

Tudor Parfitt, *Hybrid Hate: Conflations of Antisemitism and Anti-Black Racism from the Renaissance to the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 290.

by *Monica Miniati*

Tudor Parfitt's volume is an exercise in erudition. Draws on an extensive documentation, it offers a detailed reconstruction of the history of racism, and more precisely, the history of racism before racism as seen against the backdrop of the long confrontation (or "struggle," as the author calls it), between polygenism and monogenism. The clash between these two opposing theories concluded with the tragic epilogue of the racist rampage that would engulf the twentieth century. The reconstruction and detailed analysis of this confrontation, develops through an historical narrative in which the wealth of cited documents does not always make for easy reading. Parfitt's analysis takes as its starting point St Augustine's assertion of a common origin of all human beings, even those monstrous creatures reported by "secular history," to which the philosopher and theologian claims there is no obligation to give credit: "Whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in color, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast." (*City of God*, Book XVI, Chapter 8).

With the Age of Discovery, the Augustinian model of a common origin and an equality in diversity, which is a pillar of Christian monogenism, had to face the challenges posed by polygenist theories, which emerged after the discovery of new and "strange looking" populations in Africa and the Americas. This discovery raised many questions about the origin of these populations, while the genealogical scheme of monogenism did not seem to have adequate space to accommodate the newcomers. In the sixteenth century, the debate on the origin of humanity was no longer the exclusive preserve of theology, but was joined by a scientific discourse that marked the beginning of modern racism (p. 4).

Indeed, supporters of the polygenist thesis had difficulty understanding how Adam's descendants could have reached such remote places on the globe. The only valid explanation was that those people represented a human lineage not

descended from a single generative line. Thus, Paracelsus, an early proponent of polygenism as well as a physician, alchemist and astrologer, declared a transmigration of Adam's descendants implausible. Instead, he claimed that they occupied only a small portion of the earth because God, in his desire not to leave the rest of the world empty, had created blacks, Native Americans and other strange peoples to populate it. In this perspective, Adam found himself having to share the act of creation with *another being*, and the belief in a human race defined by unity was burdened with serious doubts. Similarly, the philosopher Giordano Bruno, on the basis of his own idea of the infinity of worlds, stated the existence of "parallel Adams": the earth was home to several human species, divided by the philosopher on the basis of colour, whose origin could not be traced back to a single father. Whites, blacks and Jews had separate origins. Bruno ascribed a descent from Adam only to the Jewish race, the "sacred race," and he asserted very strongly that the "Ethiopian race" had no connection to Adam's lineage. With Bruno, black populations began to be the subject of a distinction that a few years later would be reiterated with serious and dangerous overtones by Lucilio Vanini. For him, in fact, the Ethiopians are descended from apes.

The French Calvinist theologian Isaac La Peyrère also ventured onto the same territory and as early as the seventeenth century he made no distinction between Jews and blacks, but lumped them together under their shared negative characteristics. Like Bruno, La Peyrère believed in Jews' exclusive descent from Adam but, unlike Bruno, Jews were not a "sacred race" in his view. On the contrary, despite his Jewish origins, La Peyrère showed no particular empathy towards Jews. They are black and smelly but may lose these unpleasant characteristics by embracing the Christian faith. Black skin therefore had a negative overtone, but in the case of Jews, a religious change guarantees a glowing white complexion and an intoxicating scent. On the other hand, according to Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce, Baron La Hontan, there are no prospects of salvation for Blacks. Not only is it impossible that Native Americans and Africans, so different from each other, be children of Adam, it is also pointless to look at air quality and climatic conditions, on which the monogenist theory was based, for the causes of their diversity. Whatever the climate in which they are born, the children of a black man and a black woman will only ever be black.

Blackness is therefore a final ruling, and Enlightenment philosophical and scientific thinking does not always allow for any mitigating circumstances. In this regard, Parfitt writes: “The Enlightenment’s demolition of the myth of the Garden of Eden was destined to have a number of unintended consequences and to be replaced by a number of other myths, none of them helpful for the onward march of humankind” (p. 20). Recalling the polygenist theory, Voltaire in fact denied the common origin of whites, blacks and the yellow race and established a mental hierarchy of races in which blacks occupied the lowest rung (slavery was proof of their mental inferiority). Similarly, the Scottish philosopher David Hume considered blacks to be inherently inferior to whites. The German naturalist Christoph Meiners, in his hierarchy of races, placed blacks closer to the animal kingdom than to the human one, which is dominated by the white race. The English historian and slave owner Edward Long argued that blacks had more in common with orangutans than humans.

Therefore, even the theorists of monogenism, while developing their thinking within the framework of the biblical narrative, fell into the trap of black inferiority. Carl von Linné, the father of taxonomy, although convinced of the unique genesis of humanity, accompanied his strict classification of races with subjective value judgements that in time would become racist prejudices: the white race is creative, industrious, orderly, and governed by laws, while the black race is lazy and incapable of developing an organized and civilized life. Similarly, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, also an advocate of the common origin of mankind, in pointing to the different races as degenerations of an original white strain, established the superiority of the white race. In the same manner Kant too assumed an original strain of which the various races were a variation. The white race was closest to the original prototype while the black race was the furthest. As previously pointed out by George L. Mosse, and as can be seen from Parfitt’s extensive treatment, the Enlightenment, with its classificatory preoccupation, began a discriminatory approach that offered racism a fundamental theoretical basis. Polygenists and monogenists, observes Parfitt, by dividing humanity into races, without ever reaching agreement on their number, generated a “confusion that was to continue until the Third Reich” (p. 24). Enlightenment thinking stigmatized blacks as an inferior race but was not generous towards Jews either, even though it recognized them as part of the white, Caucasian race. Voltaire

considered Jews to be despicable, cruel and dishonest beings. On the basis of their alleged refusal to conform to European customs, Kant judged them to be completely alien to the norms that governed civilized peoples: the Jews were noisy “social vampires,” harmful to society. Jews were attributed the same negative features that characterized blacks, such as violence, exploitation, theft, lying, and a proverbial cunning in doing business. And like blacks, the Jews also sinned in their profound ignorance. Until they had freed themselves from their mistaken beliefs and rituals, they could never be a full part of Western society. “For many Enlightenment thinkers the Jews, like blacks, had nothing to offer” (p. 49).

As Parfitt shows, the radical otherness of Jews and blacks had been discussed in earlier eras, but the Enlightenment sanctioned it. From this moment on, throughout the nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, Jews and blacks were to be the privileged subject of the study of racial differences in Europe. The definition, in particular, of the “colour of the Jews” in the nineteenth century represents another essential moment in the contest between monogenists and polygenists. The discovery in 1773 of black Jews in Ethiopia, reported by the Scotsman James Bruce, followed in 1777 by the finding of black Jews in Loango, together with the presence of an ancient community of black Jews in Cochin, with whom Claudius Buchanan, also a Scot, had come into contact on his journey to South India in 1806 and 1807, as well as the existence of black Jews in the Jordan Valley and the Sahara—had all fuelled a debate in which the blackness of Jews was far from being a mere chromatic detail.

Blackness was the field where monogenists and polygenists clashed, and both sides referred to it to claim the legitimacy of their respective theories. For monogenists, it was crucial that European Jews be considered white because the dark skin of their African, Indian, Middle Eastern and other co-religionists confirmed the thesis of climatic determinism as well as the common origin of humanity. For the polygenists, however, the blackness of the Jews stood in the way of the theory of the immutability of race. The only way to solve the problem was therefore to assert, as the Englishman Charles White had done in 1799, that all Jews, whatever the climatic conditions in which they lived, were in general of one and the same color, that is to say swarthy. This thinking would see new developments in the nineteenth century when polygenist anthropologists, in order to circumvent the obstacle of a color spectrum among Jews, established that all Jews were brown.

However, there was also at the same time another school of thought according to which Jews were everywhere black, descended from Africans, had black blood and a “negro” (original text) appearance.

Of course, this was not merely a matter of color. The assimilation of Jews into a racial group that instinctively aroused feelings of strong revulsion in European society was the most effective means of conveying the idea of Jews’ eternal and immutable racial otherness: “In trying to convey the unchanging otherness of Jews, European society selected an equally immutable figure to typify Jews: the African black” (p. 158). The “Africanization” of Jews, Parfitt continues, descended from a belief, based on the medieval notion that Jews were black, that had asserted over the centuries the close link between Jews and blacks, as well as their position as peoples distinct from the rest of humanity. These old beliefs were then complemented by the new obsession with black Jews, raising the question of the color of Jews. “The conflation of Jew and negro [...] was thus the culmination of an ancient historical and racial theory and produced the fusion of two ancient streams of hate: the hatred of Jews and the hatred of blacks” (p. 158).

The Englishman Robert Knox, one of the first physical anthropologists, stated in 1850 the non-European affiliation of Jews, who were “dark, tawny and yellow-colored persons,” in whose veins black blood flowed. In 1853, the Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau was fighting on the same front. The Jews’ black blood was the fruit of a very ancient union between Semites and Hamites and was the cause of their cultural coarseness. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the idea of a shared origin of blacks and Jews gathered an increasing number of supporters, and the obsession with color was joined by an equally compulsive search to define their somatic characteristics. Indeed, it was believed that “negroid” features were more pronounced in some Jews than in others. The French anthropologist and linguist Abel Hovelacque wrote in 1882 that Africans resembled monkeys, while the main characteristic of Jews was their goat-like profile. However, Jews with such a profile somehow constituted an elite compared to co-religionists with coarse negroid and ape-like features, such as the broad nose, fleshy lips, and wavy or frizzy hair, evidence of long-standing interbreeding with a less evolved race which was, needless to say, the blacks of Africa. A few years later he was echoed by the English anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddod, who reiterated the existence of Jews of superior and inferior types. The superior type had a

dignified and intelligent appearance; the inferior, on the other hand, being descended from lower elements, had a negroid appearance and like all negroes had a round head, an under-developed nose, thick lips and frizzy hair. In 1903, the French anti-Semite “Docteur Celticus” turned his attention to Jews’ nose by distinguishing two types. The hooked nose is the prerogative of the true Jew while the snub nose is typically African, the result of crossbreeding between Jews and blacks. Combining the two main symbols of Jews and blacks, the goat and the monkey, Celticus stated that the consequence of such a blood mixture was that Jews most often looked like goats and even smelled like them, while the younger ones, like blacks, looked like monkeys. The Jews’ protruding jaw, like that of blacks, was reminiscent of both the goat and the gorilla.

From the nose and the jaw we move on to the ears, another important stereotype in the spread of racist beliefs. Ears were the most visible sign of belonging to a race, as the anthropologist Arthur Keith had once argued. In the case of Jews, ears were often considered a somatic mark of their race and, like those of blacks, were compared to those of gorillas and apes. A further characteristic shared by Jews and blacks is smell, the unpleasantness of which has been debated for centuries. The peculiarity, in a negative sense, of the smell of blacks and Jews had been asserted in 1864 by Richard Burton, an English explorer and writer. Years later (1903), the anti-Semitic Docteur Celticus could not define exactly what the smell of the Jews was like, but it seemed sufficient for him to state that even the most expensive soap and perfume could never conceal the smell of rich Jewish ladies, despite their best efforts. Many years later, in 1940, the Franco-Swiss anthropologist George Montandon is sadly credited with proposing the most venomous thoughts on the subject: Jews had inherited their unpleasant smell from their black ancestors and therefore the smell of a Jew was the smell of a “nigger” (original text). Nonetheless, nose, ears, smell or other physical features did not seem to satisfy racist appetites and the ideological need to assimilate Jews with blacks and blacks with Jews. Something more substantial was needed, like great ugliness, for example. Here the Hottentots came to the rescue. The Khoi, an ethnic group from South West Africa, had been given that name by the Dutch, and the term was later adopted by other Europeans. The Hottentots were considered a monstrous race, perhaps the missing link between true humanity and the orangutan (p. 163). The first to mention them was the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, who in 1497 described

them as small in stature and hideous-faced. Da Gama was later echoed by travelers, colonial administrators, philosophers and scientists who stigmatized them as the smallest, smelliest, most hideous and savage of the African peoples. In short, the Hottentots possessed all the characteristics to become “the paradigm of the radically extreme ‘other’ and ‘ugly race’ par excellence” (p. 163). From the seventeenth century onwards, scholars and travelers stated their Jewish descent. Parfitt cites in this connection the German scholar Peter Kolben who in 1719, after an exploration in South Africa, had stated that the customs and traditions of the Hottentots were similar to those of the Jews and that Jewish blood flowed in their veins. From this belief, also shared by other scholars, it followed that the Africans, considered the ugliest people in the world, were descended from the ugliest people in all of Europe, namely the Jews.

Parfitt then discusses a hybridization of Jews and “Negroes” that appeals to ugliness as a powerful instrument of discrimination and devaluation. Hence we find the reference to the German historian, philosopher and polygenist, Christoph Meiners who in 1785 declared beauty or ugliness the main characteristic of a race and divided humanity between the beautiful and civilized white race and the animalistic, monstrous and uncivilized black race. Jews belonged to the latter category and Jews and blacks not only shared ugliness but also degeneracy. Meiners’ thinking was destined to have a long and successful career, sometimes even among Jews themselves, as Karl Marx testifies.

In 1863, in a vehement attack on the Jewish socialist leader Ferdinand Lassalle, Marx did not hesitate to add his voice to the chorus of those who thought the Jews descended from a mishmash of “niggers,” lepers and Hebrews, who had gathered during the flight from Egypt. Marx contemptuously called Lassalle a “Jewish nigger:” the shape of his head, the texture of his hair, his negroid substance and his intrusive behavior were proof of this.

It was not always the case, though, that the Jews’ negroid characteristics of Jews were so easy to spot. In 1861, the English polygenist John Beddoe had raised the issue of Jews’ invisibility by stating that their appearance was not necessarily revealing of their nigrescence. It was true that the Jews scored one hundred per cent on the nigrescence index compiled by the eminent ethnologist, but, in possessing chameleon-like characteristics, they had a wide range of colors that allowed them to take on the same appearance as the peoples among whom they

lived and guarantee racial invisibility. In the wake of Beddoe's "discovery" of the chameleon-like faculties of Jews, Rudolf Virchow, a German pathologist and anthropologist, tried to establish in 1871 the racial composition of the newly created German Reich. He conducted a study of almost seven million German schoolchildren, using hair and eye color as the preferred instrument of investigation. The study established that German and Jewish children were racially different. The true color of an individual's skin was not necessarily what could be seen with the naked eye, and in order to determine it another scientific method was to be used in which eyes and hair played a key role. The children and teachers who participated in the investigation, consciously or unconsciously, learned that establishing the color of people was not so obvious and that Jews constituted a separate race. The persecution and annihilation of Jews was still a long way off but the die had been cast. Although unintentionally, Virchow through his study had instilled in people's minds a first dose of the poison that some twenty years later his compatriot, Theodor Fritsch, would inject in abundance by asserting that the Jews were a mongrel race with a strong negroid component.

In this sense, as Parfitt points out, Fascist and Nazi nigrophobia and anti-Semitism would receive a rich heritage accumulated over centuries by polygenist discourse. The twentieth century has handed polygenist theory the coveted laurel crown. However, it is not entirely random to ask whether, viewed through the prism of science, the success of that theory was accompanied by its failure. Polygenism wished to present itself as a scientific and rational theory, disengaged from religion, but ended up paving the way for the racial anthropology or pseudo-scientific racism that would lead humanity to inhumanity. It was a pseudo-science which, in the case of Italian fascism, had to jump through many hoops to assert the purity of the "Italian race" and its belonging to the "Aryan race," obviously ignoring history and paleontology, that boasted a long tradition of studies from which the multiple ethnic composition of Italy and Italians emerged clearly. Likewise, this pseudo-science failed to live up to the expectations of Nazi racist theorists who witnessed the failure of their attempts to delineate a complete racial profile of Jews. The Nazi regime's persecution and extermination of Europe's Jews found no certain and scientifically founded racial basis to support itself.

The volume under examination offers such a wealth of material that the author's thoughts often take second place to the sources cited. It also raises many questions



that are often not answered for the reader. Furthermore, even taking into account the author's focus on the convergence of hatred against Jews and hatred against blacks, the volume underestimates the fact that in Fascism and Nazism the main target remained the Jews. Nevertheless this study has the merit of reminding us that: "Throughout its long history, humanity has made strenuous efforts to understand the nature of things in the world and how they are intertwined, but at the same time it has also made an equally heroic effort not to understand them."<sup>1</sup> And for not wishing to understand them.

*Monica Miniati, Independent Scholar*

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<sup>1</sup>The words are from Eduardo Boncinelli, "A proposito di catastrofi: i filosofi e il sisma di Lisbona," Review of *Filosofie della catastrofe*, by Andrea Tagliapietra, ed., *La Lettura*, March 27, 2022, 5.