



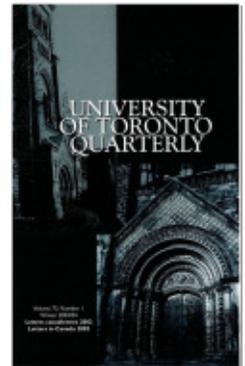
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Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings by Sheila
Delany (review)

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instruct him/her on the endless possibilities of the *fieri*: whether this openness is yet another textual siren who leads astray those who are, in Dante's words, 'in piccioletta barca' (*Paradiso*, II, 1) is a question worth addressing. (ELENA LOMBARDI)

Sheila Delany. *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings*
Routledge. xi, 258 US \$90.00

This collection is a timely contribution to the current debate regarding constructions of alterity during the later Middle Ages. During the last decade, studies of Orientalism and postcoloniality in medieval texts have begun to intersect with studies of medieval anti-Semitism, giving rise to new insights regarding how medieval views of 'the Jew' both influenced and were influenced by conceptions of 'Saracen' identity. Sheila Delany's new volume seeks to contribute to this debate by providing a selection of articles, both new and previously published, centred on the canonical figure of medieval English literature. Only five of the essays, however, actually treat Chaucer's writings; the others deal with such topics as depictions of Jews in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, use of Hebrew authorities in Christian exegesis, historical treatment of Jews in medieval England, and pedagogical approaches to teaching medieval texts (such as Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*) which, for modern readers, are disturbingly anti-Semitic. The wide range of the essays dilutes the focus of the volume, as the editor acknowledges in her introduction: 'the volume considers much more than Chaucer per se ... because I have sought to challenge the idea of the "author per se."' Delany's stated goal is to 'embed the author in a network of practices and discourses constitutive of his own.' A laudable goal, but one which is incompletely realized in this volume, which lacks a sufficiently strong editorial framework to explicate how Chaucer's work emerges from (and, perhaps, participates in) late medieval discourses of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism.

The essays collected in the first of the volume's three sections, centred on Chaucer's own writings, are of uneven quality. Delany's own 'Chaucer's Prioress, the Jews, and the Muslims' and Sylvia Tomasch's 'Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew' are the most substantial articles in a section which, on the whole, is rather weak. The second section, titled 'Chaucerian Contexts,' includes some of the most stimulating material in the whole book; unfortunately, its connection to the stated theme of the volume is tangential. Especially noteworthy are two new excellent essays by Mary Dove ('Chaucer and the Translation of the Jewish Scriptures') and Denise Despres ('The Protean Jew in the Vernon Manuscript'). In spite of the title, Dove's fascinating essay has very little to do with Chaucer, being a study of how late fourteenth-century translators of the Vulgate Bible drew upon

Hebrew exegetical techniques in their own explication of the literal sense of holy scripture, as well as their justification of why a vernacular translation should be made available. Despres has written several important articles on literary and pictorial depictions of Jews in medieval texts, revealing how Christian devotion to the Virgin was frequently predicated on the destruction of Jews, either metaphorically or actually. This new essay examines the famous Vernon manuscript, illuminating the relationship of the anti-Judaism of several of the works collected there to the overall devotional framework of the miscellany. The final section, 'Chaucer, Jews, and Us,' is a coda devoted to modern reactions to medieval anti-Semitism. The two new essays, on teaching Chaucer to Orthodox students in the New York area, are rather anecdotal. Colin Richmond's 'Englishness and Medieval Anglo-Jewry,' however, is a moving response by a British historian to the attempted erasure of Jewish history in England, both in actual history (during the thirteenth century) and historiographically (during the second half of the twentieth century). Five of the previously published essays (Richmond, Narin van Court, Mandel, Delany, and Rose) appeared within the last decade, most of them within other essay collections, which makes it difficult to understand why they are reprinted here. Seminal essays on the book's topic by Steven Kruger and Louise Fradenberg do not appear (although Narin van Court's essay, often cited in current literature, is wisely included). The collection thus falls between two stools, as it were, being neither a collection of classic essays on an important topic, nor a group of new responses to the state of the field. *Chaucer and the Jews* inconveniently lacks a list of the original venues of the previously published essays (useful for the preparation of bibliographies). Most frustrating is the lack of corresponding page numbers for citations of previously published articles within other essays in the volume: for example, when Tomasch refers to Delany (82n15), the page cited refers to the original publication in *Medieval Encounters*, rather than the reproduction of Delany's essay found in the present volume. A similar reference to Narin van Court appears in Despres (161n6). It would have been useful to update the notes to the previously published essays; unfortunately, the only updated note appears in Delany's own reprinted essay, referring to her work in progress (57n42). (SUZANNE CONKLIN AKBARI)

James M. Gibson, editor. *Kent: Diocese of Canterbury*
Records of Early English Drama. University of Toronto Press. 3 volumes.
ccxxiv, 1664. \$500.00

The Records of Early English Drama (REED) series has transformed scholarly understanding of the history of English drama before 1642. Combing private, civic, and ecclesiastical records, county by county (and sometimes