Chanita R. Goodblatt. *The Christian Hebraism of John Donne: Written with the fingers of man's hand.*

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Chanita Goodblatt's work on the Christian Hebraism of John Donne is an outstanding philological and historical study on the early modern English interest in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, on the latter's strong intertextual character, and the adaptation of Hebraic learning to "distinct [Protestant] theological, cultural and political purposes" (167). Goodblatt's objective is clearly presented as the authentication of "Donne as a Christian Hebraist by elucidating the exegetical strategies that make him a participant in this intellectual and religious movement" (2). The strict historicism of this work presents the reader with a competent reconstruction of contextual language-games, while the well-documented

philological investigation into the uses of Jewish exegesis by "sixteenth and seventeenth century Christian readers of the Hebrew Bible" exemplifies what Bakhtin has termed "a heteroglot conception of the world" (21, 22). If Jeanne Shami has in the past challenged Donne scholarship by stating that "rarely are the sermons seen as issuing from any specific context — generic, historical, theological, political, or cultural," (in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross* [1995], 383) Goodblatt has successfully met the challenge, overcoming the urge of scholars to index Donne's Hebraism rather that present it as the gesture of a historical player within a specific network of theological lexica.

The book begins with an overview of the sources and strategies behind Donne's Hebraism. As Goodblatt punctually reminds her reader, the scholarship that developed in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was but the result of a broader humanist phenomenon, which manifested itself as the "creation of the English Reformation Bibles" (11). Scholars were focused solely on the Bible, and developed a field of interest supported by "complex, multilingual systems of biblical and interpretive texts" that included the Hebrew Bible, its Aramaic translations in original and Latin versions, and the "medieval Jewish exegetical sources" (12). This complexity was, though, accompanied by an "inbuilt ambivalence" and "uncomfortable attitude" on the part of the English Hebraists toward Jewish authority — while these scholars were part of the "timeless *Respublica Litterarum Sacrarum*" extending from Jerome to Luther, their work literally "explored the Hebraic roots of European civilization" (20).

Once Goodblatt clarifies to her reader the grammatical nature of the Hebraic exegesis adopted by Christian Humanist scholars, learned from canonical works of Abrahama Ibn Ezra, Rabbi David Kimhi, and Rashi, she proceeds to locate John Donne against this background. Donne's interest in Hebrew was in no way comparable to that of Pico della Mirandola or Johannes Reuchlin, but was that of a "third-order Hebraist" (22). Like a vast majority of seventeenth-century educated Englishmen, Donne had no real fluency in Hebrew, but a vague smattering that he had attained in the years preceding his ordination in 1615. It is for this reason that Goodblatt states that a "discussion of linguistic knowledge alone cannot . . . definitively establish Donne's competence as a Christian Hebraist," and that it must include both the issue of "linguistic knowledge" and that of "transmitted knowledge" (26). Donne, Goodblatt concludes, was not unlike many other Christians who, though well-versed in Hebrew, were not able to consult the original versions of their Jewish sources, and thus learned the "more sophisticated semantic nuances of Jewish medieval exegesis from the intermediate Christian Hebraist sources cited so abundantly throughout his sermons" (26).

The central corpus of Goodblatt's work is the practical part of her scholarly endeavor, a well-structured application of the philological tools defined in the introduction and first chapter, the objective of which is to provide the reader with a textual demonstration of how Donne as a preacher managed to appropriate and re-designate the diverse Jewish authorities he cited. Goodblatt's decision to work on the Penitential and Prebend sermons grows out, as she says, from the fact that these

two sets of homilies are clearly part of what Paul Stanwood has called a "literary and devotional tradition" (in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross* [1995], 366). By engaging with the penitential tradition, and with the Protestant substitution of Prebend sermons for the Catholic daily recitation of psalms, Donne, Goodblatt concludes, not only found an "opportunity to fully develop an integrated method of preaching on the biblical text," but also reiterated and engaged with "liturgical traditions" (8). *The Christian Hebraism of John Donne*, then, successfully accomplishes what it defines as its objective, namely to "discern . . . Donne's attention to the original, Hebrew biblical text from within a concept central to his preaching on these psalms" (10). Donne's use of intertextuality and of a heteroglot variety of exegetical traditions is, as Goodblatt elegantly concludes her book, not only of great scholarly interest for the understanding of his personal role within and appropriation of a complex exegetical tradition, but also of considerable "significance for the modern reader of the Hebrew Bible" (167).

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