



# **The Accommodated Jew: English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton**

*Kathy Lavezzo*

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England during the Middle Ages was at the forefront of European antisemitism. It was in medieval Norwich that the notorious "blood libel" was first introduced when a resident accused the city's Jewish leaders of abducting and ritually murdering a local boy. England also enforced legislation demanding that Jews wear a badge of infamy, and in 1290, it became the first European nation to expel forcibly all of its Jewish residents. In *The Accommodated Jew*, Kathy Lavezzo rethinks the complex and contradictory relation between England's rejection of "the Jew" and the centrality of Jews to classic English literature. Drawing on literary, historical, and cartographic texts, she charts an entangled Jewish imaginative presence in English culture.

In a sweeping view that extends from the Anglo-Saxon period to the late seventeenth century, Lavezzo tracks how English writers from Bede to Milton imagine Jews via buildings?tombs, latrines and especially houses?that support fantasies of exile. Epitomizing this trope is the blood libel and its implication that Jews cannot be accommodated in England because of the anti-Christian violence they allegedly perform in their homes. In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the Jewish house not only serves as a lethal trap but also as the site of an emerging bourgeoisie incompatible with Christian pieties. Lavezzo reveals the central place of "the Jew" in the slow process by which a Christian "nation of shopkeepers" negotiated their relationship to the urban capitalist sensibility they came to embrace and embody. In the book's epilogue, she advances her inquiry into Victorian England and the relationship between Charles Dickens (whose Fagin is the second most infamous Jew in English literature after Shylock) and the Jewish couple that purchased his London home, Tavistock House, showing how far relations between gentiles and Jews in England had (and had not) evolved.

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