

**Michael Scrivener, *Jewish Representation in British Literature 1780-1840: After Shylock*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Pp. 278. £57. ISBN 9780230102897.**

Michael Scrivener's new study of the representation of the Jew in Romantic literature explores the figurative usage of the Jew outside the established canon. Though he refers to mainstream Romantic writers in his conclusion, the bulk of his research is dominated by hitherto overlooked primary material such as the Old Bailey Court *Proceedings* and 'Jew Songs' in the *Universal Songster*. In this respect, Scrivener's work carries an archival importance, while allowing for a better understanding of the power and function of the literary stereotype of the Jew in British culture.

Scrivener maintains that 'although the number of English Jews in the early nineteenth-century was small, the impact of figurative Jewishness on British culture was large' (6). Jewish representation, Scrivener argues, functions 'like Freud's return of the repressed: expelled and excluded, they keep coming back, raising uncomfortable questions' (7). As Scrivener's subtitle indicates, his study explores the aftermath of Shylock, its impact on the English imagination and popular Jewish stereotypes. The true merit of this work lies in Scrivener's attempt to examine the literary stereotype against actual case-studies. We find that in almost each chapter Scrivener places the figurative Jew against an actual Jew from the period, thus examining the stereotype's existence in and outside the literature.

Relying on Freudian psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory, Scrivener argues that 'Romantic Jewish representations as a whole are ambivalent' (2). In this respect, Scrivener's thesis does not differ from previous arguments raised by Bryan Cheyette and Judith W. Page. In his conclusion, Scrivener comments that the source of this ambivalence is rooted in the fact that 'the Romantics usually work with these cultural myths from tradition and make something far less toxic than the raw material with which they started. They work the stereotypes ... The bias against Judaism and Jews, however, is the position from which they start because of the many centuries of hostility (203). This cautious tone, however, is slightly undermined a few pages later when Scrivener anticipates that the model of ambivalence that critics adopt in their dealings with the Jewish question in literature will no longer 'serve the interests of accounting most insightfully for the evidence at hand. Accented differently, ambivalence will appear to be intellectual evasion rather than open-mindedness' (208).

The first chapter, 'Jewish Representations, Literary Criticism and History' traces the developmental understanding of Jewish stereotypes in literature. Scrivener argues that contrary to earlier criticism, dating from 1880 to 1971, today's critics 'read Jewish texts semiotically and rhetorically, not just according to the anti- and philosemitic focus' (23). Chapter 2, '1656 and the Origins of Anglo-Jewish Writing', offers an historical overview of the debates surrounding the Jews' readmission to Britain in the seventeenth century. Scrivener associates Menasseh ben Israel's Jewish messianism with the period's philosemitic millenarianism, 'a pattern of similarity and difference repeated in the Georgian period as well' (41). From Chapter 3 onwards, Scrivener surveys four popular Jewish stereotypes starting with that of the pedlar. Scrivener examines how Jewish pedlars figured in the Old Bailey court *Proceedings* and in the 'Jew Songs' in the *Universal Songster*, progressing to consider the itinerant Jew in Maria Edgeworth's *Harrington* and William Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Excursion*.

Chapter 4 focuses on the image of the Jewish moneylender. After establishing the influence of Shylock on the cultural concept of the Jew as a financial parasite, Scrivener turns his attention to two actual moneylenders from the period, the financier Benjamin Goldsmith and John 'Jew' King. The following chapter, 'The Jew's Daughter', centres on the image of

the Jewess as false (who despite her initial appearance as Jewish turns out to be a Christian) and as the object of conversionist narratives. The final section of the chapter is dedicated to the real life drama of the King sisters – Charlotte and Sophia (daughters of John ‘Jew’ King) and their negotiation between their Jewish origin and Christian surroundings. The first part of Chapter 6, ‘Exiles and Prophets’, concentrates on Thomas Spence and Lord George Gordon and the inspiration they found in the social ideals presented in the Jewish scripture. The second part of the chapter discusses the female component of the stereotype, debating the difficulties faced by Jewish female writers such as Emma Lyon, Celia and Marion Moss and Grace Aguilar.

The book makes for an interesting and enlightening read not simply because of its topic, which has been previously explored, but rather due to the breadth of primary material Scrivener examines. Scrivener’s efforts pay off as his meticulous research into the cultural makeup of the Romantic period helps cement his argument that even though small in numbers, the Jews formed part of the cultural lexicon of the early nineteenth century. As such, this book is an important addition to scholarly debates concerning the *Other* and the Romantic imagination.

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