



Kathy Lavezzo. *The Accommodated Jew: English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016. 392 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-0315-7.

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Published on H-Judaic (November, 2018)

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The Accommodated Jew: English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton describes how, in the medieval and early modern periods in England, ideas about the place of Jews in Christian society intersected with ideas about spatiality in general, and the built environment in particular. It thus argues that the Christian imagination of the Jew was as much “geopolitical” as it was theological. Whence the pun of the book’s title, the “accommodated Jew,” which cleverly connects where and how English Jews lived to the ways in which they endured an uneasy coexistence with the Christian society that, just barely, tolerated their presence.

The opening chapter, “Sepulchral Jews and Stony Christians: Supersession in Bede and Cynewulf,” begins at the beginning, in the Anglo-Saxon period, with a comparative reading of the exegetical and historical works of Bede and Cynewulf’s *Elene*. Here, the emphasis is on the ways in which metaphors of stone function multivalently to condemn the Jews for their “stony hearts,” on the one hand, while also providing the figurative building blocks of Christian supersessionist ideology, by which the ancient temples of Jerusalem are rebuilt in Christian England: both literally as they were referenced in church architecture, and figuratively, as Christian bodies replace Jewish stones as the building blocks of the new church. The time period covered by the second

chapter is, interestingly, the only one in which there were communities of Jews living openly in England. “Medieval Urban Noir: The Jewish House, the Christian Mob, and the City in Postconquest England” considers how, when Jews came to live in English towns after the Norman conquest of 1066, “alongside such writings about long-gone Jewish buildings images of contemporary Jewish built environments began to appear during this period in English texts” (p. 66). This fairly wide-ranging chapter discusses two main texts: Thomas of Monmouth’s *The Life and Miracles of William of Norwich* (1149-73) and William of Newburgh’s *Historia rerum Anglicarum* (1196-98). The theme loosely connecting these two texts is the role of the crowd in urban space. It contrasts interior spaces of houses and synagogues, marked by a thematic emphasis on closed doors, with the open, outdoor spaces where Christian crowds congregate. Lavezzo here argues for a contrasting representation of urban space between these authors, with Thomas of Monmouth focusing more on division of space while William of Newburgh obsesses about the transgression of boundaries. Both texts work together, however, to articulate how the very idea of urban space is taken up by English antisemitic texts.

A key theme that emerges from these early chapters is that of entwined urban and economic

development across the medieval and early modern period. If the second chapter focuses on urban space, the third chapter, “The Minster and the Privy: Jews, Lending, and the Making of Christian Space in Chaucer’s England,” focuses on commerce. This chapter centers around Geoffrey Chaucer’s antisemitic Canterbury tale, *The Prioress’s Tale* (c. 1387-1400). It argues that, like the monasteries and cathedrals of England, largely financed by Jewish financiers, Chaucer imagines the minster of *The Prioress’s Tale* likewise as a conduit connecting Jews and Christians in a putatively religious space implicated in the flow of capital. Here, the spaces of “The Minster and the Privy” of the chapter’s title index both a public/private binary but also the pure/soiled binary that marks Christian-Jewish relationships in the Christian imaginary. In a continuation of the commercial theme, chapter 4, “In the Shadow of Moyses’s Hall: Jews, the City, and Commerce in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*,” offers a speculative reading of the fifteenth-century *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* (c. 1461), a play that triangulates the identities of Jew, Christian, and Merchant, through the positing of an analogue that is not textual but rather spatial. The “urban analogue” (p. 140) is Bury St. Edmunds, a town within the general region that scholars have identified as the play’s likely origin, and a town with an interesting and well-documented history of Jewish-Christian relations. Lavezzo asks: “What meanings would accrue both to Croxton and Bury were the play performed in the town’s Great Market, in the shadow of Moyses’ Hall [a building traditionally associated with Jewish ownership]?” (p. 141). The answer she suggests is a mixed one, emphasizing both Christian self-regard, but simultaneously the degree to which commerce and religion are as deeply imbricated as the figures of the Jew and the Christian.

Chapter 5, “Failures of Fortification and the Counting Houses of *The Jew of Malta*,” is attentive to the ways in which spatial thinking structures the critique of Christian society in Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (1592). Here, Lavezzo con-

siders not only the most famous built environment of the play, the “little room” in which Barabas enjoys his “infinite riches,” but also the ways in which each of the play’s five acts centers one of Barabas’s houses. The reading scales up its spatial critique, considering Malta’s status as famously fortified as a key aspect of why this specific location should be chosen for the setting of the play. A final chapter, “Readmission and Displacement: Menasseh ben Israel, William Prynne, John Milton,” analyzes how “debates over readmission pivoted on questions of space, such as where the Jews would live and how would those places intersect with larger issues of location and Jewish global dispersal” (p. 212). This chapter includes a fresh reading of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* (1671), where Samson’s destruction of the Philistine’s temple obliquely figures Milton’s opinion that Jews should not be allowed to rebuild theirs in England. A short coda considers the afterlife of these themes in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1837-39).

The Accommodated Jew wrestles with some seminal antisemitic texts that happen also to be canonical texts of their period. The *longue durée* vision offered here is particularly useful for the way in which it contests the utility of literary historical periodization for the study of antisemitism. This is a book that rewards both a reader who progresses from cover to cover as well as one who reads more selectively. *The Accommodated Jew* addresses multiple audiences gracefully, offering new readings of familiar texts alongside explication of social and economic structures for those unfamiliar with the period in question. It will be of interest to medievalists, early modernists, and Jewish studies scholars alike.

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Citation: Heather Blurton. Review of Lavezzo, Kathy. *The Accommodated Jew: English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. November, 2018.

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