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Representations of Jews in Late Medieval and Early Modern
German Literature (review)

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sions employed. What he has to say about the individual Maskilim is clear and articulately presented, and need not be recounted here. Dauber's point, after all, is as much his method as his conclusion, and his method, centered on his fine analysis of allusions, is consistently effective, insightful, and convincing.

Dauber has produced a first-rate book, at once interesting and eminently readable, and both historians and students of Jewish literature will learn much. Given that this is a first book from a young scholar, *Antonio's Devils* is a most impressive offering, one that would elicit from his maskilic protagonists the hope that he produce books without limit.

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Representations of Jews in Late Medieval and Early Modern German Literature, by John D. Martin. *Studies in German Jewish History* 5. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004. 254 pp. \$49.95.

Incorporating recent discussions about the distinction between anti-Judaism and antisemitism and the "hermeneutic Jew," John Martin contests the almost universally negative portrayal of late medieval and early modern German representations of Jews formulated in modern scholarship. He rejects what he considers an uncritical acceptance of the idea that only decline in Jewish and Christian relations in medieval Germany is depicted in medieval German literature as well as the belief that medieval literature, especially medieval religious drama, played a large role in provoking anti-Jewish violence. In response to recent scholarship (especially the work of Natascha Bremer, Edith Wenzel, and Andrew Gow), Martin asserts that "the facts of daily life in medieval Germany make it difficult to defend the thesis that such conceptions of Jews as inhuman monsters exerted an unchallenged and unquestioned influence over the minds of medieval Christians" (p. 29). He suggests instead that medieval Christians were aware of the Jewishness of their own religion and that there existed a variety of literary Jews, who were complex and ambivalent. The monstrous image of the Jew, however, was never the sole, and often not the prominent, image in the literature.

In his attempt to establish this contention, Martin examines a wide range of German literature, focusing on Passion plays, saints' legends, and fables. He notes that Jews could frequently be depicted in sympathetic light. Often Jews clearly identified in the literature were depicted not as venal or irrational creatures but as people seeking the truth about God. Even when late medieval

literature cast the Jews as associated with the devil, Jews were more likely to be presented as dupes, not willing agents, of evil.

Martin argues that the emphasis on the Jewish origins of Christianity in the literature is multivalent, but that orientation does not necessarily imply a condemnation of the Jews. He asserts that the plays, for example, do not convey the message that the Christian Gospels do not offer hope to Jews or that Jews have no proper place in Christian society. What is more, the literature at times portrays a realistic depiction of Jewish polemic and rabbinic teachings about Jesus. Martin concludes that Jewish resistance to the Christian Gospels was nevertheless not seen as a symptom of an inherited race-based defect.

Martin does note that certain literary productions clearly did include more anti-Jewish animus than others and that there were occasional, and often significant, shifts in representation. He points to two developments completed in several fifteenth-century texts, namely, the shifting of blame for the Crucifixion onto all Jews and the creation of an anachronistic division between Jews and the followers of Jesus. In some cases, this shift was also evident in the dehumanization of Jews through the use of animal imagery.

Martin believes that even negative imagery needs to be properly contextualized, however. The degradation of Jews through the use of scatological humor, for example, was entirely typical of the *Fastnachtspiele* genre. Such contextualization, Martin argues, makes it possible to reconsider even some of the apparently most vehement anti-Jewish portrayals. In the work of Hans Folz, for example, he sees hostility toward Jews as an abstract, psychological phenomenon, not a credible, extant danger to the lives and property of Christians. Folz, Martin contends, deals with Jews differently in his varying literary pieces, and overall evinces a disputative and theological interest in the Jews.

Even in the literature that at times depicts Jews as sorcerers or magicians, some Jews, even when they remain unconverted, are depicted as righteous. Indeed, at times later German adaptations of Latin stories and fables actually minimized the anti-Jewish components, focusing more broadly on the universal and inclusive nature of the Christian message. Fables served as a vehicle to convey moral points and conventional wisdom and were much less, if at all, concerned with anti-Jewish characterizations. There was no compulsory anti-Jewish orthodoxy at work, Martin contends, noting that some fable collections emphasized the piety of certain Jews. The late thirteenth and early fourteenth century Hugo von Trimberg, for example, rejected the stereotype that Jews were uniquely susceptible to the vice of usury, arguing instead that the vice itself was an oppressive progeny of the devil which preyed on all mankind.

Martin admits that "the ambivalent, often positive representations of Jews found in many of the fable collections apparently had no ameliorative effect on

the attitudes of the public, as the increased intensity and frequency of anti-Jewish violence in the late medieval and early modern period makes plain" (p. 181). He concludes, however, that like the ambivalent image of Jews in literature, the views of the Christian populace toward their Jewish neighbors were overwhelmingly just as ambivalent and that outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence must be attributed to the actions of small but influential political groups; they were not part of an over-arching anti-Jewish ideology.

While many of those who work in this field will find some of these arguments persuasive and welcome them as corrective, the conclusions raise some questions about broader applicability at the same time that they chart further lines of investigation. One obvious question revolves around the reception of this literature. While the details are of course hard to come by—and Martin does often present it where it exists—we would benefit from more information about how and in what form these works were received. The question of reception is related to a larger methodological concern. In several places Martin assumes that the ambiguity of the literary hermeneutic Jew is mirrored in real-life ambiguity as well. After all, Jews were persecuted throughout this period, but they did manage to survive in or return to many places. Martin contends that even in the pogroms of the later Middle Ages some Christians attacked, while others defended, Jews. While this of course makes some sense, it is hard to defend the vast Christian population and lay blame solely on a handful of rabble-rousers. As the scholarship on the massacres and expulsions of 1348–1350 as well as the vast expulsions of the fifteenth century has made clear, there were many groups and motivations involved in anti-Judaism.

At times, it is not clear how biblical and contemporary Jews are being represented or differentiated. So, although Martin is highly protective of New Testament texts—he in fact argues that depictions of Jews were generally more favorable the closer they paralleled the biblical texts; though he later writes that incidents of apparent contradictions in the treatment of Jews are attributable to conflicted, contradictory, and ambiguous images of the Jews in the Gospels themselves—it is not always clear where our late medieval and early modern authors are drawing lines or how they in fact understand the concept of "Jews." In addition, it would be interesting to know more about how other marginal groups were represented throughout the literature, especially as other groups sometimes experienced similar marginalization. In the end, this is a book that provides helpful analysis and that further reveals the complexity of the topic. The volume brings to the surface a host of important questions that continue to warrant further study.

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