CHAPTER 13

POSTCOLONIAL CHAUCER
AND THE VIRTUAL JEW

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> *Despite the Expulsion of 1290, the perpetuation of the "virtual Jew" remained essential to English religious devotion and national identity. Allosemitic constructions of the Jew, fostered by medieval English postcolonial conditions, were manifested in fourteenth-century literary and artistic productions, including the Holkham Bible Picture Book, the Luttrel Psalter, and the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer.*

In the *Canterbury Tales,* Geoffrey Chaucer alludes to Jews more frequently and more explicitly than the almost exclusive critical attention paid to the *Prioress's Tale* would indicate.[1] Chaucer's allusions, ranging from the faintly positive to the explicitly negative, present Jews as proto-Christian prophets, wandering exiles, blasphemers and torturers, and anti-Christian murderers—all familiar depictions in his time. Some medievalists have found Chaucer's reiteration of the sign "the Jew" puzzling, Jews having been expelled from England 100 years earlier. In fact, it is perfectly consonant with the late medieval circumstances that perpetuated the presence of the "virtual Jew" in the absence of actual Jews. Denise Despres puts the case for such simultaneous "absent presence"[2] most cogently when she writes: "Despite the fact that no practicing Jews were permitted to reside in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, late-medieval English devotional culture is rife with images of Jews, from the Old Testament patriarches [*sic*] in the Corpus Christi Plays to the blasphemous, terrifying host

desecrators dramatized in the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* and legitimized in Middle English sermons."[3] Although some scholars have tried to explain away "the paradoxical centrality of Jews to late-medieval English literature and art" by "asserting that Jews function in this literature to represent a generic 'Other,' or as a displacement for the Lollard sect," Despres concludes that, to the contrary, "Jews were not merely symbols of alterity in English culture, whether generic or specific, but rather . . . their presence was a necessary element in the devotional world of the later medieval English laity."[4]

Following Despres, and along with Colin Richmond and James Shapiro, I argue in this chapter that "the Jew" was central not only to medieval English Christian devotion but to the construction of Englishness itself.[5] As Shapiro writes, "The desire on the part of the English to define themselves as different from, indeed free of, that which was Jewish, operated not only on an individual level but on a national level as well: that is, between 1290 and 1656 the English came to see their country defined in part by the fact that Jews had been banished from it."[6] The centrality of Jews to English religious devotion and national identity certainly helps explain the persistence of "the Jew," both pre- and post-Expulsion. But in addition, we can understand this enduring sign as marking the persistence of colonialism in England from the thirteenth into the fourteenth century. For although the Expulsion signaled the exile of the Jews, it did not entail an utter break with England's colonial past. That is to say, the English colonialist program did not end in 1290, and its pernicious effects continued to be felt, postcolonially, by the colonizing subjects, the English themselves.[7]

Some scholars have insisted on using "colonial" and "postcolonial" only in reference to the modern period. And indeed, if we define these notions exclusively in terms of European imperialism or the rise of capitalism or the birth of nationalism,[8] then they will not serve to delineate conditions in the Middle Ages. But if we attend to Kathleen Biddick's assertion that "[t]he periodization of colonialism . . . begins to look very different if one includes Jews,"[9] then it is possible to employ these terms to explore certain very troubling aspects of late medieval culture. To that end, recent theorizations of the relationship between colonialism and postcolonialism provide a critical grammar for describing the mentality of Chaucer's England. In addition, recent theorizations of the idea of the virtual contribute to a more nuanced understanding of late medieval representations of "the Jew." Considering Chaucer's poetry through the double lens of the colonial and the virtual provides grounds for refuting those who would either save him from charges of anti-Semitism or damn him accordingly. Rather than try to do either, I intend here to explore the complexities of medieval

representations of Jews so as to understand the ways in which post/colonial English conditions fostered the creation of virtuality and the paradox of Jewish absent presence.

The acme of English depiction of Jews occurred in the thirteenth century as prelude to and, no doubt, stimulus for the 1290 Expulsion.[10] In thirteenth-century England, Jews served all sorts of theological, political, social, and economic purposes, being alternately commended or condemned according to the interests of their observers. For example, Matthew Paris, in his *Chronica majora,* extended "his condemnation when the Jews advanced royal power and, conversely, his unconditional support whenever the Jews either obstructed the centralising aims of the king or became the victims of royal policy."[11] Similarly, other monastic chronicles, such as the *Annals of Burton,* distinguished between blameworthy contemporary English Jews (thought to be demonic descendants of Judas) and their praiseworthy ancestors.[12] Such inconsistent, even contradictory, attitudes are common, and, according to Jeremy Cohen, correlate with contemporary theological shifts in conceptions of the "hermeneutical Jew."[13] This shift followed from the "traumatic encounters" of Christian Europeans with Muslims, encounters that led to a new perception of Jews as allied to external adversaries such as Tartars, Saracens, and Turks. Perceiving Jews as aligned with many threatening Others helped justify violence against them on the "assumption," in Sophia Menache's words, "that they constituted an actual danger to the physical survival of Christendom."[14] This new perception of Jews was thus one crucial part of religio-political trends that led not only to the 1290 Expulsion from England and Aquitania but also to subsequent expulsions throughout Europe. This new perception also led to the paradox of English post/colonialism: For the sake of security, Jews had to be removed; for the sake of self-definition, "the Jew" had to remain. The English shift from colonialism to postcolonialism is thus marked both by the expulsion of the actual and by the persistence of the virtual.

It is not surprising, therefore, that artistic productions of the period depict Jews in a striking variety of roles. Thirteenth-century English apocalypse manuscripts, for example, portray Jews in a wide variety of guises, some positive, such as Old Testament prophets or the allegorical personification of the Old Testament itself, and some negative, such as beast worshippers, resistant listeners to Franciscan sermons, or captives of demons.[15] As Suzanne Lewis's magisterial study shows, these manuscripts also depict various others as Jews, including John the author of Revelations, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the sponge wielder at the crucifixion, and two figures from Canticles used to symbolize the nation of Israel—the Bridal Soul and the Shulamite. In these manuscripts a single visual panel

often contains more than one Jewish representation or allusion. For example, in the illustration showing John consoled by the Elder (Lewis's figure 33), the Old Testament patriarchs are embodied three times, by the angel, the Elder, and John. The angel represents those who prophesied Christ as the redeemer, while the Elder and the weeping John symbolize those who, believing only literally, "held the Old Testament but did not see it."[16] Thus throughout the thirteenth century, "the Jew" appears in multiple, sometimes contradictory variations that are repeatedly reinscribed—even after the Expulsion.

The persistence of Jewish representation in fourteenth-century cultural productions is well illustrated, albeit often with a diminution in intensity. For example, according to Michael Camille, although the *Luttrell Psalter* still contains "distorted hook-nosed semitic stereotypes of Christ's torturers," such images are "notably less emphatic" than their counterparts in thirteenth-century psalters.[17] Similarly, as Martin Walsh shows, the *Holkham Bible Picture Book* only intermittently employs stereotypical Jewish characteristics; often it does so to emphasize basic theological distinctions. For example, one four-paneled illustration (folio 12) shows the course of Joseph's conversion from incredulous Jew to believing Christian by setting out a series of contrasting actions and attributes (figure 13.1). In the first panel, Joseph is fully denoted as a Jew, first by his placement among others of his kind and second by his hold on Old Adam's spade; however, in the second panel, as he lays his hand on Mary's womb, he is unmarked. In the third panel, during his encounter with Gabriel, Joseph wears the *pileus cornutus,* one of the sartorial signs of difference enjoined by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. But in the fourth panel, as he is reconciled with Christian truth, both "the Jewish hat and Adam's spade are now put behind him."[18] Lying as he does on the typological "fault line between the Old and New Testaments,"[19] Joseph thus attests not only to the multiple Jewish figurations available to Christian artists of the time but also to the continuing centrality of Jews to Christian self-definition. In these ways, both of these early fourteenth-century illustrated texts, the *Luttrell Psalter* and the *Holkham Bible Picture Book,* are typically post-Expulsion, for despite a diminishment in frequency and negative intensity, Jews remain what "they had already become in the thirteenth century: a ubiquitous presence in the English imagination established largely (and after 1290, entirely) through words, texts, and images."[20] Or as Camille says of Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne,* its "minimal detraction of Jews . . . has been ascribed to the fact that there were no Jews [in England in the fourteenth century]. . . . But their non-presence in English society does not mean that they cannot still be attacked in the realm of the imaginary . . . as part of the very definition of a good society—that is, as excluded from it."[21] Turning to the words,

Figure 13.1: Four-panel image of Joseph. Used by permission of the British Library (ADD46780F12).

texts, and images of Geoffrey Chaucer, we can see the continuing post-colonial construction of the good society and of its negative exemplum, the virtual Jew.

In the *Canterbury Tales,* one crucial component of the fabrication of the good society is the construction of Englishness, both geographically and

characterologically.[22] We see this construction in the tales of the Prioress and the Pardoner. In the *Prioress's Tale,* a polluted Asia—polluted through Jewish presence and actions—is implicitly contrasted with a purified England, whose sanitized state is founded on the displacement of the Jews.[23] The geographical removal of the Jews to Asia echoes their prior territorial Expulsion. On one hand, it *removes* the narrative from the context of English land, English people, English acts, and, especially, English Jews. On the other hand, it *requires* that forbidden identification and reasserts Englishness by including the coda recalling Hugh of Lincoln's martyrdom at the hands of the—now-expelled—Jews. This dislocation also enables an unremitting replay of perpetual Jewish crimes by containing Jews in an eternal, orientalized present. Because "translating Jews from time into space was a way in which medieval Christians could colonize—by imagining that they exercised dominion albeit in an [*sic*] phantasmatic space,"[24] the Prioress's "Asye" can be understood not only as the medieval orientalized East that replaces the familiar English homeground but also as the "phantasmatic space" that supplants in the English imaginary the actual, contested Asia of losing crusades. This is also an Asia, therefore, not only of subjugated Jews but of triumphant Christians; here actual victorious Saracens are displaced by virtual vanquished Jews.

If the Prioress's Asia substitutes for England as purified space, the Pardoner's Flanders stands for England as corrupted place. The *Pardoner's Tale* speaks to the vice-ridden conditions of English life that were blamed, at least in part, for the ravages of the plague. Representing the wicked English populace, the rioters are responsible for bringing Death upon themselves by seeking out its agent, the Old Man. In the tale, the Old Man emblematizes many of the most popular and pernicious anti-Judaic fantasies of the Middle Ages. Linked to the Wandering Jew,[25] the legendary figure punished for his mocking of Christ, the Old Man personifies not only Jews in general (nonbelieving exiles wandering through Christian time and space), but medieval European Jews in particular. Like them, he is intimately connected with gold—the unearned profits of avarice and usury—as well as with the massive population decimations of the mid-fourteenth century within which the Pardoner sets his tale. The evil nature that caused New Testament Jews to revile Christ and induced their Norwich and Asian coreligionists to kill innocent Christian boys also was believed to lead contemporary Jews to poison wells and spread the Black Death.[26] Precisely because he is undenoted as a Jew, the Old Man performs a perfect displacement of them.

A corollary component of the fashioning of the good society is the construction of Christianness, particularly as manifested in the material bodies of believers.[27] We see this dynamic in the tales of the Parson and

the Monk. In order to dissociate good Christians from evil Jews, the *Parson's Tale* (like the chronicle of Burton) must first dissociate Jews from their own religion. Through traditional typological strategies, laudatory Old Testament Hebrew prophets are distinguished from blameworthy New Testament or contemporary Jews. Solomon, Moses, David, and others are cited with approbation, while post - Old Testament Jews appear in the context of deicide. The tale makes clear that medieval Jews are abominations to the sacred, embodied community their ancestors are used to authenticate. By linking words and bodies, the Parson specifically admonishes Christians not to swear and thereby emulate Jews: "For certes, it semeth that ye thynke that the cursede Jewes ne dismembred nat ynough the preciouse persone of Crist, but ye dismembre hym moore" (X[I].591). Such a focus on bodily dismemberment recalls not just the blood crimes of which contemporary Jews were accused (as in the *Prioress's Tale*) but also hints at their perverse physicality, voluntarily enacted in the continued self-dismemberment accomplished through the superseded ritual of circumcision.

As the *Parson's Tale* dissociates Jews from their own religion, the *Monk's Tale* dissociates them from their own bodies. The Prioress's murderous dismemberment of the Christian boy is countered in this tale by the salvific self-destruction of Samson. The Monk presents Samson, simultaneously the christianized proto-martyr and the judaized self-mutilator, in a number of ways, all of which dissociate Jews from their own bodies as well as from their own religion. First, the fact that he is an exemplary Israelite judge—or, as the tale puts it, "fully twenty wynter . . . / He hadde of Israel the governaunce" (VII.2059–60)—is almost completely elided. His generalized loss of power is specifically carnalized in his physical blindness, a blindness (like that of the allegorical figure of Synagoga) that symbolizes Jewish spiritual lack. Moreover, when Delilah cuts Samson's hair, the action makes visible—by metaphorical displacement—the self-castrating (i.e., the circumcising) impotence of Jews. What is particularly interesting, however, is that at the same time that the Monk presents Samson as a thoroughly impotent Jew, he also dejudaizes him. The very first lines of the episode—"Loo Sampsoun, which that was annunciat / By th'angel longe er his nativitee, / And was to God Almyghty consecrat" (VII.2015–17)—serve to reposition Samson within a famously Christian context.

In these tales, drawing on well-established representational conventions, Chaucer continues the post-Expulsion English practice of reiterating the sign "the Jew." As is typical in medieval postcolonial cultural productions, he assumes the factuality of blood guilt and bodily difference, without, however, ever matching pre-Expulsion artists and writers in their relish for portraying Jewish perfidy and perversity. As we have seen in other post/colonial texts, in the *Canterbury Tales* "the Jew" is never entirely or

solely negative; in certain instances the sign can be understood, at least su-
perficially, as philo-Semitic. The Man of Law, for example, speaks merely
descriptively when he cites the "peple Ebrayk" (II [B].489), and the Par-
doner himself mentions "hooly" Jews (VI [C].364). (In similar fashion,
Bromyard praises Jews for their piety; Langland for their kindness; and
Brunton, for their compassion for their poor.[28]) However, it should be ob-
vious, especially when we remember patriarchy's complementary valoriza-
tion of Mary and denigration of Eve, that all stereotypical assertions, both
positive and negative, are merely isotopic variants. Like phonemes, they
have no base term. The two sides—Jews as wicked murderers / Jews as
generous alms-givers—are not merely conjoined, but, as with Mary and
Eve, they are the same. By the later Middle Ages, every Jew is both evil and
good, murderous and charitable, for all Jews can be characterized as "the
Jew." Following Zygmunt Bauman, therefore, a better term to describe
such indivisible, isotopic variation is "allosemitism."[29] What is important
for appraising a writer such as Chaucer, therefore, is not whether he is anti-
or philo-Semitic—he was, I believe, inevitably both—but rather that, given
his Englishness and his Christianness, Chaucer could not help but con-
tribute to the ongoing allosemitic construction of the virtual Jew.

What does it mean for an entire people to be virtual? And how does that
virtuality correlate with their actuality? We can begin to address these
questions by contextualizing medieval Jewish virtuality within the shift in
England from a condition of colonialism to one of postcolonialism. Anne
McClintock's definitions of "colonization" and "internal colonization" are
helpful here:

> *Colonization* involves direct territorial appropriation of another geo-politi-
> cal entity, combined with forthright exploitation of its resources and labor,
> and systematic interference in the capacity of the appropriated culture (it-
> self not necessarily a homogeneous entity) to organize its dispensations of
> power. *Internal colonization* occurs where the dominant part of a country
> treats a group as it might a foreign colony.[30]

The case for understanding pre-Expulsion medieval English Jews as an "in-
ternally colonized" people is a complex one.[31] On one hand, although
Jews were not, strictly speaking, a separate "geo-political entity" within
England, they were a distinct religious entity, with separate political and so-
cial responsibilities, privileges, and liabilities.[32] There is no question that
their Christian overlords "systematic[ally] interfer[ed] in [the Jews'] capac-
ity . . . to organize [their own] dispensations of power." Neither is there
any question that in their use and abuse of Jews, the English did their best

to "forthright[ly] exploit . . . [Jewish] resources and labor"—until, that is, such exploitation no longer suited their needs. Finally, "direct territorial appropriation" occurred, most vividly although not uniquely, at the Expulsion itself. Thus, while this case is not one McClintock considers, the situation of thirteenth-century English Jews fits her definition of internal colonization all too well.

On the other hand, the internal colonization of medieval English Jews was not territorial in any simple fashion. Three paradoxical aspects are important for understanding not only the decolonization of the Jews but also postcolonialism itself. First, however long Jews had been in residence in England (and most scholars agree that it closely followed within 100 years of the Conquest of 1066), they were by no means the indigenous inhabitants. The nonnative nature of their English habitation was important to monastic chroniclers of the Expulsion. Whereas some accounts (i.e., the *Annals of Waverley*) stressed the continuity of Jewish residence, others (i.e., the *Annals of Dunstable*) stressed the justness of such punishment because of their sins (especially that of blasphemy). One consequence of their second-order status, therefore, was that during the troubles of the thirteenth century, Jewish resources could more easily be appropriated by the very same Christians who expressed pity for their plight. The post-Expulsion image of the Jews is thus the familiar double one: ancient inhabitants, whose exile after their long sojourn is to be pitied (according to the Cistercians of Waverley) versus threatening interlopers, enemies of Christ whose exile is deserved (according to the *Annals of Osney*).[33] Creatures of such unresolvable duality are obvious dangers to and therefore must be rent from the body of Christian society.

This state of inassimilable difference leads to the second paradox: At the very same time that Jews were understood as secondary in terms of territorial occupation, in more important ways—important, that is, in terms of Christian supersessionist theology—they also were perceived as necessarily prior.[34] While domination in the medieval English case involved the exploitation of land, resources, and labor, even more fundamentally, it involved the appropriation of religious truth and the true religion. For the ultimate territory at stake in medieval English post/colonialism was theological. Although the Expulsion was unarguably a consequence of a multitude of economic, political, and social factors, underlying all was the fact that the Jews were reviled, massacred, and expelled because they were not Christians, because they were not (truly) English, and because Christians/English were not (could not be, must not be) Jews. Although Judaism provided the foundations for Christianity, Jews threatened the definitions of Christian society. Jews were expelled not merely because they first possessed (English) lands and goods from which they needed to be displaced,

but because they first possessed the (Christian) book—from which they needed to be displaced. In their priority lay the rationale for their alterity, the justification for their abuse, and the roots of their destruction. The Christian dilemma set the stage for English action: the "dreadful secondariness" (to use Edward Said's phrase[35]) of medieval Jews was thus a consequence of their intolerable primariness.

Third, and contrary to the usual modern postcolonial scenario, in medieval England it was the dominant group (the Christian English) that expelled the subordinate group (the English Jews), and not the other way around. It was the dominant group that then suffered from inevitably disappointed utopian fantasies of a purified and liberated state. It was the dominant group that exhibited the "pathology" resulting from "persisting colonial hierarchies of knowledge and value."[36] In a word, it was the Christian English, not the English Jews, who suffered from the postcolonial condition. When Leela Gandhi asserts that "[t]he postcolonial dream of discontinuity is ultimately vulnerable to the infectious residue of its own unconsidered and unresolved past,"[37] she is referring to the condition of the formerly colonized. In the case of medieval England, however, the "postcolonial dream of discontinuity" was that of the colonizers, the English. As ever, that dream failed. In their attempts to liberate themselves from intrusive foreign elements, thereby purging their country of religious difference, the English expelled the Jews. Yet, as our examination of the *Canterbury Tales* and other texts has shown, while the English may have eliminated the Jews, they never eradicated "the Jew."[38]

Terms proliferate to describe this reiterated sign: "hermeneutical," "theological," and "notional Jew" have all been proffered.[39] Yet none of these speaks directly to the postcolonial condition; for that purpose, I am proposing the term "virtual Jew." Although I derive "virtual" from cyberspace studies, "virtual Jew" is meant to foreground the condition of historically specific oppression as well as the concomitant illusion of liberation from history that is postcolonialism as its most pernicious. "Virtual Jew" stresses the integral connections between imaginary constructions and actual people, even when they exist only in a fabricated past or a phantasmatic future. In cyberspace studies, "virtual" is used most often to modify "worlds" or "narratives."[40] Marie-Laure Ryan explains the usual "two senses of the term":

> One is the philosophical meaning, which invokes the idea of potentiality. The virtual is the field of unrealized possibilities that surround the realm of the actual in a system of reality. . . . [Within a narrative universe] the potential type of virtuality is represented in two ways: in the as-yet unrealized representations formed by the [text's] characters, such as wishes, goals and plans,

and in the horizon of possible events surrounding the textual actual world. . . . The other sense of "virtual" describes an optical phenomenon. According to Webster's dictionary, a virtual image is one formed of virtual foci; that is, of points "from which divergent rays of light seem to emanate but do not actually do so." This meaning can be metaphorically transferred to a type of narrative discourse that evokes states and events indirectly as they are captured in a reflecting device that exists as a material object in the textual actual world. This reflecting device could be a mirror, text, photograph, movie, or television show.[41]

Building on Ryan's definitions, we see that the virtual does not actually refer to the actual, although this is what it claims to do. Rather, the virtual "surround[s] the realm of the actual in a system of reality," thereby creating a simulation that, by seeming to be more authentic than the actual, may be mistaken for it. When we examine the virtual Jew, for example, we see that it does not refer directly to any actual Jew, nor present an accurate depiction of one, nor even a faulty fiction of one; instead it "surrounds" Jews with a "reality" that displaces and supplants their actuality. In fact, following the trail of the virtual guarantees that one will never arrive at the actual, for the referent of any virtual is always irretrievable. Thus, rather than being surprised at or having to explain the continuation of English reference to Jews after the Expulsion, we might better acknowledge that Jewish absence is likely the best precondition for virtual presence. For wherever in Western culture actual Jews come to reside, they encounter the phantom that follows and precedes them. By virtue of its virtuality, therefore, "the Jew" maintains its frightful power.

    To further understand the subtle workings of this medieval phantasm, it will help to situate the virtual Jew within Homi Bhabha's discussion of colonial truth production. In his well-known essay, "Signs Taken for Wonders," Bhabha writes that

> the field of the "true" emerges as a visible effect of knowledge/power only after the regulatory and displacing division of the true and the false. From this point of view, discursive "transparency" is best read in the photographic sense in which a transparency is also always a negative, processed into visibility through the technologies of reversal, enlargement, lighting, editing, projection, not a source but a re-source of light. Such a bringing to light is never a prevision; it is always a question of the provision of visibility as a capacity, a strategy, an agency.[42]

In Bhabha's terms, the virtual Jew is a "transparency," "processed into visibility through [various] technologies." More than simply a projection of the Christian gaze in the psychological sense, the sign is a projection in the

optical sense: an image that is necessarily an illusion. The virtual Jew is not
a source of emanations of the actual in itself but a "re-source," a reflection
constructed by means of such processes as "reversal, enlargement, editing,"
and so on. "The Jew" reflects not any actual Jews but the "capacity, strat-
egy, agency" of the observer. In this sense, we do not start with the actual
existence of actual Jews, then consider how the depiction of Jews in vari-
ous forms of discourse in the Christian Middle Ages matched or distorted
the actuality. Rather, we understand from the start that the virtual Jew is
an invented "reality" that does not depend on actual medieval Jews for its
connotations, let alone its denotation. For even if we were to observe ac-
tual medieval Jews, we could only come to the conclusion that they do
not, in themselves, possess the "true." The widespread medieval use of
phrases such as "*verus Israel*" and "*Hebraica veritas*" confirms Bhabha's asser-
tion that the determination of true and false has been made *prior to* the
reading of the true, for having determined that Jews are not the "true Is-
rael," Christians then could claim to be those who, truly, possess "Hebrew
truth."[43] When Christians become the true Hebrews and Jews the false, the
need for Jews as augustinian "bearers of the book" is superseded. And as we
have seen, such dispossession of Jews is actualized in colonial displacement,
particularly, in England, in the Expulsion of 1290.

Despite—or because of—its *a priori* determination of the real, the vir-
tual contains almost unlimited potential for proliferation. Bhabha argues
that such proliferation is an essential aspect of the stereotype, which
functions in a "continual and repetitive chain . . . [so that] the *same old*
stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupid-
ity of the Irish *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are dif-
ferently gratifying and terrifying each time."[44] To these compulsive
retellings we can add the multiple medieval reiterations of "the Jew" that
recur in the *Canterbury Tales* as well as in apocalypse manuscripts, the *Lut-
trell Psalter,* and the *Holkham Bible Picture Book.* Reiterating the sign, "the
Jew," is thus an act that releases possibilities of image—but also of event,
with actual consequences for actual Jews. When Jews (whose basic reli-
gious tenets forbid blood contamination) are accused of blood crimes, or
when Jews (who place little or no emphasis on proselytizing) are de-
nounced for judaizing, the resulting persecutions are "effects of knowl-
edge/power" of the virtual Jew upon actual Jews. The sign is thus the
equivalent of an optical "reflecting device" ("not a source but a re-source
of light"), by means of which the post/colonial "system of reality sur-
rounding the actual" is constructed. According to this system, it is actual
Jews who must suffer for the sins of the virtual Jew, and their punish-
ments arise, in Louise Fradenburg's words, "from the very need to sub-
stantiate an irreality populated by hallucinations."[45]

However irreal, however phantasmatic, the power of the virtual is with us still. In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England, social, political, and religious conditions ensured that artists, writers, and theologians participated in the paradox of continually ridding England of Jews while continually repatriating them. But as we have seen, the ongoing colonial construction of the virtual Jew did not end with the Expulsion of 1290; rather, it began to gather steam so that by the sixteenth century, "[m]ost European kingdoms had expelled their Jews . . . [as the] idea of a Europe *Judenrein* began to take its place in the mentality of Western Christendom."[46] When Despres notes that "[l]ike the Canterbury pilgrims, Chaucer's audience lived in a post-expulsion world,"[47] she is alluding to the aftereffects of colonialism on Chaucer and his English contemporaries. But modern medievalists also live in a post-Expulsion world, and the England we construct for Chaucer is most often as *judenrein* as the England of the *Canterbury Tales.* In light of the history that followed the Expulsion— the history of European Jews as well as the history of Western imperialism—it therefore becomes imperative to consider the Middle Ages from the perspective of postcolonial studies as well as to consider postcolonialism from the perspective of medieval studies.

When Ella Shohat famously asks, "When exactly, does the 'post-colonial' begin?" nowhere in her answer does she indicate that a reconfigured, nonhegemonic "notion of the past" might include the European Middle Ages.[48] I am not suggesting here that the Middle Ages is that origin; medievalists such as Allan Frantzen already have pointed out the dangers inherent in such a position.[49] Rather, I am suggesting that we need to recognize the many connections between medieval English Christians and Jews that constituted a colonial, then postcolonial, relation: The English acted as colonizers, using their power to exploit and deterritorialize; the Jews were an internally colonized people, achieving release from English colonialism only at the cost of exile; the English/Christians constructed "the Jew" as part of their fabrication of national/religious identity; and English artists and writers, such as Geoffrey Chaucer, participated in the ongoing, postcolonial, allosemitic production of the virtual Jew. When we consider all of these connections, then we also must recognize that the 1290 Expulsion, while marking a turning point in English Christian and Jewish relations, constitutes but one episode within a postcolonial continuum whose tragic effects persist to the present day.

Notes

1. Surveys of the critical literature on Chaucer and the Jews are included in Florence Ridley, *The Prioress and the Critics,* University of California Pub-

lications, English Studies 30 (Berkeley: University of California Press,
1965); and Louise O. Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism, and the Pri-
oress's Tale," *Exemplaria* 1 (1989): 69–115. Most notable among the articles
written on the subject in the 1990s is Denise L. Despres, "Cultic Anti-Ju-
daism and Chaucer's Litel Clergeon," *Modern Philology* 91 (1994): 413–27.
All references to and citations from the *Canterbury Tales* are from Geoffrey
Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer,* 3rd ed., gen. ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston:
Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

2. On Jewish absent presence in the *Divine Comedy,* see Sylvia Tomasch,
   "Judecca, Dante's Satan, and the *Dis*-placed Jew," in *Text and Territory: Ge-*
   ographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and
   Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp.
   247–67. For the case in medieval England, see Michael Camille, *The Lut-*
   trell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England (Chicago: University of
   Chicago Press, 1998), p. 284; Christine Chism, "The *Siege of Jerusalem:* Liq-
   uidating Assets," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 319;
   Despres, "Cultic Anti-Judaism," 414; and Colin Richmond, "Englishness
   and Medieval Anglo-Jewry," in *The Jewish Heritage in British History: Eng-*
   lishness and Jewishness, ed. Tony Kushner (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 56.
   For the case in early modern England, see James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and*
   the Jews (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). For a modern in-
   stance that reverses the usual sequence of absence following presence, see
   Leo Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism*
   (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), p. 166.

3. Denise L. Despres, "Immaculate Flesh and the Social Body: Mary and the
   Jews," *Jewish History* 12 (1998): 47. See also her "Cultic Anti-Judaism"; and
   "Mary of the Eucharist: Cultic Anti-Judaism in Some Fourteenth-Century
   English Devotional Manuscripts," in *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Ju-*
   daism in Medieval Christian Thought, ed. Jeremy Cohen (Wiesbaden: Har-
   rassowitz Verlag, 1997), pp. 375–401.

4. Despres, "Cultic Anti-Judaism," 427. See also Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the*
   Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society (Philadelphia: Uni-
   versity of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), esp. chap. 3.

5. Richmond, "Englishness"; and Shapiro, *Shakespeare.*

6. Shapiro, *Shakespeare,* p. 42.

7. Postcolonial theorists agree that since the effects of colonialism are ongo-
   ing, the "post-" cannot be taken to mean a simple "after"; as Ania Loomba,
   Colonialism/Postcolonialism (London: Routledge, 1998), writes, "a country
   may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and
   neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally de-
   pendent) at the same time" (p. 7). But since England was not colonized from
   without, was colonizing the Jews within, and was therefore not neocolonial
   in the ways Loomba indicates, I use "postcolonial" here to link both the
   shift in chronology and the continuation of colonial culture that inhered in

England during Chaucer's lifetime. On occasion, I use "post/colonial" as shorthand for "colonial and postcolonial."

8. On these widely held positions, see Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism,* chap. 1.

9. Kathleen Biddick, "The ABC of Ptolemy: Mapping the World with the Alphabet," in *Text and Territory,* ed. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles, p. 291 n 2.

10. On causes of the Expulsion, see Shapiro, *Shakespeare,* pp. 46–55.

11. Sophia Menache, "Matthew Paris's Attitudes Toward Anglo-Jewry," *Journal of Medieval History* 23 (1997): 158; on Henry's policy, see pp. 160–61. Kenneth L. Stow, "The Avignonese Papacy or, After the Expulsion," in *From Witness to Witchcraft,* ed. Jeremy Cohen, cites a parallel case of papal pragmatism (what Zygmunt Bauman calls allosemitism, see below) when he describes the "precarious situation" of Jews under the Avignonese papacy as resulting not from "the alternation of repression with toleration or kindness, but of an integral policy in which all principles operated simultaneously" (p. 277).

12. Sophia Menache, "Faith, Myth, and Politics—The Stereotype of the Jews and Their Expulsion from England and France," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75 (1985): 360.

13. Jeremy Cohen, "The Muslim Connection or On the Changing Role of the Jew in High Medieval Theology," in *From Witness to Witchcraft,* ed. Cohen, p. 159. David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), has countered the emphasis of Cohen and other historians on the perceived shift from toleration to persecution.

14. Menache, "Matthew Paris's Attitudes," p. 144; see also Chism, "The *Siege of Jerusalem.*"

15. Suzanne Lewis, *Reading Images: Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); the illustrations cited in this paragraph are, in order, Lewis's figures 48, 83, 117, 177, 231, 9 (plus 17, 21, 33, etc.), 42 (plus 45, 48), 224, 233, 251, and 33.

16. Lewis, *Reading Images,* p. 72.

17. Camille, *Luttrell Psalter,* p. 282.

18. Martin W. Walsh, "Divine Cuckold/Holy Fool: The Comic Image of Joseph in the English 'Troubles' Play," in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium,* ed. W. M. Ormond (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1986), p. 284. We should note that Joseph also wears the *pileus cornutus* in subsequent scenes (e.g., the Nativity). Other figures (e.g., Pharisees, torturers) are presented as grotesque, sometimes wearing peaked caps suggestive of the Jewish hat, but none is as explicitly marked as "a Jew" as is Joseph. Four-panel image of Joseph used by permission of the British Library (ADD46780F12).

19. Ibid., p. 297.

20. Robert C. Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," *Jewish History* 12 (1998): 25.

21. Camille, *Luttrell Psalter,* p. 284.

22. On Englishness and Jewishness, see the essays in *The Jewish Heritage in British History: Englishness and Jewishness,* ed. Tony Kushner (London: Frank Cass, 1992); also Shapiro, *Shakespeare.*

23. On the locational politics of "Asye," see Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism," 98. Both Fradenburg and Despres, "Cultic Anti-Judaism," stress the importance in this tale of a purified England.

24. Biddick, "ABC," p. 270.

25. Nelson Sherwin Bushnell, "The Wandering Jew and *The Pardoner's Tale,*" *North Carolina Studies in Philology* 28 (1931): 450–60, argues that only since the seventeenth century is the wanderer understood as Jewish; but Despres, "Mary of the Eucharist," cites an example from the thirteenth-century de Brailes Hours (384).

26. On Jews and the plague, see Seraphiné Guerchberg, "The Controversy Over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death in the Contemporary Trea-tises on Plague," in *Change in Medieval Society: Europe North of the Alps, 1050–1500,* ed. Sylvia Thrupp (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1984), pp. 208–24. Also see Anna Foa, *Ebrei in Europa: Dalla peste nera all'e-mancipazione* (Latera: Bari, 1992); and Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence,* esp. "Epilogue."

27. On Christian and Jewish bodies, see Steven Kruger, "The Bodies of Jews in the Late Middle Ages," in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard,* ed. James M. Dean and Christian Zacher (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), pp. 301–23. See also the articles in Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., *Fram-ing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

28. Philo-Semitic examples are cited by Stephen Spector, "Empathy and En-mity in the *Prioress's Tale,*" in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World,* Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), pp. 211–28. On Brunton, also see Sister Mary Aquinas Devlin, "Bishop Thomas Brunton and His Sermons," *Speculum* 14 (1939): 324–44. For another view of Langland's citation of Jews, see Elisa Narin van Court, "The Hermeneutics of Supersession: The Revision of the Jews from the B to the C Text of *Piers Plowman,*" *The Yearbook of Lang-land Studies* 10 (1996): 43–87.

29. Zygmunt Bauman, "Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern," in *Modernity, Culture, and 'the Jew',* ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 143–56. See also Bryan Cheyette, "Introduction: Unanswered Questions," in *Between "Race" and Culture: Representations of "the Jew" in English and American Literature,* ed. Bryan Cheyette (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 1–15. Although, strictly speaking, "allosemitism" is anachronistic in reference to the Middle Ages, I believe it is useful for encompassing the contradictions

inherent in medieval Christian European attitudes toward and representations of Jews.

30. Anne McClintock, "The Angels of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism,'" *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 88 (her emphases).

31. For another discussion of premodern Jews as internally colonized, see Jonathan Boyarin, "The Other Within and the Other Without," *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 77–98.

32. On thirteenth-century English anti-Jewish measures, see: Jonathan A. Bush, "'You're Gonna Miss Me When I'm Gone': Early Modern Common Law Discourse and the Case of the Jews," *Wisconsin Law Review* 5 (1993): 1264, on the statutes of 1233, 1253, 1271, and 1275; Lewis, *Reading Images,* p. 216, mentions the synods of Oxford (1222), Worcester (1240), Chichester (1246), Salisbury (1256), Merton (1258), and Lambeth (1261). On medieval Anglo-Jewry see: Menache, "Faith, Myth, and Politics" and "Matthew Paris's Attitudes"; Richmond, "Englishness"; Shapiro, *Shakespeare,* pp. 43–55; Robert C. Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England," *Speculum* 67 (1992): 263–83; and "Recent Work in Medieval English Jewish History," *Jewish History* 2 (1987): 61–72. On Jewish-Christian relations in medieval Europe, see Anna Sapir Abulafia, "From Northern Europe to Southern Europe and From the General to the Particular: Recent Research on Jewish-Christian Coexistence in Medieval Europe," *Journal of Medieval History* 23 (1997): 179–90.

33. Throughout this paragraph, I rely on the discussion of monastic accounts in Menache, "Faith, Myth, and Politics."

34. On Christian supersessionism, see Daniel Boyarin, "The Subversion of the Jews: Moses's Veil and the Hermeneutics of Supersession," *Diacritics* 23 (1993): 16–35; also Narin van Court, "Hermeneutics of Supersession."

35. Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989): 207; quoted by Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 7.

36. Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory,* p. 7.

37. Ibid., p. 7.

38. See Richmond, "Englishness," p. 56.

39. "Hermeneutical Jew": Jeremy Cohen, "Introduction" in *From Witness to Witchcraft,* ed. Cohen, p. 9; "theological Jew": Gilbert Dahan, *Les intellectuels chretiens et les Juifs au Moyen Age* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), p. 586; "notional Jew": Bush, "'You're Gonna Miss Me When I'm Gone.'"

40. I know of only one other linking of medieval and cyberspace studies: Jeffrey Fisher, "The Postmodern Paradiso: Dante, Cyberpunk, and the Technology of Cyberspace," in *Internet Culture,* ed. David Porter (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 111–28, who speaks of a body-transcending "will to virtuality" shared by medieval and cyberspatial texts.

41. Marie-Laure Ryan, "Allegories of Immersion: Virtual Narration in Postmodern Fiction," *Style* 29 (1995): 262–64.

42. Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 32.

43. On *verus Israel,* see Friedrich Lotter, "The Position of the Jews in Early Cistercian Exegesis and Preaching," in *From Witness to Witchcraft,* ed. Cohen, pp. 163–85; also Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between the Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135–425)* (1948; 1964; reprinted Oxford University Press, 1986).

44. Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question," in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader,* ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 47 (his emphases). I distinguish "virtual" from "stereotype" in that although "virtual" also has a psychological component, it is not tied narrowly to the construction of the individual colonial subject; see also Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). I also distinguish "virtual" from "simulacrum," for although they share a technological component, "virtual" does not depend on the globalization of capital nor is it tied directly to the posttextual, commodified postmodern; see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). Most important perhaps, I use "virtual Jew" in contradistinction to Jean-Francois Lyotard's undifferentiated, universalized, lower-case "jew" as standing for the ultimate postmodern intellectual predicament—what Max Silverman, "Re-Figuring 'the Jew' in France," in *Modernity, Culture, and "the Jew,"* ed. Cheyette and Marcus, calls "the judaizing of alterity in postmodern theory" (p. 199); see Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews,"* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

45. Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism," p. 83.

46. Jeremy Cohen, "Traditional Prejudice and Religious Reform: The Theological and Historical Foundation of Luther's Anti-Judaism," in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis,* ed. Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 97.

47. Despres, "Cultic Anti-Judaism," p. 427.

48. Ella Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial,'" in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory,* ed. Mongia, pp. 325, 330. Shohat shares an assumption of the necessarily post-Columbian origins of colonialism with other postcolonial theorists; see, for example, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* p. 2.

49. Allan J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).