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MILTON AND THE JEWS

The issue of the Jews deeply engaged Milton throughout his career, and not necessarily in ways that make for comfortable or reassuring reading today. Whereas Shakespeare and Marlowe, for example, critiqued rather than endorsed racial and religious prejudice in their writings about Jews, the same cannot be said for Milton. The scholars in this collection confront a writer who participated in the sad history of anti-Semitism, even as he appropriated Jewish models throughout his writings. Well grounded in solid historical and theological research, the essays both collectively and individually offer an important contribution to the debate on Milton and Judaism and will inspire new directions in Milton studies. This book will be of interest not only to scholars of Milton and of seventeenth-century literature, but also to historians of the religion and culture of the period.

DOUGLAS A. BROOKS is Associate Professor of English at Texas A&M University.

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For Bella

*And all, that might his melting hart entise
To her delights, she vnto him bewrayd:
The rest hid vnderneath, him more desirous made.
Spenser, The Faerie Queene*

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Acknowledgments

I first conceived of this collection when I began researching the topic of Milton's knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish thought for an article I wanted to write. My goal back then was to find out what the current state of knowledge in the field was and to begin a conversation with some of the Miltonists who were working in the field. I could not have anticipated at the time just how exciting that conversation would be and how much I would learn from those scholars whose essays appear here. For that, for the depth of their knowledge, for their patience, and for their willingness to revise, I am extraordinarily grateful. I also want to thank three scholars, Jeffrey Shoulson, Jason Rosenblatt, and Tom Festa, who were involved in the early stages of this project and have continued to be remarkably supportive. Ray Ryan at Cambridge University Press greeted my initial proposal with enthusiasm, and he has been loyal and steadfast in getting the manuscript of this book read, revised, and now published. I am profoundly grateful to him for believing in this project and for staying with it. In the early 1980s when I was a graduate student in linguistics at the University of Michigan I had the good fortune of taking a class in literary theory with Sandor Goodhart, who was very excited at the time about emerging scholarly interest in the links between poststructuralism and Rabbinic thought. Over coffee at the Fleetwood Diner, we began to discuss Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction*, but wound up talking mostly about Judaism and what it meant to be a Jewish literary critic. It was the beginning of a sustained dialogue between us that greatly encouraged me to think about Milton's complicated treatment of the Jews, Judaism, and Jewish thought.

This book is lovingly dedicated to Bella, who took me by the hand, led me back to the garden, and introduced me to the luxuries of Paradise regained.

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