, including Hebrew, it provides alphabets, albeit faulty ones, for such groups as the Chaldeans and the Saracens. Only in the case of the Jews, although, is linguistic difference part of a conspiratorial threat. According to *Travels*, Jews across the world speak Hebrew so that they can band together at the end of time to destroy Christians:

If it should happen that any of them get out, they can speak no language except Hebrew and so cannot speak with other men when they come among them. Folk in the country nearby say that in the time of the Antichrist those Jews will sally out and do much harm to Christian men. And so all the Jews in the different parts of the world learn to speak Hebrew, for they believe that the Jews who are enclosed among those hills will know that they are Jews (as they are) by their speech when they arrive. And then they will lead them into Christendom to destroy Christian men. For those Jews say they know by their prophecies that the Jews enclosed among the hills will issue out and the Christians will be under their sway, just as they have been under Christian domination.²

Hebrew isolates the Jews as much as their mountain prison does. They have been displaced from Jerusalem, the “holy and excellent navel of the world” with which the text begins. Jerusalem, the text tells us, is “excellent” because “it is in the middle.” Because of this central location Christ chose to endure his Passion there (43). *Travels* continually references the Passion through its Jewish agents, who have killed Jesus because they “believed they would have peace when Christ was dead, for they said that He caused strife among them” (47). They have also tortured him, created his cross, then stolen and hidden it. For these deeds, Mandeville informs the reader, they are considered accursed by Christians and Muslims alike (105). This Jewish perfidy is not limited to the past. The narrator also claims to have first-hand knowledge of contemporary Jewish treachery, as one of them has confessed to him an attempt to murder “all Christendom” with a poison derived from an exotic tree (132).

Travels shows Jews displaced from the center to the margins, contained within mountains and put off until a foretold Endtime. But they also exist as a continual threat, since the Jews who conspired against Christ conspire murderously once again. Reference to the occasional Jewish prison break creates the sense that this threat is only narrowly contained, with the Jews continually clamoring and plotting to be let loose on innocent Christians. Through such depictions, the Jews as a group come to bear the true emotional burden of the horror of the Apocalypse. In these narratives Jews are not human victims, but agents of destruction. In this way they absorb much of what is terrifying in apocalyptic prophecy. God is not punishing Christians, rather the Jews are. Medieval apocalyptic narratives take what can be seen as an internal threat, Jews in the midst of Christians (along with Jewish messianic expectation that is at odds with Christian belief), and place this threat at the end of time on the margins of the earth.

Despite their representation as a lurking and continual threat, the Jews in *Travels* are trapped in stasis. They have failed to recognize Jesus as Messiah; they will be led to follow the Antichrist; and it is only at the end of time that some will be redeemed. The Jews are figured as locked in the time of their own spiritual error, which is the cause of their persecution and their exile. Medieval Christians needed to see the Jew as frozen in the past of the Old Testament. This type of thinking is evident in the polemics launched against the Talmud in the thirteenth century, when church and secular authorities burned it and other Jewish texts viewed as demonstrating the Jews' "heretical" refusal to adhere to the Old Testament God had granted them (Cohen *Friars* 51–76). These static Jewish figures, themselves throwbacks to the "lost" tribes, need to be banished not only to the edges of the Christian imagination, but literally to the edges of the earth, where they are walled in and just barely contained. When they do lurk within Christendom, they are seen as threatening the lives of all Christians, especially the most innocent, as in ritual murder accusation.

Tracing the Antisemitic Tradition in *Left Behind*

Reading the *Left Behind* novels in light of *Mandeville's Travels* demonstrates how they invert earlier tradition. This inversion and the shift

in characterization of the Jews from active aggressor to passive victim does not significantly alter the essential supersessionist premise of previous Endtime narratives, in which Jews also exist as mere instruments for Christian revelation.

In *Left Behind*, the Jews are also locked up, but, in an inversion of centuries of legend, they are sealed away for their own protection. Persecuted mercilessly by the Antichrist, the Jews are led by the convert Chaim Rosenzweig, reborn as the prophet “Micah,” to sanctuary in the ancient city of Petra, where they are walled off and protected. Here, the Jews of *Left Behind* become latter-day versions of the children of Israel in the desert. Using Petra as the shelter for the Jewish Remnant is not original to *Left Behind*, but is part of the premillennialist tradition. The idea was made popular by evangelist W.E. Blackstone, who, it has been said, spent \$8,000 in the 1920s to have copies of the New Testament and gospel tracts placed in the caves at Petra so that Jews would be able to recognize their Savior at the final hour.

In the *Left Behind* series God shelters the Jews in Petra from all attacks, including a spectacularly ineffectual nuclear one, preserving them for the Glorious Appearing. In contrast with the scheming, teeming Jews in *Travels* and other versions of the “enclosed Jew,” or *iudei clausi*, legend, however, these Messianic Jews are remarkably passive, waiting, watching and, of course, praying for Christ’s coming. Again LaHaye and Jenkins emphasize the Jewish role as potential victim or sacrifice. The Jews must be “transported” to safety in Petra in a massive operation that could happen only with God’s help and which, because of the violent and totalitarian nature of the Antichrist’s regime, becomes an inversion of the deportations and genocide of the Holocaust.

Tucked away in Petra, the Jews of the Remnant sit out the worst days of the Tribulation and the battle of Armageddon, protected in a space that also transports them back to the time of Moses. The Remnant becomes the new incarnation of the Children of Israel, a typology made obvious by, among other elements, the manna that sustains the group. The Jews’ role as time travelers is enabled by their cultural Otherness. Tsion, Chaim, and other Jewish characters continually refer to their “culture” and customs, which include overt patriarchal control, as well as stereotypical portrayals about humor, love of argument, and intellectualism. The one female Jewish character who

is developed to any extent is the young Naomi, a modern-day version of Rebecca in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. Learned, intelligent, and extremely old-fashioned and modest, she becomes the beloved of another key member of the Tribulation Force, Chang Wong, a convert from mainland China who has defied his own parents' atheism. Naomi is closely watched over by her father, who is part of the group of religiously observant Jewish "Elders."

The scenes in Petra take the reader back in time, placing him or her in the desert with these Israelites, who, because they are governed by the group's "Elders," seem very much an ancient tribe gathering in the rocks and cave, a throwback to the Old Testament. The refuge in Petra literally gives Jews a second chance. The site also mimics a popular form of Christian tourism, the so-called Holy Land tour, which often features visits to Petra, and Megiddo, the prophesied site for Armageddon (Weber 214–30). Those members of the Tribulation Force who also end up in Petra, but who were not "born Jewish" refer frequently to the fact that they are outsiders or even interlopers. They emphasize the special privilege of being in this chosen group, the Jewish Remnant, despite not being of Jewish birth. Their experience can be seen as a kind of ultimate Holy Land tour; the Jews authenticate prophesized events and the Gentile Christians act as their witnesses.

Tsion Ben Judah and Chaim Rosenzweig each exemplify the role of Jew as conduit in *Left Behind*. The Jews in this text are significant only in their roles as potential Christians, or, crucially, as catalysts to Christian conversion or aids to Christians. Jews act as time-travel tour guides, transporting Gentile believers to biblical times and also providing for them an authentic claim to a particular space: the Holy Land. Kristen Dombek has noted a sense of connection with biblical time in a scene in which Rabbi Tsion Ben-Judah and the two supernatural Jewish Witnesses, Eli and Moishe, "act out" a biblical exchange between Nicodemus and Jesus. Their actions transport the non-Jew Buck Williams back in time, so that he acts as "witness" to this biblical moment (63). Dombek, who argues for Buck's firm realization that he still exists in the present despite the strong evocation of time transport, links this reading to the Freudian "uncanny." The more significant element here is that Jewish characters facilitate temporal, spatial, and spiritual transport for non-Jews. Buck is allowed such close access to the supernatural Witnesses only through Tsion's

insider status as an “Orthodox Jew.” TSION’s quiet entreaties in Hebrew to the Israeli soldiers guarding the area allow Buck literal access to the Witnesses. Then it is the Jews’ “authentic” connection to original biblical language, a connection Dombek also analyzes, and to prayer and ritual unknown to Buck that allow Buck his powerful experience (61). The Jews conclude their letter-perfect rendering of the Bible (in the Revised King James Version supernaturally translated for Buck from Hebrew) with low-spoken Hebrew prayers unfamiliar to Buck and which, unlike the previous dialogue, are not miraculously translated for him into English, Revised King James or otherwise.

Although this portrayal stands in stark contrast to Mandeville’s portrayal of Hebrew as a secret code to facilitate Jewish violence and world domination, it is nevertheless important that Hebrew prayer and accompanying Jewish ritual are not translated and remain incomprehensible to Buck and, significantly, to the reader. Judaism is, one could say, “left behind.” The Old Law has been superseded and need not be observed, but its sounds linger in the air to connect Christians to the authentic biblical past that they have inherited. The Jew exists as a bridge to the biblical past and as an essential component of the prophecy of Revelation, but contemporary Jews, practicing a living Judaism that has not been superseded by Christianity, are effectively silenced. The idea that the Jew can act as a time bridge, or as Beryl Smalley has observed, as a kind of “telephone” to biblical truth for Christians, is an important component of the larger notion of Christian supersession (362, qtd. in Biddick, 28). TSION Ben Judah, whose symbolic name makes him a kind of Everyjew, is continually referred to as “Rabbi” by his followers, called “Judaites,” and the billions who check his prophecy Web site everyday to understand the horrors of the Tribulation as they unfold.

As Sherryll Mleynek has remarked, having this learned rabbi as the spiritual leader of the Tribulation Force gives a kind of “kosher seal of approval” to the novels’ theology (377). TSION also exemplifies how the novels’ Jewish characters bring strictly intellectual or cerebral attributes and talents to the Tribulation Force, in contrast with the much wider range of practical skills, including military ones, which other characters contribute. The Jews are, in fact, notably not ready for physical combat. David Hassid, the young Israeli tech whiz, has, the reader is told, never seen any kind of battle, and he is easily

killed when caught unaware by Antichrist soldiers. When Tsion Ben Judah wants to join the armed struggle, other members of the Tribulation Force doubt or oppose this decision, with specific reference to Tsion's role in helping Buck to connect with the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus (307). Tsion, even after intensive training, is still more scholar than soldier. When he does finally venture out of the protected space of Petra, he is almost immediately (and gruesomely) killed by the Antichrist's forces. He can act only as a spiritual conduit, not as a fighter—a complete inversion of the earlier menacing apocalyptic Jews.

Secular Jewish intellectuals, like Chaim Rosenzweig, while also gifted, are seen as hopelessly limited by their secularism, trapped in a modern Israel whose moral climate decays further with each passing day. And Chaim, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist, here represents the secular Jew, who demonstrates the damaging influence of the "secular humanism" that LaHaye despises (*The Battle for the Mind* 2). Chaim is a renowned botanist whose innovations have brought prosperity to Israel, but he is locked in a secular permutation of the Jew's traditional "hermeneutical handicap" (Copeland 257; Lampert 43). He must become a Messianic Jew to fulfill his appointed role and lead his people to theirs. His first name, Chaim, derives from the Hebrew for "life" and his family name, Rosenzweig, recalls the German-Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig, author of the *Star of Redemption*, who flirted with conversion to Christianity. Franz Rosenzweig ultimately did not convert, but instead fostered Jewish-Christian dialogue from an ever-deepening Jewish perspective (Kaplan; Shuck 2007). The character of Chaim, lives up to his name for LaHaye and Jenkins by following through on the conversion Franz Rosenzweig eschewed and by bringing, from the perspective of these books, a new spiritual "life" to the Jewish Remnant.

Rosenzweig holds out against conversion for volume after volume of the series, even in the face of mountainous piles of empirical evidence, such as plagues of nasty little locusts with human faces, catastrophic earthquakes, and the world's oceans turning to blood. His stubbornness must be explained:

Rosenzweig would not commit. "I am an old man," he said, "set in my ways. I regret I am a hard sell. You and your fellow believers are most impressive, and I hope against hope you are not proven right in the end, for I will be most miserable. But I have

cast my lot with the world I can touch and feel and see. I am not ready to throw over intellectualism for blind faith.” (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Apollyon* 260–61)

Put another way, Chaim is *the* Old Man of antisemitic stereotype. Chaim and other secular Jews do not believe in the Old Law, but they are trapped by a different version of it: secular rationalism, which makes a kind of sense in a theological context in which reading the Bible literally (that old charge against the Jews) is a positive, not a limiting hermeneutic. Chaim’s secular beliefs have “hardened” him, made him a “hard-sell,” recalling language of the hardened heart and the stone tablets of the law found in the Pauline epistles. Chaim’s spiritual limitations, moreover, lead him to commit an act of extreme violence: he is the one who assassinates the Antichrist (who then resurrects himself three days later), using a dreadful and ingenious blade that Chaim has secretly fashioned with his own hands.

Finally, through a near-death experience in a plane crash, Chaim is converted and then he too becomes the “right” kind of Jew. After his conversion, he resembles the typological portrayals of the Patriarchs in medieval drama, who were Christians before the fact. As “Micah,” Chaim becomes a latter-day Moses, spreading the Gospel of Christ to the Remnant of Israel. To take on his new role as leader, Chaim dons brown, biblical style robes that are, at first, incongruous and even a bit ridiculous, but which eventually make him a figure out of time, as he glides along in an outfit straight out of the Bible (or the set of DeMille’s *Ten Commandments*) (See Dombek 402–6). Chaim’s character seems to embody a temporal paradox. He is by far the oldest of the featured characters, but, as he himself says several times, he and others of his fellow Jewish converts are “young” in the faith. His character embodies Romans 9:12: the elder shall serve the younger, a text associated since the patristic period with Jewish spiritual servitude.

After his conversion Chaim begins to preach and his speeches are obsessed with time. He proclaims:

We gather here in this historic place, this holy city of refuge provided by the Lord God Himself. We stand on the precipice of all time with the shadow of history behind us and eternity itself before us, putting all our faith and trust in the rock-solid goodness and strength and majesty of our Savior. (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing* 191)

As one guide to the series explains, in prophetic theology “[t]iming is Everything” and here an expression of that timing is placed in the mouth of the Jew (Hitchcock and Ice 25). The “shadow of history” to which Chaim refers is what LaHaye and Jenkins call “the Church Age,” the epoch between the time that the Jews have rejected Jesus as Messiah and the time of Judgment, during which time the Jews have lived under a veil, separated from truth (LaHaye and Jenkins, *End Times* 18). Jewish history during these chronological years is a shadow, undifferentiated and meaningless. As in medieval narrative, contemporary Jews as Jews have no place in this Christian salvational scheme. They must live in suspension, waiting to be converted. Through this conversion they will be transformed back to a more authentic Jewish self, to become, in the terminology of some evangelicals, “completed” or “fulfilled” Jews. The Jews, according to Chaim, are now poised on the precipice of their second chance. The representations in *Left Behind* are not the demonized vision of *Travels* or medieval apocalyptic drama in which the Jews are both apocalyptic destroyers and ritual murderers. They nevertheless represent the Jews and Judaism as something old that must be “made new,” a formulation that can be traced back to the Pauline epistles and which paradoxically both erases and permanently marks Jewish difference (Boyarin 204–5). At the Glorious Appearing, Chaim is literally “made new,” as his aged body comes to feel youthful. Chaim becomes a symbol of the Old made New, enacting the supersessionist triumph of the New Dispensation over the Old. This figuration, playing on the contrast between youth and age, Old and New, has been a part of the Christian representation of Jews and Judaism for centuries.

Remarkably, Chaim and all the Jewish characters in *Left Behind* are decidedly Old World; they are all Israelis, tied to the Holy Land. There is mention, for example, of American fundraising for rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, but it is told through the mouth of an Israeli rabbi (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force* 289). In the later books there is reference to the roundup and persecution of the Jews of Zhangzhou, China, but reference to the U.S. Jewish population is strikingly absent, especially given the way in which the books reflect a point of view that seems singularly American despite its worldwide scope (LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant* 264). In the final book, after the Glorious Appearing, the sole-surviving named African-American character, stranded in North America, far away from the Holy Land

apocalyptic action, wonders if America can finally be a “Christian nation” (361). But, in a way, this seems to have been the case all along.

Why is there no place for American Jews in these American best-sellers? Arguably, once the Rapture has passed and the Tribulation begins, every Jew who matters will gravitate to Israel and to what the novels refer to as the “hometown” of the Jewish Remnant and of Jesus, Jerusalem (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing* 235, 242). The era between the Passion and the Rapture, which LaHaye and Jenkins refer to as the Church Age, is a temporal deadzone for the Jews, during which they have gone astray and drifted into secularism. The Apostle Paul, we are told, was an “Orthodox Jew” (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Apollyon* 343). It is Orthodox Jews who are preserved to be converted; in *Left Behind*, these are really the only Jews that count and the only Other that is truly important to the series. There are converts from Islam in *Left Behind*, and Muslims figure more prominently in the volumes appearing after 2001. Believing Muslims, along with Orthodox Jews, are the only groups besides, of course, true Christians, who resist the Antichrist. These misguided, yet pious, Jews and Muslims are grudgingly accorded a degree of admiration. Both Orthodox Jews and believing Muslims gather in groups that, a bit like the Jews in *Travels*, seem ready to explode into mob violence, a volatility that contrasts with the more calculated and precise violence of the Tribulation force, which includes many ex-military. But all of this violence is directed against the forces of the Antichrist, as opposed to the traditional legends, which place Jews and Muslims in his service. The two named Muslim converts in the series, Abdullah Smith and Albie, are, respectively, a former Jordanian fighter pilot and a blackmarketeer from Al Basrah. Their past lives are mostly shadowy, leading Buck to wonder if Abdullah was once a terrorist (LaHaye and Jenkins, *Apollyon* 364). Although the Muslim and other converts depicted in the series seem to be included to provide a hip global scope for the books and to act as models for potential converts in the readership, it is only the conversion of the Jews that is essential to prophecy.

In an interview, Tim LaHaye has spoken about the “capacity” of “the Jewish mind” for “great good” or great evil (Jeffrey Goldberg). Post-Holocaust, however, the old stereotype of the Jew as the agent of evil must be avoided if authors wish to avoid charges of antisemitism.

Instead, in *Left Behind*, the Holocaust has taken the place of the Jew as the symbol of absolute evil. The figure of the Jew is, nevertheless, essential in this portrayal of evil, now as victim rather than as perpetrator. In *Left Behind* old antisemitic discourses of blood, defilement, and Jewish conspiracy turned inside-out as the Antichrist defiles the Temple in Jerusalem with a massive pig. Instead of murderous Jews there are hapless Jewish victims, not walled up in distant mountains to protect Christians, but placed in a mountainous sanctuary by righteous Christians to be protected by God.

It is ultimately the passivity of the vast majority of the saved Jews in *Left Behind* that is so striking. Their conversion is necessary for the End of Days and as a means through which non-Jews can access the authentic biblical past that authorizes Christian belief. As in *Travels*, Jerusalem and the Holy Land rightfully belong to Christians, and all unbelievers, including those Jews not ripe for conversion, will be swept aside, and, in *Glorious Appearing*, horribly destroyed. *Left Behind* figures Christians as active heroes, encourages active evangelizing to Jews and depicts Jews, especially the so-called secular Jews, not only as dangers to themselves but as potential roadblocks to others' spiritual salvation. In *Left Behind*, the Jew fundamentally serves as a conduit to biblical authenticity and to prophetic fulfillment, just as the figure of the Jew did for patristic and medieval Christian thinkers. The Jews are treading water in the spiritual sense, after which they will either be saved or drowned. Because of their essential passivity, furthermore, the Jews need righteous Christians to effect their salvation. Their spiritual, political and, notably, military actions require Christian guidance and Christian aid. The representation of Jews in *Left Behind*, ultimately, is a reiteration of a fundamental element in antisemitic discourse, a denial, to borrow from Johannes Fabian's concept, of Jewish coevalness. Because the theology of *Left Behind* views all post-Crucifixion Jewish history as a deadzone, the past, present, and future of Jews and Judaism are denied. An active, autonomous Judaism remains unrepresentable and a Jewish future is impossible, since all who fail to convert to a true Christianity will be destroyed for eternity, as evidenced by the pages of gruesome violence that fill the final volume of the series. It is therefore no accident that the portrayal of Jews in *Left Behind* is obsessed with time; their conversion marks their reentry into it and, in essence, into full humanity. Any other forms of Jewish identity are, at best, superfluous. The novels' attempts at overt philosemitism are merely new

permutations of older supersessionist representations of the Jew. Jewish identity and Jewish history are no longer openly demonized, but are nevertheless quietly and definitively erased.

Notes

1. *Left Behind* has an official Web site: <http://www.leftbehind.com>. For synopses of all twelve novels, see Standaert 211–32.
2. 165–66. All references cited are from Moseley edition.

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