

Introduction

A Strange Encounter at Montigny-lès-Metz, February 2001

The scene unfolded in Montigny-lès-Metz, in a quiet retirement home called “La Sainte Famille” (The Holy Family). On February 13, 2001, in a peaceful, spacious library filled with books, three men and a woman sat in comfortable armchairs facing one another. An image of Christ dominated the entrance to the room. Emotion ran high and tears flowed as the conversation brought a forgotten past back to life.

In 1669, Didier Le Moyne, a four-year-old boy, vanished and later turned up dead in the forest of Glatigny. A Jew, Raphaël Lévy, was unjustly accused of kidnapping and murdering the boy and sentenced to burn at the stake. Now, 332 years later, Bernadette Lemoine, age ninety, the last descendant (ninth generation) of Didier’s brother Jean Le Moyne, met for the first time Pierre-André Meyer, a historian of Lorraine and sole surviving member of the eleventh generation of the family of Raphaël Lévy. By the strangest of chances, these kin of the parties that had clashed so bitterly in this extraordinary affair of alleged ritual murder found themselves engaged in a dialogue based on a shared belief: that Raphaël Lévy was innocent.

Bernadette Lemoine led the discussion with characteristic verve.¹ Elegantly dressed and still in possession of all her faculties, Mme. Lemoine went straight to the point. In her family, she said, many were convinced of Raphaël Lévy’s guilt. The memory remained intact. But Lemoine, a former teacher of piano and organ who had once played in churches and made no secret of her devout Catholic faith, had set out to get to the bottom of the allegations.² Late in life, she had transformed herself into an amateur historian, explored the Lévy file in the departmental archives of the Moselle,³ and managed to get her hands on the few extant documents that dealt with the case.

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Before long she had made up her mind: contrary to the firm conviction of her entire family, including her father, she decided that Raphaël Lévy was innocent. She saw him as the victim of a “conspiracy,” “a settling of scores among rival businessmen.” As she saw it, “the child had indeed been murdered, possibly by a butcher hoping to rid himself of a cleverer competitor, Raphaël Lévy.”⁴ To prove her point, Lemoine produced a text of thirteen pages, written in her careful, almost calligraphic hand, reminiscent of the handwriting of another era.

It was published a short while later in a Metz newsletter. In the meantime, she had corrected her manuscript: Joseph Reinach, for instance, was no longer described as “an obscure but thoroughly trustworthy historian” but simply as “a thoroughly trustworthy historian.” She now placed the tragedy not on the eve of Rosh Hashanah but on the very day of the holiday marking the beginning of the Jewish New Year. The most important change, though, came at the end of the text, where she added these sentences concerning her father, “who remained convinced of the legend’s veracity”: “But without hatred or bitterness. In his eyes, the author of the crime was a madman not responsible for his actions.” She thus minimized the anti-Semitic implications of her father’s beliefs.⁵

Lemoine wrote, “The first in my family to recognize the innocence and sanctity of Raphaël Lévy, I felt that it was my simple duty to correct the record,” adding that “my ancestors in all good faith committed a monumental error and glaring injustice and perpetuated it for three centuries.” The centenary of the Dreyfus Affair having been celebrated a short while earlier, Lemoine hoped to draw attention to this other tragedy and discredit the results of another “hasty and clearly biased trial.”⁶ Courageously contradicting her family’s memories, she wrote: “My ancestor unwittingly caused an enormous injustice to be committed, but he was under heavy pressure from prominent local citizens when he accused the unfortunate Lévy of the crime. It is more difficult for me to understand his attitude later on.”⁷ In a private letter, she made this moving comment on the case: “My ancestor was used as an instrument by criminals who will remain forever unknown. How can we judge the behavior, three centuries ago, of an illiterate peasant traumatized by the tragic loss of his child?”⁸

Yet a careful reading of the documents from the trial as well as of various narratives recounting the circumstances of the case fails to support this allegation against “criminals who will remain forever unknown” and who supposedly used Gilles Le Moyne as their “instrument.” This reading amounts to an exculpation of the man who hounded Lévy to his death. Nor is there any evidence of a crime committed by a person or persons unknown—perhaps, as Lemoine apparently believed, by one of the butchers who “could no longer stand competition from Jews” and “sought to have the king expel all Jews from the region.”⁹ When she asks if “the criminals had set their sights on the Le Moyne child, or was the kidnapping a chance occurrence, abetted by circumstances?” she assumes the existence of a veritable conspiracy, a kidnapping that ended tragically in a murder. Again, there is no evidence for this hypothesis, which overlooks the more likely possibility that the boy had simply lost his way in the forest and been torn apart by wild animals. In short, we still know nothing about the actual circumstances of little Didier’s death, but there is no evidence of a crime and no proof of a conspiracy of butchers to rid themselves of troublesome competitors “too clever at business,” as Lemoine put it. The affair cannot be put down to ordinary commercial rivalry, and a tragedy that awakened ancestral fears cannot be explained without saying something about the beliefs of the people involved.



Although Bernadette Lemoine said nothing about the Catholic faith of her ancestors, she exhorted today’s Jews to remain faithful to their values, the values for which Raphaël Lévy unhesitatingly gave his life. For instance, on February 24, 2002, she wrote to Schumann, the man who arranged the memorable meeting with Meyer: “Thanks for your kind wishes. Please accept my very sincere wishes for a good and happy new year for yourself and your family. But for you the year begins in September. I hope that you continue to keep faith with your age-old traditions as much as possible. It must not be very easy!”¹⁰ Thus she explicitly evoked the tragic Rosh Hashanah of the past, suggesting the importance of continuing to celebrate it as a symbol of perseverance in a faith that the Le Moynes and many of their neighbors had sought to eradicate.

In another letter, this one addressed to Meyer, she wrote, “Please accept my sincere best wishes for 2002. But for you the year begins in

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September. I hope that you continue to keep faith with your beautiful age-old traditions as much as possible. Roughly forty centuries stand between us and Abraham, our common Father. It's enough to make you dizzy, but what a miracle! . . . Life is short: a fleeting episode, a time of preparation for the perfect Joy that will reunite us in our one and transcendent God."¹¹

With these touching letters, which insisted on the need for Judaism to survive, Lemoine sought to close the book on the tragic affair that had involved her Catholic ancestors in a wicked miscarriage of justice against Lévy, a Jew who in their eyes was the very incarnation of evil—a perverse child killer with a demonic thirst for the blood of young Christians. Memory of this tragedy, which instantly revived traditional accusations of ritual murder that had been all but forgotten in France, remains virtually intact among the Jews of Lorraine, so much so that even today some of them are reluctant to wander at night in the accursed forest of Glatigny.¹²

Like a brave soldier, Lemoine launched a frontal assault on a legend without having the slightest idea how it had influenced her fellow Christians in the past or what they might make of it today. Behind this lurid fantasy lay a bottomless demonology and a culture permeated with magical thinking. It originated in the night of time, and no one woman—even one of the Just like the courageous and obscure Bernadette Lemoine—can put it to rest.

This legend was born in the Catholic West. Between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian anti-Judaism was built around three closely related myths: (1) that Jews crucified young Christian males in order to reenact and mock the crucifixion of Christ, (2) that they kidnapped and killed Christian boys to obtain blood for their rituals, and (3) that they sought to profane hosts that through transubstantiation had become the body of Christ, in order to kill him again.

These three myths formed the basis of medieval anti-Judaism, even if it was often difficult to distinguish them with such analytic clarity.¹³ For Gavin Langmuir, these fantasies, which can be related to beliefs about cannibalism, are not so much irrational as nonrational. Going beyond anti-Judaism, he argues, they established a true ideology of anti-Semitism, a product of medieval Christianity.¹⁴ During centuries of crusades and intense faith, Christians consciously or unconsciously associated

the crucifixion of Christ at Easter with Passover, the “Jewish Easter,” which marks the exodus from Egypt and calls for preparation of *matzoh*, or unleavened bread, in commemoration of what the Hebrews ate during their flight across the desert.¹⁵

The myth of ritual murder was based on the preposterous idea that Jews cannot make matzoh without Christian blood. Despite abundant evidence that Jews do not eat food contaminated with blood and do not eat meat unless all the blood has been drained out of it, and despite all the indications of the constant vigilance that this atavism, so deeply embedded in their beliefs and customs, obliged them to maintain, the idea that Jews thirsty for the blood of Christian children kidnapped them and collected their blood in special receptacles became the central theme of countless sermons, legends, and plays as well as paintings by the greatest masters, which decorated any number of churches.



In view of the significant contact between different cultures and religions in this period, contemporary historians such as Israel Jacob Yuval have proposed the provocative and controversial thesis that accusations of ritual murder appeared in the wake of the crusades (in 1096), and indeed that they were almost a consequence of the crusades. To prevent conversion of their children, it is argued, Jews did not shrink from sacrificing them. Horrified at the sight of Jews taking the lives of their own children, their accusers supposedly concluded that if they were prepared to commit such atrocities to hasten the redemption of their own offspring, they would not hesitate to do the same or worse to Christian children. This led to the first tales of ritual murder, which were then repeated again and again in one place after another.¹⁶ In this sense, the *Kiddush Ha-Shem*, sanctification of the name of God, might unwittingly have been responsible for the legends of ritual murder that were so widespread throughout Christendom at the time.¹⁷



Traditionally, the first appearance of this superstition is said to date from the death of little William in Norwich, England, on the eve of Easter 1144. His mutilated body was found in a forest, and it was alleged that he had been murdered during Pesach (Passover) in the home of the

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Jew Eleazar, who, with the help of confederates, had stabbed him repeatedly with a knife in order to collect his blood before crucifying him. Threatened with burning by the local authorities for offenses against Christianity, the accused Jews took refuge in a royal castle after the king took them under his protection.¹⁸

The best-known accusations of ritual murder of Christian children by Jews come from England and France: Lincoln (1255), Blois (1171),¹⁹ Bray-sur-Seine (1191), and Le Puy (1320).²⁰ In Spain the best-known example remains that of La Guardia, which took place in 1488. Between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, there were many cases of this type, the majority of them in German-speaking countries (forty-three, compared with only seven in France, and none after the fourteenth century, because the Jews had been expelled from both France and England).²¹ As Hillel Kieval has observed, France was a nation-state and therefore less prone to accusations of this type, which were more common in regions of uncertain political status, especially in German-speaking areas and in the Russian Empire.²²



In the Rhineland, one of the most celebrated cases occurred in Würzburg in 1147.²³ In 1470, in the town of Endingen (not far from the French border), three Jewish brothers were accused of committing a ritual murder during Passover. Under torture, they confessed to the crime in lurid detail, denounced other Jews who had allegedly taken part in the ceremonies, and described how they had drained the little boy's blood into a glass receptacle. Every time they were tortured, they added new details to the story, hoping to satisfy their judges and thus put an end to their suffering. Strappado was the method generally used: the victim's hands were tied behind his back, and he was then lifted by a rope attached to his wrists, while heavier and heavier weights were attached to his feet. Ultimately, his arms were broken. He was then burned at the stake as a sorcerer or servant of the devil. The execution, carried out before a cheering crowd, symbolized the victory of Christianity over the evil incarnate in the Jew.

The burghers of Endingen were also asserting their political autonomy vis-à-vis the emperor, who had offered his protection to the Jews. The trial "represented nothing less than the victory of one Christian civic

community over the Jews and, by implication, over their noble protector as well."²⁴ In other words, the accusation of ritual murder figured in an ongoing confrontation between local and central powers. Myths deeply rooted in popular Christian beliefs, which drew analogies between ritual murder and the crucifixion of Christ and desecration of the host, were mobilized in this battle. In Regensburg in 1470, Jews were also accused of ritual murder and desecration of the host. Under torture, six of them, including a rabbi, invented fantastic tales that reflected Christian beliefs in their magical powers. The intervention of Emperor Frederick III proved decisive in thwarting citizens whose thirst for vengeance was encouraged by clerics preaching violent retribution against the Jews.



Five years later, in 1475, a similar accusation was made in Trent. The unusual dimensions of this affair ensured that it would remain engraved in memory for centuries as the most celebrated case of ritual murder, and one that would go on being cited repeatedly until quite recently. Two centuries before the Metz tragedy, a young boy named Simon disappeared. Somehow the idea that he had been murdered for his blood by Jews during Passover took hold. Rumor had it that the boy's body was discovered in a ritual bath in the cellar of a prominent Jew named Samuel on Easter Sunday, and that the corpse was seen to bleed when Jews were present.

Inevitably, Simon's death was linked to that of Christ, and in the eyes of municipal authorities this constituted irrefutable proof that Jews were responsible for the crime. Magic was involved, and the Jews were compared to sorcerers acting on behalf of the devil. Their alleged crime was likened to cannibalism. Fantasies of this type are common when accusers and accused mingle socially and are involved in relations of economic dependence. A midwife, married to a man named *Le Suisse*, had recently assisted in delivering the child of a prominent Jew named Samuel. A dispute over wages led to the midwife's dismissal, and *Le Suisse* accused Samuel of ritual murder.

Six Jews were immediately arrested and subjected to horrible tortures, including strappado. When they could bear it no longer, they invented out of whole cloth a "theater of death," constructed around details of the murder of which they stood accused. Their judges were satisfied;

“Tell me what I have to say,” one of the defendants implored, “and I will say it.” The accused concocted a series of horrors, each more improbable than the next, and declared themselves guilty of the most perfidious crimes in order to put an end to their torment. Solidarity among the defendants was destroyed by the same methods, and in their extreme suffering they denounced one another, though nearly all of them tried desperately to save at least the women among them, who were also subjected to appalling tortures. The extreme cruelty and large number of Jews accused in Trent ensured that this case would leave an indelible impression.

Despite the fanatical climate, some Christian neighbors of the accused did not hesitate to come to their assistance. Once again, outside political and religious authorities also intervened on behalf of the Jews. For instance, the doge of Venice expressed incredulity about such myths, and Pope Sixtus IV was convinced of the innocence of the accused. But none of this made any difference; fourteen Jews were executed after extended torture. Sixtus IV was no more able to stop the spread of anti-Semitic violence than Innocent IV had been in 1247, and the incendiary preaching of the Franciscans only added to it.²⁵ In Trent, a veritable cult of Simon developed, with paintings, statues, and processions celebrating the death of the innocent child. This cult was not abolished until 1967, and traces of it remain today.²⁶

The Trent trial haunts the centuries: the story of ritual murder, confession, and torture has spawned a long list of publications and been cited repeatedly by anti-Semitic authors, in nineteenth-century France for example, as an archetypal instance of Jewish culpability.²⁷ Elevated to the status of a model, the example of Trent also attests to the limits of imperial power in dealing with events on the periphery of the empire. Successive emperors did not cease to protest, however, against such extreme forms of intolerance, which flew in the face of imperial law. A century later, in 1544, Charles V also extended his protection to the Jews and ended the prosecution of several Jews accused of ritual murder. He also ordered that no such case be prosecuted in the future without his consent. Other emperors followed suit: Ferdinand II (1562), Maximilian II (1566), and Rudolph II (1577). These imperial interventions contributed to the rapid decline of the practice in the Holy Roman Empire in the sixteenth century.

Although the theme of ritual murder remained common in ballad and legend in the sixteenth century, and although it figured in conversation and fed rumors that lent force to anti-Semitism, no Jew was executed on such a charge in a German-speaking country after the sixteenth century.²⁸ But the slack was taken up, however briefly, by France, as the extraordinary case of Raphaël Lévy attests.



The Lévy affair was also linked to another myth, related to that of ritual murder but different from it in a number of respects. In roughly the same period, Jews were also accused of desecrating the sacred host. With knives, daggers, and swords they would allegedly attack a host that they somehow obtained, usually by bribing a Christian woman with promises of cash or cancellation of a debt. The host thus became a form of currency, and this legend later culminated in the image of the Jew as a rich capitalist manipulating the poor innocent Christians. Once they got hold of the host, the Jews went wild, heaping insult after insult upon it, beating it, and slashing it with violent blows. Then, the legend has it, a miracle would occur, as blood flowed from the host, striking fear into the Jews, who often begged to be converted, having been convinced of the truth of transubstantiation, of the mystery of the Eucharist. These desecrations generally occurred around the time of Easter. The basis of the myth was of course the story of the Last Supper. According to Matthew, “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.” The blood of Jesus Christ was thus supposed to replace the “blood of the covenant” with which Moses had anointed his people. And in Paul’s 1 Corinthians 11, we read: “This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”²⁹

Many legends accused the Jews of “indecent” treatment of the host, which, once consecrated, became the body of Jesus Christ. By devious means involving the use of money, Jews were said to obtain Christ’s body in order to crucify him anew. For them, only the cruelest punishment

would do. This other accusation against the Jews also appeared at the beginning of the thirteenth century in the Rhineland, Spain, and Paris, among other places. Linked to the allegation of ritual murder, it shows that, owing to the influence of Thomas Aquinas, the Jews were now held to have crucified Jesus deliberately in full knowledge of who he was. In Saint Augustine's earlier interpretation, the Jews were supposed to have been unaware that Jesus was the Messiah. But Aquinas and other Paris theologians, Franciscan as well as Dominican, insisted that the Jews had acted deliberately. When they attacked the sanctified host, therefore, they were simply persisting in their criminal behavior, because "the body of Christ is the symbol of both spiritual things and Christ on the cross."³⁰ In this respect, the accusation of desecration of the sanctified host is of a piece with the older accusation of ritual murder.³¹ "Internal enemies" living on the fringes of Christian society,³² the bloodthirsty Jews were thus portrayed as veritable monsters.³³



Desecration of the sanctified host, which was also said to occur around Easter, received its ultimate symbolic consecration in an altarpiece that Paolo Uccello executed between 1467 and 1469. The miracle of Les Billelles, one of the "gentiles' tales,"³⁴ occurred in 1290 in what is today the rue des Archives. It inspired Uccello's predella, which can be seen today in the ducal palace in Urbino and which depicts the symbolic murder of the host: "The Christian child is replaced by the sacramental body of Christ; the battered and boiled host will again produce the theophanic effect by transforming the body of Christ into the eucharistic child."³⁵ The story that Uccello tells in his six panels presents the desecration of the host in a perfectly convincing manner. In the first panel, a woman displays a round host to a Jewish merchant in Florentine dress standing behind a counter. He can be identified by insignia visible on the mantle of the fireplace. In the second panel, two children, one crying, can be seen between a man and a woman clad in red. As a red liquid flows from a pot on the fire, soldiers force their way into the room. The other panels recount how the host is saved from the machinations of the Jewish merchant and how the man, his wife, and his two children are tied to a stake and burned. Meanwhile, an angel has prevented the hanging of the woman who had tried to sell the host.³⁶

The miracle of *Les Billettes*, with its dramatic ending, spread across Europe between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁷ In every instance, the cruelty of the Jew was recounted in lavish detail. The host was always obtained in exchange for cash or other goods. Countless paintings and plays substituted this story of desecration for the tale of ritual murder. Jérôme Séguier's version, which was published in 1604, sixty-five years before the Raphaël Lévy affair, is worth citing at length:

This cruel and barbaric Jew, having obtained the sanctified Host, was blinded by the dark beliefs to which he clung tenaciously and refused to believe that this piece of bread contained the true flesh of Our Savior [...] He began to talk to himself in the following terms: "Now I will know, and with this blow I will find out whether there is any truth in what these mad Christians say." With that he took a dagger or small knife [...] and began to pierce in several places the living host of the holy Body of Jesus Christ, which he had placed on a chest. No sooner had he done this than he saw a large quantity of precious blood flow out of it [...] He once again took the same Host and with a nail pierced it through with several blows from a hammer, and again abundant quantities of blood began to flow from it [...] With a heart as hard as Pharaoh's, he again took the Host from his foul hands and threw it into a large brazier. But it immediately jumped out and began dancing about, to the great astonishment of the infidels. The impious Jew now took a large kitchen knife and tried to cut it and carve it to pieces to complete its punishment. The wretch went to a great deal of trouble, but all in vain, because the Body of Jesus Christ remained intact and perfect. So as not to forget any of the torments and tortures to which Our Lord was subjected in his first Passion, the cruel Jew nailed the Host to a filthy and foul-smelling place and with all his strength hurled a lance at it, unleashing a torrent of Blood from the wound, as before. Not yet satisfied by all this cruel punishment, this henchman and minister of Satan plunged the Host into a boiling cauldron, the last of his damnable inventions. Immediately the boiling water turned blood red, and the holy Host by dint of its own Majesty raised itself up from the bubbling liquid and displayed itself to the infidel in the form of a crucifix.³⁸

The end of the story is easily guessed: the Jew persists in his error, while his wife and children convert. Condemned to the stake, he asks for his Talmud. After it is brought to him, "he is tied up and attached to a

criminal in the cart, and when wood that has been laid around the stake is set ablaze, the Jew along with his Book is consumed by the flames as easily as he stubbornly refused to convert.” This description of the cruelty of the Jew is chilling. Given its wide circulation in the early seventeenth century, it is easy to imagine the influence it had in that period of militant Counterreformation.



What is lacking in these stories, however, is another miracle that gives a more explicit indication of their meaning: the resurrection of the body of Christ in the host in the form of a young child, symbolizing innocence. This miracle occurred in a celebrated case in which a host was stolen in Passau (Bavaria) in 1477. According to the legend:

On the Friday before Saint Michael, when the abbey gate was open for the Feast of Our Lady, the tabernacle was broken into, and Christopher Greisshammer made off with four pieces of the venerable sacrament, touched them with his sinful hands, wrapped them in a handkerchief, and kept them about his person from Friday to Sunday morning. He then turned them over to the Jews, a dishonest race, in exchange for Rhenish florins. A host earned him thirty pfennigs, to the great shame of the Holy Christian Church. The Jews and their God kept them. Gripped by doubt, they took the body of Christ in their sinful hands and carried it into their synagogue. With greedy zeal they touched the crucified body in order to protect themselves from the Christian faith. A Jew took a sharp knife and pierced the body of Christ on the altar of their synagogue, so that blood flowed from it. The face of a child appeared, which greatly frightened the Jews.³⁹

Before Lent in the year 1477 the malefactor and the Jews were arrested, and after Easter all were executed. For centuries, the culture believed in “the transubstantiated host as the real Christ and in one of his suffering personas as a sacrificed . . . bleeding child.”⁴⁰



In Metz in 1513 twenty-five actors performed a play in several acts, “The Mystery of the Sacred Host.” Violently hostile to the Jews, this drama left its mark on the inhabitants of the city. It also took its place in a long tradition of local infanticides that were mostly blamed on natives of

Germany. This is mentioned in any number of later Metz chronicles. It was so popular that several editions were published in the sixteenth century.⁴¹

The Jew: We will now find out whether this God, in whom the Christians believe and in whose name they despise us, has any virtue, strength, or power. Gather round this chest and contemplate the foolishness of these Christians, who believe in this piece of bread and say that it contains life and blood, that it is God Himself [...]

I will now test it with this dagger.

The Jew's Wife: Oh! Oh! It bleeds! [...] What sacrilege! Oh! By Mohammed! It is alive.

The Daughter, on her knees: Oh! Good papa, I beg you, do not hit it.

The Son, in tears: Alas! It bleeds! Alas! Alas! Father, for God's sake, stop! Oh! It is so beautiful, so gentle. Give it to me. I will keep it.

The Jew: I will look in back for the big knife I use to cut meat. I will cut it into a thousand pieces. One, two, three, four, five. By God Almighty! After each blow it seems to put itself back together. It remains intact, as it was before. But thou shalt suffer even worse, if possible. [...] I will kill it. [...] *He takes the host and nails it to a column. Blood runs down to the ground.* [...] I will burn it in my fireplace. *He throws the host on the fire. . . . He takes his lance and pierces the host on the brazier.* [...] *He then takes a kitchen knife and hacks it to pieces all over the house. . . .*

The Son, in tears: Oh! Good papa, please stop. Would you kill this beautiful child? Look how its blood is flowing. No sadder sight has ever been seen. [...] *A crucifix appears in the cauldron next to the fireplace.* O crucifix, divine and pure, I beg thy pardon. I will leave this place, which thy grandeur abhors. Accursed be the man who engendered me and the woman who brought thee here to suffer such misfortunes.⁴²

Once again, Jacob Mousse, the Jew, asks for his Talmud to protect him, and then, as the provost noted, “this sorcerer was burned along with his book.”⁴³ In a rather unusual departure for these theatrical performances—which shaped history itself—the Jew is here identified as a sorcerer and thus associated with the witches who were also mercilessly put to the stake in sixteenth-century Lorraine. What is more, the host was explicitly transformed into “a small child.” In a contemporary chronicle of these events, Philippe de Vigneulles wrote: “As if it were a

pissing baby.⁴⁴ Thus we have here another rare example of the link that was often drawn between ritual murder and desecration of the host. In the Christian imagination, host desecration, here located in Metz, replaced ritual murder as another way Jews could obtain the blood they needed to prepare matzoh for Passover, the holiday celebrating their own redemption via exodus from Egypt. Host desecrations were thus identified with accusations of ritual murder because “the logic of the principle of transubstantiation implies that the Jew did not require a flesh-and-blood Christian; all he needed to do was to stab the host or dip it in boiling water.”⁴⁵ In fact, by drawing blood from the host, the Jews presumably proved the truth of the Eucharist, which some Christians doubted. Thus the accusation served a second purpose: it relieved Christians of their own doubts.⁴⁶

Still, it was in Metz, in this play, that the assimilation of the desecrated host to the body of Christ resurrected in the form of an innocent child brought the two types of accusation together. But it was not just in Metz that the innocent child appeared, its radiant features serving to highlight the cruelty of the Jew and to reveal the truth of transubstantiation. A similar apparition occurred in 1725, in the miracle of Les Abeilles, which is depicted in a tapestry in the château de Langeais. Like the tale of the miracle of Brussels in 1370, the definitive version of which would not be published until 1720, all of these stories survived the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and remained alive in the eighteenth.⁴⁷ Clearly, the seventeenth-century public would have been well aware of these famous stories of host desecration, so that in the atmosphere surrounding the trial of Raphaël Lévy for ritual murder it was only natural for such tales to be revived in Metz and figure in the local discussion of the event. As we shall see, they would become an overlooked but crucial element in the Lévy affair, which substantially transformed their meaning.⁴⁸